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Vertical Readings
in Dante's *Comedy*

Volume 2

EDITED BY
GEORGE CORBETT AND
HEATHER WEBB

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IN DANTE'S *COMEDY*

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14. The Patterning of History: Poetry, Politics and Adamic Renewal

Catherine M. Keen

It is still an unusual endeavour to read Dante's *Commedia* in a systematically vertical manner, linking three single *canti* from *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso* on the basis of numerical positioning, rather than following the extraordinarily well-determined linear pathway that Dante delineates for his narrative journey from Hell to Heaven. On first encounter with the *Commedia*, readers often feel directed towards horizontal rather than vertical approaches to a poem in which the exercise both of its writing and its reading are figured as linear progressions along tracks, pathways, or sea-routes. But the value of comparison and retrospection, to identify connections between episodes in different *canti* or *cantiche*, soon emerges. The narrative of the entire poem is, after all, cast as a recollection of lived experience in the protagonist-author's first-person voice, hence structurally retrospective from the outset. Its one hundred-canto, triple-*cantica* structure is clearly the product of complex planning, in which the unfolding assembly of parts and whole facilitates the establishment of parallels and echoes between its multiple elements.¹

1 Among studies that emphasize the importance of seeking parallels and retrospections when reading the *Commedia*, I have found especially productive the essays by Charles S. Singleton, 'The Vistas in Retrospect', *Modern Language Notes* 81.1 (1966), 55–80; Zygmunt G. Barański, 'Structural Retrospection in Dante's *Comedy*: The Case of *Purgatorio* xxvii', *Italian Studies* 41 (1986), 1–23 (especially pp. 2–3, 14–15, 23); and John Freccero, 'The Significance of *Terza Rima*', in *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion*, ed. by Rachel Jacoff (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), pp. 258–71.

The exercise of vertical reading proposed in this series advances further questions about how patterns and intersections occur within Dante's poem. The alignment of *canti* on the single, strict criterion of number order creates its own discipline. This essay seeks to demonstrate that the spatial implications of the metaphor of vertical reading are, indeed, very apt to the Fourteens, where connecting all three of what initially appear to be somewhat disparate *canti* permits a new set of meanings to emerge, based around coordinates supplied individually within the three parts. Successively, *Inferno* xiv, *Purgatorio* xiv, and *Paradiso* xiv each open an atlas page on which north-south and east-west axes are laid out with topographical precision, matched morally and rhetorically by the coordinated temporal references that Dante plots to both secular and sacred history between the three same-numbered *canti*. Each canto of course offers its own mapping of moral concerns, consistent with its place within the horizontal narrative of the *Commedia*. But their vertical juxtaposition does more. The grandiose epic and scriptural dimensions evident in the poetry of *Inferno* and *Paradiso* xiv are at first sight out of scale with what look like rather parochial regional and genealogical surveys in *Purgatorio* xiv. Yet as this essay will show, this middle canto pays a form of attention to the minutiae of individual place, time, and personal biography that is central to Dante's understanding of how universal history links all humanity into the salvation narrative invoked more explicitly in the imagery of the Old and the New Adam in the infernal and paradisaical *canti*.

In the reading that follows, both direct and oblique instances of vertical connection between *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso* xiv will be examined. The essay begins by examining some linguistic and aesthetic common points between the Fourteens, in their shared and contrasting uses of imagery of water and of light. It then presents a series of thematic reflections on the three *canti*'s readings of both secular and providential history, and of moralized terrestrial topography. Examining in turn the historical, rhetorical, and eschatological range of Dante's concerns within and between the three *canti*, it is my hope that the vertically ordered reading opens new vistas onto the real complementarity that can be discovered between the Fourteens.

Water and Fire

Probably the most evident vertical connection that a reader will initially identify between the Fourteens (or two of them, at least) is a topographical one, given the prominence, in both *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*, of river imagery.

Roughly half the space of both *canti* is occupied by the starkly moralized description of waterways. In *Inferno* xiv, we begin with a ‘picciol fiumicello’ [little stream] (l. 77) flowing through a stony channel in the circle of violence, which recalls the Bulicame, a natural thermal spring near Viterbo. In *Purgatorio*, river imagery begins with an unnamed ‘fiumicel’ [little stream] (l. 17), which rises in the Apennines and flows more than a hundred miles down to the sea. The two speeches will both unfold at some length before the two rivers, infernal Phlegethon and Tuscan Arno, are finally named. They open with almost identical locutions:

‘In mezzo mar siede un paese guasto’,
diss’elli allora, ‘che s’appella Creta,
sotto ’l cui rege fu già ’l mondo casto’. (*Inf.*, xiv. 94–96)

[‘In the midst of the sea lies a ruined land’, he said then, ‘called Crete,
under whose king the world once was chaste’.]

E io: ‘Per mezza Toscana si spazia
un fiumicel che nasce in Falterona,
e cento miglia di corso nol sazia’. (*Purg.*, xiv. 16–18)

[And I: ‘Through the midst of Tuscany there flows a little stream that is
born in Falterona, and a hundred miles of flowing do not sate it’.]

Besides their lexical and structural symmetries, equally notable is the way that each river episode begins by describing an apparently harmless *fiumicello*, but develops into unsettling, monstrous imagery as it follows the river from source to end. In *Purgatorio* xiv, the Arno flows down through a series of communities metamorphosed from the human to the bestial, as if through Circe’s black magic (l. 42).² The Arno’s known course clearly identifies these unnamed locales, each symbolized by a more unpleasant animal, from uncouth swine in the Casentino, to whining dogs in Arezzo, wolves in Florence, and in Pisa cheating foxes (ll. 43–54). Confirming the explicit moral allegory of the bestial imagery, it has been noted since the

2 Notably, the second part of the canto also uses rivers as important regional denominators, naming the Po and the Reno as the upper and lower boundaries of the protagonists’ region of origin, lying ‘tra ’l Po e ’l monte e la marina e ’l Reno’ [between the Po and the mountain and the sea and the Reno] (l. 92).

early commentaries that the Arno's 'maladetta e sventurata fossa' [cursed and baleful furrow] (l. 51) follows a scale of descending vices that matches the stratification of sin in *Inferno*, as it passes from swinish incontinence, through lupine force, to vulpine fraud.³

