

Follow the Light: *Lumen Gloriae* and *Visio Dei* in the Works of Dante Alighieri and Marguerite *dicta* Porete

Sigue la luz: *Lumen gloriae* y *visio Dei* en las obras de Dante Alighieri y Marguerite *dicta* Porete¹

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Abstract: In this article we compare the language of light used by Dante Alighieri with the one used by his “heretical” contemporary Marguerite *dicta* Porete (†1310) to express the final contact-vision of God. We will analyze both authors’ use of the images of light, of the gradual ascent and of the knot, placing their books in the context of the theological doctrines concerning the *visio Dei* in the 14th century. This will allow us to posit the authors’ shared eschatological background based on the conception of God as a visible being who radiates his love and knowledge through the created universe. In conclusion, we will discuss the visual and narrative strategies these authors employed in order to express a relationship with the divine, focusing on the historical heterodox implications of the *Commedia* and the *Mirouer*.

Key Words: Dante Alighieri, *Divina Commedia*, Marguerite Porete, *Mirouer des simples ames*, medieval eschatology, *lumen gloriae*.

Resumen: En este artículo comparamos el lenguaje de la luz utilizado por Dante Alighieri con aquel de su contemporánea Marguerite *dicta* Porete (†1310) para expresar la visión final de Dios. Para ello, analizaremos el uso que ambos hacen del imaginario lumínico, del ascenso graduado y del nudo, poniendo sus obras en el contexto de las discusiones teológicas sobre la *visio Dei* en el siglo XIV. Esto nos permitirá reivindicar un transfondo escatológico compartido, basado en la percepción de Dios como ser visible cuyo amor-conocimiento se irradia por todo el universo. Como conclusión, reflexionaremos sobre las estrategias visuales y narrativas que ambos autores utilizan para abordar su visión directa de lo divino y discutiremos las implicaciones que las mismas representan en relación a la posible consideración de sus textos como heterodoxos.

¹ This article constitutes an updated version and an English translation of a previous published work (Pablo GARCÍA ACOSTA, “*Lumen Dantis et Lumen Margaretae*: el imaginario compartido de Dante Alighieri y Marguerite *dicta* Porete”, in *Tenzone*, 11, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 2011), which was, at the same time, a reorganization of the materials and analysis contained in the Fourth chapter of my PhD thesis, Pablo GARCÍA ACOSTA, *Poética de la visibilidad del Mirouer des simples ames*, PhD diss., Universitat Pompeu Fabra, 2009, published in the TDX database (<http://hdl.handle.net/10803/7448>). These works are framed in the activity of the Bibliotheca Mystica et Philosophica Alois M. Haas Research Group, Universitat Pompeu Fabra (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2009GR1551). In these pages we will use the following abbreviations: DS = M. VILLER *et al*, *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité ascétique et mystique. Doctrine et Histoire*, Paris, Beauchesne, 1937, quoted as DS, s. v. «article», column/s. ED = U. BOSCO (ed.), *Enciclopedia dantesca*, Roma, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1971. *Mirouer* = R. GUARNIERI (ed.), Marguerite Porete, *Le mirouer des simples ames*, Turnholt, Brepols, Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Medievalis LXIX, 1986, quoted as *Mirouer*, chapter (Roman numerals), page/s: line/s.

Palabras Clave: Dante Alighieri, *Divina Commedia*, Marguerite Porete, *Mirouer des simples ames*, escatología medieval, *lumen gloriae*.

Sumario: 1. Introduction. Dante's *Paradise* and its mirrors. 2. Face, light and *visio Dei*. 3. Liquid light in the Empyrean. 4. The knot of love and the Farnerness (*Loingprés*). 5. Conclusions. Sources and Bibliography.

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1. Introduction. Dante's Paradise and its mirrors

As we know, Dante Alighieri's *Commedia* constructs its own universe through a perceptive narrative that is mainly based in the visual². The clearest historical signs of this are the professional pictorial interpretations which we find in the illustrated medieval manuscripts of the Florentine's main work. For instance, if we take a look at the classical catalog provided by Brieger, Meiss and Singleton³, we can confirm the *Commedia*'s visibility: highly defined in *Inferno*, moderated in *Purgatorio* and very blurry in *Paradiso*. In J. Pope-Hennessy's words regarding the beautiful codex illuminated by Giovanni di Paolo⁴: «The Paradise by its very nature was more resistant to illustration than the other *Cantiche* and was indeed less often illustrated. Whereas the episodes in the Inferno and Purgatory are concrete and strongly visual, the encounters in Paradise are veiled in mystery». In fact, drawing the eight angelic-planetary heavens did not present a problem at all for the medieval illuminators: there the author continues showing us a series of dialogical meetings with different characters, but when he passes the ninth heaven, the Primum mobile, what Dante *sees* becomes more and more problematic. As we know, after that he finds the Empyrean and there the objects of perception are intangible, full of light and doctrinally risky. A quick look at the graphic tradition of the *Commedia* confirms this⁵.

In the following pages we want to examine the visual implications in the last four *canti* of the Paradise. We propose to do this through analysis of the iconography used by Dante and through comparison with other works whose

² Charles S. SINGLETON, «The irreducible Vision», in Peter H. Brieger, Millard Meiss y Charles S. SINGLETON, *Illuminated Manuscripts of the Divine Comedy*, 2 vols., London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969, pp. 1-29. For the light in Dante's Paradise, see ADA Ruschioni, *Dante e la poetica della luce*, Novara, Interlinea, 2005. For visual perception in the *Commedia*, see Patrick BOYDE, *Perception and Passion in Dante's Comedy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993, pp. 61-92. About the sight and its relationship with the understanding in Paradise (specifically, for Paradise X), see Peter DRONKE, *Dante e la tradizione latine medioevali*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1990, pp. 131ss.

³ Peter H. BRIEGER, Millard MEISS y Charles S. SINGLETON, *op. cit.*, pp. 209-239.

⁴ John POPE-HENESSY, *Paradiso. The Illuminations to Dante's Divine Comedy by Giovanni di Paolo*, London, Thames and Hudson, 1993, p. 17.

⁵ We find a significant example of this in the series of drawings of each *canto* of the *Commedia* by S. Botticelli: in them the representation of *canti* XXXI and XXXIII does not exist and for *canto* XXXII he just draws Dante and Beatrice in the middle of a white void. See the drawings in Hein-ThomasALTCAPPENBERG (ed.), *Sandro Botticelli. The Drawings for Dante's Divine Comedy*, exh. cat., London, Royal Academy of Arts, 2000.

historicity, doctrine and forms or protocols of visibility are similar. We will focus our efforts, especially, on the coincidences with a forbidden and heretical treatise: the *Mirouer des simples ames*, written by Marguerite *dicta* Porete (†1310)⁶. We are not interested in relating these texts as sources, but as different parts of a collective imaginary tradition or, in other words, as examples of a specific visual culture⁷.

Before starting our analysis, we should ask ourselves if the historical contemporaneity of the texts and the visual coincidences between them are enough to prompt a comparative study between Dante and Marguerite. First of all, we have to understand that from their own perspective both texts are depicting an itinerary of perfection, which is typical of the period in which both the *Commedia* and the *Mirouer* were composed. Graphically they are configured in a parallel way, with the light-knowledge-love synthesis providing the essential element for expressing the “approach” of the Soul to the divinity. In fact, both works express the evolution from an earthly life, a life of sin, to a heavenly beatitude, using a spatial imagery based on light⁸. In Marguerite’s case, we could represent her *way* as follows⁹:

