

**BREAD MATTERS AND MATTERS OF BREAD:
TASTING DIVINE IN THE *COMMEDIA***

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Bread is uniquely symbolic within the *Commedia*: this is explicitly and implicitly attested by its frequent and repeat occurrence. Bread functions as a central image and connects seemingly unrelated images such as the womb, flowers, coins, and the sin of Pride, etc. It is also key to interpreting other symbolic imagery and provides social, cultural, religious, and liturgical contexts for explaining imagery, objects, and figures in the *Commedia*. This article will demonstrate how, through a complex symbolic imagery revolving around bread, Dante makes prominent the cognitive value of the senses (particularly taste), stressing their irreplaceable roles in humankind's understanding of God. This reveals a profound influence of the Mystics and Franciscans on Dante's perception of corporeality and bodily sensations in ways that would otherwise remain ambiguous.

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I.

“e come 'l *pan* per fame si manduca, così 'l sovrano li denti a l'altro pose” (*Inf.* 32.127–8).¹ In this scene, Dante meets Count Ugolino at the end of his underground journey. The cannibalism, which constitutes one of the most notoriously horrific episodes in medieval literature, parodies Jesus's offering of his flesh and blood. In its initial inclusion/mention in the *Commedia*, bread is associated with corporeality. However, most commentaries over the centuries seem to have overlooked the imagery of bread in this verse.² Scholars/Commentators such as Francesco da Buti and Gabriele Rossetti

¹ All passages from the *Commedia* are quoted from Petrocchi's edition (*La Divina Commedia*, 3 vols., ed. Giorgio Petrocchi (Milano: Mondadori, 1994). English translations of certain words and phrases are quoted from Robert Durling's edition (*The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*, 3 vols., ed. and trans. Robert Durling (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997–2011)).

² As observed by Christiana Purdy Moudarres, scholarship on the phenomenon of cannibalism extracted from this verse is relatively recent. Dante's early commentators are more interested in the medical description of the episode. See Christiana Purdy Moudarres, “Bodily Starvation and the Ravaging of the Will: A Reading of *Inferno* 32–33,” *Viator* 47, no. 1 (2016): 205–28. In this article, Purdy Moudarres investigates

(1826–27), are more interested Dante’s knowledge of anatomy and medicine as indicated in the verse, “’ve ’l cervel s’aggiungne con la nuca” (*Inf.* 32.129).³ Niccolò Tommaseo (1837–65), reveals the biblical connotation of bread in *Psalms* 14:4 (“who eat up my people as they eat bread”)⁴ implies the idea of cannibalism and is the first commentator to emphasize the parallel between bread and men. Luigi Bennassuti, the only commentator who attempts to explain Dante’s choice of bread imagery, notes that bread is comprised of both a soft and a crunchy part, similar to the flesh and bone of the head.⁵ As one of the hundreds of imageries in the *Commedia*, bread has been commented on, but the problem of corporeality has been treated only incidentally.⁶ The reason for this omission may be the imagery alleged transparency: Ugolino treats Ruggieri’s head like bread precisely because he and his children starve for bread until they die in prison.

John Freccero and Ronald B. Herman, both of whom recognize Dante’s parody of the Eucharist in the Ugolino episode, were the first to underline the obvious association of bread with corporeality. Ugolino’s interpretive failure, according to Freccero, is a recurrence of the Jews’ inability to interpret Jesus’s phrase *Hoc est corpus meum; hoc est sanguinis meum*, within which they only saw the horror of cannibalism. Ugolino fails to understand the

how Ugolino’s lower form of appetite overwhelms his Will, and Ugolino’s eating of Ruggieri’s spinal cord represents his will to ravage.

³ The medieval commentators, such as Pietro Alighieri, suggested that the scene alluded to Statius’ *Thebaid*: “similitudinarie ad Tydeum, qui sagittatus in praelio circa Thebas a Menalippo nominato et famoso milite, caput ablatum ejus a Capanaeo rodit. Unde in persona ejus Statius in VIII.o ait.” According to da Buti, the brain is where emotion, intelligence, and memories lie; thus, eating the head is an act of destroying sentiments. All the commentaries are available online: <http://dantelab.dartmouth.edu/reader>.

⁴ All the biblical texts in English herein quoted are from the 21st Century King James Version.

⁵ Bennassuti commented that “Perché prende la similitudine di chi spinto da fame rabbiosa mangia pane, e non altri cibi? Perché il pane ha la polpa e la crosta, e la polpa nel caso nostro risponderrebbe alla carne o alle parti molli della testa di sotto, e la crosta risponderrebbe alle ossa di quella testa. La testa di sopra adunque nel mangiare la testa di sotto faceva sentire coi denti quel suono, che fa chi mangia il pane, e lo mangia con fame.”

⁶ For example, Luca Serianni treats bread as a general representation of food and a symbol for the ancient world, see Serianni, “Il cibo nella Divina Commedia,” *Cuadernos de Filología Italiana*, vol. 14 (2007): 61–67.

Christian hope and pre-figuration of Jesus enveloped in his children's corporeal offering, mistaking spiritual salvation for physical consumption, redemption for the satisfying of an appetite.⁷

In this gruesome story, roles are ironically reversed and result in a drastic rupture of parental love. Cannibalism, as Ronald B. Herzman puts it, "is the ultimate pass, the total absence of love," and it "inverts...the spiritual eating of the son of God, the Eucharist."⁸ When the youngest child Anselmuccio asks: "Tu guardi sì, padre! Che hai?" (*Inf.* 33.51), Ugolino turns into an emotionless stone devoid of any tears or affection for his children. His response stands in stark contrast to Christ's instruction in the Gospel of Matthew: "Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone" (7.9)? The children, on the other hand, take on a fatherly role," with their offering of food "Padre, assai ci fia men doglia se tu mangi di noi," and Gaddo's imploration "Padre mio, che non m'aiuti?" (*Inf.* 33.61-2; 69) confirms their status as Christ-like figures. In this light, Ugolino is disqualified as a father. He is instead a childlike cannibal who loses control of his own appetite: he "must become as a little child, become truly Ugolino."⁹

Even when Dante leaves Ugolino and descends to Ptolomea, the imagery of bread persists, forming the foundational context of the entire *Canto*. There, the pilgrim meets Fra' Alberigo, whose soul is already in hell though his body remains alive: "il corpo suo l'è tolto da un demonio, che poscia il governa mentre che 'l tempo suo tutto sia vòlto" (*Inf.* 33.130-2). As Pietro Alighieri's comments reveal, this peculiar phenomenon may allude to St. Paul's statement in I *Corinthian*: whoever commits sexual immorality will be delivered "to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus" (5.5). A later statement by St. Paul (5.6-8), discussing the Eucharistic bread, unveils and emphasizes the Eucharist's presence in, and significance as, bread.

⁷ John Freccero, "Bestial Sign and Bread of Angels: *Inferno* XXXII and XXXIII", in Freccero, *Dante, the Poetics of Conversion*. Ed., and with an Introduction by Rachel Jacoff (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), 158.

⁸ Ronald B. Herzman, "Cannibalism and Communion in *Inferno* XXXIII," *Dante Studies* 98 (1980): 57-58.

⁹ Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, ed. and trans. by Robert M. Durling, Intro and notes by Ronald L. Martinez and Durling (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). Additional Note 15 "Ugolino", 579. For the analysis of Ugolino's unnatural appetite, see Patricia Vázquez, "Dante's Cannibal Count: Unnatural Hunger and its Reckoning," *Arion. A Journal of Humanities and the Classics* 28, no. 1 (2020): 67-93, esp. 15-17.

He goes on to say (5.7) that to become “the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth,” like Christ, one must purge immorality (“the old leaven”). Probably because of this context, Pietro believes his father might also be alluding to the “last supper” in John 13 when Christ gave Judas the bread symbolizing his body and said, “Now after the piece of bread, Satan entered him” (26-7). Despite the literal absence of bread, Dante’s biblical references emphasize the importance of the Eucharist.

In fact, the final four circles of *Inferno* pivot around the motif of bread. Unlike Jesus’s sacrifice of his flesh as bread, Caina’s murder of his family members foreshadows Ugolino’s cannibalism in the circle of Antenora. Both are symbols of the annihilation of love. In the section of Ptolomea, one witnesses the bizarre separation between the soul and body of Fra’ Alberigo, as mentioned above, whose action alludes to the Eucharist. In the section of Judecca, where cannibalism occurs in a more gruesome and violent manner, the inverted Devil, who represents the anti-Christ, is feeding on humans. The bread on the altar, which is intended to nourish and save people, is transformed into an act of merciless cannibalism. Moreover, there are numerous explicit references to bread in the other two canticles. “The bread of angels” in *Par.* 2 refers to spiritual nourishment. It parallels the food “makes one thirst of it” (v.128) in the Canto 31 of *Purgatorio*: “il gran digiuno che lungamente m’ha tenuto in fame, non trovandoli in terra cibo alcuno” (vv. 25-7).¹⁰ Dante’s *digiuno* and longing echoes his insatiability of the Christ-like Gryphon in *Purg.* 31: “quel cibo che, saziando di sé, di sé asseta” (vv. 128-29). Dante also mentions that he feasts on the sacrament in *Par.* 23: “la mente mia così, tra quelle dape fatto più grande” (vv. 43-4). Together, the bread, the feast, and the table constitute a complex network of imageries that centers on the Eucharist and the sense of taste, which will ultimately dominate Dante’s later heavenly journey. Gustatory desire becomes an important indicator of the God-man relationship.

It is no coincidence that bread imagery/symbolism occurs throughout the *Commedia*. It draws attention to Dante’s emphasis on corporeality, as well as his confirmation of the significance of sensation and emotion in comprehending divinity. Dante’s focus on corporeality is evident in his portrayal of a weary body and an

¹⁰ The term *cibo* usually alludes to Wisdom, which is further identified with Christ, see the passages of *Prov.* 9.2. Wisdom is portrayed as imitating Christ during the Last Supper to invite people to partake of her bread and wine: “Wisdom hath... set forth her table... And to the unwise, she said: Come, eat my bread, and drink the wine which I have mingled for you.”

injured leg. This emphasis on the corporeal is evident throughout his work, including in depictions of the separation of body and soul in the Suicide Woods and Brother Alberigo. It is possible that Dante is introducing a new perspective on this peculiar status of the human soul: the independence from the body. As Seamus O’Neil has put it, Dante’s view of the body may have been influenced by the Neo-Platonists Plotinus and Porphyry, who believed that “the body has an active power over the soul.” As a result, the soul is incapable of leaving the body violently by suicide.¹¹ The act of suicide denies the connection between body and soul. In other words, by committing suicide, the soul arrogantly believes it can choose to leave the body of its own free will—which Dante firmly opposes. Tradition holds that the body is subordinate to the soul. Yet Dante shows that the body may not only reject the soul but also detach from it by existing independently.