As for the rivers of Hell itself, in *Inferno* xiv they too follow a downward flow that is figured as both physically and morally degenerative. The Phlegethon has a sufficiently sinister appearance, with its sulphurous, boiling similarity to the Bulicame, and waters red with blood. As Virgil explains, it forms part of a continuous system of four rivers flowing through Hell (ll. 115–20): the Styx, Acheron, Phlegethon, and Cocytus, all names borrowed from classical poetry, including Virgil's own *Aeneid*. As noted above, before the rivers are named, a long circumlocution explains their origin in the familiar earthly world, on Crete's Mount Ida (ll. 94–114). Yet although the locale and mechanics of the river system's source are earthly, they are also uncanny. The bloody waters of the Phlegethon have their source in another bodily fluid: the tears weeping from the statue of an Old Man, hidden in a cave on the island of Crete. The tears flow not from the statue's eyes, but from wounds perforating its body, in a parody of the redemptive flow of blood from the wounds of Christ at the Crucifixion: 'Ciascuna parte, fuor che l'oro, è rotta / d'una fessura che lagrime goccia' [Each part of him, except his golden head, is broken by a crack that drips tears] (ll. 112–13).⁴ The image carries a reminder that all the pain of souls in Hell has its origins in their sinful actions on earth. Within a vertical reading, there is also a parallel between the weeping wounds of *Inferno* xiv's Cretan statue, producing the rivers of Hell, and the weeping, wounded eyes of

3 Fourteenth-century commentators who highlight the infernal qualities of the Arno's description include Pietro Alighieri, Francesco da Buti, and the author of the *Chiose Vernon*. Commentaries consulted via the *Dartmouth Dante Project* (<http://dantelab.dartmouth.edu/reader>, later cited as *DDP*). See Gabriele Muresu for an incisive study of the canto's bestiary imagery, in *I ladri di Malebolge. Saggi di semantica dantesca* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1990), pp. 51–82.

4 In a familiar medieval theological image, Christ's wounds themselves cured the wounded nature of postlapsarian humanity. See Giuseppe Mazzotta, *Dante, Poet of the Desert: History and Allegory in the Divine Comedy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), pp. 35–36. Georges Güntert stresses that the water and blood flowing in the Phlegethon are also both materials of renewal in Christian theology — the water of baptism and the blood of the Crucifixion and the Eucharist. See 'Canto XIV', in *Lectura Dantis Turicensis: Inferno*, ed. by Georges Güntert and Michelangelo Picone (Florence: Cesati, 2000), pp. 193–205 (p. 199); his interpretation moderates the perhaps overly broad statement of the baptismal significance of the infernal rivers and their source proposed by Anthony K. Cassell, *Dante's Fearful Art of Justice* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), pp. 60–61, 65.

Guido del Duca, who produces the polluted, infernal image of the Arno in *Purgatorio* xiv.

The infernal rivers' relentless downward flow from the fissures in the statue make a single interconnected system out of, not only the abyss of Hell, but of the whole Mediterranean above ground, where Crete lies *in mezzo mare*. If the landscape imagery in the whole circle of the violent forms a negative counterpart to earthly landscape phenomena — sterile bushes in the wood of the suicides, the desert and rain of fire of blasphemy, the blood-filled Phlegethon — this reversal of natural order is consolidated in the Old Man image. Hell's rivers, in exact opposition to earthly ones, have their origins in salt waters and flow downwards into ice, in the frozen lake of Cocytus; whereas rivers in the human world rise in icy mountain regions and flow towards the salt sea. Nonetheless, at the end of the canto, a brief allusion to the fifth river of the classical afterlife, Lethe, reminds us that the flow of water can, and should, cleanse as well as contaminate:

'Letè vedrai, ma fuor di questa fossa,
là dove vanno l'anime a lavarsi
quando la colpa pentuta è rimossa'. (*Inf.*, xiv. 136–38)

[Lethe you will see, but outside this ditch, there where the souls go to be washed once their repented guilt has been removed.]

If the mountain island of Crete is the well-spring for Hell's rivers of pain, Dante will also provide a counter-balancing image in Purgatory of a mountain island where the Lethe rises with pristine Edenic origins, and produces consolation.⁵

The second part of *Inferno* xiv is dominated by this discussion of infernal rivers and their strange earthly origins, but the canto opens with another reversal of natural order, in a snowfall of flakes of fire:

Sovra tutto 'l sabbion, d'un cader lento,
piovean di foco dilatate falde,
come di neve in alpe senza vento. (*Inf.*, xiv. 28–30)

[Over all the sand there rained, with a slow falling, broad flakes of fire, like snow in the mountains without wind.]

5 See Ambrogio Camozzi, 'Il Veglio di Creta alla luce di Matelda: Una lettura comparativa di *Inferno* xiv e *Purgatorio* xxviii', *The Italianist* 29 (2009), 3–49 (pp. 22–25).

The expressive beauty of the *terzina*, with its paradoxical image of fiery snow, carries direct echoes of lines from the love poetry of Guido Cavalcanti, and from a lyric sestina of Dante's own, as well as from earlier Italian love poets.⁶ At the same time, the image stresses the implacable flow of the flames, falling downwards in contradiction of the elemental nature of fire; while the silence of a true snowfall is inverted by the endless noise generated by the sinners' hands slapping at their burnt skin, sound and motion recalling the rhythms of a dance or *tresca* (and the *terzina's* sound-pattern here mimetically shifts from sweet lyricism to a harsher, consonant-heavy tone):

Sanza riposo mai era la tresca
de le misere mani, or quindi or quinci
escotendo da sé l'arsura fresca. (*Inf.*, xiv. 40–42)

[Without any rest ever was the dancing of their wretched hands, brushing away the fresh burning, now from there, now from here.]

