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BOOK REVIEWS

Anthony K. Cassell, *Dante's Fearful Art of Justice*. Toronto-Buffalo-London: University of Toronto Press, 1984. Pp. xiv + 186.

Anthony Cassell's study of Dante's "art of justice" seeks to uncover a pattern in the iconography of the Infernal *contrapasso*. Cassell uncovers the patristic concepts which inform Dante's punishments, all of which he sees as perverted images of the Godhead, and especially of baptism and eucharist, as portrayed in the writings of the Church fathers or in contemporary art. His choices are somewhat eclectic but they all demonstrate the veracity of his thesis.

In his first chapter, on Farinata, Cassell follows other critics in seeing *Inf.* IX and X as a single episode. The circle of the heretics, he argues, must be read as the interior of Dis, informed by Augustine's description of the Earthly City. Dante's description of Farinata, whose speech Cassell finds cunning and deceptive, echo patristic images of pride. Farinata's risen soul parodies a tradition that joins the image of Christ's tomb to that of the Church altar, and to the ark as well, both as the holy tabernacle and as Noah's vessel (Dante's own use of the word "arche" [*Inf.* IX.125 and X.29] is crucial). Recourse to the visual arts exposes a tradition showing the risen Christ from the waist up in his tomb, and Noah likewise in an ark which resembles more a tomb than a boat. Indeed the latter was a figure of Christ's own tomb, as Augustine testifies. Cassell also identifies a tradition which contrasts escape from the flood and destruction by fire, and suggests that Dante seized upon this and inverted it into the fiery tombs of the heresiarchs.

As for Farinata, Cassell argues against the Romantic, "heroic" reading of Pier della Vigna. He suggests that Dante drew on a pun common in Piero's time, which linked his name "della Vigna" to the image of the vine, in order to make this *contrapasso* an inversion of the Tree of Salvation, through the traditions of the Trees of Jesse and of the Cross. Both St. Bernard and St. Bonaventure discuss images of vines and plants, the latter seeing the body of Christ as a plant, and bloodletting as a form of pruning (Dante then parodies this in having himself break a branch from Piero's plant).

In tracing the historical record, Cassell argues that Piero's apology is a lie, and that he is guilty above all of avarice. He identifies and explicates classical allusions to Phineus, Actaeon and Polydorus, all symbols of avarice, in the episode. But, he argues, Piero above all resembles Judas, the figure of avarice who, like the logothete, finally kills himself out of despair. Medieval illuminations of the canto draw on the visual topos of the hung Judas, and thus reinforce Cassell's argument.

For Cassell the Veglio di Creta symbolizes the cracked or ruined nature of man which Christ will redeem. The Veglio incorporates both original sin and the sins of the *saeculum* — the pride and vainglory of the present world. As the blood which flows from Christ's wound will redeem man, so do the Veglio's tears form the hellish rivers. The Veglio looks to Rome as an idolatrous place, the mirror of Babylon. He thus inverts the Platonist-Christian theme of the soul as the mirror of God.

Cassell then follows an intricate series of arguments to relate the Veglio to the blasphemers and sodomites, through the Baptismal imagery surrounding the figure of the Veglio and the "sunken" metaphors of Nebuchadnezzar and Niobe which are present in the canto. He argues that these blasphemers are unique among the many of the Inferno, in that they prevent the worship of God and substitute themselves for Him: this is the perfection of blasphemy. The sodomites share the space and the punishment because sodomy is a form of divine punishment for idolatry, as St. Paul argues in Romans I:23-27. Finally, Cassell offers a masterful argument for the relevance of Crete in this canto, identifying Dante's use of the legend of Zeus Cretagenes, according to which the dead Zeus is buried on Crete. The legend was held to be blasphemous, and the figure of Zeus-Jove as blasphemer. The legend thus reinforces the theme of idolatry.

Cassell's chapter on Ulysses follows the same thorough, almost labyrinthine approach used elsewhere. He details how the bucolic opening relies on the pseudo-Virgilian mock-epic *Culex* for its meaning, and how the true meaning of this deceptive image sets a tone of deception which pervades the canto. Ulysses systematically inverts the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, opting to pursue the life of the senses, not of the spirit. Any reading of the figure as virtuous is erroneous, since Eteocles and Polynices, to whom the traveler Dante compares the Ulysses/Diomedes flame, symbolize greed and lust in the semblance of virtue, according to Fulgentius' commentary on the *Thebaid*. Ulysses himself is the antithesis of the prophet Elijah: the latter achieved heaven in life and rejected the life of the senses; the former pursued it. Cassell exposes the ironic inversion when he points out that Elijah prefigures the gift of tongues, while Ulysses becomes a tongue of flame.

In his final chapter, Cassell argues that Satan is a total negation of the Godhead. He details inversions of both the baptism of Christ and of Eucharist symbolism, the latter through the many images of grain and of the grist-mill. He finds an important antitype, again comforted by contemporary representations, in the Old Testament story of Joseph placed in a pit by his brothers: "[Satan] who seeks man's damnation is punished not only as the betrayed Christ the Saviour at his baptism, but also as Christ in the salvific sacrament as it is adumbrated by the betrayed Joseph." In the image of the mill Cassell finds the dividing line between the Old and New Testaments; Satan likewise represents the division between the Old-Testament law of retribution and "the purgatorial realm of Grace and Justification."

Cassell's text is brief, 104 pages, but dense, and requires careful readership to follow its complex but rewarding paths. The 34 plates are often even more convincing than Cassell's textual sources, and surely represent one of the better uses of the principle of "ut pictura poesis." The author has a keen eye for Dante's ironic and parodic strategies, and is especially adept at tracing Dante's subtle allusions through patristic metaphors, the Old and New Testaments and on into the text of the *Inferno*. His research into Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and others has yielded especially convincing results. While the text does not pretend to offer comprehensive readings of given cantos, it provides a solid treatment of the problems it addresses, and offers intriguing and worthwhile solutions to them.

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