The Mystical Dimension of Michelangelo’s Writings

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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University of Toronto

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2011

Abstract

This dissertation examines the spiritual poetry of Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564) in light of three distinct but related contexts: Italian Evangelism of the Catholic Reformation, the Italian lauda tradition, and Renaissance Augustinianism. After reviewing the reception and critical history of Michelangelo’s poetry, chapter one presents the anthropological approach of the present study as an effective means of illuminating the poet’s spiritual verses by considering what they may have meant – collectively and individually – to the poet himself.

Chapter two analyzes Michelangelo’s lyrics inspired by Vittoria Colonna with respect to the Spirituali of the Ecclesia viterbiensis in general and to the Beneficio di Cristo and personal letters of Vittoria Colonna in particular. It shows that the portrayal of Vittoria Colonna in this poetry as an instrument of grace effecting Michelangelo’s spiritual refashioning, rebirth, and renewal reflects a theology of the Holy Spirit that was dear to the Italian Evangelical community and central to their self-perception.

The third chapter presents the Italian lauda tradition and its mystical verses addressing Christ and the Holy Spirit as an inspiration for Michelangelo who, in a later spiritual sonnet, borrowed directly from one of Lorenzo de’ Medici’s laude. This chapter shows how Michelangelo’s verse is informed by a long, popular Christian tradition in the vernacular.
The discussion in chapter four centres on Dante’s *Commedia* and on the Augustinian *allegoreses* that permeate Landino’s *Comento* to the grand epic. These two works, it is argued, constitute sources as important as Petrarch’s *Canzoniere* for Michelangelo’s Augustinian vision of a mystico-moral ascent through conversion.

This dissertation concludes that for Michelangelo poetry became an instrument of spiritual devotion. His mystical verses reveal a Catholic intellectual versant in Italian rhetoric of the Catholic Reformation and a poet inspired by Paul, Augustine, and the Italian *lauda* tradition.
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Introduction

Over the course of its critical history, Michelangelo’s lyrical production has undergone a variety of diverse critical readings. Approaches have ranged from biographical and historical, through formalist and aesthetic, to gendered and psychoanalytic readings all with varying results and degrees of success. Despite the rich contributions made by these diverse critical methodologies, Michelangelo’s poetry remains mysterious and resistant to totalizing qualifiers. This is especially true of his “spiritual” or “religious” verses.

On the one hand, Michelangelo’s verses are so personally expressive and apparently genuine that an autobiographical approach seems most appropriate. Yet, on the other hand, Michelangelo clearly engaged in poetic composition as an intellectual exercise as well as a medium of personal reflection. He elaborated “concepts.” These constitute a primary characteristic of his verse, including some of his spiritual poetry. The intellectual depth of Michelangelo’s lyric production has inspired many attempts to identify the currents of thought that inform them, but because the philosophical and theological elements of his lyrical corpus are so ambiguous, the compositions themselves promise failure to anyone intent on categorizing them as an instance or expression of a given ideology.

The fact that we do not know Michelangelo’s intentions when, in 1542-46, he set about revising a selection of his lyrics only complicates matters further. Formalist analyses have furnished insight into the mechanics of Michelangelo’s poetry. Yet, given the intimate tone and personal expressiveness of the verses, analyses that focus exclusively on their formal features emerge somehow incomplete. In short, a new approach is required: one that can accommodate the biographical, philosophical and formal aspects of Michelangelo’s spiritual verse, while, at the same time, illuminating at least some of the mystery surrounding the dynamics of his more mystical verse.

The present dissertation uses a cultural approach with an anthropological focus. As such, it constitutes a new way of examining Michelangelo’s lyrics. From a theoretical perspective, this study considers the literary text as an historical artefact possessing a distinct social and cultural function that must be considered in order to reach a proper evaluation of the text itself. The foundational presupposition of the present dissertation, and thus its organizing principle, is that a historicized reading of Michelangelo’s verse must relate the lyric compositions to the epistemes of both the Renaissance and the Reformation. Michelangelo’s verse documents the evolution of the metaphysics and ideological constructs of these two historiographical
categories, specifically the ones concerning the nature of reality, man’s place and purpose in the world, and the ultimate goal of man and his vocation – subjects at the very heart of Michelangelo’s poetic production.

As a cultural study with an anthropological focus, the present dissertation aims to analyze Michelangelo’s poetry in light of the meaning it held and the function it fulfilled for its author. In this sense, the approach to Michelangelo’s verse adopted here is biographical. The privileged method of analysis, however, is intertextuality. This dissertation thus examines the dialogue between Michelangelo’s spiritual verses and other socially and culturally relevant historical documents. Because of this, Michelangelo’s poetry is read against three primary texts, and each chapter is dedicated to an intertextual reading.

Chapter two considers Michelangelo’s later spiritual poetry in light of an Evangelical treatise, the Beneficio di Cristo. Chapter three considers these same verses in the context of Michelangelo’s later religious poetry and the tradition of spiritual/religious lauds by Italian mystics and/or mystical writers from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century, including major writers, such as Lorenzo de’ Medici, and minor writers, such as Bianco da Siena. Chapter four reads Michelangelo’s verse from the perspective of Cristoforo Landino’s Augustinian and Platonizing commentary on Dante’s Commedia, to which Michelangelo’s spiritual verses frequently allude.

One of the reasons for reading Michelangelo’s poetry in light of the texts with which it dialogues is to illuminate the function of his verses in the social and cultural contexts from which they originate. Understanding the social function of these texts clarifies the function of Michelangelo’s own poetry. Without this understanding, it is impossible to discern the personal function poetry writing fulfilled for the poet and to resolve, or even to make sense of, the conundrums that have plagued attempts to interpret his Rime. An understanding of the cultural and social climate and contracts that informed Michelangelo’s spiritual poetry enables one to comprehend not only his later spiritual verse, but also the evolution of his poetry and poetics from the beginning to the period of maturity and beyond.

In the context of the Italian reform movement, Michelangelo’s poetry served as a locus for meditation and oration, two spiritual disciplines aimed at mystical communion with the divine, through union with and/or the experience of divine presence in forms as wide-ranging as comfort, on the one hand, to complete metaphysical refashioning of the self from without, on the other. The lauda tradition served as a model of meditation, oration and adoration that informed
Italian Evangelism in general, and Michelangelo’s mystical poetry in particular. In late Quattrocento Florence, lauds possessed a specific function as a paraliturgical text employed for devotional purposes in lay religious contexts. Research in the field of sixteenth-century Italian religious history persuasively suggests that spiritual poetry fulfilled a comparable function for the Evangelical circles that Michelangelo frequented during the middle to late, and most prolific, stage of his production of lyrical verse. This new understanding of the function of poetry within the community of Reform-minded intellectuals in Italy of the 1530s and 1540s points to the Italian lauda tradition as an earlier and inspiring model. Michelangelo’s mystical poetry can be more fully understood only when considered as an artefact of Italian Reform devotion.

Mystical constructs and conceits abound in Michelangelo’s spiritual poetry. They are of two general varieties, each of which corresponds to a paradigm of human salvation and of the means of achieving it. The first consists of a progressive ascension through purgation and contemplation. It envisages a moral trajectory punctuated by a moment or act of conversion. The second views redemption as the consequence of an instantaneous and metaphysical transformation. Historically, Italian mysticism encompasses both.

These contrasting paradigms are at the heart of Pauline and Augustinian theology, respectively. Italian Evangelism was essentially Pauline and Augustinian, but it was also Platonic. So too is Michelangelo’s religious poetry. This thesis argues that Michelangelo absorbed Pauline elements not just from reading the Gospels, but also from the lauda tradition and its attendant practices. It also demonstrates that the Augustinian character of Michelangelo’s verse points to Dante of the Commedia and Dante of the Renaissance as its inspiration, both conceptual and linguistic. The Renaissance proclivity to Platonize resulted in both laude and the Commedia acquiring, by the end of the Quattrocento, language and topoi particular to Ficinian Neoplatonism. As a result, these Platonized varieties of Pauline and Augustinian theology formed the cultural and intellectual matrix in which Michelangelo developed as a man, an artist, and a Christian. This dissertation brings these insights to bear upon its interpretations of Michelangelo’s poetry.

The title of the thesis speaks to its goals. The adjective “mystical” is an apt descriptor for the salvific schemes Michelangelo’s poetry embodies. It also evokes the devotional function that Michelangelo’s poetry fulfilled in a way that the terms “spiritual” or “religious” do not. “Dimension” suggests the cultural space that his later and most mystical verses occupy as a
paraliturgical practice and accessory to grace. The choice of “writings” over “poetry” is intentional. “Writings” leaves room for the interpretation of Michelangelo’s poetic compositions and fragments as more than strictly literary text.

The anthropological approach adopted in the present dissertation fulfills the need for greater historicization. The view of poetry writing as a spiritual exercise, on the one hand, and as a locus of ideological and literary experimentation, on the other, honours Michelangelo’s efforts to give poetic form to his thoughts. Finally, the anthropological approach yields something entirely new: an understanding of the poet’s metaphysical questing and questioning in light of more general problems of his day in the matter of man and vocation, Christian and salvation. In his mystical poems, Michelangelo elaborated theological ideas related to devotional practices and paradigms at the heart of the Renaissance and the Reformation alike, while, at the same time, implementing them as a spiritual exercise. Understanding this “other” function of his poetry results in a more nuanced comprehension of Michelangelo and his quest for salvation.
Chapter 1
The Critical History of Michelangelo’s *Rime* and Spiritual Poetry

1.1 Michelangelo and Poetry

What did poetry mean to Michelangelo? Robert J. Clements asked this question in the introductory pages of his comprehensive study on Michelangelo’s poetry in 1965. This query and its position at the beginning of Clements’s study imply many things. Firstly, they presuppose that poetry held either an important or a singular role for the poet. Secondly, the phrasing of the query which Clements would spend some time exploring (as had many before him, be they seeking insight into Michelangelo’s character, his art or his life) is neither obviously nor necessarily a literary one: the issue of poetics finds no direct referent in the lexical items constituting the question. Rather it suggests that the interest of Michelangelo’s poetry might well lie in the meaning it held for its creator. Indeed, this perspective held great sway in the history of Michelangelo criticism since the dawn of the Romantic period of literary history in Italy. As a result of this, the question remains a central concern of scholars to this day, as the opening line of Christopher Ryan’s first chapter on Michelangelo’s poetry attests: “If the reception of Michelangelo’s poetic work over the centuries has proven problematic, the origins of the difficulty lie with the poet himself, for his attitude to his own poetry is not clear at first sight” (3).

Responding to his query about what poetry meant to Michelangelo, Clements noted that during the roughly fifty-year period extending from the poet’s (supposed) initial exposure to verse in Lorenzo the Magnificent’s humanist circle in Florence¹ to the death of Colonna, “Michelangelo insisted that his poems were of little value” (8);² “He expressed his scorn for them in a variety of ways,” writes Clements, “he laughed them off respectively as *zanbele*, *novelle* (novelties), *goffagini*, and *berlinghizzi* on four occasions” (9). This fact has been emphasized by many scholars. More recently, James Saslow (1991) affirmed that “Michelangelo himself never advanced great claims for his literary output and responded with touched gratitude to anyone who complimented it” (39).³ Yet Michelangelo’s dismissive

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¹ The question of this “initial exposure” will be addressed in a subsequent section.
² Support for this assertion is amply present in Michelangelo’s correspondence.
³ All references to Saslow in this dissertation pertain to his annotated translation of Michelangelo’s poetry: *Michelangelo Buonarroti: An Annotated Translation*, ed. and trans. James M. Saslow. References to this publication will appear as “Saslow” followed by a page number.
comments regarding his own poetry do not mean that poetic creativity fulfilled a solely personal function in his life, and his humility may well have been more rhetorical than real.

The question of whether or not the Florentine poet had literary ambitions is indeed among the most interesting topics in the history of Michelangelo (literary) criticism, for in the history of the poet’s production there is a strong exegetical tradition of equating his poetic fragments and compositions with a personal diary and of justifying this approach by recalling the “private nature” of his verses, which were not – it is assumed – initially written with a view to publication. And so the essential first question for anyone attempting to approach Michelangelo’s verse is the degree to which the poetic corpus is considered the intellectual and/or creative output of a writer (however amateur) versus the extent to which it is considered the personal and private confessions of a man.

The history of this “creation vs. confession” question in Michelangelo studies is of great importance to a dissertation that proposes to evaluate the mystical dimension of Michelangelo’s verse: the relative assessment of Michelangelo’s poetic production as more public than private, more literary than diaristic, or better yet, more intellectual than personally expressive, and/or vice versa, will directly inform the orientation and outcome of the study. First and foremost, the present study must be situated in the context of the “creation-confession” spectrum of approaches to the poet’s verse in critical history. Before turning to the reception and critical history of the Rime in general, and the spiritual poems in particular, then, their genesis must first be considered.

1.2 Poetic Activity

It is not known with certainty when Michelangelo first began writing poetry, and it is highly probable that many of his writings were lost or destroyed. These uncertainties notwithstanding, it is clear that Michelangelo’s poetic activity progressed through at least three distinct phases. It was mentioned above that according to Clements, a first “consequential exposure to poetry” occurred during the Florentine period of Michelangelo’s youth, when he lived for a while in the house of Lorenzo the Magnificent (1490-1492) and was introduced to such figures as Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Angelo Poliziano, and Marsilio Ficino, whose discussions

4 The question of Michelangelo’s literary aspirations will be addressed in greater detail in a subsequent section.
5 Saslow divides Michelangelo’s “poetic creativity” into three phases based on “the relative amount of work he produced and by shifts in theme and emphasis” (11). For a more detailed overview of these phases, see: Saslow, pp.11-22.
According to this same scholar, Michelangelo underwent a second formative experience at approximately twenty years of age, while staying in Bologna (1494-5) with Giovan Francesco Aldovrandi, who routinely called upon him to recite in his Florentine accent the fourteenth-century Tuscan greats Dante and Petrarch. Following this, Clements explains, between 1503 and 1506, following the battle of Cascina, Michelangelo began avidly reading vernacular poetry. Clements also supposed that Michelangelo might have read the erudite works of various orators, historians, philosophers, and theologians of ancient Greece and Rome because these documents were in the Medici possession, but this hypothesis is tenuous. In truth, the picture Clements draws requires amending on two counts: the assumption that Michelangelo’s experience in the Medici residence constituted an apprenticeship in Neoplatonic thought; and, the assessment that Michelangelo might have read the Roman and Greek classics.

While it is likely that Michelangelo’s poetic interests originated in the early Florentine period during which he lived with the Medici (1490-1492), it is important not to assume that he actively or regularly participated in the erudite gatherings and discussions hosted by Lorenzo de’ Medici; as Rab Hatfield notes in the political, economic, and social profile of the artist he included in *The Wealth of Michelangelo* (2002), “one greatly doubts that the largely uneducated boy often conversed with the humanists or listened to their learned discussions, some of which were probably conducted in Latin” – a language that Michelangelo had never learned in depth, as he did complete the education reserved for young males issuing from patrician families (230).

In *Michelangelo: The Artist, the Man, and His Times* (2010), William Wallace affirms, as Clements did, that Michelangelo would have had direct access to numerous erudite works while living in the Medici house, but similarly to Hatfield, he questions whether the young artist “actually could read these precious volumes” (42). Wallace, unlike Hatfield, does support the idea that Michelangelo would have gained much knowledge of the books he could not read “from the bright minds and scintillating conversation of Lorenzo’s household” (42). He emphasizes the importance of “oral transmission” in Michelangelo’s time, ultimately concluding that “two years in the Medici household, guided in his studies by such humanists as Agnolo Poliziano, Marsilio Ficino, and Cristoforo Landino, was worth more than a college education” (42). Wallace also raises an important point overlooked in the considerations of Michelangelo’s erudition and literary inspiration, that it was the depth and not breadth of one’s reading that
mattered in the Renaissance and that “a few books committed to memory were more common than the swift, unsystematic, and comparatively superficial reading of modern times” (42). All three scholars attribute importance to Michelangelo’s intellectual development of the lofty cultural matrix in which he moved as a young man, however much he studied or sought to absorb it consciously.

Michelangelo’s poetry does reveal the influence of both Poliziano and Lorenzo de’ Medici, but as Eugenio Garin noted in his study on Michelangelo’s thought, in many cases it is incredibly difficult to pinpoint precise sources when it comes to the poet’s verses, specifically when it comes to his literary Neoplatonism (536). In this article, Garin strongly emphasizes the need for caution in naming specific influences on Michelangelo’s thought, much of which, in Garin’s estimation, results from a more diffuse intellectual assimilation from his cultural environment than from the study of particular philosophies or humanist texts (independently or through tutelage, it is to be presumed). Garin believes Landino’s commentary on the Commedia to be the most probable means by which Florentine Platonic culture (and so Neoplatonism) became known: “le pagine landiniane fossero, probabilmente, il veicolo più probabile per una larga diffusione della cultura platonizzante dei circoli fiorentini” (536). Furthermore, Michelangelo’s genius consistently resulted in the production of highly original expressions and re-workings of earlier traditions and topoi across the literary and plastic arts – he was no mere imitator, nor did he appropriate any literary or artistic current entirely or without modifications (at times, ironic). The only sources we know with certainty that Michelangelo studied in any great depth were the Bible, Dante, Petrarch and Savonarola.⁷ Thus while the seeds of literary interest may well have been planted during Michelangelo’s stay with Lorenzo de’ Medici, it is more plausible that the first phase of his poetic activity (that of his creativity proper) began in and around 1503. The phase may be considered to end in 1532.

Many of Michelangelo’s writings from this first period consist of brief scribbles on work sheets and the reverse of letters. It was a period of highly experimental, but relatively unprolific, literary creativity, with the quantity of poems totalling fifty-five (with a composition rate of a poem per year for the first twenty years). The poems range in content from commentary upon

⁷Garin names Clements directly in his discussion of texts that Michelangelo would not have read. He charges Clements with identifying sources (such as Plato and Plotinus) beyond the level at which the artist, lacking a humanist education, would have sought or possessed the competence to read (536).
contemporary events to seeming exercises in Petrarchan-style love poetry, with a personally characteristic emphasis upon the suffering of the lyrical “I,” and featuring equally characteristic meditations upon sin, death, fleeting time, enslavement by/to love, and divine beauty as a springboard to ascension.

In 1532, Michelangelo met Tommaso de’ Cavalieri, a young, handsome and graceful nobleman who inspired an impressive number of compositions. In either 1535 or 1536, he met Vittoria Colonna, his beloved soul-mate (of the mind), to whom he would dedicate or by whom he was inspired to write an equally abundant number of poems. During the fifteen-year period between his introduction to Cavalieri and the equally pivotal event of Colonna’s death in 1547, Michelangelo actively composed approximately 200 of the 302 extant poems and 41 poetic fragments. Many of these were love sonnets and madrigals dedicated to or inspired by Cavalieri or Colonna and possessing deeply (and increasingly) spiritual undertones surpassing by far those of his earliest verses in the Neoplatonic vein.

In 1542, Michelangelo began soliciting feedback, largely in the form of editing assistance from friends he had made following his definitive move to Rome as a fuoruscito in 1534, when he plausibly began frequenting literary circles in the city. Among his closest friends and literary acquaintances from this time, one counts, in addition to Vittoria Colonna, Francisco Hollanda, Benedetto Varchi, Donato Giannotti, and Luigi del Riccio. As of 1542, Donato Giannotti and Luigi del Riccio would routinely (but minimally) revise Michelangelo’s poetry with respect to word choices, syntax, and spelling, often rendering the latter more Latinate in graphic representation (ex. “gratia,” instead of “grazia”). This type of epistolary exchange would characterize the years 1542 to 1546, and most particularly, 1544 and 1545, when Michelangelo selected and revised 89 of his own poems in preparation for a collection, which Luigi del Riccio first convinced Michelangelo to consider publishing, then encouraged and assisted the poet in compiling. The compositions Michelangelo sent to del Riccio had

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8 As an example, Hallock provides a compelling demonstration of how autobiography was a legitimate element of Michelangelo’s poetry by revealing that with respect to his letter of April 17, 1523, “in whose margin he wrote two cryptic endecasyllables,” Michelangelo “capsulized the quintessence of this letter narrating the drama of both his duty-bound obligation to complete the tomb of Julius II and the possibility of being liberated from his promise by Cardinal de’ Medici in the poetic fragment he jotted down in the margin: “‘L’una di par sen va con la mia sorte/ L’altra mirando pur mi porgie aita’” (The Genesis 552).
9 Hatfield, p. 233: Michelangelo was “probably active in a number of literary circles in Rome.”
10 Clements comments that the “special spellings […] revealed the artist’s pretensions to learning and etymology.” (31).
often been written years prior, and had undergone many revisions by the author himself – an editing process that reveals much about Michelangelo’s approach to poetry, as well as his interest, or goals in composing it. It is only recently that studies of the variants of Michelangelo’s poetry with an eye to exploring the genesis of his lyrical compositions have begun to appear.

After Colonna’s death in 1547, Michelangelo’s literary production declined substantially owing largely to the physical suffering he experienced during what seems to have been a painfully protracted twilight portion of his life. The poems he composed during this time are his most spiritual and Christocentric. The nature of Michelangelo’s poetic production is not near as simple nor as easily characterizable as its portrayal in this brief section suggests. With respect to both style and content, and concerning his spiritual poetry in particular, Michelangelo’s verses have given rise to intriguing exegeses and evaluations. While his poems may be amenable to various forms of typologizing, Michelangelo as a poet is a challenge to categorize.

1.3 The Poetic Corpus

Each period of Michelangelo’s poetic productivity is characterized by a different style and approach (or by a multiplicity of them), such that Michelangelo, as a poet, quite legitimately defies categorization. In the words of Charles Adelin Fiorato, editor and translator of a noteworthy 2004 bilingual Italian/French critical edition of the *Rime* modeled after Enzo Noè Girardi’s standard edition of 1960, Michelangelo is a “poète inclassable,” possessing “une production poétique inégale et hétérogène” (xvi). A cursory glimpse at the fortune of Frey was the first to suggest that Michelangelo had intended to publish his poetry in 1546 (the same year that Donato Giannotti published his *Dialogi*), explaining that he discontinued preparations when his friend Luigi del Riccio died. This interpretation of Michelangelo’s poetic activities between 1542 and 1546 is widely shared by scholars, including Girardi. In her book *Costanza ed evoluzione nella scrittura di Michelangelo*, Lucilla Bardeschi Ciulich refutes this idea, however, stating that there are neither documents nor sound reasons to believe that Michelangelo intended to publish his poetry (p.64). In Bardeschi Ciulich’s estimation, Michelangelo was likely preparing a private poetry collection to give as a gift (p.64). More recently, Antonio Corsaro has echoed Bardeschi Ciulich’s assessment (“Manuscript Collections of Spiritual Poetry in Sixteenth-Century Italy,” 2009, pp. 55-56).

Claudio Scarpati has argued the Michelangelo was likely preparing a gift-manuscript for Colonna (“Michelangelo poeta: dal Canzoniere alle rime spirituali,” 2003, p.605). Fedi’s analysis of the collection in “L’immagine vera” (1992) does not preclude such an interpretation. The present study supports the view that Michelangelo’s collection was more likely intended as a private manuscript for friends rather than a print edition destined for wide circulation. In the absence of concrete documentation, both positions are speculative, but the latter seems most plausible in light of recent studies, which are more fully addressed in chapter two of the present dissertation. Charles de Tolnay argued similarly about Michelangelo as an artist: “Mentre le più diverse correnti stilistiche, dal Rinascimento classico al Manierismo, al Barocco, al Romanticismo, possono essere viste in rapporto a Michelangelo, l’arte stessa del maestro oltrepassa ogni tentativo di classifica” (*Personalità*, p. 68). Cf. Jean-Pierre Barricelli: “Michelangelo, whose life and manner of thought stemmed from a worldview as personal and intense as it was anguished, defies classification” (“Michelangelo’s Finito,” 597).
Michelangelo’s poetry in critical history suffices to support this opinion, for the assertion that it is impossible to label Michelangelo as a poet draws its validity (and vitality) from the multitude of ways in which he has been appropriated by and/or assigned to different schools and traditions over the years. Consider, by way of illustration, the question of Michelangelo’s style and in what capacity he may or may not be considered a Petrarchist.

1.3.1 Michelangelo and Petrarchism

Adherence to the Petrarchan model was of central concern to sixteenth-century Italian literati. As Migliorini notes in his *Storia della lingua italiana*, many of the literary polemics of the sixteenth century were in essence linguistic ones. During the sixteenth century, a linguistic canon of sorts was consolidated. This was accomplished by the efforts of writers to achieve superlative beauty and proportion in their verse, as the Bemban Petrarchists did. Alongside the Petrarchist tradition, and as a reaction to it, there existed a growing anti-Petrarchist trend that is exemplified in the verses of Francesco Berni (1547-1536), from whom Bernesque poetry draws its name. Berni praised Michelangelo for the intellectual depth of his poetry in a now famous capitolo in which he asserts that Michelangelo wrote things while Petrarchists voiced merely words: “[…] egli è nuovo Apollo e nuovo Apelle: tacete unquanco, pallide viole, e liquidi cristalli e fere snelle; e ’dice cose e voi dite parole” [emphasis mine]. In addition to informing the opinions of future Michelangelo critics, Berni paved the way for (erringly) classifying Michelangelo as an anti-Petrarchan poet (Berni appropriated Michelangelo’s poetry, using it to his own ends in criticising those poets of his day that he considered Petrarchist versifiers).

Luigi Baldacci, asserting that Michelangelo shared with Berni “una poetica antimitativa, anticiceroniana e antipetrarchesca” (253), was one of the very few Michelangelo scholars to go

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13 “Tutto il Cinquecento è pieno di polemiche letterarie, e a guardar bene si potrebbe cavare qualche frutto linguistico da ciascuna di esse: le dispute su Petrarca e il petrarchismo, sul Boccaccio, su Dante; la diatribe fra il Caro e il Castelveltrio; le discussioni suscite dal Tasso” (339)

14 “Se leggiamo una pagina di prosa, anche d’arte, degli ultimi anni del Quattrocento o dei primi del Cinquecento, ci è di solito abbastanza facile dire da quale regione proviene, mentre per un testo della fine del Cinquecento la cosa è assai maleagevole. Quella che nei secoli precedenti era un’attività individualmente sviluppata dai singoli su sostrati regionali diversi, diventa nel Cinquecento un’attività dominata da correnti di gusto collettivo, in parte comuni in parte contrastanti, e da norme grammaticali che ottengono larghi consensi” (Migliorini, 332).

15 “Gli scritti più spiccatamente letterari mirano a un linguaggio colto, illustre: gli autori non s’accontentano di scrivere per diletto proprio ed altrui, ma vogliono costruire qualche cosa di durevole, di ‘monumentale’. Il culto del ‘bello stile’, la ricerca dell’eleganza, che sono tratti perenni della lingua e della letteratura italiana, ora predominano talmente da diventare una ‘maniera’: per questo periodo possiamo parlare anche noi, come gli storici dell’arte, di ‘manierismo’” (Migliorini, 332-3).

so far as to accuse Michelangelo of consciously pitting himself against the Petrarchists with his verses; for Baldacci, Michelangelo’s poetry was implicitly polemical: “una loro funzione implicitamente polemica contro quella tradizione che si riconnetteva, attraverso una linea precisa di sviluppo linguistico e storico, all’esempio del Trecento illustre” (252).

The dominant scholarly view, espoused by both Pier Luigi DeVecchi and Enzo Noè Girardi in the 1960s, is that Michelangelo was simply not a Petrarchist proper, that is, his Petrarchism was not that of the Bembists. 17 According to Umberto Bosco, Michelangelo could not possibly be considered a Renaissance poet given his rejection of (or disregard for) the model/canon/“rule” (74). Both Walter Binni and Umberto Bosco shared this view. Bosco drew attention to the fact that Michelangelo’s poetry contains almost no traces of the idyllic, concluding that he was dramatic in an undramatic literary context. 18 Binni suggested that Michelangelo’s poetry anticipated features of the Mannerist and pre-Baroque period, but that his poetry, distant from other Renaissance currents, is isolated and unique. 19 Bosco criticized the comparison of Michelangelo with the Mannerists, claiming that the poet was no closer to the Mannerists of his ambito culturale than to the Bembists. 20

Michelangelo’s commitment to essentiality – and perhaps also to innovation – yielded a distinctive style and voice that echoes, but distinguishes itself clearly from, earlier and

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17 “Dal petrarchismo bembiano Michelangelo è invece molto distante” (44); “è evidente che si tratta di un petrarchismo assolutamente diverso da quello più noto e fortunato e, direi quasi, ufficiale, di linea bembesca e dellacasiana” (Girardi Saggi 120). Girardi ventured a plausible explanation when he recalled Michelangelo’s unconventional nature: “Michelangiolo, non che non aver seguito il normale curriculo degli studiumanistici, è troppo ricco di vita interiore, troppo dotato di personalità e troppo poco condizionato dagli obblighi della convivenza per farsi rappresentare da quella ‘persona’, cioè da quella maschera piuttosto rigida e uniforme e convenzionale, ancorché dignitosa e soprattutto utile che è costituita appunto dallo stile ‘corretto,’ dalla mediocritas bembesca, dalle mezze verità di che è fatta la cultura ufficiale” (Saggi 107). Umberto Bosco, who has provided perhaps the most comprehensive and astute assessment of the classification of Michelangelo’s poetry, suggested that one need only compare Michelangelo’s poetry to that of Bemban Petrachists to see that Michelangelo was not one of them: “basta paragonare un sonetto di lui a quelli d’un Bembo, della stessa Vittoria Colonna, o ad un pezzo qualsiasi dei petrarchisti quattrocenteschi, pur così concettosi e perciò certo i più vicini a lui, o anche ad un sonetto del medesimo Petrarca, per accorgerci che il nostro poeta è agli antipodi da costoro” (73).

18 “Michelangelo è dramma, in una stagione che non giunge mai al dramma, che pure più e più volte aggredisce per imperativi retorici perentori” (74).

19 “può isolarsi letterariamente, in una via più sua, dalle linee rinascimentali […] toccando anticipi e aperture di manierismo e di prebarocco, ma richiamando, al centro, a una posizione profondamente storica e svolgendosi in una propria storia densa e complessa” (7).

20 “Da un pezzo gli storici dell’arte studiano Michelangelo alla luce anche del manierismo e del barocco. Lo stesso non è stato fatto e non è possibile fare nel campo letterario, perché egli non è più vicino ai letteratissimi del secondo Cinquecento italiano e anche ai marinisti di quel che non sia agli scrittori quattro-cinquecenteschi suoi contemporanei. Ma il fatto è che bisogna guardare a uomini di ben diversa tempra poetica e morale, in Italia e in tutta l’Europa” (75). Alma Altizer (1973) might well have had Bosco in mind when she labeled the Michelangelo’s verse “formal or rhetorical Mannerism” (viii).
contemporary literary movements and trends. The only indisputable epithets qualifying Michelangelo as a poet over the years are those based on the content of his poetry and related to his classification as a religious writer. Baldacci’s claim that Michelangelo was an anti-Petrarchist finds little support in Michelangelo’s literary activities between 1542 and 1546, when the poet was preparing a collection of his poetry. Given that Michelangelo was neither a professional nor a formally trained poet, it is implausible that he engaged deeply in the linguistic debates of his time, even if he were familiar with them. It is nevertheless conceivable that Michelangelo might have disagreed with Bembo’s theory, favouring instead, as Lorenzo de’ Medici had, the use of contemporary Tuscan.

1.3.2 Michelangelo as a Religious Writer

In an effort to explain why religious matters are not treated in a recent publication on Michelangelo’s poetry, Girardi clarified that Michelangelo’s religiosity need not be explicitly addressed as it is the very context of the Rime. Michelangelo has been long and consistently viewed as a religious poet. A prototypic Romantic sanctifier of Michelangelo, Ugo Foscolo described the artist as one “by whom sacred poesy [...] was brought among us; by whom piety [...] was kindled in our breasts” (Foscolo Ret 252). Giovanni Papini (1928) expressed that Michelangelo’s later poetry was among the most beautiful in Italian religious literature. Ausonio Dobelli (1933) noted the “biblical style” of Michelangelo’s poetry that connects him to other religious authors (though not Italian ones exclusively): “eccogli sul labbro spontaneamente quello stile biblico, fervido e austero, che passò dai Piagnoni fiorentini ai Puritani di Cromwell, e che scintilla nei versi del Milton” (9-10). Chandler Beall (1961) called Michelangelo “one of the very few religious poets of the Renaissance” (239). Alberto Chiari (1981) considers Michelangelo as belonging to the tradition of Italian religious writers that begins with St. 

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21 The topic of Michelangelo’s “essentiality” and experimentation will be addressed in section 1.7 of this chapter.
22 Rab Hatfield claims that Michelangelo’s “lack of formal education” was a “source of shame” for the poet (230).
23 Grazia Dolores Folliero-Metz, Le ‘Rime’ di Michelangelo Buonarroti nel loro contesto, 2004. In his preface to the publication, Girardi explains: “nelle Rime tutto è problematico, paradossale, discutibile; tutto, ma non la fede di chi le ha scritte in Dio e in Cristo Salvatore [...] e Michelangelo la manifesta anche nelle prime poesie – non è però interna alle loro opere come fattore costitutivo della loro struttura. Al contrario: sono le opere, sono le Rime buonarrotiane interne alla fede del loro autore, interne ad una visione del mondo e a una cultura generale pur sempre fondate su fede, speranza e carità” (18).
24 “Tutte le poesie di penitenza e di adorazione di Michelangiolo vecchio son belle e tra le più belle che abbia la nostra letteratura religiosa: tra il Petrarca e il Manzoni, in quattro secoli pieni, non c’è che lui [...] quella speranza d’eternità e di beatitudine che appena era addombrata nei volti degli Annunziatori, trovano voci scolpite e immagini d’umiltà soffrative nelle rime mistiche della vecchiezza” (XV).
25 In the introduction to his 1933 edition of Michelangelo’s Rime.
Francis of Assisi. His “Michelangelo, scrittore religioso” opens with a powerful, direct assertion that has gone unchallenged: “Il titolo di questa conversazione parla chiaro. Ed è, prima di tutto, una responsabile affermazione: Michelangelo è uno scrittore religioso” (158)

One of the most interesting comments in the matter of Michelangelo as a religious writer was Bosco’s observation that Michelangelo should be counted among seventeenth-century mystics. Chiari characterizes Michelangelo as a “Poeta di Dio” because of what he identifies as the poet’s intense desire for God (165). Bosco’s suggestion of an essential identity between the poetry of Michelangelo and the verses of mystics and other spiritual poets and Chiari’s identification of God as the poet’s supreme desire raise two points that have been the focus of studies on Michelangelo not just as a poet of religious or spiritual compositions, but of “mystical” verse. The penultimate section of this chapter will address these studies and the question of Michelangelo’s mystical poetry. In section 1.8, mysticism, together with the parameters of the present dissertation, will be defined.

1.4 Critical History

Criticism by Michelangelo’s contemporaries Benedetto Varchi (1503-1565) and Francesco Berni (1497/8-1535) aside, for two and a half centuries after Michelangelo’s death, all that was uttered with respect to his poetry were a few sweeping and uncritical statements about his verse. These were made by individuals who had plausibly not read many of his lyrical compositions and who considered his poetizing to be secondary to his other artistic endeavours and therefore inferior to them; alternately, they were glorified as divine owing to Michelangelo’s status as a titanic figure and an artistic genius. As an example of both these approaches (the comparative and the hagiographic variety of critical appraisal), Ugo Foscolo’s second English-language article on Michelangelo comes to mind (1826):

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26 “risalendo anche soltanto da un San Francesco in poi, Michelangiolo si inserisce di pieno diritto tra gli scrittori religiosi della nostra storia letteraria” (166).

27 “Se, come si deve, si prescinde dalle rese strettamente letterarie, e si pensa invece agli atteggiamenti di fronte alla vita, i vicini di Michelangelo si chiamano Campanella, Shakespeare, Corneille, John Donne, i mistici del Seicento, magari Pascal […] qui non si parla di precisi rapporti letterari, nella massima parte dei casi impossibili, sempre improbabili; ma di precorrimenti spirituali michelangioleschi” (75).

28 “Perché è Dio, s’è detto, il supremo suo desiderio; Dio che offre agli spiriti eletti l’ineffabile gudio della Sua eterna contemplazione; Dio, che nella Sua giustizia può soffrire che l’uomo sconti le colpe volontariamente commesse, ma che col Suo sangue, con la Sua Passione, offre la possibilità della Redenzione; Dio, che e veste e spoglia e purga e guarisce e attira a Sè; Dio, Che è la prima speranza, suggellata da una infallibile promessa fatta su la Croce, e per merito della Croce” (165).
Never, perhaps, did a ray of the divine nature so visibly break through its mortal covering as in the instance of Michel Angelo Buonarroti. Not content with being sublime in painting and in sculpture, and matchless in architecture, his mighty genius grasped at and won the poetic wreath; and although he did not attain to the same lofty pre-eminence in poetry as in the sister arts of imitation, yet was he such a poet as to gain the applaudses of an age, in which it appeared that the Muses had quitted their immortal seats and descended to bless and to irradiate Italy. (248)

Stock assessments modeled after Foscolo’s were almost blindly recycled, as though no one had anything new to say nor dared to say it if they did. The most basic explanation of this is twofold.

First, the unique philological history of the work is such that Michelangelo’s poems were neither well nor accurately known until the end of the nineteenth century. Second, the challenge of critically commenting upon the ancillary literary activities of a renowned artist and cultural icon was plausibly threatening enough to discourage thorough exegetical investigations or analyses of his work. One thinks of Giovanni Papini’s self-questioning in the introduction to his 1928 edition of Michelangelo’s Rime: “– E chi sei tu, omiciatto inchiostro, che pretendi illuminare il sole del genio col tuo lanternino?” (i). Then there was the idiosyncratic and untraditional nature of the poetry itself. On the one hand, it was difficult to understand and so Michelangelo’s verse was not widely read; as Rizzi so eloquently expressed in 1924, “non le ha lette, a mio vedere, perchè le rime di Michelangelo sono oscure e difficili, e la bellezza del suo canzoniere non è affatto appariscente, ma anzi celata e riposta come noce nel mallo. E il mallo è aspro e allega i denti” (xiii). On the other hand, they were composed in a seemingly piecemeal fashion by a writer lacking the formal training reserved for career literati and who, it is so often recalled, did not intend to publish his poetry.

Truly critical appraisals of Michelangelo’s work were thus rare – even well into the twentieth century, with nineteenth-century criticism expressing only two real opinions of his verse: one positive, regarding its content which was deemed, as it had been by Berni during Michelangelo’s life, rich in philosophical depth; and the other negative, with respect to form and style, which were considered by many to be unrefined, unconventional and uncanonical – in short, Michelangelo was a genius, but also a mere versifier.²⁹

²⁹ Christopher Ryan summarizes: “Michelangelo’s poetry has not lacked its champions down the years […] praise has come from a variety or sources in a number of ways: in the nuanced evaluations of major literary critics such as, in recent years, Umberto Bosco, Hugo Friedrich, Natalino Sapegno, Walter Binni, W. Th. Elwert, J. H. Whitfield, Salvatore Battaglia and A.J. Smith, not to mention two Nobel laureates Thomas Mann and Eugenio Montale, and of course, the indefatiguable Girardi […] The Italian tradition has not, however, been by any means unanimous in regarding Michelangelo as a poet of high quality. In the present century critics of the stature of
Given the connection between the unique philological history of Michelangelo’s poetry and its unusual fortune in literary criticism, and in light of the focused nature of the present dissertation, which centres upon the mystical dimension of Michelangelo’s verse, the critical reception of Michelangelo’s lyrical compositions will be treated in a somewhat unconventional manner. The remainder of the present chapter is divided into four main parts. Section 1.5 consists of a review of the philological and early critical history of the *Rime*. It covers the time period extending from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century. The second section (1.6) addresses the critical history of Michelangelo’s poetry in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. This section progresses thematically, rather than chronologically: it elaborates upon those features of the *Rime*’s critical history that present concerns and questions to modern scholars of Michelangelo’s poetry. The third section (1.7) discusses the implications of Michelangelo’s approach to poetry for the present study. The final section (1.8) presents a critical history of Michelangelo’s spiritual poetry and the question of its mystical nature and content.

### 1.5 Philological and Early Critical History of the *Rime*

#### 1.5.1 Sixteenth Century

Michelangelo’s poetry first crossed the threshold of his private life to meet public reception, however modest, in the early Cinquecento, when music was composed to accompany his madrigals.\(^{30}\) While living in the Medici residence, Michelangelo was included by Lorenzo the Magnificent in the circle he would gather around him while he performed music with the accompaniment of a singer.\(^{31}\) Armando Schiavo is one of a few critics to state that, in addition to being a poet, Michelangelo was a lyricist who could be transported by music;\(^{32}\) in fact, it

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\(^{30}\) Bartolomeo Trombincino, Giovanni Conseil, Costanzo Festa, Giacomo Arcadelt and Andrea Antingo all composed music for at least one of Michelangelo’s madrigals (*Come harò dunque ardire, Deh dimm’Amor* and *Io dico che fra voi*); see Armando Schiavo, *Michelangelo nel complesso delle sue opere*, Vol. I, p. 184. The two most famous scores – Bartolomeo Trombincino’s (1470-1535) *Come harò dunque ardire* (G12) and Jacques Arcadelt’s (1514-1560) *Deh dimm’amor* (G147) – are reproduced in Schiavo, Vol. I, pp. 185-216. Arcadelt, a singer and composer at the Sistine Chapel in Rome until 1551, was famous for his madrigal scores. He composed music not only for a madrigal by Michelangelo, he also scored verses by Petrarch, Pietro Bembo, and Lorenzo de’ Medici.


would appear that, in his own time, Michelangelo was better known to composers than to literary critics.33

Because his poetry was not published during the whole of the Cinquecento, there are relatively few contemporary references to Michelangelo as a literary figure outside of his personal correspondence (five hundred and seventy-five letters) and the five-volume carteggio indiretto that appeared in 1989. Michelangelo’s first biographers Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574) and Ascanio Condii (b.1520) both mention his poetry, but they say relatively little on the subject. Francisco De Hollanda (1517-1584), in his treatise Da pintura antiga (1538), also makes a passing reference to the poet’s verse, but the work itself focuses on Michelangelo the artist, and as Grazia Dolores Folliero-Metz noted in her edition (1998) of the two dialogues comprising the Da pintura, thematically, the treatise diverges little from other Renaissance treatises on art that seek to define the arts and explore the means of attaining optimal achievement in pursuing them (Diálogos 6).

Donato Giannotti’s (1492-1573) Dialogi dei giorni che Dante consumò nel cercare l’Inferno e ’l Purgatorio (editio princeps 1850), a literary text credited with cementing Michelangelo’s fame as a gran dantista, makes some important references to the poet’s literary acquaintanceships, production and persona that are as important for their content as for the manner in which they have been included in subsequent critical assessments of Michelangelo’s poetry. These references have influenced assumptions (some quite judicious) about the poet’s personality and habits.

In Giannotti’s dialogue, the interlocutor Michelangelo explains that he enjoys conversing with learned people and that there is no man of letters in Florence who is not his friend: “Io mi sono sempre dilettato di conversare con persone dotte; et, se vi ricorda bene, in Firenze non era huomo litterato che non fusse mio amico” (66). From these conversations, Michelangelo learns things that serve him in the reading of Tuscan writers, including Dante and Petrarch: “come voi vedete e’ mi venne imparato qualche cosetta, la quale al presente mi serve, quando leggo Dante, il Petrarca et questi altri scrittori che si leggono nella nostra Toscana lingua” (66).

In a rather moving passage, the interlocutor Michelangelo addresses the remaining three speakers (among whom one counts Michelangelo’s close friend Luigi del Riccio) about his need for solitude and the importance for him of living a life focused on death so that he does not lose himself to others given how readily he falls in love with individuals possessing talent. To justify

why he cannot join his three friends so that they might draw together that evening, Michelangelo explains that his affective nature is such that he cannot help falling in love with talented individuals: “Qualunque volta io veggio alcuno che habbia qualche virtù, che mostrì qualche destrezza d’ingegno, che sappia fare o dire qualche cosa più accoziamente che gli altri, io sono costretto ad innamorarmi di lui” [emphasis mine] (68). When he does fall in love against his will in this way, he gives himself to the beloved, losing his sense of self as a result: “et me gli do in maniera in preda, che io non sono più mio, ma tutto suo” (68). The interlocutor Michelangelo explains to his friends that if he wished to retain his identity and psychological integrity, it would be best for him not join them: “io tutto quanto mi smarrirei e perderei; di sorte che poi, per molti giorni, io non saprei in qual mondo mi fussi” (69).

This admittedly intriguing passage is often quoted to substantiate the theory that Michelangelo suffered from an overly amorous nature – a plausible assumption, corroborated by the poetic voice of the Rime, but an example, nevertheless, of how, historically, many Michelangelo scholars have been willing to accept uncritically the words of contemporaries as fact even when they are expressed in literary documents. In his critical edition of Giannotti’s dialogues, Deoclecio Redig De Campos notes that Michelangelo’s letters contain similar phrasing to the manner in which the interlocutor Michelangelo redirected the conversation in Giannotti’s text (“et però pensiamo ad altro”): “La forma bizzarra, inattesa e alquanto preziosa di questo rifiuto si ritrova spesso nella corrispondenza di Michelangelo e nei suoi versi” (69).

Though there is undoubtedly an element of verisimilitude in this literary portrayal of Michelangelo by his friend Donato Giannotti, including the artist’s manner of speaking, the flattering and hyperbolic description by the interlocutor Michelangelo of the other speakers as men so talented that he could not prevent himself from falling in love and becoming distracted is likely rhetorical.

In this dialogue, the interlocutor Michelangelo discusses the importance and benefits of keeping death in one’s line of vision:

Et vi ricordo che a voler ritrovare et godere sè medesimo, non è mestiero pigliare tante dilettationi et tante allegrezze, ma bisogna pensare alla morte. Questo pensiero è solo quello che ci fa riconoscere noi medesimi, che ci mantieni in noi uniti, senza lassarci rubare a’ parenti, agli amici, a’ gran maestri, all’ambizione, all’avartitia, et agli altri vicij et peccati che l’huomo all’huomo rubano et lo tengono disperso et dissipato, senza mai lassarlo ritrovarsi et riunirsi (69)
Death is a key theme in Michelangelo’s poetry throughout its phases. Its importance to his thought is well known. In this first dialogue of Giannotti’s Dialogi, the speaker Michelangelo describes death as an antidote to psychic dismanteling:

Et è maraviglioso l’effetto di questo pensiero della morte, il quale – distruggendo ella per natura sua tutte le cose – conserva e mantiene coloro che a lei pensano, et da tutte l’humane passioni li difende; la qual cosa io mi ricordo haver già assai acconciamente accennato in un mio madrialetto, nel quale, ragionando d’Amore, conclussi che da lui niuna altra cosa meglio che il pensier della morte ci difende. (69)

It is important to note that the interlocutor mentions one of his madrigals in the conversation. At the end of the first dialogue, Giannotti included Michelangelo’s G127, *Non pur la morte, ma ’l timor di quella* (which Girardi included in his critical apparatus of Michelangelo’s *Rime*).

The second dialogue concludes similarly with Michelangelo reciting the poem he wrote in honour of Dante, *Quella benigna stella*, the first version we possess of what became G248 (98).

Given that Giannotti’s Dialogi take as their primary focus a discussion of Dante’s *Commedia*, it makes sense that Michelangelo would need to be presented as a worthy interlocutor on the topic, and thus his poetic activity is highlighted. The question that naturally comes to mind, however, is what exactly the intervening discussions on love and death were intended to achieve. What is the point of the interlocutor’s very personal confessions (keeping in mind that he is not the author of the Dialogi)? Either Giannotti’s Michelangelo was intended to conform closely to the real Michelangelo to lend his dialogue a measure of realism and so the eponymous speaker really is similar to Michelangelo, or else the image of the amorous, psychologically sensitive and devout artist was important for some other reason (perhaps because it was a public persona that Michelangelo the artist had worked had to cultivate, or in the cultural context these values served as a signifier for some other referent unknown to us). In the absence of a date for the writing of Dialogi, it is hard to ascertain what the intention of the text might have been. Though the interlocutor Michelangelo discusses death and his poetry, the brief passage hardly constitutes a comprehensive critical commentary on his poetic production. In fact, no such sixteenth-century study exists.

The closest we come to literary analyses of Michelangelo’s verses are in Berni’s now famous and likely most referenced poem, the *Capitolo a fra Sebastiano del Piombo* (1533-1534), and in the two lectures that Benedetto Varchi delivered at the Accademia Fiorentina. As

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34 De Hollanda’s version of the poem differs from the Giannotti version by one word, *Non pur la Morte, ma ’l pensier di quella* [emphasis added])
we have seen, in four lines of his famed *capitolo*, Berni emphasized the meaningful content of Michelangelo’s poetry (“[…] egli è nuovo Apollo e nuovo Apelle:/ tacete unquanco, pallide viole./ e liquidi cristalli e fere snelle; e’ dice cose e voi dite parole” [emphasis mine]);\(^{35}\) Benedetto Varchi’s *Due lezzone* constitute a veritable close reading of the poem *Non ha l’ottimo artista alcun concetto* (while Varchi does refer to other poems by Michelangelo in these lectures, his references are brief and in some cases the *Due lezzone* remain the only attestation of the poems).

The *Esequie del divino Michelangelo Buonarroti* (1564) as well as the catafalque erected upon Michelangelo’s death both confirm that the artist was also celebrated as a poet during his lifetime (even if this is largely as a result of his friends in the literary world with whom he corresponded, and who promoted his efforts, circulating his poetry among their acquaintances). For Michelangelo’s funeral at San Lorenzo, Giovanmaria Butteri prepared a painting in which Apollo himself crowned Michelangelo; Domenico Poggini sculpted a statue of Poetry to be placed together with the statues of Painting, Sculture and Architecture on Michelangelo’s catafalque;\(^{36}\) Benedetto Varchi, Salviati, de Tarsia all spoke of Michelangelo as an excellent poet. After Michelangelo’s funeral orations, however, nothing was said of his poetry for the remainder of the sixteenth century, with little being discussed at all until the turn of the nineteenth century.

1.5.2 Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries

The first edition of Michelangelo’s poetry was published in 1623 by his grand-nephew, Michelangelo Buonarroti il Giovane (1568-1646), who so heavily revised the artist’s work that his publication of the *Rime* cannot be considered a diplomatic edition. Valentino Piccoli’s pejorative assessment (1930) of il Giovane, member of the Accademia della Crusca (“Cruscante”), as a (meddling) linguistic purist (“cruschevole”) testifies to how poorly this first edition of Michelangelo’s poetry was regarded by posterity.\(^{37}\)

\(^{35}\) *Capitolo a Fra Bastian del Piombo* (LXIII), vv. 28-31 (1534) in *Rime burlesche*. Ed. Giorgio Bàberi Squarotti. p. 245.

\(^{36}\) Christopher Ryan hypothesizes that “the presence of the poetic muse in the temporary constructions of the commemorative service was due rather to the personal interest of a few than to the widespread recognition of Michelangelo’s poetic abilities, for when ten years later a permanent tomb was unveiled in Santa Croce that particular muse had disappeared” (4).

\(^{37}\) Girardi qualifies him as “fiorentino, ma cruscente e manierista e secentista […] troppo controfondisticamente preoccupato di salvare la morale e l’ortodossia non meno religiosa che grammaticale” (*Studi*, 182). Piccoli’s comment is in the introduction to his edition of the *Rime*. 
Era sopra tutto un Cruscante, ma, quel che è peggio, cruschevole: sí che credé suo dovere mettere le mani nei versi del sommo avo, cambiò parole, completò poesie, addolcì, smussò, levigò, conciò in somma quei poveri versi in guisa tale che non erano più riconoscibili e lasciavano a stento intravedere quella che doveva essere la rude potenza originale. (xi)

It is based on these philologically inaccurate compositions that Michelangelo’s poetry was assessed and reprinted until Cesare Guasti, having consulted the manuscript version of the poet’s verse, published the first diplomatic edition of Michelangelo’s poetry in 1863. Two subsequent critical editions would ensue, that of Karl Frey in 1897 and of Enzo Noè Girardi in 1960. Girardi’s edition is now widely (though not exclusively) accepted as the standard. Critical assessments of Michelangelo’s poetry based on his grand-nephew’s edition differ little from analyses based on the first critical editions of the poetry until well into the twentieth century. Analyses were few in number, and Michelangelo’s poetry had enjoyed relative obscurity outside of Italy, as the opening line to the preface of Frey’s edition attests:

“Michelagniolo Buonarroti ist nicht nur ein Künstler, sondern auch ein Poet gewesen”

(“Michelangelo is not only an artist, he was also a poet;” v). The title of Mario Fubini’s 1964 article “Michelangelo fu anche poeta?” polemically emphasizes the fact that even into the twentieth century the poet’s verse was granted little public attention, even in Italy.

It is generally accepted that Ugo Foscolo’s approach to Michelangelo’s poetry greatly influenced that of later scholars, including Benedetto Croce.38 There are few scholars, and they are mainly philologists, who refer to publications of Michelangelo’s poetry during the Seicento and Settecento. Even fewer refer to critical opinions issuing from the time period other than to indicate that they were few in number, uncritical, or empty. Ugo Foscolo said as much in 1822:

The Italians, though constantly repeating, as a popular tradition, that Michel Angelo was a distinguished poet, seem to have never entered into the real character of his verses. In their innumerable metrical collections, of every kind and age, and from authors good, bad and indifferent, we never hit upon a single extract from Michel Angelo. Even Tiraboschi, the voluminous historian of Italian literature [...] passes very carelessly over his verses. (Italian 341)

This neglect is often attributed to the difficulty of the poetry, which was likely skimmed rather than carefully read because of how challenging Michelangelo’s verses were to understand. It is likewise natural that modern scholars would dedicate little space to discussing seventeenth-

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38 For a detailed discussion of Foscolo’s impact on subsequent scholarship, see Hallock’s “Ugo Foscolo and the Criticism of Michelangelo’s Rime,” specifically p.11: “Foscolo penetrates Michelangelo’s inner world. As a result of his approach, the Rime have been interpreted largely from a psychological point of view emphasizing the dramatic aspects of Michelangelo’s personality suggested by his legendary image.”
century Michelangelo (literary) criticism since between 1623 and 1863 only non-diplomatic versions of the poetry were analyzed. In the bibliographical component of his article “Michelangelo Buonarroti” (1974), Girardi moves from Berni, Varchi and “le annotazioni di Michelangelo il Giovine,” to a discussion of Foscolo’s assessments of the poetry: “si potrà quindi saltare al Foscolo” – this is all Girardi writes as a segue between the two, despite the fact that there were other important critical moments between il Giovane and Foscolo. It must be noted, however, that even in the realm of art history, Michelangelo was largely ignored outside of Italy during this time.