The continuous shifting movement of the flakes of fire, and of those sinners capable of motion, contrasts starkly with the immobility of this canto's only named sinner, Capaneus. Like the statue of the Old Man, Capaneus is gigantic in size;⁷ there is a compelling symmetry to the physical inertia of the two huge bodies that dominate the two halves of the canto. Capaneus retains violent energy in voice and thought, in spite of physical immobility. He shouts out defiantly persistent blasphemy, addressing the God of Dante's Christian universe with the pagan name of 'Giove' [Jove] (l. 52). Morally speaking, however, this vehemence is itself paralysed. There is a rigid continuity of rejection in the perfect rhetorical antithesis of his self-condemnation: 'Qual io fui vivo, tal son morto' ['As I was alive, so am I dead'] (l. 51). His physical immobility matches his internal, frozen determination

6 Guido Cavalcanti: 'bianca neve scender senza venti' [white snow falling when no wind blows] (*Biltà di donna e di saccente core*, 6); Dante: 'cade in bianca falda / di fredda neve' [falls in white flakes of chill snow] (*Rime*, 9, 20–21). See John A. Scott, 'Canto xiv: Capaneus and the Old Man of Crete', in *Lectura Dantis: Inferno*, ed. by Allen Mandelbaum, Anthony Oldcorn and Charles Ross (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 185–95 (p. 187); Massimiliano Malavasi, 'Canto XIV. Limiti e altezza dell'etica dei laici', in *Lectura Dantis Romana. Cento canti per cento anni. 1. Inferno. 1. Canti I–XVII*, ed. by Enrico Malato and Andrea Mazzucchi (Rome: Salerno, 2013), pp. 424–58 (pp. 431–32); Emilio Bigi, *Forme e significati nella Divina Commedia* (Bologna: Cappelli, 1981), pp. 87–88.

7 In Statius's *Thebaid*, Capaneus' immense height is commented on frequently, including in the death scene directly recalled here, x. 897–xi. 20.

to maintain rejection and contempt for God, never shifting from his stifling pride and rage.⁸ Both Capaneus's speech of defiance, and Virgil's forceful denunciation of his crimes, fill their dialogue with a vocabulary of sin and anger that closes the episode with expressions rhetorically opposite to the lyrical opening lines on snow and fire.⁹

The fire imagery of *Inferno* xiv, like that of its rivers, can be matched with elements in a vertical partner canto, this time in *Paradiso*. *Paradiso* xiv offers exceptionally frequent references to light and fire: there are at least forty separate uses of the vocabulary of light in the canto, with words such as 'luce' [light] used three times, 'raggio' [ray or radiance] four times, and 'lume' [light] five times.¹⁰ Each of the canto's two planetary heavens is identified by a single atmospheric colour: intense brightness in the Sun, and flaming red in Mars. Against these light-filled backgrounds, the souls are perceived individually as single, more intensely glowing, sparks of light. Solomon tells how the lightning-bright intensity of the souls in their current state ('questo folgór che già ne cerchia', l. 55) will be kindled to greater intensity, like flame from coal, after the Last Judgement ('sì come carbon che fiamma rende', l. 52).¹¹ Collectively, the flame-like spirits cluster into fixed forms that symbolically reveal something of each group's special virtues. In the Sun, the souls of the wise draw together around Dante-pilgrim and Beatrice in circles. From one circle in canto x, to two in xii, and finally here in xiv a Trinitarian third, the souls flow into fixed geometrical forms that nonetheless leaves each of them a joyful freedom of movement, in a wheeling dance.¹² The heavenly round-dance composed of 'sempiterne

8 The element of pride, the paradigmatic root of sin, in Capaneus's damnation, is stressed by numerous commentators. See Bigi, pp. 88–92 and Güntert, p. 202.

9 Mario Marti stresses this rhetorical negative emphasis, arguing that Dante's Capaneus lacks the *magnanimitas* of the Statian epic source. See Mario Marti, 'Canto XIV', in *Lectura Dantis Neapolitana. Inferno*, ed. by Pompeo Giannantonio (Naples: Loffredo, 1986), pp. 243–58 (pp. 249–51). Malavasi also discusses magnanimity, in a detailed reading of the passage's ethical values and linguistic tenor (Malavasi, pp. 436–42).

10 On light imagery, see Muresu, *I ladri di Malebolge*, pp. 169–71; Edoardo Soprano, 'Canto xiv', in *Lectura Dantis Scaligera* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1971), pp. 479–504; and Carlo Sini, 'Canti xiii–xiv: Salamone e il cielo della luce', in *Esperimenti danteschi. Paradiso 2010*, ed. by Tommaso Montorfano (Genoa: Marietti, 2010), pp. 157–68.

11 On light imagery for the paradisaical souls, see Marco Ariani, 'Abyssus Luminis: Dante e la veste di luce', *Rivista di letteratura italiana* 11 (1993), 9–71; and Manuele Gagnolati, 'Paradiso xiv e il desiderio del corpo', *Studi Danteschi* 78 (2013), 285–309 (295–97). Ariani suggests that Solomon's *carbone* may have a double meaning as carbuncle/ruby as well as coal (pp. 33–41).

12 The dance simile is introduced in x. 79–81, and the circling movements of the souls are described here at xiv. 19–24 and 67–78.

fiamme' [sempiternal flames] (l. 66), accompanied by melodious choral singing (ll. 31–33), almost perfectly inverts the flame-tormented *tresca* and sound of hands slapping flesh from *Inferno* xiv.

In Mars, the souls form the shape of the cross, maintaining its perfect fixed symmetry even when they move around the form, as Dante describes with two similes: first comparing the whole cross to the celestial grandeur of the Milky Way (ll. 97–102); and second describing the single souls as glittering like motes in a sunbeam (ll. 109–17). The fixed new constellation of the cross in the Heaven of Mars is thus also a shimmering cluster of individual lights, the souls of holy warriors who died in service of the 'venerabil segno' [venerable sign] (l. 101). Between these two similes, there falls a vision that is also expressed in light imagery, appearing with the suddenness and transience of a lightning flash:

Qui vince la memoria mia lo 'ngegno;
ché quella croce lampeggiava Cristo,
sì ch'io non so trovare essempro degno;
ma chi prende sua croce e segue Cristo,
ancor mi scuserà di quel ch'io lasso,
vedendo in quell'albor balenar Cristo. (*Par.*, xiv. 103–08)

[Here my memory outstrips my wit, for that cross flashed forth Christ, and I cannot find a worthy comparison, but whoever takes up his cross and follows Christ, will yet excuse me for what I must leave out, seeing in that whiteness the blazing forth of Christ.]

The triple repetition of Christ's name in self-rhyming sequence stresses the separateness of this momentary vision against the more continuous and meditative contemplation of the cross and its individual flame-like souls.