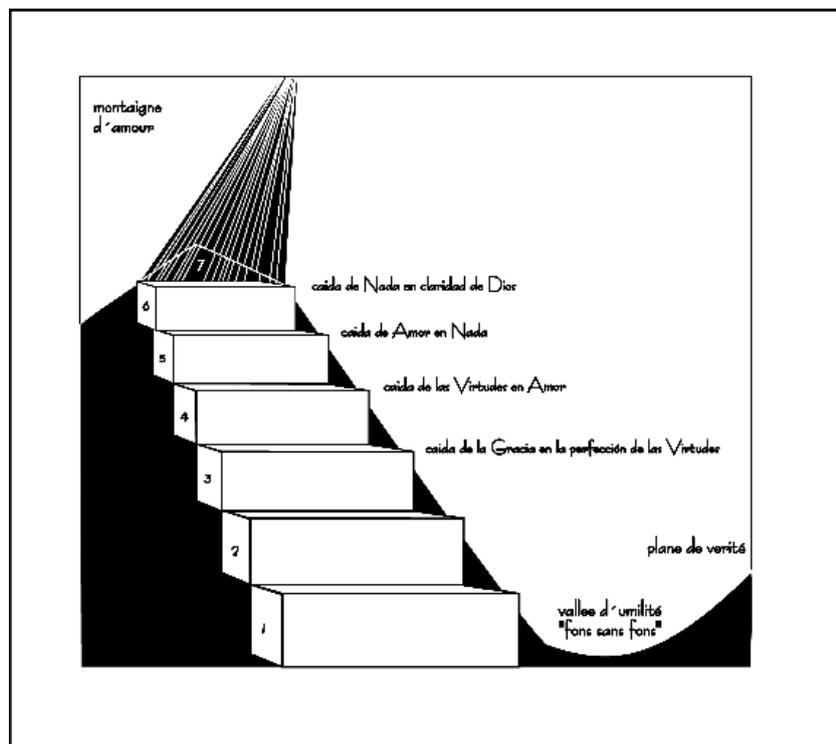


Fig. 1. Diagram of the seven degrees/stages of being described in the *Mirouer*.

⁶ For a revision of all the historiographical elements related with Marguerite’s case an essential text is L. FIELD, *The beguine, the Angel and the Inquisitor*, Notre-Dame, University of Notre-Dame Press, 2012. The most accurate bibliography about this author is Zan KOCHER (ed.), on the website of the Marguerite Porete International Society, www.margueriteporete.net.

⁷ Jeffrey F. HAMBURGER, *The Visual and the Visionary*, New York, Zone Books, 1998, p. 28.

⁸ Pablo GARCÍA ACOSTA, *op. cit.*, pp. 255-293.

⁹ We wish to thank Lara Gonzalo for the drawing of this electronic diagram.

As we can observe, Marguerite outlines a schema with two poles connected by a gradual structure which culminates in a seventh stage, where Paradise may be found¹⁰. From this summit the Divinity spreads its light through the other levels: the description and effects of this divine light depend on the level from which the Soul perceives it¹¹. As we will show in the following pages, a problematic highlight on this itinerary is the Sixth Stage, in which the Soul receives a flash of lightning, called the *Loingprés* (Farness), as a foretaste of Paradise. We will compare this lightning with the final flash which Dante perceives in the closing verses of his third *cantica*.

It is important to assert an idea that we will verify in these pages: both authors use elements of space in keeping with a series of shared cultural pre-conceptions, which we can synthesize in the image of the *viator* who goes *in via* on a pilgrimage to return *in patria*¹². However, we should initially ask ourselves if the complexity of Dante's journey can be compared with the subverted *scala virtutum* which the *Mirouer* presents. In a beautiful study, Singleton provides us with a key for comparing both itineraries¹³: we should read the *Commedia* in the allegorical sense, because by doing that we can understand Dante's pilgrimage as the conversion of an individual Soul, from the point of view of that Soul's vileness (*Inferno*) leading to its perfection in God (*Paradiso*). The Florentine is presenting an eschatology in the literal sense and narrating an individual and inner itinerary through to perfection. As Singleton asserts, we have to understand the words of Dante as a «*conversio animae de luctu et miseria peccatu ad statum gratiae*». He writes¹⁴:

Al suo tempo, ormai, secoli de meditazione avevano determinato quale avrebbe dovuto essere nella sua essenza il percorso di un viaggio a Dio, che si compia nell'anima e in questa vita. Non è il poeta che formula tale concezione: egli vi aderisce, piuttosto, perché è qualcosa di così saldamente fissato al fondo de la mente del suo lettore, che senza dubbio alcuno, egli —come poeta— potrà farvi apello: in tal modo, dallo svolgimento del viaggio letterale attraverso la vita dell'oltretomba, può gradatamente emergere la figura familiare del viaggio dell'anima. L'allegoria di Dante, si *attua* sempre nel modo di un' *evocazione*: richiama alla mente ciò che è familiare. Il lettore ha sensazione di star riconoscendo qualcosa che gli era noto, fintantoché tutto uno schema di significato non abbia preso completamente forma.

¹⁰ For a complete study of the imagery of the ladder in Marguerite's book, see Pablo GARCÍA ACOSTA, *op. cit.*, pp. 72-89.

¹¹ *Ib.*, pp. 259-293.

¹² See Wolfgang HARMS, *Homo viator in Bivio. Studien zur Bildlichkeit des Weges*, München, Wilhem Fink, 1970.

¹³ Charles S. SINGLETON, *ch. cit.*, pp. 17-67.

¹⁴ *Ib.*, p. 24.

Singleton talks here about the shared cultural background, which would have been recognized implicitly by the historical audience. In this sense, the essential image for expressing Dante's ascension to God is the heavenly ladder. Christian Heck, the major scholar on this spatial image, has suggested two essential typologies¹⁵: on the one hand, there is the spiritual ladder («échelle spirituelle») and, on the other, the eschatological ladder («échelle eschatologique»). At first glance, this opposition seems to encapsulate the contrast between Dante's itinerary and Marguerite's ladder, but as Heck emphasizes, the opposition is never categorical in medieval texts¹⁶. One of the typologies would seem to prevail in each particular case, but there is a basic and strong symbolic sense which runs through both: the macro-microcosmic meanings are interchangeable. In this sense, the Hell-Paradise polarity is present in Marguerite's ladder (as we will verify soon) and we can also read the *Commedia* as the process of perfection of the individual Soul. We will now analyze the climax of the eschatological perfection in both texts, the *visio Dei*, following the steps proposed by Dante in his last four *canti*.

2. Face and light in the *visio Dei*

Let's start our imaginary pilgrimage in *Paradiso*, the 28th canto¹⁷, the heaven of the Primum mobile. Dante is still being guided by Beatrice and both look together into the Empyrean, the place traditionally inhabited by God, where they see the following (Pd XXVIII: 16-36):

un punto vidi che raggiaba lume
acuto sì, che 'l viso ch'elli affocca
chiuder conviensi per lo forte acume;
[...]
distante intorno al punto un cerchio d'igne
si girava sì ratto, ch'avria vinto
quel moto che più tosto el mundo cigne :
e questo era d'un altro circumcinto,
e quel dal terzo, e 'l terzo poi dal quarto,
dal quinto il quarto, e poi dal sesto il quinto.
Sopra seguiva il settimo sì sparto
Già di larghezza, che 'l messo di Iuno
intero a contenerlo sarebbe arto:
così l'ottavo e 'l novo; e ciascheduno
più tardo si movea, secondo ch'era

¹⁵ Christian HECK, *L'échelle céleste. Une histoire de la quête du ciel*, Paris, Flammarion, 1999, p. 14.

¹⁶ *Ib.*, p. 24.

¹⁷ We will quote the text of the *Commedia* using Dante Alighieri, *Commedia*, Anna Maria CHIAVACCI LEONARDI (com.), Bologna, Zanichelli, 2001, abbreviating from now on If = Inferno; Pg = Purgatorio and Pd = Paradiso, followed by the number of the *canto* (Roman numerals) and verse (Arabic numerals).

in numero distante più dal uno: [...]

