

## *Inferno* XXVI

Dante Alighieri (1265-1321)  
*Epistle to Cangrande*

In his famous letter to Cangrande, Dante explains why he chose the generic title of *Commedia* for his poem, arguing, in good Aristotelian tradition, that it ends happily and is written in the vulgar tongue. Unlike the episodic and fragmentary nature of ancient comedy aesthetics, his poem presents a comprehensive world view, recycling themes and forms from tragedy, history and romance. Dante presents through his *Commedia* characters a spiritual and eschatological vision, alien to the licentious frivolity of the Roman comedy tradition but more akin to the medieval mystery play tradition.

### **Epistle to Cangrande**

Magnifico atque victoriosissimo Domino, Domino Kani Grandi de la Scala, sacratissimi Caesarei Principatus in urbe Verona et civitate Vicentiae Vicario Generali, devotissimus suus Dantes Alagherii, Florentinus ratione non moribus, vitam orat per tempora diuturna felicem, et gloriosi nominis perpetuum incrementum.

1. Inclyta vestrae Magnificentiae laus, quam fama vigil volitando disseminat, sic distrahit in diversa diversos, ut hos in spem suae prosperitatis attollat, hos exterminii deiciat in terrorem. Huius quidem praeconium, facta modernorum exsuperans, tanquam veri existentia latius, arbitrar aliquando superfluum. Verum ne diuturna me nimis incertitudo suspenderet, velut Austri regina Hierusalem petiit, velut Pallas petiit Heliconam, Veronam petii fidis oculis discursurus audita. Ibique magnalia vestra vidi, vidi beneficia simul et tetigi; et quemadmodum prius dictorum ex parte suspicabar excessum, sic posterius ipsa facta excessiva cognovi. Quo factum est, ut ex auditu solo cum quadam animi subiectione benevolus prius exstiterim; sed ex visu postmodum devotissimus et amicus.

2. Nec reor, amici nomen assumens, ut nonnulli forsitan obiectarent, reatum praesumptionis incurrere, quum non minus dispares connectantur quam pares amicitiae sacramento. Nam si delectabiles et utiles amicitias inspicere libeat, illis persaepe insipienti patebit, praeeminentes inferioribus coniugari personas. Et si ad veram ac per se amicitiam torqueatur intuitus, nonne summorum illustriumque principum plerumque viros fortuna obscuros, honestate praeclaros, amicos fuisse constabit? Quidni? quum etiam Dei et hominis amicitia nequaquam impediatur excessu! Quod si cuiquam, quod asseritur, nunc videretur indignum, Spiritum Sanctum audiat, amicitiae suae participes quosdam homines profitentem. Nam in Sapientia de sapientia legitur, "quoniam infinitus thesaurus est hominibus, quo qui usi sunt, participes facti sunt amicitiae Dei." Sed habet imperitia vulgi sine discretione iudicium; et quemadmodum solem pedalis magnitudinis arbitratur, sic et circa mores vana credulitate decipitur. Nos autem quibus optimum quod est in nobis noscere datum est, gregum vestigia sectari non decet, quinimmo suis erroribus obviare tenemur. Nam intellectu ac ratione degentes, divina quadam libertate dotati, nullis consuetudinibus adstringuntur. Nec mirum, quum non ipsi legibus sed ipsius leges potius dirigantur. Liqueat igitur, quod superius dixi, me scilicet esse devotissimum et amicum, nullatenus esse praesumptum.

3. Praeferens ergo amicitiam vestram quasi thesaurum carissimum, providentia diligenti et accurata sollicitudine illam servare desidero. Itaque, quum in dogmatibus moralis negotii amicitiam adaequari et salvari analogo doceatur, ad retribuendum pro collatis beneficiis plus quam semel analogiam sequi mihi votivum est; et propter hoc munuscula mea saepe multum consexi et ab invicem segregavi, nec non segregata percensui, digniusque gratiusque vobis inquirens. Neque ipsi Praeeminentiae vestrae congruum comperi magis quam Comoediae sublimem canticam, quae decoratur titulo Paradisi; et illam sub praesenti epistola, tanquam sub epigrammate proprio dedicatam, vobis adscribo, vobis offero, vobis denique recomendo.

4. Illud quoque praeterire silentio simpliciter inardescens non sinit affectus, quod in hac donatione plus dono quam domino honoris et famae potest conferri videri; quinimmo, cum eius titulo iam praesagium de gloria vestri nominis amplianda, satis attentis videar expressisse, quod de proposito. Sed zelus gratiae vestrae, quam sitio, vitam parvipendens, a primordio metam praefixam urgebit ulterius. Itaque, formula consummata epistolae, ad introductionem oblatis operis aliquid sub lectoris officio compendiose aggrediar.

5. Sicut dicit Philosophus in secundo Metaphysicorum: "Sicut res se habet ad esse, sic se habet ad veritatem"; cuius ratio est, quia veritas de re, quae in veritate consistit tanquam in subiecto, est similitudo perfecta rei sicut est. Eorum vero quae sunt, quaedam sic sunt, ut habeant esse absolutum in se; quaedam sunt ita, ut habeant esse dependens ab alio per relationem quandam, ut eodem tempore esse, et ad aliud se habere, ut relativa, sicut pater et filius, dominus et servus, duplum et dimidium, totum et pars, et huiusmodi, in quantum talia. Propterea quod esse talium dependet ab alio, consequens est quod eorum veritas ab alio dependeat: ignorato enim dimidio, nunquam cognoscitur duplum; et sic de aliis.

6. Volentes igitur aliqualem introductionem tradere de parte operis alicuius, oportet aliquam notitiam tradere de toto cuius est pars. Quapropter et ego, volens de parte supra nominata totius Comoediae aliquid tradere per modum introductionis, aliquid de toto opere praemittendum existimavi, ut facilius et perfectior sit ad partem introitus. Sex igitur sunt quae in principio cuiusque doctrinalis operis inquirenda sunt, videlicet subiectum, agens, forma, finis, libri titulus, et genus philosophiae. De istis tria sunt in quibus pars ista, quam vobis destinare proposui, variatur a toto, scilicet subiectum, forma et titulus; in aliis vero non variatur, sicut apparet inspicienti; et ideo, circa considerationem de toto, ista tria inquirenda seorsum sunt: quo facto, satis patebit ad introductionem partis. Deinde inquiremus alia tria, non solum per respectum ad totum, sed etiam per respectum ad ipsam partem oblatam.