Poetry and History

In the Heaven of Mars, the fixed icon of the cross and the momentary vision of the Crucifixion form part of an engagement with ideas about the history of redemption that run through *Paradiso* xiv as a whole. The canto covers a long arc of human history. In the Heaven of the Sun, Solomon, wise king of the Old Testament, speaks about the Last Judgement and the final resurrection of humanity in the flesh in the far distant future. In Mars, the vision of Christ on the cross stresses the doctrine of redemption, looking

back to humanity's original Fall in Adam and Eve, with the consequent need for atonement. Two other pivotal moments in redemption history are also explicitly cited in the canto. Solomon's 'voce modesta' [modest voice] recalls Gabriel's annunciation of Christ's incarnation (ll. 35–36), in the *sermo humilis* of biblical rhetoric, in his meditation on the universal re-incarnation of humanity at the Last Judgement.¹³ The words 'Resurgi' and 'Vinci' ['Arise' and 'Conquer'] (l. 125) in the hymn of praise that follows the vision of Christ crucified clearly allude to the Resurrection in which Adamic sin and death were conquered.¹⁴ It is an apt motto for the holy warriors who have 'taken up their crosses and followed Christ': in the biblical passages that provide the source for this phrase, which Dante translates exactly at line 106, the following verse tells how 'he that shall lose his life for me, shall find it' (*Matthew* 10.39), as in martyrdom and crusade.¹⁵ Overall, the canto's punctuated series of allusions to death, atonement, resurrection, and judgement offers continuous echoes of Saint Paul in *i Corinthians* 15, with his central emphasis on the Resurrection as the foundation of Christian faith.

Just as much as *Paradiso* xiv is densely packed with allusions to Scripture and the *sermo humilis*, and rooted in a sense of biblical time, so the other two Fourteens each focus on a distinctive textual style and historical time period. In the case of *Purgatorio* xiv, this is the time of Dante's immediate historical past and present. The canto's two souls, Guido del Duca and Rinieri da Calboli, demonstrate a minutely analytical concern with the local history of Tuscany and Romagna over not much more than a hundred-year period.¹⁶

The Arno speech focuses on the present (that is, the spring of 1300), using present tenses throughout, even in its closing prophecy of the treacherous government of Florence by Rinieri's grandson in 1303. This event, future to the *Commedia's* time-scale but past to Dante at the time of *Purgatorio's* composition, is also presented with the present tense 'Io veggio' [I see]

13 Sini, pp. 167–68; and Gragnolati, pp. 299–300.

14 Soprano, pp. 497–98.

15 'And he that taketh not up his cross, and followeth me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life, shall lose it: and he that shall lose his life for me, shall find it' (*Matthew* 10.38–39). The same words recur in *Matthew* 16.24–25, *Mark* 8.34–35, and *Luke* 9.23–24. Vulgate translations from the Douai-Reims text of *The Holy Bible: Translated from the Latin Vulgate* (London: Burns and Oates, 1914).

16 Guido del Duca (c.1170–1250) and Rinieri da Calboli (c.1226–96) were close contemporaries, both from the Romagna region.

(l. 58) of prophecy.¹⁷ But although this prolongs the timespan, predicting that this period's ruinous consequences will extend 'di qui a mille anni' [a thousand years from now] (l. 65), the canto's primary historical emphasis remains focused on a narrow circle of space and time. The whole second part of the canto, with its survey of the Romagna region, is couched rhetorically as an elegiac *ubi sunt?*, cataloguing the transitory glamour of the region's noble families, and underpinned by precise knowledge of the intricacies of their family trees and the politics of marriage alliances and inheritance. The speech thus combines two rhetorical figures beloved of medieval moralistic poetry, *ubi sunt?* and *enumeratio*, listing nineteen separate names of Romagnolo people and places in just twenty-six lines (ll. 97–123).¹⁸ The theme of decline, and the list of names, recalls the vernacular lyric form of the *sirventese*, typically concerned with current affairs or social morality, often with a satirical inflection.¹⁹ Guido's indignation alternates with a more melancholic tone, which crystallizes in the sole *terzina* in the sequence that lacks a proper name:

le donne e ' cavalier, li affanni e li agi
che ne 'nvogliava amore e cortesia
là dove i cuor son fatti sì malvagi. (*Purg.*, xiv. 109–11)

[the ladies and the knights, the labours and the leisures that love and courtesy made us desire, there where hearts have become so wicked.]

Here the lament invokes another literary register, that of vernacular chivalric romance and love poetry, in which *amore e cortesia* are central themes.²⁰ The rhetorical tenor of the canto's entire second half thus matches its temporal emphasis: local, vernacular, contemporary frames of reference

17 Gianni Grana, 'Canto XIV', in *Lectura Dantis Scaligeri. Purgatorio* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1971), pp. 479–535 (p. 515). Muresu also notes prophetic tones earlier in the passage: 'degnò / ben è che 'l nome di tal valle pèra' [it is surely fitting that the name of that valley perish] (ll. 29–30), recalling *Job* 18.17 (pp. 55–57).

18 Grana discusses the bravura rhetorical construction of Guido's speech (Grana, pp. 519–24).

19 The influence of lyric *sirventese* is suggested by several recent commentators, including Chiavacci Leonardi, Giacalone, and Bosco and Reggio.

20 Robin Kirkpatrick offers a magisterial reflection on the importance of *cortesia* to the construction of the whole canto. See Robin Kirkpatrick, 'Courtesy and Imagination: A Study of *Purgatorio* Canto XIV', *The Modern Language Review* 76 (1981), 67–80. See also Salvatore Accardo, *Capitoli Danteschi* (Rome: Bonacci, 1976), pp. 73–75; Muresu, pp. 74–81.

establish the historical and literary register as that of the medieval present and recent past. The first half of the canto, besides its traces of prophetic diction, likewise adopts a distinctive contemporary tone in its rhetoric of invective; while its allusion to Ovid's Circe as the source for the imagery of metamorphosed cities fits the fourteenth-century taste for moral allegorisation of the classics, attested by the commentaries of Arnulf of Orleans, John of Garland, and many others, and by the vernacular *Ovide Moralisé*.²¹

If *Paradiso* xiv's rhetorical emphasis is scriptural, and *Purgatorio* xiv's contemporary and Italian, *Inferno* xiv is strongly embedded within a framework of classical allusions, both historical and literary. Capaneus's opening words, describing his death from Jove's punitive thunderbolt, closely paraphrase the relevant episode from Statius's *Thebaid*.²² The description of the underworld's rivers likewise derives from Latin epic, in the *katabasis* of *Aeneid* vi. The small deviation concerning Lethe permits Dante-poet to demonstrate his perfect familiarity with ancient authorities, even as Dante-pilgrim's question also briefly opens a larger perspective onto the profound way that Christianity has transformed human conceptions of the afterlife, when the river is reassigned to Purgatory.