Since they are still at the border of the Empyrean, this fragment describes the vision of God from afar following the neoplatonic conception of the angelic hierarchies and the light-love diffused from the origin of the universe¹⁸: God is at the center of a series of larger circles (in the text he is described as an irradiating point of light, «un punto... che raggiaba lume») and he is surrounded by nine choirs spinning around the Divinity, just as medieval tradition used to imagine them¹⁹. As the velocity of the angels depends on their distance from the central holy point, the innermost circle spins the fastest and the external the slowest. Let's check how this figure is represented in a manuscript from the 14th century, reproduced in color in the book by Rusconi and in black and white by Brieger, Meiss and Singleton²⁰:

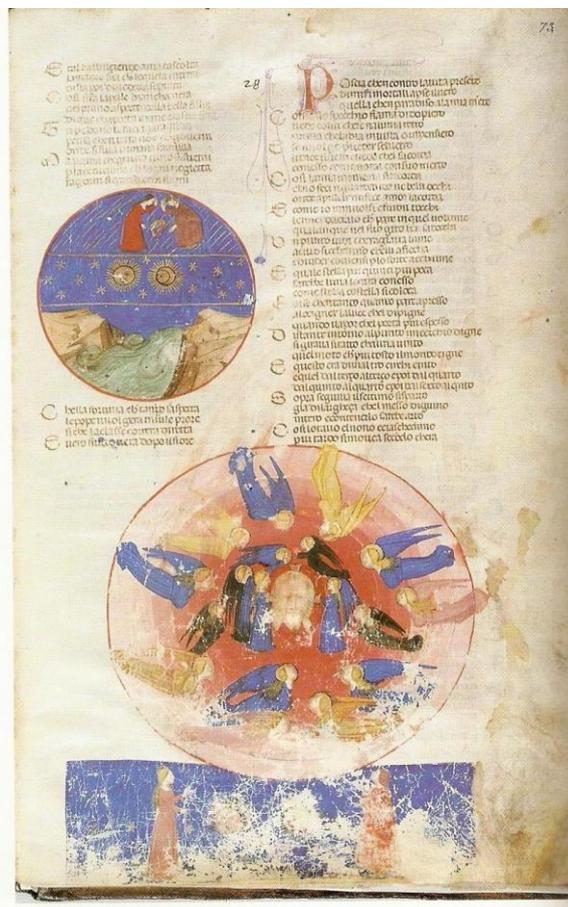


Fig. 2. ANONYMOUS MINIATURIST, *Paradiso XXVIII*. 14th century. Venezia, Biblioteca Nazionale Marziana, Ms. It. IX.276, f. 73r. Image taken from Roberto RUSCONI, *Pagine di Dante: le edizioni de la Divina Commedia dal torchio al computer*, exh. cat., Perugia, 1989, p. 88.

¹⁸ For the use of the platonic light in the *Commedia*, see ED, s. v. «luce», pp. 298-299: «Tutta la rappresentazione luministica delParadiso implica infatti l'idea di Dio-sole che irraggia di sé il universo come amore e lo muove».

¹⁹ Barbara BRUDERER EICHBERG, *Les neuf choeurs angéliques. Origine et evolution du thème dans l'art du Moyen Âge*, Poitiers, Centre d'études supérieures de civilisation médiévale, 1998.

²⁰ See Roberto RUSCONI, *Pagine di Dante: le edizioni de la Divina Commedia dal torchio al computer*, exh. cat., Perugia, 1989, p. 88.

In the blue-colored stripe at the bottom (which represents the Primum mobile, the ninth heaven) Beatrice points out to Dante what is described in the quoted verses. From a modern perspective, the most striking detail in this illustration is that the “point of light” has metamorphosed into the face of Christ, even though in the text (at least in this canto) there is not a single allusion to a human likeness. If we take a brief detour to consider the *Commedia*'s illuminated manuscripts, however, we see that this is not a mere one-off or extravagant interpretation by this specific miniaturist, but a codified form which interprets this passage in keeping with a cultural context that was implicitly understood²¹.

From the perspective of the text, the fact that the point was graphically identified with a face could be based on an assertion by Beatrice about the nature of the angels in the next canto, the 29th: «Queste sustanze [the angels], poi che fur gioconde/ de la faccia di Dio, non volser viso/ da essa, da cui nulla si nasconde»²², in which the angels are described as those who look upon the face of God and never avert their eyes from him. On the other hand, from the point of view of the Christian tradition, the son of God is the only way to perceive him through the corporeal senses: Christ is the visible God and that is the reason the angels in this illustration can be seen surrounding his face. They dwell in the nine concentric circles which represent the angelic and planetary hierarchy and they move in an eternal circular motion around God, who is an immobile point of light. The red coloring, toned down as it draws away from the center, represents the ardour of love which gives motion to the circles and the entire universe. The seraphs, the nearest angelic hierarchy to God, should be in the darkest circle, since they move faster, receiving more directly his love-knowledge.

On the other hand, we cannot observe here any trace of the acute light which caused Dante and Beatrice to close their eyes: the illustration is focused on the point-face, on showing an imprecise hierarchy of the circles and on the movement of the angels. If we want to observe a different representation of this passage, we should turn to the famous Yates-Thompson codex, in which the point is represented in a very different way²³:

First of all, we need to discuss J. Pope-Hennessy's identification of the luminous face in this illustration with the allusion to the god of the north wind Boreas that we find in the same 28th canto²⁴. On the one hand, Boreas is part of a complex metaphor in which Beatrice's answer to Dante's question is compared with the wind clearing the sky of mist, allowing the viewer to contemplate its/her full beauty. It is true that this manuscript translates the visual metaphors literally

²¹ Peter H. BRIEGER, Millard MEISS and Charles S. SINGLETON, *op. cit.*, p.84.

²² Pd XXIX, 76-77.

²³ The «Yates-Thompson Codex» (British Library, London, MS Yates-Thompson 36) is a manuscript from the 15th century illuminated by Giovanni Di Paolo, which was commissioned as a gift for Alfonso de Aragón, king of Naples. From the visual representation point of view it is very important, because it gives the greatest importance to the light-related phenomena described in the *Commedia*, trying to solve each one of them visually. For an introduction to this manuscript, see John POPE-HENNESSY, *op. cit.*, pp. 7ss.

²⁴ *Ib.*, comments to f. 179r.

into graphic form, but this specific illustration also contains characteristics which could be interpreted in a completely different way. Without a doubt, our main argument is the iconographic canon which fixes the details of each canto at a very early stage²⁵. Despite not having the face of Christ depicted here as in the previous illustration, we can verify that the face of Christ is nevertheless represented canonically as the point of light. Assuming that it is coherent with Dante's text and other illustrations of this passage, then we may also assert that the yellow circle surrounding the face should represent the angelic choirs surrounding the divine light.

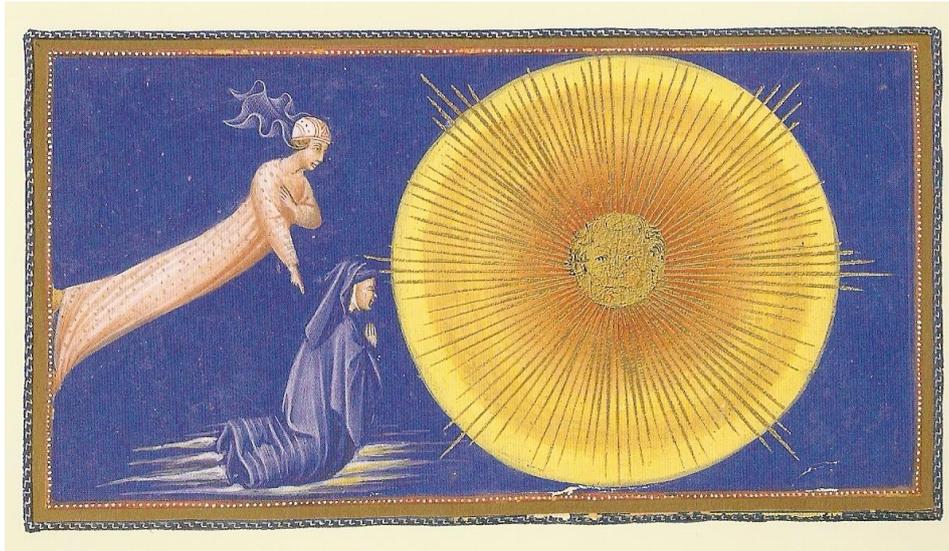


Fig. 3. GIOVANNI DI PAOLO, *Paradiso XXVIII*. 15th century. London, British Library, MS Yates-Thompson 36, f. 179r. Image taken from John POPE-HENESSY, *Paradiso. The Illuminations to Dante's Divine Comedy by Giovanni di Paolo*, London, Thames and Hudson, 1990, f. 179r.