7. Ad evidentiam itaque dicendorum, sciendum est quod istius operis non est simplex sensus, immo dici potest polysemos, hoc est plurium sensuum; nam primus sensus est qui habetur per literam, alius est qui habetur per significata per literam. Et primus dicitur literalis, secundus vero allegoricus, sive moralis, sive anagogicus. Qui modus tractandi, ut melius pateat, potest considerari in his versibus: "In exitu Israel de Aegypto, domus Iacob de populo barbaro, facta est Iudaea sanctificatio eius, Israel potestas eius." Nam si ad literam solam inspiciemus, significatur nobis exitus filiorum Israel de Aegypto, tempore Moysi; si ad allegoriam, nobis significatur nostra redemptio facta per Christum; si ad moralem sensum, significatur nobis conversio animae de luctu et miseria peccati ad statum gratiae; si ad anagogicum, significatur exitus animae sanctae ab huius corruptionis servitute ad aeternae gloriae libertatem. Et quamquam isti sensus mystici variis appellentur nominibus, generaliter omnes dici possunt allegorici, quum sint a

literali sive historiali diversi. Nam allegoria dicitur ab alleon graece, quod in latinum dicitur alienum, sive diversum.

8. His visis, manifestum est quod duplex oportet esse subiectum circa quod currant alterni sensus. Et ideo videndum est de subiecto huius operis, prout ad literam accipitur; deinde de subiecto, prout allegorice sententiatur. Est ergo subiectum totius operis, literaliter tantum accepti, status animarum post mortem simpliciter sumptus. Nam de illo et circa illum totius operis versatur processus. Si vero accipiatur opus allegorice, subiectum est homo, prout merendo et demerendo per arbitrii libertatem iustitiae praemiandi et puniendi obnoxius est.

9. Forma vero est duplex, forma tractatus et forma tractandi. Forma tractatus est triplex, secundum triplicem divisionem. Prima divisio est, qua totum opus dividitur in tres canticas. Secunda, qua quaelibet cantica dividitur in cantus. Tertia, qua quilibet cantus dividitur in rithimos. Forma sive modus tractandi est poeticus, fictivus, descriptivus, digressivus, transumptivus; et cum hoc definitivus, divisivus, probativus, improbativus, et exemplorum positivus.

10. Libri titulus est: "Incipit Comoedia Dantis Alagherii, Florentini natione, non moribus." Ad cuius notitiam sciendum est, quod comoedia dicitur a comos, villa, et oda, quod est cantus, unde comoedia quasi villanus cantus. Et est comoedia genus quoddam poeticae narrationis, ab omnibus aliis differens. Differt ergo a tragoedia, in materia per hoc, quod tragoedia in principio est admirabilis et quieta, in fine seu exitu est foetida et horribilis; et dicitur propter hoc a tragos, quod est hircus, et oda, quasi cantus hircinus, idest foetidus ad modum hirci, ut patet per Senecam in suis tragoediis. Comoedia vero inchoat asperitatem alicuius rei, sed eius materia prospere terminatur, ut patet per Terentiam in suis comoediis. Et hinc consueverunt dictatores quidam in suis salutationibus dicere loco salutis, "tragicum principium, et comicum finem." Similiter differunt in modo loquendi: elate et sublime tragoedia; comoedia vero remisse et humiliter; sicut vult Horatius in sua Poetria, ubi licentiat aliquando comicos ut tragoedos loqui, et sic e converso:

Interdum tamen et vocem comoedia tollit,  
Iratuque Chremes tumido delitigat ore;  
Et tragicus plerumque dolet sermone pedestri  
Telephus et Peleus etc.

Et per hoc patet, quod comoedia dicitur praesens opus. Nam si ad materiam respiciamus, a principio horribilis et foetida est, quia Infernus; in fine prospera, desiderabilis et grata, quia Paradisus; ad modum loquendi, remissus est modus et humilis, quia loquutio vulgaris, in qua et mulierculae communicant. Et sic patet quare Comoedia dicitur. Sunt et alia genera narrationum poeticarum, scilicet carmen bucolicum, elegia, satira, et sententia votiva, ut etiam per Horatium patere potest in sua Poetria; sed de istis ad praesens nihil dicendum est.

11. Potest amodo patere quomodo assignandum sit subiectum partis oblatae. Nam, si totius operis literaliter sumpti sic est subiectum: status animarum post mortem, non contractus sed simpliciter acceptus, manifestum est quod hac in parte talis status est subiectum, sed contractus, scilicet status animarum beatarum post mortem. Et si totius operis allegorice sumpti subiectum est homo, prout merendo et demerendo per arbitrii libertatem est iustitiae praemiandi et puniendi obnoxius, manifestum est in hac parte hoc subiectum contrahi, et est homo, prout merendo obnoxius est iustitiae praemiandi.

12. Et sic patet de forma partis per formam adsignatam totius. Nam, si forma tractatus in toto est triplex, in hac parte tantum est duplex, scilicet divisio canticae et cantuum. Non eius potest esse propria forma divisio prima, quum ista pars sit primae divisionis.

13. Patet etiam libri titulus. Nam si titulus totius libri est: "Incipit Comoedia" etc., ut supra; titulus autem huius partis est: "Incipit cantica tertia Comoediae Dantis, quae dicitur Paradisus."

14. Inquisitis his tribus in quibus variatur pars a toto, videndum est de aliis tribus in quibus nulla variatio est a toto. Agens igitur totius et partis est ille qui dictus est, et totaliter videtur esse.

15. Finis totius et partis esse posset multiplex, scilicet propinquus et remotus. Sed omissa subtili investigatione, dicendum est breviter quod finis totius et partis est, remove vivere in hac vita de statu miseriae et perducere ad statum felicitatis.