Capaneus and the Phlegethon are both posited as materially present in this circle of Dante's Hell; but descriptions and similes bring numerous other classical reference points into view by allusion.²³ The burning desert sands bring comparison with Cato's desert campaigns in Lucan's *Pharsalia* (l. 15);²⁴ the snowflakes of fire, a reference to Alexander the Great's Indian conquests (ll. 31–39).²⁵ Equally, Virgil's description of the Old Man statue

21 Bodo Guthmüller, 'Canto XIV', in *Lectura Dantis Turicensis. Purgatorio*, ed. by Georges Güntert and Michelangelo Picone (Florence: Cesati, 2001), pp. 211–24 (p. 216); Accardo, pp. 67–70.

22 Capaneus's speech, 52–60, recapitulates several key elements of *Thebaid* x. 897–910.

23 Elisabetta Tarantino identifies an elaborate and precise set of intertextual references to Virgil, Lucan, and Ovid, as well as Statius, underpinning both the canto's literary classicism, and its satirically-inflected but deeply serious theological concerns. See Elisabetta Tarantino, 'Fulvae Harenae: The Reception of an Intertextual Complex in Dante's *Inferno*', *Classical Receptions Journal* 4 (2012), 90–126.

24 The mention of Cato is elliptical, but the term *veglio*, used for the Cretan statue here and for Cato in *Purg.*, i. 31, suggests a wider relationship, for which see Mazzotta's ample discussion, pp. 14–65 (especially pp. 37, 60–65).

25 Dante's source is probably Albertus Magnus's *De meteoris*. Brenda Deen Schildgen points out that the Alexander elliptically mentioned here has elements of the hubristic Capaneus or Ulysses, in overstepping the divine boundary of the Ganges into a zone unfit for human habitation. See Brenda Deen Schildgen, *Dante and the Orient* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2002), pp. 97–98. See also Tarantino, pp. 104–05.

on Crete opens with a dense sequence of classical allusions.²⁶ In describing Crete as a site 'sotto 'l cui rege fu già 'l mondo casto' [under whose king the world once was chaste] (l. 96), Dante recalls the opening passage of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, where Saturn is king of a Golden Age of justice. (Virgil's fourth eclogue opens with the same Golden Age legend.) In Ovid, the Golden Age is followed by increasingly corrupt ages of silver, bronze, and iron, a sequence of metals also followed in the body of the *gran veglio* statue (ll. 106–11). Finally, the metamorphosis of Crete from a fertile land 'lieta / d'acqua e di fronde' [happy with water and foliage] (ll. 97–98) into a 'paese guasto' [ruined land] (l. 94) recalls the *Aeneid's* account of how plague and famine cut short the Trojans' attempt at Cretan settlement, driving them onward to Italy.

The textual and historical emphases of the Fourteens could thus be stratified as follows: *Inferno* xiv is shaped primarily by involvement with the literature and history of pagan antiquity; *Purgatorio* xiv is preoccupied with contemporary Italian local history and the intricacies of current affairs, adopting the language predominantly of medieval satire and invective; while *Paradiso* xiv highlights the biblical *sermo humilis* and offers a scriptural, Christocentric survey of history encompassing the whole arc of human experience, from the Adamic Fall to the far future of the Last Judgement, and giving special emphasis to the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Christ in the flesh on earth.

The Old Man of Crete and Redemption History

This is not to say that there is not inevitably a mixture of classical, contemporary, and scriptural elements within individual *canti*, even if one of these aspects proves preponderant. In *Inferno* xiv, for instance, although Dante-poet underlines the classical derivation of his images both of the rain of fire and of the Old Man statue, they also inevitably evoke episodes from the Bible. In the former case, the circle of the violent against God has been earlier identified by Virgil as housing the sinners of 'Sodoma e Caorsa / e chi, spregiando Dio col cor, favella' [Sodom and Cahors and whoever speaks with scorn of God in his heart] (*Inf.*, xi. 50–51). Although Sodom is not mentioned in xiv, the rain of fire irresistibly recalls how 'the Lord rained upon Sodom and Gomorrha brimstone and fire from the Lord

²⁶ Summaries in Scott, p. 189; and Malavasi, p. 445.

out of heaven' (*Genesis* 19.24–25). The comparison of Phlegethon to the sulphurous Bulicame springs, and their association with 'le peccatrici' (l. 80) — according to early commentators, prostitutes who used the spring for bathing or washing²⁷ — further extends the implied allusions to the story of Sodom, and the creation of the sulphurous Dead Sea in punishment for sexual sin.

Likewise, despite the classicising surface referents in Virgil's speech, he describes the Old Man of Crete with details that almost perfectly match a source in the Old Testament book of *Daniel*. Divine revelation enables Daniel to interpret correctly the mysterious dream of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon:

Thou, O king, sawest, and behold there was as it were a great statue: this statue, which was great and high, tall of stature, stood before thee, and the look thereof was terrible. The head of this statue was of fine gold, but the breast and the arms of silver, and the belly and the thighs of brass. And the legs of iron, the feet part of iron and part of clay. (*Daniel* 2.31–33)

Daniel reveals that this symbolizes the golden period of Nebuchadnezzar's own reign, his succession by weaker kings, and the fragmentation of his territories, until finally:

the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed [...] and itself shall stand for ever. (*Daniel* 2.44)

The historico-political elements of the biblical prophecy, with the succession of kingdoms through gold, silver, bronze, and iron, match so well with the Ovidian myth of the Golden Age, that Dante's Old Man image has long been read in similar vein. The statue's different metals are taken to represent different epochs, either running from Adam (the prelapsarian golden head) through Noah, Abraham, Moses, to the sinful present;²⁸ or from Saturn, through the empires of the Medes and Persians, of Alexander, of Rome, again up to the present.²⁹ The feet of clay and iron fit Dante's well-known obsession with the division of authority between the papacy

27 See, for example, Jacopo della Lana, Ottimo, Boccaccio and Benvenuto da Imola.

28 A succession of ages dominated by biblical figures is favoured by Jacopo Alighieri, the Ottimo, and several other early commentators.