If we accept this hypothesis it will be fruitful to compare this image with the previous one. In the first place, we can verify that the color degradation of the circle is immediately apparent in both manuscripts. This points to the presence of both the angelic hierarchy and the fire of God's love: the only difference is that this illuminator is less interested than the other in placing emphasis on the borders that separate the levels. In the second place, we can observe that this miniaturist has taken into account the code of the irradiation: the Divinity expresses his love in the form of light and knowledge to the angels and this act is represented here with the golden lines gushing from the center. The closer a Soul or an angel is to the center, the more love they will receive from the Divinity²⁶.

These are examples of artistic versions, that is to say specific visual translations, of the vision of the Pseudo-Dionysian heavenly hierarchies as Dante read them²⁷. However, what is interesting to us is, firstly, the visible status given

²⁵ See, Peter H. BRIEGER, Millard MEISS y Charles S. SINGLETON, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

²⁶ Pd XXVIII: 100-102.

²⁷ Diego SBACCHI, *La presenza di Dionigi Aeropagita nel Paradiso di Dante*, Firenze, Leo S. Olschki, 2006.

to the Divinity through the language of light and, secondly, the visual conception of this light as expanding from the divine. As we can corroborate in the verses by Dante, the vision of God that the angels have consists only of his face, and this is what we find represented in the illustrations²⁸. On the other hand, we should observe that in the main biblical source for the use of the face in the representation of the *visio Dei* there is an opposition between *nunc* and *tunc*²⁹: Dante's vision-poem is located, precisely, in the *tunc*, because he is seeing God (as a *face*) as the blessed after death. One of the illustrations of the *Omne Bonum* demonstrates that such visions were considered orthodox ones³⁰:



Fig. 4. ANONYMOUS MINIATURIST, *Illustration of the Papal Bull Benedictus Deus*. 14th century. London, British Library, Royal MS 6 EIV, f. 16r. Image taken from Lucy F. SANDLER, *Omne Bonum. A Fourteenth-Century Encyclopedia of Universal Knowledge*, 2 vols., London, Harvey Miller Publishers, 1996, fig.115.

²⁸ For instance, see Peter H. BRIEGER, Millard MEISS and Charles S. SINGLETON, *op. cit.*, pp. 504, 512, 517 and 519.

²⁹ I Cor, 13, 12.

³⁰The best work about this medieval *summa* is Lucy FREEMAN SANDLER, *Omne Bonum. A Fourteenth-Century Encyclopedia of Universal Knowledge*, 2 vols., London, Harvey Miller Publishers, 1996. For an introduction, see Jeffrey F. HAMBURGUER, *The Rothschild Canticles. Art and Mysticism in Flanders and the Rhineland c. 1300*, New Haven-London, Yale University Press, 1990, p. 136. Also see the comments in Lucy FREEMAN SANDLER, *op. cit.*, pp. 94 and 127.

This miniature illustrates the papal bull *Benedictus Deus* enacted in 1336 by Benedict XII³¹, in which the Pope fought the controversial opinion of his predecessor, John XXII, who had asserted that before the Final Judgment not a single Soul could see God³². If we consult the bull we find it expressing strong opposition: not only the angels, but the saints and the blessed men, are capable of seeing God without any mediation from their death until the end of the times³³. We can explain this miniature not only with reference to the text of the bull, but by considering the role of light in the *Commedia* as explained by Singleton and also by following a classification by Thomas Aquinas about the perception of the divine light³⁴. This last author presents and describes to us three kinds of light: «lumen gloriae», «lumen fidei» and «lumen naturale». Let's check whether we can correlate these three categories of light with the *Omne Bonum* miniature.

At the upper level we see the face of God surrounded by angels and just one blessed soul. This strip represents the *visio Dei*, the essential vision of God which occurs post-mortem. From the divine face emanates light which we can divide into two kinds: on the one hand, the light which is surrounding the head in the form of golden flames and, on the other, the orange and white lines. We can also observe that the entire eschatological-representative conception coincides with the aforementioned vision from the *Commedia*.

In the central section, we can identify Benedict of Nursia and the Apostle Paul as examples of the holy souls which the *Benedictus Deus* asserts have seen, are seeing, and will see the beatific vision. They are represented in a separate strip because of the different status which is conferred to them in the papal bull.

³¹ Christian TROTTMANN, *La vision béatifique des disputes scholastiques á sa définition par Benoît XII*, Roma, École française de Rome, 1995, p. 804.

³² *Ib.*, p. 432.

³³ This papal bull contains the following: «[...] animae sanctorum omnium [...] et aliorum fidelium defunctorum post sacrum ab eis Christi baptisma susceptum [...], ac post domini Iesu Christi passionem et mortem viderunt et vident divinam essentiam visione intuitiva et etiam faciali, nulla mediante creatura in ratione obiecti visi se habente, sed divina essentia immediate se nude, clare et aperte eis ostende, quodque sic videntes eadem divina essentia perfruuntur, necnon quod ex tali visione et fruitione eorum animae, qui iam decesserunt, sunt vere beatæ et habent vitam et requiem æternam, et etiam animae illorum, qui postea decedent, eandem divinam essentiam videbunt ipsaque perfruuntur ante iudicium generale, [...]», quoted in Josep GIL, *La benaurança del cel y l'ordre establert. Aproximació a l'escatologia de la Benedictus Deus*, Barcelona, Facultat de Teología de la Universitat de Barcelona/Herder, 1987, pp. 37-38.

³⁴ Singleton's approach is to read the three guides of Dante (Virgilio, Beatrice and Bernardo) as if they represented an orthodox perspective on the three degrees of vision of the divine (corresponding to the three degrees of light). He interprets this with the following Thomas of Aquinas text: «Est enim quedam visio ad quam sufficit lumen naturale intellectus, sicut est contemplatio invisibilium per principia rationis: et in hac contemplatione ponebant philosophi summam felicitatem hominis. Est iterum quedam contemplatio ad quam elevatur homo per lumen fidei sufficiens, sicut sanctorum in via. Est enim quedam beatorum in patria ad quam elevatur intellectus per lumen gloriae, videns Deus per essentiam, in quantum est objectum beatitudinis; et hoc plene et perfecte non est nisi in patria; sed quandoque ad ipsam raptim elevatur aliquis etiam existens in hac mortali vita; sicut fuit in raptu Pauli» (*Commentary on Isaiah I*). Also see Christian TROTTMAN, *op. cit.*, pp. 283-336 and DS, s. v. «lumiere»: 1166-1167.

However, it is also apparent that the *lumen gloriae* is exceeding the limit of its own section and entering the visual territory of the lower strip. Following our interpretation of the light of this miniature, Benedict and Paul are represented as recipients both of the *lumen gloriae* (flames) and the *lumen fidei* (lines). Concerning the second kind, Thomas of Aquinas wrote³⁵: «Est iterum quaedam contemplatio ad quam elevatur homo per lumen fidei sufficiens, sicut sanctorum in via». In fact, the saints appear here as behavioral examples and mediators between the human and the divine, as we can verify in the gesture with which Benedict points to humankind, trying to orientate the divine emanation of light.

Finally, at the bottom level we find the reception of the *lumen naturale* by men. As Thomas of Aquinas asserts, this is the light of reason, which allows human beings to imagine visible beings in their minds. As we can verify in this illustration, this light is related with Original Sin, because it implies a limitation with respect to the divine vision-knowledge: it only arrives in the human world once it has been filtered by the heavenly spheres. We can suppose here a double identification. Firstly, through their parallel postures, the saints are visually related with the donors: the saints must be examples of behavior for them. In the second place, the donors are related with Adam and Eve through the conception of sin. This double situation is reflected in the reception of light. Humans: *lumen naturale*, because they have sinned; saints: *lumen fidei*, when they are *in via*; blessed men and angels *in patria*: *lumen gloriae*.