1.5.3 Nineteenth Century

Guasti and Frey both belonged to the generation of Romantic scholars in Italy that comprised the whole of the nineteenth century and the first few decades of the twentieth century. Critical publications dedicated to Michelangelo’s Rime during the Romantic period frequently amounted to one of two things. Either they constituted the transcription of one’s personal communion with Michelangelo’s poems, or a politically-motivated interpretation with nationalistic tones. Of the former, many publications uncritically considered Michelangelo’s poetry as divine as the man and artist; to recall Papini’s introduction to his 1928 editions of the Rime once again: “parlar di Michelangiolo agli italiani è come cantar le lodi del Martello ai fabbri o del Petrarca ai sonettieri” (II). Hallock’s observation that “the Romanticists dwelt on indications of his patriotism, quest for liberty, exceptional spirit and indomitable will” is accurate (Michelangelo 11). Girardi’s assessment that Guasti’s work was “impegnato” could well apply to many of the critical publications issuing from this time period: “un romanticismo, direi, manzoniano quello del Guasti; risorgimentale e cattolico, moralistico e, come oggi si direbbe, impegnato” (Studi 190).

During the Ottocento and the early Novecento, Michelangelo was more myth than man. Girardi noted that there was a confluence of many myths in the figure of Michelangelo:

[c’erano] nel mito di Michelangiolo, un po’ tutti i miti romantici: da quelli nostrani, risorgimentali, della patria, della libertà, dell’esilio, a quelli più complessi e profondi, o magari soltanto più nebulosi, che ebbero voga anche tra noi soprattutto nell’età di

39 None that are of great interest for the present dissertation. As an example of an important moment, however, one thinks of Biagioli’s 1821 publication of Michelangelo’s poetry (which Foscolo read and upon which he based his own interpretations) in which the editor argues that Michelangelo, along with Dante and Petrarch, form the illustrious “triumvirate” of Italian poetry (p. 343). For a detailed publishing history, including translations, between 1623 (il Giovine edition) and 1863 (Guasti edition), see: Guasti, pp. lxvii-lxxxiv. For a general (and more relevant) overview of publishing and critical history, see Barelli, pp. 16-31.
Among the Decadentists who, “pursued the ‘terrible’ Michelangelo of suffering, solitude, night, death, psychological trauma and spiritual anguish,” one counts Amendola (1911), Rizzi (1924), Bongioanni (1935), and Calero (1945), whose ideas will be considered in greater detail in subsequent sections of the present chapter.

1.6 Critical History of the Rime in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries

1.6.1 The Long Quest for the Objectivity

A hallmark of both Romantic and Decadent Michelangelo scholarship is the failure of its critics to distinguish between the historical person and the literary persona of the poet. Nowhere is this better illustrated than in the respective evaluations of Michelangelo’s poetry by Giovanni Amendola (1920) and Giuseppe Calero (1945): “Non è l’opera di Michelangelo, ma è Michelangelo stesso che ci sta dinanzi” (Amendola 10); “le rime riflettono i suoi dubbi e le sue tristezze, i palpiti del cuore e gli ardori della fede. Egli può ben dire di sè: ‘Quale io sono, tale io mi mostro a voi’” (Calero 25). Amendola and Calero treated Michelangelo’s poetry less as a literary document than as a biographical one, giving the impression that for them the canzoniere was on equal footing with any psycho-spiritual autobiography the artist could have written. For many scholars of early to mid-twentieth century, this was the value of Michelangelo’s poetry, because during this period in literary criticism, thanks to Croce’s influence, Michelangelo’s poetry was deemed of little literary or poetic value; its worth had thus to be established on different grounds. Consider, as an example, Stefano Bottari’s comment (1935) that the Rime constitute a “biography of the soul” but possess little aesthetic value: “Una ideale biografia dell’anima è dunque il libro dei versi di Michelangelo […] come diario di un ‘anima esso va letto e meditato […] l’interesse estetico del canzoniere viene […] ad essere limitato” (129).

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40 Hallock, Michelangelo, 11.
41 For a detailed discussion of the lyrical persona in Michelangelo’s Rime, see Susanne Gramatzki’s Zur lyrischen Subjektivität in den Rime Michelangelo Buonarrotis. For more on the treatment of Michelangelo’s lyrical persona with respect to his historical person in the history of German literary criticism, her introduction provides a concise overview and a wealth of bibliographical information.
42 Benedetto Croce, Tommaso Parodi and Gianfranco Contini had reacted to Romantic scholarship that preceded the Decadent criticism treated here by approaching Michelangelo’s poetry with an almost exclusive focus on his literary style, a method that has been labeled both neo-idealistic and formalistic-aesthetic. Michelangelo fell short of the great models to which he was compared in their analyses.
Much as possessing judicious discernment in matters of critical approach and historicization has been a key characteristic of good scholarship since the middle of the twentieth century, to this same degree it was seemingly irrelevant to many Decadent scholars during the first fifty years of the century who were content to write what they saw personally rather than to bother with precise contextualization – a practice that began with Foscolo, was legitimized by Frey, and that would not end until the post-Girardi paradigm-shift. This is clearly attested by the case of Fortunato Rizzi whose approach to Michelangelo’s poetry (Michelangelo poeta, 1924) involved listening quietly to hear the vibrations of Michelangelo’s soul in his verse: “io mi son posto, con tutta l’anima mia trepidante, dinanzi alla grande anima di Michelangelo poeta e ho cercato di sentirne le intime voci” (xviii). Rizzi, like Bottari after him, approached Michelangelo’s poetry as a personal diary. His approach was not the exception, but rather the rule for his generation.

In 1916, for example, Tommaso Parodi stated that Michelangelo’s verses were valuable for “la confessione d’un particolare stato psicologico, hanno valore cioè d’appunti personali, come in un diario d’anima” (195). For Parodi, the value of the Rime was primarily its capacity to furnish insights into the author’s spiritual nature and life:

Il libro dei versi di Michelangelo è, insomma, come un quaderno di abbozzi e di confessioni, ed ha per noi, che conosciamo l’artista dei marmi, un alto valore essenzialmente spirituale, e cioè più e meno, nel tempo stesso, che di mera d’opera d’arte, rientrando piuttosto nell’interesse d’una biografia ideale dell’anima. (197)

These glimpses into Michelangelo’s soul were also of value for what they could contribute to the understanding of his art, as Ceriello (1954) also noted in the introduction to his edition of the Rime: “questo diario poetico […] svela i segreti della grande anima e il clima spirituale di tanti capolavori” (13). The use of Michelangelo’s poetry as a psycho-spiritual source for understanding his art presupposed that Michelangelo’s goal in writing was to express himself rather than ideas or to create literature – a topic which will be addressed later in this chapter. This view is concisely expressed by Valerio Mariani (1941), who suggested that sixteenth-century Petrarchism “favoured” in Michelangelo “l’atteggiamento ‘autobiografico’ quasi riserbando alla lirica ciò che l’animo non riusciva ad esprimere altrimenti” (Poesia, 7). For

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43 The echo here of Anne Schutte’s article entitled “The Post-Cantimori Paradigm-Shift” is intentional.
44 As it was for the generation in which he was raised; as Girardi noted: “l’utilizzazione del canzoniere in senso materialmente e spiritualmente autobiografico è un fatto del tutto normale in tutto l’Ottocento” (Studi 202).
Mariani, whose interest was in studying the poet’s verses together with his art, Michelangelo wrote because he possessed “un natural bisogno di raccontarsi” (7).

Among Romantic and Decadent scholars who treated Michelangelo’s poetry as a diary, Arturo Farinelli’s scholarship was not only one of the first, but the most fundamental, the most frequently emulated, and the one best received by contemporary critics. Farinelli relied heavily on the notion that Michelangelo wrote exclusively for himself, forgetting the world around him, including the world of letters: “A pochi amici confida le sue rime; abitualmente scrive per sè medesimo; dimentica la folla, il mondo dei poeti, il mondo tutto” (5). Michelangelo’s poetry thus constituted an “intimo soliloquio” (5). Because he addresses himself alone, a psychological approach to his verses is suitable: “Michelangelo parla con singolare costanza a sè stesso e di sè stesso. È studio dunque essenzialmente psicologico quello che conviene fare intorno alle rime di Michelangelo” (6-7). For Farinelli, Buonarroti’s poetry has its origins in a personal and secret inner struggle:

L’opera poetica, nel suo complesso generato dalla lotta interna, dall’amore e dal dolore, opera che gronda lagrime, ch’è sangue del suo sangue, è arte schiva del pubblico […] è arte tutta intima, tutto segreta” (5)

His poetry is an enigma because it reflects his complex psyche and its spiritual concerns (7). Later scholars would echo this idea.

In his well-read 1930 edition of Michelangelo’s Rime, Valentino Piccoli echoed Farinelli in attributing the enigmatic, or “hermetic,” character of Michelangelo’s verses to the fact that the poems originate in their author’s own spiritual torment, which they document:

Spesso l’opera di Michelangelo si chiude in un singolare ermetismo: il Poeta sembra sforzarsi invano ad esprimere l’inesprimibile. Per questo, a volte, mentre egli sembra voler dare espressioni compiute e determinate, noi non possiamo intenderlo o seguirlo. Bisogna considerare allor i suoi versi – e, più, i suoi frammenti – come l’annotazione di un tormento spirituale: quasi la rappresentazione verbale di un’atmosfera interiore, anzi che l’espressione di un definito pensiero (Parola, XII)

Quoting this very passage, in 1941 Valerio Mariani would re-affirm its validity and relevance: “mi sembra giusto quello che scriveva più di trenta anni fa Valentino Piccoli nell’annotare le rime michelangiolesche” (24). In this same year, Raffaele Spongano also attributed the hermetic nature of Michelangelo’s verses to the man’s inner suffering: “l’astrattezza e la oscurità non

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45 In 1926, Aldo Oberdorfer called Farinelli’s article “il più serio lavoro di critica michelangiolesca che sia pubblicato in Italia” (192).
sono volute ma sofferte da Michelangelo e non si tratta quindi di un ripudio cosciente delle forme del tempo” (9).

That Farinelli’s view was twice repeated in the 1960s is attributable to the fact that he – like many of the Decadent scholars who approached Michelangelo’s poetry as a diary – had successfully described the subjective experience of the reader of Michelangelo’s *Rime*. This is indeed the strength of Decadent criticism. Its non-negligible weakness, however, is the failure to distinguish more critically between author and authorial voice, between reality and impression, between autobiography and autobiographical mode. The Decadent approach neglects the variants of Michelangelo’s poems and the critical apparatus more generally.

### 1.6.2 *Canzoniere* as Personal Diary vs. Literature in the Autobiographical Mode

This manner of treating Michelangelo’s verse as a personal diary has alternately been called “biografismo,” “psicologismo,”

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and “diarismo.” The trend was viewed quite negatively by scholars such as Gianfranco Contini, who criticized Giuseppe Prezzolini, founder of *La Voce*, for his Romantic/Decadent interpretation in his anthology of Michelangelo’s poetry. For Contini, Prezzolini’s Romantic interpretation was not merely personal, but rather generational, and not a characteristic, but a fault: “lo psicologismo è stato un difetto fondamentale della sua generazione” (326). The scholarship of Enzo Noè Girardi (1960s and 1970s), Walter Binni (1970s), and Mario Baratto (1980s) had two goals: to affirm that Michelangelo was more than an amateur writer, and to argue for proper historicization of his verses. They did so without denying or negating the impressions sensed by Romantic scholars.

Girardi was one of the first to suggest Michelangelo’s poetry not be considered as autobiography, but as literature in the autobiographical mode. He explained that the content of the poet’s *Rime* was not autobiographical but that it was “tradotto in termini di esperienza autobiografica” (Girardi *Saggi* 113).

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He also emphasized that the purpose of poetry is not to furnish psychological insight into the historical figure of the poet:

Non è compito della poesia essenzialmente considerata offrir testimonianze d’ordine psicologico o storico o ideologico, e non è pertanto nelle singole, particolari

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46 This term does not apply to psychoanalytic studies of Michelangelo’s poetry, such as Robert S. Liebert’s *Michelangelo: A Psychoanalytic Study of His Life and Images* (1983).

47 This was Paschal Viglionese’s approach to the poetry of Petrarch and Michelangelo in 1984: “autobiographical discourse is constituted by a subject that speaks in the *mode* of autobiography [...] rather than an attempt to portray some pre-existing person, a lyric text is more likely to be an act of creation of a persona which belongs wholly to the text” (244).
In his edition of Michelangelo’s *Rime*, Giovanni Amendola (1911) stated that Michelangelo’s verses “esprimono l’anima direttamente, fuori del simbolo” (11); perhaps Girardi had this comment in mind when he asserted that the symbolic dimension of the poetry was more important than the relationship of any possible literal meaning to its historical context: “il significato primario del canzoniere, il perno della sua unità poetica non è lì, nel rapporto con la situazione storica, ma nella portata simbolica, profondamente e universalmente significativa ch’egli imprime” [emphasis added] (Girardi *Saggi* 118).

Girardi considers proper and objective historicization to be of prime importance in any pursuit of critical analysis. He specifies that, in the case of Michelangelo, historicizing does not mean negating the originality of the poetry, but rather providing as much historical context as possible to enable the greatest appreciation of his unique production: “storicizzare non significa negare la singolarità del genio e la sua capacità di testimoniare direttamente sulla natura e sul destino dell’uomo [ma] fornire il più possibile di spiegazioni storiche, storicamente plausibili, di quella grandezza, di quella singolarità, di quella capace testimoniale” (*Studi* 204). Finally criticism had changed: “Ora noi abbiamo altri strumenti, non amiamo più far confronti psicologici o tipologici; preferiamo altre vie: la prospettiva storica, lo studio dei rapporti con l’ambiente, la tradizione letteraria, la cultura; l’analisi filologica e stilistica” (*Girardi Studi* 204-205).

A decade after Girardi’s call for critical objectivity in Michelangelo scholarship, Binni began employing Girardi’s methods while denouncing the Romantic tendency of casually assigning Michelangelo a lofty position in Italian literary history based on his celebrity status and of treating his verse as a diary based on the speculative assumption that he was a mere amateur poet who composed without any pretensions to literary achievement or acclaim. In

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48 “Il primo compito di chi voglia affrontare il problema tutt’altro che facile di Michelangelo scrittore e poeta consiste, a mio avviso, nell’intendere le sue prospettive operanti, in rapporto alla sua posizione, storico-personale, superando preliminarmente sia la disposizione agiografica e di un automatico passaggio dalla grandezza dell’artista figurativa a quella dello scrittore e del poeta […], sia la dura preclusione in nome di una mancanza di esperienza e possesso di mezzi espressivi in poesia, di un dilettantismo o di un diarismo senza vera necessità espressiva, sia la semplice presentazione viceversa di uno sperimentatore di stile su di una tematica sostanzialmente fissa, statica e astorica” (3).
1978, Pietro D’Angelo voiced the same concerns as Girardi and Binni in his study on the fortune of Michelangelo’s verse in the history of literary criticism. He encouraged historicization, as they had, so that one might avoid the risks of “biografismo” and “psicologismo,” as well as the Romantic tendency to make sense of the poetry through knowledge of the poet’s personality; he does so polemically, with reference to Croce in his mention of “poesia” and “non poesia:”

Per superare il puro esame di poesia e non poesia o quello semplicemente stilistico o, ancora, la posizione agiografica, cioè di automatico passaggio della grandezza dell’artista a quella del poeta, bisogna adottare come criterio esclusivo le ragioni di contenuto e la forma come una unità inscindibile. Il che naturalmente implica il recupero del mondo storico e morale, culturale e spirituale e in cui il poeta si è formato, e del rapporto che egli creò tra quel mondo e quello suo naturale, tra quel lessico, per così dire, preso a prestito e quello suo che gli proveniva dalla pratica d’ogni giorno [...] Tutto ciò permetterà di giungere ad una rappresentazione di giudizio per una via più oggettiva, evitando insieme il rischio del biografismo e dello psicologismo e quello, ancora, di cadere in forme di critica romantica, quando si cercherà d’intendere le ragioni stesse dell’operazione poetica in rapporto con la sua personalità che tiene un posto così vistoso per la potenzialità inesaurita di trasfigurazioni in termini simbolici che sempre hanno la base in un sentimento che continuamente si rinnova (16-17) [emphasis mine]

D’Angelo echoes Binni, who took pains in Michelangelo scrittore (1975) to defend his study against possible charges of “biografismo” and “psicologismo” while denouncing both Croce and Romantic criticism in exactly the same terms:

Prospettiva di un ricupero di tutti gli elementi atti a chiarirci la realtà della sua esperienza di scrittore, sì che non si temerà di affrontare il rischio del biografismo e dello psicologismo ben sapendo come proprio una spregiudicata valorizzazione dei nessi vita-poesia e il richiamo di necessità espressiva e di poetica ha pur permesso in tanti casi di rendersi conto della natura di una poesia al di là del puro esame di poesia e non poesia della semplice verifica stilistica […] Né si temerà di ricadere in forme di critica romantica se si cercherà di intendere le ragioni stesse dell’operazione poetica nel loro rapporto con la posizione storico-personale dello scrittore, sapendo fra l’altro che così si contribuirà pure indirettamente ad un migliore chiarimento della stessa origine interna delle più alte manifestazioni dell’artista figurativo. (4) [emphasis mine]

Both Binni and Baratto were preoccupied with ensuring that their approach to Michelangelo’s poetry should not be confused with that of the Romantics. Baratto (1976) addressed the Romantic/Decadent approach more explicitly. First, he acknowledged the twin dangers inherent in approaching the Rime from a psychological perspective: “di considerarle in sostanza il documento [...] della storia di un’anima, un diario intimo” and “come il diario
then he criticized the formal aesthetic approach, specifically denouncing Parodi and Croce for contributing to even greater subjectivity in analysis than the Romantics. Singling out the work of Contini, Girardi argued that the Romantic methodology resulted in a fragmenting that completely excised Michelangelo’s poetry from its context. Baratto attacked the neo-idealistic approach arguing that it runs counter to the approach suggested by the poems themselves. For Baratto, the manner in which Michelangelo approached the composition of poetry results in the eye of the reader naturally turning to the author of the poems rather than to a lyrical “I.” Essentially, Baratto defends the Romantic and Decadent instinct to approach Michelangelo’s poetry from a psycho-biographical perspective as a legitimate one (in the case of Michelangelo, only, perhaps), even if he disapproved of their method and called for greater historicization in the analytical process.

Baratto’s assertion that Michelangelo’s verse demands some kind of autobiographical and psychological treatment is echoed in Cambon: “when we discuss his loves or his attitude to visual art or his interest in Platonism, in the republican cause, and in religion, we do so because these themes are intrinsic to his poetry; they are the stuff of it” (43). Additionally, if not more importantly, the opinion that the nature of Michelangelo’s verse demands an autobiographical and psychological approach finds much empirical evidence in the sheer number of scholars, not all Romantic, who have approached the Rime in this way. Nowhere is this more clearly evident

49 “la critica del Novecento, a cominciare da uno studio famoso di Tommaso Parodi che è degli anni 1912-’13, ripreso poi più sinteticamente dal Croce nel ’22, ha cercato di respingere questi due pericoli di lettura; ma va pure detto che, per respingerli, essa è stata costretta a isolare, in modo soggettivo, qualche frammento poetico, a leggere cioè le rime nella prospettiva di una scelta antologica, in cui finisce per pesare il gusto soggettivo del lettore” (viii).

50 “c’è, in queste pagine continiane, un pericolo grosso, anche più grosso di quello che è proprio della metodologia romantica. È il pericolo di sostituire allo psicologismo generico uno stilismo fin troppo specifico, a un frammentismo che seziona minutamente per traverso il corpo del canzoniere buonarrotiano, un altro frammentismo che lo seziona, in un certo senso, per il lungo, isolando la superficie delle ‘cose’ di Michelangiolo dal loro cuore e dalla loro anima, la loro apparenza fisica e insieme stilistica, dalla loro natura simbolica (Studi 203-204).

51 “rispingerle le due pericolose direzioni di lettura respingendo insieme l’atteggiamento del poeta stesso verso il proprio lettore. È qui infatti che si rivela la prima paradossale contraddizione in cui si imbatte un lettore un po’ più attento delle Rime di Michelangelo: le due interpretazioni cui ho accennato costituiscono infatti un itinerario che ci è proposto dal poeta stesso” (viii).

52 “Ed è chiaro, allora, che non possiamo respingere automaticamente le proposte che ci vengono da Michelangelo stesso, le proposte di lettura che accompagnano la proposta del testo; solo che dobbiamo cercare di verificare nel testo queste indicazioni, cercando di storicizzare nel testo queste indicazioni, cercando di storicizzare in questo mondo (parlo della storia dell’autore) un documento che è molto vario o disuguale, e fa certamente parte di una zona più privata e recondita di Michelangelo, non equiparabile alle manifestazioni ufficiali dell’artista, si da apparire talvolta una sorta di hobby, sia pur notevolmente costante” (viii-ix).
than in the work of those scholars who have analyzed the Neoplatonic dimension of Michelangelo’s creations.

Nesca Robb (1935), for example, asserted that Michelangelo’s lyrical compositions “are a kind of spiritual autobiography that links up the chronicle of fact, as recorded by Condivi, with the movements of the inner world that was bodied forth in the vault of the Sistine and the Medici tombs” (241). In her opinion, “certain fundamental conceptions of Neoplatonism harmonized with the natural temper of his mind” and “the framework of his philosophy came from his training, but its value from his own exultations and agonies” (240). For Robb, Neoplatonism was a means by which Michelangelo expressed his authentic spiritual and psychological self:

The language of Neoplatonism becomes so convincing on his lips because it corresponded closely with his own artistic and religious experience [...] In this naked poetry of passion and intellect Neoplatonism found an authentic voice. Michelangelo never tried to use its phraseology as a veil for emotions of a different order; and aspects of his philosophy that had not a strong personal appeal for him he left alone. His acceptance of it rested on a real psychological basis. (233-4; 241)

Beall (1961) makes the same claim almost thirty years later: “Religion for him was never mere outward show, and his Platonism was not mere jargon, but an integral part of his philosophic outlook” (239). John Arthos echoed this same idea when he separated Michelangelo from other Platonists: “There is in the very idea an urgency that distinguishes Michelangelo’s thought from all gentlemanly Neo-Platonicizing, and even from the most responsible of Platonists” (169). Even Erwin Panofsky (1939) and Charles De Tolnay (1965) fall into this same camp, with the latter echoing the former in seeing Neoplatonism as a “metaphysical justification” of self:

But among his contemporaries Michelangelo was the only one who adopted Neoplatonism not in certain aspects but in its entirety, and not as a convincing philosophical system, let alone as the fashion of the day, but as a metaphysical justification of his own self [...] Michelangelo might be called the only genuine Platonic among the many artists influenced by Neoplatonism. (Panofsky 180)

Among so many Renaissance minds affected by the idea of Platonism, Michelangelo was perhaps the only one to find in such doctrines the metaphysical justification of his own personality. His own experiences corresponded to this philosophy. (De Tolnay 32)

These interpretations all hinge in some way upon the impression of sincerity in Michelangelo’s verse. Honesty of personal expression has long been perceived in Michelangelo’s *Rime*. This impression of sincerity, much like the hermeticism of the verses, is largely created by the unpolished and unrefined style of poetry and the the manner in which it was composed.
1.7 Michelangelo’s Approach to Composing Poetry and its Implications

Those who defend a psychological-autobiographical approach to Michelangelo’s verse focus on the scribbles that Michelangelo had jotted down on papers, drawings and on the reverse of letters in a seemingly spontaneous and instinctive manner. They argue for the authenticity of the emotional expression in the lyrics. Conversely, those who oppose this psychological approach to his poetry are usually of the opinion that Michelangelo deserves to be considered a poet among poets, and thus they focus on Michelangelo’s poetics, examining the variants. As a result, they view the poetry in a very different manner than those who consult the final poems but not their critical apparatus. It is worth considering a few concrete examples of both approaches before continuing.

In 1933, Ausonio Dobelli described Michelangelo’s poetry as private writings born from fleeting inspiration: as “scritti ai margini de’ cartoni de’ disegni o sul rovescio di lettere, là dove capitava al Poeta di fissare in carta l’invito di un’ispirazione momentanea” (12). Like the Decadent scholars explored in the previous section, Dobelli concluded that the writings proceed from the poet’s soul: “sono [...] sfoghi dell’anima” (12). Similarly, in 1936, Ottone Lorenzo Degregorio emphasized the personal nature of the compositions in the same breath that he implied, as a result of the hasty or unpredictable manner in which Michelangelo wrote, that they were thus authentic emotional expressions:

Le sue rime – e così pure le sue lettere – hanno questo fascino speciale: che il poeta si rivela apertamente, parla di sé a se stesso, convinto che nessuno lo stia a sentire [...] affida così alla prima carta che gli capita sotto mano, al retro di un qualche disegno o in margine a studi o altro, l’esplosione di un affetto o di uno sdegno e più di tutto i pensieri, le considerazioni che pullulano nella sua mente solitaria. (4)

By contrast, later scholars such as Baldacci and Girardi would advance the strikingly different opinion that Michelangelo consciously sought to extend his divine image into the realm of literature, thus implying that his poetic creativity was as much an intellectual pursuit as an instance of personal expression. Baldacci did so somewhat erringly, as we have seen, by claiming that Michelangelo wrote in a manner expressly opposed to the customary method of the Petarchists: “egli volle coscientemente sottrarsi alle ragioni storiche del proprio tempo, contribuendo così per primo al mito della propria ‘divinità’” (265).

Baldacci was following Girardi’s lead in asserting that which the editor of the third and most authoritative critical edition of the Rime called the “vocazione autentica di scrittore” (Saggi 106). It is Girardi’s comprehensive critical apparatus, after all, that has allowed
subsequent scholars to conduct well-founded analyses of Michelangelo’s style. Naturally, it was Girardi, defender of Michelangelo as a poet proper, who drew overt attention to how unspontaneous and non-dilettante many of Michelangelo’s verses truly are. D’Angelo reiterated Girardi’s message a decade later, insisting that Michelangelo’s lyrical compositions had been a serious endeavour for the poet. Contemporaneously, the role of the concetto in Michelangelo’s elaboration of his verse became a point of scholarly focus.

In 1963, Pier Luigi De Vecchi asserted that Michelangelo’s poetic compositions always began from a concept or an idea: “nasce sempre da uno spunto meditativo, da una idea tematica che sovente viene lasciata allo stato di frammento, di appunto” (61). This is attested by the variants, he argues, because they reveal a methodical elaboration on the part of the poet: the genesis of Michelangelo’s compositions may be found in hasty notes intended to capture a thought, in pre-baroque word-play and conceptual contrapositions, or in a simile or a metaphor. For De Vecchi, Michelangelo’s primary interest was conceptual development: “È chiaro che l’interesse si esaurisce interamente nella esposizione del concetto che deve venir portato, per mezzo dell’‘artificio’ poetico, a maggiore intensità espressiva” (62). Ultimately, he challenges the view that Michelangelo’s poetry was solely the result of spontaneous

54 “Ma come queste non nascono in sostanza né, come è stato detto troppi volte, per diletto e quasi per passatempo, in margine all’attività maggiore, né, come pure qualcuno ha proposto, per la necessità spirituale di esprimere pensieri troppo complessi e profondi per essere affidati alle possibilità espressive della pietra e del colore, né infine per sfogo di umori e d’amori, ma per la semplice, fondamentale presenza in Michelangiolo di una vocazione di scrittore” (Saggi 105).

55 “la sua poesia non fu una attività nata da singoli momenti occasionali, né rappresentò uno strumento di evasione o di confessione privata, né diario segreto di una biografia dell’anima, o, viceversa, documento autobiografico e trascrizione di suggestioni figurative, né divertimento ozioso e sperimentazione vuota di un artista rinascimentale che è portato a tentare tutte le diverse forme dell’espressione, ma fu, soprattutto, un’attività affrontata con serietà ed impegno e con la volontà di assurgere a forme ben definite, elaborate e complete” (17-18).

56 He elaborates: “possiamo riconoscere affiorante all’improvviso nel corpo di un componimento costruito faticosamente aggregando, attorno a questo nucleo centrale, altri diversi materiali che rimangono inerti riempitivi, assolutamente privi di quella forza espressiva che rivela l’idea generatrice. Si spiega così anche il potere suggestivo che hanno certi versi delle ‘Rime’ staccati dal loro contesto e presi isolatamente” (61).

57 “La prova che Michelangelo componeva proprio in questo modo, partendo cioè da una ‘idea-frammento’ che non poteva essere sviluppata, ma solo portata al maggior grado d’intensità espressiva, la si può trovare anche per mezzo dell’esame delle varianti, che, come è stato giustamente osservato, testimoniano più una ‘inquieta incontestabilità’ che una ‘metodica elaborazione’ e un ‘sapiente lavoro di lima’” (61).

58 “L’origine della poesia di Michelangelo va pertanto ricercata proprio in quegli appunti frettolosi con cui egli cercava di fermare un pensiero improvvisamente insorgente. Si tratta soprattutto di meditazioni personali, rielaborazioni di spunti letterari, giochi prebarocchi di contrapposizioni concettose, brevi sentenze epigrammatiche. Altre volte ancora il punto di partenza è una metafora o una similitudine che viene portata alle estreme conseguenze mediante lo svolgimento, fin troppo sottile, di ogni possibilità, oppure l’analitica, minuziosa descrizione di un particolare fenomeno, oppure la variante di un componimento che viene tratta, con lievi modificazioni, ad un diverso significato” (62).
expression. More specifically, De Vecchi identifies in the tripartite division of Michelangelo’s typical madrigal a pattern of introducing, developing and concluding a situation. He likewise observes a tendency, on the part of Michelangelo, to develop certain concepts in different, and at times opposite, directions. These two patterns are subsequently explored by both Hallock and Cambon, the former in her analysis of the variants of *Te sola del mie mal contenta veggio* (madrigal G246), and the latter in his study of, among other poems, *Ogni cosa c’i’ veggo mi consiglia* (madrigal G81).

Examining the variants of *Te sola del mie mal contenta veggio*, Hallock observed that the original poetic nucleus became “four formal poetic compositions: two attempted capitoli and a variant of the first capitolo’s introductive terzine, a third, incomplete capitolo, and, finally, a madrigal” (*The Genesis* 555). She noted that “the three aborted capitoli and the definitive madrigal which were structured around the original ‘fragment,’ *T[e] sola d[el mi]e mal contenta veggio*, display the extreme to which Michelangelo struggled in the ‘laboratory’ of his variants with both content and metrical form in his efforts to realize a given poetic nucleus” (Hallock *The Genesis* 560). In Hallock’s seemingly accurate estimation, this “radical revision of content and form [...] typifies fifty percent of Michelangelo’s other compositions with variants evolving from an introductory nucleus. It also conclusively demonstrates his unhesitating experimentation with form and content to arrive at the optimal realization of the epitome of his thought” (561).

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59 “Occorre parlare di capacità spontanea perché in realtà, per quanto riguarda lo stile, Michelangelo dà, se non molto raramente, l’impressione di curarsene, anche se ripetutamente egli afferma con forza la propria impazienza e insoddisfazione e in diverse occasioni si lamenta di non sapersi esprimere con sufficiente chiarezza [...] Tale impazienza è tuttavia caratteristica della personalità di Michelangelo e si manifesta in ogni sua occupazione, compresa quella artistica” (63-64).

60 “la tipica struttura tripartita del madrigale michelangiolesco: esposizione di una ‘situazione,’ sviluppo e conclusione” (36).

61 “Trovato un motivo su cui fare centro Michelangelo non se ne stacca più e sembra quasi volerne sviluppare tutte le possibilità espressive con una serie inesauribile di situazioni diverse, riguardandolo da punti di vista sempre nuovi,” 39.

62 The elaboration of these two poems is often compared because each possesses many variants that Michelangelo seems to pursue in an analogous manner, as the shared conclusion by Hallock and Cambon attest; Girardi himself suggests the comparison in his critical apparatus.

63 It appears accurate on the basis of Girardi’s critical apparatus of Michelangelo’s poetry. It is evident from Hallock’s article that she indeed studied the apparatus in detail; consider the following statement: “Citing only the most obvious correlates of his *Rime*, no fewer than four poems [...] incorporate the thematic nucleus expressed by the verse *Chi men vive più lieve al ciel torna*; four madrigals [...] embody the thematic nucleus found in the verse *Né contr’a morte è forte altro che morte*; three compositions [...] formalize the thematic nucleus *Non è dannò pari al tempo perso*; and three madrigals [...] embody the thematic nucleus *L’uso di molt’anni in un di non toglie*” (*The Genesis* 563).
Cambon’s analysis of the variants of *Ogni cosa c’i’ veggio mi consiglia* coincides with Hallock’s conclusions based on her analysis of *Te sola* (a study that Cambon had read as he referenced it directly prior to commencing the analysis of his own in question).\(^6^4\) As proof that “Michelangelo’s choices are very deliberate” and that “he explores many formal possibilities before deciding on any one in particular” (146), Cambon provides the worksheet Michelangelo used in elaborating the lyrical expression, noting that the sheet “carries rhyme pattern marks, on the right hand margin and only for the first seven lines” and “abstract signs, identical for each rhyme” (147).

Undoubtedly it is such *marginalia* that led Ferrero to state that Michelangelo struggles with language and versification (“lotta duramente contro la frase, e il ritmo e la rima ribelli; e dalla lotta non esce quasi mai pienamente vittorioso ” 52), or Clements to note that “rhyme was not one of his obvious talents” and that Michelangelo occasionally made “compromises to syntax, even meaning, to achieve rhyme” (32). For Hallock, “Michelangelo’s poetic nucleus is born as the end result of his reductive process and is the representation of that quiddity” (*The Genesis* 553). Single lines, distichs, and quatrains “can no longer be discounted as baroque ‘bisticci’ or ‘fragmental’ works, as incomplete aspects of an unknown whole. On the contrary, for Michelangelo they were the complete epitome of the whole” (*Hallock The Genesis* 554).\(^6^5\) In sum, poetizing was also an intellectual exercise for Michelangelo – as Berni’s contemporary assessment implied, and as Calero noted in 1945: “Michelangelo non cerca la *parola* ma la *cosa* […] Non domanda l’interesse del suo canto all’elaborazione della forma, ma all’importanza del concetto che esprime” (20).

One may reasonably conclude that Michelangelo’s poetry is amenable to treatment as both personal expression and as an intellectual and literary exercise, respectively; but neither approach can be applied to all the poems. Any truly critical analysis of Michelangelo’s poetry

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\(^6^4\) “Before quarrying his text for an acceptable final shape, Michelangelo has to let it grow in several directions; the solution is far from predictable, and if the analogy to his sculptural procedure often induces us to use a sculptural metaphor for his diachronical method in writing, perhaps in cases like the present one a vegetal metaphor might be more to the point. The text has to grow and branch out before it can be pruned” (139).

\(^6^5\) Hallock successfully argues that Michelangelo’s ultimate purpose in composing many of his poems could not have been the communication of an autobiographical event: “If the revelation of a specific situation were his primary concern, the content of the variants of a poem would remain unchanged. Instead, we have seen their content altered to such an extent that the definitive composition has virtually nothing in common with the original draft, other than the poetic nucleus – which remains intact. To uphold this lone poetic keystone he unhesitatingly bends not only the elements of form and content in structuring the formal arch of his verse, but those of logic as well” (*The Genesis* 561).
must employ both approaches at different times, now seeing honesty and emotional expression, now rhetoric and conceptual development. Few scholars who have studied Michelangelo’s verse from the perspective of his poetics have systematically approached Michelangelo’s spiritual or religious poems in this way, considering the variant of each poem examined when analyzing it for reasons other than to explore the formal aspects of his poetry. Whether Michelangelo composed spontaneously, for the sake of personal expression, or alternately, to make people think, as Bosco asserted (“per far meditare i [suoi] lettori,” 78), must be decided for each poem on an individual basis.

1.8 Michelangelo and the Mystical

In their study on the melancholic temperament of artists throughout history, Rudolf and Margot Wittkower observed that Michelangelo’s personality had been qualified in almost every way imaginable:

> There cannot be many adjectives that have not, at one time or another, been used to characterize his personality. He has been called avaricious and generous; superhuman and puerile; modest and vain; violent, suspicious, jealous, misanthropic, extravagant, tormented, bizarre, and terrible; and this list is far from being complete. (72)

One of the adjectives that belongs on their list is “mystical.”

Section 1.3.2 discussed Chiari’s study and the classification of Michelangelo as a religious writer. In that section, the topic of mysticism was touched upon with Bosco’s assertion that Michelangelo’s poetry resembles that of the seventeenth-century mystics. The purpose of this current section is to present the character of scholarship focusing on the “mystical” and Michelangelo’s poetry, while highlighting the most seminal publications on the topic. The epithet “mystical” has been applied both to Michelangelo and to his poetry by those who have focused on individual compositions, as well as on the collection as a whole from a chronological perspective. The adjective “mystical” has been used to qualify both the poetry and the man. The term “mystical” will be defined over the course of the present discussion.

Giovanni Amendola (1920), in an interpretation typical of Romantic/Decadent criticism, described Michelangelo as a mystical mendicant:

> è l’uomo ch’è in lotta contro il mondo (il mondo stesso, non i suoi mali) si volge a Dio. Si volge a Dio per reaﬁermare, negativamente, il proprio inappagamento della realtà limitata – per mendicare la liberazione. L’uomo chiede la libertà – la sua voce non ha più l’accento della battaglia, ma quello della preghiera. In Michelangelo questa preghiera
esprime un infinito bisogno – un’appassionata e sempre rinnovata invocazione di libertà, che passa attraverso tutti i gradi della tristezza e dell’emozione, e risveglia la voce umana in tutti i cuori. Egli è un divino mendico; un mendico che non chiede questa o quella cosa, ma solo ciò che non è mondo. Il suo bisogno di Dio è assiduo e indimenticabile come un bisogno di pane. (14)

Notwithstanding the “psicologismo-biografismo-diarismo” of his approach and the florid language in which it is couched, Amendola’s observation that, in his poems, Michelangelo prays to God with lyrical intensity is keenly accurate. It is an interpretation that recurs in subsequent scholarship, including Clements’s key study dedicated to the question of Michelangelo as a baroque poet and mystic. Amendola’s work influenced Ininga, Rizzi and Calero, all of whom treat Michelangelo’s poetry as a diary, with Calero having treated it as a spiritual one.

Michelangelo has been described as “mystical” in nature for the intensity of his powerful longing for union with the Divine and/or for a direct relationship to Christ as this is expressed and felt in his poetry; his verses have been described as “mystical” for: 1) the poet’s attempts to rise to God (longing for divine union); 2) the poet’s direct addresses to Christ (desire for/evidence of personal relationship); and 3) the poet’s anguished descriptions of failed attempts at ascent to divine union, and his effusive appeals for assistance in his pursuit of divine grace and presence. Scholars who discuss mysticism and Michelangelo have historically focused on one of more of these characteristics of the spiritual compositions in the *Rime*. Some have focused on the “mystical” traits of the poetry and/or the man in a general way, others have drawn parallels between Michelangelo and/or his poetry and specific varieties of mysticism.

Nesca Robb (1935) dedicated an entire chapter to Michelangelo’s poetry in her pioneering book on Neoplatonism in the Renaissance. Robb perceived much sincerity in Michelangelo’s verse. She believed (as did Panofsky and DeTolnay) that Michelangelo’s use of Neoplatonic elements rested upon an authentic psychological affinity between the philosophy and the poet. For Robb, as for Amendola before her, this affinity is attributable to Michelangelo’s mystical nature: “When one considers his art and his life one finds them dominated by two forces, the instinct of creation and the instinct of flight, opposing yet complementary phrases of a single overwhelming instinct of worship. It was the conflict between the mystic and the artist” (242). Without noting the prayer-like quality of

66 Itala Rutter has called this intensity of Michelangelo’s verse its “dramatic modality”: “the dramatic modality that characterizes Michelangelo’s *Rime* has been variously attributed to the fact that he was a precursor to the baroque, that he was a poet of the Counter-Reformation, prey to its turbulent fervors and doubts, that his was a mystical nature nurtured by Savonarola’s and Vittoria Colonna’s zeal” (“Michelangelo’s *Rime*: Form and Meaning,” p. 160).
Michelangelo’s verse as Amendola did, Robb nevertheless compares the poet to a mystic for the quality and intensity of ecstasy he experiences in pursuing the Beautiful, which, in Christian Neoplatonism, is God:

His religious fervour is as much a part of the visionary quality of his mind as any image that he fixed on stone or canvas. No man could ever have said with more truth: ‘My body and soul crieth out, yea for the living God.’ [...] His desire to flee the world was no empty formula; it was a crying reality [...] Love ... un concetto di bellezza. Immaginata o vista dentro al core, really produced in him some such dilation of the soul as a religious mystic feels in an act of prayer, and this ecstasy always far exceeded in perfection either whatever visible object first called it into being or any attempt to embody it in art. (243-244)

The only study dedicated almost exclusively to the exploration of Michelangelo as a mystic was written by Robert J. Clements (1961): “Michelangelo as a Baroque Poet.” Though brief, it is well known and it appears in countless publications of, and on, Michelangelo’s poetry. In fact, after having stated that Michelangelo’s poetry is similar to that of the seventeenth-century mystics, Umberto Bosco mentioned Clements’ study: “strano sembrerebbe avvicinare a questo i mistici cattolici del Seicento; eppure il Clements l’ha fatto persuasivamente” (6). In his article, Clements qualifies Michelangelo’s poetry as baroque, mystical and Counter-Reformational:

Michelangelo’s verse is baroque because it is Counter-Reformational, because it is mystical and confessional, because it is riddled with doubt, contradiction, and desengaño, and lastly, because it utilises modes of expression now generally conceded to be typical of this religious and aesthetic movement. (183)

Clements, more specific than some earlier critics, explicitly links Michelangelo’s spiritual compositions to the historical context of reform in Italy (“Counter-Reformation”), and to the corresponding literary period (“baroque”). Many scholars writing after Clements explore the connection between Michelangelo’s mystical verse and the context of the Catholic Reformation in Italy. Clements’ does not credit the historical period alone for the mystical character of

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67 The content of this article, as well as that of another related article, “Prayer and Confession in Michelangelo’s Poetry,” is repeated in two of Clements’s books: The Poetry of Michelangelo (ch. 3, “Michelangelo as a Baroque Poet,” pp. 38-59; ch. 9, “Physical and Moral Self-Portrait,” subsection “Spiritual self-portraiture,” pp. 179-183; ch. 11, “Poetry as Prayer and Confession,” pp. 221-227), and Michelangelo: A Self-Portrait (includes a section – part II of VII – on Religion and Philosophy, that is divided into three subsections, the first of which lists literary and epistolary evidence of Michelangelo as a Christian and a mystic).

68 A noteworthy exception is Silvia Fabrizio-Costa’s recent article “L’agonie et l’extase: Michel-Ange et la lutte du corps” (2005). In attempting to discover what Michelangelo could have been thinking during the time that he composed his verses – an exercise that Eugenio Garin’s scholarship encouraged her to undertake – Fabrizio-Costa noticed “happenings, images, and situations” in Michelangelo’s poetry that seemed to point to mysticism, which she defined as “an immediate, personal and direct rapport with a reality that is beyond man and the world, that is,
Michelangelo’s verse, which he ascribes to “the intensely mystical nature of the man, particularly as he aged” (183). For Clements, Michelangelo was a mystic: “He is a mystic in longing for God, in appealing for release from the bonds of physical existence through prayer, in fearing the double death and in expressing ‘the unstable, tentative, contradictory nature of life” (188). As evidence, Clements cites three prayers (austensibly) written by Michelangelo, as well as the poet’s use of verse as a medium of confession, his later close relationship with Christ, and his knowledge of Valdés through Colonna. He mentions figures such as Saint Theresa, Richard Crashaw, and Robert Southwell, but the comparisons are general rather than specific, likely because, as he stated in The Poetry of Michelangelo, “it is a more challenging task to establish the baroque character of his outpourings of sonnets, madrigals, canzone, stanze, and fragments” (39).

Robert J. Clements was the external examiner of an unpublished doctoral thesis on the Rime (Mario Acacia, 1973) that included a presentation of Michelangelo as a Christian mystic poet whose ultimate goal in life was “the complete realization of the mystical union with his Master” (11). Noting that Michelangelo “read and admired the poems of many authors,” Acacia demonstrates “that he was especially drawn to those writers whose poetry was essentially spiritual in content” (51). Acacia’s thesis included a persuasive mini-study (pp. 51-71) in which he compared Savonarola’s and Michelangelo’s poetry to reveal the “underlying mystical aspiration in Michelangelo which made him often look unconsciously toward the Deity, just as plants tend to turn toward the light” (51).

In his article entitled “The Religious Poetry of Michelangelo: The Mystical Sublimation,” Konrad Eisenbichler (1987) traces in Michelangelo’s verse the poet’s love history from his allegedly carnal attraction to Febo del Poggio and Gherardo Perini through the Platonic love for Tommaso de’ Cavalieri to the spiritual love for Vittoria Colonna, and then for Christ. He reveals that for Michelangelo, Neoplatonic and Savonarolan ideas ultimately became “imbued with a strong element of religious mysticism and fervour” (125). Eisenbichler demonstrates that, through poetry, Michelangelo “develops a direct, private and intense relationship with the Divine Person, a relationship which is the basic element of mysticism [for] the intimacy of the relationship is seen in terms of a mystical marriage: Christ is the groom.

with that which is ‘divine’” (12, 14) [translation mine]. Fabrizio-Costa stops short of labeling the poet a “mystical writer,” yet in the same sentence she highlights the essential identity between the nature of Michelangelo’s spiritual verses and those of St. John of the Cross, whose “dark night” she parallels to Michelangelo’s sonnet of the night, thus echoing much of the earlier scholarship examined in this chapter (27).
Michelangelo is the bride” (130). He concludes that “the rapture which Michelangelo could not experience through earthly loves is thus found in the mystical sublimation of earthly passions and the ensuing faith in the saving embrace of the Beloved” (133). This article stands alongside Clement’s publication in being the most complete and well received scholarly works on the topic. An earlier publication by Ann Hayes Hallock (1978) also charted the evolution of Michelangelo’s poetry in light of his relationships with Colonna, Cavalieri and Christ in terms of what she identifies as its central “concetto,” a “life-death nexus” that is elaborated throughout the Rime. Without labeling Michelangelo as a mystic, she nevertheless depicts the spiritualizing of the poet via his relationship with Vittoria Colonna.

Perhaps one of the most insightful and comprehensive studies of Michelangelo’s mystical verse is Fausto Bongioanni’s 1935 study entitled “Sul travaglio religioso di Michelangelo.” Bongioanni’s writing style, together with his absolute faith in the honesty of Michelangelo’s lyrical expression, places him firmly among the Romantic/Decadent scholars:

Michelangelo ha inteso l’esperienza religiosa Cristiana nel suo aspetto piú tragico, che forse è il piú genuino. Nel suo tormento religioso – che non è un modo qualunque di ‘fare della letteratura’ (un Michelangelo che “faccia della letteratura” è inconcepibile) – si può ravvisare quell’erica grandezza, quell’esigenza del sublime, che, a giudizio d’un altro Italiano smanioso di cose grandi, l’Alfieri, distingue la dignità morale dei santi del cristianesimo, vissuti per superare entusiasticamente i limiti terreni della vita (273).

Yet, the strength of Bongioanni’s study is the manner in which he discusses Michelangelo while clarifying the religious context of the Cinquecento. Recalling that Michelangelo’s time was among the most mystical ones (“I santi, tra i piú accesi di zelo mistico e di saldezza spirituale, che mai ebbe la Chiesa, fiorirono massimamente nel secolo di Michelangelo,” 275), Bongioanni situates Michelangelo’s verse in historical context. Bongioanni successfully argues that Michelangelo’s Rime constitute a mystical conversion story, from Neoplatonism to death:

Michelangelo è autenticamente cristiano, ed i suoi tentativi poetici, riportati a questo processo, prendono il significato di una storia d’una conversione. Per raggiungere una contemplazione della Morte nudamente e schiattamente cristiana, Michelangelo si deve liberare della neoplatonica e gentilesca contemplazione della Bellezza. (278)

Bongioanni is one of the first scholars to cite specific sources of the religious dimension of Michelangelo’s verse (as opposed to the generalities casually mentioned by others: “Savonarolan influence,” “biblical reference,” etc.). Furthermore, he lists them in pairs,

69 Michelangelo The Poet: The Man Behind the Myth, pp. 229-382.
70 Michelangelo The Poet, pp. 292-309.
according to the antithetical strains of thought that are juxtaposed in Michelangelo’s poetry: “i Piagnoni e Marsilio Ficino; la Bibbia e Platone; il Dio d’Abramo e quello del Quarto Evangelo; il cristianesimo paolino ed agostiniano, e quello umanista” (278). Pauline, Augustinian, and humanist – Italian Evangelism of the Catholic Reformation was, in essence, a fusion of all three. Between Michelangelo’s verse and Pauline and Augustinian mysticisms, on the one hand, and his poetry and Evangelism, on the other, there is much to discover and to relate. This dissertation will consider Pauline and Augustinian mystical varieties as they figured in Italian Evangelism and as they appear in Michelangelo’s spiritual poetry.

Scholarly interest in Michelangelo and mysticism has not abated since Amendola’s 1920 publication. “Michelangelo: poeta e artista,” a conference held at the Istituto Italiano di Cultura in Paris, France in 2005, attests to this: multiple presentations delivered at the conference (and subsequently published) address the role of grace in Michelangelo’s poetry, and one discusses mysticism and Michelangelo outright.71 Not all analyses of Michelangelo and mysticism, however, mention or investigate the poet’s connection to Italian Evangelism. Conversely, not all studies on Michelangelo and the Catholic Reform have discussed “mysticism” per se. The focus of many investigations on Michelangelo and the Catholic Reform is the question of the artist’s religious beliefs and his relationship to philo-Protestant ideas, such as the efficacy of Christ’s blood and justification through grace by faith alone. In addition to participating in theological discussions, however, Italian Evangelicals engaged in devotional activities such as meditation on the Crucifixion and on Christ’s blood, and so to the extent that scholars have looked for evidence of philo-Protestant ideas in Michelangelo’s later spiritual verse, so too have they touched upon the matter of his “mysticism” and/or of the “mystical” in his verses, even if the word “mystical” itself does not appear in the text of these studies.72

71 On grace, see Matteo Residori’s discussion of Michelangelo’s sonnets of the nights in “E a me consegnaro il tempo bruno’ Michelangelo e la notte” and Carlo Ossola’s discussion of the Holy Spirit and conversion in connection to the sonnets of the night, as well as the dynamics of love and grace in Michelangelo’s poetry to Vittoria Colonna in “La poésie de Michel-Ange: l’idée de la grâce.” On mysticism, see Silvia Fabrizio-Costa’s “L’agonie et l’extase: Michle-Ange et la lutte du corps.” All three articles are published in Michelangelo: poeta e artista. Eds. Paolo Grossi e Matteo Residori: Residori, pp. 103-124; Ossola, pp. 125-154 ; Fabrizio-Costa, pp. 11-40. They will be addressed in greater detail in chapter two of this dissertation.

72 Mirela Saim’s “Éléments pour une typologie textuelle dans les sonnets religieux de Michel-Ange” is a case in point. In her analysis of the rhetorical “microstructures” of Michelangelo’s religious poetry with respect to the situational “macrostructures” of the Council of Trent (18), Saim identifies in the Rime religious poems aimed at securing salvation through divine grace (18) and expressing the desire to “establish and pursue the dialogue between man and God” (27) without raising the topic of mysticism specifically [translations mine].
At some point in each of these earlier studies, Michelangelo’s connection to either the Catholic Reform in Italy or to Vittoria Colonna is addressed. Firstly, because fervent prayer and the personal development of an intimate relationship with Christ were typical of Catholic Reform devotion and they became features of Michelangelo’s poetry composed during the same time period. Secondly, as we have also seen in the studies mentioned in this section, because the poetry Michelangelo composed over the course of his friendship with the Italian Evangelical, Vittoria Colonna, seems to reflect a deep and abiding spiritual change within the artist.

Michelangelo’s mystical poetry is indissociable from the social and cultural climate of Italy leading to and through the Catholic Reformation. The true meaning of his verse comes to light only when considered in connection to the devotional practices and not just to the ideas of Italian Evangelism. Pauline, Augustinian and platonic in nature, Italian Evangelism provides a perfect framework for a more nuanced understanding of Michelangelo’s “mystical” poetry. For this reason, chapter two of this dissertation is devoted entirely to the topic of Michelangelo and the Catholic Reformation in Italy.

In attempting to discover what Michelangelo could have been thinking during the time that he composed his verses – an exercise that Eugenio Garin’s scholarship encouraged her to undertake – Fabrizio-Costa noticed “happenings, images, and situations” in Michelangelo’s poetry that seemed to point to mysticism, which she defined as “an immediate, personal and direct rapport with a reality that is beyond man and the world, that is, with that which is ‘divine’” (12, 14) [translation mine]. Fabrizio-Costa stops short of labeling the poet a “mystical writer,” yet in the same sentence she highlights the essential identity between the nature of Michelangelo’s spiritual verses and those of St. John of the Cross, whose “dark night” she parallels to Michelangelo’s sonnet of the night, thus echoing much of the earlier scholarship examined in this chapter (27). The present dissertation will take as its definition of mysticism “a direct and unmediated experience of divine presence” that may be additionally understood as “a direct and personal relationship with the divine” – a definition similar to that of Fabrizio-Costa, but one that places greater emphasis on the subjective human experience of the divine presence that characterizes a mystical individual’s rapport with reality. Michelangelo’s religious and spiritual verses that render a yearning or request for a direct experience of the divine will be considered mystical, as will his poems that directly address Christ or that describe a direct experience of the divine.
1.8 Conclusion

Michelangelo is a religious writer whose spiritual poetry has frequently been termed “mystical” along with its author. During the period of Italian literary criticism up to the 1960s, there was a tendency to cull Michelangelo’s verses for evidence of the poet’s psychological constitution, evolution and religiosity. With the publication of Enzo Noè Girardi’s critical edition of the *Rime* in 1960, together with Girardi’s studies of Michelangelo’s lyric production aimed at affirming Michelangelo as a real poet, and not just a dilettante versifier, there has been an increasing push for greater objectivity and historicity in studies of his verse. Studies from the 1960s onward no longer treat Michelangelo’s poetry as a psychological or spiritual diary, yet analyses of his verse continue to discuss mysticism.