29 A classical or secular series of leaders or empires, in varying combinations, is suggested by Bambaglioli, Jacopo della Lana, Guido da Pisa, Pietro Alighieri, and several others. See Malavasi, pp. 446–47.

and the empire, the statue's imbalance indicating the evils of contemporary papal corruption.³⁰

The confluence of the political prophecy in *Daniel* with the Golden Age legend of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is suggestive. The story of the Old Man may well be intended to awaken ideas about the succession of historical time, and the rise and fall of ages or empires. Yet as Mario Marti notes *à propos* *Inferno* xiv, Dante's allegorical passages tend towards polysemanticism, including many possible layers of meaning within a single poetic element.³¹ Another potential meaning of the statue is clarified by the practice of vertical reading, when *Inferno* xiv is brought alongside *Paradiso* xiv. This is the hypothesis, first proposed by Giovanni Busnelli, that the Old Man of Crete is a symbol of postlapsarian humanity, the *homo vetus* or *primus Adam* corrupted by sin.³² In the mystical language of *i Corinthians*, Christ's death and resurrection made this Old Adam into the *homo novus*, or *novissimus Adam* (*i Corinthians* 15.20–28, 45–49).³³ In this ethico-religious interpretation, the composite body of the statue represents the vitiation of original human perfection by the wounds of sin, whereby free will (golden) may be corruptly exercised in four ways in fallen man: ignorance and error wound the silver of reason, malice the bronze of will, infirmity the irascible appetite (iron) and cupidity the concupiscent appetite (clay).³⁴ The categories of sin, divided between indulgence of incontinent appetite, violent exercise of the will, and fraudulent corruption of reason, also correlate with the structural organization of the whole of Dante's Hell.

The allegory of the *gran veglio* in *Inferno* xiv thus generates parallels and echoes with the vision of Christ on the cross in *Paradiso* xiv. A vertical

30 Fourteenth-century commentators almost unanimously see the clay foot as representing the corruption of the Church (often citing the Donation of Constantine), regardless of how they interpret the statue's other elements.

31 Marti, pp. 251–54, 257.

32 Giovanni Busnelli, 'La concezione dantesca del gran Veglio di Creta', in *L'Etica Nicomachea e l'ordinamento morale dell'Inferno di Dante* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1907), pp. 159–91.

33 Mazzotta (pp. 23–37) reviews and extends this conception of the statue as a figure of the *homo vetus*, requiring redemption, and notes that Dante's omission of the dream's ending, when the statue is destroyed without human intervention (*Daniel* 2.34–35), makes its negative connotations more overt. Malavasi (pp. 449–53) and Camozzi (pp. 18–24), both explore symmetries between this episode and *Purgatorio*'s earthly Paradise sequence. Cassell (pp. 57–65) extends the Old and New Adam symbolism to argue for baptismal allegory in the statue's wounds.

34 Busnelli follows an allegorical scheme derived from Richard of St Victor and Thomas Aquinas. See Busnelli, pp. 178–84 (the wounded elements) and pp. 184–88 (the intact golden head). See also Scott, pp. 193–95; Güntert, p. 202; and Bigi, pp. 96–100.

reading of both reveals how symmetrically *i Corinthians* underpins the *Inferno* canto as well as the *Paradiso*. Paul's words on the Old Adam and the New Adam (*i Corinthians* 15.22), and on the victory of Christ over death and sin (*i Corinthians* 15.55–57), clearly inform the language and imagery both of the Old Man of Crete passage and of Solomon's discourse on the Resurrection of the flesh. The same Pauline passage also closes with a prophecy on the Last Judgement and Kingdom of Heaven that echoes the Messianic prophecy of God's future kingdom in Daniel's gloss to Nebuchadnezzar's dream:

The God of heaven hath given thee [Nebuchadnezzar] a kingdom, and strength, and power, and glory. [...] But [...] the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed [...], and itself shall stand for ever. (*Daniel* 2.37, 44)

Afterwards the end: when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God and the Father: when he shall have brought to nought all principality and power and virtue. (*i Corinthians* 15.24)³⁵

The Old and New Testament passages were already linked in exegetical tradition: Dante enriches this connection with his mirroring of the Pauline themes of the Old and New Adam, transmuted via his poetic images of the *gran veglio* in *Inferno* and the lightning-flash vision of Christ in *Paradiso*.

Yet the political or historical potential of the *Inferno's* overt classical intertexts with Virgil and Ovid is not overturned by this pairing: the polysemous text generates meanings by accretion, rather than elimination. The classical legend of the Golden Age was indeed already well established with Christological meaning thanks to Messianic readings of Virgil's fourth eclogue, with its opening reference to the return of Justice and a renewed age of Saturn. Dante cites and translates the eclogue's opening lines in *Purgatorio*, xxii. 70–72, appropriating Virgil's historical and imperial poem into a text that converted Statius-character, through its fit with the evangelization of the early Christians (*Purg.*, xxii. 79–81). The historical Statius is also vividly present in *Inferno* xiv, as author of the *Thebaid* and source for Dante's Capaneus. So the Virgil and Statius whose epic poetry provides so much of the classicising surface patterning of *Inferno* xiv can be drawn into a wider relationship that embraces their function as protagonists

35 Paul's text also draws on a second passage from *Daniel* relating to the dream of the four beasts and the Last Judgement (*Daniel* 7.14, 27).

within Dante's own poem. The flash-forward to *Purgatorio* xxi–xxii further underlines the creative outcomes of cross-reading classical and scriptural texts, a process that Dante claims effected Statius's conversion.