St. Augustine’s theory of body-soul relationship is the main source of Dante’s perception of corporeality. The saint asserts that the flesh is not guilty in itself: “Nam corruptio corporis, quae adgrauat animam, non peccati primi est causa, sed poena.”¹² Dante’s sudden incarnation, “il corpo lasso” (*Inf.* 1.28) can be interpreted as a nod to Augustine’s doctrine.

Augustine’s argument vehemently refutes the negative perception of corporeality held by Neo-Platonists who regard the body as the contaminated and carnal prison of the soul. In Plato’s *Phaedo*, there is a focus on purification and the overcoming of bodily desires.¹³ His theory of corporeality differs from that of Asceticism arising in the early Middle Ages, which entailed a harsh treatment of the body through fasting and flagellation. Whereas Augustine justifies the role of the body, he overlooks its significance in humankind’s salvation. Rather than advocating a Neo-platonic flight from the body, he emphasizes that people should look to their inner selves. This is a departure from the idea that the body is a hindrance to the soul; however, the role of corporeality herein is minimized to the point of becoming marginal in terms of salvation.

However, through his philosophy of love (affection), Dante reintroduces the body into the narrative of salvation. Love is emphasized from the beginning of the *Commedia*. Beatrice informs

¹¹ Seamus O’Neil, “‘How Does the Body Depart?’: A Neoplatonic Reading of Dante’s Suicides,” *Dante Studies* 132 (2014): 181–82.

¹² Augustine di Hippo, *Augustini de civitate Dei*, Liber XIV, 3.2. Accessed Feb. 3, 2023. <https://www.thelatinlibrary.com/august.html>.

¹³ Studies on the negative Platonic view of the body and its influence on Dante, see also O’Neil, “‘How Does the Body Depart?’,” 175–200, esp. 176–78.

Virgil that “amor mi mosse, che mi fa parlare” (*Inf.* 2.72), while Virgil and St. Bernard, Dante’s other two guides, come to his aid because of God’s Love. The poet uses a metaphor of parental love and marriage to represent man’s affection for Christ, rather than relying on theological syllogisms. The Trinity is bound by love between father and son: “Guardando nel suo Figlio con l’**Amore** che l’uno e l’altro eternalmente spira” (*Par.* 10.1-2); man’s affection for Christ: “come ... la sposa di Dio surge a mattinar lo sposo perché l’ami” (vv.139-41). The character of Thomas Aquinas is assigned to the Heaven of the Sun, but Dante’s emotional tone in representing him gives the character an unusual air of sensitivity, in contrast with the intellectual gravitas typically associated with the historical St. Thomas.

Dante takes a step further by emphasizing Love as the origin of everything. He believes that God’s flames of Love is the source of all creation: “La divina bontà, che da sé sperne ogni livore, ardendo in sé, **sfavilla** sì che dispiega la bellezze etterne” (*Par.* 7.64-6), and the degree of freedom granted to each soul suggests the degree of its intimacy with God: “Ciò che da essa senza mezzo piove libero è tutto” (*Par.* 7.70-1). This idea is supported by Beatrice’s remark in reference to the Neo-Platonic doctrine of emanation, which states that all things are derived from the emanation of light of “the One.” Objects are placed into a hierarchy based on varying degrees of luminescence. Just as the celestial souls who share a particle of *sfavilla* with God’s flame, each creature possesses a particle of the “ever-radiant light” and seeks to return to the One, which is the ultimate light source.¹⁴ Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite describes the One as resembling the sun:

It exercises no rational process, no act of choice, and yet, by the very fact of its existence it gives light to whatever is able to partake of its light, in its own way. So it is with the good.¹⁵

The God of the *Commedia* may be compared to the Areopagite’s sun, whose *bontà* generates a variety of species and endows humankind with nobility. His goodness, in fact, is an infinite love offered to humankind as graces and *doni*. Aquinas believed that the capacity to “know” is dependent upon the degree of immateriality:

¹⁴ Denys Turner, *Eros and Allegory: Medieval Exegesis on the Song of Songs* (Athens, Ohio: Cistercian Publications, 1995), 47.

¹⁵ Pseudo Dionysius, *The Complete Works*, trans. by Colm Luibheid (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1987), 693b-696^a, quoted from Giuseppe Mazzotta, “Dante’s Franciscanism”, in *Dante and the Franciscans*, ed. Santa Casciani (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 191.

“Patet igitur quod immaterialitas alicuius rei est ratio quod sit cognoscitive; et secundum modum immaterialitatis est modus cognitionis.”¹⁶ Dante’s preoccupation with love, as this study will demonstrate, fundamentally distances him from the Aristotelian-Thomistic theory of cognitive processes.

This article explores the significance of Eucharistic bread in the *Commedia* and its connection to the human body and senses. By examining its various roles, such as representing the womb, Pride, fruit, trees, and coins, it becomes clear that bread serves as a central point that connects seemingly unrelated imageries. This interweaving of imagery highlights the importance of bodily sensations for the human experience. Bread also acts as a hermeneutic key to other imageries, since its rich cultural connotations disclose the social, religious, and liturgical meanings concealed within other imageries. The article concludes by demonstrating the intrinsic connection between bread and Dante’s two key tenets: Love and Affective piety. Dante intends for his readers to perceive the body and its sensual experiences, sentiments, and emotions in a way that differs from Dominican intellectualism via the symbolic connotations of bread.

Beginning in the twelfth century, there was a significant shift in theological and philosophical perceptions regarding the human body. In the contemplation of divinity, the prejudice against corporeality was reshaped and gradually oriented toward a revelation of its positive function. Parallel changes were occurring in religious life, with a greater emphasis on affective piety and compassion for Jesus’s sacrifice in both public and private spheres. Senses, emotions, and experiences are essential cognitive tools for comprehending the Unknown and provide the basis for the progressive emancipation of the body from the traditional hierarchy assigning lower status to the senses. Even more revealing is that the Eucharist makes evident the important significance of gustatory experiences in knowing divinity—God is sweet and (therefore) can be perceived through the sense of taste. As Fortunato Trione has pointed out, the value of affective experience lies in “una apertura completa e sincera all’oggetto della propria ricerca”.¹⁷ In our understanding of the *Commedia*, however, these valorizations of the body, senses, and emotions promoted by Mysticism, the Franciscans, and the

¹⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Teologia*, 1.4.1.C, accessed Feb 3, 2023, <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/4075.htm#article5>.

¹⁷ Fortunato Trione, “Paura del senso e timore di Dio: Misticismo nella ‘Divina Commedia’,” *Dante Studies* 129 (2011): 189.

Beguines¹⁸ are occasionally overshadowed by the Aristotelian—Aquianist intellectualism in the Dominican tradition. However, Dante’s attention to bread in the *Commedia* shows his indebtedness to the theological ideas of the Cistercians and Franciscans, as well as his firm support of affective piety. This also indicates his deliberate divergence from the Dominican tradition’s intellectualist approach to the perception of the body.

II.

In addition to its direct presence, bread serves as a central image woven throughout numerous other images. Carrying complex symbolic values, bread becomes a self-centered linguistic network connecting previously irrelevant imageries and objects through social, cultural, religious, and liturgical connotations. In this light, the scattered images are better understood through the Eucharistic bread’s shape, taste, and creation. In other words, the bread functions as a hermeneutic tool or interpreting other images and objects.

Bread as the Link between Botanical and Corporeal Images

The mystical fruit in *Purg.* 23–24 is linked to Jesus’s body through bread and Communion. In Canto 23, when Dante sees the starving souls, he is reminded of one Maria who eats her sons: “quando Maria nel figlio diè di becco” (v. 30). Unlike the benign Virgin Mary, this Maria is a mirror of Ugolino, and the fact that she possesses a “becco” further sets her apart from the griffon who “non discindi col *becco* d’esto legno dolce al gusto” (*Purg.* 32.43–4, italics mine). All these elements—the name Maria, the act of eating, the sacrificial son—point to a single interpretation: this is a *Canto* about the Eucharist and Jesus. This is made clear in the subsequent tercet in which Forese explains to the pilgrim that it is the *voglia* [“menò Cristo lieto a dire à *Eli*, quando ne liberò con la sua vena” (*Purg.* 23.74–5)] that causes all souls to crave the fruit tree: “Chi crederebbe che l’odor d’un *pomo* sì governasse, generando brama (*Purg.* 23.34–5, italics mine).

¹⁸ For Dante and his relationship with the Mystics, see Edmund G. Fardner, *Dante and the Mystics. A Study of the Mystical Aspect of the Divina Commedia and Its relations with Some of Its Medieval Sources* (Darlington: J.M. Dent, 1913). For Edmund, Scholasticism and Mysticism “are but the two roads, of science and experience, along which the soul travels towards the same goal” (p. 3). In particular, the author stresses that the experience of the Mystics was closely related to the experience of Love, as shown in Dante’s *Commedia*, *Nuova vita*, and *Convivio* (iii).

The fruit's name, *pomo*, is believed to refer to an apple or some kind of round fruit. Although Dante does not specify what exactly it is, he later describes it as the "fioretti del *melo*" that makes angels crave for its eternal bliss in heaven (*Purg.* 32.73-5). Herzman reminds us that Christ is often "described within a Eucharistic context as fruit."¹⁹ If the "fruit" in Dante's work does refer to the "apple," its Eucharistic connotation becomes more prominent as the apple is a metaphor for Jesus in the Song of Solomon, "Like an apple tree among the trees of the woods, so is my beloved among the sons" (2.3). In the Gospel of Luke, similarly, Gabriel tells Mary: "blessed is the **fruit** of thy womb" (1.42). This metaphor is widely employed in monastic theology. A source immediately accessible to Dante may have been Thomas Aquinas' hymn *Page Lingua* sung at the liturgy for *Corpus Christi*, in which he praises Jesus as the "fructus ventris generosi."²⁰ For the Franciscan Bonaventure of Bagnoregio, Jesus is the life-giving fruit that hangs upon the Tree of Life.²¹ Though the association between Jesus and the apple (fruit) existed prior to Dante, it is not immediately apparent in *Canto* 23.