It is time for Michelangelo’s mystical verses to be studied as historical artefacts in cultural context by means of proper historicization based on the newest understanding of the Catholic Reformation, and with scrupulous attention to the critical apparatus of his *Rime*. It is not the intention of this study to suggest that Michelangelo was a mystic. The goal is rather to examine his “mystical” compositions in light of Italian Evangelism of the Catholic Reform and the Italian *lauda* tradition to suggest that his mystical verses and the process of composing them – regardless of how intellectual and technical the act of writing may or may not have been – served a devotional function for the poet, with the creation of mystical verses constituting a spiritual exercise and the poetry an accessory to grace: an effective medium of meditation, oration, and transformation for Michelangelo in his quest for salvation.
Chapter 2
Michelangelo, the ‘Spirituali,’ and Italian Evangelism

2.1 Introduction
In the past thirty years, critical interest in Michelangelo’s experience of Catholic reform in Italy and his relation to the currents of thought and theology it comprised has grown steadily. One reason for this is that in the 1980s the archives of the Holy Office were opened to scholars who discovered a file containing letters exchanged among members of reform-minded intellectuals of the 1540s; together with trial records from the Inquisition, these documents have since generated a broad range of investigation and re-consideration of the activities and significance of reform-minded Catholic circles in Italy.¹ Two noteworthy publications emerged from this venture into the archives: Sergio Pagano and Concetta Ranieri’s Nuovi documenti su Vittoria Colonna e Reginald Pole (1989), and Massimo Firpo and Dario Marcatto’s Il processo inquisitoriale del cardinale Giovanni Morone (1981-1989), a critical edition of the trial. The impact of this pioneering research has been no less than revolutionary.

Coincident with this archival research, in the field of art history the question of Michelangelo’s Nicodemism became a new focus of investigation. In 1989, two articles examined Michelangelo’s self-portrait in the Nicodemus figure of the Florentine Pietà, which he had designed for his own tomb, a summative life-statement.² The 1990s saw two more important studies on the topic of Michelangelo and reform thought: Emidio Campi’s Michelangelo e Vittoria Colonna: un dialogo artistico-teologico ispirato da Bernardino Ochino (1994) and Alexander Nagel’s “Gifts for Michelangelo and Vittoria Colonna” (1997). Campi examined the Crocifisso and the Pietà – two drawings the poet prepared for Vittoria Colonna that surviving fragments of their vigorous epistolary exchange illuminates – in light of

Valdesian thought as this was popularized by the famous Capuchin preacher Bernardino Ochino and as it was expressed in the poetry of Michelangelo (G285, G289, G290, and G298). Nagel examined gift exchange in light of the presentation drawings Michelangelo prepared for Colonna and their discussion of gift-giving and repayment in terms of the concept of justification by grace through faith (a thesis that he later re-proposed and expanded in *Michelangelo and the Reform of Art*, 2000, pp. 169-187).

The *Last Judgement*, on which Michelangelo laboured from 1536 to 1541, has often been discussed in relation to reform in Italy, originally because his nudes constituted a transgressive affront to Tridentine pudor, but more recently because of the fresco’s theological ambiguity. In the past two decades, many other of Michelangelo’s works have been re-visited in light of the artist’s theologically innovative iconography and the verisimilar inspiration of these rich and hermetic artistic creations in the debates and dialogues of Catholic reform in Italy, in general, and on the topic of justification by grace through faith, in particular. Michelangelo’s connection to reform circles in Italy through his relationship with the poet and noblewoman Vittoria Colonna forms the context of these analyses. Una Roman D’Elia explored Michelangelo’s drawings for Vittoria Colonna in light of poetry by Michelangelo, Vittoria Colonna and their circle in “Drawing Christ’s Blood: Michelangelo, Vittoria Colonna, and the Aesthetics of Reform” (2006). Antonio Forcellino (2001, 2002) and Maria Forcellino (2008, 2009) have illuminated the Evangelical iconography of the tomb of Julius II in their respective analyses of the statue of Active Life that are grounded in the circumstances of Ercole Gonzaga’s patronage of the work. With these publications, what were once intuitions and hypotheses about the heterodox nature of Michelangelo’s later artistic creations are quickly becoming theses supported by historically precise argumentation. Since Emidio Campi’s book on Michelangelo and Vittoria Colonna (1994), analyses of Michelangelo’s poetry in light of new interpretations of his works and the new understanding proffered by archival research are growing in number.

Critical attention is slowly turning to Michelangelo’s poetry, too. In 1993, Joseph Francese published a short article suggesting that Michelangelo’s Nicodemism was evident in

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3 Chapter four of the present dissertation features a detailed description of the *Last Judgement* in light of Catholic Reform in Italy.

his sonnets on the night (“Il ‘nicodemismo’ di Michelangelo nei ‘sonetti sulla notte.’”). More recently, this series of sonnets (G101-104) on the night have come into focus in analyses of Michelangelo’s poetry as mystical, and/or in relation to the Catholic Reform in Italy. It is becoming a commonplace to refer to the famous treatise of the Spirituali, the Beneficio di Cristo, in discussions of Michelangelo’s later mystical verse. Most recently, Ambra Moroncini examined Michelangelo’s presentation drawings for Vittoria Colonna as well as his poetry (G159, G160, G66, G280, G289, G161, G162 and G283) and the related letters exchanged between Michelangelo and Vittoria in light of Italian Evangelism; she highlights the Christocentrism of his poetic compositions and she reaffirms earlier observations on how the gratuitous nature of grace is exemplified and emphasized in the exchange of gifts between the two friends. It has thus become clear that a more thorough and comprehensive analysis of Michelangelo’s poetry in light of this new research and in close consultation with the text of the Beneficio di Cristo itself is in order.

It has long been observed that Vittoria Colonna had a transformative effect on Michelangelo and that in his poetry dedicated to her she is described as a divine instrument of his metamorphosis and conversion. Interpretations of the philosophical or theological paradigms at work in these later spiritual poems have yielded powerful insights, but the discussions have necessarily been abstract. The dynamics between the spiritualized lover and beloved characteristic of Michelangelo’s poetry from the time he was introduced to Colonna forward replicate patterns of interaction between Italian Evangelicals themselves in light of their new and evolving “theological concept of the individual and of the work of Christ,” but also of the Holy Spirit, whom they believed operated within their circle and through its members. Until this information came to light, there was no means of grounding abstract discussions of the philosophical and/or theological images and processes in Michelangelo’s verse to a precise socio-cultural phenomenon, because it was not yet known. In Michelangelo’s poetry inspired by or dedicated to Vittoria Colonna, one discerns two major patterns: a series of theologically endowed Neoplatonic lyrics that juxtapose love and artistic creation; and poems alluding to

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5 Francesce is not the first to speculate on this topic. Francesco Gandolfo does the same in Il ‘dolce tempo’: mistica, ermetismo e sogno nel ’500, 1978 (pp. 119-122).
7 Carlo Ossola quotes two passages on grace from the Beneficio in his analysis of grace in Michelangelo’s poetry (“La poésie de Michel-Ange,” pp. 143-145).
8 “I disegni di Michelangetlo per Vittoria Colonna e la poesia del Beneficio di Cristo” (2009).
9 Emidio Campi, Michelangelo and Vittoria Colonna, p. 77.
that are further illuminated when considered in light of the intertextual echoes of Dante’s
Commedia that they contain. This chapter will demonstrate that these two poetic varieties –
lyrics containing theological Neoplatonism, on the one hand, and Dantian allusions, on the other
– collectively illustrate two views of salvation that coincide in expressions of Italian
Evangelism, such as the Beneficio di Cristo. Michelangelo’s late spiritual poetry will thus be re-
read and further restored to its specific cultural historical context within Italy of the Catholic
Reform.

2.2 The ‘Spirituali’ and Catholic Reform in Italy

In her presentation of the Spirituali in Giulia Gonzaga and the Religious Controversies of
Sixteenth-Century Italy, Camilla Russell stated that one of the challenges of studying the
Spirituali is that they span the Renaissance, the Reformation, and the Counter-Reformation, that
is, “three well-established historiographical categories delineating not only specific time frames,
but discrete cultural, political, and religious periods as well” (44). Admittedly, defining these
Catholic reform-minded intellectuals presents a considerable challenge to anyone attempting to
speak of them, as the title of Thomas F. Mayer’s recent article attests: “What to Call the
Spirituali?” (2007).10 Our understanding of who they were – whether they are best understood
as a group, a network, a conventicle, a Church, a movement, a menacing political force or all of
the above – has evolved through various stages and in different directions over the past fifty
years.11 For all that has been persuasively written on them as interpreted through these varied
prisms, their nature remains elusive; in Elizabeth Gleason’s words, “they defy neat
categorization” (81).12 It is in fact Gleason who provides the most concise definition of the
Spirituali as: “a group of Italian reform-minded Catholics […] includ[ing] cardinals, high
prelates, noblewomen, artists, scholars, writers and poets […] who despite their diversity were
united by their Christocentric piety, deeply personal religion based on the reading and study of
the Scriptures (especially the Pauline epistles), adherence to the doctrine of justification by faith,
and a irenic attitude toward Protestants” (81).

10 Thomas Mayer’s discussion of Cardinal Reginald Pole and the Spirituali constitutes the third chapter of Reginald
Pole: Prince & Prophet, 2000; the chapter bears an interrogative title: “The Church of Viterbo?”
11 For an overview of the salient early scholarship, see Gleason, “On the Nature of Sixteenth-Century Italian
Evangelism: Scholarship, 1953-1978.”
12 “On the Nature of Sixteenth-Century Italian Evangelism: Scholarship, 1953-1978.” All page references to
Gleason in this section refer to this article. For a more recent evaluation, see: Thomas Mayer, “What to Call the
Spirituali?” (2007).
Eva-Maria Jung’s article “On the Nature of Evangelism in Sixteenth-Century Italy” (1953) is an important text on the history of the Italian Reformation. Most subsequent discussions of Italian Evangelism and the *Spirituali* use Jung’s definition as a point of departure and the present dissertation is no exception. Jung defined “Evangelism”\(^{13}\) as “the last Catholic Reform movement before the Council of Trent and the first ecumenical movement after the Reformation,” but the word “movement” is admittedly deceiving, as it implies a more formal organization than actually existed (515). Jung identified the “three essential characteristics” of Evangelism as its undogmatic, aristocratic and transitory nature (521). It was undogmatic, she argues, because it “did not draw from [certain] premises the conclusions which led Protestantism to overthrow the entire ecclesiastical structure and social order and to change the whole concept of God, Church and Man” (520-521). It was aristocratic because it “lacked all revolutionary character” (524). In Jung’s assessment, Evangelism was “an exclusive religion for the aristocratic élite” (524). Evangelism was “aristocratic not in the sense that all its adherents belonged to the aristocracy by birth, but that they became aristocrats in spirit by virtue of their higher education, refined manners, leading positions, and aristocratic connections” (524). This paradigm persisted relatively unchallenged for several decades, with criticism emerging only in the late 1970s. Recent studies indicate that key members of the *Spirituali* likely possessed a political agenda and, as Gleason has noted, that church reform was of interest to Christians of all classes (81).

Jung’s observation that Evangelism represents a “shift of emphasis” with respect to Catholicism, however, still stands. For reform-minded individuals, “the stress was no longer on good works, but on divine grace; not on law, but on faith; not on the Church, but on Christ” (522). The *Spirituali* were heavily influenced by the teachings of the Spanish *alumbrado* Juan de Valdés, who resided in Naples from the 1530s until his death in 1541 and whose circle was reconstituted in Viterbo as a smaller and more recondite community in 1542 around the figure of Cardinal Reginald Pole, who came to replace Gasparo Contarini as the leading figure of the group. In the early 1540s, with the flight of Bernardino Ochino (1541), Contarini’s death (1542), and the inauguration of the Council of Trent (1545), a form of religious dissimulation termed Nicodemism and characterized by the pursuit of a personal mystical relationship with Christ became a widespread phenomenon in which reform-minded Christians who chose not to flee

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\(^{13}\) A good and summative history of this term and its use with respect to Italian sixteenth-century religious history appears in Anne-Jacobson Schutte’s “The Lettere Volgari and the Crisis of Evangelism in Italy” (1975), pp. 641-650.
Italy opted to conform publically to Catholicism and its institutions while privately adhering to philo-Protestant beliefs and devotional practices.\(^\text{14}\) It is also at this time that the ideas of the Spirituali found a more public expression in an Evangelical tract known as *Trattato utilissimo del Beneficio di Giesù Cristo crocifisso verso i Cristiani*\(^\text{15}\) – the creed of the Spirituali.\(^\text{16}\)

The Spirituali shared neither statutes nor a constitution and thus the group was not a formal organization, but a loose network:

Both Contarini and Pole were at the center of a considerable network of friends whose attitude toward religion was similar [but not the same]. Outstanding among them were cardinals Gregorio Cortese and Ercole Gonzaga (regent of Mantua), bishops Gianmatteo Giberti of Verona and Pier Paolo Vergerio of Capodistria, the poets Marcantonio Flaminio and Vittoria Colonna, and her friend Michelangelo, the great preacher and vicar-general of the Capuchin friars, Bernardino Ochino, the Lateran canon Pietro Martire Vermigli, and the Spaniard Juan de Valdés, influential writer and teacher of Spirituality.\(^\text{17}\)

They formed a rather ephemeral or intangible community, based on the exchange of letters, and other documents, meeting in person only occasionally and seemingly a few at a time, though there is strong evidence to suggest that they participated in the composition and delivery of lay sermons.\(^\text{18}\) The beliefs that they shared and the practices this engendered are most often characterised as an attitude – a “sentiment” (Adriano Prosperi) or a “cast of mind” (Barry Collett) – not a doctrine. Expressions of belief were highly personal and idiosyncratic, rather than homogeneous. Religious curiosity, questing, and, to a certain degree, experimentalism, seem valid and verisimilar descriptors for Italian Evangelism and the principal traits of its exponents.

The common belief in justification through faith alone was threat enough to the Church that reform-minded intellectuals took consistent and concerted pains to destroy evidence of their communications as well as to veil them. From the 1550s onwards, for example, some used

\(^{14}\) The neologism “Nicodemism” was coined by John Calvin in reference to the figure of Nicodemus, a Pharisee who went to see Christ under the cover of darkness (John 3:1). For more on this topic, see: Schutte, “The Lettere Volgari,” p. 641, note 3.

\(^{15}\) Valdés’s ideas are not the only ones in the *Beneficio di Cristo*, a theologically and philosophically rich text that will be treated in greater detail in a subsequent section of this chapter.


\(^{18}\) See: Simoncelli, *Evangelismo italiano del Cinquecento*, pp. 218-221.
ciphers to represent highly charged or laden words though attempts at hermetic communication becomes apparent in their writings as early as 1540. As a community, the Spirituali sought not only to keep each other informed of religious and political developments of relevance, but to provide updates on each other’s well-being and whereabouts. Ample evidence of the kind of epistolarly exchange characteristic of the Spirituali is provided by Camilla Russell in her study of the 228 extant letters exchanged between Giulia Gonzaga and Pietro Carnesecchi (Valdés’s key disciples who were primarily responsible for the circulation of his works in the 1540s). Based on her close reading of over a thousand pages of epistolarly exchange, Russell explains how documents from one or more correspondents might be included in letters exchanged between other Spirituali: Just as deliveries of mail between Giulia Gonzaga and Pietro Carnesecchi included more than one letter for different recipients, so did their letters often contain several additional documents that were intended to be read in conjunction with the main letter. These documents, which often pertained to their religious views or networks in some way, consisted of separate sheets of information, extracts or previous letters, or extracts of others’ letters [...] Some letters included extracts of other correspondence by their friends. (148-149)  

Constance Furey analyzes the exchange of religious letters among reform-minded intellectuals in Erasmus, Contarini and The Religious Republic of Letters. Her study centres heavily upon three key figures of the Spirituali: Gasparo Contarini, Reginald Pole and Vittoria Colonna. In her analysis, Furey emphasizes that “the popularity of friendship among reform-minded Catholics is well-known but not fully analyzed” (4). Drawing on Alan Bray’s work in The Friend, Furey affirms that friendships were “public, religious relationships” (5). Focusing on “how people subjectively experience the relationships they create,” Furey argues that “Catholic intellectuals sought out friendships with one another in order to demarcate a realm of spiritual meaning – a new kind of religious community bound together by affective relationships and shared interests in spiritualized scholarship” (5). In her evaluation, “the difficulties of attaining emotional transformation and illumination through texts lead many to focus on friendship and spiritual advisors,” because “in their lives, the search for meaning was synonymous with the quest for transcendence, the desire for salvation, and the longing for God” (11-12). For Furey, reform-oriented Catholic intellectuals assumed a communal identity with a communal ideal; one of the ways in which they achieved this was through praise: “pious literati used praise to articulate a spiritual ideal” (11).
In effect, Furey concludes that the religious network created by these intellectuals constituted a “virtual community” that was “held together by shared codes of conduct and modes of interaction – civil conversations and rational discourse” (11-12) – to this one must add the exchange of art and poetry. In their quest for “relational self-transformation,” Furey states, “where reading and writing failed, they looked to their relationships with other people to help them achieve the same goal” (117). In short, “relationships became a locus of salvation” (145). Steven Bowd echoes Furey’s work in his recent article “Swarming with Hermits: Religious Friendship in Renaissance Italy, 1490-1540” (2009) where he turns his attention to relationships of Pietro Bembo, Gasparo Contarini, Tommaso Giustiniani and Vincenzo Querini, whom he qualifies as “a group of friends for whom friendship, in its monastic, religious and humanist senses, was important” (13). The letters and writings exchanged among these reform-minded intellectuals bespeak a “struggle to resolve the tension between the individual and the universal, or indeed the ‘external’ and ‘internal’ selves,” a struggle that was “initially couched in the language of ideal friendship and drew heavily on neo-Platonic and Petrarchan ideas or literary forms” (13). For these “hermits,” Bowd argues, “friendship was an effective means of the production of the self” (13). Again echoing Constance Furey’s work, Bowd describes the progressive evolution of this Republic of Letter towards more recondite, spiritual communities: “the intense inner spiritual experience of individuals and groups of friends became associated with mystic women, Erasmians and Valdesian sects” (25).

The *Spirituali*, specifically those comprising the *Ecclesia viterbiensis*, formed a virtual community. They communicated according to certain agreed upon principles of decorum and with the aim of redeeming self and other. In this community, justification through grace by faith was exemplified; words exchanged, in poetry or prose, were (for Colonna at least) thought to secure the salvation of both originator and recipient in a plausibly noetic, metaphysical way. Michelangelo is counted among them.

### 2.3 Michelangelo and the ‘Spirituali’

Michelangelo was likely introduced to the *Spirituali* through his relationship to Vittoria Colonna, noblewoman, poetess, and key figure of the *Ecclesia viterbiensis*, whom he met in 1535 or 1536. In his introduction to Antonio Forcellino’s *Michelangelo Buonarroti: Storia di...*

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21 For a recent detailed publication on Michelangelo and Vittoria Colonna, see: Pina Ragionieri’s *Vittoria Colonna e Michelangelo* (2005). For Michelangelo and the Counter-Reformation, see: Romeo De Maio’s *Michelangelo e la...*
Adriano Prosperi reconsiders Michelangelo’s relations with the Spirituali in light of new information and understanding of the community gleaned largely, but not exclusively, from the trial records of Giovanni Morone and from letters exchanged between various members of the group. What emerges from these documents is the impression of Michelangelo as a hub about which the metaphorical wheel of the Spirituali rotated – a figure whose artistic creations were of high interest to the Reform-minded intellectuals collectively identified as the Spirituali of the Ecclesia viterbiensis.

Prosperi’s research confirms that all members of the Spirituali figured in the registers of the Inquisition except for Michelangelo, a curiosity he attributes to the plausible fact that the popes for whom Michelangelo worked were happy to engage his artistic talents for the lustre such artworks promised for their papacy without questioning his political and religious beliefs: “tra le poche cose che i papi di quel mezzo secolo avevano avuto in comune c’era stata proprio la volontà di servirsi della sua opera, senza chiedergli mai conto delle sue idee politiche o religiose.” Prosperi suggests that Michelangelo lived the question of justification by faith alone, the central problem discussed within the group and in the greater context of the Catholic Reform. As support for this idea he quotes Michelangelo’s poetry and points to the fact that the artist’s drawings of Christ, crucifixions and Pietà were circulated – exchanged and copied – between Pole and Colonna, and between Pole and Ercole Gonzaga (xxvii). For Prosperi,

È una circolazione di immagini e di idee in cui Michelangelo non è solo l’artigiano che esegue quel che vuole il committente, ma è personalmente e profondamente coinvolto nella riflessione sul tema fondamentale della crisi religiosa dell’epoca: la questione della giustificazione, la meditazione sulla Redenzione. Si tratta di rapporti di un circolo dai forti legami di vero e proprio cenacolo spirituale, che si riconobbe nel famoso trattatello Il beneficio di Cristo. (xxviii)
In addition to this “mysticism of Redemption,” Prosperi observes that a “religion of the Spirit” was likewise at work in their relationships:25

Prosperi asserts that for Reginald Pole, Vittoria Colonna acted as a vehicle through which the Holy Spirit spoke. In “‘Intellects Inflamed in Christ’: Women and Spiritualized Scholarship in Renaissance Christianity,” Constance Furey cites letters from contemporaries of Colonna who affirm the poet’s unique and spiritually inspiring way of communicating; Colonna “was able to write and speak in ways that transformed her friends” and she was viewed as “a woman enabled by divine intervention to speak and write about God” (3). “As a patron,” Furey affirms, Colonna was “part of a reciprocal system of spiritual intercession” (4) and she was “a spiritual patron who pointed the way to eternal life” (5). Furey notes how Renaissance dialogues are unique in portraying women “as focal points for discussions about salvific change,” and thus “reveal that intellectual Christians were shifting their attention from the question of how to imitate saints and holy ways of life to an interactive, verbal process of spiritual transformation” [emphasis mine] (11). Vittoria Colonna, and women such as Elisabetta Gonzaga in Baldassare Castiglione’s Il Cortegiano, appear in these texts “as interactive catalysts for spiritual growth” (12). There is good reason to believe that they were.

Though Michelangelo’s connection to the Spirituali extends beyond his relationships with Vittoria Colonna and Cardinal Reginald Pole, whom Vasari notes as friends of Michelangelo in his 1550 biography of the artist, it is plausibly through his connection with Vittoria Colonna that most of the philo-Protestant ideas reached him. Michelangelo’s poetry echoes hers in many respects. Furthermore, she seems to have been a spiritual patron to him in much the same way she is described by other admiring contemporaries. The remainder of the present chapter will thus focus on: 1) the parallels between Michelangelo’s poetry and the ideas contained in the Beneficio in light of how these tenets were incorporated by Vittoria Colonna

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into her own Evangelical poetry; and 2) the concept of “relational self-transformation” and the notion that Michelangelo’s relationships served as “a locus of salvation” for the poet.

In a letter to Cardinal Reginald Pole dated from Viterbo on 15 July 1543, Vittoria Colonna wrote that she sensed in Pole “un ordine di spirito, che solo lo spirito lo sente.” The closer she walked to Christ the more she needed to speak with Pole because he “fa stare l’anima su l’ali, sicura di volare al desiderato nido.” She conversed with the Cardinal at Viterbo “come un intimo amico del sposo, che mi prepara.” Through her relationship with Pole she seems to have experienced the “meraviglioso frutto spirituale” promised by Valdés in his Alphabeta Cristiano to those who confide in spiritual individuals. Furthermore, Colonna, who shared her poetry with friends, ostensibly wrote spiritual sonnets “in the hope that the writing itself [would] change its reader – whether this be the author (who having written might read herself differently) or another reader (who might be transformed by her words about Christ’s broken body.)” Her letters as well as her writings seem to have served an almost dogmatic spiritual function echoing Valdés’ guidance in the Alphabeta Cristiano to seek advice from those who have been illuminated through the light of others that they may illuminate you in turn. Nowhere is this more evident than in the letters exchanged between Vittoria Colonna and Marguerite de Navarre.

In his study on the exchange of letters between Colonna and Marguerite de Navarre, Barry Collett indicated that by the end of the Quattrocento the role of the Holy Spirit in Catholic thought had changed: “The stimulus given by the Council of Florence and Ferrara to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, the recurrent though unsuccessful efforts of head and members of institutional reform, and the Neoplatonist ideas of personal development through ambitious asceticism, all combined to transform the role of Spirit during the later years of the fifteenth

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27 This quotation makes an allusion to the amicus sponsi of John 3:29: “Qui habet sponsam sponsus est amicus autem sponsi qui stat et audit eum gaudio gaudet propter vocem sponsi hoc ergo gaudium meum implementum est” (Biblia sacra vulgata) [emphasis mine]. Michelangelo used the illustrated Italian Malerbi (Malermi) version (Biblia vulgare istoriata, 1490) [see: Edgar Wind], and later, he plausibly consulted the Brucioli (1532) version as well: “Quello che ha la sposa egli è sposo: ma l’amico che sta & vedelo, con gaudio si rallegra per la voce del sposo” (Bibbia Brucioli, 1532). The term was variously used in the medieval Christian tradition in reference to the bishop and the Pope.
29 Reproduced in Firpo, Tra Alumbrados, p.57: “per indirizzarla ‘in un camino secreto’ sul quale intraprendere il suo personale itinerario di conoscenza ed esperienza ‘senza essere veduta dal mondo’, affiancandosi al consiglio di quelle ‘persones spirituali’ che, ‘avendo visto la luce col lume d’altri’, possono poi dar ‘luce ad altri.’”
century” (38). Collett states that, by the 1490s, “the Spirit was held to be a necessary and efficient agent of reform” (43). “During this period [of Reformation],” he affirms, “greater appreciation was shown for St. Basil’s linking the Spirit with the individual and the communal life – both monastic life and society in general – in an effort to sanctify Christians, transforming human nature without denying or destroying it” (44).

In France, by 1524, Collett explains, Marguerite de Navarre and her male spiritual counterpart, Bishop Guillaume Brinçonnet, had elaborated a double doctrine of the Holy Spirit to promote Catholic reform:

One doctrine was that the Spirit brings gifts of an intense individual experience of purgation, illumination, and indwelling fire of love; the other doctrine, in the tradition of St. Basil, saw the Spirit as a strengthening and illuminating guide to community life, giving understanding and strengthening bonds amongst the group – healing the wounds of the group and avoiding further wounds through charity and understanding. (57)

Essentially, like the Benedictine Spirituality based on the Greeks, “the Spirit theology of Brinçonnet and Marguerite […] placed great emphasis on transformation” (86).

Vittoria Colonna similarly emphasizes the role of the Spirit in transformation and renewal in her correspondence. Collett highlights this fact in his analysis of a letter written by Colonna in 1545 in which the poet identifies the primary actions of the Spirit in relation to divine providence: 1) “when the Spirit authenticates and guides the church through history;” 2) when the Spirit “effect[s] the providence of God by creating channels of grace, both in individuals (not necessarily priests) and in networks of personal understanding and intimacy;” and 3) when the Spirit renews human beings to render them more perfect (95-96). A shared belief in this second work of the Spirit seems to have been at the heart of Vittoria Colonna and Michelangelo’s relationship as it is reflected in Michelangelo’s poetry, which strongly parallels, conceptually and linguistically, Colonna’s poetry and the Beneficio (that itself expounds a role of the Spirit in human renewal and improvement).

In her study Vittoria Colonna and the Spiritual Poetics of the Italian Reformation (2008), Abigail Brundin convincingly argues that Vittoria Colonna used her spiritualized Petrarchist poetry as a convenient and underestimated medium for spreading her philo-Protestant religious views, namely those contained in some manner in the Beneficio di Cristo. Colonna prepared special manuscripts of her poetry for both Marguerite de Navarre and Michelangelo, respectively. Brundin’s analysis of these manuscripts and the poetry they contain

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31 See also Brundin’s earlier publication: “Vittoria Colonna and the Poetry of Reform” (2002).
is a fundamental study on the topic. From her analysis of the verses contained in Colonna’s manuscript for Michelangelo it becomes clear that Colonna’s canzoniere for Michelangelo was meant to fulfill a didactic function uniquely tailored to the artist’s personal spiritual concerns. In the poetry she sent to Michelangelo (103 poems), Colonna urges her reader to “don the vestments of Christ with living faith” and to inscribe Christ’s message upon his heart (86). The antithetical Petrarchan images of light and darkness, heat and cold are used to convey her message, which constitutes a more general injunction to engage in an “unwavering focus on the image of Christ as the locus for understanding and salvation” (86). Colonna’s poems are deeply Christological and her poetic rendering of the mystical marriage of the soul to Christ further suggest the Beneficio di Cristo as the inspiration of her compositions (86-87). More specifically, Colonna the poet “longs to raise her own ‘basso intelletto’ high enough to see [Christ], so that she may host him in the sanctuary of her heart” (87). Her poems thus bespeak a pronounced aspiration and yearning for divine union in her present life (87).

2.4 The Beneficio di Cristo

2.4.1 Soteriology and Justification in Italy of the Reformation

In his study on Benedictines in fifteenth-century Italy, 33 Barry Collett details the two types of soteriology, or salvific schemes, present in Quattrocento Italy: 1) the journey to salvation as encompassed in ascent theologies; and, 2) the redemptive justification central to what he terms “theologies of the Cross” (15). Ascent theologies propose a “graded spiritual ascent of man, a scala perfectionis through which men progressed, with the aid of grace, to some kind of ultimate union with God” (15). Soteriological schemes of justification, on the other hand, evidence a “leitmotif” of “restoration rather than ascent”: man is restored to “God’s favour,” and the “divine image” is restored to man “by virtue of Christ’s saving act” (15).

Within the category of ascent theology, Collett delineates three means of transformation: the illuminative (Neoplatonic and contemplative), the ascetic (Christocentric), and the affective (amorous and experiential). The illuminative mode of ascent is conceived as a progression

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32 There have been a number of excellent scholarly contributions on Vittoria Colonna, her writings, and the Italian Reformation. Among them one counts: Dennis McAuliffe’s “Neoplatonism in Vittoria Colonna’s Poetry: From the Secular to the Divine” (1986) and “The Language of Spiritual Renewal in the Poetry of Pre-Tridentine Rome: The Case of Vittoria Colonna as an Advocate for Reform” (1996); Itala Rutter’s “La scrittura di Vittoria Colonna e Margherita di Navarra: resistenza e misticismo” (1991); and, Rinaldina Russell’s “The Mind’s Pursuit of the Divine. A Survey of Secular and Religious Themes in Vittoria Colonna’s Sonnets” (1992) and “L’ultima meditazione di Vittoria Colonna e l’Ecclesia viterbiensis” (2000).

through “successive stages of catharsis and illumination” (15). There are many proponents of this version, including Marsilio Ficino and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. Writers on the illuminative way consist of theologians as well as laymen. The ascetic way, by contrast, aims at the attainment of perfection via “an ascetic self-identification with the humble and suffering Christ” (15). It corresponds to the path espoused in the devotio moderna. The affective way follows “Bernard’s idea of the soul transformed and drawn up the scale of love, beyond encumbrances of the flesh to mystical union with God;” in Italy, Paolo Giustiniani34 was its chief teacher (22-23). The exact role of Christ in these models of ascent is not specified (15). Italian soteriology of the late Quattrocento and early Cinquecento was primarily of the kind “that described salvation in terms of an ascent to a state of perfection – by asceticism, illumination, or affective response” (23). Michelangelo’s middle and later poetry fits squarely in this tradition as a Petrarchan lyric variety evidencing a quasi-affective Ficinian scala perfectionis and comprising a scale of love that aims at mystical communion with God.

In ascent theologies, good works were required for salvation and, as Collett summarized, “man contribute[s] to his own salvation, progressively achieving perfection through his efforts in co-operation with grace, so that failure to achieve certain levels of illumination, asceticism, feeling, or works implied insufficient progress towards perfection;” in effect, “man strives for progress in perfection until he reaches God; whilst the means and strength are given by God, it is man who climbs the scala perfectionis and his progress is measured by the inner experiences and by works that appertain to holiness” (24-25). By contrast, at the heart of Protestant theologies of the Cross there is “a theology which [sees] salvation in terms of justification, and with its denial of the saving value of works” this brand of theology “had a profound effect upon ascent theology in Italy” by “quickly turn[ing] the emphasis of Italian Spirituality away from the questions of ascent and towards the problem of justification” (26).35 Alongside the anti-Protestant and philo-Protestant currents of thought that emerged in Italy at the time, Collett highlights the presence and importance of a third current particular to the monks of the Benedictine Congregation at Santa Giustina.

34 Venetian humanist Paolo Giustiniani was a friend of Gasparo Contarini. Collett clarifies that Giustiniani was familiar with the Neoplatonic schemes of Ficino and Pico della Mirandola, and that he was likely familiar with early Franciscan writings and Dante, but not the “devotio moderna,” and that he espoused an affective ascent that was not Pauline in nature and that Contarini denied in favour of a “way to ascent to perfection more in illumination and reason than in affective response” (22-23)

35 To support his thesis, Collett cites as evidence the large number of biblical and Pauline commentaries written in Italy after the Reformation and the concomitant decrease in “popularity of the ‘ascent’ manuals” support this interpretation (26).
Prior to the Reformation period, the monks of Santa Giustina “taught a pattern of salvation of the ‘restoration’ type expressed in Pauline terms of sin, the Cross, grace and faith, mainly using the exegeses of Augustine and Chrysostom” (26). What they advocated was not the moral restoration of man “to a state of justice,” but the spiritual restoration of man to a state of health (26). These monks “were Pauline in theology, but they were not Protestant, they were loyal to Rome, but they were not in the main streams of Catholic orthodoxy;” they were “sympathetic to worldly sinners” and held “unique beliefs about the nature and the salvation of man” (11-12). Additionally, the monks of Santa Giustina viewed justification “through eyes different from those of the Reformation and counter-Reformation theologians” (27). Most importantly, the monks of the Congregation were somehow connected to the Spirituali: it is a Cassinese monk, Benedetto da Mantova, who wrote the first draft of the Beneficio, which was polished and published by the Spirituale humanist and poet Marcantonio Flaminio, and was first printed as a second edition in Venice in 1543.

2.4.2. The Text of the Beneficio

The philological history of the Trattato utilissimo del beneficio di Giesù Christo crocifisso verso i cristiani is complex. Furthermore, as Adriano Prosperi and Carlo Ginzburg note in their seminal study on the treatise, Giochi di pazienza (1975), the Beneficio lacks the specific details that typically link a text to a particular time and space: there are no references to patron saints, or to confraternities, or to elements of collective or civic religious life, such as masses or processions, save mention of the Eucharist as a force of Christian unity (185). The rhetoric of the tract indicates that it was aimed at a large audience; in fact, before the text was placed on the index of prohibited books in Venice in 1549 its Evangelical message did succeed in reaching a large public.

The text was prepared by two individuals, Benedetto da Mantova (1495-1556) and Marcantonio Flaminio (1498-1550), with Cardinal Reginald Pole plausibly assisting Flaminio.\textsuperscript{37} The authorship of the Beneficio thus ties it to both the Spirituali (through Flaminio and Pole) and to the Benedictines (through Benedetto da Mantova). Though it was long accepted that the text embodies the teachings of Juan de Valdés in content and language, Collett convincingly demonstrated that there are two parts to the work, one written by Benedetto and later revised by Flaminio, the other composed by Flaminio:

The Beneficio is really two separate works. The first was a monastic treatise on sin, grace, faith, and restoration, written by the monk and polished by the poet, who was familiar with the Congregation and its theologians, but who was also a disciple of Valdés and sympathetic to Reformation theology. The second work, entirely the work of Flaminio, was his later exposition of justification by faith alone according to the teachings of John Calvin (183-184).\textsuperscript{38}

According to Collett, the source of Benedetto’s portion of the Beneficio (chapters 1, 2, 3 and the first half of chapter 4) is the Benedictines and the Greek Fathers from which they drew inspiration, while the sections written by Flaminio\textsuperscript{39} (the end of chapters 4 and 5, and chapter 6) derive from Valdés, Thomas à Kempis, and Calvin (185).\textsuperscript{40} Collett attributes the mystical dimension of the Beneficio to the Cassinese substratum of the text (which Flaminio plausibly couched in Valdesian phraseology). As Thomas F. Mayer observed, regardless of its particular theological lineage, the Beneficio describes an intense personal relationship between the elect and God that unfolds outside of Catholic institutions and that borders on mysticism:

\textsuperscript{37} Thomas F. Mayer, Reginald Pole: Prince & Prophet, p. 120: “Pole deserves more credit for the work than he has usually received […] perhaps the best way to conceive of the process through which the Beneficio came into being is to think of it as a collective effort with deep and broad roots.”

\textsuperscript{38} Don Benedetto da Mantova began the tract whilst he was at the Cassinese monastery of S. Nicolò de Arenis in Sicily, from 1537 to 1541. Marcantonio Flaminio finished and polished the text. Very probably, Flaminio carried out his revisions of the manuscript in Florence in 1541. A now extinct first version of the work circulated from late 1541 to 1543.

\textsuperscript{39} Collett argues that “when Flaminio rewrote Benedetto’s text ‘according to his own ideas,’ he modified the Cassinese theology on this crucial question of the works of faith, by the insertion of paraphrases from the Alfabeto […] Flaminio used Valdés to rewrite the teaching on works, removing the element of supposed Pelagianism” (174).

\textsuperscript{40} Collett hypothesizes that Flaminio’s earlier connection with the monks of the Benedictine Congregation informed his approach to Valdés: “Since the underlying Cassinese theology placed heavy emphasis upon the Pauline themes of sin, grace, and faith, and since Flaminio had close connections with the order, it is possible that Flaminio’s own Pauline emphasis had been earlier imbibed from the monks: if so, when he read Luther, and encountered Valdés, and through him the writings of Calvin, he must have been aware of the common ground between the monks of Santa Giustina and the Reformers, not only the Bible and Pauline theology, but also Calvin’s sense of new life and transformation, which appears to have been drawn from the Greek Fathers. Indeed it is possible that Flaminio felt justified because of this common ground to extend from Benedetto to Calvin” (185).
however the Beneficio is interpreted – whether as rooted in the possible heterodox beliefs of Valdés, the certainly heretical ones of John Calvin, traditional Benedictine piety or something else – it ignored institutional religion and the pope, stressing an almost mystical relation between God and the chosen few.\footnote{Reginald Pole, p. 120}

This mystical dimension of the Beneficio is the aspect of the tract that is of greatest interest to the present discussion. Its nature can be understood only through recourse to the text itself. A close analysis of the text reveals that it prescribes a manifestly mystical relation between the Christian and Christ, one that is attested by the manner in which the ideas of the text were employed in Evangelical circles such as that of Michelangelo and Vittoria Colonna, as we have seen, and as will be further demonstrated in this study.

The Beneficio consists of six chapters.\footnote{All excerpts included in this dissertation are taken from Salvatore Caponetto’s 1975 edition.} It begins with “Del peccato originale e della miseria dell’uomo,” which narrates how, through the act of eating the forbidden fruit, man became similar to beasts and to the devil that deceived him (29). Having inherited the injustice, impiety, and hatred for God from his ancestors, man cannot be saved by his own initiative for he is powerless to conform to the will of God of his own volition:

E, sí come, se gli nostri primi padri fussero stati ubbidienti a Dio, ci avrebbero lasciato, come cosa ereditaria, la loro iustizia e santità; così, essendo stati disubbidienti a Dio, ci hanno lasciato per eredità la iniustizia, la impietà e l’odio loro verso Dio: di modo che è impossibile che con le forze nostre possiamo amar Dio e conformarci con la sua volontà (29-30).

Man’s corrupt will needs healing and Christ is the doctor who cures man’s soul from the contagion of original sin (31).

The second chapter is entitled “Che la Legge fu data da Dio, acciocché noi, conoscendo il peccato e disperando di poterci giustificare con le opere, ricorressimo alla misericordia di Dio e alla giustizia della fede.” It explains the operation of the Law of Moses by which man is ultimately made to love God intensely (“comanda che amiamo Dio con tutto il cuore, con tutta l’anima, e con tutte le forze,” 33). The Law unfolds a five-stage, divinely orchestrated process by which: 1) man’s sin is made known to him; 2) it is made to grow; 3) the wrath and judgment of God becomes apparent to man, who feels the threat of death and eternal punishment; 4) afraid, man become desperate and seeks to satisfy the Law to avoid the second death; and 5) man realizes that through his own power he is unable to change, and so, by necessity, he turns to Christ:
Avvendo dunque la Legge scoperto il peccato e accresciutolo e dimostrato la ira e furor di Dio, che minaccia la morte, fa il quarto ufficio, spaventando l’uomo, il quale viene in disperazione e vorrebbe satfare alla Legge; ma vede che chiaramente non può e, non potendo, si adira contro a Dio [...] Il quinto ufficio della Legge e il proprio suo fine, e più eccellente e necessario, è che dà necessità all’uomo di andar a Cristo. (36)

While these “offices” (“ufficio”) of the Law were long thought to derive from Valdés’ *Alfabeto cristiano* (1536), Collett convincingly argues that their pedagogical function links them to Cassinese works on the Law in general and to the writings of the Benedictine monk Don Teofilo Folengo in particular. In his earlier work, *L’umanità del Figliuolo di Dio* (1533), Folengo asserted that men turn to grace for salvation when they become aware that they are unable, of their own will and strength, to fulfil the Law. 43 Much of Michelangelo’s poetry revolves around his experiences of a similar state: having recognized his sin and watched it grow despite his desire to curb it, the poet looks outside himself to Christ for liberation.

Emancipation is the focus of chapter three, “Che la remission delli peccati, e la giustificazione, e tutta la salute nostra depende da Cristo,” which contains “two radically different though not exclusive, concepts of salvation,” as Barry Collett noted. The first scheme is justification by grace through faith, in which the influence of both Valdés and Calvin is apparent; the second one, “restoration by grace though faith,” seems to be drawn “not from Valdés but from the monastic theology of the Cassinese order.” 44 This third chapter opens with a reminder that Christ was sent to free man from the Law (original sin), to reconcile him with God, to render him capable of accomplishing good works by healing his free will, and to restore in him the divine image (Augustine’s *imago Dei*):

Avendo adunque il nostro Dio mandato quel gran profeta che ci avea promesso, che è l’unigenito suo Figlio, accioché esso ci liberi dalla maledizione della Legge, e riconcili con lo nostro Dio, e faccia abile la nostra volontà alle buone opere, sanando il libero arbitrio, e ci restituisca quella divina imagine, che perduta abbiamo per la colpa de’ nostri primi parenti. (37) 45

Alight with the flame of true faith, man runs to Christ’s arms, and Christ – who is frequently depicted in Reform circles as extending his arms to man from the Cross – offers to make man anew: “corriamo con li passi della viva fede a lui nelle braccia, il quale ci invita gridando: ‘Venite a me tutti voi che siete affannati e aggravati, e io vi recrearò’” (37). The role of Christ is

43 *Italian Benedictine Scholars*, p.167
44 *Italian Benedictine Scholars*, pp. 171-172.
summarized as one of liberation and vivifying transformation; Christ reforms man’s will, restoring his innocence and the divine image:

ci libera dal grave giogo della Legge, abrogando e annichilando le sue maledizioni e aspere minacce, sanando tutte le nostre infirmità, riformando il libero arbitrio, ritornandoci nella pristina innocenza e instaurando in noi l’immagine di Dio: perticchè secondo san Paolo, si come per Adamo tutti moriamo, così per Cristo tutti siamo vivificati (38)

This notion of being re-made or refashioned finds a direct analogue in Michelangelo’s poetry on sculpture and the “concetto.” The occasional art metaphors in the Beneficio might also have struck Michelangelo (such as the Pauline injunction to sculpt words into one’s heart: “O parole notabilissime, le quali ogni cristiano dovrebbe scolpire nel suo cuore, pregando Dio che gliele facesse gustar perfettamente” 48). This is not to suggest the Beneficio as the exclusive or even primary source of the imagery. Michelangelo might well have drawn directly from the Bible and because the poet was also an artist one almost expects to find sculptural metaphors in his poetry, which should – in this case – be strongly considered in light of his biography.

The most salient characteristic of the tract, and certainly of chapter three, might well be its optimism. The overarching message is one of hope. The sinner should not despair because grace outweighs sin and Christ is stronger than Adam: “dove abondò il peccato, ivi maggiormente abondò la grazia [...] la giustizia di Cristo è più gagliarda del peccato di Adamo” (40). The problem of sin and guilt is presented as an inherited problem as well as a personal one; the responsibility for man’s salvation is thus only partially his own in the sense that he need only have faith: “Se il peccato di Adamo fu bastante a constituirci peccatori e figliuoli d’ira senza alcuna colpa nostra attuale, molto maggiormente sarà bastante la giustizia di Cristo a farci giusti e figliuoli di grazia senza alcune nostre buone opere” (40). This is not to say that the Christian plays a passive role in his justification. On the contrary, salvation required vigorous inner and devotional work.46

If the third chapter imparts the knowledge that Christ can emancipate man, chapter four, “Degli effetti della viva fede e della unione dell’anima con Cristo,” explains how this liberation is achieved through faith and the mystical marriage. Like the previous chapter, this one

46The development of strong faith required much action, as Abigail Brundin emphasizes in “Vittoria Colonna, Sonnets for Michelangelo”: “One of the most significant outcomes of a belief in sola fide is of course the increased responsibility that it bestows upon the individual Christian for developing an active faith through contemplation, meditation, and study of the word of God through the Bible” (in Teaching Other Voices: Women and Religion in Early Modern Europe, eds. Margaret L. King and Albert Rabil Jr., p. 91).
comprises two different traditions: Cassinese thought, according to which faith is “an instrument of restoration,” and Valdesian/Calvinist “justification by faith alone and not by works.”47 It is in this chapter that the mystical dimension of Evangelical piety is expounded via the concept of the soul’s marriage to Christ.

As it is in human marriage, so it is in the marriage of the soul to Christ. The “properties” of one become the “assets” of the other; the debts of one are compensated by the “credits” of the other. In this case, Christ purges man’s debt of sin in the fires of his sacrifice on the cross:

Cristo dice adunque: - La dote dell’anima, sposa mia cara, cioè i suoi peccati [...] sono divenuti in poter mio sono in mia propria facoltà, e a me sta a negoziare di essa come piú mi piace, e perciò voglio gettarla nel fuoco della mia croce e annichiarla (48)

Metaphorically and metaphysically, the spouse becomes as holy and as pure as Christ, thus becoming justified in the eyes of God:

La sposa similmente dice con grandissima allegrezza: - Gli reami e gli imperi del mio dilettissimo sposo sono miei, io son regina e imperatrice del cielo e della terra, le richezze del mio marito, cioè la sua santità, la sua innocenza, la sua giustizia, la sua divinità con tutte le sue virtù e potenze sono mie facoltà; e perciò son santa, innocente, giusta e divina; alcuna macula non è in me; son formosa e bella, percióché il mio dilettissimo sposo non è maculato, ma formoso e bello, e, sendo tutto mio, per conseguente tutte le cose sono mie, e perché quelle sono sante e pure, io diventa santa e pura. (48)

The sinner effectively becomes Christ: “Veramente si può dire che il cristiano è stato fisso in croce, è sepolto, è resuscitato, è asceso in cielo, è fatto figliuolo di Dio, è fatto partecipe della divina natura” (48).

Faith is the only condition of justification. Accepting the Gospel as truth grants one the remission of sins, reconciliation with God, grace, recovery of the divine image, entrance into the kingdom of God, and mystical marriage to Christ:

Chiunque accetta questa buona nova e la crede veramente, ha la vera fede, e gode la remissione de’ peccati, ed è reconciliato con Dio, e di figliuolo d’ira diventa figliuolo di grazia, e ricupera la imagine di Dio, entra nel regno di Dio, si fa tempio di Dio, il qual sposa l’anima col suo unigenito Figliuolo per mezzo di questa fede, la quale è opera di Dio e dono di Dio, come piú volte dice san Paolo. (51)

This is not the beatific vision, the scala perfectionis of the Neoplatonic ascent, nor the via purgativa of the Dantean journey towards mystical ecstasy; it is an instantaneous transformation.

47 Collet, Italian, p.172
The Holy Spirit plays a central role in the process of vivification by which man becomes Christ. Faith is generated in the heart by the Holy Spirit, full of divine love, who thus inspires good works: “Questa santa fiducia è generata nel cuore dallo Spirito santo, che ci è comunicato per la fede, né mai è vacua dell’amor divino; e di qui procede che da questa viva efficacia siamo incitati al bene operare” (54). The Holy Spirit is both faith and saving grace: “Questa è quella santa fede, senza la quale è impossibile che alcuno possa piacer a Dio, e per la quale tutti i santi del vecchio e novo Testamento si sono salvati” (55). Christ, too, is said to inhabit the heart of the faithful: “quando San Paulo e gli dottori dicono che la fede sola giustifica senza le opere, intendono ch’ella sola ci fa godere del perdono generale e ci fa ricever Cristo, il quale, come dice San Paulo, abita nei cuori per fede” (65). In chapter six, it is further explained how, as children of God, the elect are temples of the Holy Spirit, which lives within them “come un sigillo” (103).

Christ also inhabits the human heart because His spirit is that of charity (“lo spirito di Cristo è spirito di carità,” 68). The faith that justifies is like a flame (“è come una fiamma di fuoco” 69). Christ, as faith and the spirit of charity, may thus reside as a transforming flame in the heart (69). This faith is conceived as a sentient presence, the presence of God (of his charity, the Holy Spirit) that inhabited Christ when He was on earth as a just man who performed miraculous deeds as a both a statement and consequence of this holiness:

Possiamo ancora assimigliare questa santissima fede, che giustifica, alla divinità ch’era in Iesù Cristo, il qual, essendo vero uomo, ma senza peccato, operava cose stupende, sanando gl’infermi, illuminando i ciechi, caminando sopra all’acque e suscitando i morti. Ma queste opere miracolose non erano cagione che Cristo fosse Dio. Innanzi che operasse alcuna di queste cose egli era Dio e Figliuolo legittimo e unigenito di Dio, e non gli era necessario, per esser Dio, operare cotali miracoli; ma perché egli era Dio, gli operava: onde questi miracoli non facevano che Cristo fosse Dio, ma dimostravano che egli era vero Dio. Così la vera fede viva è una divinità nell’anima del cristiano, il qual opera mirabilmente né mai si trova stanco dalle buone opere. Ma queste opere non sono cagione che ’l cristiano sia cristiano, cioè giusto, buono, santo e gratissimo a Dio. E a lui non era necessario, per diventar tale, far cotali opere; ma egli, perché è cristiano per la fede, come Cristo uomo, per la divinità, era Dio, fa tutte quelle buone operazioni; onde queste buone operazioni non fanno che ’l cristiano sia giusto e buono, ma dimostrano che egli è buono e giusto. Adunque, si come la divinità di Cristo era cagione di suoi miracoli, così la fede, operando per dilezione, è cagione delle buone opere cristiano.

[emphasis mine] (70-71)

Good works do not make a man just, they demonstrate that he is just: first a man becomes good, then he does good. He becomes just through the mystical transformation his faith engenders and
the Holy Spirit through Christ, as charity, effects. This was the idea that so threatened the Church.

According to the Beneficio, Christ was able to earn a sure place in heaven through the performance of good works, because He was first united to the Word (the Spirit of God): “fu da Dio premiato nella ressurezione, essendogli dato ogni podestà in cielo e in terra, la quale innanzi, come uomo, non aveva, e questo meritò per la unione che ha il Verbo divino con l’umanità di Cristo” [emphasis mine] (71). As it was for Christ, so it can be for man: “così fa la fede nel cristiano, la qual, per la unione che ha con l’anima, quello che è dell’uno, e’ s’attribuisce all’altro” (71). Effectively, through a mystical union with Christ, the Christian may achieve that which Christ had earned for himself when the Son of God was a man:

talora Scrittura santa promette al cristiano la vita eterna per le buone opere sue, perciocché le buone opere sono frutti e testimonio della fede viva, e procedono da lei come la luce della fiamma del fuoco, come abbiamo già detto sopra. E questa santissima fede abbraccia Cristo e lo unisce con l’anima; e tutt’e tre, cioè la fede, Cristo e l’anima, diventano una cosa istessa, di modo che quello che merita Cristo, l’anima medesimamente il merita, e però dice Santo Agostino⁴⁸ che Dio corona in noi i doni suoi. [emphasis mine] (71)

According to the above passage, it is possible for man to become Christ, not just to grow in likeness of Him. One cannot help but think of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola’s Oration on the Dignity of Man and the notion of man as a god-like creator of his own existence. An unstated, but important corollary of this principle is that the Holy Spirit might work through any man as it worked through Christ. The elect (which the Spirituali considered themselves to be) – those who were one with the Spirit of God – might thus conceivably serve as vehicles for the vivifying action of the Holy Spirit for each other.

Justification, as described in the Beneficio, does not merely denote a change of status in the eyes of God, nor does it simply lead to a change in conscience or consciousness (though it does this too), but rather leads to spiritual mortification:

La fede, che giustifica, è una opera di Dio in noi, per la qual il nostro uomo vecchio è crocifisso, e noi tutti, trasformati in Cristo, diventiamo nuova creatura e figliuoli carissimi di Dio. Questa divina fede è quella che ci inserisce nella morte e nella resurrezione di Cristo, e per conseguente ci mortifica la carne con gli affetti e con le concupiscenze. (233)

⁴⁸ This reference to Saint Augustine and the gifts of the Holy Spirit is an important allusion. Michelangelo, Saint Augustine, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit are a primary topic of chapter four of this dissertation.
This literal becoming of Christ is explained through the Pauline clothing metaphor that is the topic of chapter five, “Come il cristiano si veste di Cristo.”

In the fifth chapter of the *Beneficio* it is explained that through faith the Christian comes to possess Christ and to unite with him just as a man possessing a garment dons it and becomes one with it:

La fede certamente fà che noi possediamo Cristo e tutto quello che è di lui, come ciascun di noi possede la sua propria veste; e perciò il vestirsi di Cristo altro non è che tenere per fermo che Cristo sia nostro, come nel vero è, se noi il crediamo, e creder che per questa celeste veste noi siamo grati e accetti nel conspetto di Dio. (77-78)

With this faith alone, God’s grace can mollify man’s heart (78), so that it may house his Spirit:

Questa sola fede e fiducia, che abbiamo nell’meriti di Cristo, fa gli uomini veri cristiani, forti, allegri, giocondi, inamorati di Dio, pronti alle buone opere, possessori del regno di Dio e suoi carissimi figliuoli, nelli quali veramente lo Spirito santo abita. (79.)

Donning Christ signifies imitating him, and this includes suffering trials and tribulations as Christ did: “la vita di Cristo, della cui imitazione ci dobbiamo vestire, fu una perpetua croce piena di tribulazioni, ignominie e persecuzioni, se vogliamo conformarci con la vita sua, ci bisogna portare di continuo la croce” (82). Carrying this cross “vuol mortificare in noi gli affetti dell’animo e gli appetiti della carne” so that man, too, may become perfect like Christ (83). Man’s faith must be refined, like gold, in the fires of tribulation: “la fede nostra, affinata, come l’oro, nella fornace delle tribulazioni, risplenda a laude sua” (83).

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The sixth and final chapter, “Alcuni rimedi contra la diffidenza,” recommends, among other things, oration, communion, and the recollection of Baptism as a means of securing grace through faith (87). True oration is considered a strong desire: “la orazione non è altro che un fervente desiderio fondato in Dio” (88), and in prayer, one should ask for faith (87). One should also meditate on the blood of Christ, which earned the possibility of redemption for man. Saint Augustine is presented as the *auctoritas* in this matter too, just as he was on the topic of the gifts of the Holy Spirit: the Bishop of Hippo “dimostra chiaramente che ’l cristiano non dee temere, ma esser certo della sua giustificazione, fondando questo non nell’opere sue, ma nel precioso sangue di Cristo, il quale ci monda di tutti i peccati nostri e ci pacifica in Dio” (114).