16. Genus vero philosophiae, sub quo hic in toto et parte proceditur, est morale negotium, sive ethica; quia non ad speculandum, sed ad opus inventum est totum et pars. Nam si in aliquo loco vel passu pertractatur ad modum speculativi negotii, hoc non est gratia speculativi negotii, sed gratia operis; quia, ut ait Philosophus in secundo Methaphysicorum, "ad aliquid et nunc speculantur practici aliquando."

17. His itaque praemissis, ad expositionem literae secundum quandam praelibationem accedendum est; et illud praenunciandum, quod expositio literae nihil aliud est quam formae operis manifestatio. Dividitur ergo ista pars, seu tertia cantica, quae Paradisus dicitur, principaliter in duas partes, scilicet in prologum et partem executivam. Pars secunda incipit ibi: "Surgit mortalibus per diversas fauces."

18. De parte prima est sciendum quod, quamvis communi ratione dici posset exordium, proprie autem loquendo non debet dici nisi prologus; quod Philosophus in tertio Rhetoricorum videtur innuere, ubi dicit quod "prooemium est in oratione rhetorica, sicut prologus in poetica, et praeludium in fistulatione." Est etiam praenotandum quod praevisio ista, quae communiter exordium dici potest, aliter fit a poetis, aliter a rhetoribus. Rhetores enim concessere praelibare dicenda, ut animum comparent auditoris. Sed poetae non solum hoc faciunt, quinimmo post haec invocationem quandam emittunt. Et hoc est eis conveniens, quia multa invocatione opus est eis, quum aliquid contra communem modum hominum a superioribus substantiis petendum sit, quasi divinum quoddam munus. Ergo praesens prologus dividitur in partes duas: in prima praemittitur quid dicendum sit, in secunda invocatur Apollo; et incipit secunda pars ibi: "O bone Apollo, ad ultimum laborem," etc.

19. Propter primam partem notandum quod ad bene exordium tria requiruntur, ut dicit Tullius in Nova Rhetorica, scilicet ut benevolum et attentum et docilem reddat aliquis auditorem; et hoc maxime in admirabili genere causae, ut ipsemet Tullius dicit. Quum ergo materia circa quam versatur praesens tractatus sit admirabilis, et propterea ad admirabile reducenda ista tria intenduntur in principio exordii, sive prologi. Nam dicit se dicturam ea, quae qui vidit in primo coelo retinere mente potuit. In quo dicto omnia illa tria comprehenduntur; nam in utilitate dicendorum benevolentia paratur; in admirabilitate attentio; in possibilitate docilitas. Utilitatem innuit, quum recitaturum se dicit eaque maxime allectiva sunt desiderii humani, scilicet gaudia Paradisi; admirabilitatem tangit, quum promittit se tam ardua, tam sublimi dicere, scilicet conditiones regni coelestis possibilitatem ostendit, quum dicit se dicturum ea quae mente retinere potuit; si enim

ipse, et alii poterunt. Haec omnia tanguntur in verbis illis, ubi dicit se fuisse in primo coelo, et quod dicere vult de regno coelesti quidquid in mente sua, quasi thesaurum, potuit retinere. Viso igitur de bonitate ac perfectione primae partis prologi, ad literam accedatur. 20. Dicit ergo quod "gloria primi Motoris," qui Deus est, "in omnibus partibus universi resplendet," sed ita ut "in aliqua parte magis, et in aliqua minus." Quod autem ubique resplendeat, ratio et auctoritas manifestat. Ratio sic: Omne quod est, aut habet esse a se, aut ab alio. Sed constat quod habere esse a se non convenit nisi uni, scilicet primo, seu principio, qui Deus est; quum habere esse non arguat per se necesse esse, et per se necesse esse non competat nisi uni, scilicet primo, seu principio, quod est causa omnium; ergo omnia quae sunt, praeter unum ipsum, habent esse ab alio. Si ergo accipiatur ultimum in universo, non quodcumque, manifestum est quod id habet esse ab aliquo; et illud a quo habet, a se, vel ab aliquo. Si a se, sic est primum; si ab aliquo, et illud similiter vel a se, vel ab aliquo. Et esset sic procedere in infinitum in causis agentibus, ut probatur in secundo Metaphysicorum. Et sic erit devenire ad primum, qui Deus est. Et sic, mediate vel immediate, omne quod habet esse, habet esse ab Eo; quia ex eo quod causa secunda recipit a prima, infinit super causatum ad modum recipientis et reperimentis radium, propter quod causa prima est magis causa. Et hoc dicitur in libro De Causis, quod "omnis causa primaria plus influit super suum causatum quam causa universalis secunda." Sed hoc quantum ad esse.

21. Quantum vero ad essentiam, probo sic: Omnis essentia, praeter primam, est causata; aliter essent plura quae essent per se necesse esse, quod est impossibile. Quia causatum est vel a natura vel ab intellectu; et quod a natura est, per consequens causatum est ab intellectu, quum natura sit opus intelligentiae. Omne ergo quod est causatum, est causatum ab aliquo intellectu mediate vel immediate. Quum ergo virtus sequatur essentiam cuius est virtus, si essentia intellectiva, est tota et unius quae causat. Et sic quemadmodum prius devenire erat ad primam causam ipsius esse, sic nunc essentiae et virtutis. Propter quod patet quod omnis essentia et virtus procedat a prima, et intelligentiae inferiores recipiant quasi a radiante, et reddant radios superioris ad suum inferius, ad modum speculorum. Quod satis aperte tangere videtur Dionysius de coelesti hierarchia loquens. Et propter hoc dicitur in libro De Causis quod "omnis intelligentia est plena formis." Patet ergo quomodo ratio manifestat divinum lumen, id est divinam bonitatem, sapientiam et virtutem, resplendere ubique.