Geography and Eschatology

Each of the Fourteens, in its own way, brings to attention concerns with the problem of conflict within the political sphere. Through the figure of Capaneus, *Inferno* xiv showcases the story of Thebes, with the fraternal conflict that led to the war of the seven Greek kings against the doomed city. Additionally, political readings of the Old Man statue make it a symbol of the successive rise and fall of great kingdoms, biblical or classical. *Purgatorio* xiv gives us a close-up analysis of regions, cities, and families where internal rivalry and faction-based alliances have brought devastation to contemporary Italy, turning Tuscany into a metaphorical sewer and Romagna into an imaginary wasteland. *Paradiso* xiv offers a view of warfare sanctified by faith, and begins to explore the paradox that violence, so destructive in *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* xiv, can serve the cause of peace and unification within a universal Christendom.

The interest Dante shows in all three *canti* concerning political conflict is further underscored by considering their shared emphasis on topography. Like the theme of the Old and New Adam, this is something that perhaps emerges best from the retrospective viewpoint of *Paradiso*. From here, one can see that several leading images in the three *canti* have sketched an intriguing to-and-fro between the symbolic compass points of east and west.

Paradiso gives us the principal city of the medieval western imagination of the east: Jerusalem. In Dante's afterworld geography, Jerusalem lies at the antipodes to Mount Purgatory and Eden; and he follows medieval convention in placing the city at the central meeting-point of the three known continents of the northern hemisphere, as *umbilicus orbis*. Solomon, builder of Jerusalem's first Jewish Temple, dominates the first half of *Paradiso* xiv, in the Heaven of the Sun. In the second half comes the vision of Christ, who spoke of his crucifixion as the destruction of the Temple (*John* 2:19–21), and whose tomb in Jerusalem was the primary goal of medieval Europe's pilgrims and crusaders. The presence of the crusader Cacciaguida throughout *canti* xv–xvii means that the entire Mars sequence privileges Jerusalem. Cacciaguida's story also serves to underline a second primary

characteristic of crusade: that it was launched from west to east, sanctioned by the Church of Rome and led by the Holy Roman Empire.³⁶

From Jerusalem, the Fourteens also look further eastwards, to Babylon. According to Old Testament history, Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Solomon's Temple, and carried its treasures to Babylon (*ii Kings* 25–26). The captive Jews deported to Assyria included the prophet Daniel. This makes a vertical link between the scriptural history of Solomon and Jerusalem in the first part of *Paradiso* xiv, and the biblical allusions in the second part of *Inferno* xiv, with the Old Man statue. The statue itself has a significant orientation, being set along a roughly east-west axis:

che tien volte le spalle inver' Dammiata
e Roma guarda come s'io specchio. (*Inf.*, xiv. 104–05)

[with his back towards Damietta, looking toward Rome as to his mirror.]

In some of the early commentaries, Damietta — an Egyptian port on the Nile delta — is glossed as Babylon, the Bible's supreme example of hostility to Jerusalem and the chosen people.³⁷ The reading gives obvious moral symbolism to the statue's gaze, looking away from the east towards the west and Rome, the city of both ecclesiastical and imperial greatness (but which is also the new Babylon of Augustine's *City of God*).³⁸ The orientation of Dante's statue thus asserts the supremacy of the Roman church and the states of western Christendom, whilst also recalling the crusading impetus towards the east and Jerusalem that focused on capturing the city from its Muslim (typologically 'Babylonian') rulers.

36 The warriors named in *Par.*, xviii. 37–48, however, recall the very broad reach of medieval crusade activity: only Godfrey de Bouillon and Cacciaguida were in Palestine; Charlemagne and Roland fought in Iberia; William of Orange and Renouard in southern France; and Robert Guiscard in southern Italy.

37 In, for example, Jacopo Alighieri, Jacopo della Lana. Benvenuto da Imola follows them in noting Dante's intention to allude to the Assyrian Babylon of Nebuchadnezzar, though he finds Dante's historical geography faulty: 'autor videtur hic facere eundem errorem, quem videtur fecisse in *v* capitulo, scilicet quod capit Babyloniam AEgypti pro Babylonia magna antiqua' [here the author is seen in the same error as in canto *v*, that is, he takes Babylon in Egypt for the great Babylon of ancient times] (*DDP*). But compare Camozzi (pp. 4–5) on the contemporary fame of Damietta as a major Muslim port and crusade objective.

38 The Rome-Orient symbolism functions politically, as alluding to the *translatio imperii* with Aeneas from Troy to Rome, and religiously, with the Jewish Exodus from Egypt to Jerusalem fulfilled, for western Christendom, in the establishment of the papacy at Rome. See Scott, pp. 189–90, 194.

Crete, meanwhile, located mid-Mediterranean *in mezzo mare*, was the umbilical point of ancient Rome's legendary geography; the site of Saturn's just kingdom in the Golden Age. The statue, with its Old Adam associations, is thus located at the symbolic centre of a pagan, postlapsarian topography. The reference to Lethe at the end of *Inferno* xiv however displaces this pagan world view, and looks towards the new geographic centre-points of Dante's Christian afterworld. The true centre-points of the southern and northern hemispheres will prove, respectively, to be the prelapsarian Eden of Mount Purgatory, and the redemptive Jerusalem lying at the junction of the three known continents.³⁹

The grand east-west and north-south sweep of the imagined geographies of these two Fourteens thus matches the ambition of their literary relationships with classical epic and biblical sources, and the regal splendour of their allusions to Solomon, Capaneus, Alexander, Nebuchadnezzar, and the rest. The exercise of vertical reading, however, requires a return to *Purgatorio* xiv, to different and salutary effect. There is conflict here, and east-west geography: but on the localized scale of the Italian regions. Romagna and Tuscany lie on the opposing eastern and western sides of the Apennine range that runs down the centre of the Italian peninsula. According to Guido del Duca, in the years around 1300 both regions were suffering the violent consequences of failed leadership; while his single portrait of a figure who crosses between east and west, the Forlivese Fulcieri da Calboli, portrays him as a butcher motivated only by greed and prejudice. Dante's acute sensitivity to contemporary politics makes his portrait of Fulcieri chillingly unforgettable:⁴⁰

'Io veggio tuo nepote che diventa
cacciator di quei lupi in su la riva
del fiero fiume, e tutti li sgomenta.
Vende la carne loro essendo viva;
poscia li ancide come antica belva;
molti di vita e sé di pregio priva.