In the preface to her book on Colonna’s spiritual poetics of reform, Abigail Brundin emphasizes the “surprising fact [...] that while scholars have always acknowledged Colonna’s close involvement in a consideration of the most pressing religious question of her age, few
have brought this knowledge to bear upon their reading of her work” (x). This observation applies to Michelangelo’s lyric production too. In his later poetry there is a fusion of Neoplatonic conceits and a mysticism that approximates that of the Beneficio, yet few scholars have dedicated space to a close comparative reading of Michelangelo’s Rime and the Beneficio, and there is certainly no systematic study on the topic – nothing approximating the analyzes of his art as Maria Forcellino recently completed. Robert J. Clements described Michelangelo’s poetry as “the medium of his confiteor.” It is also the instrument of his oration and his transformation, as this chapter will show.

2.5 Michelangelo, Vittoria Colonna, and the Holy Spirit: A Sacred Trinity?

In his volume dedicated to the poetry of Michelangelo, Christopher Ryan summarizes that, of the 343 items (poems and fragments) comprising Michelangelo’s poetic corpus, seventeen poems are known to be “certainly” dedicated to Vittoria Colonna (G111, G151-G154, G159-G166, G235, G236, G265, G266), nine are “probably” dedicated to her (G113, G116, G148-G150, G156, G229, G234, G239) and thirteen are “possibly” dedicated to her (G115, G117, G120-G122, G237, G238, G240, G241, G254, G257, G258, and G264). Of these thirty-nine poems, twenty-seven are complete madrigals, eight are complete sonnets, two are incomplete sonnets, one is a double sestet and the other is a quatrain; thirty-six are on love and only four lack an obvious religious dimension. Many of Ryan’s assessments are relevant to the present study: 1) Colonna is the catalyst of the poet’s moral improvement and regeneration; 2) the poet addresses her as if she were God or Christ; 3) she is depicted as the direct cause of his “movement from evil to good, from life to death” (143); 4) she was his muse both literally and metaphorically; and, 5) there is a focus on the process of artistic creation in these works.

Of the seventeen poems “certainly” dedicated to Vittoria Colonna, fifteen narrate or name a spiritual transformation other, or more than, the stock Neoplatonic ascent. A healthy portion of these relate spiritual transformation to artistic creation. Two sonnets are explicitly on gift-giving in relation to the subject of grace (G159, G160). Four were written during and concerning Colonna’s distance from Michelangelo while she was in Viterbo (G163-G166) and can be linked to the Evangelical community of the Spirituali (G163). All of these poetic compositions are in a language that alludes to ideas central to the Beneficio di Cristo or that is characteristic of letters exchanged between key members of the Spirituali and other like-minded Evangelicals. This section intends to examine these poems in light of the Beneficio and personal
letters exchanged between Vittoria Colonna and other spirituali. The result is a more nuanced understanding of Michelangelo’s later verses in the context of Italian evangelism and the social function of art and poetry therein.

2.5.1 Gift-Giving and Justification by Grace Through Faith

Scholars interested in Michelangelo’s relationship to religious reform in sixteenth-century Italy and to Vittoria Colonna in light of the Catholic Reformation begin their discussions with the letters, poetry, and gifts exchanged between the two friends. The respective research of Natalie Zemon Davis and of Alexander Nagel set the stage for considering Michelangelo’s verses in the context of theological discourses of the Catholic Reformation in Italy.49 These studies, combined with insights of an historical nature on the Spirituali resulting from the archival research detailed in the introduction to this chapter, have led to a reconsideration of Michelangelo’s art – of its innovative religious iconography and of its social function as a devotional instrument for the Spirituali of the Ecclesia viterbiensis. The impetus for exploring Michelangelo and the Spirituali came, in part, from the known connection between the poet and Vittoria Colonna as this is reflected in his verses. So far, however, the new knowledge to which these documents gave rise has not been brought back to bear on the poetry itself. A more nuanced examination of the theological discourse at the heart of the Rime and of the social significance of these verses is now possible.

Colonna served as a spiritual patron for Michelangelo as this concept was elaborated by Constance Furey and re-presented earlier in this chapter. Other than the respective poetry of Vittoria Colonna and Michelangelo, the documents that attest to this unique spiritual relationship are few in number, but they are poignant: two letters and three presentation drawings sent from Michelangelo to Colonna, and five letters from her to him, together with a gift manuscript of spiritual poetry she had prepared for him. Recent analyses, since Nagel’s watershed publications, have centred on the gift drawings Michelangelo had prepared for Colonna and that he sent to her around 1539-40: a Crocifisso, a Pietà (and later, around 1542-

49 Zemon Davis: “Beyond the Market: Books as Gifts in Sixteenth-Century France” (1983); The Gift in Sixteenth-Century France (2000); “Nagel: “Gifts for Michelangelo and Vittoria Colonna” (1997), and Michelangelo and the Reform of Art (2000). These studies were referenced and expanded upon with respect to Vittoria Colonna’s gift manuscripts for Michelangelo and Marguerite de Navarre by Abigail Brundin (Vittoria Colonna and the Spiritual Poetics of the Italian Reform, 2008), and with reference to Michelangelo’s artistic production by Maria Forcellino (Michelangelo, Vittoria Colonna e gli “spirituali”: Religiosità e vita artistica a Roma negli anni Quaranta, 2009), and by Anna Moroncini (“I disegni di Michelangelo per Vittoria Colonna e la poesia del Beneficio di Cristo,” 2009)
1543, a Samaritana that exists in the form of preparatory drawings only). The Crocifisso and the Pietà have been read in light of the Beneficio di Cristo. Studies focus on the Christological aspects of these works in connection to the topic of justification through grace by faith, with the emphasis on faith. To my knowledge, no studies have analyzed the pneumatological aspect of sola fide – the role of the Holy Spirit as the efficacious grace to which faith gives rise, and that flows through Christ as the spirit of God’s love. The present analysis will focus on this related but distinct aspect of sola fide: the operation of grace within groups and individuals in light of the known perception of this phenomenon among the Spirituali who refer to each other as instruments of divine grace. What emerges is an understanding of the devotional function of Michelangelo’s poetry – the writing of it and the reading of it – in the social and cultural context of Italy in the 1540s.

The Beneficio di Cristo emphasizes Christ’s sacrifice on the cross and the blood he shed. Meditation on images of Christ’s sacrifice constituted a devotional exercise aimed at increasing personal faith. The focus, in Michelangelo’s later verses, on Christ and his blood is well treated in recent studies. One scholar has acknowledged the temptation, in light of historical research, to imagine that the Crocifisso Michelangelo prepared for Colonna was intended for the cover of the Beneficio itself. At the very least, the drawing was intended for circulation among the Spirituali for the spiritual benefit of its members. An inspired artist, Michelangelo created images with iconographic details pertaining to beliefs of the Spirituali for the purpose of their devotion. In the letters and poetry exchanged between Colonna and Michelangelo on the Crocifisso, the two friends engaged in a discourse of gift-giving in relation to the concept of justification through grace by faith. The two poems that Michelangelo composed on these topics are G159 and G160. G159 is included in a letter he sent to Colonna. In these poems, grace is no less emphasized than faith.

Sonnet G159 (1538–41) engages in a discussion of the gratuitous nature of grace and the implication of this for the exchange of gifts between individuals. In this sonnet, the poet concedes that a heavenly gift cannot be repaid and that grace rains down from the beloved who opens a path of ascension to the lover that his own “worth” and “base intellect” could not:

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51 Ambra Moroncini, “I disegni di Michelangelo per Vittoria Colonna e le poesie del Beneficio di Cristo,” p. 47.
Per esser manco, alta signora, indegno
del don di vostra immensa cortesia,
prima, all’incontro a quella, usar la mia
con tutto il cor volse ’l mie basso ingegno.
Ma visto poi, c’ascendere a quel segno
proprio valor non è c’apra la via,
perdon domanda la mia audacia ria,
e del fallir più saggio ognor divergno.
E veggio ben com’erra s’alcun crede
la grazia, che da voi divina piove,
pareggi l’opra mia caduca e frale.
L’ingegno, l’arte, la memoria cede:
c’è un don celeste non con mille pruove
pagar del suo può già chi è mortale.

(G159)52

The sonnet opens with a confession by the poet to the noble lady: in order to be less unworthy of her immense courtesy, at first he wanted to repay it with all his heart (vv. 1-4). He has since come to understand, however, that his own base intellect does not suffice to raise him to her lofty heights (vv. 5-6). He asks to be forgiven for his audacity (presumably a mixture of insolence and arrogance), stating that he will find a way to grow wise from his failure (vv. 7-8). It would be a mistake, the poet concedes, to believe that his “fleeting and frail” work could equal the grace that rains down from the divine lady (vv. 9-11). Genius, art, and memory yield (vv. 12) because a mortal being can never repay a divine gift, not even with a thousand trials (vv. 13).

Arrogant at first, the poet is tempted to employ his genius and his memory in service of art to repay the lady’s graciousness and to rise to her level. He then realizes that his goal is futile. The initial instinct to rise by his own wits symbolizes the poet’s inability to receive, passively, the courtesy that is extended to him (vv. 1-4). This courtesy is no ordinary gift, it is divine grace, which pours down like rain through the lady to the poet. The content of the sonnet closely parallels the language of the accompanying letter Michelangelo wrote to Vittoria Colonna:

Volevo Signoria, prima che io pigliassi le cose che Vostra Signoria m’ha più volte volute dare, per riceverle manco indegnamente ch’i’ potevo, fare prima qualche cosa a quella di mio mano; dipoi riconosciuto e visto che la grazia di Dio non si può comperare e che

52 Donato Giannotti (1492-1573) edited this poem for Michelangelo. The lexical changes and alterations are minor. It is worth noting, however, that in the original v. 2 reads “dell’immensa vostra alta cortesia,” v. 7 reads “colpa” and not “audacia,” and v. 14 was “pagar può sol del suo.” See Girardi’s critical apparatus, pp. 342-334.
’l tenerla a disagio è pecato grandissimo, dico mie colpa e decte cose volentieri accetto. E son certo, quando l’arò, non per averle in casa, ma per essere io in casa loro, mi parrà essere in paradiso.

The “cose” Colonna would like to send Michelangelo are likely spiritual poems, if not the gift manuscript that she had prepared and given to him. At first, the poet wanted to create something for Colonna with his own hands by way of compensation, but then he realized that the grace of God cannot be bought – “indegniamente” and “colpa” are echoed in the first iteration of G159, v. 1 (“Per esser manco, almen, signiora, indegno”) and v. 7 (“perdon domanda la mie colpa ria”). “Comperare” echoes the discussion of grace in the Beneficio. In this letter, Michelangelo refers directly to the grace of God. His certainty that when he receives the poems he will feel as though he is in Paradise is expressed by two curious clauses that are highly suggestive. The poems “will not be in his house,” but rather “he will be in theirs.” When Michelangelo enters into these spiritual sonnets Colonna prepared for him, it will be as though he were in heaven – he will rise to their lofty height.

It is worth highlighting that in G159 the poet does not use a simile in describing the grace that rains down from lady – the poet speaks more literally than figuratively in his description. The key words “don” (v. 2, v. 11), “grazia” (v. 10) and “opra” (v. 11) possess the most overt connection to the doctrine of justification through grace by faith characteristic of the Beneficio di Cristo. Three other lexical items link this poem to the greater context of spiritual patronage among Italian Evangelicals: “indegno,” “basso ingegno” (v. 4), and “segno” (v. 5). These words tie this poem to the rhetoric of the Spirituali and the significance of the spiritual support they offered each other and that was not just moral, but also noetic. Similar terms and correspondences appear in the letters exchanged between Vittoria Colonna and Marguerite de Navarre. In considering the above exchanges – epistolary and poetic – between Michelangelo and Colonna in light of letters exchanged between Colonna and Marguerite de Navarre, it is important to recall that Marguerite was, like Michelangelo, the recipient of a gift-manuscript of spiritual sonnets from Colonna.

In a letter dated Rome, 15 February 1540 that Vittoria Colonna wrote to Marguerite de Navarre one easily discerns the discourse on grace. The letter sheds considerable light on the nature of spiritual patronage at play between Colonna and Marguerite and on how the concepts at the heart of the Beneficio found application in the daily lives of Italian Evangelicals. The

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dynamics between Colonna and Marguerite are paralleled in the relationship between Michelangelo and Colonna, with Colonna serving as the guide to Michelangelo in the manner that she was guided by Marguerite. In her letter, Colonna highlights Marguerite’s superior will and intellect, thus emphasizing her noble cousin’s rectitude and wisdom: “in una sola [donna] fuor d’Italia s’intendeva esser congioncte le perfettioni della volontà insieme con quelle de l’intelletto.”

By means of a laden biblical reference, Colonna describes her sadness and fear given Marguerite’s “high rank” and the distance between them:

ma per esser in si alto grado et si lontana, si generava in me quella tristezza e timore, che hebbero li Hebrei vedendo il fuoco e la gloria di Dio sulla cima del monte, dove essi ancor imperfetti di salir non ardivano, et tacitamente nel cuor domandavano al Signore che la sua divinità nel verbo humanando, si degnassi di approssimarsi ad essi: et come in quella spiritual sete la man pia del Signore gli andò intertenendo, hor con l’acqua miracolosa della pietra, hor con la celeste manna, così V.M. s’è mossa a consolarmi con la sua dolcissima lettera; et se a quelli effetto della grazia superò di gran lunga ogni loro aspettazione, a me similmente l’utilità di vedere la M.V. credo che avanzarà d’assai ogni mio desiderio.

Colonna affirms that an earlier letter sent to her by Marguerite had consoled her. Colonna parallels the grace that she experienced through Marguerite’s missive to the grace the Jews received from God and that exceeded their expectations. The reference to water flowing forth from a rock symbolizes the action of the Holy Spirit, which Colonna portrays as the same grace operating through Marguerite’s epistle.

It is not just grace, but illumination that Marguerite bequeaths to Colonna – and so the aspect of the Holy Spirit as divine love (grace) is conjoined to the aspect of divine wisdom (illumination). Marguerite’s letter illuminated Colonna’s intellect and pacified her conscience:

et certo non mi sarà difficile il viaggio per illuminare l’intelletto mio et pacificar la mia coscienza, et a V.M. spero che non sia disiosa, per haver dinanzi un subietto, ove possa esercitare le due più rare vertù sue, cioè l’umilità, perchè s’abbasserà molto ad insegnarmi, la carità, perchè in me troverà resistenza a saper ricever la sue gratie. Ma essendo usanza che ’l più delle volte de i parti più faticosi sono i figliuoli più amati, spero che poi V.M. debbia allegrarsi d’havermi si difficilmente partorita con lo spirito, et fattami di Dio et sua nuova creatura. [emphasis mine]

Colonna describes herself as one of Marguerite’s “subject[s]” – a word evoking the feudal relationship of vassal to lord. Humility and charity are underscored. Marguerite will have to

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54 Reproduced from Appendix D of Barry Collett’s *A Long and Troubled Pilgrimage*, pp. 125-126. All quotes from letters exchanged between Vittoria Colonna and Marguerite de Navarre are reproduced from Barry Collett’s transcriptions.
lower herself to teach Colonna (humility). Charity will have to prepare Colonna to receive the grace Marguerite dispenses, because Colonna will resist it.

A letter from Vittoria Colonna to Marguerite from March 1540 contains multiple references to Marguerite’s “high rank” (“alto grado”), which Colonna attributes to Marguerite’s moral qualities (“virtù”), and not just her royal lineage. Because of her noble virtue, Marguerite may serve as an example for others to imitate. Colonna “dares” to write to the virtuous and high ranking Marguerite, whom she presents as a lofty woman beyond her own reach, only because she believes herself to be writing from a place of “humility.” She would like to offer Marguerite a gift, not from pride, but as the expression of love. Colonna had formed a strong image in her mind of Marguerite through faith and she felt it necessary to give it expression, “to make it effectual through a gift of love”: “era già si grande il concetto di V.M. per fede, che conveniva partorirlo in qualche opera per amore” [emphasis mine]. A “concept,” generated by faith needs be “birthed” as a work of love. This letter elucidates the manner in which justification through grace by faith played out in the spiritualized relationships of the Evangelical community that served as the locus and instrument of devotion and change. “Concetto” and “partorir” are key terms that not only recur, but are explored in great depth in Michelangelo’s artistic poems inspired by Colonna. In this letter from March 1540, Colonna refrains from offering her weak service (“debil servitù”) to such greatness (“grandezza”). She refers to Marguerite’s noble graciousness (“nobil cortesia”), emphasizing her lowly state (“bassezza”) and unworthiness (“indignità”) in comparison to Marguerite. The “indegno” and “cortesia” of G159 vv. 1-2 are paralleled in this letter.

Alexander Nagel was the first to identify the theological discourse on grace in G159 and G160 (1997). Barry Collett refined Nagel’s analysis by adding to his discussion of grace and faith the important element of love. To receive love is to receive grace. The Holy Spirit is both

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55 Barry Collett’s translation, p. 113.
56 Collett asserts that Nagel’s “argument is neat, but not altogether sustainable” [...] to be more accurate he should have used ‘salvation by grace through faith’ in which the person must respond to the love gift of salvation, that is, accept the love with happiness, just as a loved one accepts the love of a lover [...] his point still remains that Michelangelo and Vittoria connected art with religious discourse through the concept and the language of gift giving” (Italian, pp. 88-89). Vittoria Colonna included an unpublished sonnet on the same theme in her manuscript for Michelangelo (sonnet 39); in it, she emphasizes the importance of love in relation to grace by describing God as a “true lover” who gave birth to his love in Christ: “Suol nascer dubbio se di più legarsi / il donare ad altrui segno è maggiore, / o se 'l ricever con pietoso amore / pegno è sicuro assai di più obbligarì; // ma il vero amante, Dio, che non mai scarsi / fece partiti, a noi diede il suo amore / divino e per sé prese il nostro errore / umano e volse in terra mortal farsi, // onde dai larghi doni umile e grato / l'uomo fosse, e dal ricever suo sicuro / sì che di fede viva e d'amore arda; // ma la tanta luce il nostro oscuro / occhio, da color falsi qui turbato, / quanto risplende più, meno
the gift of grace and its operation as charity. As Carlo Ossola recently observed, \textsuperscript{57} in G159, the theory of love becomes fused with the theology of grace (147). The disparity in rank between the servile lover and the noble beloved typical of the Italian lyric tradition is employed in this sonnet in a theological discourse. The appropriation is most natural: the faith that secures grace is love and it is generated by love (charity/the Holy Spirit), as the Beneficio emphasizes (“Questa santa fiducia è generata nel cuore dallo Spirito santo, che ci è comunicato per la fede, né mai è vacua dell’amor divino,” \textsuperscript{54}). The dynamics of grace and faith are likewise the dynamics of love.

The opening quatrain of G160 echoes G159 in questioning how a debtor may repay the gift of restored life (of having been brought back to life from death) and thus set himself free. There is no such means of repayment, he concludes, and if there were the recipient (the debtor) would be robbed of the infinite mercy [which would no longer be infinite if it could in fact be repaid] (vv. 5-8).\textsuperscript{58}

\begin{verbatim}
S’alun legato è pur dal piacer molto,
come da morte altrui tornare in vita,
qual cosa è che po’ paghi tanta aita,
che renda il debitor libero e sciolto?
E se pur fusse, ne sarebbe tolto
il sopratost d’una mercé infinita
al ben servito, onde sarebbe ’mpedita
da l’incontro servire, a quella volto.

Dunche, per tener alta vostra grazia,
donna, sopra ’l mie stato, in me sol bramo
ingratitudin più che cortesia:
ché dove l’un dell’altro al par si sazia,
non mi sare’ signor quel che tant’amo:
ché ’n parità non cape signoria.
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{58}I follow Girardi’s literal interpretation: “il beneficato, restituendo il beneficio, si priverebbe della protezione di quella infinità grazia [la quale, infatti, non sarebbe più infinita, se si pensasse di poterla pagare con un qualsiasi altro servizio], p. 343.
the two individuals by which the beloved stands above the lover (or artist) as his lord (or patron) – a dynamic suggestive of Reformation debates on the (gratuitous) nature of grace such as the one in the Beneficio and in the exchange of letters between the Spirituali. The notion of the beneficiary as a recipient becomes important in Michelangelo’s poems on artistic creation inspired by Colonna, as do the themes of restoration and coming to life (through birth or renewal). The allusion, in these sonnets, to the vertical distance between the lover and the beloved, who stands so high above him, reappears in the same poems of artistic creation just mentioned, where analogous imagery recalls the showering of grace from the noble beloved upon the lover in G159, v.10 (“grazia, che da voi divina piove”). The pneumatological imagery and allusions in these verses echo letters exchanged between Italian Evangelicals. The spiritualized and spiritualizing mode of relating characteristic of these Evangelicals finds direct parallels in Michelangelo’s verse. These poems thus contain important theological discourses and reflections that have yet to be fully explained.

If the Beneficio di Cristo expounds upon the topic of justification through grace by faith, the letters exchanged between Colonna and Marguerite provide the context for a much more nuanced understanding of Michelangelo’s verses, not just of their meaning and the discourses they contain, but of their function in the relationship of spiritual patronage between Colonna and Michelangelo. The patronage in question was not just a matter of guidance and example setting, but of spiritual change. The framework provided by the letters Colonna wrote to Marguerite

59 These images and allusions are biblical in origin. The most relevant passages are John 3:2-5 and Titus 3:4-8. All quotes are from the Vulgate with an Italian version from the Malerbi Bible, which Michelangelo is known to have used (see: Edgar Wind). John 3:2-5: hic venit ad eum nocte et dixit ei rabbi scimus quia a Deo venisti magister nemo enim potest haec signa facere quae tu facis nisi fuerit Deus cum eo respodit Iesus et dixit ei amen amen dico tibi nisi quis natus fuerit denuo non potest videre regnum Dei dicit ad eum Nicodemus quomodo potest homo nasci cum senex sit numquid potest in ventrum matris suae iterato introire et nasci respondit Iesus amen amen dico tibi nisi quis renatus fuerit ex aqua et Spiritu non potest introire in regnum Dei (Questo venne una notte da iesu: & disse : Rabi noi sapiamo che tu sei venuto da dio maestro certe niuno non puo fare li signi che tu fai se dio non fusse con lui. Rispose iesu & disse In verita in verita te dico che chiunque non rinascera unaltra volta non potra vedere el regno de dio. Disse nichodemo. Come puote lhuomo renascere quando e vechio? Come pote egli entrare unaltra volta nel ventre dela matre: & puoi renascere. respuose iesu & disse ; in verita in verita te dico che chi no[n] renasca per aqua et spirito sancto non potra entrare nel regno de dio [emphasis mine]; Titus 3:4-8: cum autem benignitas et humanitas apparuit salvatoris nostri Dei non ex operibus iustitiae quae fecimus nos sed secundum suum misericordiam salvos nos fecit per lavacrum regenerationis et renovationis Spiritus Sancti quem effudit in nos abunde per Iesum Christum salvatorem nostrum ut iustificati gratia ipsius heredes simus secundum spem vitae aeternae fidelis sermo est et de his volo te confirmare ut curent bonis operibus praeesse qui credeunt Deo (apare la begninita & humanita del nostro salvatore dio non per opere di iustitia lequale havessimo facte in prima. Ma secondo la sua misericordia fece noi salvi per lavamento & renascimento del renovamento del spirito sancto elqual egli sparse sopra di noi abundantemente per iesu cristo nostro salvatore. Acio che fuossimo heredi secondo la speranza de vita eterna essendo iustificata per la sua gratia fidele parola) [emphasis mine]
prove a powerful interpretive paradigm through which to make sense of Michelangelo’s hermetic poems of artistic creation inspired by Colonna.

2.5.2 Art, Grace and Divine Refashioning

In their letters to each other, both Marguerite and Colonna mention that God works through his creatures. Michelangelo alludes to this in his artistic poems. Of the eighteen artistic references in Michelangelo’s poetic corpus, thirteen pertain to sculpting, two refer to painting, and three mention writing. His compositions on art are his most purely and strikingly Neoplatonic poems. Yet, through the very conceits of the philosophy that they evidence, these poems transcend Neoplatonic thought. In these poems, Michelangelo unites three discrete but related discourses: artistic creation, divine creation, and love. The relation of these elements within these poems – and namely G151, G152, G153 and G154 – have been variously interpreted. John Arthos clarifies that for Michelangelo artistic creation is not just analogous to divine creation, or the creative processes in nature, but that they are the same thing; furthermore, these homologous processes are effected by, through, and as a result of love:

The love that has urged the artist towards his work is part of the great dynamism of the universe, conceiving and creating into eternity. The creation of the artist is indeed a continuation of the creation of God – the impulse is the same, the informing purpose is the same. (59)

Stressing that love is charity and Michelangelo considers it grace, Arthos affirms: “Michelangelo is consistent in maintaining that the key factor is the operation of divine power, and he will speak of it as ‘grace,’ in painting and in sculpture as well as in the forming of the image in the mind.” (68). Gavriel Moses emphasized, by contrast, that for Michelangelo, as an artist, Neoplatonic conceits held a different value than for the typical writer: “what to philosophers and poets was a vivid Neoplatonic metaphor, was for him a primary routine reality” (164). Moses notes that in Michelangelo Neoplatonism lacks comprehensive application: “what we find instead of philosophically consistent poetry is a consistently professional closeness to images and concepts which Neoplatonic philosophers themselves had

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61 Cf. Alma B. Altizer, “one thing is clear: Michelangelo’s ‘theory of art,’ as evoked in this and other poems, transcends Neoplatonism or any other system of thought.” (“Self and Symbolism in the Poetry of Michelangelo,” p. 20)
adopted in metaphorical terms from a realm of experience which to Michelangelo was quite
literal” (177). For Michelangelo considerations of grace and good works could not possibly have
been divorced from reflections on his profession and the attendant routines of his daily life, for
he was a self-proclaimed artist of inspired and inspiring religious works.

As an artist, Michelangelo sought to create divinely inspired images of sacred subjects.
In the 1540s, his artistic production was almost exclusively religious. Michelangelo’s vocation,
in this sense, was a literal “calling” – it is by means of art that Michelangelo sought to glorify
the divine. Though the poet engaged in alms giving and other traditionally Catholic “good
works” throughout his life, Michelangelo likely thought of his religious artistic creations as
“good works” too. In support of these and similar observations on the correspondences between
love, artistic creation and divine creation, scholars refer to Francisco de Hollanda’s Da pintura
antigua in which Michelangelo, an interlocutor in the dialogue on art, specifies that an artist of
religious works must live justly so that his mind will be inspired by the Holy Spirit. Arthos
claims that in his art Michelangelo sought a fusion of Neoplatonic, the Christian, and the Pagan
(51). In his poetry, it seems more appropriate to assert that Michelangelo fused the Christian and
the Neoplatonic in a theological discourse on the efficacy of grace through faith by the
instrument of divinely inspired individuals.

One of Michelangelo’s most famous poems, G151 (1538–44), is a sonnet that became the
subject of Varchi’s lectures at the Accademia fiorentina. G151 is consistently interpreted as a
poem elaborating a Neoplatonic artistic theory for its focus on the “concetto,” or idea, that the
sculptor seeks to unveil in the material he fashions. The opening quatrains clearly encompasses a
theory about the art and craft of sculpting: stone matter suggests to the artist what it should
become. If he does his job well, the artist renders the inner image or ‘concetto’ a reality by
removing the parts of the stone that veil it. The “concetto” is not typically interpreted as a
Neoplatonic one, but rather as something indigenous to the stone rather than external to it and
transcendent. The remainder of the sonnet, however, has little to do with art.

Non ha l’ottimo artista alcun concetto
c’un marmo solo in sé non circonscriva
col suo superchio, e solo a quello arriva
la man che ubbidisce all’intelletto.
Il mal ch’io fuggo, e ’l ben ch’io prometto,
in te, donna leggiadra, altera e diva,
tal si nasconde; e perch’io più non viva,
contraria ho l’arte al disïato effetto.
Amor dunque non ha, né tua beltate
o durezza o fortuna o gran disdegno
del mio mal colpa, o mio destino o sorte;
se dentro del tuo cor morte e pietate
porti in un tempo, e che ’l mio basso ingegno
non sappia, ardendo, trarne altro che morte.

(G151)

The second quatrains directs the reader’s focus from the physical, material realm of artistic creation to the human and spiritual realm of love and relationship. It is on this plane that the poem unfolds. Unfortunately, the poet is unable to draw out of his beloved that which he seeks (vv. 7-8), because he can draw from the beloved’s heart only that which, within it, most corresponds to the poet. The poet’s “basso ingegno” (v. 13) prevents him, though he burns, from drawing anything but death from the beloved’s heart.

The impression that emerges from such a reading is that the death in question is the second or spiritual one, the death of the soul; the poet fails to secure his own redemption because he is unable (despite his strong desire) to raise himself high enough, that is, to catalyze or invoke his own transformation sufficiently well in order to secure, through the lady, his own salvation. The poet places the responsibility of initiating his own salvation squarely on himself, while acknowledging that redemption itself ultimately comes through other channels. The sonnet illustrates the difficulty, if not impossibility, of ascending by contemplation alone. The poet plays a passive role.

Oscar Schiavone describes Michelangelo’s passivity in yielding to divine guidance as a consequence of his identity as a faithful Christian. John Arthos gives this sonnet a compelling and altogether different significance:

the activity of the artist does not exist in itself, it aims towards a state of being known to God and judged by him, and the failure of the artist is not in the failure to realize perfectly in the work of his hands the conception within his mind, but a failure to come into a state of being within his mind that would be in harmony with God’s purposes. (75)

According to Arthos, the first quatrains means “that the stone contains innumerable ideas, and that an artist can discover within himself none that are not in the world outside him” (75). With this sonnet, Michelangelo “does not mean to imply that there is a rational or even an
engendering relationship between the universe and his own activity. He is outlining a more complex system of relationships in which something other than the thing brought into being is the end in view” (75). The artist’s concern about producing an imperfect final product is not really about the artistic creation at all, it is about the failure of the work as a means of the perfection and the eternizing of the artist” (76). In the sonnet, Colonna “has the very power of Christ, mercy and redemption” (77).

Madrigal G152 (1538-44) presents an analogy between artistic creation and spiritual health. Good deeds of the soul, concealed by the hard shell (flesh) of the body become greater as the outer sheath that veils them is removed just as a stone comes to life as its excesses are removed by the sculptor (vv. 1-8):

Sì come levar, donna, si pone in pietra alpestra e dura una viva figura, che là più cresce u’ più la pietra scema; tal alcun’opre buone, per l’alma che pur trema, cela il superchio della propria carne co’ l’inculta sua cruda e dura scorza. Tu pur dalle mie streme parti puo’ levarne, ch’in me non è di me voler né forza.

Only the lady can extract the good deeds from him, because the poet lacks the will and strength to complete the task for himself (vv. 9-11). The stone resists the artist’s chisel, just as the poet is resistant to the grace that flows through the beloved to him. Girardi notes that in G152 the moral act of ‘levare’ is transferred to the poet (334). Many scholars, beginning with Panofsky, have observed that there is a catharsis and rebirth at hand and that it is only through the woman full of grace that purification takes place. In his article “Sculptural Form as Metaphysical Conceit in Michelangelo’s Verse” (1962), Glauco Cambon underscores the importance of the verb “levare” to the meaning of the poem qualifying Colonna as Michelangelo’s midwife on the basis of how she is portrayed in the madrigal: “Since Vittoria as a sculptress of the soul is really maieutic to Michelangelo as he was maieutic to the stonebound form, we can even read in ‘levare’ an obstetric overtone, for levatrice after all means ‘midwife’ and a metaphoric ‘delivery’ in question” (160-161).
Ann Hayes Hallock echoes and expands upon Cambon’s explication of the poem in her *Michelangelo the Poet: The Man Behind the Myth* (1978), where she observes that “the sculptural process affords a perfect analogy to the spiritual birth of Michelangelo’s soul wrought by Vittoria Colonna” (301). Hallock notes that “both syntactically and actually” the lady “occupies the position of intermediary in the syncretic sculptural process of *levar* and *poner*” and that “she alone can *levar* his soul out of his exterior hull” because the poet is unable to do this for himself (301); she is likewise the only one who can place the living image within the poet.

The poet’s helplessness conforms to the assertion, in the *Beneficio*, that man cannot change himself without grace. The birth image recalls Vittoria Colonna’s letter of March 1540 to Marguerite de Navarre and her description of having been compelled to give loving “birth” to a “concetto” of Marguerite in a work: “era già si grande il concetto di V.M. per fede, che conveniva partorirlo in qualche opera per amore.” This letter is not the only instance in which Colonna uses the term “partorir” in a spiritual letter to Marguerite. Vittoria employs the term to describe her own rebirth through spirit mediated by Marguerite in a letter dated 15 February 1540: “spero che poi V.M. [Marguerite] debbia allegrarsi d’havermi sì difficilmente *partorita* con lo spirito, et fattami di Dio et sua nuova creatura.” The concept of being reborn and refashioned a new creature through the spirit of God was central to the understanding Italian Evangelicals had of their relationship to each other – a spiritual union in which the Holy Spirit operated both through and between its members; as Marguerite de Navarre wrote to Vittoria Colonna in the period 20-25 January 1545: God “parla et opera per le sue creature.” The “concetto” and “partorir” in Colonna’s letter to Marguerite de Navarre finds a clear analogue in G152, which contains a theological and Evangelical reflection by the poet (if not also the narration of a lived experience). The reference to “good works” (v. 5) also finds a similar parallel in a letter from Vittoria to Marguerite from 10 May 1545 in which Colonna implies that the Holy Spirit flows through Marguerite to her, blessing her and leading her to produce good works: “sperando in quel santo spirito, chi fa fluire sì vive acque da lei, che non saranno nel mio terreno tutto vacue di frutto, se ben in altra più fondata radice sariano cagione di maggior

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63 She quotes Cambon’s observation on the “obstetric overtone for *levatrice*” on p. 301.
64 Reproduced from Barry Collett’s transcription in appendix to *A Long and Troubled Pilgrimage*, p. 129.
It is interesting to note that the phrasing suggests the creation of good works, not just the performance of good deeds.

Madrigal G153 (1536-42) is thematically related to G151 and G152, but the artistic medium shifts from stone sculpting to metal casting. An unfinished mould waits to be filled (or “re-filled,” as the first version of the poem was written) with fired silver or gold. The work of art will only be finished when it is extracted from the mould that must be broken apart for the perfect work to be truly completed. Similarly, the poet refills the inner void that is his desire for beauty and for his beloved with the fire of love (vv. 1-9), that is, with spiritual love.

Non pur d’argento o d’oro
vinto dal foco esser po’ piena aspetta,
vota d’opra prefetta,
la forma, che sol fratta il tragge fora;
tal io, col foco ancora 5
d’amor dentro ristoro
il desir voto di beltà infinita,
di coste’ ch’i’ adoro,
anima e cor della mie fragil vita.
Alta donna e gradita, 10
in me discende per sì brevi spazi,
c’a trarla fuor convien mi rompa e strazi.

(G153)

The language of this madrigal is somewhat cryptic and the metaphor is inherently imperfect, as one vessel (the mould) is a passive recipient, and the other (the poet) is initially presented as an agent (ristoro) as well as a recipient (in me discende). The image evoked is one of the lady serving as a channel by which spiritual love enters into and fills the poet. The metaphorical “precious” liquid (love) that flows into the poet does so through such narrow spaces (presumably his eyes) that he must first be torn down and broken (vv. 10-12) before he can be filled and ultimately made perfect.

In G153, the twin concepts of finished and perfected (opra prefetta) are fused. The lady literally re-makes the poet into something more perfect than he was before; she is an agent that brings about a new creature, as the artist does a new creation. As much as the process of metaphysical transformation is rendered by Neoplatonic conceits (love as light entering the

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65 Cf. G292, vv. 5-6, addressed to Christ: “Tu sol se’ seme d’opre caste e pie, / che là germuglian dove ne fa’ parte,” which is turn seems inspired by Dante, Purgatorio XXX, vv. 109-138.
66 See Girardi’s critical apparatus, p. 334
67 The “brevi spazi” are interpreted by Girardi as the eyes, through which love from the woman would reach the poet’s soul in Ficinian Neoplatonic theory, p. 334.
lover through the eyes), the logic of the metaphor corresponds to the action of the Holy Spirit in its vertical descent into the suitable channel from which/whom it flows as grace. Alma B. Altizer in fact notes that “the only verb in the whole poem that is actively and immediately in the present tense is ‘discende’” – the drive of the refashioning is outside of the poet – it is grace that finds him through the beloved (4). The double nature of the poet as both agent that re-fills his own void and a recipient that is filled by the Other epitomizes the concept of justification through grace by faith, and the remaking of the poet by a divinely inspired beloved is Evangelical in nature.

Madrigal G161 (1538-41) accompanies a letter to Vittoria Colonna by Michelangelo on the topic of the Crocifisso that he drew for her and that constitutes a meditation on the significance of Christ’s sacrifice. While the madrigal does not feature Colonna as an agent of spiritual transformation, the poem concludes with an appeal to Christ to “re-make” the poet into someone pleasing to Him: Signor, nell’ore streme, / stendi ver’ me le tue pietose braccia, / tomm’a me stesco e famm’un che ti piaccia” (G161, vv. 15-17). The lines recall the passage from the Beneficio di Cristo describing Christ on the cross to whom the faithful run with open arms: “corriamo con li passi della viva fede a lui nelle braccia, il quale ci invita gridando: ‘Venite a me tutti voi che siete affannati e aggravati, e io vi recrearò’” (37). The madrigal serves to illustrate how in Michelangelo’s relationship with Colonna Evangelical piety played a central role.

G162 (1538-41) accompanies the same letter. In this madrigal the poet, seeking salvation, offers himself as a blank sheet to the ink of the beloved and “divine” Colonna (vv. 7-8) so that mercy might “write the truth” (v. 9) into the poet:

Ora in sul destro, ora in sul manco piede variando, cerco della mie salute.
Fra ’l vizio e la virtute
il cor confuso mi travaglia e stanca,
come chi ’l ciel non vede,
che per ogni sentier si perde e manca.
Porgo la carta bianca
a’ vostri sacri inchiostri,

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68 For an early introduction, see Deoclecio Redig de Campos, “Il Crocifisso di Michelangelo per Vittoria Colonna” (1966).
The beloved once again possess divine attributes. In the *Beneficio* it was emphasized that the Holy Spirit restored the divine image to man, where it then resides “come un sigillo” (103). This spiritual process is enacted by the beloved. The question posed by the poet in the closing tercet echoes an exchange between the duchess and Fra’ Bernardino in Ochino’s dialogue on how to grow to love God: “Duchess: Is it not enough for me to wish that I could will myself to love him [Christ]? / Friar Bernardino: Indeed it is, provided that your wish is strong enough” (20).

In his verses on artistic creation in relation to the poet’s own spiritual re-birth and re-making through a Christ-like beloved, Michelangelo portrays concepts that were at the heart of the *Spirituali* community and of their understanding of their relation to each other in terms of God’s spirit and its action through God’s creatures. In these poems, the pneumatological paradigm of the beloved as an instrument of God’s spirit is a successful perspective from which to understand Michelangelo’s metaphors on love and creation. If the beloved in these compositions is endowed with Christ-like attributes, it is because the spirit of God is perceived to reside in the beloved as it had inhabited Christ when he walked the earth performing good works as an inspired mortal. The action of the Holy Spirit in these lyrics is described in the divine refashioning of the lover as a Christian soul. As the next section of this chapter will demonstrate, the aspect of the Spirit as compunction and divine illumination is also depicted in Michelangelo’s verses inspired by Vittoria Colonna. In these poems, Michelangelo frequently alludes to the *Commedia*, as if he were “dialoguing” hermetically with Colonna through the words of Dante.

**2.5.3 Ascent On Borrowed Wings: Michelangelo, Vittoria, and Dante**

The *Pietà* that Michelangelo drew for Vittoria Colonna in 1539/40 contains a quote from Dante that serves as an interpretative key for the enigmatic drawing: “Non vi si pensa quanto sangue
The verse is taken from *Paradiso* XXIX (v. 91), a canto that presents the creation of the angels as a gratuitous act of love by God and contains an invective against theologians and preachers who alter the words of Scripture. The message is that man does not think enough of the blood that Christ shed and that testifies God’s love for us. A consideration of Dantean allusions in Michelangelo’s later poetry frequently proves useful as an interpretive key for Michelangelo’s verses that contain these intertextual echoes. Thus, while exploring other pneumatological allusions in the *Rime*, the present section will also show that Michelangelo made a habit of “dialoguing through Dante” in his poems inspired by Colonna and that reading the poems inspired by Colonna in light of their Dantean allusions yields a clearer understanding of the theological discourses informing the composition.

Madrigal G111 (1536) is widely accepted as the first poems in the *Rime* inspired by Vittoria Colonna. A lady of divine beauty still lives, eats, sleeps, and talks among us like a mortal (vv. 1-4),

her grace and mercy remove all doubt (of her mortal nature, it is presumed),

and so the poet questions what punishment would be fitting for one having committed the sin of not following her (vv. 5-7). Blind and lost in his own thoughts, the poet admits to being slow/late to fall in love by his own powers (vv. 8-10). He invites the lady to draw within him as an artist does in stone or on a blank sheet of paper that which he would like to be present (vv. 11-13). Girardi specifies in his prose translation of the passage that the poet wants the lady to draw the image of her divinity into him and this is the meaning given to G162, vv. 7-9 examined above (“Porgo la carta bianca / a` vostri sacri inchiostri, / c’amor mi sganni e pietà `l ver ne scriva”).

S’egli è, donna, che puoi come cosa mortal, benché sia diva di beltà, c’ancor viva e mangi e dorma e parli qui fra noi, a non seguirti poi, cessato il dubbio, tuo grazia e mercede, qual pena a tal peccato degna fora? Ché alcun ne’ pensier suoi, co’ l’occhio che non vede, per virtù propria tardi s’innamora.

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70 For more details, see Emidio Campi, “‘Non vi si pensa quanto sangue costa.’ Michelangelo, Vittoria Colonna, and Bernardino Ochino” (1996).

71 Residori interprets the passage a little differently than Girardi did. The interpretation maintained here is that of Girardi. In his annotated edition of *Inferno* 33, 140 Branca Doria, not yet dead, still ‘eats drinks and sleeps and puts on clothes’ (James Saslow’s note in his edition of Michelangelo’s poetry, p. 245).
Disegna in me di fuora,
com’io fo in pietra od in candido foglio,
che nulla ha dentro, e èvvi ciò ch’io voglio.

(G111)

Michelangelo’s “co’ l’occhio che non vede” (v.9) is almost a direct calque of Dante’s “chi guarda con l’occhio che non vede” (v. 9). Purgatorio XV deals with Dante the pilgrim’s passage from the second terrace of the envious to that of the wrathful. It is in this canto that Dante narrates the experience of an ecstatic vision (vv. 85-115). The passage features the Virgin Mary, an example of gentleness. She is described as “a woman at the threshold” (“una donna, in su l’entrar, con atto / dolce di madre,” vv. 88-89). The verse in question (134) is the penultimate of an eighteen-line passage (Purg. XV, 118-135) in which the poet’s guide questions him about his ungrounded state following this vision:

Lo duca mio, che mi potea vedere 120
far si com’om che dal sonno si slega,
disse: “Che hai che non puoi tenere,
ma se’ venuto più che mezza lega
velando li occhi e con le gambe avvolte,
a guisa di cui vino o sonno piega?”
“O dolce padre mio, se tu m’ascolte,
io ti dirò,” diss’io, “ciò che m’apparve
quando le gambe mi furon si tolte.”
Ed ei: “Se tu avessi cento larve
sovra la faccia, non mi sarian chiuse
le tue cogitazion, quantunque parve.
Ciò che vedesti fu perché non scuse
d’aprir lo core a l’acque de la pace
che da l’eterno fonte son diffuse.
Non dimandai ‘Che hai?’ per quel che face
chi guarda pur con l’occhio che non vede,
quando disanimato il corpo giace; 135

Dante’s guide, Virgil, informs the wayfarer that he looks like one who has just awoken from sleep (vv. 118-119). Virgil questions the pilgrim about his clouded vision and weak legs, which resemble those of one who is drunk or dreaming (vv. 120-123). Dante offers to tell Virgil about his vision (124-126). The guide responds that he already knows from the wayfarer’s face what the pilgrim has seen (vv. 127-129): even if the poet had tried to conceal his thoughts these efforts would have failed. The poet’s vision was made transparent to his guide in the event that the wayfarer refused to be changed and propelled further by it (vv. 130-132). Virgil clarifies his intention in questioning: Virgil is not blind to Dante’s vision and the content of his thought, he
simply wanted to draw the pilgrim’s attention to his own slow movement in an effort to encourage a faster recovery of his senses (vv. 133-135).

What immediately strikes one familiar with the Beneficio is the mention in verses 131-132 of “opening one’s heart to the waters of peace that flow forth from the eternal source” (“d’aprir lo core a l’acque de la pace / che da l’eterno fonte son diffuse”). The language of this passage corresponds almost exactly to images Vittoria Colonna uses in her poetry to indicate the purifying action of the Holy Spirit in renewing man. As Marguerite de Navarre and Vittoria Colonna used biblical references in their letters and poetry to simultaneously indicate a topic while suggesting an ulterior interpretation of it, so Michelangelo could well have used Dante’s words to express ideas foreign to Dante’s text, that is, to couch unorthodox material in the orthodox language of a traditional source.

It is generally assumed that the beloved with which the poet is slow to become enamoured in this madrigal is the lady plain and simple, but it might make more sense to consider the love that one cannot achieve through one’s own powers to be the love of Christ, which can be achieved through grace alone. Perhaps the poet beseeches the lady as an instrument of God’s will through whom the Holy Spirit acts to draw (upon his heart?) the Augustinian imago dei. The reference to stone (sculpture) and to writing correspond respectively to the depiction of the unrenewed heart (which is imagined to be of stone) and the act of composing (Evangelical) poetry, which Colonna did with the intention of transforming others.

There is another ambiguity in the madrigal that might also be illuminated by reading v. 7 in light of its allusion to the Commedia – an allusion less explicit than that of v. 9, but a reference nevertheless. The ambiguity is in v. 5, “a seguirti poi.” It is not clear what the poet intends by “seguire” – is a destination or a manner intended, that is, should the poet follow his beloved to a place or should he follow her lead, imitating her in his actions?

Michelangelo’s verse “qual pena a tal peccato degna fora?” recalls Purg. X, v. 6 “qual fora stata al fallo degna scusa.” Dante’s verse is clearly echoed in the lexical items of Michelangelo’s “qual,” “fora,” and “degna,” and in the syntactical structure of Michelangelo’s “qual pena a tal peccato degna fora?:”

Poi fummo dentro al soglio de la porta
che ’l mal amor de l’anime disusa,
perché fa parer dritta la via torta,
sonando la senti’ esser rinchiusa;
Dante, having just passed through the gates at the entry to Purgatory (v. 1) – a crossing that is rarely made because the soul’s misdirected love makes the wrong path look right (vv. 2-3) – hears the gate close and knows that it is shut (vv. 4-5). He is on the terrace of the proud and the purifying ascent is about to begin. The poet asks himself what excuse there could be for him if he turned back to face the gate (vv. 5-6). Michelangelo’s reference to this passage could well have been intended to highlight the impossibility of “looking back,” that is of contemplating a different path, one other than the straight path of purification and perfection that had just been chosen, a path that in the context of G111, seems to mean following either the lady’s way or her example, that is by following her to a destined state and/or by modelling of his behaviour after hers in the manner of the *imitatio Christi*. The implication is that it would be a sin for the poet to deny himself the experience of being transformed for the better by the lady in refusing to follow her to where she leads. To refuse the “gift” of her example is a sin, for “grace” is to be received, despite one’s resistance to it.