22. Similiter etiam at scientius facit auctoritas. Dicit enim Spiritus Sanctus per Hieremiam: "Numquid non coelum et terram ego impleo?" et in Psalmo: "Quo ibo a spiritu tuo? et quo a facie tua fugiam? Si ascendero in coelum, tu illic es; si descendero in infernum, ades. Si sumpsero pennas meas," etc. Et Sapientia dicit quod "Spiritus Domini replevit orbem terrarum." Et Ecclesiasticus in quadagesimo secundo: "Gloria Domini plenum est opus eius." Quod etiam scriptura paganorum contestatur; nam Lucanus in nono: "Iuppiter est quodcumque vides, quocumque moveris."

23. Bene ergo dictum est, quum dicit quod divinas radius, seu divina gloria, "per universum penetrat et resplendet": penetrat, quantum ad essentiam; resplendet, quantum ad esse. Quod autem subicit de "magis et minus," habet veritatem in manifesto; quoniam videmus in aliquo excellentiori gradu essentiam aliquam, aliquam vero in inferiori; ut patet de coelo et elementis, quorum quidem illud incorruptibile, illa vero corruptibilia sunt.

24. Et postquam praemisit hanc veritatem, prosequitur ab ea, circumloquens Paradisum; et dicit quod fuit "in coelo illo quod de gloria Dei, sive de luce, recipit affluentius." Propter quod sciendum quod illud coelum est coelum supremum, continens corpora universa, et

a nullo contentum, intra quod omnia corpora moventur (ipso in sempiterna quiete permanente), et a nulla corporali substantia virtutem recipiens. Et dicitur empyreum, quod est idem quod coelum igne sive ardore flagrans; non quod in eo sit ignis vel ardor materialis, sed spiritualis, qui est amor sanctus, sive caritas.

25. Quod autem de divina luce plus recipiat, potest probari per duo. Primo, per suum omnia continere et a nullo contineri; secundo, per sempiternam suam quietem sive pacem. Quantum ad primum probatur sic: Continens se habet ad contentum in naturali situ, sicut formativum ad formabile, ut habetur in quarto Physicorum. Sed in naturali situ totius universi primum coelum est omnia continens; ergo se habet ad omnia sicut formativum ad formabile; quod est se habere per modum causae. Et quum omnis vis causandi sit radius quidam profluens a prima causa, quae Deus est, manifestum est quod illud coelum quod magis habet rationem causae, magis de luce divina recipit.

26. Quantum ad secundum, probatur sic: Omne quod movetur, movetur propter aliquid quod non habet, quod est terminus sui motus; sicut coelum lunae movetur propter aliquam partem sui, quae non habet illud ubi ad quod movetur; et quia sui pars quaelibet non adepto quolibet ubi (quod est impossibile) movetur ad aliud, inde est quod semper movetur et nunquam quiescit, et est eius appetitus. Et quod dico de coelo lunae, intelligendum est de omnibus praeter primum. Omne ergo quod movetur est in aliquo defectu, et non habet totum suum esse simul. Illud igitur coelum quod a nullo movetur, in se et in qualibet sui parte habet quidquid potest modo perfecto, ita quod motu non indiget ad suam perfectionem. Et quum omnis perfectio sit radius Primi, quod est in summo gradu perfectionis, manifestum est quod coelum primum magis recipit de luce Primi, qui est Deus. Ista tamen ratio videtur arguere ad destructionem antecedentis, ita quod simpliciter et secundum formam arguendi non probat. Sed si consideremus materiam eius, bene probat, quia de quodam sempiterno, in quo posset defectus sempiternari: ita quod, si Deus non dedit sibi motum, patet quod non dedit sibi materiam in aliquo egentem. Et per hanc suppositionem tenet argumentum ratione materiae; et similis modus arguendi est ac si diceremus: Si homo est, est risibile; nam in omnibus convertibilibus tenet similis ratio gratia materiae. Sic ergo patet quod quum dicit "in illo coelo quod plus de luce Dei recipit," intelligit circumloqui Paradisum, sive coelum empyreum.

27. Praemissis quoque rationibus consonanter dicit Philosophus in primo De Coelo quod coelum "tanto habet honorabiliores materias istis inferioribus, quanto magis elongatum est ab his quae hic." Adhuc etiam posset adduci quod dicit Apostolus ad Ephesios de Christo: "Qui ascendit super omnes coelos, ut impleret omnia." Hoc est coelum deliciarum Domini; de quibus deliciis dicitur contra Luciferum per Ezechielem: "Tu signaculum similitudinis, sapientia plenus et perfectione decorus, in deliciis Paradisi Dei fuisti."

28. Et postquam dixit quod fuit in loco illo Paradisi per suam circumlocutionem, prosequitur dicens se vidisse aliqua quae recitare non potest qui descendit. Et reddit causam, dicens "quod intellectus in tantum profundat se' in ipsum desiderium suum, quod est Deus, quod memoria sequi non potest." Ad quae intelligenda sciendum est quod intellectus humanus in fine vita, propter connaturalitatem et affinitatem quam habet ad substantiam intellectualem separatam, quando elevatur, in tantum elevatur ut memoria post reditum deficiat, propter transcendisse humanum modum. Et hoc insinuat nobis per Apostolum ad Corinthios loquentem, ubi dicit: "Scio hominum (sive in corpore, sive extra corpus, nescio, Deus scit), raptum usque ad tertium coelum, et vidit arcana Dei. quae non licet homini loqui." Ecce, postquam humanam rationem

intellectus ascensione transierat, quid extra se ageretur non recordabatur. Hoc etiam est insinuatum nobis in Matthaео, ubi tres discipuli ceciderunt in faciem suam, nihil postea recitantes, quasi obliti. Et in Ezechiele scribitur: "Vidi et cecidi in faciem meam." Et ubi ista invidis non sufficiant, legant Richardum de Sancto Victore in libro De Contemplatione; legant Bernardum in libro De Consideratione; legant Augustinum in libro De Quantitate Animae, et non invident. Si vero in dispositionem elevationis tantae propter peccatum loquentis oblatrant, legant Danielem, ubi et Nabuchodonosor invenient contra peccatores aliqua vidisse, divinitas oblivionique mandasse. Nam "Qui oriri solem suum facit super bonos et malos, et pluit super iustos et iniustos," aliquando misericorditer ad conversionem, aliquando severe ad punitionem, plus et minus, ut vult, gloriam suam quantum cumque male viventibus manifestat.