As we have said and as Singleton points out, this system of three categories of light in the text by Thomas Aquinas explains Dante's light as part of a cosmological view that is implicit in his text. It belongs among the cultural preconceptions that the readers of Dante knew and that we have forgotten. Returning to Marguerite, what we should now ask is: Did she share these preconceptions about the location of the Soul in the universe? We assert that she did and we aim to demonstrate this through her texts. For example her 33rd chapter talks in its entirety about the *visio Dei*³⁶:

<L'Ame> - Hee, sire, dit l'Ame, comment suis je en mon sens demouree, quant j'ay pensé aux dons de vostre bonté, qui avez donné a mon ame la vision du Pere et du Filz et du saint Esperit, que mon Ame verra sans fin? Puis donc que je verray si grant chose comme la Trinité, la cognoissance des anges, des ames et des sains ne me sera mie tollue, ne aussi la vision des petites choses, c'est a entendre de toutes les choses qui sont mendres de Dieu!

Hee, sire, dit l'Ame, que avez vous fait pour moi? Vrayement, sire, je suis toute esbahye de ce que j'en cognois, que je ne sçay ouquel m'esbahir, ne je n'ay aultre usage ne ne puis avoir, pour la continuacion de ceste cognoissance. Sire, si je n'avoie aultre occasion de moy esbahir, que de ce que vous avez donné a mon ame la vision de toute la Trinité, des anges et des ames, ce que vous n'avez pas

³⁵ *Commentary on Isaiah I.*

³⁶ *Mirouer*, pp. 108-110.

donné a vostre precieux corps, qui est joinct a la nature du Pere en la personne du Filz, si est ce merveilles comment je puis tant vivre! Mais encore, sire, c'est si grant chose de veoir les anges et les ames a qui vous avez donné la vision de vostre douce face, lesquieulx anges et ames nulz corps n'est a la value de veoir, et par plus forte raison ne peut veoir nulz corps la Trinité, puisqu'il ne peut veoir les anges ne les ames, et neantmoins avez vous donné ce don a mon esperit a tousjours més, tant comme vous serez Dieu.

If we bear in mind the information about the understanding of Paradise in the *Commedia* and our interpretation of the miniature of the *Omne Bonum* as we read this chapter, we may experience a very rich medieval reading. The main doctrinal problem of this passage is that it talks about the *visio Dei* not only as an event which will happen in a near future (post-mortem, as orthodoxy maintained) but as a present reality for the illuminated soul. The reason is clarified in the 97th chapter³⁷, which declares that a soul still linked to a body cannot see Paradise gloriously (in terminology related with the *lumen gloriae*) but divinely (the same, but with divinization). So, in its allusion to the vision-knowledge of the angels, the saints and the souls in the other world, *Le Mirouer* coincides with Dante's assumptions, but where Marguerite implies the divinization of the Sixth Stage, it does not.

In another sense, with her Sixth Stage Marguerite is implicitly talking about something that it is impossible to speak of, the Seventh Stage, which you can only reach after death. As we have asserted, Marguerite's graded itinerary includes Paradise as its Seventh Stage, from which all the light which impregnates the other ones flows. In her own words³⁸: «Et en Paradis est le .vije. [the 7th], et cestuy est parfait sans deffailance». If we accept the implications of this interpretation we can understand Marguerite's assertion about what Paradise is: it is the Seventh Stage and the Soul will arrive at it after death to see the face of God.

Laying the texts aside in order to focus on the historical context, however, calls to mind that the start of the 14th century was especially tense regarding the doctrinal discussions about the *visio Dei*. Christian Trottman declares that the formulation of the aforementioned thesis by Thomas Aquinas had an avalanche of answers³⁹. He talks, for example, about the role of the beghards (and, we may add, of the beguines) in the controversy, connecting their doctrine of deification *hic et nunc* with an anti-scholastic position that was opposed to the doctrinal argument. It is entirely relevant for the eschatological notions of the *Mirouer* that the fifth proposition against the beguines and beghards in the Council of Vienne was, precisely: «l'âme naturellement bienheureuse peut se passer du *lumen gloriae*» (Trottman's translation), because, firstly, it puts Marguerite's doctrinal problems in a specific doctrinal frame (the beatific vision) which includes a

³⁷ *Mirouer*, p. 268.

³⁸ *Mirouer*, p. 258.

³⁹ Christian TROTTMAN, *op. cit.*, pp. 323-327.

previously codified vocabulary and symbology, and secondly, it puts the *Mirouer* (or, at least, at the hypothetically related beguinal groups) at the core of the problem.

Accepting this cosmovision in the *Mirouer*'s case will enable us, for instance, to understand the following fragment about the punishment of Lucifer after he became aware that the vision of God had been denied to him⁴⁰:

Amour. – Quant la divine Trinité crea les anges de la courtoisie de sa divine bonté, ceulx qui mauvais furent, par leur perverse election s'accorderent au mauvais vouloir de Lucifer, qui voit avoir pour nature de luy ce qu'il ne pot avoir fors par grace divine. Et tantost qu'ilz voudrent ce de leur forfaitte voulenté, ilz perdirent l'estre de bonté. Or sont ilz en enfer sans estre, et sans jamais recouvrer misericorde de veoir Dieu. Et ceste haulte vision leur fist perdre leur voulenté, qu'ilz eussent eue pour donner leur voulenté, laquelle ilz retindrent. Or regardez a quel chef ilz en vindrent!

We can relate the will which causes the fall of Lucifer with, again, the illustration of the *Omne Bonum*: misled by him, Adam and Eve sinned in earthly Paradise, wishing to conquer for themselves what the divine will had prohibited, and our humanity thus placed us at the same level as the corruption of Lucifer. This is the reason we can never experience a direct vision of God during our bodily life, but are limited to reason's *lumen naturale*: the light is filtered through the planetary spheres and only reaches us weakly⁴¹. Of course, Hell is also located in Marguerite's gradual itinerary, thus confirming that her discourse is based in a common Christian cosmology.

One remaining question as we continue to take Thomas Aquinas's order of categories of light as a reference, is to ask where the *Loingprés*, Marguerite's flash of lightning in the Sixth Stage, fits in? If we relate it with the aforementioned Vienne documents, we may consider it an exceptional manifestation of the *lumen gloriae* which certain souls can receive during their corporeal life. And it is partly this lifetime reception of the light that confirmed Marguerite's doctrine as heterodox and led to its being condemned at Vienne. In the case of Dante, that certainty that we find in Marguerite is also present, if only implicit, in the conception of the *Commedia* as a visionary poem. If we see Dante as a privileged soul *in via* we should decodify his last *canto* through the background of a visionary from the period, a privileged soul that, like the Apostle Paul, was involved in a *raptus*. If the image is the same and the background conception is parallel in both cases, why is the *Mirouer* considered heretical rather than the *Commedia*? We will try to answer this question in the pages below.

⁴⁰ *Mirouer*, p. 200, our emphasis.

⁴¹ See our «Fig. 5».

2. Liquid light in the Empyrean

While they are in the heaven of the Primum mobile, Beatrice describes to Dante the nature of the angels, a discourse that, as we know, takes up almost the complete canto 29⁴². The next one starts with Dante flattering Beatrice once more upon her eyes⁴³, while they are still ascending to the Empyrean border crossing. Once there, Beatrice recites⁴⁴: «Noi semo usciti fòre/ del maggior corpo al ciel ch' è pura luce:/ luce intellettual, piena d'amore;/ amor di vero ben, pien di letizia»⁴⁵. In fact, they have arrived at the place which includes all the heavens. Let us focus on the verse «luce intellettuale; piena d'amore». As we can observe, Dante's understanding coincides with Marguerite's because they share a common background in which they conceive of the Divinity as spreading in the form of light⁴⁵: "intellectual light", which can be perceived by the Soul as knowledge; and "full of love", because it springs from God, who disseminates his gifts and attracts the Soul towards him.

From this moment on everything that Dante sees will be full of light. There are two remarkable occurrences in this canto, just before Dante's vision of the angelic choirs: first, a bright light like a flash of lightning surrounds him («Come subito lampo [...] / così mi circumfulse luce viva») and dazzles him⁴⁶: when he is able to open his eyes he feels that suddenly he has a renewed visual perception, a «novella vista»⁴⁷, which allows him to perceive something quite hallucinatory: a river made of light in which sparks rise and sink again. This river will soon be revealed as God surrounded by his angelic choirs⁴⁸:

E vidi lume in forma di riviera
fluvido di fulgore, intra due rive
dipinte di mirabil primavera.
Di tal fiumana uscian faville vive,
e d'ogni parte si mettien ne' fiori,
quasi rubin che oro circunscrive [...]