Madrigal G154 (1536-40) describes an ascension via borrowed wings (v. 6). The image of wings as a means to rise to God recurs in Vittoria Colonna’s writings, not just her poetry, but also her letters. The grace of Michelangelo’s lady catalyzes the separation of the poet from his soul such that, by remaining with her, it is ensured salvation:

```
Tanto sopra me stesso
mi fai, donna, salire,
che non ch’i’l possa dire,
nol so pensar, perch’io non son più desso.
Dunche, perché più spesso,
se l’alie tuo mi presti,
non m’alzo e volo al tuo leggiadro viso,
e che con teco resti,
se dal ciel n’è concesso
ascender col mortale in paradiso?
Se non ch’i’ sia diviso
dall’alma per tuo grazia, e che quest’una
fugga teco suo morte, mie fortuna.
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(G154)

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72 One recalls the letter of 15 July 1543 in which she wrote that Pole “fa stare l’anima su l’ali, sicura di volare al desiderato nido” (examined in section 2.3 of the present chapter).
The poet is no longer himself for having risen so far above himself (by means of the beloved’s wings) that he cannot put the experience into words. In the supposed ineffability of the lyrical subject, James Saslow sees a parallel to *Paradiso* I, vv. 5-6 where Dante begins his ascent with Beatrice to heaven.  

In *Par. I*, vv. 4-9, Dante explains that as one returns from the beatific vision, one’s memory fails (cf. G151):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Nel ciel che più de la sua luce prende} \\
\text{fu`io, e vidi cose che ridire} \\
\text{nè sa né può chi di là su discende;} \\
\text{Perché appressando sé al suo desìre,} \\
\text{nostro intelletto si profonda tanto,} \\
\text{che dietro la memoria non può ire.}
\end{align*}
\]

In Michelangelo’s madrigal, the corresponding vision is of the beloved’s face. The image is one of Neoplatonic ascent and the lady’s grace is also a Neoplatonic/stilnovistic conceit. Yet, the presentation of justification in the *Beneficio* is recalled in that the poet’s ascension to the divine vision is catalyzed by the beloved’s enabling intercession. The borrowed wings might also reflect the concept of the mystical marriage as elaborated in the *Beneficio*, where it is written that through the metaphysical wedding of the soul to Christ, his attributes are appropriated by his bride.

In madrigal G165 (1541-44), compunction is a central metaphor. The madrigal recalls the *Commedia* in the form of a direct borrowing “un punto sol” (v. 11):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Se `l commodo degli occhi alcun constringe} \\
\text{con l’uso, parte insieme} \\
\text{la ragion perde, e teme;} \\
\text{ché più s’inganna quel c’`a sé più crede:} \\
\text{onde nel cor dipinge} \\
\text{per bello quel c’`a picciol beltà cede.} \\
\text{Ben vi fo, donna, fede} \\
\text{se `l commodo né l’uso non m’ha preso,} \\
\text{si di raro e` mie veggion gli occhi vostri} \\
\text{circonscritti ov’ `a pena il desir vola.} \\
\text{Un punto sol m’ha acceso,} \\
\text{Nè più vi vidi c’una volta sola.}
\end{align*}
\]

(G165)

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73 All references to Saslow in this chapter pertain to his translation of Michelangelo’s *Rime*, *The Poetry of Michelangelo*. This particular observation occurs on p. 307.
G165 problematised the impact of visual familiarity on judgment. As the habit of seeing something grows, one loses judgment and fears for its loss, because one is more deceived the more one believes oneself (vv. 1-4). When discernment has been lost, one “paints in one’s heart” as beautiful something that leads to little beauty (vv. 5-6).

With the second sentence, the poem switches from a general reflection to a particular consideration of the poet’s experience of his beloved. Habit has not invaded their relationship because he seldom sees her eyes: they are “confined where desire can fly only with effort”74 – a statement often considered to support the assumption that the poem was dedicated to Vittoria Colonna while she was at Viterbo. The closing two verses, however, suggest an alternate or additional interpretation.

“A single moment enflamed”75 the poet, and he has only seen her the once (vv. 11-12).76 On the surface, the narration reads as a Petrarchan/stilnovistic composition in which the poet has fallen in love with a woman he has seen only once. There are three intertextual allusions to Dante, however, that suggest an alternate, or rather, double interpretation of Michelangelo’s poem.

As Saslow notes (323), the concept of the “single moment” or “point” is one that appears in both Paradiso (XXX, v. 11; XXXIII, vv. 94-96) and Inferno (V, vv. 130-133). In Inferno V, vv. 130-133, the moment in question concerns the point at which passion erupted between Paolo and Francesca:

Per più fiate li occhi ci sospinse quella lettura, e scolorocci il viso; ma solo un punto fu quel che ci vinse.

Dante’s “solo un punto fu quel che ci vinse” becomes in Michelangelo “un punto sol m’ha acceso.” The passion between Paolo and Francesca is both carnal and illicit. Their judgment is clouded and they are deceived by the romantic text that they read, the source of their ensuing passion by which they came to merit damnation in Hell. The story they read was ultimately something beautiful that led to little beauty. In Paradiso, by contrast, the “point” in question is a

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74 Saslow’s translation, word for word, p. 323.
75 Saslow, p. 323.
76 Vittoria Colonna also uses the word “punto” in her discussion of compunction; sonnet 23, vv. 9-14 (1542) in Sonnets for Michelangelo, p. 74: “Lo spirito è ben dal caldo ardor compunto, / e sereno dal bel lume desio, / ma non ho da me forza a l’alta impresa. // Deh! Fa, signor, con un miracol ch’io / mi veggia intorno lucida in un punto / e tutta dentro in ogni parte accesa.”
divine vision. In *Paradiso* XXX, vv. 9-11, Dante the poet is compelled by love to turn his eyes to Beatrice:

Non altrimenti il trïunfo che lude
sempre dintorno al punto che mi vinse,
parendo inchiuso da quel ch’ell’inchiuade

The point that overcame the poet (il “punto che mi vinse”) was God as a bright light that encloses the very thing by which He himself is circumscribed. In *Paradiso* XXXIII, vv. 94-96, by contrast, having set his eyes on God and seen the totality of human experience as a whole of interconnected events, a “single volume bound by love” that humans only see as “scattered sheets” (vv. 86-87), Dante the poet clarifies that the vision (“un punto solo”) brought him tremendous forgetfulness:

Un punto solo m’è maggior letargo
che venticinque secoli a la ’mpresa
che fê Nettuno ammirar l’ombra d’Argo.

The contrast, within the tercet, between Neptune’s first vision of the Argonaut’s ship on the surface of the water above him that is still remembered after multiple centuries and Dante’s beatific vision that has just concluded but that cannot be recalled highlights the distance between what was seen and what was remembered.

The first six verses of madrigal G165 correspond to a more carnal love (something seemingly beautiful that leads to nowhere good), such as the one narrated in *Inferno* V. Yet, the six ensuing verses suggest a vision that could only be divine. Michelangelo’s “un punto sol” is a perfect calque of Dante’s “un punto solo” in *Paradiso* XXXIII. A plausible interpretation of the closing six verses of Michelangelo’s poem might then be that the poet has been able to ascend to a sublime vision through the eyes of his beloved on only one occasion – a moment when he truly saw her as the reflection/embodiment/vehicle of the divine that she is. Though he has seen the beloved since, he has not ascended again to such a spiritual vision. Because the experience has not become habitual, the poet’s judgment remains intact and he can trust himself.

The grounds for this interpretation is in v.10, “circoscritti ov’ a pena il desir vola.” The place to which desire flies with effort is the divine vision, which is achieved through contemplation. The word “circoscritti” recalls Dante’s description in *Paradiso* XXX cited above of God as one circumscribed by that which He encloses. G165 may thus be read as the poet’s
confession to having ascended through his beloved, but only once. Within the poet, the journey from base passion to divine ecstasy passes through the beloved.

In sonnet G166 (1541-44), the poet once again describes the impossibility of physically and/or metaphorically reaching the beloved with and/or while in his body (vv. 1-4):

Ben posson gli occhi mie presso e lontano
veder dov’apparisce il tuo bel volto;
ma dove loro, ai pie’, donna, è ben tolto
portar le braccia e l’una e l’altra mano.

L’anima, l’intelletto intero e sano
per gli occhi ascende più libero e sciolto
a l’alta tuo beltà; ma l’ardor molto
non dà tal privilegio al corp’umano.

Grave e mortal, sì che mal segue poi,
senz’ali ancor, d’un’angioletta il volo,
e ’l veder sol pur se ne gloria e loda.

Deh, se tu puo’ nel ciel quante tra noi,
fa’ del mie corpo tutto un occhio solo;
né fie poi parte in me che non goda.

The poet’s eyes can see those of his lady whether she is near or far, though his arms and hands are not able to reach her (vv. 1-4). Naturally, one assumes that with these first four verses the poet describes being unable to reach his beloved because of the physical distance between them. While there is little in the poem to discredit such an interpretation, the ensuing four verses reveal that the distance intended is also metaphysical: “L’anima, l’intelletto intero, e sano / per gli occhi ascende più libero e sciolto / a l’alta tuo beltà.” These words recall the “libero, dritto e sano [...] arbitrio” of Purgatorio XXVII, v. 140 with the notable difference (mentioned in an earlier analysis) that in Michelangelo the soul is able to ascend to the beatific vision not because the will is healed and straight and free, but because the mind is whole and healed.

Rather than highlighting the role of the will that is progressively purged of concupiscent desire in its journey to divine union (which Michelangelo treats in his earlier poetry and is so central to the soteriology of the Commedia), Michelangelo opts for the words “intero” and “sano,” key lexical items denoting the concept of transformative healing through Christ the physician as a precursor and means to salvation. As further evidence of this, the image of the poet’s outstretched arms recall the description in the Beneficio of the extended arms of Christ reaching out with the promise of re-making his future brides. Sonnet G166 is a unique fusion of Neoplatonic and Benedictine images, of ascension on the one hand and of transformation on the
other. The body cannot ascend without wings and so the poet prays to have his whole body transformed into an eye so that all of him may rise to the height of his beloved. Though grace is not mentioned in any of these poems, their language ties them to the themes of renewal and renovation in the Beneficio.

Though it does not allude directly to the Commedia, Madrigal G164 (1541-44) also explores the role of eyes in ascension from earthly to celestial things:

Per fido esempio alla mia vocazione
nel parto mi fu data la bellezza,
che d’ambo l’arti m’è lucerna e specchio.
s’altro si pensa, è falsa opinione.
Questo sol l’occhio porta quella altezza 
c’a pingere e scolpir qui m’apparecchio.
S’è giudizi temerari e sciocchi
al senso tiran a beltà, che muove
e porta al cielo ogni intelletto sano,
dal mortale al divin non vanno gli occhi
infermi, e fermi sempre pur lì d’ove
ascender senza grazia è pensier vano.

(G164)

In the first sestet, the poet asserts that the ideal of beauty was given to him at birth to serve as a faithful guide to his vocation (vv. 1-2). This is true, the poet asserts, because beauty alone can elevate the eye to the height the poet prepares to paint and sculpt (vv. 3-6). Individuals of unsound intellect seek to derive beauty from the senses, the poet continues (vv. 7-8). But beauty is what carries the “healthy” mind to heaven (v. 9) and healthy eyes alone can raise the poet from contemplating the mortal to beholding the divine (v. 10). “Infirm” eyes become stuck and, when they do, they can rise to heaven only through grace (vv. 11-12). Grace is required to overcome infirmity and to restore health so that ascension becomes possible.

While the theme of meditation on art as a springboard to beatific vision is consistent with the Ficinian Neoplatonic theory of ascent through love that is developed in the double sestet, the mention of health with respect to the eyes (“inermi”) and to the intellect (“sano”) is Benedictine in nature. According to the doctrine as it is expounded in the Beneficio, Christ is a medic who, though his grace, restores health to Christians. While the adjective “sano” appears in other literary narrations of ascent, such as the Commedia, it rarely qualifies the intellect or the eyes (in Purgatorio, for example, it is used to qualify the purgated “arbitrio,” Purg. XXVII, vv. 139-142). Given that Michelangelo’s art was to serve an Evangelical and possibly mystical
function for the *Spirituali*, this poem, plausibly written while Colonna was at Viterbo, must be considered in light of these historical circumstances.

The four poems G163-G166 constitute a subset of their own. They were all written while Vittoria was at Viterbo and thus physically distant from Michelangelo who could no longer meet with her on a daily basis in the gardens of San Silvestro to meditate on Pauline epistles. The four compositions all focus on the role of the eye in ascension, a key element in the Neoplatonic anagogy of ascent, but also in letters exchanged between members of the *Ecclesia viterbiensis* who lament the spiritual peril of being physically distant from each other.

In her letter of 15 July 1543 addressed to Cardinal Pole (examined in section 3.2), Vittoria Colonna stated that the closer she walked to Christ, the more she needed to speak with Pole. She lamented their distance. Colonna repeats a similar sentiment in her letter of 10 May 1545 to Marguerite de Navarre whom she longed to be near because of the spiritual benefit of physically *seeing* her: “sempre la *vista*, di Vostra M.tà sarrà da me sommamente desiderata benché guardandola si si va in Christo, et riverendola in spirito” [emphasis mine] (130). But while Marguerite is distant from Colonna, her letter written to Vittoria will serve as a source of grace for the Italian noblewoman: “sono di tanta consolatione, soccorso et virtù alla mia debolezza che se v. ra M.tà il sapesse così certo, come certo io lo sento, me ne faria gratia più spesso, del che spesso pregarò Dio, il qual solo può mover lei, et consolarme, che si degni perficere in vostra M.tà si mirabili gratie, et sempre adempir in me ogni voluntà” (131).

Madrigal G163 appears to be, at first glance, a purely Neoplatonic poem. The poet fears less for the fate of his soul when he is near his beloved (vv. 3-4) because when they are close he sees her face and eyes, “full of salvation,” that speak of heaven’s promise and he longs for this:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Quante più fuggo e odio ognor me stesso,} & \\
\text{tanto a te, donna, con verace speme ricorro; e manco teme} & \\
\text{l’alma di me, quant’a te son più presso.} & \\
\text{A quel che ’l ciel promesso} & \\
\text{m’ha nel tuo volto aspiro} & \\
\text{e ne’ begli occhi, pien d’ogni salute:} & \\
\text{e ben m’accorgo spesso,} & \\
\text{in quel c’ogni altro miro,} & \\
\text{che gli occhi senza ’l cor non han virtute.} & \\
\text{Luci già mai vedute!} & \\
\text{nè da vederle è men che ’l gran desio;} & \\
\text{ché ’l veder raro è prossimo a l’oblio.} & 
\end{align*}
\]
The present chapter has examined the pneumatological imagery and the attendant theological discourses in Michelangelo’s poems on art, as well as in his verses inspired by Colonna that allude to the *Commedia*. In these lyrics, two patterns of spiritual patronage and intercession were analyzed: the divine refashioning of the poet (through grace) and the mystical ascension of the poet through contemplation rendered efficacious through grace (illumination, borrowed wings). Three important poems remain to be discussed. They are the most commonly analyzed verses in reflections on the relationship between Vittoria Colonna and Michelangelo, and in them the ideas explored in this section are easily discerned – perhaps more so than in the verses analyzed so far.

2.5.4 Colonna, the Holy Spirit, and Salvific Intercession: From Perfection to Restoration

Madrigal G235 (1544-46) is perhaps the best known poem inspired by Colonna. Michelangelo had sent it to her while she was alive:  