29. Vidit ergo, ut dicit, aliqua "quae referre nescit et nequit rediens." Diligenter quippe notandum est quod dicit "nescit et nequit." Nescit quia oblitus, nequit quia, si recordatur et contentum tenet, sermo tamen deficit. Multa namque per intellectum videmus quibus signa vocalia desunt; quod satis Plato insinuat in suis libris per assumptionem metaphorismorum, multa enim per lumen intellectuale vidit quae sermone proprio nequivit exprimere.

30. Postea dicit se dicturum illa quae de regno coelesti retinere potuit; et hoc dicit esse materiam sui operis; quae qualia sint et quanta, in parte executiva patebit.

31. Deinde quum dicit: "O bone Apollo," etc., facit invocationem suam. Et dividitur ista pars in partes duas: in prima invocando petit; in secunda suadet Apollini petitionem factam, remunerationem quandam praenuntians; et incipit secunda pars ibi: "O divina virtus." Prima pars dividitur in partes duas: in prima petit divinum auxilium; in secunda tangit necessitatem suae petitionis, quod est iustificare ipsam, ibi: "Hucusque alterum iugum Parnassi," etc.

32. Haec est sententia secundae partis prologi in generali. In speciali vero non exponam ad praesens; urget enim me rei familiaris angustia, ut haec et alia utilia rei publicae derelinquere oporteat. Sed spero de Magnificentia vestra, ut alias habeatur procedendi ad utilem expositionem facultas.

33. De parte vero executiva, quae fuit divisa iuxta totum prologum, nec dividendo nec sententiando quidquam dicetur ad praesens, nisi hoc, quod ubique procedetur ascendendo de coelo in coelum, et recitabitur de animabus beatis inventis in quolibet orbe, et quod vera illa beatitudo in sentiendo veritatis principium consistit; ut patet per Iohannem ibi: "Haec est vita aeterna, ut cognoscant te Deum verum," etc.; et per Boetium in tertio De Consolatione ibi: "Te cernere finis." Inde est quod ad ostendendum gloriam beatitudinis in illis animabus, ab eis, tanquam videntibus omnem veritatem, multa quaerentur quae magnam habent utilitatem et delectationem. Et quia, invento principio seu primo, videlicet Deo, nihil est quod ulterius quaeratur, quum sit Alpha et Omega, id est principium et finis, ut visio Iohannis designat, in ipso Deo terminatur tractatus, qui est benedictus in saecula saeculorum.

## Translation

### Epistle to Cangrande

To the great and most victorious lord, Lord Can Grande della Scala, Vicar General of the Principate of the Holy Roman Emperor in the town of Verona and the municipality of Vicenza, his most devoted Dante Alighieri, Florentine in birth but not in manners, wishes him a happy life through long years, as well as a continuous increase in his glorious reputation.

1. The outstanding praise of your Magnificence, which watchful fame spreads abroad on flying wing, pulls different people in different directions, so that it brings some to hope in their prosperity, casts down others in fear of destruction. The report of such fame, exceeding by far that of any present day person, as somewhat beyond the truth, I judged to be somewhat exaggerated. In truth, so that this great uncertainty might keep me in suspense longer, as the Queen of Sheba came to Jerusalem, as Pallas came to Helicon, I came to Verona to be an eye-witness for myself what I had heard. And there I saw your great works, I saw your benefices and touched them; and just as I had earlier suspected excess in part in your praisers, now later I know the excess of the deeds themselves. So that, just as by hearsay alone I was favorably inclined by a sort of submission of the mind, now I am through sight your faithful servant and friend.

2. I am not afraid, in taking on the name of friend, as some perchance may object, that I will incur the guilt of presumption, since unequals are not less bound by the sacred bonds of friendship than are equals. Indeed, if one is willing to look at pleasureable and useful friendships, most frequently it will be obvious to him that they join persons of preeminence to their inferiors. And if the understanding turns to true, disinterested friendship, will it not show that frequently men of obscure fortune, outstanding in honesty, were friends of most illustrious princes? Why not? Since not even friendship between God and man is impeded by the disparity! But if to anyone that which is asserted seems now to be improper, let him hear the Holy Spirit offering certain men the sharing of his love. For in Wisdom one reads concerning wisdom: "For she is an infinite treasure to men; which they that use, become the friends of God." But the inexperience of the common people has judgment without discrimination; and just as the sun is though to be the size of a foot, thus concerning customs they are deceived in vain credulity. For us, however, to whom it is given to know the best that is in us, it is not proper to follow the tracks of the herd, but rather we ought to confront their errors. For, being lacking in intellect and reason, though endowed as it were by divine freedom, they are restricted by no custom. It is not strange, since they are not directed by law, but rather the law by them. It is clear then, as I said above, viz. that I am your servant and friend, is in no way presumptuous.

3. Therefore, holding your friendship in high esteem, like a most precious treasure, I wish to preserve it with diligent care and close solicitude. Thus, as it is taught in moral philosophy that friendship is returned and preserved by similarity, I have purposed to follow similarity in paying back the benefits more than once conferred upon me; and for that reason I have often looked at my little gifts and separated them each from the other and then looked through them, looking for ones which might be worthy of and pleasing to you. Nor did I find anything more fitting for your very Preeminence, than the exalted canticle of the Comedy which is entitled Paradiso; and I dedicate it to you by the present letter, as if by a proper epigram; in fine, I dedicate, I offer, I recommend it to you.



4. My burning affection will also not permit me simply to pass over in silence the fact that it would seem that in this donation honor is conferred more on the gift than on yourself; on the contrary, since in its title (salutation) already the prediction of the amplification of your fame will have been seen to be expressed by any attentive reader, as I intended. But, desire for your favor, for which I thirst, little estimating my life (own person), urges me forward to the goal set from the beginning. Thus, the form of the letter having been fulfilled, I shall move to the introduction of the work offered, rather compendiously, under the guise of reader.