The subsequent *Canto* contains a scene that provides more direct and substantial linguistic support for this association. The pilgrim observes the souls gazing eagerly at the fruit held so high they are unable to reach it: "alzar le mani e gridar non so che verso le fronde" (vv. 106-7). The addressee of the penitents' requests does not reply (v. 109) but "per fare esser ben la voglia acuta, / **tien alto** lor disio e nol nasconde" (vv. 110-11). When looking at the liturgical practice of Communion during Dante's time, the action of holding high "lor disio" merits greater attention. During Communion, the bread is consecrated, and the celebrant holds the bread high while proclaiming "*Hoc est corpus meum.*" This is an important moment for all communicants: the sight of the elevated Host means the "intake" of the bread, signifying the completion of the Union. During the Middle Ages, people would run from church to church in a single day, often drenched in sweat, to ob-

¹⁹ Ronald B. Herzman, "Cannibalism and Communion in *Inferno* XXXIII," 73-74.

²⁰ Quoted from Herzman, "Cannibalism and Communion in *Inferno* XXXIII," 74. The text is originally found in the "Officium de Festo Corporis Christi," in *S. Thomae Aquinatis Opuscula Theologica*, vol. II, *De Re Spirituali* (Torino: Marietti Editore, 1954), 275.

²¹ Quoted from Ann W. Astell, *Eating Beauty. The Eucharist and the Spiritual, Arts of the Middle Ages* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2006), 39. The original text is from Bonaventure, *Lignum vitae, Opera omnia*, 8:69a.

serve this moment; the phenomenon is known as medieval “elevation mania.” Thomas Cranmer, the Protestant Archbishop of Canterbury, described people’s unusual mania as such:

For else what made the people run from their seats to the altar, and from altar to altar... What moved the priests to lift up the sacrament so high over their hands; or the people to say to the priest, “hold up! hold up!”²²

The gesture of “holding up” the Eucharist during Communion has the same religious and psychological effect as that of the mysterious person who holds up the apple (*Purg.* 24: 111). Both serve to stimulate the communicants’ yearning for the Eucharist. The paralleling of the bread and apple reveals their equivalence. According to Sheila J. Nayar, the pilgrim’s upward journey through *Purgatorio* is, in fact, “a ceremonial progression through the ritual of Mass ... towards that most sacred part of the church, the sanctuary, where the Mass is physically celebrated.”²³ Dante, a devout Christian, is well aware of the ritual of the Eucharist and its effects on the communicants. Dante is the one who finally receives the Host and is renewed. The souls in the circle of Gluttons, however, hunger for the Eucharist in this *Canto*, wherein gluttony is portrayed as more than just a sin. It is an intuitive and gustatory desire to taste the sacred bread, rather than a mere metaphorical expression of one’s longing for God. They are homogeneous. Just like what San Diadoco has said: “il vero e sommo strumento di prova per gli uomini è il gusto del Signore, della cui sensazione, una volta esperita, bisogna avere una memoria senza oblio.”²⁴

Dante associates flowers, trees and fruit, with corporeality through the symbolism of bread. In the *Canto* 33 of *Paradiso*, St.

²² Quoted from Aden Kumler, “The Multiplication of the Species, Eucharist Morphology in the Middle Ages,” *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 59/60 (2011): 179–80, originally in *Writings and Disputations of Thomas Cranmer Relative to the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper*, ed. J. E. Cox, (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1844), 229.

²³ Sheila J Nayar, *Dante’s Sacred Poem, Flesh and the Centrality of the Eucharist to the Divine Comedy* (Bloomsbury, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 102. The idea of regarding *Purgatorio* as the “return to the altar” is also held by Mary Alexandra Watt, see *The Cross That Dante Bears: Pilgrimage, Crusade, and the Cruciform Church in the Divine Comedy*, (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2005), 130–38.

²⁴ Quoted from Giorgio Stabile, “Sapor-Sapientia: Tatto e gusto cultura agraria, medicina e mistica”, in *Natura, scienza e società medievali, Studi in onore di Agostino Paravicini Bagliani*, eds. Claudio Leonardi and Francesco Santi (Florence: Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2008), 306.

Bernard sings a sweet hymn to the Virgin Mary which says: “Nel ventre tuo si raccese l’Amore per lo cui caldo ne l’eterna pace così è germinato *questo fiore*” (*Par.* 33.7-9, italics mine). For Dante, flowers are another kind of spiritual sustenance that satisfies his hunger; they are the Eucharistic bread’s equivalent:

Ond’ io appresso: “O perpetui fiori
de l’eterna Letizia, che pur uno
parer mi fate tutti vostri odori,

solvetemi, spirando, il gran digiuno²⁵
che lungamente m’ha tenuto in fame,
non trovandoli in terra cibo alcuno. (*Par.* 19.22-27)

The strong connection between Jesus and flowers is emphatically confirmed by Bonaventure, who, in praising Jesus’s divine beauty, writes: “This most beautiful flower of the root of Jesse which had blossomed in the incarnation and withered in the passion...”²⁶ St. Albert uses an analogy to describe the beauty of the Eucharist, comparing Jesus to a flower with powerful fragrance and vibrant colors. Additionally, the use of the word “ventre” (meaning womb or belly) once again recalls the Gryphon’s *ventre*, whose refusal to eat the tree’s luscious fruit does not cause its *ventre* to become twisted (“poscia che mal si torce il *ventre* quindi” *Purg.* 32.45).

Notably, medieval iconology depicts Mary’s womb as a warm oven used for baking the bread-Jesus.²⁷ As the Benedictine monk Bruno of Segni (1045-1123) puts it: “ita et *panis* iste coelestis benedictione mutatur in *carnem Christi*, non in aliam quidem ... quam de Virgine matre sucepit.”²⁸ This iconological perception continues into the Renaissance. The Franciscan friar John Reyman once wrote: “In virgyne Mary this brede was bake.”²⁹ In this light, the womb of Mary is compared to a space filled with the warmth

²⁵ Michael Alan Anderson, “Root, Branch, and Flower: Lineage and Fecundity in the Versified Offices for St. Anne”, in *The Book of Nature and Humanity in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, eds. David Hawkes and Richard G. Newhauser (Antwerp, Brussels: Brepols, 2013), 105-132.

²⁶ Quoted from Astell, *Eating Beauty*, 40.

²⁷ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast. The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987), 271.

²⁸ Matthew Treherne, “Ekphrasis and Eucharist: The Poetics of Seeing God’s Art in *Purgatorio X*”, *The Italianist* 26 (2006): 186-87.

²⁹ Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 145.

of Holy love that can bake both bread and bloom flowers, which reveals the theological likeness and concordance of both images.

The botanical connotations of Jesus's body, as noted by Michael Alan Anderson, are always juxtaposed with motherhood and female genealogy. Both the Virgin and her mother, St. Anne, are depicted as a fertile tree or flower that bears the precious fruit of Jesus. The imageries of fruit, flowers, and trees are scattered but all gravitate around Jesus's body and humanity through the image of bread. In the discourse of the Eucharist, bread fulfills its role of aggregating other imageries, becoming a mutual reference and interconnection for other images.

The Visual Image of Bread in the Commedia

The appearance of the Eucharist and its true nature is a topic of much disagreement. This has resulted in debates regarding the doctrines of Transubstantiation and Consubstantiation, which are represented visually as a difference between white and red in the *Commedia*, the two most common colors used by the poet. For instance, the griffon's body is composed of white and red ["le membra d'oro avea quant'era uccello, / bianche l'altre, di vermiglio miste" (*Purg.* 29.113-14)]. The ladies dancing beside the griffon are attired in crimson and white; the elders of the parade have their heads garlanded with lilies and roses. Dante's recognition of the close relationship between the colors and Eucharistic bread is evident in the dynamic frequency. This is because the dogma of Transubstantiation dictates that the external color of the Eucharist is white, while the interior is crimson. Both hues, typically juxtaposed with green, are traditionally glossed as the three virtues of Christianity: Faith, Hope, and Love. Beatrice, dressed in these colors, appears to the eyes of the pilgrim as follows:

sovra *candido* vel cinta d'uliva
donna m'apparve, sotto *verde* manto
vestita di color di *fiamma* viva. (*Purg.* 30.31-3, italics mine)

The color green not only symbolizes hope, it also has botanical associations whereby Jesus is compared to the Tree of life and the evergreen vine.

In *Canto* 31 of *Paradiso*, there is a scene that describes the Eucharist's visual disparity, in which Christ's shed blood is visually transformed into a white rose: "In forma dunque di *candida* rosa / mi si mostrava la milizia santa che nel suo *sangue* / Cristo fece

sposa” (vv. 1–3). According to Robert Durling’s commentary, this *tercet* may allude to *Apocalypse* 7.14, which states that the white robes are made “white in the blood of Lamb.” To clarify, the heavenly troop presents a white rose to the pilgrim that is stained with blood. The subsequent passage of *Apocalypse* 7, which describes the Lamb that feeds its people [“They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more...for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters” (Apoc. 7.16–17)], provides additional evidence of the Eucharistic overtones in this *tercet*. This optical illusion, described by art historian Aden Kumler as “the failure of the phenomenal,” aligns well with the depiction of the consecrated bread; as the classic late medieval English folk song goes, “Hyt semes quite, and is red.”³⁰ The inherent horror of cannibalism can only be erased in the context of Communion, just as Miri Robin has clarified: “So used did the eye become, so trained was the mind, to think of the transubstantiated host as the real Christ ... that horrific tales of a bleeding child Christ in the host were tolerated within the culture.”³¹ The image of Ugolino exposes the disturbing truth behind the story of the Eucharist. Without the concept of grace, the only thing left is cannibalism.