```
Un uomo in una donna, anzi uno dio
per la sua bocca parla,
ond’io per ascoltarla
son fatto tal, che ma’ più sarò mio.
l’ credo ben, po’ ch’io
a me da lei fu’ tolto,
fuor di me stesso aver di me pietate;
si sopra ’l van desio
mi sprona il suo bel volto,
ch’i’ veggio morte in ogni altra beltate.
O donna che passate
per acqua e foco l’alme a’ lieti giorni,
deh, fate c’a me stesso più non torni.
```

(G235)

A god speaks through his beloved and he has been made other than himself as a result (vv. 1-4; this recalls the beatific vision to which he had ascended on her borrowed wings in G154). His lady “passes souls through fire and water on to happy days” and the poet hopes that he will remain outside of himself (vv. 11-13). The reference to fire and water as passion and tears occurs elsewhere in Michelangelo’s *Rime*, but in this madrigal they should be interpreted as symbols of the Holy Spirit that work on him through his lady. This is certainly Carlo Ossola’s

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77 Michelangelo indicates as much in a letter to a friend after her death; see Girardi’s critical apparatus, p. 387.
assessment in “La poésie de Michel-Ange: l’idée de la grace” where he states that in vv. 12-13 Michelangelo “celebrates” Colonna as the “author” of his “baptism”: “Michel-Ange célèbre la présence et l’autorité de cette dame comme l’auteur de son bapteme d’eau et de feu, de son martyre, qui l’élève au ciel” (149). The mention in v.1 of a god speaking through the lady’s mouth, which could be interpreted as a mere praise of her verbal prowess, seems more likely to refer to Colonna’s ability to transform the poet. Given the manner in which Colonna’s contemporaries characterize her as an oracle through which the divine speaks, this interpretation is a plausible one.

G236 (1545-56) is a sonnet that appears on the same sheet as G235. The poem constitutes an extended reflection on the theology of the Holy Spirit in light of personal experience (the five variants of the poem included in the critical apparatus of Girardi’s critical edition of the Rime support this interpretation):

Se ben concetto ha la divina parte
il volto e gli atti d’alcun, po’ di quello
doppio valor con breve e vil modello
dà vita a’ sassi, e non è forza d’arte.

Né altrimenti in più rustiche carte,
anz’una pronta man prenda ’l pennello,
fra’ dotti ingegni il più accorto e bello
pruova e rivede, e suo storie comparte.

Simil di me model di poca istima
mie parto fu, per cosa alta e prefetta
da voi rinascer po’, donna alta e degna.

Se ’l poco accresce, e ’l mie superchio lima
vostra mercé, qual penitenzia aspetta
mie fiero ardor, se mi gastiga e ’nsegna?

(G236)

If the divine part of the artist (his intellect) has conceived well, the sculptor may then give life to stone – a feat that is not simply a creative act, but a divine one (vv. 1-4). Similarly, the poet who was born possessing little worth (like a stone), was reborn through his beloved as a “perfect thing” (like a work of art) (vv. 9-11). If the beloved’s grace “increases the poet’s worth and moderates its excesses,” the poet wonders what penance he should expect from his fierce ardour [the lady] that [who] castigates and teaches him so as to perfect him. This sonnet exemplifies the Benedictine concept present in the Beneficio of achieving perfection through

78 This is Girardi’s wording in his prose translation of the poem, p. 388.
transformation by grace. The key lexical items, like “concetto” and “rinascere” recall G151, G152 and G153 examined in this chapter.

G257 is an incomplete sonnet that Ryan considers “possibly” dedicated to Vittoria Colonna, G257 (1546-47):

Perché sì tardi e perché non più spesso
con ferma fede quell’interno ardore
che mi lieva di terra e porta ’l core
dove per suo virtù non gli è concesso?
Forse c’ogn’ intervallo n’è promesso 5
da l’uno a l’altro tuo messo d’amore,
perc’ogni raro ha più forz’e valore
quant’è più desïato e meno appresso.
La notte è l’intervallo, e ’l di la luce:
l’una m’aghiaccia ’l cor, l’altro m’infamma 10
d’amor, di fede e d’un celeste foco.

(G257)

The poet laments that the “inner ardour” of “firm/steady faith” that lifts his heart from the earth to higher spheres of experience happens seldom (vv. 1-4). In specifying that the ascension is not secured by his worth alone, the poet draws attention to the various ways by which one can rise despite one’s own worth or abilities. The poet then turns to the source of the “messo d’amore” (“love received” or grace). He uses the familiar form of address (“tuo”) to clarify that the interval in which the transporting love is absent is like night, which freezes the poet’s heart, while the interval in which the love is felt is like day, which sets the poet’s heart on fire.

Whether the poet’s interlocutor is Vittoria Colonna or Christ, the nature of the effect is manifest: the poet’s heart is enflamed by love (“amor”), by faith (“fede”), and by celestial fire (“celeste foco”) – the Holy Spirit. The poet distinguishes between love and faith on the one hand and a second flame on the other. The discourse transcends the Neoplatonic or Petrarchan rhetoric of love and ascension; a third element enters the discussion, a discrete phenomenon, of divine origin, that evokes the flame of the “true faith” described by Valdés, while simultaneously alluding to the Holy Spirit as described in the Bible, in Vittoria Colonna’s poetry, and in letters exchanged between Vittoria and Marguerite de Navarre.

On the reverse of the page on which G273 (1547) is written, there is a sketch of a hand holding a book (a possible reference to the study of the Gospel). This incomplete sonnet written the year of Colonna’s death borrows its setting from Paradiso I, 1-9 (vv. 1-6). In the poem Michelangelo links the Benedictine topos of the health/sickness (“egritudin,” v. 7) and the
Neoplatonic idea, expressed by him in the poetry explored in the above study, that one draws from something (or to oneself) that which is most reflective of one’s nature/spiritual-psychological state (“conforme a la suo parte interna,” v. 14):

Se sempre è solo e un quel che sol muove
il tutto per altezza e per traverso
non sempre a no’ si mostra per un verso,
ma più e men quante suo grazia piove.
A me d’un modo e d’altri in ogni altrove: 5
più e men chiaro o più lucente e terso,
secondo l’egritudin, che disperso
ha l’intelletto a le divine pruove.
Nel cor ch’è più capace più s’appiglia,
se dir si può, ’l suo volto e ’l suo valore; 10
e di quel fassi sol guida e lucerna.
truova conforme a la suo parte interna.

(G273)

God appears to a given individual according to how much “sickness has dulled one’s mind to the evidence of divinity.” Whereas in the Paradiso passage in question, God and his presence are simply imagined as light of varying intensity, in Michelangelo the divinity is additionally qualified as a source of “showered grace” (“grazia piove,” v. 4), an epithet that Michelangelo has applied to Colonna in the poetry he dedicated to her. In G273, Michelangelo fuses Neoplatonic conceits and Benedictine images.

After Colonna’s death, Michelangelo would do away with intermediaries (such as the beloved) as well as his cryptic or seemingly codified language and begin to address Christ openly, as he had plausibly done once before in G87 (Vorrei voler, Signor, quel che non voglio; 1534). In these final poems, Reform rhetoric becomes even more unabashed as a Christocentric devotion replaces the mysticism of the Spirit characteristic of Michelangelo’s friendship with Vittoria Colonna. The role of Colonna as an instrument of divine grace depicted in Michelangelo’s poems inspired by her, later becomes transferred to Christ. With Colonna’s death in 1547, Michelangelo had few friends left: Christ had to become a direct source of grace for the poet, as there were no longer suitable earthly intercessors to complete the task his soul required.

79 Saslow, p.462.
2.6 Michelangelo, Christ, and the Redemption of the Cross

In sonnet G274 (mid-1547), the poet beseeches the Lord to present himself to the poet’s eyes everywhere he looks (v. 1) so that he might once again experience being enflamed by the Lord’s fire (the Holy Spirit?). The Lord in question (whom Michelangelo frequently addresses as “Signor mie caro” as he does in v. 5) is the only one capable of renewing the poet within and without (v. 7):

Deh fammiti vedere in ogni loco!
Se da mortal bellezza arder mi sento,
appresso al tuo mi sarà foco ispento,
e io nel tuo sarò, com’ero, in foco.
Signor mie caro, i’ te sol chiamo e ’nvoco
contr’a l’inutil mie cieco tormento:
tu sol puo’ rinnovarmi fuora e drento
le voglie e ’l senno e ’l valor lento e poco.
Tu desti al tempo, Amor, quest’alma diva
e ’n questa spoglia ancor fragil e stanca
l’incarcerasti, e con fiero destino.
Che poss’io altro che così non viva?
Ogni ben senza te, Signor, mi manca;
il cangiar sorte è sol poter divino.

(G274)

It is the Benedictine notions of renewal and divine re-making that Michelangelo expounds in this sonnet. Christ’s re-making and holy fire are required for the poet to achieve salvation (vv. 13-14). Only divine power can alter human fate (v. 14). The appeal constitutes as oration – a fervent prayer recommended in the Beneficio.

The double quatrain that constitutes G280 (1547-50) develops along similar Benedictine lines:

L’alma inquieta e confusa in se non truova
altra cagion c’alcun grave peccato
mal conosciuto, onde non è celato
all’immensa pietà c’a’ miser giova.
I’ parlo a te, Signor, c’ogni mie pruova
fuor del tuo sangue non fà l’uomo beato:
miserere di me, da ch’io son nato
a la tuo legge; e non fie cosa nuova.

(G280)

The poet suffers for a “grave sin” that he scarcely knows, presumably that of original sin, which he did not commit, but whose penance he has inherited – a point underscored in the first chapter
of the Beneficio. The poet asks the Lord for mercy ("pietà") because it is only through Christ’s blood that a man may become blessed. The reference to divine law ("a la tuo legge"), may well allude to the five “offices” of the Law of Moses described at length in the Beneficio.

G285 (1552-54) is frequently quoted by those interested in linking Michelangelo to the Reformation. In this sonnet, the poet reveals that he is uncertain of salvation (he approaches two deaths, one of which is certain, the other likely, vv. 10-11). A Petrarchan nautical image of the soul as a boat is invoked to narrate the poet’s troubled earthly journey towards final judgment. The poet’s art is no longer sufficient to calm his soul and so he turns to Christ, whom he describes as the one who opened his arms on the cross to receive mankind (v. 14) – a plausible reference to the image of Christ in the Beneficio that he incorporated into his Crocifisso for Vittoria Colonna.

Giunto è già ’l corso della vita mia,  
con tempestoso mar, per fragil barca,  
al comun porto, ov’è render si varca  
conto e ragion d’ogni opera trista e pia.  

Onde l’affettuosa fantasia  
che l’arte mi fece idol e monarca  
conosco or ben com’era d’error carca  
e quel c’è mal suo grado ogn’uom desia.  

Gli amorosi pensier, già vani e lieti,  
che fien or, s’a duo morte m’avvicino?  
D’una so ’l certo, e l’altra mi minaccia.  

Né pinger né scolpir fie più che quieti  
l’anima, volta a quell’amor divino  
c’aperse, a prender noi, ’n croce le braccia.

(G285)

The syntax of v. 14 is curious for its inversions and its jarring rhythm. It is a compressed, impressionistic verse characterized by a hyperbaton (the location of “a prender noi, ’n croce” between “c’aperse” and “le braccia”) that leaves open to the reader the question of what semantic elements the poet intended to emphasize and why. The physical and visual distance separating the words “c’aperse” and “le braccia” suggests just how wide Christ opened his arms, and by analogy, just how loving he is and how significant his sacrifice was. Of the five versions of the sonnet, Michelangelo attempted to change this verse only once, in version IV, where he left “c’aperse” and “le braccia” in the same position: “c’aperse in croce a prender noi le braccia” [the emphasis is Girardi’s and it appears in the critical apparatus of his edition of the Rime on p. 451]. In this second version, Michelangelo also maintains the rhyme between “minaccia” (v. 11) and “braccia” (v. 14) – a rhyme that recalls the role of Christ as judge: it is
Christ’s raised right arm in representations of the Last Judgement that relegates the damned to Hell. The rhyme between “minaccia” and “braccia” echoes the poet’s fear of final judgement alluded to in his concern about nearing a double death (v.10). Michelangelo’s sonnet thus evokes the dual role of Christ as judge, on the one hand, and as saviour, on the other.

Michelangelo’s Christ in G285 is a more complex figure than the Christ in the Beneficio. The ambiguous representation of a Christ who seems to promise salvation as he simultaneously threatens to condemn is characteristic of Michelangelo, in general, and of his Last Judgement, in particular.

In G286 (1552-54) the poet similarly laments his many misguided thoughts which should already have been eliminated in favour of one single idea (Christ’s passion) capable of leading him along the straight path:

Gl’infiniti pensier mie d’error pieni,
negli ultim’anni della vita mia,
ristringer si dovrien ’n un sol che sia
guida agli eterni suoi giorni sereni.
Ma che poss’io, Signor, s’a me non vieni
coll’usata ineffabil cortesia?

(G286)

The poet asks the Lord how he will be able to achieve this end without divine assistance. The aid in question has been experienced before as “ineffable courtesy.” The poet here requests the repetition of an experience that he has already had, but that has not yet resulted in a permanent change. Michelangelo has flirted with salvation, but he has not yet secured it. In the two closing tercets of sonnet G288 (1555), the poet repeats his request for help:

Ammezzami la strada c’al ciel sale,
Signor mie caro, e a quel mezzo solo
salir m’è di bisogno la tuo ’ita.
Mettimi in odio quante ’l mondo vale
e quante suo bellezze onoro e colo,
c’anzi morte caparri eterna vita.

(G288, vv. 9-14)

The poet appeals once again to his “Signor mie caro,” beseeching that he halve the road to salvation. The image of the upward journey corresponds to a soteriological scheme of ascent, yet the poet’s impassioned address embodies the same mystical spirit as the Beneficio and his admission that divine help would still be required even if the Lord “shortened the climb by half”
implies the need for one of personal transformation or assistance in maintaining faith in order to complete the journey: two functions of Christ as he is portrayed in the Beneficio.

This interpretation of the help the poet seeks (transformation, strengthened faith) may seem like a stretch, based on the general nature of the words “la tuo ’ita,” but the following sonnet, G289 (1555), elaborates these very ideas. Consider the second quatrains and two tercets of the complete sonnet:

Deh, porgi, Signor mio, quella catena che seco annoda ogni celeste dono: la fede, dico, a che mi stringo e sprono; né, mie colpa, n’ho grazia intiera e piena. Tanto mi fie maggior, quante più raro il don de’ doni, e maggior fia se, senza, pace e contento il mondo in sé non have. Po’ che non fusti del tuo sangue avaro, che sarà di tal don la tuo clemenza, se ’l ciel non s’apre a noi con altra chiave.  

(G289, vv. 5-14)

The poet urges the Lord to extend to him the chain (the bond of faith) that brings with it all other heavenly gifts and the “full grace” that he cannot achieve on his own because of his guilt (which prevents the poet from enjoying full faith and so being justified) (vv. 5-8). If full faith is not granted along with grace, the poet will not be saved though Christ’s blood has been shed: this is the doctrine of justification by grace through faith. Michelangelo’s poetry grows ever more theologically transparent. A consideration of the mystically-tinged sonnet G290 supports this observation:

Scarco d’un importuna e greve salma, Signor mie caro, e dal mondo disciolto, qual fragil legno a te stanco rivolto da l’orribil procella in dolce calma. Le spini e’ chiodi e l’una e l’altra palma col tuo benigno umil pietoso volto prometton grazia di pentirsi molto, e speme di salute a la trist’alma. Non mirin co’ iustizia i tuo sant’occhi il mie passato, e ’l gastigato orecchio; non tenda a quello il tuo braccio severo. Tuo sangue sol mie colpe lavi e tocchi, e più abondi, quant’i’ son più vecchio, di pronta aita e di perdono intero.  

(G290)
In the first quatrain Michelangelo employs the metaphor of a boat approaching the port of its final destination to denote the journey of the soul to final judgment; Christ is once again addressed as “Signor mie caro.” Christ’s passion is then described in an iconographically atypical manner consistent with Michelangelo’s drawings for Vittoria Colonna: the Lord’s countenance is benign, humble and merciful – the innovation being Michelangelo’s focus on a serene rather than suffering Christ – and his (happy) face promises the poet’s “unhappy” soul the “grace” of “great repentance” and the “hope of salvation.” The poet expresses his desire that Christ’s blood suffice to “wash and cleanse” his sins, and to provide prompt assistance and forgiveness as needed. The multiple references to the “benefits” of Christ and the vivid, descriptive language in which they are presented leave no doubt as to the poet’s familiarity with the Beneficio. The “braccio severo” of v. 11, however, recalls the role of Christ as judge. In this sonnet, as in G285, Michelangelo evokes both aspects of Christ – the saviour and the judge. Once again, his Christ is more complex than the one of the Beneficio; the poet’s salvation is not certain.

The incomplete sonnet G292 (after 1555) presents Christ as a strengthener of faith and will (vv. 1-4), as well as the exclusive source of good works (vv. 5-6):

Ben sarien dolce le preghiere mie,
se virtù mi prestassi da pregarte:
nel mio fragil terren non è già parte
da frutto buon, che da sé nato sie.
   Tu sol se’ seme d’opre caste e pie,
   che là germuglian, dove ne fa’ parte;
   nessun proprio valor può seguirtarte,
   se non gli mostri le tuo sante vie.

(G292)

The poet does not have sufficient power, unless the way is first shown to him. He addresses Christ with the familiar (tu) form: “tu sol se’ seme d’opre caste e pie” – a verse that echoes the language of Colonna’s letter to Marguerite of 10 May 1545 and that also constitutes a discourse inspired by Dante, as noted earlier in this section.

The intimate tone of G292 is maintained in sonnet G293, where the poet once again emphasizes the impossibility of changing his life by his own strength (vv. 5-8).

Carico d’anni e di peccati pieno
e col trist’uso radicato e forte,
vicin mi veggio a l’una e l’altra morte, e parte ’l cor nutrisco di veleno.
He appeals to his “Signor mie caro” to understand that it will take more than inspiring in him a desire for heaven for his soul to be re-made: Christ must re-form him (vv. 9-11). Once more Michelangelo fuses these Benedictine and Valdesian concepts with a soteriological scheme of ascent according to which the poet requests that his upward journey be halved (v. 13).

In the first two verses of a sonnet addressed to Lodovico Beccadelli (an archbishop and friend of Michelangelo), G300 (1556), the poet expresses his certainty that he and his friend will meet again in heaven owing to the cross, grace and various sufferings: “Per croce e per grazia e per diverse pene / Son certo, monsignor, trovarci in cielo” (G300, vv. 1-2). The various sufferings conform to the injunction in the Beneficio to model one’s life after Christ’s experience of carrying the Cross. The order of the words “croce-grazia-diverse pene” stand, synecdotally, for the soteriological trajectory of every Christian; Michelangelo says to Beccadelli: Christ died on the Cross; we received the benefits of his sacrifice, and transformed by these, we too, have carried our metaphorical crosses and so Heaven is ours.

The last (extant) poem by Michelangelo, incomplete sonnet G302 (1560), includes the key Benedictine and Valdesian elements present in the Beneficio in an intimate address to Christ in the familiar form (tu): “Signor mie caro, tu sol che vesti e spogli, / e col tuo sangue l’alme pughi e sani / da l’infinte colpe e moti umani” (G302, vv. 5-7). Christ alone can clothe (Valdesian) and strip (Benedictine) the soul, which is purged and healed (Benedictine) by his blood (the source of all our “benefits”). The poems of divine presence examined in this section do not seem so much a medium of confession as an exercise in devotional meditation and oration aimed at spiritual transformation. In the absence of Colonna and other spiritual intercessors, Michelangelo turned to Christ.
2.8 Conclusion

Michelangelo’s poetry inspired by Vittoria Colonna and the community of Spirituali is characterized by a consistent theological discourse on grace, redemption, rebirth, and renewal. In these compositions, Michelangelo reflects on theological ideas in light of a real or desired personal experience. His poetry thus functions as a devotional medium for salvation and self-change. In his lyrics, Michelangelo portrays experiences of divine refashioning by means of Neoplatonic conceits and artistic imagery. In some of these poems, allusions to Dante’s *Commedia* offer insight into the theological reflection or mystical experience at hand. After Colonna’s death, Michelangelo begins requesting experiences of divine refashioning or union through ascent directly from Christ – in her absence he turns to the efficacy of writing and to the power of the word and a pneumatological mysticism gives way to a Christocentric one.

In studies on Michelangelo’s art and the Catholic Reformation, references to his poetry are frequently employed to illuminate the theological discourse under investigation. In examinations of Michelangelo’s *Crociﬁsso* and *Pietà* for Colonna, we have seen that the poems on grace and gift-giving (G159, G160), as well as the later poems to Christ, are typically read in light of the Beneficio. To my knowledge, there have been no analyses of the preparation drawings of the Samaritana in connection to Italian Evangelism. The present study on Michelangelo’s poetry thus intends to offer a brief analysis of the “Samaritan at the well” in light of the pneumatological discourse emphasized in analyses of Michelangelo’s poetry for Vittoria Colonna in this chapter.

In Michelangelo’s preparation drawing of the Samaritana, two figures stand by a well: the woman from Samaria is positioned to the left of the well and Christ to the right. A tree stands behind the well. The two figures gaze at each other with an arm extended slightly in front of them. Each points to the well, but also seemingly to each other, in the centre of the drawing, directly over the well and in front of the tree. Christ extends a finger to the woman’s outstretched hand. The gesture is reminiscent of God’s finger extended to Adam on the Sistine ceiling that stands symbolically for the Holy Spirit and the transmission of grace. Just as grace was extended to the woman from Samaria through Christ, so Colonna – frequently described as Christ-like in Michelangelo’s poetry – was as a divine and intercessory figure through which the artist and poet experienced grace. The Samaritana can thus be seen to represent the relationship between Michelangelo and Colonna in terms of its deepest spiritual significance: Colonna is literally the poet’s saving grace.
In the conclusion of his seminal study on Michelangelo and Vittoria Colonna, Emidio Campi echoed Giorgio Spini in suggesting that many elements and influences culminated in the religious expression of Michelangelo’s later years:

Qualunque tentativo di valutazione teologica di Michelangelo non può prescindere dal considerare gli stimoli decisivi che gli giunsero dalla dimestichezza con grandi personalità dell’umanesimo fiorentino come Angelo Poliziano, Cristoforo Landino, Marsilio Ficino, durante gli anni trascorsi alla corte di Lorenzo il Magnifico e di Piero de’ Medici, dallo studio dei grandi trecentisti volgari – Dante Petrarca, Boccaccio – di cui studiò con profonda serietà le opere, dalla predicazione di Savonarola, di cui conservava anche da vecchio viva memoria, dallo studio personale delle sacre Scritture accompagnato dalla lettura di autorevoli interpreti. (57).

Rather than assuming that theological issues suddenly became important to Michelangelo when he met Vittoria Colonna, as Charles De Tolnay had suggested, Emidio Campi concludes that it is more realistic to assume that she simply intensified concerns that had already occupied the artist: “Sembra più realistico pensare che tale incontro abbia riproposto, sia pure in maniera più accentuata, motivi e problematiche che per anni e anni avevano occupato le mente dell’artista” (57).

The remaining chapters of the present dissertation will explore two earlier life experiences that plausibly set the stage for the artist’s later formation of a personal theology. The first is a Pauline influence that reached Michelangelo through Lorenzo de’ Medici and through the mystical verses of the Italian lauda tradition (chapter three). The second experience constitutes an Augustinian influence that informed Dante’s Commedia, but also Cristoforo Landino’s Platonizing commentary of Dante’s grand epic (chapter 4). As will be demonstrated, a consideration of these respective Pauline and Augustinian influences in Michelangelo’s early life provides a fruitful means of elucidating how it is that the poet arrived at the mystically fervent theology of his later years.
Chapter 3  
Michelangelo, Lorenzo de’ Medici and Italian Mystical Verse

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, Michelangelo’s later poetry was considered in light of his relationship to the Italian Evangelicals known as the Spirituali of the Ecclesia viterbiensis. The Beneficio di Cristo as well as the poetry and poetics of Vittoria Colonna were considered as sources of inspiration for Michelangelo’s later religious verse, which was analyzed for its Benedictine and Valdesian content as well as for evidence of the poet’s engagement in a process of “relational self-transformation” through his friendship with Vittoria Colonna, and later, in the context of a personal, mystical relationship with Christ. It was shown that in his poetry Michelangelo routinely describes Vittoria Colonna as an instrument of grace – of divine refashioning, rebirth and renewal. It was also demonstrated that in the poetry composed after her death, Michelangelo turns to Christ, as a source of grace, and requests, if not mystical union with God, then the kind of spiritual transport and metamorphosis that in Italian religious verse pre-dating the Quattrocento were most commonly found in paraliturgical texts, such as laude, where mystical supplication was granted lyric form. Because of this, the lauda tradition should be considered as source of inspiration for Michelangelo’s spiritual poetry.

In Italian religious verse of the Trecento and in the later mystical laude of the Quattrocento, both Christ and the Holy Spirit were invoked to effect, through grace and divine love, the sinner’s spiritual transformation and regeneration, as well as the Christian soul’s mystical union with God. In the Florence of Michelangelo’s youth, both Lorenzo de’ Medici and Girolamo Savonarola composed lauds and contributed not only to a renewed interest in the laude of earlier centuries, but to their revival, including the more mystical compositions. Lorenzo de’ Medici, whose general influence on Michelangelo’s poetry is widely accepted but insufficiently explored, was a source of poetic inspiration and example not only of (erudite) Neoplatonic poetry, but of (popular) Christian mystical verse as well. The present chapter will thus examine Michelangelo’s relationship to Lorenzo de’ Medici and his verse (including his laude), as well as to the lauds of the tradition that inspired Lorenzo. For these reasons, after considering Lorenzo de’ Medici as a source for Michelangelo’s rime, the present chapter will examine the mystical laude of the Florentine tradition with respect to Michelangelo’s later
mystical poetry as it was characterized in the previous chapter on the *Spirituali* and the *Beneficio di Cristo*.

In this chapter, the Italian *lauda* tradition is presented as a plausible source of Michelangelo’s mystical poetry, and it will be argued that both Franciscan and Dominican mystical verse provided Michelangelo with many lexical and conceptual elements for his own spiritual poetry. Ultimately, it will be shown that Michelangelo’s mystical verse is informed by a Christian literary tradition in the Italian vernacular that begins with the poetry of Jacopone da Todi (Duecento), passes through Giovanni Colombini and Bianco da Siena (Trecento), Leonardo Giustinian and Feo Belcari (early Quattrocento), and Lorenzo de’ Medici (late Quattrocento) to reach Michelangelo himself (Cinquecento). For the purposes of qualifying or contextualizing the present discussion, references will be made, where necessary, to important points raised in this previous chapter on Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the Reformation.

### 3.2 Rethinking Michelangelo’s Sources

In an article on Michelangelo’s thought (“Il pensiero di Michelangelo”), Eugenio Garin challenged the scholarly platitude that Michelangelo was a Neoplatonic artist steeped in the philosophic literature of the time. Reviewing the scholarship of Erwin Panofsky and Charles de Tolnay on Michelangelo’s art, he argued that the theory of philosophic doctrines should be set aside left behind in favour of less erudite and precise sources:  

1. Essentially, Garin sought to challenge Michelangelo’s supposed illustrious and unified Neoplatonic initiation, which he considered more myth than fact.  
2. Earlier scholarship, he argues, had produced an utopic and thus somewhat disingenuous representation of the Florentine context of Michelangelo’s adolescence.  

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2. “Michelangelo si trovò in anni decisivi alla corte di Lorenzo accanto a Ficino, Landino, Poliziano, Pico; tutti platonici. Ne sentì l’influenza, dunque ebbe un avvio platonico: infatti considerò il corpo un carcere terreno, vide l’idea nascosta nella materiale, sentì la tensione fra vita attiva e contemplativa, capì il senso della forma che emerge dall’uniforme. Poi subì il contracolpo, ma anche il fascino, della predicazione savonaroliana. Così la sua ispirazione si tese fra la rinascita del neoplatonismo e i bisogni di una riforma piagnona; e tutto questo sullo sfondo degli ultimi anelli dell’umanesimo civile della morente repubblica di Firenze” (533).

3. “quella cultura fiorentina del cadere del ’400, perfino intorno a Lorenzo, era rottola da differenze non piccole; nel suo seno si alimentavano polemiche non trascurabili. Ficino non era Pico, né Poliziano. Petrarca e il petrarchismo non erano il neoplatonismo dei ficiniani. Landino e il suo commento a Dante avevano i modi propri; il ritorno alle
Michelangelo had read, in particular with respect to the erudite or Latin literature: “anche maggiore si impone quando si vada ricostruendo il patrimonio di letture di Michelangelo, e si sia tentati di collocarlo a livelli molto alti” (536).

Garin praised Nesca A. Robb’s suggestions of Benci’s “Pimandro” and Ficino’s “Convito” in the vernacular as sources for Michelangelo’s poetry. He also approved of Erwin Panofsky’s suggestion of Landino’s commentary on the Commedia (the most probable source for Michelangelo’s exposure to Neoplatonic ideas), as well as conversations, academies, and preaching in general (“un diffondersi di motivi, un clima, degli ambienti” 536). What Garin criticized was the suggestion of erudite sources, such as those proposed by Robert J. Clements (536). He disapproved of comparing Michelangelo’s verses with contemporary literature in the vernacular, primarily because similar ideas do not denote genetic relationship.\(^4\)

In the absence of a systematic analysis of vernacular lyric of the century, Garin asserts, it is easy to presume but difficult to ascertain with certainty the influence of one contemporary author on another when the possibility remains of a source of inspiration common to both and when the similarities between the two poets’ compositions constitute shared theme and imagery alone.\(^5\) It is observations such as these that ultimately lead Garin to conclude that the sources of Michelangelo’s inspiration are limited to the Bible, Dante and his commentators, Petrarch and “questi altri scritti che si leggono nella nostra Toscana lingua”\(^6\) (538). In Garin’s estimation, Michelangelo’s philosophy originated in the vernacular culture: “La sua ‘filosofia’ aveva, anch’essa, le sue fonti in quest’ambito, di una cultura ‘vulgata,’ di dotti conversari, identificabile in un’atmosfera generica piuttosto che in teorie particolarmente articolate a livello tecnicamente alto” (538).

Enzo Noè Girardi paints a different but not entirely incompatible picture of Michelangelo’s sources. In “Le lettere e le rime” he notes, echoing Condivi and Vasari’s

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\(^{4}\) Juxtaposing a verse by Michelangelo to one by Pico, Garin observed that it is easy to compare the two lines based on their shared theme of changing fortune: “è difficile non associare, in un contesto di motivi analoghi (fortuna, morte, rapida perdita d’ogni bene ecc.), quei versi: cosa mobil non è che sotto il sole/non vinca la morte... del Buonarroti, e del Pico: cosa ferna non è sotto la luna” (536).

\(^{5}\) Senza una esplorazione sistematica, da cui siano ben lontani, dei prodotti volgari in rima dei secoli XV e XVI, in somma degli anni di Michelangelo, non è agevole rendersi conto di quanto una produzione riprendesse temi largamente circolanti, e derivasse motivi e concetti d’uso, anche con garbo, anche con accenti originali, ma senza per questo rifarsi a fonti primarie troppo lontane, e senza esprimere sempre necessariamente esperienze profonde” (536).

\(^{6}\) The quote is reproduced by Garin from Donato Giannotti’s Dialogi, p. 66.
biographies, that Michelangelo’s foray into composing poetry passed through “poeti ed oratori volgari,” that is Florentine poets and prose writers. Girardi assumes the term “oratori” also applied to at least one preacher: Girolamo Savonarola – and in fact both biographers mention the important role Savonarola’s preaching and writings had in Michelangelo’s life (554). Girardi also assumed that Michelangelo read the platonic prose of Ficino, Lorenzo il Magnifico, Bembo of the Asolani, and probably Boccaccio and other Tuscan novella writers. He qualified these assumptions as hypothetical, even if plausible, suppositions (“ma si tratta di pure supposizioni: non v’è alcun documento da cui si possa ricavare qualcosa di più certo” 554).

As for poets, Girardi suggested, in addition to Dante and Petrarch, Poliziano of the “Stanze,” and Lorenzo de’ Medici. Girardi noted a frequent and palpable influence of Lorenzo in Michelangelo’s “poesie di meditazione autobiografica,” such as G22 (Che fie di me?), G33 (Sie pur, fuor di mie proprie) – poems “ispirate ai motivi della fugacità del tempo, della giovinezza perduta, dell’approssimarsi della morte, del destino avverso, del crudele dominio d’Amore;” Girardi suggests that these are inspired by Lorenzo de’ Medici’s poems XVII, XVIII, XV, XLIX, from his Rime (555). Girardi also identified a Laurentian influence in Michelangelo’s earliest sonnets and madrigals, G3 (Grato e felice, cf. Lorenzo’s XXVII), G38 (Quanta dolcezza, cf. Lorenzo’s CXXII), G39 (Del fiero colpo, cf. Lorenzo’s I), G40 (Quand’ amor, cf. Lorenzo’s LXI, LXXXIX, Commento,V), and G61 (S’i avessi creduto, cf. Lorenzo’s LI, 9-14). As regards Platonic doctrine, he additionally suggests G229 (Occhi miei, cf. Lorenzo’s VII) and G166 (Qual meraviglia, cf. Lorenzo’s XII, XIII, CXXII).

For Girardi, many poetic themes and images in Michelangelo’s verse, though Dantean and Petrarchan in origin, bear an “intellectualistic stylization” that echoes Lorenzo de’ Medici’s Canzoniere and that includes the theme of “cruel fortune,” key thematic pairings (“cielo-terra,” “notte-giorno,” “luce-ombra,“), symbols (“Febo,” “fuoco,” “strale d’Amore”) and certain expressions (“lumi santi”, “mio sole”). Lorenzo de’ Medici is considered a definitive source of inspiration for Michelangelo’s verse, but he is not commonly cited in relation to Michelangelo’s most mystical poetry. He should be, as the present analysis aims to demonstrate.

Italian laude should likewise be considered alongside the commonly named sources listed above. Their paraliturgical and musical nature constitute a unique literary case. Lauds

played a central role in public life and piety, and in this sense the story of their development and dissemination crosses the purely literary boundaries to include social and anthropological history. *Laude* were a part of the cultural matrix that nurtured all contemporary and subsequent religious verse in Italy. For this reason, they will be considered in this chapter as a model for Michelangelo’s spiritual verse.

### 3.3 Michelangelo Buonarroti and Lorenzo de’ Medici as Poets of Love

Lorenzo de’ Medici (1449-1492) is commonly acknowledged as a source of inspiration for Michelangelo’s poetry. As we have just seen, Enzo Noè Girardi listed many poems by Michelangelo that reveal a Laurentian influence. More recently, James Saslow echoed some of these observations in his translation of Michelangelo’s verse into English. A common reference in Michelangelo scholarship exploring the poet’s relationship to the verse of Lorenzo de’ Medici is to the imitation by the artist of a line from Lorenzo’s *La Nencia di Barberino.* This parallel has led scholars, such as Robert J. Clements, to assert that Michelangelo had not only read Lorenzo’s verses, but that he had heard them performed aloud (*The Poetry*, 326).

Of the *rime* by Michelangelo that Girardi suggests for comparison with Lorenzo de’ Medici’s sonnets, many of the lyrical compositions centre upon the heart and on the action of love within the heart, having arrived there through the eyes (from those of the beloved through those of the poet-lover). In these poems, love’s action or image in the poet’s heart effects varied outcomes: it comforts the poet (G38), it turns the poet’s eyes to heaven (G39), it heals his heart (G40), it renews the poet through burning (G61), and it prepares the poet’s soul for ascension (G62). Most often, these poems are compared to Lorenzo de’ Medici’s sonnets for their Neoplatonic or stilnovistic character. Yet, Michelangelo lends to this love and to its “image in the heart” actions and properties that in their respective later compositions both poets ascribe to Christ or to God.

Michelangelo’s later poetry (namely his verses inspired by or dedicated to Vittoria Colonna, and his *rime* addressed to Christ or God) are characterized by two features: the desire for and/or appeals to the Other (Colonna, Christ, God) to effect the poet’s salvation; or allusions to or descriptions of spiritually transformative interactions. The action of the Other in Michelangelo’s poetry, even in his poetry from the 1520s, is similar to the properties

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8 Michelangelo (G20): “Tu ha ’l viso piu dolcie che la sapa.” Lorenzo (La Nencia, 29): “Tu se’ piu bella che non è um papa.” This juxtaposition is highlighted in Robert J. Clements’ *The Poetry of Michelangelo*, p. 327.
traditionally associated with the agency of Christ or the Holy Spirit in rendering man fit for salvation – attributes that are described in the *Beneficio di Cristo*, but that are equally present in the Italian *lauda* tradition dating back to Jacopone da Todi in the Duecento.

In light of these observations, it is the intention of the present discussion to suggest a slight revision of the Michelangelo/Lorenzo de’ Medici relationship in the matter of literary influence. More specifically, it will be argued that rather than Lorenzo’s earlier Petrarchan poetry, it is the illustrious Medici’s later spiritual poetry, including his *laude*, that constitute a more plausible (comprehensive) source of inspiration for Michelangelo’s poetic production (including the poetry of Michelangelo’s middle period). A strength of this hypothesis is its verisimilitude: Michelangelo knew Lorenzo only in the Medicean patriarch’s final years of life (1490-1492) – years in which il Magnifico had turned his eye as well as his pen to more pointedly Christian concepts and concerns, writing *laude*, a *sacra rappresentazione*, and extending an invitation to Savonarola to reside in Florence (1490). Additionally, of all the supposed instances of Laurentian inspiration in the matter of love poetry, there is only one clear case in which Michelangelo definitely borrows from Lorenzo (rather than merely echoing or alluding to him), and it is from one of Lorenzo’s *laude*. Before examining this important and plausibly intentional gloss, let us first consider the relevant cases of Laurentian inspiration specifically singled out by Girardi.

Girardi suggested that G38 by Michelangelo be compared to Lorenzo de’ Medici’s CXXII. The supposed influence of Lorenzo’s poem on Michelangelo’s incomplete sonnet is repeated by Saslow in a footnote to the unfinished composition in his *Poetry of Michelangelo* (118). A close look at the two poems, however, reveals that their similarity is more approximate than exact. In sonnet G38 (1520s), Michelangelo describes the sweetness of love that passes into the poet’s heart where it resides as a concept of beauty that ennobles him:

![Italian text]

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9 Analyzed in detail in chapter 2.
Love brings sweetness to the poet’s heart through his eyes (v. 1). It comforts the poet (v. 3), and even during his moments of apprehension/anguish (“gli affanni,” v. 4), it grows stronger and persists (vv. 3-4). A power that grants energy and wisdom (v. 5), love awakens/revives the spirits (“desta gli spiriti,” v. 6) and (because of this) it is a concern greater and more worthy than any other (v. 6). He who lives without love, lives like a dead man (vv. 7-8). Love is a concept of beauty that is imagined or seen within the heart; it is united with virtue and gentility (vv. 9-11). Love takes away time and death in the same instant (v. 2), that is, it removes the poet from time and space (perhaps unwillingly, as “fura” suggests, v. 2). The poet’s experience of love is thus portrayed as a contemplative if not mystical one. This interpretation is further suggested by the reference to Love as a source of wisdom (the interpretation that Girardi, Saslow and Residori give for v. 4 “Amor, come virtù viva e accorta”). Yet the poet could well be talking about God. The same cannot be said of Lorenzo’s CXXII, in which the poet narrates a physiological and affective experience of voluptas dolendi, or pleasure-pain:

Il cor mio lasso, in mezzo allo angosciioso petto i vaghi pensier’ convoca e tira tutti a sé intorno, e pria forte sospira, poi dice con parlar dolce e piatoso:

“Se ben ciascun di voi è amoroso, pur ve ha creati chi vi parla e mira: deh! Perché adunque eterna guerra ed ira mi fate, sanza darmi un sol riposo?”. Rispondo un d’essi: “Come al novo sole fan di fior’ varii l’ape una dolcezza, quando di Flora il bel regno apparisce, così noi delli sguardi e le parole facciamo, de’ modi e della sua bellezza un certo dolce-amar che ti nutrisce”.

The poet’s weary heart gathers and draws into its anguished breast futile thoughts (vv. 1-3). After sighing, the heart speaks sweetly and mercifully (vv. 3-4), addressing the thoughts/spirits, telling them that if they be of love, then they were created by he who admires/

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10 All Lorenzo’s writings included in this chapter are taken from Paolo Orvieto’s edition of his works, Tutte le opere, unless otherwise specified. In transcribing them, I have respected all the graphic particularities including accents; “più,” for example, is rendered by “piú,” as it appears in Orvieto’s text.
looks at them (vv. 5-6). Why then, laments the heart, do they wage continual war on him, without a moment’s respite (vv. 7-8). One of the thoughts/spirits responds that just as with the new sun (v. 9) when spring appears (v. 11) bees makes honey from various flowers (v. 10), so do the thoughts make of the beloved’s manners and beauty a bitter-sweet nutrition of images and words (vv. 12-14) – sweet, because the images are of the beloved’s beauty; bitter, because the images intensify the poet’s already ardent desire.

Both poems address images of the beloved or his/her beauty in the heart. Other than a few shared lexical items (“dolcezza,” “bellezza”), however, the sonnets share little else in common: not even rhyming words or rhyme schemes apart from “dolcezza” – “bellezza.” A reason for this is that the poems address two different orders of experience. In Michelangelo’s Quanta dolcezza, love is presented as a sweetness. There is no mention of accompanying bitterness, no oxymorons. The portrayal is extremely positive: Love is a comfort to the poet, and even more so when the bard is afflicted. It is a source of energy and wisdom that awakens the spirits within and confers life to the dead. In short, Love demonstrates those qualities that a contemporary Christian would attribute to Christ, God, or the Holy Spirit. In Michelangelo’s sonnet, the discourse is expressly spiritual. This observation is supported by the partner poem that accompanies Quanta dolcezza (G38): In me la morte (G37).

In the critical apparatus accompanying his 1960 edition of Michelangelo’s Rime, Girardi presents both incomplete sonnets G37 and G38 together not only because they appear on the same manuscript folio, but because – with the exception of the first three lines of In me la morte – both poems were written rather hastily in red with only a short red line separating them such that it was not entirely clear to philologists whether they should be considered independently or together.¹¹ Like Quanta dolcezza, In me la morte is spiritual in nature; Love is supernatural, possessing divine attributes that bring the poet to contemplate God:

In me la morte, in te la vita mia;  
tu distingui e concedi e parti el tempo;  
quante vuo’, breve e lungo è ’l viver mio.  
Felice son nella tuo cortesia.  
Beata l’alma, ove non corre tempo,  
per te s’è fatta a contemplare Dio.

¹¹ For a more detailed discussion, including how these two poems have been considered by earlier philologists, see Girardi’s edition of Michelangelo’s Rime, p. 190. Girardi suggests that the two poems be considered separately.
The poet declares that death lives in him while his life resides in Love (v. 1). Love determines, according to his own desires, how long the poet shall live (vv. 2-3). The amorous poet’s happiness depends on Love’s kindness (v. 4). The poet’s soul is blessed because, in the place where time does not flow, it was made by Love to contemplate God (vv. 5-6). The addressee of the poem is here considered to be Love, in keeping with G38 and with Girardi’s interpretation of it in his prose translation of the passage. As Saslow judiciously notes, however, the poet could just as well be addressing “the abstraction of divine love, or perhaps Christ himself” and even the three Fates (117). G37, like its counterpart G38, is more spiritual than it is psychological in theme. Both incomplete sonnets feature the poet or his soul in a state of no-time and no-space. In each case he or his soul is led to contemplate the divine.

Lorenzo’s sonnet, on the other hand, is more psychological than spiritual in theme. The poet’s experience of love is bitter-sweet. The protagonist of the poem is not “Love” (an anthropomorphized or divine abstraction) so much as it is “love” (a human physiological and affective experience). The presence of love in the heart of Lorenzo’s poet consists of words and images rather than of a single (and possibly supernatural) image placed or sent there by Love as is the case in Michelangelo’s Quanta dolcezza and In me la morte, where Love promises a spiritual reward. Explaining the sonnet in his Comento de’ miei sonetti (where CXXII appears as XXXIV), Lorenzo discusses little beyond the operation of his thoughts, which generate images in the heart that bring it joy while simultaneously increasing the poet’s suffering by reinforcing his desire for that which he cannot have (503-506). Though quite distinct, Michelangelo’s Quanta dolcezza and Lorenzo’s Il cor mio lasso seem to share a Dantean literary inspiration.

The incipit of Michelangelo’s G38 Quanta dolcezza has been linked to Dante’s Tanto gentile (v. 10 “che dà per li occhi una dolcezza al core”). Similarly, the stilnovistic concept expressed by Michelangelo’s “desta gli spiriti” (G38, v. 6), is likewise an echo of Dante, of his Amor e ’l cor gentil (vv. 12-13: “e tanto dura talor in costui, / che fa svegliar lo spirito d’Amore”). Purgatorio XVIII, 22-27 has likewise been identified as a possible source for

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12 Saslow’s translation of the poem is followed here (“Blessed is the soul where time does not flow: / it has been brought by you to contemplate God”), p. 117. This interpretation diverges slightly from Girardi’s prose translation of the poem (“Beata è infatti quell’anima che per tuo mezzo s’è fatta a contemplare Dio nell’eternità”), p. 189.
13 According to Saslow, “the actions of line 2 also suggest the three Parcae, or Fates, who were believed in antiquity to spin, measure, and cut the thread of each life” (117).
14 If Love is considered the addressee of the G37, in both unfinished works Love is framed as the source of the poet’s life.
15 For both references, see Residori’s notes to Quanta dolcezza, p. 65 in his edition of Michelangelo’s poetry.
Michelangelo’s *Quanta dolcezza*. 16 *Purgatorio* XVIII, 22-27 constitutes part of a didactic conversation between Dante the wayfarer and Virgil. Dante asks Virgil to explain what love is: “Però ti prego, dolce padre caro, / che mi dimostri amore, a cui reduci / ogne buono operare e ’l suo contraro” (vv. 13-15). To this, Virgil responds that the mind is drawn to that which pleases it and this stimulates mental activity: “L’animo, c’è creato ad amar presto, / ad ogne cosa è mobile che piace, / tosto che dal piacere in atto è desto” (vv. 19-21). The active mind draws an image within the heart in imitation of the real object of desire, and this image turns the mind to further contemplation of the love-object: “Vostra apprensiva da esser verace / tragge intenzione, e dentro a voi la spiega, / sì che l’animo ad essa volger face” (vv. 22-24). If the mind is drawn to the image, the nature of the impulse is love: “e se, rivolto, inver’ di lei si piega, / quel piegare è amor, quell’ è natura / che per piacer di novo in voi si lega” (vv. 25-27).

The closing tercet of Michelangelo’s *Quanta dolcezza* (“Amore è un concetto di bellezza/ immaginata o vista dentro al core/ amica di virtute e gentilezza”) clearly expresses the same concept as *Purgatorio* XVIII, vv. 22-24 (“ Vostra apprensiva da esser verace / tragge intenzione, e dentro a voi la spiega, / sì che l’animo ad essa volger face”). This same dialogue on the nature of love could well be cited as a source for other poems by Michelangelo, including G39, G40, and G42 – all of which Girardi suggests for comparison with sonnets by Lorenzo. G42, composed in 1532, is a paradigmatic example. In the sonnet, Love explains to the poet that the beloved’s beauty passes through to the bard’s soul, transforming and ennobling it:

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16 See Saslow’s *The Poetry of Michelangelo*, p. 118.
The poet asks Love to be merciful and to answer the question of whether his eyes (the poet’s eyes) perceive a real beauty existing outside of himself and towards which he is drawn, or if the (image of) beauty already resides within him so that wherever he looks he sees her face as if it were sculpted before him (vv. 1-4). Love should know the answer to the question, the poet asserts, since He (Love) accompanies her in depriving him of peace – the reason for which he now suffers (vv. 5-6). Yet, the poet would not renounce the least sigh nor ask for a less ardent love (vv. 7-8). Love responds to the poet, clarifying that the beauty the poet sees truly comes from the beloved (v. 9), but that as it passes beyond the physical eyes to the soul, a more noble place, and it grows (vv. 10-11). In the soul, the mortal beauty is transformed and becomes truly beautiful, pure and divine, because the immortal soul remakes it after its own nature (vv. 12-13). This immortal beauty is the one that reaches the poet’s eyes (v. 14).

The soul transforms and purifies the image of beauty, improving it, perfecting it, then causing the poet to see it everywhere. This is not a mere psychological discussion of how a lover’s mind idealizes his beloved, or sees only her, so much as it is a metaphysical description of the power of the soul to transform a base material into something purer – the Platonic idea or divine ideal. This reveals the role of both love and the soul as a point of connection (and possible union) between the two orders of existence – the earthly realm of human existence and the non-material or immaterial realm of the divine.17 This is a theme that acquires great importance in Lorenzo’s later poetry, especially in his canzone CLXV (which shall be examined in great detail below).

Purgatorio XVIII, 22-24 is likewise a plausible source of inspiration for Michelangelo’s G39 and G40, both of which feature the poet’s mind being turned to contemplate the divine. In the (sole) tercet and the two final verses of the second quatrains of the incomplete sonnet G39, a “messenger from Love”18 informs the poet that the only way for a mortal to reach heaven is through the suffering engendered by His piercing arrow:

Del fiero colpo e del pungente strale
la medicina era passarmi ’l core;
ma questo è proprio sol del mie signore,
crescer la vita dove cresce ’l male.
E se ’l primo suo colpo fu mortale, seco un messo di par venne d’Amore

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17 Saslow suggests a comparison with Paradiso 3:45 on “the soul [...] spiritualizes and elevates whatever it absorbs into itself” (122).
che mi disse: – Ama, anz’ardi; chè chi muore
non ha da gire al ciel nel mondo altr’ale.
I’ son colui che ne’ prim’anni tuoi
gli occhi tuo infermi volsi alla beltate
che dalla terra al ciel vivo conduce. –

In the opening quatrain of G40, the poet describes a time when Love was happy to lift him to heaven by means of his beloved’s eyes:

Quand’ Amor lieto al ciel levarmi è volto
cogli occhi di costei, anzi col sole,
con breve riso ciò che preme e dole
del cor mi caccia, e mettevi ’l suo volto;
e s’i’ durassi in tale stato molto,
l’alma, che sol di me lagnar si vole,
avendo seco là dove star suole,
...

Girardi suggested that G39 be compared with the opening sonnet of Lorenzo’s

Canzoniere, which narrates how the poet was first wounded by Love’s arrow:

Tanto crudei fu la prima feruta,
sí fero e sí veemente il primo strale,
se non che speme il cor nutrisce e ale,
sare’ mi morte già dolce paruta.
E la tener età già non rifiuta
seguire Amore, ma piú ognor ne cale;
volentier segue il suo giocondo male,
poi c’ha tal sorte per suo fato avuta.
Ma tu, Amor, poi che sotto la tua insegna
mi vuol sí presto, in tal modo farai,
che col mio male ad altri io non insega.
Misericordia del tuo servo arai;
e in quella altera donna fa’ che regna
tal foco, onde conosca gli altrui guai.

The respective sonnets by Michelangelo and Lorenzo have fundamentally little in common aside from a few shared lexical items (“fiero/fero”; “strale”; and “ale”), rhyming in “ale” (A in Michelangelo’s ABBA ABBA CDE; B in Lorenzo’s ABBA ABBA CDC DCD), the theme of wounding from love’s arrow, and the idea of death as an escape from love’s suffering (Michelangelo’s vv. 1-2; Lorenzo’s vv. 1-4). Even the lexical parallels are not exactly what they seem. In Lorenzo’s sonnet, “ale” (v. 3) is a verb meaning to “nourish,” whereas in Michelangelo’s poem it is a substantive denoting the wings that lead the soul to heaven (v. 8).
Michelangelo’s lyrical composition is once again more descriptive of a spiritual experience whereas Lorenzo’s sonnet is more illustrative of a psychological one, much like in G38 and CXXII compared above.

In G39, “Amore” instructs the poet to love and to burn so that he might reach heaven (“– Ama, anz’ ardi; chè chi muore / non ha da gire al ciel nel mondo altr’ale,” vv. 7-8). “Amore” is what caused the poet, when he was young, to turn his eyes from earthly beauty to heaven (“I son colui che ne’ primi anni tuo / gli occhi tuo infermi volsi alla beltate / che dalla terra al ciel vivo conduce,” vv. 9-11). Similarly, in G40, “Amor” enjoys raising the poet to divine contemplation (v. 1). Love leads the poet to behold a loftier reality through the beloved’s eyes, which are functionally synonymous with “the sun,” symbol of God/Christ and of wisdom/illumination (“Amor lieto al ciel levarmi è volto / cogli occhi di costei, anzi col sole,” vv. 1-2). Love removes the poet’s suffering (presumably from the lover’s heart) and replaces it with his face (Amor’s face), that is, with an image of love/the beloved (“con breve riso ciò che preme e dole / del cor mi caccia, e mettevi ’l suo volto,” vv. 3-4) – yet another likely reference to Purgatorio XVII, vv. 22-24. In G40, Love – a Christ-like figure – thus heals the poet’s heart.

G39 and G40 resemble each other graphically and both were written hastily in red pencil, not unlike G37 and G38 (which are mentioned above), suggesting that they were written under analogous circumstances in close temporal proximity and that they likely issue from the same source or moment of inspiration. On the surface, then, the Dantean references explored above – and Purgatorio XVIII, 22-24 in particular – do seem to be more plausible sources of inspiration for Michelangelo’s G38 (as well as for G37, G39, G40 and G42) than the image of sweetness entering the poet’s heart in Lorenzo’s CXXII. Indeed, it is more likely that in the case of G38 and CXXII Michelangelo and Lorenzo share Dante, including Purgatorio XVIII, as a source of inspiration for their respective sonnets. The topos of battling thoughts that one finds in Lorenzo’s CXXII (Il cor mio lasso), for example, is in all likelihood derived from Dante’s Vita nuova (XIII and XXXVIII). The other possible Dantean echo in CXXII also refers to Purgatorio XVIII.

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19 For a description of the autograph poems, see Girardi’s critical apparatus in Rime, pp. 191-192.
20 See Saslow’s The Poetry of Michelangelo, p. 118.
21 This parallel was observed by Orvieto. See his comments to Lorenzo’s XXXIV of the Comento in Tutte le opere, v. I, p. 221.
Lorenzo’s analogy of bees gathering pollen from flowers in the spring to make honey that will sustain them during the winter is central to sonnet CXXII:

Rispondo un d’essi: “Come al novo sole
fan di fior’ varii ’l ape una dolcezza,
quando di Flora il bel regno apparisce,
cosi noi delli sguardi e le parole
facciam, de’ modi e della sua bellezza
un certo dolce-amar che ti nutrisce”.
(vv. 9-14)

Lorenzo provides his own gloss to these closing tercets of CXXII/XXXIV in his *Comento de’ miei sonetti*, in which he explains the bee-honey relationship as a metaphor for the physiological exercise of creating an inner image of the beloved from various instances of her beauty:

risponde uno de’ pensieri già detti, mostrando in effetto loro essere cagione della vita del core e facendo comparazione che, come le pecchie la primavera, quando Flora piena di fiori adorna il mondo, fanno di diversi fiori una sola dolcezza, cioè il mèle, così li miei pensieri di diverse bellezze della donna mia generano nel core certa dolcezza, mista con amaritudine, onde el cor si nutrisce e vive: mettendo nella donna mia li sguardi, le parole e i modi e l’altre bellezze sue, come stanno fiori in un prato.22

Lorenzo’s analogy between bees making honey and the mind producing images in the beloved’s likeness to sustain the poet in her absence (the metaphorical winter) could well constitute an extension of a bee-honey reference made by Dante in *Purgatorio* XVIII (vv. 58-59)23 to convey the excitement with which the mind constructs images of the beautiful things that inspire it to love:

Però, là onde vegna lo ’ntelletto
de le prime notizie, omo non sape,
e de’ primi appetibili l’affetto,
che sono in voi sì come studio in ape
di far lo mele; e questa prima voglia,
merto di lode o di biasmo non cape.
(vv. 55-60)

This image of the bee and honey is an important one for Lorenzo de’ Medici, who develops the analogy into an extended metaphor with a distinctly mystical cast that finds its most detailed and

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22 *Tutte le opere*, v. I, p. 221. For a brief discussion of the bee-honey analogy in Lorenzo’s CXXII, see Orvieto’s footnotes 384 and 385 to XXXIV of the *Comento in Tutte le opere*, v. I, p. 221.
23 This observation is mine.
iconic articulation in CLXV – a canzone that more closely matches the spiritual tone not only of Michelangelo’s G38, but of all the other poems suggested by Girardi for comparison with verses by Lorenzo de’ Medici. In fact, many of Lorenzo’s poems that relate thematically or conceptually to Michelangelo’s spiritual love poetry are based on, or serve as the inspiration for Lorenzo’s CLXV.

The first stanza of Lorenzo’s mystical canzone presents a pastoral setting; a ray of sunshine encourages bees to leave their hive and venture into the flowering fields to produce honey:

Quando raggio di sole,  
per piccola fessura  
dell’ape entrando nella casa oscura,  
al dolce tempo le riscalda e desta,  
escono accese di novella cura  
per la vaga foresta,  
predando disiose or quella or questa  
spezie di fior’, di che la terra è adorna.  
Qual esce fuor, qual torna  
carca di bella e odorata preda;  
qual sollecita e stringe  
se avvien che alcuna oziosa all’opra veda;  
altra il vil fuco spinge,  
che ’nvan l’altrui fatica goder vuole.  
Così, di vari fior’, di fronde e d’erba,  
saggia e parca fa il mèl, qual dipoi serba,  
quando il mondo non ha rose o viole.  
(vv. 1-17)

When the temperature rises in the spring (v. 4) and a ray of the sun enters a dark hive (“casa oscura”) through a small hole (vv. 1-3), the bees inside are roused to action (v. 5). Emerging from the house with renewed vitality, they go out into the forest to gather pollen from various beautiful species of flower that “adorn the earth” at that time (vv. 5-8). From the various “flowers, fronds and grasses” (v. 15), the bee makes honey that then serves him when the world has no more roses or violets (vv. 16-17).

The stanza contains a veiled analogy that the subsequent verses clarify: like the bee making honey, the poet’s heart constructs images of the beloved’s beauty for the times when she is not physically present. The second and third stanzas assume a marked Neoplatonic, stilnovistic, and theological character as the focus of the narration turns from the fields to the inner landscape of the poet’s affective physiognomy:
Venne per gli occhi pria
nel petto tenebroso
degli occhi vaghi el bel raggio amoroso,
e destò ciascun spirto che dormiva,
sparti nel petto, sanza cure ozioso;
ma, tosto che sen giva
in mezzo al cor la bella luce viva,
li spirti, accesi del bel lume adorno
corsono al core intorno.
Questa vaghezza alquanto ivi gli tenne;
poi, da nuovo diletto
spinti a vedere onde tal luce venne,
drento allo afflitto petto
lasciando il cor, che in fiamme è tuttaviva,
salîr negli occhi miei, onde era entrata
questa gentil novella fiamma e grata,
vagheggiando di lì la donna mia.
Indi, mirando Amore,
che in quella bella faccia,
armato, altero, e duri cor’ minaccia
da quella luce, e prende la difesa
che a’ cuor’ gentili e non ad altri piaccia,
lasciôr tristi
la impresa
di gire al fonte ove è la fiamma accesa;
e stavansi negli occhi paurosi,
quando spiriti pietosi
vidon venir dagli occhi ove Amor era,
dicendo a’ miei: “Venite
al dolce fonte della luce vera:
con noi sicuri gite!
Se bene incende, quel gentil signore
Non arde, o a ria morte non conduce,
ma splende il core acceso di tal luce;
e, se non vive, assai piú lieto muore”.

Questo parlar suave
dètte ai miei spiriti lassi
qualche ardire, e movendo e lenti passi,
da quei piú belli accompagnati, al loco
givan dubbiosi, ove Amor lieto stassi;
là dove, a poco a poco,
securi in così bello e dolce foco,
già d’Amor spiriti, non paurosi o tristi,
stavan confusi e misti
con quei che mossi avea la pia virtue
Like the ray of sun entering the beehive through the small hole (vv. 1-3), a beautiful ray of love enters the human breast through the eyes (v. 18-20), rousing the spirits within that had been sleeping (v. 21). When the beautiful lively light (“luce viva,” v. 24, symbol of wisdom) enters the breast, it ignites the dormant spirits who, having come to life, race around the heart (vv. 24-26). Heightened desire inspired by the beautiful light within the breast compels the spirits to find the ray’s source (vv. 27-30). Leaving behind his enflamed heart, the poet’s spirits ascend to his eyes; it is through them that the flame in his heart arrived in his breast, when the poet first gazed upon his beloved (vv. 31-34). Seeing Love in the woman’s face (vv. 35-36), the poet’s spirits journey to where the flame of love was first ignited (vv. 41). They see other spirits – merciful ones that issue from the woman’s eyes, where Love resided (vv. 42-44). The beloved’s spirits invite those of the poet-lover to accompany them to “the sweet source of the true light” (vv. 45-47). The sweet words of the merciful spirits lend ardour to those of the poet, who accompany the “more beautiful” spirits to the place where love resided (vv. 54-56).

Safe within the “beautiful and sweet fire” (v. 58), “little by little” the poet’s spirits merge and become confused with the divine spirits that had issued from the beloved to lead the spirits of the lover to the true light (vv. 60-61). The true light is vivifying: “non arde o a ria morte non conduce / ma splende il core acceso di tal luce, / e, se non vive, assai più lieto muore” (vv. 49-51). It burns without consuming. This theme also appears in Michelangelo’s poetry, including compositions explored in the chapter on Michelangelo, Vittoria Colonna, and the Beneficio di Cristo for their Christian and mystical content. This topos will be explored later in this chapter.

At the heart of this canzone is “a theological extension of the Platonic physiological theory of sight.” The sun’s light awakens the poet’s ocular spirits, enabling him to see: “la luce del sole, ‘destando’ gli spiriti visivi degli occhi, in un incessante adirivieni tra spiriti luminosi irradiati dal sole e spiriti visivi degli occhi attua la vista o contemplazione dell’oggetto.” The light of the beloved that awakens the lover’s sleeping spirits is both Platonic and stilnovistic; it is a topos that one finds in the writings of St. Paul, and that re-emerges in Dante and Cavalcanti.

24 For a meticulous analysis and deconstruction of this canzone, including an overwhelmingly detailed discussion of the philosophical and theological sources of the images Lorenzo employs in the poem, see Orvieto’s “Contributi ad un commento al Canzoniere laureziano: La canzone VII e la ballata,” as well as his footnotes to CLVX in Tutte le opere, vol. I, pp. 302-316. A list of parallels between the opening and subsequent two stanzas of the canzone is treated in detail in both texts. The article predates Tutte le opere, which refers back to “Contributi.”
27 This is Orvieto’s observation. Tutte le opere, vol. I, p. 308, note to vv. 18-22.
Orvieto recalls in both Tutte le opere (vol. I, 306, note to v. 1) and his “Contributi” (80) how this canzone, a later work by Lorenzo, possesses a more religious cast than his earlier poetry. He makes three observations relevant to the theological dimension of the canzone and to the present discussion. First, bees are symbolic mediators between heaven and earth and this theological significance has its roots in the writings of Ovid, Plato and Christian mystics such as Saint Bernard.28 Second, the description of light entering the poet’s eyes and awakening the spirits in his breast (vv. 18-22) corresponds not only to Ficino’s Neoplatonic vision, but also to Augustine’s theory of illumination (according to which the divine ray constitutes illuminating grace and a source of conversion) and to Dionysius the Aeropagite’s ‘supersubstantial ray’ (as a vehicle of truth and beauty).29 Third, Lorenzo’s description of the heart as “cuor’ gentil” (v. 39) and of Love as “gentil signore” (v. 48) lends a religious tone to the canzone by denoting spiritual purification and the vivifying action of the Holy Spirit, respectively.30

The essential identity between the “gentil signore” as a “poetic image” of the Holy Spirit rests upon the vivifying action of love described in the stanza: “in quanto fuoco e ardore, accende, purifica e rapisce (solleva all’alto, come il fuoco), ma non uccide, anzi dà vita.”31 This interpretation is further supported by the mention of the “sweet fire” (“dolce foco,” v. 58) in which, burning, the soul leaves mortality behind and returns, purified, to the realm of the divine.32 Furthermore, the “confusion of spirits” responsible for the subsequent transformation of the lover into the beloved refers to the action of a vivifying ardour as described by St. Paul; it is a process common to multiple currents of thought and their corresponding texts, including the Bible, Augustine, Ficino and Pico.33 Clearly then, the range of possible sources for the canzone include not only Neoplatonic and literary sources (such as Dante), but Christian ones as well. Before examining alternate religious sources and their connection to the poetry of Lorenzo and Michelangelo, the comparison between the latter two poets requires further development.

The topos of vivifying ardour explored in Lorenzo’s canzone emerges elsewhere in his Canzoniere, as does the topos of Augustinian illumination evoked in vv. 18-22. In fact, CXXIII – the sonnet directly following CXXII that was analyzed and compared to Michelangelo’s G38

28 Orvieto discusses the symbolism of the bee, its theological character, and its philosophical, literary and religious precedents in Tutte le opere, vol. I, pp. 306-307, note to v. 3.
29 Orvieto repeats these references at different points in his analysis of the canzone. In Tutte le opere, vol. I, they are first mentioned in Orvieto’s introduction to CLXV (pp. 302-306), on p. 304.
30 See Orvieto’s Tutte le opere, vol I, p. 309 (“cuor’ gentil” reference), and p. 311 ( “gentil signore” reference).
31 Orvieto, Tutte le opere, vol I, p. 311, note to vv. 48-49.
32 See Orvieto, Tutte le opere, vol I, p. 311, note to v. 58.
33 Orvieto, Tutte le opere, vol I, p. 311.
above – closely parallels the canzone *Quando raggio di sole* (CLXV) and because of this it makes for a much more natural comparison with G38.\textsuperscript{34} CXXXIII and its analogue, sonnet CXL, with which it shares an identical first quatrain, both open with the “gentil foco” in which the poet burns sweetly (v. 2), and conclude with a comparison of the earthly eye (described as “mortal” in CXXIII, v. 14, and “finite” in CXL, v. 14) and heavenly fire (“eterno,” v. 14, CXXIII and CXL, respectively):

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Qual meraviglia, se ognor più s’accende quel gentil foco in cui dolcemente ardo?
Se mille volte quel bel viso guardo,
mille nuove bellezze alli occhi rende.

El core, a cui questa bellezza scende,
si meraviglia, e l’occhio ottuso e tardo
a veder le virtù del bello sguardo
accusa di pigrizia, e lo riprende.

Amor per li occhi di mia donna vede
li occhi mia lassi, e al mio cor favella
pe’ dolci raggi della vista pia:
“Infinito è il tuo valore onde procede
all’occhi tuo dolezza ognor novella:
l’occhio è mortale, e ’l foco eterno fia”.
(CXXIII, vv. 1-14)
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Qual meraviglia, se ognor più s’accende quel gentil foco in cui dolcemente ardo?
Se mille volte quel bel viso guardo,
mille nuove bellezze alli occhi rende.

Il cor, cui beltà nuova ognor discende,
si maraviglia e duol del fral mio sguardo,
che sia a tanto ben conoscere tardo,
e come o cieco o pigro lo riprende.

Piangon gli occhi accusati; Amor li vede,
e scusandoli allora al cor favella
da’ piatosi occhi della donna mia:
“Infinito è il valore onde procede
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\textsuperscript{34} Orvieto in fact qualifies CXXIII as “inscindibile dalle summae teologico-poetiche che sono la canz. CVXV e la ballata CLXVI” (*Tutte le opere*, vol. I, p. 222). CXXXVIII in Orvieto’s *Tutte le opere* (vol. I, p. 244) constitutes an alternate though less compelling possibility for a Laurentian inspiration in Michelangelo’s G37-G40 and G42. It narrates the poet’s contemplative experience of reaching the third heaven that St. Paul was believed to have attained. In many ways it is a poem of conversion: “Per lunga, erta, aspra via, nelle ombre involto, / scorgendo, Amor lo mio cieco pensiero, / mossi i piè per incognito sentiero, / avendo il disio già verso il ciel vòlto. // Per mille errori alfin, con sudor molto / all’orizzonte del nostro emispero / pervenii, indi in eccelso e piú altero / loco, di terra già levato e tolto. // Della gran scala al terzo grado giunto, / consegnandomi alla madre il caro figlio: / se ben confusa allor mostrossi a noi. // Quindi, in piú luminosa parte assunto, / potei mirare il Sol con mortal ciglio, /né mai cosa mortal mi piacque poi.”
all'occhi tuoi bellezza ognor novella:
l'occhio è finito, e 'l foco eterno fia.”

Beauty descends to the heart in CXXIII (v. 5) and CXL (v. 5), and in both sonnets, rays of love from the beloved’s eyes reach the poet (v. 11 in each poem). The parallels to canzone CLXV’s “dolce foco” (v. 58) and to the “raggio amoroso” (v. 20) that reaches the poet’s heart (v. 19) are unmistakable. Girardi suggested that G61 and G62 be compared to LI. For the intense mystical nature of these sonnets, however, Lorenzo’s CXXIII and canzone CLXV are much more relevant compositions for comparison as well as for possible sources of inspiration.

Sonnets G61 and G62 were composed in 1532 (like G42 analyzed above). They were both inspired by the poet’s relationship with Tommaso de’ Cavalieri. They share the theme of the poet’s renewal by fire. In G61, the poet is warmed by the light (“warm sun”) of the phoenix that is his beloved:

\[
\begin{align*}
S'\text{i' avessi creduto al primo sguardo} \\
di quest’alma fenice al caldo sole \\
rinnovarmi per foco, come suole \\
nell’ultima vecchiezza, ond’io tutt’ardo, \\
qual più veloce cervio o lince o pardo \\
segue ’l suo bene e fugge quel che dole, \\
agli atti, al riso, all’oneste parole \\
sarie cors’anzi, ond’or son presto e tardo. \\
Ma perché più dolermi, po’ ch’i’ veggio \\
negli occhi di quest’angel lieto e solo \\
mie pace, mie riposo e mie salute? \\
Forse che prima sarie stato il peggio \\
vederlo, udirlo, s’or di pari a volo \\
seco m’impenna a seguir suo virtute.
\end{align*}
\]

The poet is renewed not only by the fire of the phoenix, but also by the ardour in which he burns (vv. 3-4). In the eyes of the “angel” that is his beloved, the poet sees/locates “peace, repose and salvation:” “negli occhi di quest’angel lieto e solo / mie pace, mie riposo e mie salute” (vv. 10-11). The poet ascends with his beloved (not unlike the spirits of the poet in Lorenzo’s CLXV): a volo / seco (vv. 13-14). The autograph version of G61 appears on the same sheet as G60, which

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35 This is not to suggest a genetic relationship – one of direct borrowing or influence – on the part of Michelangelo, but rather to identify the stylistic and seemingly ideological parallels between the two that might point to shared inspiration in a third party or multiple “third-party” sources, such as the tradition of Italian mystical laude might have provided.