5. As the Philosopher says in the second book of *Metaphysics*: "As each thing is in respect of being, so it is with respect to truth"; the reason for this is that the truth about a thing, which consists in truth as in the subject, is the perfect image of the thing as it is. Of those things which are, there are some which are absolute within themselves; there are some which are dependent on something else through some relationship, such as to be at the same time and to exist with something else, as the relatives, like father and son, lord and servant, double and half, whole and part, and many other like things. Wherefore, since such a being depends on another, it follows that the truth of them depends on something else: if the concept of half is not known, never will double be known, and the same with the others.

6. Those who wish to give some kind of introduction to a part of any kind of work ought to offer some information about the whole of which it is a part. Whence also I, wishing to offer something concerning the above named part of the whole *Comedy* by way of introduction, thought that I ought to first set down something about the whole work, that it might be a easier and better entry to the part. There are six things to be looked at at the beginning of any doctrinal work, viz. subject, actor, form, purpose, title, and the type of philosophy. Of these there are three in which this part, which I meant to dedicate to you, is different from the whole, that is, the subject, the form, and the title; in the others it does not differ, as is obvious to anyone who looks; and therefore, in the consideration of the whole, these three ought to be looked at separately: this having been accomplished, the way will be open for the introduction of the part. Then we will look at the other three, not only with respect to the whole, but also with respect to the part offered.

7. For me be able to present what I am going to say, you must know that the sense of this work is not simple, rather it may be called polysemantic, that is, of many senses; the first sense is that which comes from the letter, the second is that of that which is signified by the letter. And the first is called the literal, the second allegorical or moral or anagogical. Which method of treatment, that it may be clearer, can be considered through these words: "When Israel went out of Egypt, the house of Jacob from a barbarous people, Judea was made his sanctuary, Israel his dominion" (Douay-Rheims, Ps. 113.1-2). If we look at it from the letter alone it means to us the exit of the Children of Israel from Egypt at the time of Moses; if from allegory, it means for us our redemption done by Christ; if from the moral sense, it means to us the conversion of the soul from the struggle and misery of sin to the status of grace; if from the anagogical, it means the leave taking of the blessed soul from the slavery of this corruption to the freedom of eternal glory. And though these mystical senses are called by various names, in general all can be called allegorical, because they are different from the literal or the historical. Now, allegory comes from Greek *alleon*, which in Latin means other or different.

8. Now that we have seen this, it is obvious that the subject around which the two senses turn must be twofold. And therefore it is to be determined about the subject of this work when it is taken literally. then about the subject when it is understood

allegorically. The subject of the whole work, taken only from a literal standpoint, is simply the status of the soul after death, taken simply. The movement of the whole work turns from it and around it. If the work is taken allegorically, however, the subject is man, either gaining or losing merit through his freedom of will, subject to the justice of being rewarded or punished.

9. Its form is twofold, the form of the treatise and the form of the treatment. The form of the treatise is three-fold, according to the three-fold division. The first division is that by which the entire work is divided into three canticles. The second that by which each canticle is divided into cantos. The third that by which each canto is divided into rhyming units. The form or the mode of treatment is poetic, fictive, descriptive, digressive, transumptive; and along with this definitive, divisive, probative, improbable, and setting examples.

10. The title of the book is: Begins the Comedy of Dante Alighieri, Florentine in birth, not in custom. In order to understand you need to know that comedy comes from komos "village" and oda, which means "song," whence comedy sort of means "country song." And comedy is sort of a kind of poetic narration, different from all others. It differs, therefore, from the tragedy, in matter by the fact that tragedy in the beginning is admirable and quiet, in the end or final exit it is smelly and horrible; and it gets its name because of this from tragos, which means "goat," and oda, sort of like "goat-song," that is, smelly like a goat, as can be seen in Seneca's tragedies. But comedy begins with harshness in some thing, whereas its matter ends in a good way, as can be seen by Terence in his comedies. And thus letter writers are accustomed to say in their salutations in the place of an address "a tragic beginning, a comical end." They differ also in the way of speaking: the tragedy is elevated and sublime, the comedy loose and humble, as Horace tells us in his *Poetria*, where he permits now and again comic writers to speak like tragedists and also vice versa.

At times, however, even comedy exalts her voice, and an angry Chremes rants and raves; often, too, in a tragedy Telephus or Peleus utters his sorrow in the language of prose . . .

And from this it is obvious that the present work is called comedy. And if we look at the matter, in the beginning it is horrible and smelly, because *Inferno*; in the end it is good, desirable and graceful, for it is *Paradiso*; as to the manner of speaking, it is easy and humble, because it is in the vulgar tongue, in which also women communicate. And thus it is obvious why it is called Comedy. There are also other genres of poetic narration, such as bucolic song, elegy, satire and the votive sentence, as also may be seen through Horace in his *Poetria*, but at present there is nothing to be said about these.

11. Now it can be explained how the part offered (*Paradiso*) may be assigned a subject. Well, if the subject of the whole work, taken literally, is this subject: The status of souls after death, taken simply and not limited, it is obvious that in this part such a status is the subject, but restricted, that is, the status of the blessed souls after death. And if the subject of the whole work, taken allegorically, is man, as he gains or loses merit by the exercise of his freedom of will, being subject to the justice of punishment or reward, it is obvious that in this part the subject is restricted, namely, man, to the extent that he is subject by merits to the justice of punishment.

12. And this is obvious concerning the form of the part through the form given to the whole. For, if the form of the treatise as a whole is threefold, in this part it is twofold only,

i.e. the division of the canticle and the cantos. The first formal division is not proper here, since this part is of the first division.

13. Also the title of the book is obvious. For if the title of the whole book is Here begins the Comedy, etc, as above, then the title of this part is Here begins the third canticle of the Comedy of Dante, which is called Paradiso.

14. After we have examined this three by which the part varies from the whole, we must look at the other three, in which there is no variation from the whole. The agent (protagonist), then, of the whole as well as the part is he who has been mentioned, and throughout he will be seen to be.

15. The purpose of the whole and the part could be multiple, that is both remote and proximate. But leaving off subtle investigation, we can say briefly that the purpose of the whole as well as the part is to remove those living in this life from the state of misery and to lead them to the state of bliss.