Pride, Bread, and the Manufacturing of the Eucharist

Dante confesses to committing only one sin, Pride. In *Canto* 11 of *Purgatorio*, Dante reveals that he has a “gran tumor” (v. 19) in his heart. It is possible that St. Augustine’s use of the phrase “residebat tumor meus” (*Conf.* VII. 8) in his *Confessions*, in which he expresses gratitude to God for curing his Pride, inspires Dante’s connection of Pride with *tumor*.³² This sin is closely linked to bread, particularly its manufacturing culture. Such an association is unsurprising, given that Pride entails an inflating (*inflatus*) of the self. For example, when Beatrice satirizes the Franciscan friars, she portrays them as “*gonfia* il cappuccio” (*Par.* 29.117, italics mine): these swollen monks, ignorantly taking Pride in their “theological

³⁰ Quoted from Aden Kumler, “The multiplication of the species, Eucharist morphology in the Middle Ages”, 179, originally in E. Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, c.1400–c.1580* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1992), 102.

³¹ Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture*, 137. In her research of Eucharist imagery, Rubin finds some “horrific” scenes that show a child on the altar under a wielded knife.

³² St. Augustine, *Confessions*, a version with J.J O’Donnell’s commentaries, accessed Feb 3, 2023, https://faculty.georgetown.edu/jod/conf/frame_entry.html.

knowledge,” fed God’s men with the empty wind “le pecorelle ... tornan del pasco pasciute di vento” (*Par.* 29.106-7). There are warnings against Pride throughout the Scriptures. The most common example is found in I *Corinth.* 4: “Now some are puffed up as though I would not come to you. But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord wills” (18-19). Notably, St. Paul uses the metaphor of “puffing up bread” to describe Pride in I *Corinth.*:

And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you... Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. (1 *Corinthians* 5.2, 6-8)

He believes that the negative influence of pride can prevent people from recognizing the boundless benefits of Christ. St. Paul urges individuals to eliminate their old negative attitudes and instead celebrate with genuine and truthful intentions, symbolized by the unleavened bread. This is described in I *Corinth.* 5.8.

The method of preparing the Eucharistic bread can shed light on why Pride is particularly associated with leavened bread. The bread used for Communion differs from the bread for the daily table: it is white, round, and flat. During the time of Jesus, yeast had a rather negative reputation and was viewed as a source of contamination. Thus, Jesus cautioned his disciples against “the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees” (*Matt.* 16.11). According to Cristina Mazzoni’s study on food’s religious connotations, leaven, at that time, “was made out of old, fermented, basically rotten and smelly dough,” which is commonly employed as a metaphor for the ancient contaminations and corruption.³³ Jesus reportedly warned his disciples: “Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees” (*Matt.* 16.6). Hence, the sin of Pride is a kind of old, corrupt leaven that causes an inflation of pride in people. In 1054, the use of leavened or unleavened bread even became the focal point of the Great Schism. The Latin churches insisted on using unleavened bread in the Eucharist because Jesus was born immaculately, and leaven symbolized original sin. In essence, to be proud is to love incorrectly: to love oneself more than God and consider one’s own deeds greater than Christ’s. As a result, Augustine proposed: “itaque pietate humili reditur in te... (non) amplius *amando proprium nostrum quam te*” (*Confession*, III,

³³ Cristina Mazzoni, *The Women in God’s Kitchen* (London, New York: Continuum, 2005), 19.

8.16, italics mine). The Pride admitted by the pilgrim is actually pride in knowledge.³⁴ The unusual desire for knowledge leads to the tragic shipwreck of Ulysses in the *Inf.* 26. St. Paul exclaims: “Knowledge puffs up (*scientia inflat*), but love edifies” (I *Corinth.* 8.1), highlighting the dangers excessive pride can have on one’s intellect.

The association of Pride with bread is employed elsewhere in the *Commedia*. For example, Beatrice compares the pilgrim’s previous misconception to a leavened dough: “Tu stesso ti **fai grosso** col falso imaginar” (*Par.* 1.88–9). When Dante becomes inflated and cumbersome, his spirit is so blinded by mortal corporeality that he fails to comprehend that “Tu non se’ in terra, sì come tu credi” (*Par.* 1.91). It is important to understand the manufacturing culture of the Eucharistic bread to fully grasp why Dante views Pride as his own personal sin. Pride is symbolically the opposite of unleavened bread and Jesus’s humanity. This emphasizes Dante’s role as the *altro* Adam, who must undergo spiritual purification before becoming a poet of God. Ultimately, Dante overcomes his own flaw of inflation and becomes a humble bread like Jesus.

Bread, Coin, and Greed: The Visual Culture of the Eucharist

The appearance of the Eucharistic bread, in fact, is quite distinct from that of ordinary bread: it is a round, thin, and white wafer. But what makes it so special is that during the manufacturing process, the monks use a tool called “Host Press” to stamp religious icons on the Host. The “Host Press” is an iron instrument comprised of two metal plates used to make the Mass bread. To bake the flour Host, the operator first puts a mixed paste of water and wheat between the metal plates before placing the press over a flame. During the eleventh and twelfth centuries, printed images were regarded as emblems of authority and were as crucial as the consecration. As such, the Mass bread bears two significant distinguishing characteristics: it is baked by monks and has imprinted images. Both elements guarantee that the communicants receive Jesus’s body. The “Host Press”, as discovered by Kumler Aden, enables the mass production of the Eucharistic while maintaining identical appearance for each piece. Usually, the surface of the bread is

³⁴ In his *Confessions* V, 3–6, St. Augustine discussed the pride of knowledge among the Manicheans, saying that they: “possent aestimare saeculum, quamquam eius dominum minime invenerint” (5.3.3).

etched with Christ's name, liturgical phrases, the image of the crucified or resurrected Christ, or the Holy Face.³⁵

This custom of fabrication, beginning in the late eleventh century, gives the Eucharistic the appearance of a coin. By the thirteenth century, people had become so accustomed to the coin-shape that they did not take any more notice.³⁶ This shape is inspired by biblical sources such as the workers in the vineyard, the coin bearing Caesar's image, and the thirty coins Judas received for betraying Christ.³⁷ The coin-shaped bread symbolizes both a punishment for the traitor and a reward for the good deed. In *Inferno*, coins are negatively portrayed and are usually associated with deceit and avarice.³⁸ If we analyze the visual image of bread, we may find that coins and bread are contrasting images. In *Inferno*, Master Adam narrates his fraudulent behavior with the coins:

Ivi è Romena, là dov'io falsai
la lega suggellata del Batista,
per ch'io il corpo su arso lasciai. (*Inf.* 30.73- 5)

His swollen, lute-like belly is the central image of the episode. The swollen belly is an immediate reminder of Mary's blessed womb, but in an opposite manner. Master Adam's negative imagery is invoked again in *Purg.* XVI, in which Dante laments that: "Lo mondo è ben così tutto deserto / d'ogne virtute come tu mi sone, / e di malizia **gravido** e coverto" (vv. 58-60). The word *gravido*, which means "pregnant," conjures up an image of the pregnant Mary and her womb. The term connotes a negative image of a swollen world that resembles a loaf of bread raised by the leaven of malice. Dante places the coin in a scene that resembles the Eucharist, indicating his intentional connection between the coin and bread.

Following this contextual paralleling of coin and sacrament, readers would have a better understanding of why Dante, in the circle of avarice, suddenly hears ("per ventura udi") a mysterious voice calling: "Dolce Maria!... / e seguitar: 'Povera fosti tanto / quanto veder si può per quello ospizio / dove sponesti il tuo *portato*

³⁵ Aden Kumler, "The Multiplication of the Species, Eucharist Morphology in the Middle Ages," 185-6.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 188.

³⁷ Kumler, "The multiplication of the species," 188.

³⁸ For the moral connotation of Dante's coins, see Morris Karp, "Dante's Coins: Currencies of Justice in the Three Kingdoms," *Dante Studies* 138 (2020): 92-127.

santo” (*Purg.* 20.19-24, italics mine). The desire for wealth is expressed through the metaphor of coins in the poem. The poet compares the sinful contamination of the world to the process of creating currency through the phrase “ché la gente che fonde a goccia a goccia / per li occhi il mal che tutto ’l mondo occupa” (vv. 7-8). However, the Holy Infant of the Virgin Mary, who becomes the bread on the altar, presents a contrasting image of purity and selflessness. Mary and Jesus’s poverty and humility stand in opposition to the greed for wealth represented by the coins. The sudden mention of Mary and her child serves to counter the opening narrative of the coin.

The inverted relationship between the bread and the coin is alluded to in *Par.* 22, in which St. Benedict of Nursia, in denouncing the corruption of monastic orders, states: “le cocolle / sacca son piene di *farina ria*” (vv. 77-8). The pure white flour was tainted by the avarice of the Benedictines “del bianco fatto bruno” (v. 93). The dark evil flour (*farina ria*), according to Francesco da Buti, produces only “bad” bread: “E come della mala farina esce *male pane*; così de le male voluntadi ... esceno male operazioni.”³⁹ The presence of flour already strongly reveals the overtone of the Eucharistic bread in this Canto. Durling notably interprets Dante’s criticism of monastic orders’ unjust accumulation of wealth by understanding flour as a symbol for coins and money. Both da Buti and Durling remind readers not to ignore the visual resemblance between the coin and the Eucharistic. According to Benedict’s rule on the preparation of Hosts, the making thereof “had to be done before breakfast, and only the best and purest grain was used ... [the servant] was dressed all in white, his head covered by an amice such that only his eyes were visible.”⁴⁰ To ensure clean and quality bread, it is important to wash all the tools used, such as the millstones, sieve, table, and water vessel. Dante probably uses the term *bruno* flour

³⁹ Da Buti’s comments are available online <http://dantelab.dartmouth.edu/reader>, italics mine. Many commentators of the *Commedia* glossed “the evil flour” as a poetic metaphor of avarice. For instance, Pietro Alighieri (1340-42) thought Dante used it to condemn the corruption of the orders because they abandoned the religious contemplation: “Dicendo inde quomodo dicta scala, idest religiosa contemplatio, hodie per monachos et regulares modico frequentatur in adscensu, et quod jam multum erat in usu per monachos imitantes olim melius regulam ejus Benedicti”; Cristoforo Landino (1481) took this metaphor to be the demonstration of “la tralignata vita de’ suoi monaci,” Emilio Pasquini and Antonio Quaglio (1982) noted that “ria” meant the corrupted friars.