may provide a clue to its meaning since G59-G61 are graphically similar and written in the same pale ink, indicating that they were composed at/around the same time.

In G60, vv. 12-14, what the poet longs for and learns from the beloved’s face is misunderstood by human minds, and only one who has died can understand his yearning: “Quel che nel tuo bel volto bramo e ’mparo, / e mal compres’ è dagli umani ingegni, / che ’l vuol saper convien prima che mora.” The death in question is metaphorical, mystical. The poet yearns to merge with the divine through the beloved’s face (where Love resides, as in Lorenzo’s CLXV?). Furthermore, v. 4 of G61 is ambiguous: “a che più indugio a salutarci omai?” As Saslow observes, the “salutarci” of v. 4 could be read in one of two ways: “why then delay our meeting any longer?” or “why then delay our mutual healing/salvation?”

G62 is thematically related to G61. It exists in three variants. They are so similar, however, that for the present discussion, only the version included by Girardi in his collection of Rime need be considered. The opening five lines of sonnet G62 refer to a smith shaping iron and to an artist-cum-alchemist elevating gold to its most rarefied state:

    Sol pur col foco il fabbro il ferro stende
al concetto suo caro e bel lavoro,
    né senza foco alcuno artista l’oro
al sommo grado suo raffina e rende;
    né l’unica fenice sé riprende
se non prim’arse; ond’io, s’ardendo moro,
    spero più chiar resurger tra coloro
che morte accresce e ’l tempo non offende.
    Del foco, di ch’i’ parlo, ho gran ventura
c’ancor per rinnovarmi abbi in me loco,
    sendo già quasi nel numer de’ morti.
    O ver, s’al cielo ascende per natura,
al suo elemento, e ch’io converso in foco
    sie, come fie che seco non mi porti?

It is only with fire, emphasizes the poet (“sol pur col foco,” v. 1), that these craftsmen can achieve their desired end (a “bel lavoro,” v. 2, and refined gold, vv. 4-5, respectively). Likewise, neither can the phoenix rise without first burning, asserts the poet (“né l’unica fenice sé riprende

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37 Saslow notes that v. 11 of G61 should be compared to G60 (The Poetry of Michelangelo, p. 156).
38 This is Saslow’s observation. See The Poetry of Michelangelo, p. 155.
39 Saslow, The Poetry of Michelangelo, p. 155: “Though salutare means “to greet,” it derives from salute (health, salvation); M may thus also mean to imply a healing or reconciliation.” Saslow refers to a healing in the actual relationship between the two historical figures. It is interpreted in the present discussion in a more transpersonal, metaphysical way, which this psychological interpretation by Saslow supports.
/ se non prim’arse,” vv. 5-6). Similarly, the poet hopes to rise again brighter (“spero più chiar resurger,” v. 6), should he die from burning (“s’ardendo moro,” v. 6).

The slightly imperfect analogy between the phoenix who dies and is reborn from its own ashes and the poet who ascends to heaven or is re-made anew after dying from ardour (a spiritual death if Love has raised him to its divine source) nevertheless communicates the poet’s desire for mystical conversion through fire. The language is at once Neoplatonic, stilnovistic, and theological, like Lorenzo’s canzone CLXV and sonnet CXXII. Having established the affinity – if only thematic and conceptual – between Lorenzo’s spiritual poetry and that of Michelangelo, let us turn now to Lorenzo’s laude.

3.4 Lorenzo il Magnifico and the Lauda

Though Lorenzo de’ Medici composed spiritual poetry throughout the three phases of his lyric production (Capitoli in the earlier phase; spiritual sonnets in the later phase; a sacra rappresentazione and lauds in the final years), his laude are arguably the most religious of his poetic corpus. Lorenzo composed only nine laude. Bernardo Toscani, editor of an authoritative 1990 critical edition of Lorenzo’s lauds, dates these compositions to the brief period extending from 1490-1492: years when Michelangelo lived with the Medici family, Savonarola became the prior of San Marco upon Lorenzo’s insistence, and a new religious fervour began to take hold of the city. These dates coincide with a rise in popularity, as well as print dissemination, of the lauda. In laudari circulating in Lorenzo de’ Medici’s Florence at the time, one finds mystical topoi analogous to those of Michelangelo’s later poetry: instances of mystical-cum-relational self-transformation involving not only God or Christ, but also the Holy Spirit.

Lorenzo’s laude are not of interest for their originality. In fact, as Bigi noted, Lorenzo’s lauds did not stand out from those written by other contemporaries:

non si sollevano molto di sopra delle tante composte a altri verseggiatori in quel tempo: sono in genere amplificazioni di versetti della Scrittura, condotte secondo le consuetudini tecniche dell’oratoria sacra, con qualche inserimento, talora, di reminiscenze

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40 Saslow in fact cites Ficino’s Sopra lo amore oration 3, ch. 4 as a source for the sonnet (The Poetry of Michelangelo, p. 157).
41 Based on Lorenzo’s personal correspondence, 1491 seems to be the year in which he dedicated himself most fully to lauda writing: see Paolo Orvieto’s Lorenzo de’ Medici, p. 82.
42 For a discussion of the lauda print tradition in Quattrocento Florence, see Blake Wilson, Singing Poetry, p. 56-69.
neoplatoniche, stilnovistiche e petrarchesche e qualche accenno a quel tema dell’amor divino che si notato nei poemetti ascetici (705)

Lorenzo’s *laude* are of interest because Michelangelo borrowed from one of them in his later spiritual poetry. They are likewise important in serving as a point of departure for a discussion of the Florentine *lauda* tradition that they exemplify. They constitute the perfect vehicle for approaching the history of Italian mystical verse from its inception. The Italian mystical *lauda* is a plausible source for Michelangelo’s most mystical poetry. They also conform to Garin’s suggestion that sources considered as inspiration for Michelangelo’s verse should be generic (widely diffused, well integrated in the discourse of the time) and not overly academic.

Lorenzo’s *lauda* II is of particular importance to the present discussion. The theme of purification in a “dolce foco” in Lorenzo’s *canzone* CLXV and its partner poem, sonnet CXXIII (v. 58 and v. 2, respectively), is Christianized and re-presented in his *lauda* II, *Poi che io gustai, Iesù, la tua dolcezza*, vv. 37-39. Most importantly, however, it is a *lauda* that Michelangelo alludes to through an intertextual reference in the form of a borrowed line (G289, v. 12) that (in my research) only Bernardo Toscani has identified, despite the fact that it constitutes one of the rare unequivocal and direct borrowings of Lorenzo’s poetry by Michelangelo.43

*Poi che io gustai, Iesù, la tua dolcezza* was intended to be sung to the tune of Feo Belcari’s *Tanta pietà mi tira e tanto amore*, which was in turn meant to be sung to the same melody as Ugo Panziera’s *Sì fortemente son tratto d’amore* (all three speak to the peace one gains in loving God). In the laud, elements from the mystical canzone and related sonnets above are immediately recognizable (sweetness, fire of love, desire satisfied by the beloved alone). There is a marked switch from a Neoplatonic to a Christian paradigm, yet analogous processes of enamourment are narrated and certain lexical items are shared (“dolcezza,” “infiammato”):

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Poi che io gustai, Iesù, la tua dolcezza
[...]
tanto infiammato son del tuo amore;
nulla altro mi contenta o dà quiete,
né si spegne la sete,
se non solo al tuo fonte benedetto. (v. 1, 9-12)
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The verse borrowed by Michelangelo (v. 35) comes at the end of Lorenzo’s 39-verse *lauda*:

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Poiché non fusti del tuo sangue avaro,
di questa grazia ancor non mi esser duro:
arda sempre il mio cor tuo dolce foco,
tanto che a poco a poco
altri che tu non resti nel mio petto. (35-39)

In this excerpt, the heart burns with a sweet flame, an image that we have encountered in Lorenzo’s poetry multiple times before, but, as in the above passage, they form part of a Christian rather than Neoplatonic discourse. Philosophy and poetry combine with theology. The poet beseeches Christ, who had been generous with his blood, to be equally kind in sharing grace, a transformative element that causes the heart to burn with Charity so nothing but Christ remains in the poet’s heart. The “poco a poco” echoes CLXV and recalls the description of the poet’s spirits merging and becoming confused with the divine spirits that had issued from the beloved to lead the spirits of the lover to the true and vivifying light (vv. 60-61).

It is significant that this borrowing occurs in Michelangelo’s later and most spiritual poetry (G289, v. 12):

Non è più bassa o vil cosa terrena
che quel che, senza te, mi sento e sono,
onde a l’alto desir chiede perdono
la debile mie propria e stanca lena.

Deh, porgi, Signor mio, quella catena
che seco annoda ogni celeste dono:
la fede, dico, a che mi stringo e sprono;
né, mie colpa, n’ho grazia intiera e piena.

Tanto mi fie maggior, quante più raro
il don de’ doni, e maggior fie se, senza,
pace e contento il mondo in sé non have.

Po’ che non fusti del tuo sangue avaro
che sarà di tal don al tuo clemenza,
se ’l ciel non s’apre a noi con altra chiave?

In the second quatrain of Michelangelo’s sonnet, the poet beseeches Christ to extend to him the theological chain that promises all heavenly gifts: the grace that, through his own guilt, the poet lacks. The word “chain” (catena) that appears so often in Michelangelo’s earlier love poetry (and in that of Lorenzo) to denote the lover’s enslavement to carnal desire acquires a positive, religious significance in this sonnet. In the closing tercet, the poet asks the pivotal question
regarding his own salvation: Since Christ was not miserly with his blood (v. 12; borrowed from Lorenzo), what will become of His mercy, if the gate to heaven is opened with a different key, that is, if the poet does not possess the necessary faith in Christ’s sacrifice to be saved by it?

Many of the reformational theological debates on faith and grace at the heart of the Beneficio and of Michelangelo’s later poetry were also topical subjects in late Quattrocento Florence. A sonnet (LXXIV) that Lorenzo de’ Medici addressed to Feo Belcari helps to explain just how this pertained to the individual Christian:

Lo spirito talora, a sé redutto,  
e dal mar tempestoso e travagliato  
fuggito in porto tranquillo e pacato,  
pensando ha dubbio, e vuolne trar costrutto.

S’ègli è ver che da Dio proceda tutto,  
e senza Lui nulla è, cioè il peccato,  
per sua grazia è se ci è concesso e dato  
seminar qui per còrre eterno frutto.

Tal grazia in quello sol fa operazione,  
che a riceverla è vòlto e ben disposto:  
dunque che cosa è quella ne dispone?  
Qual prima sia vorrei mi fussi esposto,  
o tal grazia o la buona inclinazione.

Rispondi or tu al dubbio ch’è proposto.

What comes first, Lorenzo asks Belcari, grace or the inclination towards it (vv. 12-13)? Orvieto identifies this poem as the only truly religious one in Lorenzo’s Canzoniere. Drawing on the work of Vasoli, Orvieto contextualizes the theological questions posed in the sonnet: “quel che è certo è che le sette questioni sollevate sono tra le più spinose e dibattute dalla teologia non solo contemporanea a Lorenzo e non solo di parte francescana e domenicana” (159). These questions, enumerated by Vasoli and repeated by Orvieto, include the matters of grace and good works. Can man perform good works capable of securing salvation without divine grace? What disposition or conversion is required of man for him to receive divine grace?

As we saw in the previous chapter on the Spirituali, similar questions on grace formed the background of Michelangelo’s G289.

Other images typically associated with the Catholic Reform movement in Italy also appear in Lorenzo’s laude. In Lorenzo’s Vieni a me, peccatore (lauda IX), it is the gentle and

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44 For a detailed discussion of the religious poem and the theological questions it raises, see Orvieto, *Tutte le opere*, vol I, pp. 158-159. The reference made here is to p. 158.
loving Christ later portrayed in the *Beneficio de Cristo* who, from the cross, beckons the sinner to his open and waiting arms:

\[
\text{Vieni a me, peccatore,}
\text{Che a braccia aperte aspetto,}
\text{Versa dal santo petto,}
\text{Visibilmente acqua, sangue ed amore.}
\]

(vv. 1-4)\(^45\)

Images such as these, in particular those involving water and love as symbols of grace issuing forth from Christ’s wounded chest, are commonplace in Italian *laude*. In fact, many of the images that appear in the *Beneficio* and in Michelangelo’s mystical verse have a long history in Italian paraliturgy. An understanding of the Italian *lauda* and its history, specifically as this pertains to the Florentine tradition, is essential in order to make sense of the individual compositions that will be analyzed in this chapter.

### 3.5 Lorenzo, Michelangelo and The Florentine *Lauda* Tradition

The fifteenth-century Florentine *lauda* is characterized by the style and production of its most prolific (and documented) exponents: Feo Belcari (1410-1484), Francesco degli Albizi (1382-1458), Lucrezia Tornabuoni de’ Medici (1425-1482), and her son Lorenzo de’ Medici (whose stature and importance in civic life account for his inclusion as a proponent of the *lauda* more so than the quality or quantity of his modest *lauda* corpus).\(^46\) Despite the proliferation of

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\(^45\) Toscani follows Bigi in identifying vv. 1-10 of the *lauda* as Christ speaking to the sinner from the cross (*Laude*, p. 99, note to vv. 1-10). *Lauda* IX appears as “CCLX.7 (Cantasi come – Tu m’hai legato, amore)” in Galletti’s *Lauda spirituali di Feo Belcari* (Gall3), p. 1p. 117.

\(^46\) Blake Wilson also includes “Ser Michele Chelli,” a Benedictine friar, in his list of “chief poets” (*Music and Merchants*, p. 166), as does Bianca Becherini, who also names Antonio di Guido, Giovanni Dominici, l’Ingesuato (Bianco da Siena), Castellano Castellani, Bernardo Giambullari and Girolamo Benivieni (“Musica italiana a Firenze nel XV secolo,” p. 115). In *La poesia religiosa del secolo XV*, Domenico Coppola highlights the verse of Feo Belcari, Leonardo Giustinian, Francesco D’Albizio, Giovanni Dominici, Lucrezia Tornabuoni, Lorenzo Tornabuoni, Lorenzo de’ Medici, Angelo Poliziano, Bernardo Giambullari, Castellano Vastellani, Girolamo Benivieni, and Girolamo Savonarola. Feo Belcari and Francesco degli Albizi (also d’Albizi) are by far the most prolific of the mid-late Quattrocento Florentine tradition. While Castellano Castellani (1461-1519/20) and Girolamo Benivieni (1453-1542) are also key *lauda* writers in the Florentine tradition, they are best considered with the respect the post-Savonarolan sixteenth-century tradition for the influence of the famed Dominican friar on their thought and style. With respect to Michelangelo as a Savonarolan poet, Giulia Ponsiglione’s “La lirica di Michelangelo e i poeti Savonaroliani” is essential reading. Savonarola did compose *laude* (two of which were widely known: *Te Deum* and *Ecce quam bonum*) and his presence and activity in late Quattrocento Florence greatly contributed to the renewed popularity of the *lauda*. He, like Lorenzo, wrote *laude* of the *cantasi come* variety to be sung to the melody of well-known *canti carnascialeschi* – a conscious attempt, on the part of Savonarola, to effect change in the mores, if not morality, of late fifteenth-century Florentine society. As a *lauda* writer, Savonarola was himself inspired by Lorenzo de’ Medici (see Eyolf Østrem and Nils Holger Peterson’s *Medieval Ritual*, pp. 15-17). Since the pinnacle of his influence (1495-1498) and the corresponding impact on the *lauda* tradition came slightly later...
contemporary lauds in late Quattrocento Florence, the Florentine *lauda* tradition of the late fifteenth-century was a varied aggregate of compositions and influences issuing from earlier phases of Italian *lauda* production. For the purpose of the present discussion, its history is most expediently treated in reverse chronological order moving from the particulars of the late Quattrocento in Florence to generalities of the earlier periods.\(^{47}\)

As Blake Wilson outlines in *Music and Merchants* (1992), there were two Quattrocento *lauda* traditions, one Venetian, the other Florentine; the Florentine tradition, though “dedicated to an unwritten musical tradition of *cantasi come* references,” was greatly impacted by the Venetian tradition, which it had in part absorbed (175).\(^{48}\) The Venetian repertoire of the early to mid-Quattrocento was dominated by the production of Leonardo Giustinian (1388-1446), humanist and statesman famous for his *strambotti* and *canzone* who began composing spiritual

\(^{47}\) For an overview of the Italian *lauda*’s literary evolution from its origins in Umbria and Tuscany of the Duecento forward, see Giulio Bertoni’s “La lirica religiosa,” Emilio Pasquinì’s “La lauda”(both of which listed in Alessandro Vettori, *Poets of Divine Love*, p. xx, note 8), and Domenico Coppola’s *La poesia religiosa del secolo XV*, pp. 7-11. A comprehensive overview may also be found in Flavio Testi’s *La musica italiana nel medioevo e nel Rinascimento*, pp. 109-129 and 239-292. A preliminary list of incipits is to be found in Alessandro D’Ancona’s *La poesia popolare* (“principij del secolo XV e XVI citati nelle raccolte spirituali,” pp. 475-495), and a comprehensive list appears in the appendices to Blake Wilson’s *Singing Poetry in Renaissance Florence* and in its corresponding database (*Singing*, “Alphabetical index of *lauda* incipits in the *cantasi come* database,” pp. 221-255). On the development of the Italian *lauda* and its connection to religious and civic ritual, see: Eyolf Østrem and Nils Holger Peterson, *Medieval Ritual and Early Modern Music: The Devotional Practice of Lauda Singing in Late-Renaissance Italy*; pp. 15-42 provide a more recent overview (2008) of the evolution from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century. With respect to the spiritual *lauda*, see pp. 7-36 of Patrizia Dalla Vecchia’s (ed.) *Giulio Cattin: Studi sulla lauda offerti all’autore da F.A. Gallo e F. Luisi*. For a discussion of the role and development of the *lauda* in medieval and premodern Tuscan society, specifically, see in particular: Cyrilla Barr, *The Monophonic Lauda*, Ronald F.E. Weissman’s *Civic Ritual in Renaissance Florence*, and Blake Wilson’s *Music and Merchants*. As regards the Italian *lauda* tradition of sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, see *La lauda spirituale tra Cinquecento e Seicento: poesie e canti devozionali nell’Italia della Controriforma* (eds. Giuseppe Filippi et al., 2001); and as a primary resource, see Fra Serafino Razzi’s *Libro primo delle laudi spirituale* (1563). Noteworthy anthologies of Italian religious verse include Ulivi Ferruccio’s *Poesia religiosa italiana dalle origini al ’900* (1994); Valerio Volpini’s *La preghiera nella poesia italiana* (1969); and Giovanni Fallani’s *La letteratura religiosa italiana: profilo e testi* (1963).

\(^{48}\) In *Music and Merchants*, Blake notes that “the majority of manuscripts that preserve fifteenth-century laude in musical settings are directly or indirectly traceable to the Veneto”
lauds later in life. In Giustinian’s Venice, the *lauda* was a flourishing form in part because it had been favoured by Benedictine reform begun earlier at Santa Giustina of Padova (the monastery that later housed Benedetto da Mantova, first author of the *Beneficio di Cristo* – a fact whose importance will become apparent later in this chapter when Giustinian’s laudistic invocations to the Holy Spirit are analyzed for their mystical content).  

The Venetian tradition popularized by Giustinian had itself been influenced by earlier Sienese lauda writers and religious figures, namely Giovanni Colombini (1304-1367) and Bianco da Siena (c.1350 - 1412). Both the Venetian and the Florentine traditions of the fifteenth century included *laude* from these Gesuati of late Trecento Siena; by Michelangelo’s time, Giustinian’s *laude* had also been absorbed into the Florentine tradition, where they co-mingled with the Tuscan and Umbrian *laude* of the Duecento and Trecento, as well as a host of anonymous compositions. It is presumed that these lauds by Giovanni Colombini, Bianco da Siena, and Leonardo Giustinian became assimilated into the fifteenth-century Florentine *lauda* tradition through the figure of Feo Belcari.  

Closely associated with the Medici, Belcari was a well-known author of *sacre rappresentazioni* and *laude*. Belcari’s influence on *lauda* form and practice in Florence was so great that in *Singing Poetry in Renaissance Florence* (2009), Blake Wilson in fact labels the period from 1430-1510 the “Belcari era.” As regards his devotional verse, “not only did the Belcari *laudario* [M690] strongly influence an immediate circle of manuscript sources, but it forms a bridge between the older, more idiosyncratic collections of the first half of the fifteenth-century, and the more standardized and widely-disseminated print tradition that arose shortly  

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49 Blake Wilson provides an analysis of Leonardo Giustinian and the *giustiniane laude* in *Singing Poetry in Renaissance Florence*, pp. 74-83. See also *Music and Merchants*, pp. 167-176.  
50 This is Blake Wilson’s assessment in *Music and Merchants*, where he states: “a devotional climate favourable to the lauda developed with the Benedictine reform movement initiated in 1409 by the Venetian nobleman Ludovico Barbo. Having begun in the Paduan monastery of Santa Giustina, the Congregatio Sanctae Iustinae soon included most of the Italian Benedictine establishments [...] This reform impulse attained a much broader influence through Gabriele Condulmer, the Venetian patrician who became Pope Eugene IV in 1431, and through Lorenzo Giustiniani, the poet’s brother, who served Eugene IV and became the first Patriarch of Venice in 1451” (p. 169). The connection between the *lauda* and Benedictine piety was an important one in Florence during this time, as Belcari’s connections to the Florentine *Badia* suggest (see Wilson, *Singing*, p. 84).  
51 In *Music and Merchants*, Wilson notes that “the Gesuati, originally a Sienese lay congregation that included a number of lauda poets in their circle, had brought their lauda tradition north from Siena in the late fourteenth century, and their most famous poet, Bianco da Siena, died in Venice in 1412” (p. 169).  
52 According to Blake in *Music and Merchants*, Belcari was “a key figure in the popularizing of the Venetian repertoire in Florence,” p. 176). Blake recalls that Belcari makes numerous *cantasi come* references to Giustinian (p. 176). Belcari also wrote a biography of Giovanni Colombini (*Vita del beato Giovanni Colombini da Siena*) that includes a discussion of Bianco da Siena (ch. XXXVII).  
53 This is the title of chapter II, p. 55.
after Belcari’s death” (83). Belcari began composing laude in the 1430s, around the same time as Giustinian (who began in 1428). As Wilson observes, his “range of activities and contacts reveal the lines along which cantasi come repertoire was disseminated during his lifetime” (83):

The rubrics and content of several Belcari laude indicate their intended performance in monastic and mendicant institutions, in particular those of the Dominicans at San Marco, and the Servites at Santissima Annunziata where professional lauda singing was taking place by the early 1480s. Several other laude were clearly intended for a Benedictine establishment, most likely the Florentine Badia. Recently published correspondence by Belcari has revealed that the Badia was home to his personal confessor, and that he enjoyed particularly close associations with the abbey. Belcari’s close ties to the Badia, coupled with the knowledge that the large and important cantasi come collection LA480, containing a majority of laude by Belcari, came from this same environment, reveal the Badia fiorentina as another active center of lauda cultivation. Belcari’s private correspondence with individuals in both confraternal and monastic settings indicates that laude were transmitted to these spheres for private devotional use as well as for public ceremony. (84)

Historically, the lauda assumed the form of the classical ballata, but by Michelangelo’s time this had already begun to change, in part with the rise in popularity of polyphonic music in the 1470s. Giustinian, for example, had composed not only ballate, strambotti, and canzone, but also frottole, capitoli and ode, a fact consistent with the observation that despite shared content, the laude of different generations tend to reflect the changing literary and musical tastes and trends of their time. Though traditionally exalting or penitential, the lauda, also varied quite considerably in theme and purpose, assuming didactic, moralizing, and mystical casts in addition to the more traditional venerating and/or ascetic compositions. Though mystical lauds represent only a portion of this religious lyric, they constitute an essential and enduring component.

Next to St. Francis’s “Canticum creaturarum,” Jacopone’s poetic corpus comprises the oldest (extant) attestations of mystical verse in the Italian vernacular. Perhaps the best known spiritual poet to have employed the lauda as a means of expressing his mystical desire, Jacopone

54 For a detailed discussion of the Belcari manuscript (M690) and Belcari’s laude, see pp. 83-95. For the laudario of Francesco d’Albizo, see pp. 95-108.
55 For a discussion of the poetic forms of the Venetian lauda repertoire, see Wilson, Music and Merchants, p. 169, where he lists the forms popularized by Giustinian. It is Blake who noted that the changing form of the lauda resulted from the influence of secular poetry and music (p. 2 of the same publication).
56 Lauds and hymns existed in Latin prior to the Duecento, and the psalms were an early inspiration in the development of the form. For a discussion of the birth of Franciscan poetry and the origin of the Italian literary canon, see Alessandro Vettori’s Poets of Divine Love: Franciscan Mystical Poetry of the Thirteenth Century: pp. 79-104 for an analysis of the “Canticum creaturarum,” and pp. 112-188 for a comprehensive treatment of Jacopone’s poetry and poetics.
remained an integral part of the lauda repertoire through Michelangelo’s time and beyond. Not only do his compositions appear in late Quattrocento Florentine multi-authorial prints, but in one print from 1495, Panciatichi 22, ninety-five poetic compositions are attributed to him.\footnote{See Wilson, \textit{Music and Merchants}, p. 27.}

According to Wilson, these lauds are “rubricated in a manner that suggests they were used as sermon material”\footnote{Wilson, \textit{Music and Merchants}, p. 27.} and in Republican Florence of the late Middle Ages, “there was rarely an occasion in the various laudesi services when preaching and lauda singing were not closely juxtaposed” (28).

As regards the Florentine print tradition, there are only two extant laudari manuscripts with musical notation prior to the Belcari era (though there are approximately two hundred extant laudari without musical notation\footnote{See Testi, \textit{La musica italiana}, p. 114.}): Magl\textsuperscript{1} (belonging to the Company of Santo Spirito, otherwise known as della Colomba) and Magl\textsuperscript{2} (at the Company of San Giglio).\footnote{See Wilson, \textit{Music and Merchants}, p. 133. For a discussion of the Company of Santo Spirito, see pp. 132-139; Wilson notes that Lorenzo joined the confraternity 10 May 1467. His son Piero also joined, as did Lorenzo di Pier Francesco de’ Medici. He likewise observed that “the company was transformed by the influx of prominent families of the quarter century during c.1440-70 ” (p. 218).} As Wilson notes in \textit{Singing Poetry in Renaissance Florence}, much of what is known about the Florentine lauda tradition of the Quattrocento results from a nineteenth-century publication by Galletti of four supposed laudari; Wilson’s identification of these laudari as Gall1, Gall2, Gall3, Gall4, respectively, will be repeated in the present discussion.\footnote{For a detailed scholarly analysis of the Galletti print tradition, including lists of located and reported copies of each Galletti exemplar, see pp. 62-68.} According to Galletti (1863), Gall1 dates to 1480, Gall2 to 1485/6, Gall3 to 1489, when it was printed “forse a spese del Magnifico Lorenzo de’ Medici” (v), and Gall4 to 1510. Only Gall2 bears a print date, however, and at present, it is generally assumed that Gall2 pre-dated Gall1 (1490) by approximately five years, that Gall3 dates to 1495, and Gall4, 1502-1507.\footnote{For an overview of the scholarly history surrounding the dating of these four Galletti prints, see Wilson’s \textit{Singing}, pp. 62-63.}

As Wilson aptly emphasizes, “the authoritative status assigned to Galletti’s edition of his four earlier prints has led to two wide assumptions: that the four collections as published by Galletti are more or less faithful editions of four historic prints, and that these four collections more or less represent the Florentine cantasi come practice of the time” whereas “only one (Gall1) of Galletti’s four edited versions may resemble any known exemplar from which he must have been working, and it is difficult to know what he was consulting” (62-63). Though
Galletti had the dating wrong and he modified the collections to eliminate redundancy, it is clear that the *laude* contained in these manuscripts were in circulation in late-Quattrocento Florence.

As the *lauda* itself changed face over the years, its role evolved from daily performance by confraternity members, to performance by professionals on certain feasts and, in the late Quattrocento, the trend of private reading and performance took hold, as attested by a “great increase of private devotional books (for laymen and clerics) containing laude.” As Wilson noted in his most recent publication, *Singing Poetry in Renaissance Florence* (2009):

> the scriptorium-generated sources related to M690 [the Belcari *laudario*] also reveal a potentially large public market of individual citizens interested in continuing the long-established customs of domestic lauda singing. These citizens included some of the city’s most prominent families. (84)

Though the *lauda* experienced its own evolution, both textually or formally (as poetry and music) and performatively (as music and drama), including changes in its relative popularity and in the meaning that it had within liturgical and civic ritual from its inception in the Duecento through to the late Quattrocento, it nevertheless remained a central feature of lay piety in *laudesi* and *disciplinati* companies throughout the Quattrocento. Because of this, the *lauda* is indissociably connected with confraternal life. The scholarly investigation of lay religious companies has thus played a primary role in demystifying the function of these texts in Italian society, in particular in *laudesi* and *disciplinati* companies. To summarize, the impact of the

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63 The quote is taken from Wilson, *Music and Merchants*, p. 214. Wilson notes that, historically, the *lauda* “has played a part in mass flagellant processions, the civic processions of clerics and laymen, the sacre rappresentazioni of fifteenth-century Florence, the secretive services of flagellant companies, the liturgies of friars and reformed Benedictine monks, mendicant sermons, and the private devotions of clerics, nuns, laymen and laywomen. But in each of these the role of the lauda was marginal, and in only one context does the lauda appear as the undisputed centrepiece – in the liturgical services of the laudesi companies” (*Music and Merchants*, p. 2). John Henderson refers to *laudari* as “the lay equivalent of the clergy’s service book” (*Review of Music and Merchants*, p. 242). Wilson nevertheless observes that “the Florentine *cantasi come* sources appear to have been private collections” (p. 175). According to Wilson, though the *cantasi come* tradition may not have arisen within the companies, they ultimately became popularized there; he credits Feo Belcari for their introduction into the confraternities (p. 176). On the dissemination of the *lauda* in more private versus public spheres, see Robert Nosow, “Binchois’s Songs in the Feo Belcari Manuscript,” pp. 236-238.

64 For a discussion of the changes in the performative aspect of the *lauda* from 1415-1470, see Wilson, *Music and Merchants*, pp. 164-176; for the time period from 1470 to 1570, see pp. 176-182 of the same publication.

65 For an overview of scholarship on “the impact of confraternities on the social, religious, and civic fiber of late-medieval and Renaissance Florence,” see Eisenbichler’s “Lorenzo de’ Medici and the Confraternity of the Blacks,” pp. 85-86 and for Lorenzo’s role therein see pp. 87-88, and note 12 on related scholarship in particular (the quote is from p. 85). See also Eisenbichler’s later publication, *The Boys of Archangel Raphael*, pp. 14-15 for a more expanded review of prior confraternity scholarship.

66 In her 1988 publication *The Monophonic Lauda and the Lay Religious Confraternities of Tuscany and Umbria in the Late Middle Ages*, Cyrilla Barr charts the evolution of the *lauda* from its early relationship to the mendicant orders of the Franciscan and Dominican orders to the eventual “settling” into close association with monasteries
laud on Italian medieval society in a sentence, as Alessandro Vettori’s did: “what the mendicant movements did on a sociological level, the lauda did on a catechetical level” (xv).

Lorenzo de’ Medici is not only important for his laude, but also for his active role in Florentine confraternal life. Fortunately, much more about this participation is known than in 1990 when Toscani published his edition of Lorenzo’s lauds. Though there had been a number of publications dedicated to Lorenzo’s political involvement in (isolated) confraternities, it was not until Ludovica Sebregondi’s article on Lorenzo de’ Medici as a confraternity member of San Paolo that his personal engagement in the spiritual life of the organization came to light. With “Lorenzo de’ Medici confratello illustre,” Sebregondi offered a profile of Lorenzo as a confraternity member actively engaged in the religious life of the confraternity of San Paolo, one of the five Florentine ‘Buche’ that were created in the early Quattrocento (328).

San Paolo was a deeply ascetic confraternity whose night-time rituals included devotional sermons delivered by its members and self-flagellation. It might well have been San Paolo that Ronald F. E. Weissman had in mind when he stated that in disciplinati and penitenti companies of the Renaissance “an intense preoccupation with interior religious experience and prayer characterized the devotional practices [...] thus creating for some laymen

and friaries governed by laymen, where psalms and laude were sung into the late fourteenth and fifteenth century (9). Building on the earlier work of musicologists, historians and literary scholars, she provides an overview of the paraliturgical exercises in (Marian) laudesi companies and (penitential) disciplinati companies, as well as exempla of the corresponding musical documents. She notes that in the Trecento, the function of the lauda shifted from its spiritual role as a “paraliturgical expression in which the faithful might join,” to a social performance (and eventually, the staging of religious spectacle). Yet, in the (penitential) disciplinati companies characterized by “devotion to penance in the form of self-flagellation,” the lauda remained an essential part of their piety throughout the fifteenth century (31) and the disciplinati “preserved the purity of the motivation which had initially animated them” (36). Ronald F.E. Weissman’s Ritual Brotherhood in Renaissance Florence is another landmark publication on the topic.

67 In an appendix containing unedited documents on Lorenzo’s involvement in the disciplinati confraternity of San Paolo (pp. 105-111), Toscani mentioned that Lorenzo’s confraternal activity was under-studied: “In verità, gli specialisti di studi laurenziani non hanno accordato molta attenzione ai rapporti che il Magnifico ebbe con diverse confraternite dal 1466 fino alla morte” (Lorenzo de’ Medici, Laude, ed. Bernardo Toscani, p. 105).

68 In addition to Bernardo Toscani’s appendix to his 1990 publication of Lorenzo’s lauds, one counts (most notably), Rab Hatfield’s “The Compagnia de’ Magi;” Robert F.E. Weissman’s Ritual Brotherhood, pp. 169-173; John Henderson’s “Le confraternite religiose;” Konrad Eisenbichler’s “Lorenzo de’ Medici and the Confraternity of the Blacks” (1994; first published in Italian in 1992 as “Lorenzo de’ Medici e la Congregazione dei Neri nella Compagnia della Croce al Tempio;” Eisenbichler references this and other related scholarship on p. 87, note 12) presents an overview of Lorenzo and confraternities on pp. 87-88; this information is represented and expanded in The Boys of Archangel Raphael (1998), pp. 46-49. In all three publications, Eisenbichler presents a thorough analysis of preceding scholarship. Collectively, the above-mentioned scholars revealed that the Medici intervened in a pragmatic and political way in numerous Florentine confraternities. Ludovica Sebregondi’s “Lorenzo de’ Medici confratello illustre” (1994) builds on the work of these earlier and/or contemporary publications. More recently, Lorenzo Polizzotto’s Children of the Promise (2004), ch. 6, also discusses the Medici in connection with the youth confraternity of the Purification of the Virgin (pp. 98-113).

69 Sebregondi discusses this and other rituals beginning on p. 328.
the role of contemplative or mystic.” Sebregondi notes that unlike other disciplinati companies, San Paolo’s members did not participate in public processions or don special attire (329). Most strikingly, confratelli of San Paolo were forbidden from participating in other confraternities of its kind (329). By reason of its strongly penitential character and strict regulations, San Paolo represents a curious choice on the part of Lorenzo, as Sebregondi highlighted: “Appare significativo che – tra tutte le confraternite alle quali era ascritto o nelle quali era implicato – Lorenzo avesse scelto proprio quella in cui le regole erano più dure, per esprimere la propria religiosità” (334-335).

On 25 April 1472 Lorenzo was one of four members selected to reform the statutes of San Paolo (330). On 22 November, the new Capitoli were formally approved (331). As a consequence of the new Capitoli, some members, including Lorenzo, renounced their affiliation with other disciplinati companies (332). Unique regulations set San Paolo apart from other disciplinati companies, tying it to the youth confraternity San Giovanni Evangelista. Though Lorenzo’s attendance in San Paolo was inconsistent during his later years, his involvement with the youth confraternity is well-documented, as is his children’s participation in San Giovanni Evangelista, where Lorenzo’s sacra rappresentazione SS. Giovanni e Paolo was performed on 17 February 1491.

Both San Paolo and the youth confraternity of San Giovanni Evangelista operated out of the same building and the relationship between the two confraternities extended beyond the shared physical space. This is attested by the participation of Giovanni and Giuliano de’ Medici, the former of whom upon a return to visit the youth confraternity in 1515 recalled having grown up there. If there is any truth in Condivi’s assertion that Michelangelo was treated by Lorenzo

70 “Cults and Contexts: In search of the Renaissance Confraternity” in Crossing the Boundaries, ed. Konrad Eisenbichler, p. 204.
71 Sebregondi specifies that “le compagnie ‘proibite’ dagli statuti erano solo quelle di disciplinati e dunque non quelle di laudesi (Santa Agnese e le altre) e le caritative (Neri e Misericordia). Rimangono le confraternite di Gesù Pellegrino e del Bachella, ma non sappiamo se dopo tale rinuncia Lorenzo vi fosse ancora iscritto” (333). For a discussion of Lorenzo as a governor of the confraternity, see pp. 333-334.
74 Del Lungo, Florentia, p. 194.
75 An anecdote narrated in Del Lungo’s Uomini e cose del Quattrocento, p. 194 and subsequently referenced in scholarship on the Medici and Florentine confraternal life by scholars Sebregondi (“Lorenzo de’ Medici confratello illustre,” p. 337), Eisenbichler (“Lorenzo de’ Medici and the Confraternity of the Blacks,” p. 47, and The Boys of Archangel Raphael, p. 27), and Taddei, Fanciulli, p. 155.
as one of his children, then it is entirely possible that Michelangelo had frequented the establishment. In fact, it is likely in the vicinity of the Vangelista, if not from within the walls of the confraternity, that he heard Savonarola’s preaching in the early 1490s.

Consistent with the mandate of educating adolescents in Christian ways, the confraternity’s activities included, in addition to the recitation of the Office and the celebration of the Forty hours, the singing of religious songs – vernacular laude as well as church hymns in Latin, as Eisenbichler notes. Eisenbichler also notes that within the confraternity’s educational program, adolescents “learned and taught catechism, delivered sermons, staged plays, learned music and singing, and generally imbibed the basic elements of a responsible and devout Christian life.” The Medici connection to these confraternities greatly contributed to their status as centres of culture.

In discussing the flourishing of youth confraternities in Quattrocento Florence, Ilaria Taddei drew attention to the interest in education and pedagogy shared by both (lay) humanist and clerics alike: “l’azione coordinata dei circoli umanistici e dei riformatori religiosi fu

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76 Condivi, The Life of Michelangelo (ed. Wohl), p. 13: Lorenzo “arranged that Michelangelo be given a good room in his house, providing him with all the conveniences he desired and treating him not otherwise than as a son, both in other ways and at his table, at which, as befitted such a man, personages of the highest nobility and of great affairs were seated every day. And as it was the custom that those who were present at the first sat down near the Magnificent, each according to his rank, without changing places no matter who should arrive later, it quite often happened that Michelangelo was seated above Lorenzo’s sons and other distinguished company in which that house flourished and abounded. By all of them Michelangelo was treated affectionately and encouraged in his honorable pursuit, but above all by the Magnificent, who would send for him many times a day and would show him jewels, carnelians, medals, and similar things of great value, as he knew the boy had high intelligence and judgment.”

77 This point, discussed in Del Lungo, Florentia, p. 194, is repeated in Artusi and Patruno’s Deo Gratias: “i locali di via dell’Acqua sede del Vangelista furono talora teatro pure delle prediche (soprattutto nel periodo carnevalizio) del Savonarola” (p. 180). Additional information is provided by Taddei in Fanciulli e giovani, pp. 148-149. Reaffirming the Dei Lung reference to Savonarola frequenting the youth confraternity (p. 149), Taddei adds that the biography of Florentine merchant Giovanni Empoli likewise indicates that the youth of the Vangelista “participated in activities organized by Savonarola” (p. 148).


79 Eisenbichler, The Boys of Archangel Raphael, pp. 18-19, where Eisenbichler also explains that youth confraternities were sometimes known as ‘scuole di dottrina’ on the basis of the above-named activities. These points are echoed in the less scholarly treatment of the Compagnia di San Giovanni Evangelista detta il Vangelista by Luciano Artusi and Antonio Patruno in Deo gratias (1994), where it is noted that “i fanciulli cantavano laude volgari, recitavano salmi e preci liturgiche e leggevano il sermone” (179).

80 This point is also echoed by Luciano Artusi and Antonio Patruno in Deo gratias, where they note that the Vangelista “doveva rivestire senz’altro una certa importanza anche rispetto alla storia del costume e della cultura del secolo, se si pensa a quali personalità letterarie [such as Poliziano] passarono per quelle devote pratiche e fra quei canti [...] molto forte, e probabilmente predominante era quindi l’aspetto culturale della Compagnia, la quale si può definire addirittura essere stata una ‘palestra di giovanile eloquenza’” (p. 180). Naturally, the earlier reference is to Del Lungo’s Florentia, including the reference to the confraternity as a “palestra di giovanile eloquenza” (a quote from Del Lungo, p. 194).
Taddei essentially reaffirms Paul Oskar Kristeller’s observations in “Lay Religious Traditions and Florentine Platonism” where he highlighted the importance of “religious prose literature composed by or for laymen that flourished in Italy before and during the fifteenth century and that also may in part be linked to the religious guilds” (103). Naming the Compagnia of the Magi and the Compagnia di S. Giovanni Evangelista, Kristeller noted that in the extant manuscript collections of lay sermons “the religious purpose was combined with literary or rhetorical intentions” (105) and that the names of many authors of these sermons “include men who became famous as statesmen, poets or humanists” (106).

Kristeller likewise highlighted the importance of the lettera spirituale to Renaissance Florentine culture and to lay piety by recalling the “great age” of the fourteenth-century devotional letter (featuring the letters of Giovanni Colombini and St. Catherine), and affirming its continued importance in fifteenth-century Florence, in part, through Feo Belcari (pp. 106-108). In addition to showing “how the institutional traditions of the lay religious associations and the literary patterns of the lay sermon and of the spiritual letter as developed in the Italian Middle Ages persisted throughout the fifteenth century and constituted a significant factor in the religious life of the early Italian Renaissance,” Kristeller also suggested “that the Platonic Academy of Florence and the work of its leader, Marsilio Ficino, was in various ways linked with those religious traditions and owed to this background the influence which it exercised in turn upon the religious movements of the sixteenth century” (108-109). Kristeller judiciously recalled that Ficinian Neoplatonism was both religious and philosophical, and that Ficino was an ordained priest who firmly believed in the compatibility of Neoplatonism and Christianity (109). He likewise recounted that Ficino delivered in public not only lectures on Plato and Plotinus, but also sermons and lectures on St. Paul (111) and that he fulfilled the role of spiritual guide for his circle (113). This syncretism in Ficino will become increasingly important to remember as the present chapter progresses, and in particular, as this section transitions into the subsequent treatment of Christ and the Holy Spirit in Italian spiritual lauds.

While there is no real or known documentary history of confraternal associations on the part of Michelangelo during his youth (and it is generally assumed that he participated in a

81 Fanciulli e giovani: crescere a Firenze nel Rinascimento (2001), pp. 164-165. The quote is on p. 165, where Taddei refers the reader to Paul Oskar Kristeller’s “Lay Religious Traditions and Florentine Platonism” (note 181).
82 For a full treatment of the relationship between Ficino’s Neoplatonism and Christianity, see pp. 109-121.
limited manner as an adult),\textsuperscript{83} it is a plausible assumption that as an adolescent in Florence he would have been be exposed to, if not somehow involved in, their activities. If it is true, as Clements asserted, that Michelangelo had read Lorenzo’s poetry and heard it recited, it is likewise plausible that he would have read or (more likely) heard laude recited or performed, if not at in a confraternity, then at the Medici house, by the Medici children, or during any number of civic and religious festivities. As William Wallace observed in his 2010 biography of Michelangelo, it is important to recall the role of oral performance of literary texts: “in a culture saturated with printed words and images, we sometimes forget the importance of oral transmission; books were read aloud, poetry was recited at length, sermons were explained and elaborated, and street and court performances made works of ‘literature’ accessible to a wide public.”\textsuperscript{84}

3.6 Christ and the Holy Sprit in Christian Mysticism

In the previous chapter on the Catholic Reformation, two topics were highlighted for their central importance to devotional practices of the \textit{Spirituali}: 1) “meditation on the Redemption” (mentioned by Adriano Prosperi, 2001); and 2) “Mysticism of the Spirit” (described by Barry Collett, 2000). These two points were discussed briefly in relation to justification, and to spiritual friendships as “loc[i] of salvation,” respectively; they served as an introduction to the \textit{Spirituali} and the text of the \textit{Beneficio di Cristo}, as well as a segue to the analysis of Michelangelo’s poetry for or inspired by Vittoria Colonna. Though lauds were typically addressed to Mary or Christ, some laude, like some hymns, have been addressed to the Holy Spirit. Traditionally, Christ and the Holy Ghost have played a central role in Italian mysticism: the former explicitly, the latter, often more implicitly.

The Passion of Christ figures largely not only in Catholic liturgy, but also in mystical devotion and its expression in literary and paraliturgical texts such as the lauda.\textsuperscript{85} In fact, the primary focus of an overwhelming number of devotional, mystical laude was the Passion of Christ. In these texts, the love of Christ is not only remembered and recalled, but requested. This

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\textsuperscript{83} Rab Hatfield’s assertion in his “political, economic and social profile” of the artist in \textit{The Wealth of Michelangelo}, p. 233

\textsuperscript{84} \textit{Michelangelo: The Artist, the Man and His Times}, p. 42.

\textsuperscript{85} More specifically, meditations on the cross and on Christ’s suffering were central to both ascetic and contemplative practices throughout the Middle Ages, as Carla Bino (2008) has shown in \textit{Dal trionfo al pianto}, where she charts the changing face of meditations on Christ, the cross, and the crucifixion and of the attendant liturgical and paraliturgical practices in medieval Italy as she traces the development, from its roots, of the “theatre of mercy.”
request often accompanies the sinner’s personal supplication for transformation and/or renewal. Because of these personal appeals for transformation and renewal, the Holy Spirit is ever present in these compositions, symbolically as fire or water, or when the traditional gifts, graces and actions of the Holy Ghost are invoked to effect the salvation of the sinner through transformation or renewal. Before turning to these aspects of the Holy Ghost in Catholicism and its connection to the Crucifixion, it is worth recalling the key descriptors of the Holy Spirit in the primary treatise of the Spirituali.

In the Beneficio, the act of generating faith in the human heart is attributed to the Holy Spirit: “Questa santa fiducia è generata nel cuore dallo Spirito santo, che ci è communicato per la fede, né mai è vacua dell’amor divino” (54). For the authors of the Beneficio, the Holy Spirit was synonymous with true faith and this faith existed as a sentient presence (the Holy Ghost as divine love) within the Christian soul: “La vera fede viva è una divinità nell’anima del cristiano” (70). In the treatise, Christ is said to dwell in the human heart by virtue of this faith (“abita nei cuori per fede,” 65), which is described as a flame that burns away sin: “la fede, che giustifica, è come una fiamma di fuoco, la qual non può se non risplendere [...] estingue e abbruscia i peccati” (69). The Holy Spirit, as an aspect of divine love, generates faith in the human heart, and residing in that same heart as divine love, embodies the aspect of Christ, who can also be said to reside in the heart of the truly faithful, and thus God-loving, Christian. All of these aspects of the Holy Spirit have biblical roots, many of which are Pauline.

Romans 5:5 states that God’s love is diffused in our heart by the Holy Spirit, which He gives to us: “spes autem non confundit quia caritas Dei diffusa est in cordibus nostris per Spiritum Sanctum qui datus est nobis” (Ilche la speranza non confunde: imperho che ne li cuori

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86 In the previous chapter, it was shown that these themes of transformation and renewal were at the heart of both the Beneficio di Cristo and Michelangelo’s poetry for Vittoria Colonna. The presence of these themes in Evangelical texts is most natural given that the matters of transformation and renewal have been a permanent feature in Italian piety and religious literature, not to mention Church reform, since the birth of Catholicism and mystical theology (though this is not to deny the uniqueness of expression and purpose to which they were employed by the reformers, who re-configured and re-presented these features of Catholic devotion in service of a wider discussion on salvation and grace.)

nostri eglie diffusa la carita de dio: per el spirito sancto elequal a noi e dato”). In Ephesians 3:16-17 it is wished that the community of the faithful be strengthened by the Spirit in the inner man so that Christ may dwell in their hearts by faith: “ut det vobis secundum divinitas gloriae suae virtute corroborari per Spiritum eius in interiore homine habitare Christum per fidem in cordibus vestris in caritate radicati et fundati” (“acio che egli dia a voi : secondo le divitie dela sua gloria: virtu de firmeza : per el suo spirito nel animo vostro dentro. Et che vi da gratia che christo habiti per fede ne vostri cuori. Et oro per voi che siati radicati & fondati nela carita”).

Because Ephesians is Pauline (though it was not written by St. Paul), it is an important New Testament reference for the Spirituali, and the stylistic parallels between the Beneficio and this particular biblical passage are easily noted. In the laude that will be examined in this chapter, is not always clear whether a particular reference pertains to Christ or the Holy Spirit. Rather than indicating theological confusion or inconstancy on the part of these writers, this confluence and co-mingling of attributes reflect the fact that in Christianity, and in Pauline thought in particular, pneumatology and christology are intricately linked (as the Ephesians quotation above reveals). For the Christian believer, “to experience the Spirit is to experience Christ” because their actions are coordinated.

Ephesians is concerned with the operation of the Spirit within a community of apostles. In the short text, it is emphasized that “by grace” the community of the elect is “saved through faith” (Eph 2:8): “gratia enim estis salvati per fidem et hoc non vobis Dei enim donum est” (“Certe fece salvati ne la fede. Et questo non e per nostra bonta : ma e dono de dio”). For St Paul, the Holy Spirit is in relationship not only with Christians in the context of their participation in the corporate body of the Church, but also in a more personal, intimate way with the individual believer (Beck 67). It is the manner in which the individual believer of the Cinquecento conceived of his or her relationship to Christ and the Holy Spirit and pursued this relationship to God as expressed in the Trinity that determined whether or not he or she

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88 All quotes are from the Vulgate (Biblia sacra vulgata) with the Italian Malerbi version (Biblia vulgare istoriata, 1490) in parentheses as this is the illustrated version used by Michelangelo (See: Edgar Wind, “Maccabean Histories,” 1960). Any linguistic analyses of Michelangelo’s poetry in light of the Bible should include the Malerbi Bible (also known as the Malermi Bible), and for poems composed after 1532, the Brucioli Bible should also be consulted. As the purpose of this discussion is simply to present the Holy Spirit in the context of the Christian tradition up to and including the Renaissance, the Vulgate and the Malerbi Bible will be the only ones cited in this section.

89 In the Istitutes, John Calvin espouses a Pauline pneumatology (see Paul S. Chung, The Spirit of God Transforming Life: The Reformation and the Theology of the Holy Spirit, pp. 81-88, and p. 86 in particular); it is undoubtedly for this reason that Calvin’s thought is identified in the Beneficio di Cristo. The quote is from T. David Beck, The Holy Spirit, p. 81.
overstepped the bounds of orthodox Catholicism; it is when an individual believer engaged in the intense pursuit of this relationship outside the confines of corporate worship and/or without mediation by the Church (by means of the sacraments, for example) that a devout Christian would ultimately come to risk the charge of heresy during the period of the Catholic Reformation.

Among the traditional roles of the Holy Spirit, one counts uniting Christian souls to God and to each other, and renewing the hearts of men. In St. Paul, both of these points are emphasized. In his pneumatology, Paul distinguishes between regeneration and resurrection of the believer, and “the present indwelling of the Spirit is linked to the future resurrection of the body.” 90 T. David Beck explains that “the indwelling of the Spirit” does more than just assure the future resurrection of the believer, “it is the partial presence of the future redeemed life” (that will occur with the second coming of Christ) (69). It is thus easy to understand how periods of intense mysticism have historically coincided with apocalyptic fervour of one form or another.

There is another series of related descriptors in the Beneficio that also have biblical foundations – scriptural elements that have been consistently incorporated into Italian mystical discourse, directly and indirectly, since its beginning. In the Beneficio, faith is described as the work of God within us by which our old selves are crucified and through which we are transformed into Christ becoming new creatures: “è una opera di Dio in noi, per la qual il nostro uomo vecchio è crocifisso, e noi tutti, trasformati in Cristo, diventiamo nuova creatura” (69). In Romans 6:3, St. Paul clarifies that Christians were baptized into Christ’s crucifixion: “an ignoratis quia quicumque baptizati sumus in Christo Iesu in morte ipsius baptizati sumus” (“Or non sapete fratelli che tutti noi che seme battizati in christo iesu: se mo baptizati ne la morte sua”). Because of this, “our old man is crucified with him” (Rom 6:6): “vetus homo noster simul crucifixus est” (“lantiquo huomo nostro insieme glie crucifixo”).

Similar but more cryptic statements appear in Galatians and Corinthians, respectively, where life and death are described as concomitant experiences: “vivo autem iam non ergo vivit

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90 T. David Beck, The Holy Spirit and the Renewal of All Things, p. 65-69; the quote is from p. 69. Beck refers frequently to the earlier scholarship of Geerhardus Vos in the development of his argument. Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen also underscores the importance of this soteriological aspect of St. Paul’s pneumatology, which distinguishes him from other New Testament authors (Pneumatology, p. 32).

91 In recapitulating his treatment of the Holy Spirit’s relationship to the individual Christian, T. David Beck inadvertently clarifies the cryptic meaning of the “new (mystical) life” in the Spirit: “the Spirit is the immediate agent of the resurrection. Second, the Spirit is the element, or the atmosphere, in which the resurrection-life is lived” (p. 77).
vero in me Christus” (“Et vivo gia non io: ma vive in me christo” Gal 2:20); and, “quasi morientes et ecce vivimus” (“come morti : & ecco viviamo” 2 Cor 6:9). According to Evelyn Underhill, considered together, these two passages constitute “the whole Pauline concept of the soul’s union with, and transmutation in Christ.”\(^92\) They describe “the mystical crucifixion”\(^93\) whereby our sinful selves are extinguished with Christ (on a spiritual level), and a new life begins (on all levels). The Holy Spirit restores the divine image or likeness to man, restoring him to a state of holiness.\(^94\)

When the Beneficio states that faith unites the devout to God leading Him to live in our hearts and to clothe the souls of the faithful in Christ, it echoes the above biblical passages on the mystical crucifixion: “Questa medesima fede ci unisce con Dio e fa che egli abita nei cuori e veste l’anima nostra di se stesso” (69). Its particular reference to a new life as “clothing oneself” in some form of new attire (such as Christ) also has a specific biblical precedent: “quicumque enim in Christo baptizati estis Christum induistis” (“tutti che seti bابتزتى [sic] in christo : havete vestiti christo” Gal 3:27). A series of donning references likewise appear in Coloss 3:10-16, where the faithful are urged to “take off” the “old man” and to “put on” the “new”: “expoliantes vos veterem hominem cum actibus eius et induentes novum eum” (“spogliatevi del vechio homo con le sue opere & vestiteve el novo” Coloss 3:9-10). All references are Pauline, either directly, for having been written by him, or indirectly, by embodying his thought. Given the appearance of the dressing metaphor in the Beneficio, it is no surprise that an analogous statement occurs in Eph 4:22-24: “renovamini autem spiritu mentis vestrae et induite novem hominem qui secundum Deum creatus es in iustitia et sanctitate veritatis” (“vi corrumpevate secondo li desiderii del spirito de la vostra mente & vestitive de novo homo el qual e creato secondo dio in iustitia: & in sanctita de verita”).

The coordinated action of Christ and the Holy Spirit in drawing man back to God is long reflected in Catholic understanding of the Passion of Christ. When Christ’s side was pierced by the soldier (John 19:34), both water and blood flowed forth from the wound: “sed unus militum lancea latus eius aperuit et continuo exivit sanguis et aqua” (“Ma uno de cavalieri co[n] la la[n]cia gli aperse el costato suo & in mantinente uscite fuori sangue & aqua”). The

\(^92\) In Jacopone da Todi: Poet and Mystic, p. 228.

\(^93\) This wording is influenced by Evelyn Underhill’s treatment of the subject in Jacopone da Todi, p. 228.

\(^94\) T. David Beck writes: “Paul conceives of the Spirit as an agent of the transformation of believers into a state of holiness. However, holiness is defined in terms of the Son of God. Paul conceives of the existence of all believers to have a common yet specific teleology – transformation into the image of Christ (Rom 8:29, 2 Cor 3:18)” (The Holy Spirit, p. 81).
water stands for the Holy Spirit that will issue forth from Christ’s side after death, as He explains in John 7:37-39:

in novissimo autem die magno festivitatis stabat Iesus et clamabat dicens si quis sitit veniat ad me et bibat qui credit in me sicut dixit scriptura flumina de ventre eius fluent acquae vivae hoc autem dixit de Spiritu quem accepturi erant credentes in eum non enim erat Spiritus quai Iesus nondum fuerat glorificatus

Ma nel ultimo giorno gra[n]de de la festa stava iesu & cridava e diceva : se alcuno ha sete venga a me & beva chi crede in me si come dice al scriptura li fiumi de aqua viva usciranno del suo ventre Et questo disse del spirito elqual doveano ricever li crede[n]ti in lui : conciosia chel spirito non era dato il[m]perho che ancora non era glorifcato iesu

[emphasis mine]
The water, a lesser known Passion symbol (though it is well known for its connection to Baptism), has long been interpreted as the Holy Spirit that welled up inside Christ and that flows forth unto the faithful. In St. Paul, baptism is both Christological and pneumatological, and it is inextricably linked to the Crucifixion.95

In Christian thought, the Holy Spirit is also conceived of as God’s gift to the faithful:

“The Spirit is the donum of the Father and the Son. But the Spirit is also what is given, donatum. […] God is donabile in the Holy Spirit. The culmination of God’s salvific work is thus the indwelling of the Holy Spirit” (173). The central role of the Holy Spirit to Christian mysticism becomes clear when it is understood that “Christian mysticism is rooted in the baptismal call of all Christians to enter into the divine mystery” (Sheldrake, 901). The seven attributes of the Holy Spirit – the seven gifts or graces that it imparts to the baptized that they might achieve their destined reconciliation and reunion with God – are wisdom, understanding, counsel, strength, knowledge, godliness, holy fear (1 Cor 12: 4-10). In the Catholic paradigm, one comes to know the Spirit in the Church, through Scripture, the sacraments, and liturgy.96

In liturgy, the Holy Spirit is celebrated at Pentecost, the feast recalling the inauguration of the Catholic Church by the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles (Acts 2). The ninth-

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95 Anthony Sherman notes that “three elements characterize Paul’s understanding of baptism: it is in Christ Jesus; it is in the Holy Spirit; it is formative of community” (“Baptism,” p. 135).
96 As discussed in the previous chapter, a point of divergence between Protestantism and Catholicism is the question of the relationship of the Holy Spirit to the individual and to what degree this connection is mediated by or passes through the Church (as an organization and through the sacraments).
century Pentecostal hymn, *Veni creator Spiritus*, summarizes what has long been believed, reiterated and emphasized in the Catholic Church with respect to the Holy Ghost.\footnote{The Italian translation is by Giuseppe De Luca and it taken from Ferruccio’s *La poesia religiosa*, pp. 42-43. An Italian translation is provided instead of an English one to facilitate comparisons between the hymn and later Italian laude.}  

\begin{align*}
Veni, \text{ creator Spiritus,} & \quad \text{Vieni, Spirito creatore;}
\text{mentes tuorum visita,} & \quad \text{le menti de’ tuoi visita;}
\text{imple superna gratia} & \quad \text{riempi di grazia superna}
\text{quae tu creasti pectora.} & \quad \text{i petti che tu hai creato.}
\text{Qui Paraclitus diceris,} & \quad \text{Tu hai nome di Paraclito,}
\text{donum Dei altissimi,} & \quad \text{dono del Dio altissimo}
\text{fons vivus, ignis, caritas} & \quad \text{fonte viva, fuoco, carità}
et spiritualisunction. & \quad \text{e unzione spirituale.}
\text{Tu septiformis munere,} & \quad \text{Tu settiforme nei doni,}
dextrae Dei tu digitus, & \quad \text{tu dito della destra di Dio,}
tu rite promisso Patris & \quad \text{tu che per una promessa formale del Padre}
sermone ditans guttura. & \quad \text{arricchisti di parola le labbra.}
\text{Accende lumen sensibus} & \quad \text{Ai sensi accendi un lume,}
\text{infunde amorem cordibus} & \quad \text{nei cuori infondi l’amore,}
\text{infirm nostris corporis} & \quad \text{le parti inferme del nostro corpo}
virtute firmans perpeti. & \quad \text{corroborando con una forza perpetua.}
\text{Hostem repellas longius,} & \quad \text{Respingi sempre più lontano il nemico,}
pacemque dones protinus: & \quad \text{e dona subito la pace:}
ductore sic te praevio, & \quad \text{così, avendo innanzi a noi te condottiero,}
vitemus omne noxium. & \quad \text{eviteremo ogni danno.}
\text{Per te sciamus, da, Patrem} & \quad \text{Dàcci di conoscere il Padre per te,}
noscamus atque Filium & \quad \text{e conoscere il Figlio,}
te utriusque Spiritum & \quad \text{e credere in te, Spirito d’entrambi,}
credamus omni tempore. & \quad \text{in ogni tempo.}
\text{Praesta, Pater piissime,} & \quad \text{Concedi, Padre piissimo,}
patrique Compar unice, & \quad \text{e tu al Padre unico Pari,}
cum Spiritu Paraclito & \quad \text{con lo Spirito Paraclito,}
regnans per omne saeculum. & \quad \text{che regni in ogni secolo.}
\end{align*}

*Veni Creator Spiritus* is believed to have been composed by the Frankish Benedictine monk Rabanus Maurus (776-856). One of the most frequently employed hymns in the Catholic Church, its use extends beyond missal celebrations of Pentecost, or Terce. Historically, it has
played an important role in other ceremonial rituals, such as the ordination of priests, and during the sacrament of Confirmation – moments of deeper initiation into the community of the Catholic Church; in this sense, it “functions as a hymn of election and anointing.” It is perhaps because of this that it was also used in confraternal initiation rites. Ronald F. E. Weissman observed that these induction rites recalled the sacrament of Baptism:

As a ceremonial transition in status for the novice, the initiation rite was in some respects reminiscent of the ancient rites of baptism. In front of the members of the company, the signs of the novice’s previous status in the world were removed; he replaced his worldly garb with the garments of the confraternal community. Throughout the rite, the images of rebirth shaped the ceremony. At crucial moments he kneeled, and was then ‘raised’ up by the governor of the company. At other moments, he ‘turned’ to receive the Holy Spirit. Lighted candles and prayers celebrating the symbolic meaning of light and flame were prominent during the ritual. (Ritual, 97)

Given the tendency of lay confraternities to model their activities on liturgical practices, this is not surprising. It is thus only natural that invocations to the Holy Ghost appear in both the Magli and Magl laudari.

A mystical, as well as doctrinal text, the hymn is divided into seven quatrains: the number corresponding to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, which are elaborated in the text. The Holy Ghost is described as a gift from God (vv. 5-6), as well as the Spirit of both the Father and the Son (v. 23). He is invoked to fill the poet’s breast with grace (vv. 3-4) and love (v. 14), as well as to grant peace (v. 18). The view of the Holy Spirit as a bond of love between God and man reflects Augustine’s contribution to pneumatology. It is noteworthy that the Holy Spirit is at once described as a lively spring (the mystical waters that quench spiritual thirst), fire (a means of spiritual purification), charity (divine love), and spiritual unction (comfort): “fons vivus, ignis, caritas / et spirituali unction,” (vv. 7-8).

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99 Ronald F.E. Weissman reproduces a segment of the statutes of San Paolo that refer to their induction ritual (Ritual, p. 96).
101 Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen discusses this contribution in Pneumatology, pp. 46-49. She notes that for Augustine “the primary presence of the Holy Spirit is love, not knowledge,” p. 47. His thought influenced subsequent theological considerations of the Spirit.
Invocations like *Veni, creator Spiritus* are common within the Christian tradition. The twelfth-thirteenth century Whitsunday mass sequence, *Veni, Sancte Spiritus,* (“The Golden Sequence”) is another well known example. The invocation echoes the ninth-century *Veni, creator Spiritus,* but this later hymn is an invocation for illumination, and so there is a distinct emphasis on light imagery in the text (recalling John 1, perhaps). It is the comforting and counselling aspects of the Holy Ghost that find emphasis in the Latin sequence:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Latin (Golden Sequence)</th>
<th>Italian Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Veni, Sancte Spiritus,</em></td>
<td><em>Vieni, Santo Spirito,</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>et emitte coelitus</em></td>
<td><em>e manda dal cielo</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>lucis tuae radium.</em></td>
<td><em>un raggio della tua luce</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Veni, pater pauperum,</em></td>
<td><em>Vieni, padre dei poveri,</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>veni, dator munere,</em></td>
<td><em>veni, datore di doni,</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>veni, lumen cordium.</em></td>
<td><em>Vieni, luce dei cuori.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Consolator optime,</em></td>
<td><em>Ottimo consolatore,</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>dulcis hospes animae,</em></td>
<td><em>dolce ospite dell’anima,</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>dulce refregierium.</em></td>
<td><em>dolce refrigerio.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>In labore requies,</em></td>
<td><em>Nella fatica riposo,</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>in aeternum temperies,</em></td>
<td><em>nel calore frescura,</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>In fletu solacium.</em></td>
<td><em>conforto nel pianto.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>O lux beatissima,</em></td>
<td><em>O luce beatissima,</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>reple cordis intima</em></td>
<td><em>riempie l’intimo del cuore</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>tuorum fidelium.</em></td>
<td><em>dei tuoi fedeli.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Sine tuo numine,</em></td>
<td><em>Senza il tuo aiuto,</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>nihil est in homine,</em></td>
<td><em>nulla è nell’uomo,</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>nihil est innoxium.</em></td>
<td><em>nulla è innocente.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Lava quod est sordidum,</em></td>
<td><em>Monda ciò che è impure,</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>riga quod est aridum,</em></td>
<td><em>irrora ciò che è arido,</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>sana quod est saucium.</em></td>
<td><em>sana ciò che è ferito.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Flecte quod est rigidum,</em></td>
<td><em>Piega ciò che è rigido,</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>fove quos est frigidum,</em></td>
<td><em>scalda ciò che è freddo,</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>rege quod est devium.</em></td>
<td><em>drizza ciò che è storto.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

102 The Italian translation is by Giovanni Getto and it taken from Ferruccio’s *La poesia religiosa,* pp. 49-50. An Italian translation is provided instead of an English one to facilitate comparisons between the hymn and later Italian *laude.* A. Pietro Frutaz notes that in some cases, the sequence *Sancti Spiritus adsit nobis gratia* was used instead of *Veni Sancte Spiritus* (“Pentecoste,” p. 1158, in *Enciclopedia cattolica,* vol. 9).
Da tuis fidelibus,  
in te confidentibus,  
sacrum septenarium.

Dà ai tuoi fedeli,  
che in te confidano,  
i tuoi sette doni.

Da virtutis meritum,  
da salutis exitum,  
da perenne gaudium.

Corona la virtù col merito,  
donaci la salvezza finale,  
Donaci il gaudio perenne.