39 Camozzi, pp. 11–14, 26–28; and Malavasi, p. 452. Matelda's comment that the ancient poets' notion of the Golden Age was perhaps a dream of Eden (*Purg.*, xxviii. 139–42) in part confirms this radical relocation of universal moral topography.

40 It is worth remembering that Fulcieri's actions in Florence reconfirmed the supremacy of Dante's own historical political opponents, strengthening the improbability of ending his exile.

Sanguinoso esce de la trista selva;
lasciala tal, che di qui a mille anni
ne lo stato primaio non si rinselva'. (*Purg.*, xiv. 58–66)

[I see your nephew become the hunter of those wolves along the bank of the fierce river, and he terrifies them all. He sells their flesh while it is still living; then he kills them like old cattle; he deprives many of life and himself of praise. All bloodied he comes forth from the wicked wood; he leaves it such that a thousand years from now it will not be reforested to its original state.]

The description underlines the horror of warfare as an expression of human sinful fragility, however small-scale the episode may be. The canto's sketch of local Italian tumults does not attempt to parallel them with civilization-changing episodes of crusade, or the battles of classical epic. Equally, though, Dante-poet does not let his audience forget that local clashes spring from the same fatal human tendency to sin and error that are expressed in grand images such as the Old Man of Crete or the vision of Christ crucified.⁴¹

Warfare, and family or faction rivalry have combined, *Purgatorio* xiv tells us, to produce the metamorphosis in Tuscany of city communities into packs of wild beasts, and to distort the family trees of Romagna's nobility into 'venenosi sterpi' [poisonous thickets] (l. 95). Dante-poet's familiarity with these two regions permits detailed analysis of the destructive consequences of such rivalries for the social microcosms of city and castle, village and family. His conclusions cast light on the grander, but more remote, conflicts that *Inferno* and *Paradiso* xiv both contemplate. Warfare in Thebes and Jerusalem, although we know about it primarily through epic poetry and the sacred word of Scripture, must also be counted in the kind of individual losses and single moments of mistaken choice, folly, or corruption that Dante has at his fingertips for central Italy in 1300. The intimacy and intricacy that he summons in these surveys remind his readers that despite the complexity of relationships in any human community, large or small, all are founded on simple encounters between individuals. We know our neighbours when we can name them, place them in their localities, remember their family relationships and personal preferences.

41 These themes, with the intuition that Dante's local history accords with an eschatological history of postlapsarian humanity, are reviewed by Muresu (pp. 73–74).

These concerns inform my final vertical perspective, linking forward to *Paradiso* xiv. In *Paradiso*, the canto's first part emphasizes the collective harmony and happiness of the celestial community of the wise. Individuality is scarcely marked as the souls cluster into circles, to dance and perform choral hymns. Even the episode's main speaker, Solomon, is not directly named in the canto; he does not leave the circle to address Dante-character; and despite earthly kingship and pre-eminent wisdom, he speaks with a *voce modesta*, conveying the truths of an authority higher than his own.⁴² Equally, what he has to say focuses on the future, collective experience of universal resurrection, that moment when:

In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet [...] the dead shall rise again incorruptible. And we shall be changed. (*i Corinthians* 15.52)⁴³

The response to Solomon's speech, though, draws back to the level of simple, intimate human relationships, and the social value of each individual's connection with his or her fellow-beings. The elevated linguistic register dips towards the everyday as Dante-poet reveals the almost childlike, spontaneous reaction of every paradisaic soul to this message, displaying a perfect harmony of collective response with individual feeling:

Tanto mi parver sùbiti e accorti
e l'uno e l'altro coro a dicer 'Amme!',
che ben mostrar disio d'i corpi morti:
forse non pur per lor, ma per le mamme,
per li padri e per li altri che fuor cari
anzi che fosser sempiterno fiamme. (*Par.*, xiv. 61–66)

[So swift and eager were both choruses to say 'Amen!' that they well showed their desire for their dead bodies, perhaps not for themselves alone, but for their mamas, for their fathers, and for the others who were dear before they became sempiternal flames.]

42 See Michelangelo Picone, 'Canto XIV', in *Lectura Dantis Turicensis. Paradiso*, ed. by Georges Güntert and Michelangelo Picone (Florence: Cesati, 2002), pp. 203–18 (pp. 212–15).

43 Ariani (pp. 9–23) discusses Dante's treatment here of the doctrine of bodily resurrection; see also Gragnolati's attentive reading (especially pp. 298–302, 304, 309). Muresu (pp. 155–64) warns against over-sentimentalizing lines 64–66.

That love for ‘le mamme, li padri e gli altri cari’ which the souls express is the foundational bond of human relationships. Vertically and retrospectively, *Paradiso* xiv thus corrects the vision of *Inferno* xiv, with its ancient Theban warfare fuelled by fraternal hatred, and of *Purgatorio* xiv’s struggling Italian cities and families. The joyful response to Solomon’s speech also gives a measure of the sacrifice offered by the holy warriors of Mars, in the second part of *Paradiso* xiv.

Each of the Fourteens thus offers a different emphasis in its scrutiny of terrestrial history and of the pain and difficulty inherent in life in the body. Solomon’s speech looks towards the perfected afterlife of ‘la carne gloriosa e santa’ [our glorious and holy flesh] (l. 43) beyond the Last Judgement; though *Inferno* xiv and *Purgatorio* xiv offer harsher reminders of the fragility and indignity of sinful bodies, in the images of the infernal souls’ tortured dancing and the sewn-blind eyes of Purgatory, or the mutation of Tuscans and Romagnoli into beasts and plants. Individually, these *canti* offer examples of bodies wounded and broken in the violence of historical tensions between peoples: the crusaders, the Theban warlords, the Italian faction heads who clash at particular moments in the perpetual human struggles for power and authority, whether secular or sacred. The vividly imagined geographies of the three *canti* highlight these currents of opposition by providing recurrent east-west compass points for the clashes between cities, regions, and continents. Via the vertical connection, Dante’s Fourteens locate such single, even trivial, instances of crisis within a larger perspective. Framing the individual historical and geographical reference points, the paired images of the *gran veglio* and Christ crucified as Old and New Adam, and the grand axes linking Eden and Jerusalem, Lethe and Phlegethon (but also Arno, Po, and Reno), open vistas between the three Fourteens onto the entire span of creation history.