⁴⁰ Aden Kumler, “Manufacturing the Sacred in the Middle Ages: The Eucharist and other Medieval Works of Arts,” *English Language Note* 53, no. 2 (2015): 15-6.

to refer to the contaminated Host: the polluted flour fails to produce clean bread but instead dark coins that represent evilness. The coin's multiple moral, theological, and affective connotations are conspicuous only in the context of the bread's manufacturing culture. Furthermore, the episode foretells Dante's tacit recognition of St. Bernard's authority, which only becomes evident in the final cantos of *Paradiso*. At one point, St. Bernard asserts that no one has the right to change a white monk's status to a black one ("transire de statu monachorum *alborum* ad statum *nigrorum*," italics mine).⁴¹ In other words, St. Bernard considers his own order superior to the Benedictines. Dante's possible allusion to St. Bernard's color metaphor here may be an indication that he acknowledges the superiority of the Cistercians. This would align with his belief in affective piety, which is promoted through the figure of St. Bernard.

The bread not only connects the previously scattered images, but also helps readers interpret various objects mentioned in the poem. In other words, the imagery of bread provides readers with cultural, social, and literal backgrounds for viewing the objects like coins, the womb, flowers, and the fermented dough within the context of the Eucharistic. These roles attributed to bread are largely the result of Dante's emphasis on love and affective piety, which are primarily conveyed through the body, primarily through the human taste. Without connecting function of the bread imagery, the objects mentioned above would remain isolated and, therefore, the imageries related to them would remain scattered, without any mutual connections and interactions.

Amor plays an essential role in Franciscan theology. The historical depiction of St. Francis as lover of Poverty highlights this belief. This belief is reflected in *Paradiso*: "per tal donna giovinetto in guerra / del padre corse ... *Et coram patre* le si fece unito; / poscia di di in di l'amò più forte" (*Par.* 11.58-63). The blurring of the boundaries between the physical and the spiritual⁴² subverts the privilege previously granted to spirit over corporeality and makes physicality prominent. The saint frequently emphasizes in his sermons and instructions that God *is* Love. He references "The Lord's

⁴¹ St. Bernard, *Epistula ad Robertum puerum*, quoted from Dabney G. Park, "The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: What Dante Says about Bonaventure of Bagnoregio, Matthew of Acquasparta, and Ubertino da Casale," *Dante Studies* 132 (2014): 283.

⁴² Giuseppe Mazzotta points out that Dante's portrayal of the marriage of Francis and Lady Poverty is strategic: "the eminently spiritual love between the two lovers is portrayed in terms of a physical relationship", and "the spiritual ceremony ratifying this marriage is cast in legal language," *Dante and the Franciscans*, 184.

Prayer” and sings about how God’s love inflames us: “inflaming them so that they may love, because you, Lord, are Love.”⁴³ In “Give us this day our daily bread,” St. Francis lauds Jesus “so to remind us of the love he showed for us and to help us understand and appreciate it and everything that he did or said or suffered.”⁴⁴ In lieu of establishing philosophical or theological theories of love, he stresses a concrete love for the creatures and the world we live in, from Brother Sun and Sister Moon to Brother Wind, Sister Water, Brother Fire. Francis’s Love brings Dante back to the material world previously dismissed by philosophical and theological traditions. As noted by Lawrence Cunningham, “He (St. Francis) loved people, not humanity; wolves, not wildlife; Christ, not Christianity.”⁴⁵

Due to its compassion for corporeality, the Franciscan order worships *Christus Patiens*, who bows his head in sorrow, whose body suffers pain, and whose limbs weakly fall. They believe that Jesus’s willingness to suffer in human form is motivated by his love for humanity, as also observed by Dante in *Paradiso*: “che dal suo Fattore / s’era allungata, unì a sé in persona / con l’atto sol del suo eterno amore” (7.31-2).

The replacement of *Christus Triumphans* with *Christus Patiens*, was initiated by the Franciscans, and took place between the last decades of the thirteenth century and the fourteenth century; clear traces are visible in Italian paintings and other art forms. During this transition, the depiction of Jesus in paintings changed from an upright posture—which represented fearlessness and transcendence—to an S-shape. As pointed out by André Vauchez, from the end of the twelfth century to the thirteenth century, the object of veneration is no longer the king of heaven, but Christ incarnate.⁴⁶ Additionally, new narrative motifs such as Betrayal, Flagellation, Mocking, and the Way to Calvary are employed in the portrayal of

⁴³ *The Complete Francis of Assisi, His Life, the Complete Writings, and the Little Flowers*, ed., trans and intro. by Jon M. Sweeney, (Orleans, MA: Paraclete Press, 2015), 286.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 287.

⁴⁵ *Brother Francis: An Anthology of Writings by and about St. Francis of Assisi*, Lawrence Cunningham ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), XII.

⁴⁶ André Vauchez, *The Laity in the Middle Ages*, Daniel E. Bornstien ed., Margery J. Schneider trans. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993), 219-20.

Jesus's life. These artworks emphasize the torments of Jesus and accentuate his physical sorrow.⁴⁷ Through its focus on the body and senses, affective piety highlights the significance of anthropomorphism in Jesus's Passion.

The Franciscans were not the only order concerned with Christ's body. However, St. Francis's legend is distinguished by its intense focus on Christ's sacrificing body, earning him the name "another Christ" (*Alter Christus*). His *stigmata* on the Mount La Verna is evidence of his corporeal union with Christ: "Fusti en lui s'è trafisso,—mai non te mutasti; co te ce trasformasti—nel colpo è *miniato*."⁴⁸ The scars on his limbs attest to his participation in the Passion and make him the ideal earthly embodiment of Christ. St. Francis's conversion culminates in his public nudity in the square of San Rufino. As Alessandro Vettori has argued, his display of nudity initiates a "reevaluation of the human body, previously considered more a hindrance than an instrument of spiritual elevation."⁴⁹

Again, the emphasis on Christ's Passion is not exclusive to the Franciscans. Sympathy for the Passion emerges as early as the late eleventh century and had already been widely accepted in the twelfth century. Well before the founding of the Franciscans, St. Bernard's Order—the Cistercians—were renowned for their ardent advocacy of Christ's mystical body. St. Bernard and St. Anselm write extensively about Christ's physical sufferings, which greatly influenced St. Francis and many of his contemporaries.⁵⁰ Yet according to the Cistercian regulations, the order must remain isolated from mainstream scholastic activity and maintain a distance from emergent universities, such as Paris.⁵¹ As Steven Botterill's study reveals, Bernard's impact on scholastic thought reached an apex in the thirteenth century, especially in the "Franciscan setting." Conversely, the establishment of Franciscan's affective culture is fueled by St. Bernard and other Cistercian mystics' sensual

⁴⁷ Anne Derbes, *Picturing the Passion in Late Medieval Italy, Narrative Painting, Franciscan Ideologies, and the Levant*, (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 7-8.

⁴⁸ Francesco D'Assisi, *Laude* 61, italics mine, cited from Alessandro Vettori, *Poets of Divine Love, Franciscan Mystical Poetry of The Thirteenth Century* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2004), 148.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵⁰ Derbes, *Picturing the Passion in Late Medieval Italy*, 17. See also Steven Botterill, *Dante and the Mystical Tradition Bernard of Clairvaux in the Commedia* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 34-35. Botterill notes that Bernard's cultural figure and theological work have a great influence on the Franciscans and other spiritual writers of the Middle Ages.

⁵¹ Botterill, *Dante and the Mystical Tradition*, 27.

exegesis and interpretation of biblical passages, a type of exegesis which can be traced back to St. Anselm, according to R. W. Southern's seminal work.⁵² It is therefore not surprising that affective piety flourished in both the Cistercian and Franciscan traditions during Dante's time. Furthermore, in the thirteenth century, the Franciscans became the leading force in "promoting" Christ's humanity: "With St. Francis and his followers, the fruits and experiences of St. Anselm and St. Bernard were brought to the market place, and became the common property of the lay and clerical world alike."⁵³

The Protestants attempt to downplay Christ's physical suffering, while the Franciscans conversely embrace it; they acknowledge not only that Christ is human, but also that he suffers *as a human*. They also extoll Mary for her physical bearing of Christ. However, the Dominicans prioritize intellectualism over affective piety and the Franciscans' worship of Mary. In *Inf.* 27, St. Francis is suspicious of logic and speculative grammar,⁵⁴ which further attests to the difference in perspective on affect and body between the two religious orders.

In fact, the Franciscans actively participated in the debates on the nature of the Eucharist. Like the Church, they endorsed the doctrine of Transubstantiation, which emphasizes the actual presence of Christ's body on the altar during the consecration of the Host. The doctrine was promulgated at the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 and drew unprecedented attention to Christ's body and the value of corporeality itself. The practice of *Imitatio Christi* rapidly gained adherents, which placed the actual participation of corporeality at the forefront of life. The Franciscans' feverous awe of Christ's body is evident from their introducing the ritual of the elevation of the Host into the Roman missal, making them the first order to do so.⁵⁵

Less research has been done on St. Francis' influence on Dante's theory of corporeality in *Commedia*, as compared to St. Augustine and St. Thomas. Nevertheless, reading the work within

⁵² R.W. Southern, *The Making of the Middle Ages* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), 232-40.

⁵³ Southern, *The Making of the Middle Ages*, 240.

⁵⁴ The figure of Guido of Montefeltro, as suggested by Giuseppe Mazzotta, "evokes the key questions of the thirteenth-century debate on the liberal arts and the Franciscan attack against logic and speculative grammar," in Santa Casciani, "Introduction," *Dante and the Franciscans*, 5.

⁵⁵ Anne Derbes, *Picturing the Passion in Late Medieval Italy*, 18, also the note no. 31 at page 187.

the Franciscan intellectual tradition proves fruitful.⁵⁶ V.S. Benfell III reveals how Dante incorporates the Franciscan theories of Peter John Olivi and Bonaventure into his *Commedia*; the source of Dante's knowledge of the Franciscan Apocalypse is probably Olivi and his student Ubertino da Casale.⁵⁷ There is speculation that Dante may have joined the *minor* order and became a lay member.⁵⁸ The underlying point is that in *Par.* 11, Dante equates the Franciscan tradition to the Dominican one. And the life story of Francis and the establishment of his order is narrated by St. Thomas. In the following passage, I will show how the Franciscan emphasis on corporeality sets the stage for Dante's construction of the affective-cognitive system in the *Commedia*, as well as his stress on the cognitive value of the human faculty of taste. Bread is the window and the most obvious sign that leads to such a system.