«Lume in forma di riviera/ fluvido di fulgore...»: This is not the first time that we find in the western literary tradition a definition of the Divinity that employs light and liquid⁴⁹. In any case, God and his choirs represented that way in the

⁴² Pd XXIX: 10-145.

⁴³ Pd XXX: 1-33.

⁴⁴ Pd XXX: 38-42.

⁴⁵ Luisa MURARO, *Lingua materna Scienza divina. Scritti sulla filosofia mistica di Margherita Porete*, Napoli, M. D'auria, 1995, p. 65.

⁴⁶ Pd XXX: 46-49.

⁴⁷ Pd XXX: 58.

⁴⁸ Pd XXX: 61-66.

⁴⁹ V. Robert LERNER, «The Image of Mixed Liquids in Late Medieval Mystical Thought», in *Church History*, vol. 40, n°4 (dic. 1971), pp. 399-400.

Commedia is not as strange as it may seem if we take into account the fact that God spreads himself in the form of light and love through his angelic choirs and that this love, in some low medieval mystic authors (especially female authors) is codified as a liquid and luminous element⁵⁰. Let us consider a medieval representation of that *fiumana*:



Fig. 5. ANONYMOUS MINIATURIST, *Paradiso XXX*. Second quarter of the 14th century. London, British Library, B. M. Egerton 943, f. 179v. Image taken from Dante ALIGHIERI, *Commedia*, Anna Maria CHIAVACCI LEONARDI (ed.), Bologna, Zanichelli, 2011.

We find the river framed by two riverbanks decorated with trees. Within the river we find a group of jumping suns, which we can identify with the «*faville vive*» in the text. This miniature takes a visual form which is an apparent paradox: that of flowing light. At a representative level, the figure of the river has been depicted following the medieval conventions for representing rivers⁵¹: there are two riverbanks, a blue volume and inside it light in the shape of *faville*. To our knowledge, this is the only medieval representation of this passage and the illustration seems to suggest what is not difficult to imagine with the mind's eye: a river of flowing light⁵².

⁵⁰ See Hildegard E. KELLER, «ABUNDANCIA. Una estética de lo líquido y su circulación en la Edad Media y en el siglo XX», in Victoria Cirlot and Amador Vega (eds.), *Mística y creación en el siglo XX*, Barcelona, Herder, 2006, pp. 87-137.

⁵¹ See, for instance, the representation of the baptism of Christ in Herrad DE LANDSPERG, *Hortus Deliciarum*, Pfälzische Verlagsanstalt, 1979.

⁵² It is useful to compare this miniature with the respective one in the «Yates-Thompson Codex», where the «*faville*» are personified: see John POPE-HENESSY, *op. cit.*, f. 183r. About the «*luce fluente*» in Dante, see the source study by Marco ARIANI, «Metafore assolute: emanazionismo e sinestesia della luce fluente», en Marco ARIANI (ed.), *La metafora in Dante*, Firenze, Leo S. Olschki, pp. 193-219.

Dante bends over the river and wets his eyelids in it: «E sì come di lei bevve la gronda/ de le palpebre mie, così mi parve/ di sua lunghezza divenuta tonda»⁵³. It is just at that moment that the river is manifested as the direct light of God, light surrounded by angelic choirs, which in the first verses of the next canto are defined as «candida rosa»⁵⁴. We should emphasize here that this act of wetting his eyes in a liquid light seems to point to a sort of second purification of the sight, which permits Dante to see the Divinity in its essence as *lumen gloriae*⁵⁵:

E come clivo in acqua di suo imo
si specchia, quasi per vedersi adorno,
quando è nel verde e nei fioretti optimo,
sì, soprastando al lume intorno intorno
vidi specchiarsi in più di mille soglie
quanto di noi là su fatto ha ritorno.

As we can read in the quoted text, Dante uses here the image of the mountain reflected in the water, comparing this mountain with the souls returning to God and being reflected in the immobile point of light which is God (the mountain «si specchia»; Dante sees the souls *specchiarsi*). This metaphor of the water as a mirror and God as a mirror of souls is crucially opposite to the mirror metaphor expressed in Marguerite's book explaining the Sixth Stage⁵⁶. This is very important, because it highlights a complete contrast between the *Mirouer* and the *Commedia*. In the visual relationship that Marguerite draws between the Soul and God, the Sixth Stage is defined by the negation of the Soul's perception and the description of the Soul as a mirror where the Divinity is reflected⁵⁷. This happens because the *Mirouer* clearly expresses that the Soul has been made one with God and that is the reason why we cannot find in this image God looking at her, but only God reflected in her. In other words, different perspectives and wills have been simplified. The *Mirouer* expresses an equalization of diverse substances, a complete fusion with Love. On the other hand, in Dante's eschatology, blessed souls will never return to the uncreated state, even though they stand before the Creator after death, but they will be looking at him, receiving his gifts of love and spinning around him forever, like the bees that Dante compares with the angels⁵⁸, who try to resemble God but never achieve this goal⁵⁹.

⁵³ Pd XXX: 89-90.

⁵⁴ Pd XXXI: 1.

⁵⁵ Pd XXX: 109-114.

⁵⁶ See Diego SBACCHI, *op. cit.*, pp. 93-113 and Catherine M. MÜLLER, *Marguerite Porete et Marguerite d'Oingt de l'autre côté du miroir*, New York, Peter Lang, 1999.

⁵⁷ See Pablo GARCÍA ACOSTA, *op. cit.*, pp. 284-293.

⁵⁸ Pd XXXI: 7.

⁵⁹ Pd XXXIII: 100-102.

3. The knot of love and the Farnearness (*Loingprés*)⁶⁰

In any case, if we continue following Dante's steps, we must move beyond the view from the Primum mobile, and analyze the last canto of the *Commedia*, the 33rd, where Dante narrates exactly what he sees when he looks directly at God. This canto starts with a prayer to the Virgin Mary uttered by Bernard of Clairvaux,⁶¹ who then urges Dante to look directly towards the light. Dante does this and his sight penetrates «per lo raggio» towards the first love. Before describing what he sees we find some verses in which the impossibility of narrating the object of the vision is combined with an exhortation where Dante asks the Divinity to give him memory and the capacity to express it⁶². In the next lines, Dante finally gazes upon the «luce eterna», the «lumen gloriae», and we find a deeply interesting image⁶³:

Nel suo profondo vidi che s' interna,
legato con amore in un volume,
ciò che per l'universo si squaderna:
sustanze e accidenti e lor costume
quasi conflati insieme, per tal modo
che ciò ch' i' dico è un semplice lume.
La forma universal di questo nodo
credo ch' i' vidi, perchè più di largo,
dicendo questo, mi sento ch' i' godo.

In these verses, using different images, the author alludes to, but at the same time avoids describing in detail, what Dante sees inside the light. The first image is a book (a volume) bound with love («legato con amore»), which contains everything in the universe (everything that is *unbound* in the universe, «ciò che per l'universo si squaderna»). The meaning of this image will be reinforced by the following words: the light is a simple light («semplice lume») and a knot (*nodo*). All these images point to the concept of unity or totality in God, following the traditional symbolism of the knot⁶⁴: if the universe is broken into multiplicity, God is a simple, unitary light, a knot which contains everything in it⁶⁵. This definition of God through his loving harmony is repeated some verses later: «O luce eterna che sola in te sidi,/ sola t' intendi e da te intelletta/ e

⁶⁰ Blanca GARÍ in Margarita Porete, *El espejo de las almas simples*, Madrid, Siruela, 2005, p. 279 outlines all the relations between images which we are studying here comparatively.

⁶¹ Pd XXXIII: 1-105.

⁶² Pd XXXIII: 55-75.

⁶³ Pd XXXIII: 85-92.

⁶⁴ See Ananda COOMARASWAMY, «The Iconography of Dürer's Knots and Leonardo's "Concatenation"», in *Art Quartely VII*, 1944, pp. 109-128.