16. The genus of philosophy under which we proceed here in the whole and in the part is the business of morals or ethics, since both the part and the whole are composed for practice rather than theory. But if in some place or passage things are lengthened out in the manner of theory, this is not for the purpose of theory, but of practice; for, as the Philosopher says in the second book of *Metaphysics*: "practical men theorize now and again" (loose quotation).

17. These being settled, we move to the exposition of letter as a sort of prolepsis, and it should be mentioned ahead of time, that the exposition of the letter is nothing but the revelation of the form of the work. This part, therefore, is divided (that is the third canticle, which is called Paradiso), mainly into two parts, that is the prologue and the real part. The second part begins thus: "The lamp of the world rises on mortals by different entrances."

18. Concerning the first part you must know, though by common practice it may be called the exordium, properly speaking however it should be called nothing but prologue, as the Philosopher indicates when he says that "the proemium is in rhetorical oration as the prologue in poetic, and the prelude in the performance on the pipe." And it must also be noted first that this excursus, which may be called the exordium by common consent, is done one way by poets, another by rhetors, for rhetors often tell ahead of time what they are going to say, so that they may make the mind of the listener receptive. But poets not only do this, but also make some kind of invocation after this. And this is right for them, for they need many invocations, whenever a man contrary to common use must ask for something from superior beings, such as certain divine gifts. Thus the present prologue is divided into two parts: in the first is indicated what is to be said, in the second Apollo is called upon; and the second part begins: "O good Apollo, for the last labor."

19. For the first part it is to be noted that three things are required for the making of a good exordium, as Cicero says in the *Ad Herennium*, namely that it render the listener well-intentioned, attentive and malleable, and this most strongly in the matter of something marvelous, as Cicero himself says. Since then the matter about which the present work revolves is marvelous, therefore at the beginning of the prologue or exordium these three intend to turn (the mind of the listener) to the marvelous, for it says that it is going to tell those things which someone who saw them in the first heaven was

able to hold in mind. In which paragraph all those three are found: for the story in its usefulness captures benevolence, in its marvelous qualities attention, in its possibility receptivity. He suggests utility when he says he is going to tell about those things which are most attractive to the desires of man, namely the joys of Paradise; he touches on the marvelous when he promises to tell about such difficult, such sublime things, i.e. shows the possibility of the descriptions of the heavenly kingdom, when he says that he will tell those things which he was able to keep in mind, as he and others have been able. These all are touched upon in those words where he says he was in the first heaven, and that he wishes to tell concerning the heavenly kingdom whatever he was able to keep in mind, sort of as a treasure chest. The goodness and perfection of the first part of the Prologue having been seen, we move to the letter.

20. He says that "the glory of Him who moves all things," who is God, "shines in all parts of the universe," but so that "in one part more, in another less." The fact that he shines everywhere both reason and authority reveal. Reason thus: Everything which is either has being of itself or through something else. But it is known that to have being of itself is proper to only one being, that is the first one or the beginning, who is God, since to have being does not argue for the necessity of being of itself, and only one thing has the necessity of being of itself, namely the first or the beginning, which is the cause of all; ergo all things which are, except for one alone, have being from something else. If therefore one takes the last thing in the universe, not just anything, it is obvious that it has being from something else, and that from which it has being, of itself or from something else. If of itself, it is the first; if from something else, and it likewise either of itself, or from something else. And thus one may proceed in infinite regress in agent causes, as is shown in the second book of Metaphysics. And thus we will arrive at the first, which is God. And thus, directly or indirectly, everything which has being has being from Him; because from that which the second cause receives from the first, it extends over the caused, like a thing receiving and reflecting a ray, whence the first cause is the greater cause. And this is said in the book Of Causes, that "every primary cause has more influence on its effect than any secondary cause." But this suffices as far as being is concerned.

21. As to essence, I demonstrate thusly: All essence, except for the first, is caused, otherwise there would be many things which would exist by necessity of being of themselves, which is impossible, for the caused is either by nature or by intellect, and that which is by nature is consequently caused by the intellect, since nature is the work of intelligence. All, then, which is caused is caused by some intellect indirectly or directly. Since therefore a virtue follows the essence of which it is a virtue, if it is an intellectual essence, it is all and only that which causes. And thus, just as before we had to arrive at the first cause of that same being, now both of essence and of virtue. For which reason it is obvious that all essence and virtue comes from the first, and the inferior intelligences receive as if from something emitting rays, and they pass on the rays of the superior to their inferiors, like mirrors. Which Dionysius is seen to touch upon when speaking of the celestial hierarchy. And for this reason it is said in the book Of Causes that "every intelligence is full of forms." It is obvious therefore in what way reason shows the divine light, that is the divine goodness, wisdom and virtue, to shine everywhere.

22. Likewise also authority makes the thing more known. For the Holy Spirit says through Jeremiah: "Do I not fill heaven and earth?" (Jer. 23.24), and in the Psalm: "Whither shall I go from thy spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy face? If I ascend into heaven, thou art there; if I descend into hell, thou art present. If I take my wings," etc.

(Ps 138.7-9). And Wisdom says that "the spirit of the Lord hath filled the whole world" (Wisdom 1.7). And Ecclesiasticus in the forty-second chapter: "full of the glory of the Lord is his work" (Ecclu. 42.16). Which also is stated by the writings of the pagans, as in the ninth book of Lucan: "Jupiter is whatever you see, wherever you move."

23. Well then is it said, when he speaks of the divine ray or the divine glory "it penetrates the universe and shines"; it penetrates as to essence; it shines as to being. When he adds "more and less," this is manifestly true, for we see one essence in something on a higher level, another in one on a lower, as is seen in heaven and the elements, of which the former is incorruptible, whereas the latter are corruptible.

24. And after he has set down first this truth, he continues from it, using circumlocution for Paradise [figurando il Paradiso]; and he says that he was in that heaven "which most receives the glory of God, or his light." For which reason you must know that that heaven is the highest heaven, containing all bodies, and contained by none, within which all bodies move (while it remains in eternal quiet), and receiving power from no corporeal substance. And it is called empyreum, which is the same as fiery heaven or flaming with heat; not that in it is fire or material heat, but spiritual, which is holy love or charity.