III.

Upon observing the giant white rose comprised of hundreds of biblical saints, Dante turns to Beatrice for an explanation. Yet she has already been replaced by St. Bernard of Clairvaux. Unlike St. Francis and St. Benedict, St. Bernard's self-introduction is very brief and devoid of details about his life or birthplace. Dante has him only speak one sentence: "E la regina del Cielo ... i' sono il suo *fedel Bernardo*" (*Par.* 31.100-2). It is very likely that Dante believes St. Bernard's love for the Virgin Mary is enough to expose his identity in the *Commedia*. Therefore, St. Bernard is not portrayed as a historical person and theologian, but rather as a lover of Christ and Poverty like St. Francis.⁵⁹ St. Bernard's affective character accords with Dante's final vision of paradise: "vidi che s'interna, / legato con *amore* in un volume, / ciò che per l'universo si squaderna" (*Par.* 33.85-7). Love, and not logic or theology, ultimately reveals the vision of God. As this article will demonstrate, the affective

⁵⁶ Besides Erich Auerbach's classical essay "St. Francis of Assisi in Dante's *Commedia*," studies on Dante and the Franciscans include: Santa Casciani ed., *Dante and Franciscans*; Nick Havely, *Dante and the Franciscans: Poverty and the Papacy in the Commedia* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Davide Bolognesi, *Dante and the Friars Minor: Aesthetics of the Apocalypse*, PhD dissertation, Columbia University, 2012.

⁵⁷ Mazzotta, "Dante's Franciscanism," 22.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 171.

⁵⁹ Botterill mentions that people, having lost interest in St. Bernard as an historical figure at the end of the twelfth century, began to treat him as a cultural icon and symbol. Such cultural trends may have influenced Dante's portrayal of St. Bernard as a lover of the Virgin. See Botterill, *Dante and the Mystical Tradition*, 24.

piety represented by St. Bernard sheds light on the role of taste in the soul's understanding of God. The consecrated bread, destined to be tasted and consumed, fits perfectly within the gustatory-cognitive system. The gustatory-cognitive system constructed by the poet accomplishes two goals: on the one hand, it challenges prejudice against physicality; on the other, it undermines the traditional hierarchy of senses in history by placing taste at the forefront.

In terms of importance, senses like taste and touch tend to be ranked lower than sight and smell because they require physical contact with an object.⁶⁰ As pointed out by Giorgio Stabile, “i sensi sono stati disposti in una serie ascendente che va dal tatto, al gusto, all’olfatto, all’udito e alla vista, secondo un principio assiologico di smaterializzazione graduale.”⁶¹ Unquestionably, sight and hearing are the most important senses for the pilgrim in *Paradiso*. Dante appropriates this hierarchy from Plato and Augustine. Plato believes that the eyes resemble the sun more than the other senses (*Republic* 6 508b).⁶² St. Augustine builds upon this idea and suggests that individuals should use “the eyes of the mind” (*mentis meae acri collyrio*) to perceive God’s light (*Conf.* VII, 8). In the heavens where “più de la sua luce prende” (*Par.*1:4), the pilgrim’s vision increases progressively: in the heaven of the Moon, Dante still cannot endure the sight of Beatrice: “ma quella folgorò nel mio sguardo sì che da prima il viso non sofferse” (*Par.* 3.128-29). But when they arrive in the Empyrean, Dante not only see Beatrice’s face for the first time “Dal primo giorno ch’i vidi il suo viso in questa vita, infino a **questa vista**” (*Par.* 30.28-9), but also the souls previously invisible to him: “poi, come gente stata sotto larve, / che pare altro che prima, se si sveste / la sembianza non s’ia in che disparve: così mi si cambiaro in maggior feste” (*Par.* 30.91-4). In the Augustinian hierarchy, sight is the foundation for the acquisition of knowledge (“oculi autem sunt ad noscendum in sensibus principes”), as well as the foundation of other senses in understanding the world:

videri enim dicuntur haec omnia. dicimus autem non solum, ‘vide quid luceat,’ quod soli oculi sentire possunt, sed etiam, ‘vide quid sonet,’

⁶⁰ Rudy, *Mystical Language of Sensation in the Later Middle Ages*, chapter 3, eps. 53-5.

⁶¹ Giorgio Stabile, “Sapor-Sapientia: Tatto e gusto cultura agraria, medicina e mistica”, in *Natura, scienza e società medievali, Studi in onore di Agostino Paravicini Bagliani*, a cura di Claudio Leonardi e Francesco Santi (Florence: Edizioni del Galuzzo, 2008), 302.

⁶² Plato, *Republic*, accessed Feb 3, 2023, <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0168%3Abook%3D6%3Asection%3D508b>.

‘vide quid oleat,’ ‘vide quid sapiat,’ ‘vide quam durum sit’ (*Conf. X*, 35.54).

In contrast, taste is considered inferior, even dangerous: “at ista corporalis, de qua loquebar, inlecebrosa ac *periculosa dulcedine* condit vitam saeculi caecis amatoribus” (X.34.52, italics mine).

During his journey, Dante ultimately chooses St. Bernard as his guide. St. Bernard has long been known to have had a powerful influence on Dante’s thoughts and works.⁶³ In one of his teachings, St. Bernard equates God’s love to a sweetness for which our tongues long, as he states: “Indeed you had not yet tasted, and you did not know what Christ tastes of; therefore you do not desire; and if you tasted and did not taste and know sweetly, you do not have a healthy palate.”⁶⁴ This desire for sweetness not only stimulates humankind’s desire for God, but also help us understand him cognitively. It is the desire for sweetness, a luxury item in Dante’s time, that most resembles the desire of God. Jesus is described as “honey in the mouth, music in the ear, a song in the heart.”⁶⁵ In one of his *Sermons*, St. Bernard even stresses that “Perhaps *sapientia*, that is wisdom, is derived from *sapor*, that is taste, because, when it is added to virtue, like a seasoning, it adds taste to something which itself is tasteless and bitter.”⁶⁶ Therefore, St. Bernard has been revered throughout history as the *Doctor Mellifluus* (Doctor of Sweetness). This explains why Dante depicts a swarm of bees in the Canto of St. Bernard’s appearance “sì come schiera d’ape che s’infiora una fiata” (*Par.* 31.7-8).

St. Bernard’s recognition of the cognitive role of human taste was widespread in the high medieval monastic atmosphere; it represented an alternative to the dominating Dominican-inspired intellectualism. The association of taste with wisdom dates to the *Epytologiae* of Isidoro di Siviglia, in which Isidoro writes: “*Sapientis dictus a sapore; quia sicut gustus aptus est ad discretionem*

⁶³ Edmund G. Gardner, *Dante and the Mystics* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1913); Botterill, *Dante and the Mystical Tradition*.

⁶⁴ Bernard of Clairvaux, *Ep.2, Sancti Bernardi opera omnia*. 8 vols. Ed. Jean Leclercq, C.H Talbot and H.M Rochais (Rome: Editiones Cistercienses, 1957-77). English translation is from Gordon Rudy, *Mystical Language of Sensation in the Later Middle Ages*, 64.

⁶⁵ Bernard of Clairvaux, *Ep.2, Sancti Bernardi opera omnia*. 8 vols., *Sermon* 15.6.

⁶⁶ *The Works of Bernard of Clairvaux*, vol. 3, *On the Song of Songs*, 4 vols., trans. Kilian Walsh and Irene M. Edmonds (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1971), *Sermon* 85.8. Meanwhile, Bernard seems to be dubious about the effect of “sight”: in his convent, no religious carvings or paintings were permitted to be hung, only bare walls, and he rebuked lazy monks who were distracted by the visual arts. See Astell, *Eating Beauty*, 63-64.

saporis ciborum, six sapiens ad *dinoscentiam* rerum atque causarum.”⁶⁷ For him, the tongue has the capacity to differentiate between flavors and tastes. The ascetic monk Diadoco di Fotina also acknowledges the taste’s ability to discern:

Il senso dell’intelletto è un gusto esatto delle cose che si discernono, allo stesso modo in cui col nostro senso corporeo del gusto, quando siamo in salute, discerniamo senza errore il buono dal cattivo e appetiamo ciò che è buono ⁶⁸

But I think Diadoco’s use of taste is essentially rhetorical and confined to describing humankind’s intuitive desire for God. The Cistercian monk Adam di Perseigne, on the other hand, clearly confirms that taste is superior to intelligence:

Nota quod feria illa quae dicitur intellectus [cioè la sexta], tota est in *splendore*, ut qui ad eam pervenerit, nihil minus quam *cherubim*, id est plenitudo scientiae fiat. Illa vero feria quae spiritus sapientiae nominator, *tota est in sapore*, ut qui ad eam pervenire meruerit, nihil minus quam *seraphim*, id est ardens vel incendens existat.⁶⁹

Adam di Perseigne challenges Plato’s traditional hierarchy of cognition by arguing that taste-based knowledge is superior to light-based intelligence. To support his argument, Perseigne figuratively places the angel Seraphim, who symbolizes God’s intense, above Cherubim, the angel of light. Perseigne’s opinion was revolutionary during his time because the sense of taste was considered inferior to the other senses. A brief review of monastic tradition reveals that taste represents not only the faculties of the “embodied” spirit but also a cognitive sense equivalent to intelligence.

According to R. James Goldstein’s study on the cultural phenomenology of sweetness in Dante’s work, the tropes of sweetness are central in the *Commedia*. Sweetness signifies the moral progress of the pilgrim throughout the *canticles*. The word *soave* and its lexical variants occur throughout the *Commedia* with high frequency: the word *dolce* occurs nineteen times in *Inferno*, forty-four in *Purgatorio*, and forty-three in *Paradiso*. Because sugar was

⁶⁷ Isidore of Seville, *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, Stephen A. Barney, W.J. Lewis, J.A. Beach, Oliver Berghof trans., with the collaboration of Muriel Hall (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 228 (italics mine).