⁶⁵ *ED*, s. v. «nodo», pp. 63-64.

intendente, ami e arridi»⁶⁶. What we would like to show in the following pages is that these images are not chosen by chance. We will also consider how everything is related with the background conception of the divine light. Let's start with Marguerite's *Mirouer*.

In the *Mirouer* the knot is an image related, as it is in Dante, with love. The passage that follows provides an example⁶⁷:

<L'Ame.> - Telles creatures ne scevent plus de Dieu parler, car, nient plus qu'elles ne scevent a dire ou Dieu est, ne scevent elles a dire qui Dieu est. Car, qui que ce soit qui parle de Dieu quant il veult et a qui qu'il veult et la ou il veut parler, ne doit point doubter mais savoir sans doubte, dit ceste Ame, que il ne sentit oncques du vray noyau de divine Amour, qui l'Ame fait en tous esbahie sans s'en appercevoir. Car c'est le vray noyau affiné de divine Amour, qui est sans matere de creature, et donné du Creatour a creature,... et es la costume de telles Ames de moult comprendre et de toust oublier par la subtilité de l'amant.

The main theme here is contained in the image of the knot: the souls which have not received it as a gift of love believe that they can talk about God, although we can be sure that what they say is false, while, on the contrary, the souls which have received it know that they cannot say anything about it. In general terms, what Marguerite proposes here is the opposition between the negative (or apophatic) and the affirmative (or cataphatic) discourses, the latter of which is here identified with the quest for experience through Love, in preference to the words of Reason. This «neither know nor say anything» is a consequence of receiving the knot of love, which in the last lines of the chapter is related with knowledge, which is to say comprehension (they are souls of «moult comprende»), in opposition to their silence (they are souls «de toust oblir»). Of course, this relationship between love and knowledge is something that we have repeated more than once in this article. One of Dante's definitions of God quoted above, for example («O luce eterna che sola in te sidi, /sola t' intendi e da te intelletta/ e intendente, ami e arridi»), expresses that only God can understand himself (because only he *is*), and the humans have to remain ignorant (because we *are not*).

From this perspective it is very significant to find in Marguerite's book the expression «noyau de la glose». As we know, the terms «glose/gloser» imply for the beguine from Valenciennes a deep comprehension that is not mediated (that is to say, not apprehended by means of Reason)⁶⁸. This is related with what Muraro calls the «concezione dinamica della trascendenza che si appoggia nella

⁶⁶ Pd XXXIII: 124-126.

⁶⁷ *Mirouer*, pp. 72-74.

⁶⁸ Catherine MÜLLER, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

tradizione neoplatonica»⁶⁹, which puts in human hands the direct knowledge of God. About this, we have to directly quote chapter 95⁷⁰, in which the origin of the *Mirouer* is narrated and mention is made of the «fons du noyau de l'entendement de la purté de sa haulte pense», where a «mendiant creature» finds her answer in her quest of God in creature. «Noyau», in this context, is pointing again to love, but in this case from a cognitive point of view: Marguerite finds the answer «at the bottom of the knot of knowledge (of Love) of high thought».

If we compare this with the knot in the *Commedia*, it becomes apparent that this image has the same meaning for Marguerite as for Dante («unity in God's love»), but with an essential doctrinal difference: the Florentine's unity is the unity of the One in front of the diversity of Creation and Marguerite's unity is the Soul merged in God. These divergent meanings also exist in the use of the term «simple»: «semplice lume» says Dante, in the context of the last vision of God, referring to the totality gathered in a point; «simples ames» is what Marguerite calls the souls melted with the divine love.

In a wider context, both knots are inextricably linked to the attempt to express the ultimate perception of God. The next folio contains an example:



Fig. 6. ANONYMOUS MINIATURIST, *Trinitarian representation*. Circa 1300. Yale University, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, MS 404, f. 84r. Image taken from Jeffrey F. HAMBURGER, *The Rothschild Canticles. Art and Mysticism in Flanders and the Rhineland c. 1300*, New Haven-London, Yale University Press, 1990, fig. 46.

⁶⁹ Luisa MURARO, *op. cit.*, pp. 50-51.

⁷⁰ *Mirouer*, p. 266.

As we can observe, there are some coincidences between Dante's vision in canto 33 and this illustration. From a central veil rises up the light in the shape of little golden rays, while at the same time from the beak of a dove a golden ray descends. The dove and the two male heads framed by the veil represent the Trinity from which the light spills. Taking into account that the Trinity itself is the source of this divine light, it is not arbitrary to compare it with the «raggio» through which Dante's vision was able to penetrate, finally allowing him to see the totality that he denominated «nodo», or knot. In the same sense, this ray can be compared with the essential manifestation of the divine light in Marguerite's book: the Farnerness, the *Loingprés*. The analogy is not merely hypothetical, because we can justify it with a chapter of the mystagogical treatise, the second part of the *Mirouer*, chapter [136], which the Latin versions had transmitted instead of a *lacuna* in the Chantilly manuscript⁷¹: «Ibi non orat ita parum sicut faciebat antequam esset. Ipsa accipit id quod habet a diuina bonitate de nucleo amoris eius, de illo nobili longe propinquo». The identification between the ray of light («longue propinquo», i. e. *Loingprés*) and the knot of love is not strange at all if we bear in mind that the first signifies the highest degree in the realm of love, together with the unitive sense that Marguerite lends to it in her system.

If we now focus our analysis on the veil, we can assert that its meaning points in two different directions: firstly, to the unity of the persons of the Trinity, due to its interwoven and knotted shape. At a comparative level, we can establish a link with the general meaning of unity through divine love, which we find in both the *Commedia* and in the *Mirouer*. Secondly, the veil is related with the negation of all *media*, the apophasis and the revelation, which in turn are related with the words that we can read in the *florilegium*⁷².

Both the «Rothschild Canticles» and the *Mirouer* therefore work with representations of the consciousness of being, and they show this in their texts. Both point to the *via negativa*, insofar as they teach that experience is opposed to language, figurative or otherwise, even if they must use it in their teachings, due to the impossibility of neutralizing it. In the «Rothschild Canticles» this is put into practice both in the miniatures in the rectos and in the verbal texts in the versos of the folios: in this particular verso, Augustine of Hippo's words provide instruction in this apophatic sense, while an anonymous voice, just before his fragment, says: «Incomprehensibilis est omnii/ cogitatio». In fact, the long veil of the miniature analyzed above negates the *visio Dei*, but at the same time gives some openings whereby we may glimpse the Trinitarian heads. Language only serves to express its own fake, incomplete and idolatrous status⁷³.

⁷¹ *Mirouer*, p. 399. As we have seen before, «nucleo» is a Latin term which we find in the place of the the French version «noyau»: in this case in one of the manuscripts (labeled by Verdeyen as A) there is a clear error of writing: «nudeo» for «nucleo». This fact has been pointed out by Catherine MÜLLER, *op. cit.*, p. 97, as well.

⁷² See Jeffrey F. HAMBURGER, *The Rothschild Canticles cit.*, pp. 137-142 and Pablo GARCÍA ACOSTA, *op. cit.*, pp. 322-324.

⁷³ Jeffrey F. HAMBURGER, *The Rothschild Canticles cit.*, pp.141.

This apophatic character is directly related with the last image that Dante *sees* on his journey towards God. In the last verses of the *Commedia*, we read:

ma non eran da ciò le proprie penne:
se non che la mia mente fu percossa
da un fulgore in che sua voglia venne.

A l'alta fantasia qui mancò possa;
ma già volgeva il mio disio e 'l velle,
sì come rota ch'igualmente è mossa,
l'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle.

Just as we have seen in this brief itinerary of the last images of Dante's Paradise, here the author uses another light image to express the Divinity. In his final effort to perceive God, his mind is assaulted by a sort of electric shock. In any case, he declares that comprehension is not representable in visual terms: the «alta fantasia» cannot provide an image concurrent with the intimate and deep comprehension of God which he has experienced⁷⁴.

Here again, the use of light by Dante connected with the ultimate vision of the divine is not by chance. The ineffable light is a traditional image which we find in authors of importance to Dante, such as Pseudo-Dionysius or the Cistercian⁷⁵. We may also finish this discussion by remarking that the image of the flash of lightning as the ultimate contact with the divine is not only a traditional image used from the beginning of Christianity, but that Dante's mystic contemporaries were making use of the same metaphor in order to express a similar concept: in Marguerite Porete's case, we have talked about the Farnearness, and as we will verify below, the coincidences on their images is not only limited to its experiential character.