25. That it receives more of divine light can be shown by two things: First, by the fact that it contains all and is contained by nothing; second, by its eternal quiet or peace. As to the first it is shown thusly: The container is connected with the contained in natural condition as the formative to the formable, as is maintained in the fourth book of Physics. But in the condition of nature of the whole universe the first heaven contains all; thus it is related to all as the formative to the formable, which means to be related by way of cause. And since all causative power is a kind of ray flowing from the first cause, which is God, it is obvious that that heaven which has the greatest degree of cause receives more of the divine light.

26. As far as the second is concerned, it is shown thusly: Everything which moves is moved by something which it does not have, which is the goal of its movement; the lunar sphere is moved because of some part which it does not have towards that towards which it moves; and since no part of it is fitted for anything towards which it moves (which is impossible), thence it is that it is always moving and never rests, and that is its urge. And that which I say concerning the lunar sphere is to be understood of all except the first. Thus everything which moves is defective in something and does not have all its being together. Therefore, that heaven which is moved by nothing must have in itself and each of its parts something which is perfect, because it does not need movement towards its perfection. And since all perfection is the ray of the Prime, which is in the highest degree of perfection, it is manifest that the first heaven receives more of the light of the Prime, which is God. This reasoning obviously argues towards the destruction of the preceding, because simply and as to the form of the argument it has no probative force. But if we look at its material logic, it is surely probative, because it deals with something eternal, in which it might be defective through eternity; that is, if God did not give it motion, it would seem that He did not give it matter in any way deficient. And through this supposition the argument holds by reason of material logic; and a similar way of arguing is as if we said: If he is a man, he laughs; for in all convertibles a like reason holds by reason of the material logic. Thus it is obvious that when he says "in that heaven which receives most from the light of God" he intends a circumlocution for Paradise or the empyrean sphere.

27. All of these reasonings having been gone through, the Philosopher says in the first chapter of *On the Heavens* "the superior glory of its nature is proportionate to its distance from this world of ours." For this purpose might also be adduced what the Apostle says in *Ephesians* concerning Christ: "that ascended above all heavens, that he might fill all things" (Eph. 4.10). This is the heaven of delights of the Lord, concerning which delights it is said against Lucifer through Ezechiel: "Thou wast the seal of resemblance, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. Thou wast in the pleasures of the paradise of God" (Ezech. 28.12-13).

28. And after he said that he was in this place of Paradise through his circumlocution, he continues, saying that he saw some things that he who descends from there cannot tell. And he cites the reason, saying "that our memory sinks so deep' into its desire, which is God, `that memory cannot follow it." To understand this you must know that the human intellect at the end of life, because of the inborn nature and affinity which it has for the separate intellectual substance, when it is raised, is raised to such an extent that memory is lacking after its return, since it transcended human kind. And this is shown to us by the Apostle, speaking to the Corinthians, where he says: "I know a man . . . (whether in the body, or out of the body, I know not; God knoweth), caught up to the third heaven . . . and [he saw secret things of God], which it is not granted to man to utter." Thus, after the intellect surpasses human reason in its ascension, it does not remember those things which took place outside of it. This is shown to us in *Matthew*, where the three disciples fell upon their faces, telling nothing later, as if forgotten. And it is written in Ezechiel: "And I saw, and I fell upon my face" (Ezech. 2.1). But if these are not sufficient for scoffers, let them read Richard of St. Victor in the book *On Contemplation*, let them read Bernard in the book *On Consideration*, let them read Augustine in the book *On the Capacity of the Soul*, and they will not scoff. But if they should object to the possibility of elevation because of the sinful nature of the person speaking, let them read Daniel, where they will find that even Nebuchadnezar saw a vision against sinners, and that God commended it to oblivion. For "who maketh his sun to rise upon the good and bad and raineth upon the just and the unjust" (Matth. 5.45), now merciful for conversion, now severe for punishment, more or less, as he wishes, makes manifest his glory even through those who live an evil life.

29. He saw, therefore, as he says, some things `which he who returns has not the knowledge or power to tell again'. It should be noted carefully that he says "neither knew nor could." Did not know, because he had forgotten; he was unable because, even if he remembered and kept the knowledge, speech would be lacking. For we see many things with our mind for which vocal signs are lacking, as Plato tells us well in his books by taking on metaphors, for he saw many things with the light of his mind which he was not able to express in his own words.

30. Then he says he is going to tell those things of the heavenly kingdom which he was able to retain; and he says this is to be the matter of his work; what they are and how many will be revealed in the narrative part.

31. Then, when he says "O good Apollo," etc. he makes his invocation. And this part is divided into two parts: in the first he makes a petition; in the second part he persuades Apollo concerning the petition which has been made, promising a kind of remuneration; and the second part begins here: "O power divine." The first part is divided into two parts: in the first he asks for divine aid, in the second he touches upon the necessity for his petition, which is to justify it: "Thus far the one peak of Parnassus," etc.

32. This is the sense of the second part of the prologue in general. I shall not expound the specifics at present, for anxiety as to family matters presses upon me, so that I must leave off these and other things useful for the public weal. But I hope for your Magnificence that there will be other times to go on to a useful exposition.

33. Concerning the executive [narrative] part, which was separated from the entire prologue, nothing is said about dividing or summing up at present, except that everywhere it proceeds arising from sphere to sphere, and one is told about the souls of the blessed found in each circle, and that that true beatitude consists in perceiving the principle of truth, as is revealed by John: "This is eternal life, that they may know thee, the only true God," etc. (Jn 17.3), and by Boethius in the third book of *The Consolation of Philosophy*: "The sight of thee is the goal. Whence it is that to show the glory of blessedness in those souls, as witnesses to all truth, much is required of them which has usefulness and entertainment. And since, the principle or the Prime being found, i.e. God, there is nothing more to be sought, since he is the Alpha and Omega, that is, the beginning and the end, as the vision of John calls him, this treatise is ended with God himself, who is blessed throughout the ages.

(Translation by James Marchand)