⁶⁸ *De perfectione spirituali capita centum*, cap. 30, ed. É. Des Places, Diadoque de Photice, *Oeuvres spirituelles* (Paris: Editions du Cerfs, 1955): 100-1, quoted from Stabile, “Sapor-Sapientia,” 304-5.

⁶⁹ Adam de Perseigne, Ep. VI, *Ad Osmundum Monachum Mortuimaris*, quoted from Giorgio Stabile, “Sapor-Sapientia,” 289, italics mine.

an imported luxury good during Dante's time, the frequent descriptions of sweetness in the *Commedia* enable readers to immediately and intuitively perceive the divine delight implied in knowing God. Dante's strategic employment of terms related to sweetness foretells St. Bernard's final appearance at the conclusion of *Paradiso*, as his most famous quote is: "Gustate e videte quoniam *suavis est Dominus*" (*Psalms* 33.9, italics mine).

For Dante, the understanding of God is not solely founded upon rationality, logic, or intelligence: the physical experience of taste also counts. The symbolism of sweetness in his writing actually reveals "affective piety", which is propagated by the Cistercians, then the Franciscans, until it spread to lay circles of devotional practice."⁷⁰ Although Dante's frequent usage of the tropes of sweetness is believed to allude to St. Bernard's sermon on the Song of Songs (*Sermones super Cantica canticorum*),⁷¹ the precise degree of Bernard's impact upon Dante is difficult to ascertain. Regardless, the poet must have been aware of Bernard's famous saying "taste and see (to understand)."

The *Commedia* contains multiple textual pieces of evidence supporting the assumption mentioned above. In the Heaven of Moon, Dante says to the souls: "O ben creato spirito, che a'rai di vita eterna *la dolcezza* senti che non gustata non s'intende mai" (*Par.* 3.37-9). "La dolcezza" not only refers to the *felicità* of knowing God, but also to the bodily experience of sweetness brought about by such *felicità*. The perception of God is edible, too: "ch'esser non puote senza *gustar di lui* chi ciò rimira" (*Par.* 10.6-7). The symmetrical occurrence of drinking at the end of both *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* should also be noted. In *Purgatorio*, Dante is pulled by Beatrice into the river "Tratto m'avea nel fiume infin la gola...ove convene ch'io l'acqua inghiottissi" (*Purg.* 31.94,102). The word *gola* already points to a shadowy presence of "taste." In *Paradiso*, Beatrice instructs Dante to elevate his "sight" by drinking the water from the river: "quest'acqua convien che tu bei prima che tanta sete in te si sazi" (*Par.*30:73-4). Dante compares his thirst to that of a newborn who cannot wait to enjoy his mother's milk: "un fante che bagni ancor la lingua a la mammella" (*Par.* 33.107-8). Commentaries on these two scenes in Dante's work often suggest they demonstrate his cognitive progress after drinking. However, it is important to consider the close connection between taste

⁷⁰ R. James Goldstein, "'Dolcezza': Dante and the Cultural Phenomenology of Sweetness," *Dante Studies* 132 (2014): 123.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 116, 123.

and juice in classical nature philosophy, which is first proposed by Aristotle: “what is tasteable is liquid” (*De anima*, 422a34).⁷²

He argues that Nature’s heat helps dissolve dry material into a liquid state, which is how different tastes are generated. Sweetness, considered lighter than bitterness and saline, can be elevated by the heat and accumulates gradually in fruits (*De sensu et sensibilius*, 4,441b). Medieval medicine incorporates the Aristotelian theory of gustatory perception due to its immense influence. For example, Galen suggests that the gustatory experience is generated by a combination of food’s liquid and bodily humors. Dante’s experience of “drinking” is in line with this theory, as God’s mysterious divinity becomes tangible and comprehensible to the pilgrim by transforming into the liquid of the river. His taste improves his eyesight.

The taste of sweetness serves more than a rhetorical metaphor for the *felicità* of the unity between man and God. It is an embodied religious experience leading to the highest level of cognition. In the evil orchard, Fra’ Alberigo proves to be the opposite of St. Bernard. He specifically uses fruit symbolism when introducing himself: “i’ son quel da le *frutta* del mal orto, che qui riprendo *dattero per figo*” (vv. 118-20, italics mine). Nearly all commentators gloss the image of fruit as a metaphor for treachery in reference to Alberigo’s signal for the assassination of his kin. The phrase “riprendo *dattero per figo*” suggests that Alberigo receives a harsher punishment for his crime since dates were more expensive than figs during Dante’s time. But commentators appear to overlook the fact that both figs and dates are extremely sweet fruits.⁷³ As early as classical times, people preserved sweetness by storing dried figs or dates. Figs, dates, and honey are commonly mentioned together in many historical, biblical, and literary texts; for instance, they are listed among the seven things produced in the land of Canaan that are “wheat, barley, vines, fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey” (*Deut.* 8.8).⁷⁴ However, it is important to note that in this context, honey refers to the honey produced by date trees, not bees. David C. Sutton reminds us of a custom whereby people exchange figs and dates on New Year’s Eve to express a wish for future happiness

⁷² All works of Aristotle are cited from *The Complete of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, 2 vols (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984).

⁷³ The sweetness of figs has already been described in *Inf.* 15, 65-66: “ché tra li lazzi sorbi si disconvien fruttare al dolce fico.”

⁷⁴ Asaph Goor, “The History of the Date through the Ages in the Holy Land,” *Economic Botany* 21, no. 4 (1967): 320-40.

(sweetness).⁷⁵ In this way, Alberigo is portrayed as “saccharophilous,” a soul addicted to the immoral and sinful sweetness. His encounter with sweetness does not lead him to God but rather to murder. Consequently, his eyes are covered with ice, a status that prevents him from perceiving the true light.

On the other hand, the meatless Forese Donati of the *Purgatorio* is represented as an intermediary between St. Bernard and Fra Alberigo. Compared to St. Bernard, Donati is still on his way to the final acquisition of true sweetness. Using figs as the cross-textual image that connects Forese to Alberigo, Forese is pictured as a legitimate saccharophilous who desires nothing but the sweetness of the Eucharistic apple:

Piange la madre, c’ha più d’una doglia,
dicendo: «Lassa, che per *fichi secchi*
messa l’avre’ ‘n casa del conte Guido!»
(*Rime* LXXIII.12-14, italics mine)

Curiously enough, in this *tenzone* to Donati, Dante imagines Donati’s mother-in-law mourning her daughter’s marriage to the impotent Forese through the images of “dried figs,” indicating Forese’s neglect of his wife.⁷⁶ The sexual connotation of fig has already been signaled in *Inf.* 25, in which the sinful Vanni Fucci “alzò” his hands “con amendue *le fiche*” (v.2, italics mine). The theft’s blasphemous invocation may be an anticipation of Alberigo’s much graver crime in the *Inf.* 33. Curiously, Fucci’s talking has been suffocated by a snake that “avvolse allor il collo” (*Inf.* 25.5)—his *gola*. The mother’s lament ironically contradicts Donati’s portrayal as an affectionate spouse in *Purg.* 23. He is transformed from

⁷⁵ David C. Sutton, “The Festive Fruit: A History of Figs”, in *Celebration: Proceedings of the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery 2011*. Mark McWilliams ed. (London: Prospect Books, 2012), 339-41. This custom is recorded in Ovid’s *Fasti*, Book I: “I kept not silence long, but caught up his last words with my own: “What mean the gifts of dates and wrinkled figs?” I said, “and honey glistening in snow-white jar?” “It is for the sake of the omen,” said he, “that the event may answer to the flavor, and that the whole course of the years may be sweet, like its beginning” [(trans. by Frazer, James George, Loeb Classical Library, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1931)]. Also, according to Herzman, the fruit of this Canto implies the presence of Christ, see Herzman, “Cannibalism and Communion in *Inferno* XXXIII,” 73-4.

⁷⁶ According to Callegari, figs are used to refer to female sexual organs, “dried figs” means/refers to her sterile life with Forese, see Danielle Callegari “Grey Partridge and Middle-Aged Mutton: The Social Value of Food in the ‘Tenzzone’ with Forese Donati,” *Dante Studies* 133 (2015): 179-80.

a cold-hearted husband to an empathetic one. The contrast between the two Donatis has been made evident in most commentaries, but a logical explanation is still required. In Donati, the desire for Eucharistic sweetness mirrors the affection for his spouse. The justification of taste symbolizes a justification of love, both of which are indispensable for purifying the soul. Through the figure of Donati, Dante demonstrates how an abstract love of holiness can be visualized by affective piety through taste. Forese's obsession with meat sets him apart from Ugolino but also makes him similar to him. In the *Tenzone*, Forese is represented as a meat-lover who enjoys partridge and mutton (*boccone*):⁷⁷ his obsession with meat makes him similar to Ugolino. In *Purgatorio*, however, Forese is portrayed as lacking the "meat" he used to enjoy so much, in stark contrast to Ugolino's cannibalism. Thus, Forese eventually restores the familial love that has been shattered by Ugolino.⁷⁸

Bitterness, the opposite of sweetness, also constitutes Dante's cognitive experiences. One example is that Beatrice's rebuke tastes like an unripe fruit: "d'amaro sente il sapor de la pietade acerba" (*Purg.* 30.80–81). Brunetto Latini declares in *Inf.* 15 that Dante's "ben far" is as sweet as figs. His enemies' deeds taste like the unpleasant taste of sour crab apples (vv. 64–66), highlighting the contrast between their deeds and Dante's. "ho io appreso quel che, s'io ridico, a molti fia *sapor di forte agrume*" (*Par.* 17.116–17, italics mine), the pilgrim laments, referring to his heavenly experience. *Agrume* means "citrus fruits," and this family includes oranges, bloodied oranges, lemons, and limes. Unlike today, early modern oranges were mostly bitter. Their mingled sweetness and bitterness are used as a metaphor for lovesickness.⁷⁹ Thus, they are given the name *melangoli*, which means *melancholy*.