If we return to the initial topic of the ladder of perfection, we can verify a gradation of experience which finishes in the Seventh Stage, identified as the Heavenly (and post-mortem) Paradise from which nobody can talk. However, we simple souls can talk about the Sixth Stage: Marguerite describes it as a sudden opening, as a very quick movement, as a flash of lightning that we can experience during our earthly life, which implies the complete death of our will and the persistence of God's will in the individual Soul⁷⁶. At an imaginary level, it is very important that the Farnearness is located at the summit of the itinerary, because this fact puts it in “physical” contact with the Paradise that we find in the Seventh Stage. If we accept the Poretan definition of this light as an “opening” we can assert that Marguerite is making reference to a foretaste of the *lumen gloriae* which may be received during life and which deifies the individual.

⁷⁴ See Mira MOCAN, *La Trasparenza e il riflesso: sull'alta fantasia in Dante e in el pensiero medievale*, Milano, Mondadori, 2007.

⁷⁵ See Steven BOTTERILL, *Dante and the Mystical Tradition: Bernard of Clairvaux in the Commedia*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994.

⁷⁶ Pablo GARCÍA ACOSTA, *op. cit.*, pp. 284-293.

As we observed in the previous pages, Dante talks about a heavenly vision too, but from an eschatological perspective. Dante looks directly at God (even while he is alive) but he avoids developing with images or, simply, discourse what he sees, and indeed, what effect it has on his individual life. In this sense, both authors use the same polarized diagram, which includes the same elements for contact with the Divinity. At the same time, they talk about the perception of the presence of God through the same image. The essential difference is the risk that each of the texts takes in the face of a dogmatic and external authority. Once again, Marguerite speaks clearly about a possible and experienced deification, showing herself as a possible example, a possibility of being, to others. For his part, Dante also claims to have known God without any mediation, but he remains silent about the effects that this has had upon him (for instance, he never speaks about divinization) and, of course, he never proposes his experience as a model for others, but as an extremely rare one. In any case, the imaginary schema which expresses the experience is the same in both authors.

5. Conclusions

In the previous pages, we have verified how the comparative analysis of two “mystical” texts pertaining to the same generation (but not necessarily related in a direct way) reveals a shared imagery (the language of light, the face of God and the knot), which coincides with a shared image of the universe, and allows us to confirm a shared cultural background (the *visio Dei*). As we observed in the first part of the article, during the period in which both works were written, the codification of the imaginary space through the *scala coeli* developed a double meaning, which implies both eschatological notions and the inner perfection of the individual Soul. Both models coexist in every image of this kind (above all, after the 12th century) and they intertwine in the work of both Dante and Marguerite. In Dante’s case, we should read his pilgrimage as an individual journey towards God (in the literal sense) and as the individual Soul’s quest for spiritual perfection (in the allegorical sense). In Marguerite’s case, however, her ladder with seven rugs is a *via* that the Soul must traverse in order to fulfil God’s will, but at the same time it is an eschatological model in which Paradise and Hell are included. In both authors, ascension symbolizes the quest for full knowledge, which can be reached only by contemplating the face of God.

Both the *Commedia* and the *Mirouer* focus on the conception of the *visio Dei* which, as we have observed in our analysis, was doctrinally daring at the time these texts were written. As we have repeated in these pages, their theological orthodoxy was being discussed in the circles of the papacy and there was a tendency in the lay spirituality of the period (identified in the Council of Vienne with the practices of the beguards) to declare that it is possible to accede to the *visio Dei* during our earthly life. This was the position of Marguerite and in her book it is expressed through the image of the lightning of the Sixth Stage, the Farnearness: it is possible for certain individuals to negate their will and to be filled with divine will. This last effect of Marguerite’s path towards perfection

was, perhaps, one of the most dangerous points in her text from the point of view of official orthodoxy.

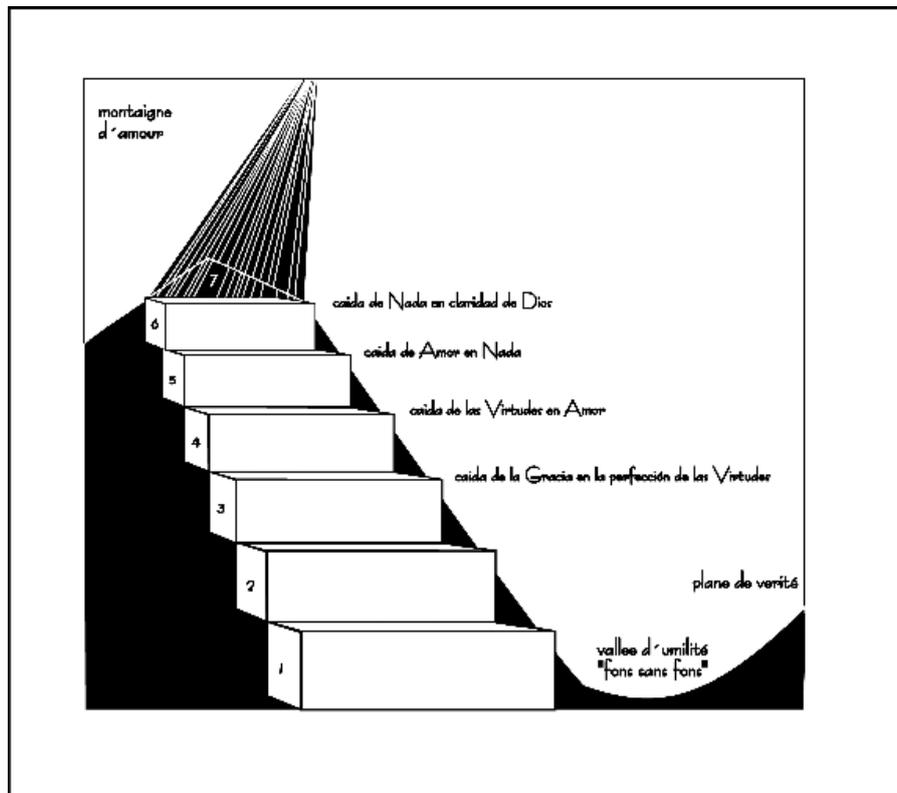


Fig. 1. Esquema de los siete escalones-grados descritos en Le Mirouer.

For his part, Dante uses diverse expressive elements in the last *canti* of his *Commedia* which coincide with a living mystic tradition. We believe that this does not happen by chance: we assert that we are in front of a conscious use of existing imagery, which Dante uses in order to play with apophatic-cataphatic implications. From this perspective, the problem of the flash of lightning, which Dante deploys imprecisely at that moment of revelation, would seem to point to individual deification, except that this is avoided, with the author choosing to make an apophatic declaration instead. This is one of the essential elements which made Marguerite's book seem heretical while Dante's could pass for orthodoxy.

At the same time, there is another element which advances the heretical charge in Marguerite's case and which highlights a point of difference between the functions of the texts. Like most of the religious literature from the period, both texts set out to provide behavioral models for others, but the way in which they teach is very different. As the title indicates, the *Mirouer* is a handbook for behavior: it is a text which wants to teach certain individuals what they have to do to deify themselves. And this is the reason for the didactic tools which we find in the *Mirouer*, such as images, verbal diagrams and *exempla*. On the other hand, the *Commedia* depicts a path to salvation, but in a such a way as to make the chosen one, Dante himself, an exception. In fact, the eschatological model seems to be more important in Dante's tale, but that model, an ascendant path to God, obliged the Florentine author to describe a unitive experience with God: this is

what we find at the end of the 33rd canto: the narration of a direct experience of divinity through a series of symbols codified in the mystic writings of his time. Dante, whose poem says that he saw God while alive, does not talk about the effects of the *visio Dei* on him, but he chooses silence instead, the non-systematized apophysis (contrary to the approach adopted in the *Mirouer*), thus avoiding a possible didacticism and, at the same time, the possibility that he should be considered a heretic.

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