According to Christina Mazzoni, the only oranges cultivated in Italy in the time of Innocent III and Dante were bitter or sour oranges (*citrus aurantium*), which are inedible in their raw state

⁷⁷ Dante, *Rime* LXXV, "Dante to Forese": Ben ti faranno il noso Salamone, Bicci (Forese) novello, e petti de le starne, ma peggio fia la lonza del castrone ... e 'ntendi che 'l fuggire e; mal boccone"(1-3,7). Accessed Feb 3, 2023. <https://dante.princeton.edu/cgi-bin/dante/DispMinorWork.pl?TITLE=Rime&REF=LXXV%201-5>.

⁷⁸ For Forese's gluttony and his association with food and eating, see Callegari, "Grey Partridge and Middle-Aged Mutton," 177–90. In this article, Callegari has analyzed various connotations and meanings of food in Dante's poetry.

⁷⁹ Christina Mazzoni, *Golden Fruit, A Cultural History of Oranges in Italy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), 22.

unlike sweet oranges.⁸⁰ That is why Dante would employ the metaphor of *agrume* to describe his heavenly experience. But Cacciaguida consoles him that his experience is beneficially edible:

ché se la voce tua sarà molesta
 nel primo gusto, vital nodrimento
 lascerà poi, quando sarà digesta. (*Par.* 17.130-32)

During the time of Dante, oranges were highly esteemed for their medicinal properties. The renowned philosopher, Great Albertus, affirmed that both the peel and flesh of oranges were effective antidotes. Additionally, Neo-Platonist Marsilio Ficino (1433-89) believed that consuming orange juice was a powerful preventative measure against the plague.⁸¹ Given the medicinal benefits of oranges, it is understandable why Cacciaguida referred to Dante's experience as *vital nodrimento*.

Upon hearing this, Dante begins to ponder: "io gustava lo mio, temprando col dolce l'acerbo, *Par.* 18.1-2). Interestingly, this verse reflects how oranges were processed during the Middle Ages: "trattone quello che v'è dentro, e mettendola in mollo, l'acqua ne trae l'amaro; poi si riempie con cose confortative".⁸² Through extensive processing, these bitter oranges become delicious after being candied. St. Catherine explains that the soul must go through a similar harsh experience to obtain purification.⁸³ Just as oranges are put in fire and water to draw out bitterness, the soul must undergo a difficult experience to achieve purification. Forese's mouth also reveals a similar gustatory perception:

Ond' elli a me: "Si tosto m'ha condotto

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 32

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁸² Caterina da Siena, *Le lettere* 130-1, from *Le lettere di S. Caterina da Siena*, Piero Misciattelli ed. (Florence: Marzocco, 1939). Mazzoni also points out that Catherine's recipe is found later in a home-known cookbook, *The Good Wife's Guide*: "To make candied orange peel, cut the peel of one orange into five pieces and scrape off the pith with a knife. Then soak the peels in nice fresh water for nine days, changing the water every day. After that, bring them just to a boil in fresh water, then spread them on a cloth and let them dry very well. Put them in a pot, cover them with honey, boil over a low fire, and skim...Draw out the orange peels one at a time and layer them, sprinkling with ginger powder between each layer." See Mazzoni, *Golden Fruit, A Cultural History of Oranges in Italy*, 53.

⁸³ St. Catherine, *Le lettere* 131: "puossi dire [e così è la verità] che il fuoco e l'acqua ne tragga l'amaro, vuotatosi di quella che prima v'era, cioè dell'amore proprio di sé: poi l'ha riempito d'uno conforto di fortezza con vera perseveranzia, e con una pazienza intrisa con mele di profonda umiltà, serrate nel cognoscimento di sé; perché nel tempo dell'amaritudine l'anima meglio cognosce sé e la bontà del suo Creatore."

a her *lo dolce assenzo* d'i martiri
la Nella mia con suo pianger diretto. (*Purg.* 23.85–7)

To reach heaven, one must undergo difficult tasks including labor, sweat, and confession, much like the process of peeling, soaking, and boiling oranges. The bitter taste of wormwood (*assenzo*) helps Forese understand the ultimate joy of knowing God.: “io dico pena, e dovria dir sollazzo” (*Purg.* 23.72).

Dante virtually learns about his future exile from Cacciaguida’s description of the taste of bread as salty: “Tu proverai sì come sa di sale lo pane altrui” (*Par.* 17.58–9). Discussions of the substantive “sale” center on whether the term should be taken literally.⁸⁴ Due to its preservative property, salt symbolizes a corrosive (perhaps military) power.⁸⁵ “Salty” thus denotes a devastating force imposed upon Dante by his exile. It is probably no accident that Shakespeare also employs bread as a metaphor for the laborious life:

Not all these, laid in bed majestic,
Can sleep so soundly as the wretched slave,
Who, with a body filled, and vacant mind,
Gets him to rest, crammed with *distressful bread*;
Never sees horrid night, the child of hell;
(Shakespeare 1997, 4. 1. 259–63, quoted from Purkiss’ article, italics mine)

Diane Purkiss suggests that bread here signifies both the lower classes’ struggle to put bread on the table and the sweat beaked into it.⁸⁶ In this light, salty evokes the taste of sweat. But I also believe that Dante is playing an etymological game between salt and exile. Isidore says in the *Etymologies* that the name *sal* stems from the Latin verb *exsilire* (spring out) because it jumps out when cast into the fire.⁸⁷ Evidently, *exsilium* (exile) and *exsilire* share the same linguistic root. According to the *Etymologies*, salt’s flight from fire is

⁸⁴ Rosa Elisa Giangoia stresses that Tuscan bread is made saltless, whereas salty bread suggests a foreign food consumed during the exile, in Rosa Elisa Giangoia, *A Convito con Dante, La cucina della Divina Commedia* (Turin: Il leone verde Edizioni, 2006), 52. Most commentaries interpret “salty” as *amaro*, see <http://dantelab.dartmouth.edu/reader>, accessed Feb 3, 2023.

⁸⁵ Pina Palma, *Savoring Power, Consuming the Times. The Metaphors of Food in Medieval and Renaissance Italian Literature* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), 285.

⁸⁶ Diane Purkiss, “Crammed with Distressful Bread? Bakers and the Poor in Early Modern England,” in *Renaissance Food from Rabelais to Shakespeare. Culinary Readings and Culinary Histories*, John Fitzpatrick ed. (Burlington: Ashgate, 2010), 11–24.

⁸⁷ Isidore of Seville, *The Etymologies*, 318.

owed to its hygroscopic nature, and water and fire cannot coexist due to their opposite natures. The contradiction between Dante and his enemies, occasionally emphasized throughout the *Commedia* (for instance, the distinction between sweet fig and sour crab apples), is configured by the salt's quality of jumping when heated, based on its pseudo-etymological derivation from *exsilire*. Dante is cast out from the political fight between White Guelphs and Black Guelphs, much like salt that jumps out of the fire. Meanwhile, Isidore is one of the good souls mentioned in the *Paradiso* ("Vedi oltre fiammeggiae l'ardente spiro d'Isidoro," 10.130–31), indicating that Dante may have fair knowledge of his masterpiece.

Now readers of the *Commedia* can see the poet represents his knowledge not via philosophy or theology, but through everyday objects and the sense of taste. *Gustate et Videte* is present throughout Dante's conversation with Cacciaguida, and the bread's rhetorical power and cultural connotation culminate in Cacciaguida's words. Dante believes that the cognitive functions of sight and taste are not influenced by their relationship with the body, which aligns him more with St. Bernard than St. Augustine. Affective piety, highlighted by the figure of St. Bernard in the *Commedia*, enriches and complements Augustine's theology of Love, and expands his theory of will beyond the strict division between will and intellect.⁸⁸ This highlights the significance of emotions and physical sensations in religious practice, potentially indicating a rise in personal devotion in the future.

It is reasonable to assert that, for Dante, the process of knowing and cognition is equivalent to that of tasting. It is not necessary to rely solely on intellectual meditation to achieve higher perception. In fact, the Dantean egalitarian philosophy, influenced by the teaching of St. Francis, emphasizes the importance of valuing all things equally, as noted by Giuseppe Mazzotta: "in a ladder the lowest rung is just as important, if not more important than the higher one."⁸⁹ St. Francis' *Sermon to Birds* and *Canticle of Brother Sun* display his equal affection for all things created. Everything, from the sun to the earthworm, ought to be loved and cared for:

Praised be my Lord God with all Your creatures,

⁸⁸ Dante's emphasis on will (heart) over intellect is seen in the *Canto 1* of *Inferno*, where Dante stresses *paura nel lago del cor* (*Inf.* 1:20), see Trione, "Paura del senso e timore di Dio," 188; Stabile, "Sapor-Sapientia," 294. On Augustine's influence on St. Bernard, see Etienne Gilson, *The Mystical Theology of St. Bernard* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1990).

⁸⁹ Mazzotta, "Dante's Franciscanism," 197.

And especially our Brother Sun,
Who brings us the day and who brings us the light.

...

Praised by my Lord for our Brother Wind,
And for air and cloud, calms and all weather

...

Praised be my Lord for our Mother Earth,
Who does sustain us and keep us,
and brings forth many fruits and flowers of many colors, and grass.⁹⁰

The Franciscan egalitarian extends to Bonaventure, who, in his *De reductione atrium ad theologiam*, claims that even mechanical arts such as weaving, hunting, sailing, can be equal to theology.⁹¹ In this sense, bodily sensations are as crucial as spiritual meditation or intellect. It is difficult to comprehend Dante's inquiry in the *Commedia* regarding why Christ's Incarnation is the sole remedy for humanity's redemption, if we only consider spiritual, logical, and philosophical knowledge.

To conclude, Dante uses the imagery of bread to build his emotional and cognitive system. This clarifies his mixed feelings about the Franciscans and Mystics. Rather than approaching the *Commedia* from a strictly Thomistic or Augustinian perspective, Dante's use of bread imagery exposes a complex series of intellectual influences, including a strong influence from Franciscan emotional thought throughout the *Commedia*.

⁹⁰ St. Francis, "The Canticle of the Sun", in *The Complete Francis of Assisi*, 174–5.

⁹¹ St. Augustine's view, especially his distinguishing from use to enjoy, apparently contrasts with Bonaventure's. In *Confessions* X. 34, he even condemned that people put much effect into making artifact: "sed *pulchritudinum exteriorum operatores et sectatores* inde trahunt approbandi modum, non autem inde trahunt utendi modum." (italics mine)