The Holy Spirit is requested to send a ray of holy light from Heaven (vv. 2-3), symbol of wisdom, guidance and grace. Similarly to the ninth-century invocation, in *Veni, Sancte Spiritus*, the Holy Spirit is the ideal comforter (v. 7), and also a place of refuge (v. 9). A blessed light, the Holy Spirit fills the hearts of the faithful (vv. 13-15). Through this, the Holy Spirit cleanses that which is dirty (v. 19), heals wounds (v. 21), and bequeaths salvation (29). Without the help of the Holy Spirit, man is nothing (vv. 16-17), because he remakes the believer into something better, by warming that which is cold, and softening that which is hard, within the individual (vv. 22-23).  

The images of a vivifying ardour capable of transforming the human (heart/soul) into the divine (God) explored towards the beginning of this chapter in the poetry of Lorenzo and Michelangelo have a very long tradition in the West. Italian laude of the medieval and Renaissance periods include invocations to both Christ and to the Holy Spirit. In them, Christ and the Holy Spirit were sometimes conflated, be it explicitly, by direct address to both aspects of the Holy Trinity, or implicitly, through symbolism or common title (such as “Signore”). The symbols of the Holy Spirit examined above were water, light and fire – the images most typically found in the New Testament (as opposed to Spirit as wind or air, which characterized the representation of the Spirit as the life force of creation in the Old Testament). The following section of the present chapter will trace the images and roles of water and grace, and of fire and love, in the two varieties of relational self-transformation explored in the previous chapter: the journey of purgation and perfection characteristic of ascent soteriology, and the instantaneous transformation particular to the redemptive model of restoration by grace. The remainder of this

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103 This Latin hymn is worth contrasting with *Sancti Spiritus adsit*, which invokes many of the same attributes (indwelling, purging of heart and mind through grace): “Sancti Spiritus adsit / nobis gratia, // Que corda nostra sibi / faciat habitacula, // Expulsis inde cunctis / vitiis spiritualibus. // Spiritus alme, / illystrator omnium, // Horridas nostrae / mentis purga tenebras. // Amator / Sancte sensatorum / semper cogitatum, // Infunde / unctionem tuam / clemens nostris sensibus. // Tu puificator / omnium flagitiorum, / Spiritus, // Purifica nostri / oculum interioris / hominis, // Ut videri / supprems Genitor / possit a nobis, // Mundi cordia / quem soli cernere / possunt oculi.” (vv. 1-28 of 78)
chapter will trace these images and their use in the Florentine lauda tradition of Michelangelo’s youth.

3.7 The Italian Mystical Lauda and the Galletti Prints

In the previous section of this chapter, Lorenzo’s lauda IX was discussed for its benign image of Christ on the cross:

Vieni a me, peccatore,
che a braccia aperte aspetto
versa dal santo petto,
visibilmente aqua, sangue ed amore.
(vv. 1-4)

In the composition, Lorenzo in fact describes the water, blood and love issuing from Christ’s chest, as Jesus invites the sinner to him with open arms: the Holy Spirit is present in the mystical water issuing from Christ’s chest. The lauda invites the listener to visualize the wound and the benefits that flow from it: the grace of the Holy Ghost and the attendant gifts. A similar confluence of imagery appears in other laude by Lorenzo.

In Poi che io gustai, Iesù, la tua dolcezza (lauda II, from which Michelangelo borrowed the verse on Christ’s blood), Lorenzo writes about the thirst that is only quenched by Christ’s blessed fountain (v. 11-12):

tanto infiammato son del tuo amore;
nulla altro mi contenta o dà quiète,
né si spegne la sete,
se non solo al tuo fonte benedetto
(vv. 9-12)

The poet is so enflamed by divine love, that nothing makes him happy or satisfies his spiritual thirst save drinking from the “blessed fountain,” that is, from the waters of the Holy Spirit that flow through Christ’s wounds (as the love of the Holy Ghost flows from God into the hearts of the faithful).

As regards paraliturgical inspiration for Michelangelo’s mystical poetry and its references to the Holy Spirit, the four lauda collections gathered together by Galletti contain a number of possible sources of inspiration by well-known lauda writers whose compositions (mainly ballate) would have circulated orally and in other prints. Venite tutti al fonte di Gesù by
Leonardo Giustinian (1388-1466) is one such composition that would likely have become a part of Michelangelo’s religious and cultural repertoire:

Venite tutti al fonte di Gesù  
Voi, che affannati siete,  
Di quell’acqua bevete,  
[...]  
Questo è quel fonte che dal ciel deriva:  
Aperto a tutti sta:  
Chi di lui gusta sente un acqua viva,  
Che ’n ciel conduce e va:  
(vv. 1-4; 29-32)

The “fountain of Jesus,” that is, the water issuing from his wounded chest, quenches spiritual thirst at the same time that it leads the soul to heaven (v. 1, and v. 32). The fountain “derives from heaven” (v. 29). It is a “living water” (v. 31) and it is “open to everyone” (v. 30). The fountain in question is clearly the Holy Spirit, who “leads to heaven and [then] departs:” having led Jesus through his mission on earth to the moment of his return to the Father in heaven, the Holy Spirit exits Christ’s body on the cross in the form of water. The vectorial dimension of the lauda (the descent from heaven and subsequent return of vv. 29 and 32, respectively) recalls the paradigm of salvation through ascent, as well as man’s mystical crucifixion through Christ.

As mentioned earlier, Leonardo Giustinian was influenced by the writings of Giovanni Colombini (1304-1367). A Dominican preacher from Siena, Colombini founded the order of the Gesuati. He is the subject of both a biography and a lauda by Feo Belcari. A portion of

104 The laud appears as “XCII, Lauda di messer Lionardo Giustiniani Gentiluomo di Vinegia” in Gall2 (1485/6), pp. 45-46. Michelangelo would have likely become familiar with the lauda through the figure of Feo Belcari and/or Belcari’s activity in Florence and the Medici circle, if not from a confraternity or private print.
106 Colombini did not write many poetic compositions; it is rather his spiritual epistles that nurtured the proliferation of mystical verse by such writers as Bianco da Siena. For a discussion of Colombini and his writings, see Giorgio Petrocchi, Ascesi e mistica trecentesca, pp. 149-175.
107 Giorgio Petrocchi identifies Colombini as the first fourteenth-century mystic in whom the joyous Franciscan spirit did not reside: “è il primo mistico del Trecento in cui non fruttifichi più il gioioso ottimismo francescano” (Ascesi e mistica trecentesca, p. 163).
108 Vita del beato Giovanni Colombini da Siena. Belcari also wrote a lauda in honour of Colombini. The opening four lines of the lauda reveal that Belcari believed the Holy Spirit to have resided in Colombini. The lauda was published in the 1490 print Gall1 as XXIV. It is prefaced by “Lodato sia Gesù Cristo. / Laude del Beato Giovanni Colombini / (Cantasi come – Nella bellezza del sommo splendore). The first four verses are as follows: “O beato Giovanni Gesuato, / O Colombin pien di Spirito Santo, / Narraci col tuo canto / L’opere per le qua’ fosti salvato” (vv. 1-4). Galletti, p. 12.
Colombini’s *In su quell’alto monte* also appears in Gall2.\(^{109}\) It is a likely source of inspiration for Lorenzo de’ Medici, and Feo Belcari before him. The first eighteen verses of the Gall2 laud repeat lines from the opening twenty-four verses of Colombini’s *In su quell’alto monte*,

In su quell’alto monte  
Ve’ la fontana che trabocch’ella,  
D’oro vi son le sponde  
Ed è argento la sua cannella.  
Anima sitiente,  
Se ne vuo bere vattene ad ella,  
Non ti bisogna argento,  
O ver moneta per comperarla:  
Qualunque ne vuol bere  
Convien che spogli la sua gonnella:  
L’anima che ne’ gusta,  
Diventa chiara più ch’una stella:  
O virgo gloriosa,  
Che del buon vin tu se la cella,  
Per grazia tu ne doni  
All’anima che è umilella:  
L’anima mia ingrata  
Donale bere, benchè sia fella:  
Benedetto sie Cristo,  
Che morir volle per ricomprarla.  
Benedetta sia la Madre  
Del buon Gesù, di cui è sorella.  
*(Cantasi come – En suso in su quel monte chiara vi surge la fontanella.)*

There are three notable differences between Colombini’s *lau da* and the Gall2 version above. Firstly, the Gall2 version is significantly shorter. Secondly, the Gall2 *lau da* ends with four verses that echo but do not repeat the closing lines of Colombini’s *In su quell’alto monte*. Thirdly, Colombini’s lyrical composition contains six verses, which should appear between v. 12 and v. 13, in the Gall2 version:

La suo dolcezza passa  
L’angelica e l’umana favella.  
L’anima peccatrice,  
Se ben ne beie, si rinnovella;  
E ’l Figliuol di Maria

\(^{109}\) CCXXXVIII, Galletti, p. 104. This composition is not to be confused with Savonarola’s quasi- homonymous *lau da*, *In su quell’aspro monte*. Savonarola modified the *incipit* of Colombini’s laud. This attests to how well circulated the laud was in late Quattrocento Florence.
Con seco unita per amor tiella.

Since Colombini’s *In su quell’alto monte* was commented by Bianco da Siena (whose own *laude* were included in the Galletti prints), it is possible to capture the (original) meaning of the images included in the lyrical composition.\(^{110}\)

In his notes to Colombini’s *lauda*, Bianco da Siena clarifies that the mountain symbolizes “humanity glorified by Christ,” and the water, Christ’s “infinite divine grace,” which may also be understood as the Holy Spirit. The soul’s stripping of its “gonnella” symbolizes the choice to leave sin behind. This is a clear echo of the Pauline clothing rhetoric explored in the previous section. The clarity the thirsting soul achieves from drinking results from the clean conscience the graceful water engenders: the sweet liquid of Christ (i.e. grace) leads the soul to abandon sin. The experience of one who drinks the sweet liquid grace of Christ is beyond human words. He who drinks of it is renewed. As Bianco explains, the more one drinks of “the sweetness of Christ’s grace,” the less one can speak. The experience is mystical and transformative. The sinner who drinks of it is regenerated instantaneously.

The verse “per grazia tu ne doni” (v. 15 of the anonymous *lauda* in Gall2; v. 21 of Colombini’s *In su quell’alto monte*) refers to the gift of grace that Christ bequeaths. Bianco explains that if sinners want grace, they must turn to Mary and ask not only to drink of Christ’s sweet grace, but to be bound by the “chains” of theological and cardinal virtues: “addimandandole non solamente bere, ma d’essere legata colle catene delle teologiche e cardinali vertudi.” The chain and its virtues are listed in Colombini’s *In su quell’alto monte*, following the line v. 18 of Gall2/v. 24 of Colombini (“donale bere, benche’ sia fella”):

\begin{verbatim}
Legala con catena, 25
che è composta di sette anella.
El primo anello è fede;
ell’altra è speranza ch’è in ella;
el terzo è caritade
per cui d’amor si consum’ella;
el quarto è giustizia;
el quinto è forza che ferma tiella;
el sesto è prudenza;
el settimo temperanza bella.
\end{verbatim}

\(^{110}\) The notes by Bianco appear in Alfredo Mori’s *Giullari di Dio*, pp. 178-183. They are also reproduced in Ferruccio’s *La poesia religiosa*, pp. 162-163.
Colombini’s poet-sinner asks to be bound by the chain with seven rings (vv. 25-26), the third of which is charity, a love that consumes. The appeal is for mystical transformation. An analogous chain image appears in Michelangelo’s later spiritual poetry.

In the same sonnet containing the borrowed verse from Lorenzo’s lauda II (G289), Michelangelo refers to the chain of grace to which all other divine gifts are bound, that is, to the Holy Spirit as divine grace, which is able to grant seven gifts to the individual Christian. In particular, he comments upon his need for the first link of the chain – that of faith:

Deh, porgi, Signor mio, quella catena che seco annoda ogni celeste dono: la fede, dico, a che mi stringo e sprono; né, mie colpa, n’ho grazia intiera e piena.

(vv. 4-8)

This image of the chains of virtues that bind the sinner is not a part of the rhetoric of the Beneficio di Cristo. Michelangelo probably drew the image from Colombini, either directly, or through Belcari, whose laude Michelangelo would have known.111 Having written a pointed sonnet on corruption in Rome (G10, Qui si fa elmi), Michelangelo would have undoubtedly been struck by verses 7-8 on grace: “non ti bisogna argento, / o ver moneta per comperarla.”

Bianco da Siena (1350?- 1412), a disciple of Colombini, was also a prolific Trecento lauda writer.112 Similar images and invocations characterize his lyrical compositions.113 Bianco’s O primo amor seems to be echoed in Michelangelo’s G87, Vorrei voler, Signor, quel che non voglio; in both compositions grace is requested to align through love the poet’s will with divine will:

O primo amor dal Padre procedente E dal Figliuol, vero Spirito Santo, O vero Iddio solo onnipotente [...] Accendimi d’amor la volontade, Acciò che solo io voglia il tuo volere, E questo fa per tua caritate.

111 No plausible liturgical or paraliturgical source common to both comes to mind. This may be an area of further fruitful research.
112 Bianco da Siena, also known as il Gesuato and l’Ingesuato, is in fact Bianco dall’Anciolina. He composed approximately 90 laude.
113 Bianco da Siena’s poetry considered in the present chapter is reproduced from Franca Ageno’s Il Bianco da Siena: notizie e testi inediti. For a discussion of the manuscript tradition, as well as a list of incipits, see pp. 1-14. Bianco’s mystical lauds also appear in an homonymously entitled edition by Gennaro Maria Monti, “Laude mystiche.” An analysis of Bianco as a poet appears in Cesira Caucci, Il Bianco da Siena, pp. 3-24.
Bianco’s *Luce divina, luce isplendiente* (CVIII) is an apostrophic and litanic invocation in terza rima. The majority of the verses beginning with “luce;” the anaphora is thus the characteristic defining structure of the lengthy composition. CVIII shares the images of the mountain of Christ and the living fountain with Colombini’s *In su quel alto monte*: “Lassù si [è] quel sopr’ogn’altro monte, / Cioè l’umanità del salvatore, / Per cui la grazia dona il vivo fonte” (CVIII, vv. 121-123). The baptismal renewal is evoked:

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Luce, per cui son l’anime purgate
E dipartite dal vecchio costume;
Luce per cui son l’anime annegate
In carità divina, per la quale
Eternalmente saran consolate
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(vv. 183-187)

The Holy Spirit is alluded to as purging illumination (v. 183), as well as the cleansing waters (v. 185) of divine love (v. 186) in which the soul must be immersed in order to leave behind the old self and its sinful habits. This light is described as a mystical essence, an invisible light: “Luce, lo cui lume è invisibile, / Lo cui isplendor nulla luce creata / Non lo comprende, luce indicibile” (vv. 206-208).

The earlier analysis of *Veni Sancte Spiritus* also revealed, in a cursory way, a focus on the Holy Spirit as light. Leonardo Giustinian’s *Spirito santo, amore*, which appears in Gall1, constitutes an analogous poetic treatment of this kind of mystical invocation using light imagery. It is worth recalling that in medieval and Renaissance art, images of the Annunciation depict the Holy Spirit entering Mary as a beam of light. Similarly to *Veni Sancte Spiritus* and to Bianco’s *Luce divina*, Giustinian’s *Spirito santo, amore* also focuses on the comforting, counselling and mystical aspect of the Holy Spirit’s mission and identity.

The *ballata* opens with the poet’s request that Holy Spirit illuminate his heart: “Spirito santo, amore, / consolatore interno, / del tuo lume supremo / Signore, inlustra el tenebroso core” (vv. 1-4). The use of “Signore” in v. 4 highlights the close relationship of the Holy Ghost to God and Christ, who are more typically addressed by the title of “Lord,” yet the request that divine

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116 It appears as *lauda* XC VIII in Gall1 (1490), pp. 46-47. It is preceded by “Di Messer Lionardo Giustiniano, Da Vinegia II. (Cantasi come e Vangeli della quaresima).” It is also included in the anthology *La poesia religiosa italiana dalle origini*. 
light illuminate the poet’s heart and dispel its darkness is a clear reference to the traditional action of the Holy Spirit as the third person of the trinity.

The Holy Spirit is described as a ray shining forth from two eternal stars (the Father and the Son):

O razzo procedente
Da due eterne stelle
O stella permanente,
Trina ed una con quelle,
Di tre sante facelle
Accendi l’alma mia.
Si, ch’io vegga la via,
Ch’i possa e voglia uscir di tenebrore.

(vv. 5-12)

Having requested that the Holy Ghost illuminate the his heart, the poet requests that it be lit/set aflame, so that he may see the way out of the shadows in which he finds himself; the illuminative aspect, symbolized by light envisioned, metonymically, as a ray proceeding from two stars, acquires a fire imagery that develops even further in the subsequent stanza as the laud progresses from an appeal to the Holy Ghost as wisdom, to a supplication for an affective experience of the Spirit as love:

O sole incoronato
Di sette ardenti lumo,
O fuoco temperato,
Che non ardi e non consumi,
Tutti i mie’ rei costumi,
Amor, vieni a purgare,
E degni abitare
El core, acceso sol di tuo fervore.

(vv. 13-20)

The metonym of the ray, gives way to a sun trope - a metaphor referring to the Holy Spirit as a seven-fold aspect/expression of the Heavenly Father (“sette ardenti lume”) that is also assimilable to Him (the sun). There is a double symbolism at play: the sun as light, but also as fire (v. 15). The conflation or co-existence of these two aspects constitutes the conceptual equivalent of an hendiadys (a figure of speech indentifying a situation in which two words convey one idea): a rhetorical union. A vivifying flame, symbol of God’s relationship to man and the means by which He draws man back to him, the Holy Spirit burns without consuming (v. 16). In this aspect, it purges the poet’s bad habits: “Amor, vieni a purgare, / e degni abitare / el core, acceso sol di tuo fervore” (vv. 18-20). If it is recalled that in the Christian paradigm the
Holy Spirit is love, then the similarity between the three verses above and Lorenzo’s and Michelangelo’s love poetry explored towards the beginning of the chapter becomes all the more apparent, including the “degni abitare” (G38).

Following this description of the Holy Spirit as light and fire, each of these aspects is once again considered individually. With the poet’s requests that his sight be directed from the blind world to the true divine splendour, a contemplative dimension is added to the ballata: “E l’occhio mio rivolta / del cieco mondo al tuo vero splendore” (vv. 26-28). As light, the Holy Ghost illuminates the dark corners of the poet’s mind, so that he may behold the truth:

Tu se’ suave fiume  
Di buon parlar profondi:  
Tu se’ razzante lume,  
Ch’ilustri e non confondi,  
La tua lucerna infondi  
Al tenebroso ingegno  
Si, ch’io diventi pregno  
Della tua verità, ch’è senza errore.  
(vv. 37-44)

In this sense, the Holy Spirit assists contemplation. As fire, on the other hand, the Holy Ghost ignites within the poet the kind of love that leads to the contemplative desire in the first place, thus healing the divided soul:

O refrigerio acceso  
D’un nutricante foco,  
O leve, o dolce peso,  
D’affanno pien di giuoco:  
Amor, vien, ch’i’t’invoco,  
L’anima a te s’inchina:  
O somma medicina  
Contr’alle piaghe del mortal furore.  
(vv. 29-36)

The poet’s attraction to the Holy Spirit is akin to that of the lover to the beloved. The poet, wondering when he will possess the beloved Paraclete, extends his arms to receive the Holy Ghost as a morally superior beloved, similar, in its elevated status, to the donna angelicata of secular poetry:

Paraclito amoroso,  
Quando t’harò io, quando,  
Amor mio dilettoso?  
Deh vien, ch’io t’addimando,  
La braccia a te ispando,
D’ogni virtù radice,  
Che l’alma peccatrice  
È sanza te qual terra senza omore.  

(vv. 45-52)

Without the gift of the Holy Spirit, whom the poet once again addresses as “Amor,” the carnal soul remains earthbound and, though living, it dies:

Amor, sanza il tuo dono  
Indarno m’affatico:  
Tu sai, che infermo sono  
Per lo peccato antico:  
Famelico e mendico,  
Pien di miseria e male:  
E l’anima carnale  
Sanz l’aiuto tuo vivendo more. (vv. 53-60)

A gift (v. 53) is requested so that the poet might overcome his weakness (v. 55), a lustful concupiscence (vv. 56-59). Having moved as far along the soteriological itinerary as possible for the Christian soul without divine intervention, the poet invokes a third gracious aspect: the Spirit as breath, a force of life that can penetrate and inhabit the human heart, purging it of all earthly desires:

Dunque col tuo spiracolo  
Spira lo mio cor vano:  
Tu sai, che ’l tuo abitacolo  
È nel buon core umano:  
D’ogni voler mondano  
Purgami tutto quanto  
Sì, che il tuo lume santo  
Alberghi nel mio core a tutte l’ore.  

(vv. 61-68)

The closing four lines of the lauda repeat the requirement of vv. 61-68 that the Holy Spirit come to adorn and reside in the poet’s heart so that he will be saved: “Po’ vien drento al mio petto / di tante gemme adorno / Sì, che all’estremo giorno / l’anima nuda torni al tuo fattore” (vv. 81-84).

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117 This reference to the carnal soul has a biblical foundation in Romans 8:6 “For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.” A similar use of the adjective appears in Jacopone da Todi, whose “canzoniere” depicts the journey of the human soul, Anima, in her evolution from a carnal lover to a divine one as a bride of Christ.

118 Cf. Michelangelo’s G32, v. 1 “Vivo al peccato, a me morendo vivo.”

119 This is yet another common aspect and symbol in the Bible, of the Holy Spirit, whose name in Hebrew (ruah), and in Greek (pneuma) both indicate, among other things, “wind” or “air.”

120 Cf. Sancti Spiritus adsit, vv 1-4: “Sancti Spiritus adsit / nobis gratia, // Que corda nostra sibi / faciat habitacula.”
The focus on sweetness, contemplation and love inhabiting the heart in Michelangelo’s *Quanta dolcezza* and Lorenzo’s *Il mio cor lasso* has a Christian analogue that also finds expression in Giustinian’s *ballata*, where the Holy Spirit is depicted as a sweet source of nourishment: “O cibo di dolcezza, / che pasci e non fastidi” (vv. 21-22). This point is elaborated twice in the *lauda*:

O manna saporita,  
D’ogni dolcezza pieno,  
O zucchero candito  
D’ogni piacer terreno,  
Guardami dal veleno,  
Che ognor m’è posto avante  
Sì, che l’alma constante  
Senta dolcezza sol nel tuo sapore.

(vv. 69-76)

Similar images appear in the fourteenth-century writings by the Sienese mystic, St. Catherine of Siena. Given that she, Giovanni Colombini, and Bianco da Siena are all from the environs of Siena, and that her mysticism and their movement constitute the defining features of the spiritual life of Trecento Italy, one can assume that Giustinian would have also absorbed this element from the fourteenth-century *lauda* tradition.

The representations of the Holy Spirit as light, the sun and fire are repeated by writers contemporary with Lorenzo de’ Medici, including Feo Belcari, who composed the *Laude de’ sette doni dello Spirito Santo*,¹²¹ which appears in Gall1. In the opening quatra, the poet invokes the Holy Spirit to purify his heart and to make him burn with charity:

Vieni consolatore,  
Spirito Santo, dolce eterno Dio,  
Purifica el cor mio  
E fa ch’egli ardi del tuo santo amore.

(vv. 1-4)

It is not only the heart, but the mind that must be purged. The poet requests that the Holy Ghost free his mind of the darkness of guilt and vice:

Vieni in me prima e purga la mia mente  
Da tanta oscurità di colpe e vizj;  
Discendi in me, come Signor potente.¹²²

(vv. 5-7)

¹²¹ Sonnet XXXV, Gall1(1490), pp. 21-22. It was intended to be sung like “e vangeli in rima della Quaresima.”
¹²² Cf. G153, v. 11: “in me discende.”
In Belcari’s 

lauda, the Holy Spirit is a comforter (v. 1) whom the poet beseeches to purify his heart (v. 3), to make him burn with divine love (v. 4), and to purge his mind (v. 5). The vertical dimension of the Holy Spirit descending into the poet from above (v. 7) is also present. This is only natural since in Belcari’s lauda, as in Giustinian’s ballata, the Holy Spirit is also responsible for bringing the poet to mystical contemplation: “Unirmi teco e fammi contemplante” (v. 56). The vivifying action of the Holy Spirit, a formulation particular to St. Paul, is similar to that of Love in the Neoplatonic/stilnovistic poems by Lorenzo and Michelangelo explored earlier in this chapter. In Gall2 (1485/6), one finds two more laude explicitly naming or addressing the Holy Spirit. In both of them, the focus is on the Holy Ghost as a flame.

This first lauda is by Belcari, and the second by Francesco d’Albizo, another well known Florentine lauda writer of late Quattrocento Florence. In the mystically fervent composition by Belcari, the poet addresses Christ, expressing his desire to die from His “perfect love:”

Gesù, fammi morire
Del tuo perfetto amore,
Fammi crepare el core,
Che l’alma mia a te possa venire.

The poet asks to be so enflamed and alight by the Holy Spirit that his soul will praise and sing the Lord.

Tanto m’infiammi e incenda
Quel tuo spirito santo,
Che l’anima ti renda
Con ogni laude e canto:
Fammi arder tutto quanto,
Dolcezza mia, ch’i’ ti possa fruire.

(vv. 1-10)

In the final two verses of this excerpt from Belcari’s lauda, Christ, the poet’s “sweetness,” is again invoked so that the poet might burn with charity.

123 It should also be noted that, as in the Veni, Sancte Spiritus and Giustinian’s laud, in Belcari’s Laude de’ sette doni, the Holy Spirit is described as a medic: “Priego mi doni, o medico pietoso / Sì, ch’io prenda riposo” (vv. 15-16); “Cominciando ad usar tua medicina” (v. 21) – an image that reappears in the Beneficio almost a full century later.
124 “XCIV. Di Feo Belcari. 93,” Gall2, p. 47.
In contrast, Albizo’s lauda appeals to the Holy Spirit directly. A part from this fundamental difference, the mystical invocations in both compositions are similar in the request to burn with the divine flame:

O colomba santa e bella,
Dove sta l’eterno amore
Refulgente più che stella,
Col tuo foco ardimi il core.
Che col tuo santo splendore
Tutto ’l mondo alluminasti,
E con quel tu consumasti
Nostro uman peccato tanto: Spirito Santo.
Fammi del tuo amore acceso,
O Spirito Santo eterno,
[...]
Quando penso al vero stato
Del divino amor perfetto
Col cor pur, costante e netto
Amo te sopra ogni santo, Spirito Santo.
(Cantasi come – O regina del mio core)
(vv. 1-10; 21-24)

Though Albizo refers to the Holy Spirit as a dove, the most common iconographical representation of the third person of the Trinity in art, Albizzo’s poet, like that of Belcari, also wants his heart to burn with the fire of the Holy Spirit (v. 4. and v. 9).

The edition containing Lorenzo de Medici’s laude, Gall3 (1495), also includes lauds in which the ascension topos particular to Lorenzo’s later poetry is readily identifiable. Consider the following two excerpts from anonymous laudari:

Sopra l’alto monte ascendi,
Dove l’amore t’aspetta,
E come fuoco t’accendi
Ed in verso lui t’affretta.
(CCLXVIII, pp. 120-122, vv. 5-8)

Sospirando el cor s’accende
Allo amore con disio,
L’animo e l’affetto ascende
All’amore del cor mio
(CCLXXIX, p. 128, vv. 45-48)

In these verses, the poet ascends through burning (“ascendi” – “accendi”; “accende” – “ascende”). In the first example, the upward movement is to the place where love awaits the poet/his soul (above the high mountain, an image employed earlier by Colombini, Bianco, and
then Giustinian). Fire ignites the wayfaring soul and draws it hurriedly towards itself: the (poet’s) soul is enraptured by the divine flame, which draws it, through grace, to God. In the second example, the heart becomes enflamed with love and desire. The soul and the poet’s emotions rise to the (heights) of the love in his heart: divine love in the poet’s heart transforms his soul and its desires into a purer form; the poet is transformed in the divine flame of the Holy Spirit.

In the instances of sweet or divine flames analyzed thus far in this chapter, the soteriological scheme of ascension through purgation was the most common construct examined. Hitherto, the discussion of laude has primarily focused on the Holy Spirit’s role in the individual Christian’s salvation. Through the analysis of Lorenzo de’ Medici and Michelangelo’s poetry, as well as of the laude, it became clear that the concept of redemption through contemplation or ascension – whether couched in Neoplatonic or Christian language (as Love or the Holy Spirit, respectively) – appears not only in Lorenzo’s sonnets and canzone, or the complete and incomplete rime of Michelangelo, but in the laude of other writers of or appropriated by the Florentine tradition as well. The topos of salvation through ascension thus clearly formed an integral part of the cultural discourse of late Quattrocento Florence, not only in erudite circles, but in popular culture.

There is another redemption scheme that finds expression in laude of the Florentine tradition. It, too, draws upon the image of fire as a means of salvation. In this scheme, however, the divine flame of love catalyzes an instantaneous transformation or renewal (rather than ascension) similar to the kind described in the Beneficio and evidenced in Michelangelo’s later poetry. It is a more pointedly Christological soteriology. Restoration and healing through divine refashioning replace purgation as the mystical way. One very early model for this kind of mysticism of redemption is the poetry of Jacopone da Todi, whose influential laude demonstrate so articulately the Christian appeal for relational self-transformation, or transformation through the Other. Venturing beyond the Galletti prints, then, one need not look far to find other laude of the Florentine tradition with which Michelangelo would have been familiar.

Cf. Michelangelo’s G15, vv. 1-4 (“Di te me veggo e di lontan mi chiamo / per appressarm’ al ciel dont’io derivo, / e per le spezie all’esca a te arrivo, / come pesce per fil tirato all’amo”) and the quatrain G49 (“Amor, la tuo beltà non è mortale: / nessun volto fra noi è che pareggi / l’immagine del cor, che ’nfiammi e reggi / con altro foco e muovi con alt’ale”) for two contrasting images of an analogous process. G15, v. 4 “come pesce per fil tirato all’amo” is clearly inspired by Marsilio Ficino’s Sopra lo amore, cap. II: “Io Anima come per un certo amo tirato, inverso del tirante si dirizza” (p. 90).
3.8 The Italian Mystical Laude in Non-Galletti Prints

A plausible and paradigmatic example of a popular lyrical composition that reveals the goal of transformation through the Other is Jacopone da Todi’s lauda XC, *Como l’anima se lamenta con Dio de la carità superardente in lei infusa* from the Florentine edition of 1490. The famed thirteenth-century Franciscan mystical poet who influenced all of the writers considered thus far in the present chapter was skilled at appropriating biblical images to mystical purpose. In the excerpt below of lauda XC, the lover is purged and transformed into the beloved. The lover clothes himself in the divine beloved. In addition to tropes of the mystical kiss and binding, and the classical Petrarchan metaphor of salvation as a desired port, Jacopone’s poetics are characterized by a focus on spiritual transformation and refashioning – themes that appear in the Beneficio and in Michelangelo’s poetry.

In Jacopone’s *Como l’anima se lamenta*, through his love for Christ, the poet becomes dispossessed of himself: “Ligata sí la mente con dolceza, / tutta se destende ad abbracciare; e, quanto pié reguarda la belleza / de Cristo, fuor de sè piú fa gettare” (vv. 91-94); “l’amor ma preso, non so do’ me sia” (v. 125). This *topos* is central to Michelangelo as well: “Come può esser ch’io non sia più mio?” (G8, v. 1); “son fatto tal, che ma’ piú sarò mio. / [...] a me da lei fú’ tolto, / fuor di me stesso” (G235, v. 4; vv. 6-7). This aspect of his character is also alluded to in Donato Giannotti’s portrayal of the poet in his *Dialogi*, where Michelangelo, a fictitious but verisimilar interlocutor, lamentingly confesses to losing himself through love to the presence of beauty/excellence in another. Like Michelangelo, Jacopone’s poet also becomes bound: “ligato sí mi tiene” (v. 122) [cf. G70]. He, too, dies in the absence of his beloved: “e vo strideno per te abbracciare; / quando te parti, sí moio vivendo, / sospiro e piango per te retrovare” (vv. 117-119) [cf. G51, v. 16, “piangendo, amando, ardendo, sospirandò”].

For Jacopone, Christ is a medicine (v. 104) that purges the poet (v. 106) – an idea at the theological heart of the Beneficio. The Christ of the Beneficio promises to remake and recreate the poet anew: “Venite a me tutti voi che siete affannati e aggravati, e io vi recrearò” (218). The Christ of the Beneficio, was the Christ of Iacopone first. Jacopone’s Christ remakes the poet in his image: “lo cor se strugge como cera sfatto: / come Cristo se retrova figurato” (vv. 85-86); “vestirsi di Cristo, tutto sé spogliato; / lo cor si trasformato” (vv. 88-89); “En cristo trasformata, quasi è Cristo: / con Dio gionta tutta sta divina;” (vv. 99-100). The poet’s goal is to become

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pleasing to Christ: “se non ti piace, que posso valere?” (v. 136) [cf. G161, v. 17 “famm’un che ti piaccia.”] Ultimately, Jacopone’s poet is reborn a new creature in Christ: “En Cristo è nato nova creatura, / spogliando lo vechio, om fatto novello” (vv. 125-126) – a Pauline reference. A portion of the ballata corresponding to the verses reported above is presented below:

Vedendo tal belleza, sí so tratto
de for de me, non so dove portato
lo cor se strugge como cera sfatto:
como Cristo se retrova figurato;
già non si trova mai sí gran baratto:
vestirsi Cristo, tutto sé spogliato;
lo cor si trasformato – amor grida che sente:
anegace la mente, – tanto sente dolzore!
Ligata sí la mente con dolceza,
tutta se destende ad abbracciare;
e, quanto piú reguarda la belleza
de Cristo, fuor de sé piú fa gettare
en Cristo tutta possa con riccheza:
de sé memoria nulla può servare,
ormai a sé piú dare – voglia nulla né cura,
né può perder valura – de sé onne sentore.
En cristo trasformata, quasi è Cristo:
con Dio gionta tutta sta divina;
sopr’onne altaura è sí grande acquisto
de Cristo e tutto lo suo star regina:
or donqua co potesse star piú tristo,
de colpa demandando medicina?
nulla c’è piú sentina – dove truvi peccato:
lo vecchio m’è mozato – purgato onne fetore.
En Cristo è nato nova creatura,
spogliato lo vechio, om fatto novello;
ma tanto l’amor monta con ardura,
lo cor par che fenda con coltello;
mente con senno tolle tal calura,
Cristo me tra’tutto, tanto è bello!
Abracciome con ello – e per amor sí chiamo:
– Amor, cui tanto bramo, – famme morir d’amore!
Per te, amor, consumome languendo,
e vo stridendo per te abbracciare;
quando te parti, sí moio vivendo,
sospiro e piango per te retrovare;
e retornando, el cor se va stendendo,
ch’en te se possa tutto trasformare;
donqua, piú non tardare: – amor, or me soviene,
ligato sí me tiene, – consumame lo core!
Resguarda, dolce amor, la pena mia!
tanto calore non posso patire:
l’amor ma preso, non so do’ me sia,
che faccio o dico non posso sentire;
como stordito sí vo per la via,
spesso trangoscio per forte langue;
non so co soffrire – possa tal tormento,
emperò non me sento, – ché m’ha secco lo core.

Cor m’è furato: non posso vedere
que deggia fare o que spesso faccio;
e, chi me vede, dice che vol sapere
amor senza atto se a te, Cristo, piaccia:
se non ti piace, que posso valere?
de tal mesura la mente m’alaccia
l’amore che sí m’abraccia, – tolleme lo parlare,
volere ed operare, – perdo tutto sentore.

(vv. 83-139)

The idea of being remade or refashioned from without is characteristic of
Michelangelo’s poetry dedicated to or inspired by Vittoria Colonna. It is worth re-examining
Michelangelo’s G161 in this regard, for his madrigal narrates an analogous process of divine
refashioning:

Per qual mordace lima
discresce e manca ognor tuo stanca spoglia,
anima inferma? or quando fie ti scioglia
da quella il tempo, e torni ov’eri, in cielo,
candida e lieta prima,
deposto il periglioso e mortal velo?
Ch’ancor ch’i’ cangi ’l pelo
per gli ultim’anni e corti,
cangiar non posso il vecchio mie antico uso,
che con più giorni più mi sforza e preme.

Amore, a te nol celo,
ch’i’ porto individa a’ morti,
sbigottito e confuso,
si di sé meco l’alma trema e teme.
Signor, nell’ore streme,
stendi ver’ me le tue pietose braccia,
tomm’a me stesso e famm’un che ti piaccia.

G161 accompanies a letter to Vittoria Colonna about the Crocifisso. In the madrigal, the poet
affirms that he is unable to change himself by himself (vv. 9). Ultimately the poet appeals to
Christ to “re-make” him into one pleasing to Him (vv. 15-17). Similarly, in Michelangelo’s final
composition G302, the poet states that it is Christ alone who can clothe and strip the soul, which
is purged and healed by his blood:
In the previous chapter, G152 and G153 were examined for their mystical and Reform content. It was shown how in G152 Michelangelo linked artistic creation and spiritual health: good deeds of the soul that are concealed by the hard shell that is the flesh of the body become greater as the outer sheath that veils them is removed just as a stone comes to life as its excesses are removed by the sculptor (vv. 1-8):

_Si come levar, donna, si pone_
_in pietra alpestra e dura_
_una viva figura,_
_che là più cresce u’ più la pietra scema;_
_tal alcun’opre buone,_
_per l’alma che pur trema,_
_cela il superchio della propria carne_
_co’ l’inculta sua crude e dura scorza._
_Tu pur dalle mie streme_
_parti puo’ levarne,_
_ch’ìn me non è di me voler né forza._

Only the lady can extract the good deeds (or the blessed state that gave rise to them?) from the poet, because he lacks the will and strength to complete the task for himself (vv. 9-11). This idea is central to the _Beneficio_ because it is only when an individual cannot change himself or herself through his own will and strength that he turns to the Lord for grace: “vorebbe satisfare alla Legge; ma vede che chiaramente non può, e non potendo, si adira contro a Dio” (218). It is at this point in the _Beneficio_ that Christ is imagined extending his arms to man and promising to make him anew: “‘io vi recrearò’” (218). Christ heals the individual’s free will, restoring to him the divine image: “sanando tutte le nostre infirmità, riformando il libero arbitrio, ritornandoci nella pristina innocenza e instaurando in noi l’immagine di Dio” (218). The earlier analysis of this poem noted that the moral act of ‘levare’ in G152 falls to the beloved. This transfer of power and responsibility reaches its greatest expression in G153.

Madrigal G153 was examined in the previous chapter for its “sculptural metaphor” of metal casting:

_Non pur d’argento o d’oro_
_vinto dal foco esser po’ piena aspetto,_
_vota d’opra prefetta,_
An unfinished mould waits to be filled (or “re-filled”, as the first version of the poem was written) with fired silver or gold.’ The work of art is finished only when it is extracted from the mould that must be broken apart for the perfect work to be truly completed. Similarly, the poet refills the inner void that is his desire for beauty and for his beloved with the fire of love (vv. 1-9), that is, with spiritual love. It was noted in the first presentation of this composition, that the language is cryptic and the metaphor imperfect because one vessel (the mould) functions as a passive recipient, while the other (the poet) is depicted as an agent (ristoro) as well as a recipient (in me discende). This is a theological truth, in Catholicism, as the section on Christ and the Holy Spirit in this chapter has revealed: grace is given freely to the faithful, who become enabled by it, to request further graces and gifts as a means to salvation.

In G153 it is implied that the lady serves as a channel for the spiritual love that enters and fills the poet. In order for the metaphorical “precious” liquid (love) to flow into the poet and perfect him, he must first be torn down and broken (vv. 10-12). The poet is literally re-made into a more perfect expression than he was before; a third element (the lady/the Holy Spirit) brings about this transformation like an artist creating a new work.

As much as the metaphysical transformation process is rendered by means of Stil Novistic conceits (love as light entering the lover through the eyes), the logic of the metaphor corresponds to the action of the Holy Spirit. The liquid gold and silver recall Colombini’s In su quell’alto monte. This recreation of the poet is similar not only to the Beneficio, but also to Jacopone da Todi: “En Cristo è nato nova creatura, / spogliato lo vechio, om fatto novello” (vv. 107-108). Though the shared inspiration is likely St. Paul, the presence of the concept in Jacopone da Todi, and then in Michelangelo and the Beneficio (not to mention the poetry of

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128 See Girardi’s critical apparatus, p. 334
129 The notion of the divine sculptor his its roots in the Christian mystical tradition in Pseudo-Dionysius’s Mystical Theology, ch II: “even as those who, carving a statue out of marble, abstract or remove all the surrounding material that hinders the vision which the marble conceals and, by that abstraction, bring to light the hidden beauty.”
Vittoria Colonna and others) speaks to the persistence of the *topos* in the religious and spiritual poetry of Italy since the beginning.

If the ideas about justification in Michelangelo’s poetry bear the mark of Reform thought and rhetoric, the images of redemption and spiritual renewal issue from a long tradition. Traces of the themes explored in Jacopone’s *Come l’anima se lamenta con Dio de la carità superardente in lei infusa* are likewise found in the Galletti editions, specifically in Gall3 (1495). As an example, in *Come l’anima debbe amare Gesù* one finds the encouragement to love Christ deeply in order to become Him: “Ama Gesù, e per lui va impazzando, / in lui te trasformando” (CCCXXV, vv. 15-16),130 or, “Ama Gesù, el qual ti fa godere, / Con tutto il tuo potere, / Senz’altro amar volere / E in lui sia trasformata” (CCCXXV, vv. 103-106). The image of being consumed and transformed (including the will) by the fire in the heart also appears in Gall3.

In CCCXXVII or *Della unità che fa l’amore con l’anima umile e devota*,131 lovers direct all of their attention to love, by whom they are enflamed; they give him all of their heart and by the “supernal splendour” that ignites them from within (the grace of the Holy Spirit), the soul is consumed in the heat (of the flame):

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Attenti son gli amanti 30
D’amar sol te, amore,
Del qual sono infiammanti,
Donando tutto el core,
Pel superno splendore, 35
Che dentro gli alluma,
L’anima per lo calore
Tutta si consuma.
Consumomi nel foco
Si, che io non trovo loco,
Per lo calor che mi fende,
El qual libera mi rende
Alla sua bonitade,
Privandomi in tutte le cose
Della volontade. 40
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The poet cannot escape the heat of the flame, which liberates him by neutralizing his will. It is the grace of God that lives within the poet: “Vivo io, già non io, In me vive el vivente / Per sola

130 p. 160.
131 Gall3, p. 169.
grazia di Dio” (vv. 179-181). The poet asks to be re-made into one who is pleasing to God: “Compiuta e perfetta / Fammi, Amor, come ti piace” (vv. 195-196).

The Galletti texts and the 1490 Florentine edition of Jacopone da Todi’s laude are by no means the only possible sources of Christian mystical lyric poetry that would have been available to Michelangelo as a cultural inheritance. In fact, other laude from the Florentine tradition also stand out as possible precursors and influences (in part, perhaps, because of the shared sources and themes reaching back to Jacopone da Todi). One lauda in particular Giannozzo Sacchetti’s Spogliati, anima mia, shares a marked affinity with the ideas advanced in the Beneficio and that is evident in Michelangelo’s later poetry.

Born in Florence in 1340, Giannozzo Sacchetti (brother of Franco Sacchetti) died in 1379. A minor fourteenth-century poet, he was a part of St. Catherine of Siena’s circle of followers in Florence, if not “uno de’ suoi più felici discepoli.” As Evelyn Underhill notes, St. Catherine (1347-1380) came into the world “at a time of almost unequalled ecclesiastical degradation,” when Italy was “full of internal wars, treachery, miseries of every kind;” it was a period of history analogous in these respects to Michelangelo’s own time after Lorenzo’s death (1492), and especially after the Sack of Rome (1527). Giannozzo likely met St. Catherine in 1374, and possibly again in 1376. As Oretta Sacchetti noted, St Catherine had many followers in Florence. Regarding Giannozzo’s participation in the group of St. Catherine’s followers in Florence, Oretta Sacchetti remarks that “fra i primi troviamo appunto Giannozzo, il quale scrisse le sue laudi perché si cantassero nelle riunioni che i fedeli tenevano in privato, essendo vietato il rito ufficiale.”

Giannozzo belonged to a supposedly penitential (and clandestine) company that met in Fiesole. It is for the members of this brotherhood that he composed his two famous lauds, which were quite widely circulated: “essendo di compagnia, ebbe a scrivere e questa, e anche un’altra laude, a uso spirituale.” (Palermo, CXI). Spogliati, anima mia is one of

132 The version of the laud in the present chapter is from the 2005 critical edition of Giannozzo Sacchetti’s Rime by Tiziana Arvigo (pp. 37-44). For the critical apparatus and a detailed philological analysis, see pp CCXXXII – CCIV. For a profile of Giannozzo Sacchetti, see Ettore Li Gotti, Restauri trecenteschi, pp. 86-90.

133 Francesco Palermo, La poesia italiana, p. CVIII. For a detailed discussion of the Giannozzo’s Sacchetti’s life, including his relationship to the cateriniani, see Oretta Sacchetti’s edition of Giannozzo’s poetry: Le Rime edite e inedite, pp. 13-27. His mysticism is discussed on pp. 49-53; Oretta Sacchetti asserts that the mysticism expressed in Giannozzo’s lauds is closely related to that of St. Catherine of Siena (p. 49). She likewise notes the terrible contrast between the poet’s spiritual aspirations and the stark reality of daily life (p. 47).

134 The Mystics of the Church, pp. 152, and pp. 152-153, respectively. For a discussion of St. Catherine and her life, see pp. 152-162.

135 Giannozzo Sacchetti, Le rime edite e inedite, p. 19.


137 Francesco Palermo, La poesia italiana, pp. CX-CXI; for a discussion of the company and its activities, see pp. CX-CXI. Palermo notes the near Fiesole the company of “San Giovan dicollato” would meet (p. CXI).
these lauds. Francesco Palermo has analyzed the composition line by line for its correspondence to the thought and teachings of St. Catherine of Siena.\footnote{By Francesco Palermo in La poesia italiana (1866), pp. 27-59: “La carità: laude di Giannozzo Sacchetti.”} Oretta Sacchetti observed that the lyric production of Giannozzo, like that of his generation, was characterized by the extremes of its culture, that is of flourishing (thirteenth-century) mysticism and nascent (fifteenth-century) humanism.\footnote{In Giannozzo Sacchetti, Le rime edit e inedite, pp. 47-48.}

The incipit of Sacchetti’s Spogliati, anima mia recalls Jacopone’s Como l’anima se lamenta: “Spogliati, anima mia, / rivestiti d’amore” (vv. 1-2). Giannozzo links the theme of purgation with the soul’s wish to be a bride of Christ: “Converratti spogliare / e rivestir di guai / se alle nozze non vai / come sposa d’amore” (vv. 81-84). The soul cannot don Christ if it does not first remove the vestments of sin: “Amor non può vestire / alma che non si spoglia / di ciò ch’è men d’amore e di se stesso” (vv. 5-7). The personal will must be made to die first if one is to receive divine love: “Prima convien morire / in noi la nostra voglia, / che voglia noi l’amor che c’è promesso” (vv. 8-10). This Pauline concept of donning Christ was a key feature of the Beneficio. St. Paul is clearly a conscious reference on the part of Giannozzo, as vv. 155-157 attest: “Potea dir Paolo Cristo, / e Cristopaolo ancora; / chè carità, di due avea fatt’uno.” As Francesco Palermo notes, St. Paul and Christ are so conjoined in divine love that their identities can be said to have merged (53).

The poet’s overwhelming desire is for mystical annihilation, for the death of the old self through spiritual transformation: “Nichilo vuoi e tutto lo transformi” (v. 17).\footnote{In Francesco Palermo’s La poesia italiana, v. 17 reads “In chi lo vuoi, e tutto lo trasformi” (p. 28).} This annihilation is rendered by sculptural references similar to those examined in Michelangelo’s G152 and G153, but in a more explicitly Christian language. The will, or “self love,” of Giannozzo’s poet is filed away by Charity, never to return, so that soul may be transformed by divine love:

\begin{quote}
Se vedi questo fine
dell’alta patria eterna,
a te rivolgi con ferro e fuoco.
In te sien le ruine,
nulla cosa governa,
taglia di lima, si che torni poco.
La grazia in questo loco
ti fina d’annullare,
in tutto trasformare
amante amato amore.

(vv. 35-44)
\end{quote}
The rhetorical figures of the final verse (v. 44) contain a theological argument. Firstly, the words “amante,” “amato,” and “amore” constitute a polyptoton – a series of etymologically related lexical items – highlighting the concept of love. Secondly, because of their ordered juxtaposition, they form an ascendant gradation, or climax, that passes from the lover through the beloved to love itself. Narrating the ultimate moment of transformative union with the divine, these three elements recall the Trinity at the same time that they evoke the relationship of man (amante) to God (amore) through Christ (amato), as well as – if not more so – that of God (amante) to man (amato) through the Holy Spirit (amore); the latter interpretation is the most compelling, given the mention of “grazia” in v. 41, and the fact that the poet’s soul is the recipient of divine action.\(^1\) The idea of union is also reflected in the use of the hendiadys of “ferro e fuoco” (v. 37). Though none of these observations are made by Palermo, the Trinitarian consideration of v. 44 corresponds to St. Catherine of Siena’s (Augustinian) view of the relationship of man to the Trinity.\(^2\)

In Giannozzo’s Spogliati, anima mia, the poet suggests that a goal of divine love is to undo the sinner so that he will be made new again. This is stated even more explicitly in terms of “undoing” in the subsequent verses of the laud. The idea of “disfare” (v. 39) that we encountered in Jacopone above returns in Giannozzo’s lauda:

\[
\text{Non è senza gran pena} \\
\text{disfar quel ch’era fatto,} \\
\text{con maggior pena n’ viso d’allegrezza.} \\
\text{Ma l’amor che ti mena} \\
\text{a quest’esser disfatto} \\
\text{col lume suo ti pasce di dolcezza.} \\
\text{Tal peso in leggerezza} \\
\text{converte la speranza,} \\
\text{che vede per certanza} \\
\text{il fin del vero amore.}
\]

(vv. 45-54)

\(^{1}\) Cf. Palermo’s comment to v. 35: “La Carità, che congiunge la creatura col Creatore, in questo la vita eterna, il fine della nostra creazione; onde il passaggio nostro terreno, scuola di carità” (La poesia italiana, p. 32). Compare also with Palermo’s lengthier analysis of vv. 41-44: “La Grazia, quaggiù sulla terra compie (fina) di annullare in noi l’amor proprio […] e Santa Caterina: ‘Congiunta in Dio, per affetto d’amore’ […] E poi: ‘Chi sta in carità sta in Dio, e Dio in lui; però che Iddio è carità. E in questo stato unitivo dell’anima, è più perfetta la congiunzione che l’anima fa, per affetto di amore, in Dio, che non è la sua congiunzione col corpo’ […] e altrove, quasi dichiarando in ciò il supremo mistero dell’esser nostro, dice che il cammino quaggiù mena ad ‘unirsi e trasformarci in Colui, ch’è via e verità e vita.’ Imperocché ‘la carità mosse Iddio a trarre noi di Sè medesimo[']” (p. 34).

\(^{2}\) See Kärkkäinen, Pneumatology, p. 54.
The pain of being undone (v. 45) is contrasted, in the rhyme scheme of v. 46 and vv. 51-54, with the inherently happy significance of the psychic/spiritual dismantling of the poet, which Giannozzo conveys by the employing harsh sounds (“ezza” and “anza”) to denote gentle abstractions, such as “happiness,” “sweetness,” lightness,” and “hope:” “allegrezza” / “dolcezza” / “leggerezza”; “speranza” / “certanza.” The meaning of the words contrast with the reader’s experience of pronouncing them, just as the experience of annihilation contrasts with meaning of it (physical suffering yields spiritual fruits).

In Giannozzo, as in Jacopone, Lorenzo and Michelangelo, fire unites the soul with love:

Morte sia il tuo conforto,  
il fuoco ti distempri,  
disciolga, leghi e tempri,  
unita coll’amore.

(vv. 61-64)

In this case, fire is the divine flame of the Holy Ghost, as suggested by Francesco Palermo’s reference of a letter by St. Catherine of Siena as a key to this passage: “‘Nell’amore, partecipiamo l’amore e la forza dello Spirito Santo. Il quale è un mezzo, che lega l’anima col suo Creatore’” (38). The prefix “dis” of “distempri” and “disciolga” communicates the idea of undoing or reversal, while the progression from “distempri” to “tempri,” and “disciolga” to “leggi” form a gradation that echoes the spiritual evolution of the soul from carnal desire and imperfection to divine love and perfection, that is from “morte” (first word of v. 61) to “amore” (the last word of v. 64). The polysemous nature of the verbs temperare/distemperare and disciogliere add a depth to the verses that is worth examining.

Whereas “legare” simply means “to bind,” “disciogliere” signifies not only “to untie,” but also “to free,” to “dissolve” and “to melt” (“liquefare” – a verb used by Jacopone, Lorenzo de’ Medici and Michelangelo). “Temperare” means “to dissolve” as well as “to moderate” (it also means “to attune,” which raises the subject of cosmic harmony and the role of the Holy Spirit and Charity therein). These verses recall Veni Sancte Spiritus: “Flecte quod est rigidum, / fove quod est frigidum” (vv. 22-23; “Piega ciò che è rigido, / scalda ciò che è freddo”).143 This collective allusion to states of matter (liquid/solid) also suggests the relationship between these states, that is their point of “conversion.” This extended metaphor becomes explicit.

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143 As a precedent for this kind of comparison, in “Shakespearean Hymn-Parody?,” Peter J. Seng argues that verses from Antony and Cleopatra echo the Veni Sancte Spiritus.
approximately half-way through the poem (itself a noteworthy observation), where the annihiliated soul is described as a hard (or solidified) liquid that pleases God:

O alma annichilata,  
liquida sempre dura,  
secondo c’al maestro eterno piace.  
In esso trasformata,  
di te non prender cura,  
ché sì vil cosa in cor gentil non giace.  
(vv. 115-120)

The oxymoron “liquida-dura” is the kind of paradox one expects to find in mystical writings, where the figure of speech is used to express the ineffable. States of matter are similarly juxtaposed in the casting metaphor of Michelangelo’s G153. Palermo evokes an analogy of the craftsman to illuminate the reference to the creator of vv. 115-117: “Immagine dello artefice umano; il quale, se la materia non è cedevole o dura […], secondo conviene al lavoro, non può effettuare e compiere il suo disegno” (47). In Giannozzo, the metaphor stands for the transformation of the poet’s heart in Christ. Paradox is also central to Petrarch’s poetics, and the “cor gentil” (v. 120) recalls not only the Dolce Stil Nuovo in general, but Guido Guinizelli and Dante in particular: Giannozzo’s laude are bicultural, combining the elements of both erudite and popular culture.

For Giannozzo, the mystical “nothingness” (or annihilation) is sweet and it leads to ascension: “Niente n’aggio ditto / di questo dolce nulla / che fa venir l’amor e fa salire” (vv. 175-176). The poet asks Christ to remove from him, like clothing stripped from a body, whatever He desires, and to re-dress his soul in love:

Spogliami al tuo piacere,  
quantunque pur mi doglia,  
contenta la tuo voglia,  
e vestimi d’amore.  
(vv. 181-184)

Bianco da Siena also wrote laude reminiscent of Jacopone. His frequent use of “caro mio Signore” and “Amore” to address the beloved in his laude are recalled by, if not echoed in,

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144 Cf. Michelangelo’s “spoglia mi di me stesso,” v. 15 of sestina G33; vv. 7-11; v. 15-18: “Qual vecchio serpe per istretto loco / passar poss’io, lasciando le vecchie arme, / e dal costume rinnovata e tolta / sie l’alma in vita e d’ogni umana cosa, / coprendo sé con più sicuro scudo [… ] Spoglia mi di me stesso, e col tuo scudo, / colla pietra e tuo vere e dolci arme, / difendimi da me, c’ogni altra cosa / è come istata, in breve tolta”
Michelangelo’s poetry. In Bianco’s *Partito se’ da me per mio difetto*, the idea of being transformed by and into Christ appears once again: “Tutta suo voglia in te si si conformi, / per la tuo grazia in te si si trasformi” (vv. 79-80). The rich, varied and lengthy Italian *lauda* tradition contains powerful images central to Franciscan and Dominican spirituality and mysticism that find clear and traceable expression in later spiritual verse including Michelangelo’s poetry; the poets examined in this chapter constitute mere *exempla* – iconic prototypes of a widely diffused phenomenon. The paraliturgical, as well as catechetical, purpose of these texts made them perfect vehicles for the dissemination of orthodox faith, but those possessing a more pronounced mystical dimension could also have resulted in the label of “heretic” being applied to those individual Christians who used them immoderately (in the eyes of the Church) as vehicles to draw direct spiritual benefits in private (outside a scriptural or liturgical context).

### 3.9 Conclusion

In a discussion of Cristoforo Landino and Humanism, Roberto Cardini identified a vein of philosophical love poetry, a fusion of Lorenzo’s *Canzoniere* and the *Commedia*, that reached its highest expression in the poetry of Michelangelo:

> Una lirica filosofica e un’amorosa e lirica filosofia, nata dalle nozze tra il *Canzoniere* e la *Commedia*. È una formula che non solo discretamente si attaglia al *Comento*, ma che soprattutto si costituisce come il ‘manifesto’ della linea più interessante e prevalente nella poesia fiorentina fra Quattro e Cinquecento: una linea di drammatico petrarchismo platonico-religioso e dantesco che muovendo dal *Comento* laurenziano e passando attraverso le poesie dello stesso Pico e soprattutto di quelle dell’amico fraterno Girolamo Benivieni (nonché di altri minori poeti dell’età laurenziana e savonaroliana), culminerà nelle *Rime* di Michelangelo.146

As we have seen, it is not only high poetry from the Laurentian age that contributed to the cultural and literary background that nourished Michelangelo the poet. *Lauda* by some of these illustrious poets, as well as by other lesser known and even anonymous writers, are an additional source of religious and mystical *topoi* with which Michelangelo was assuredly familiar. Because

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145 Cf. Lorenzo de’ Medici, *lauda* III: O Dio, o sommo Bene, or come fai, / Che te sol cerco e non ti trovo mai? [...] Tu m’ài del tuo amore acceso il petto; / Poi se’ fuggito, e non ti veggo mai. (vv. 1-2, 19-20).

146 In a footnote to this chapter by Cardini in *La critica del Landino*, the author specifies that the poetic vein in question is pre-Bembo and anti-Bembo: “È una linea di poetica prebembesca e antibembesca sulla quale non può davvero dirsi che abbondino gli studi recenti, a cominciare dalla riedizione dei testi (riedizione che, almeno nel caso delle rime di Pico e soprattutto delle opera del Benivieni, a me sembra senz’altro meritoria e urgente). È certo, comunque, che le spetta una considerazione molto maggiore della pressoché nessuna accordatale delle recenti storie letterarie.” Both quotes are from p. 229.
of the vernacular form and (semi-)popular nature of *laude*, the stock images and conceits that they contain were part of public religious discourse as well as a fundamental component of the cultural matrix of late-Quattrocento Florence. Given their performative nature and their essential relationship to religious ritual, Michelangelo need not have read these *laude* to have been familiar with their images and expressions. Michelangelo’s mystical verse is informed by this Christian literary tradition in the Italian vernacular that finds a powerful start in the poetry of Jacopone da Todi (Duecento), passes through Giovanni Colombini and Bianco da Siena (Trecento), Leonardo Giustinian and Feo Belcari (early Quattrocento), and Lorenzo de’ Medici (late Quattrocento) to reach Michelangelo (Cinquecento).

Through Lorenzo de’ Medici and his circle, Michelangelo was likely exposed to both spiritual verse and lauds. More generally, mystical *laude* were part of the Florentine culture in Michelangelo’s time and the lengthy Florentine *lauda* tradition experienced a period of revival in late Quattrocento Florence owing to a confluence of circumstances and events that include but are not limited to the figures of Lorenzo de’ Medici, Feo Belcari and Girolamo Savonarola.

Lorenzo’s declining health in the years 1490-1492 coincided with the poet’s return to more Christian rather than philosophical kind of writing, not only for personal, but also political reasons related to Savonarola’s rise to prominence in Florence. This change in Lorenzo’s poetry had begun over a decade earlier, but culminated most clearly in the *laude* that he composed in the final two years of his life. During this period, Michelangelo resided in Lorenzo’s house and was allegedly treated as one of his children, who were then active, as was Lorenzo himself, in the religious life of Florentine confraternities – the traditional venue of *lauda* production and performance. Though *lauda* performances in Florentine confraternities of the late Quattrocento were not as frequent as they had been in the Trecento, private circulation and performance of these paraliturgical pieces was on the rise and the *lauda* acquired an additional measure of importance during the Savonarolan period in Florentine history.

In the Galletti edition of lauds circulating in Florence of the 1490s, one finds mystical *laude* that include two soteriological schemes: one ascensional, the other transformational. The *topoi* particular to these two paradigms are consistent with the respective mysticisms of the Spirit and of Redemption that were discussed in relation to the Catholic Reform in Italy. In appealing to the Holy Spirit to be consumed by divine love as a means of ascension and in invoking Christ to remake them, the poets of these *laude* request the kind of intense, personal and transformative communion with the divine that later became a feature of Evangelical piety.
in Italy of the Catholic Reform (as they had been central to other periods of Church reform in 
Italian history, such as that in St. Catherine of Siena’s day).

Towards the end of his life, Michelangelo felt insufficiently prepared to be saved. Though he never fully relinquished his poetico-philosophical Neoplatonism, he nevertheless adopted a more pointedly Christian and theological lexicon and framework for his lyrical 
expression, much as Lorenzo de’ Medici had done in his final years. It is easy and most natural 
to imagine that, in the twilight of his life, Michelangelo would recall the role models and 
affective connections of his youth, and especially an individual who lovingly shaped his destiny 
and whom he had lost (too early) to death. From this perspective, there is no mystery as to why 
the lyrical borrowing from his former patron and father-figure appears in the poetry composed 
towards the end of Michelangelo’s life, even if Michelangelo himself was unsure of the reason 
for it or unaware of the parallel.
Chapter 4
Michelangelo, Augustine, and the Mystico-Moral Ascent

4.1 Introduction

The present dissertation has focused thus far on Michelangelo’s later spiritual verse and its relation to the piety of the Spirituali of the Ecclesia viterbiensis and to the mystical vein of the Italian lauda tradition – two distinct but related varieties of Christian mysticism. Little has been said of the mystical dimension of Michelangelo’s poetry and of the Augustinian current that permeates the Rime so deeply and characteristically as to constitute one of their defining features. Augustinian conceits and semantics figure largely in the Rime. Within the chords that sound Michelangelo’s unique melody as a poet lie notes of Augustine and of the Bishop of Hippo’s Confessions many of which also resound in Dante’s Commedia.

It is generally assumed that Augustinian inspiration in the Rime resulted from Michelangelo’s reading of Petrarch, a thesis that Thomas E. Mussio’s article on the “Augustinian conflict” in Michelangelo’s poetry persuasively argues.¹ The present chapter will build upon this hypothesis by introducing a more nuanced interpretation of the Augustinian dimension of Michelangelo’s verse that reveals an additional and more widely exploited source for Michelangelo’s Augustinianism than Petrarch’s Canzoniere: Dante’s Commedia and Landino’s Augustinian interpretation of it, especially his description of the role of habit in sin and salvation, as well as some key passages touching on Dante the pilgrim’s purgation from the capital vices on the Mount of Purgatory – all of which profoundly influence Michelangelo’s psychological and experiential poetic depictions, in his Rime, of Hell, Purgatory and Paradise.

Cristoforo Landino was the Dante scholar in Florence during the first twenty-two years of Michelangelo’s life.² Appointed Chair of Rhetoric and Poetry at the Florentine Studio in 1458, Landino taught classical and vernacular literature in Florence until 1497. His Comento sopra la Comedia (1481) re-created Dante as a poet of Renaissance Florence by adding to the exegetical tradition an innovative allegoresis aimed at addressing the concerns of his

¹ “The Augustinian Conflict in the Lyrics of Michelangelo: Michelangelo Reading Petrarch.” Meredith J. Gill advances a similar claim in Augustine in the Italian Renaissance, p. 3; see the ensuing section of the present chapter for a more detailed analysis.
² For an overview of Landino’s work on the Commedia, see Paolo Procaccioli’s introduction to the Comento, vol. 1, 9-105. This paragraph is taken from my article on Michelangelo and Landino, “The ‘Devil’ in Michelangelo’s Last Judgment: Michelangelo Reading Landino?”
Commissioned by Lorenzo de’ Medici, the exegetical unicum, as Paolo Procaccioli called it, became the most widely diffused publication of its kind. Marsilio Ficino, Angelo Poliziano, and Lorenzo de’ Medici himself were among those Landino tutored. Michelangelo, who spent two formative years of his adolescence in the presence of these illustrious men while living at the palazzo Medici, was reputedly very familiar with Landino’s ideas on the Commedia. Though Michelangelo knew the Commedia well enough to disagree with Landino’s glosses, he nevertheless seems to have borrowed from them, as will become evident later in this chapter.

This fourth chapter will show how Michelangelo’s understanding of human salvation and his own redemption, as discernable in his poetic metaphors, conforms closely to Augustine’s eschatology and to his experience as a Christian pilgrim as narrated in the Confessions and as this was later appropriated by Dante in the Commedia and emphasized by Crisoforo Landino’s famed Platonizing Comento to the grand epic. Through an exploration of imagery and of spiritual experience as this is expressed by the poetic voice of Michelangelo’s Rime, it will be shown that Petrarch was not the only source of Michelangelo’s “Augustinian conflict” and that it is not only Augustine’s “conflict” that Michelangelo absorbed from tradition, but also his understanding of the soul’s mystical and moral itinerary to its resting place in God.

4.2 Michelangelo and Augustine

In 1997, Thomas E. Mussio published an important article on the theme of the divided will in Michelangelo’s poetry: “The Augustinian Conflict in the Lyrics of Michelangelo: Michelangelo Reading Petrarch.” In the study, Mussio successfully identified in the Rime “a third ideological thread” (the first and second being the Neoplatonic and the Christian) that features the identity of the poet-lover’s soul as grounded in the “experience of loving,” rather than in “purity” (the

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3 It is Korman who states that Landino modernizes the commentary tradition to address matters most relevant to late fifteenth-century Florentines (“Dante Alighieri Poeta Fiorentino,” 58) and that he attempts to “reinvent Dante as a poet of the Florentine Renaissance” (64). For a discussion of the programmatic nature of Landino’s commentary, see Gilson, Dante and Renaissance Florence, 194.

4 Procaccioli in Landino, Comento sopra la Comedia, 57. Landino’s commentary was reprinted eleven times between 1484 and 1544. For a detailed discussion of the Comento’s publication history and its diffusion, see Parker, Commentary and Ideology, 124-158, especially the table on 133-134.

5 In his Dialogi di Donato Giannotti, de’ giorni che Dante consumò nel cercare l’Inferno e ’l Purgatorio, Donato Giannotti included his friend Michelangelo as one of its four interlocutors. In the dialogue, Michelangelo, who was considered by contemporaries to be a dantista in his own right, criticizes Landino for his interpretation of the literal level of Canto IX of Purgatorio, p. 54. Michelangelo generally argues against Landino’s literal interpretations on 51, 52, 55-60, 63, 75, and 76-77.
Neoplatonic model), or “infirmity” (the Pauline model) (339). For Mussio, this influence “derives mainly from Petrarch” and, more specifically, from Augustine of the Confessions as present in the Canzoniere: “even though Michelangelo may not have read the Confessions, at least as a whole text, he intuits the concerns of the pre-converted Augustine through his close reading of Petrarch” (339). Mussio argues that this third source of inspiration for Michelangelo’s poetry is a more significant influence than the Christian and the Neoplatonic “as it controls Michelangelo’s reading of both Biblical and neoplatonic texts” (339).

With great critical acumen, Mussio identifies and elaborates upon four key parallels between Michelangelo’s Rime and Augustine’s Confessions to support his thesis that Michelangelo read Augustine, if not directly, then through Petrarch’s Canzoniere and Secretum; the speaker in the Rime, like that of the Confessions: 1) gives a prominent role to “habit” in portraying his “desire and will;” 2) depicts himself as caught in a curious state “between grace and ‘non-grace;”’ 3) cannot fully “heal” his “conscience” due to its “inscrutability;” and 4) doubts the divine presence in the world (339-340). “The parallels are significant,” Mussio notes, because “none of the cited Christian, neoplatonist, or other sources, including Paul, Dante, Della Casa, Benivieni, Bembo, Ficino, or Colonna are much concerned with the concept of habit or the fear of God’s grace” (340). In Mussio’s view, “behind the major sources of Paul, Dante and Petrarch lies the more subtle influence of the preconverted Augustine of the Confessions” in Michelangelo’s Rime (339). Scholarship in the field of art history suggests, however, that Michelangelo may have had a more direct knowledge of Augustine.

In 1979, the American art historian Esther Gordon Dotson ventured an Augustinian interpretation of the Sistine Ceiling in which she suggests the humanist reformer and future cardinal Egidio da Viterbo (1469-1532) as “the formulator of the program” (223). As her thesis, Dotson suggests that “the unusual combination of subjects that constitute the ceiling, and the structural arrangements of those subjects” are drawn not only from the second part of The City of God, but also from Augustine’s treatises on Genesis, the Enarrationes in Psalmos, and the De Trinitate (223). She affirms that the connection between Augustine, Egidio da Viterbo, and Michelangelo as well as her proposed “Augustinian scheme” are “probable” given the time and place of the Sistine Ceiling, Michelangelo as the artist, and Egidio da Viterbo as advisor (250): Egidio was not only an Augustinian monk and the Prior General of the Augustinian Hermits at the time (an Order that commissioned a painted altarpiece from Michelangelo in 1496);
addition to being a foremost Augustine scholar, he “had studied Plato’s philosophy with Marsilio Ficino in Florence in the 1490s” (251-252).

In *Augustine in the Italian Renaissance: Art and Philosophy from Petrarch to Michelangelo* (2005), Meredith J. Gill builds on Dotson’s earlier work to reveal how Augustine’s “theology of the soul connects the Sistine Ceiling to the Last Judgment and brings us to the threshold of the Reformation, and a very different Augustine” (3). Asserting that “readers in the early modern period probably knew their Augustine even better than they knew their Plato” (2), Gill reminds us that “it was Augustine’s Neoplatonism as derived from Plotinus, and perhaps also from Porphyry and Iamblichus, that entered the arena of the Renaissance” (21). Drawing, in part, on Paul Oskar Kristeller’s earlier scholarship on Augustine in Ficino, she presents the Florentine philosopher as a disciple of the Church Father:

In concept and style, Ficino emulated Augustine, and he shared, too, his ideas relative to the soul’s relation to the body, the nature of sense perception, and the place of God in the mind as its ruler. Augustine’s theory of divine illumination influenced him profoundly. His metaphors for the irrepressible movement of the soul derived from Augustine, and his accounting for the relations between will and love relative to intellect and knowledge owes much to him. (23)

For Gill, as for Kristeller, Ficino was, next to Petrarch, the most important Renaissance Augustinian (23). Though she posits Petrarch as “a major link in the chain of associations” between Augustine and Michelangelo, she nevertheless points out the lack of evidence as to whether or not Petrarch was directly acquainted with Augustine’s writings.  

In her chapter on Michelangelo and Augustine’s view of creation, Gill refers to Michelangelo as “Augustine’s champion in the sphere of the arts” (148). She asserts that by 1508 Michelangelo was “fully conversant with Rome’s Augustinian culture” (188) through the “cultivated circles” of Augustinians in Rome, with whom he had first became acquainted during the summer of 1496 (154), and whose influence is to be found in his two works from the period: the Bacchus and the Entombment: “in both Michelangelo exalted mystical states of consciousness – drunkenness and sleep in death,” later visible in the ignudi of the Sistine

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8 Gill lists many relevant parallels between Michelangelo and Augustine as these pertain to her thesis that the Sistine Ceiling is both Neoplatonic and Augustinian in design and elaboration: “Both Augustine and Michelangelo spoke in the form of a first-person query or lament [...] and this gives their voices indelible force. Each saw a potentially ineradicable divide between the corporeal and the incorporeal realms, and both describe spiritual love in a language that draws its impact from earthly analogies. Each dwelt on the character of the enraptured state, on the frailties of the body, on guilt, on the identity of time, and on the eye and the act of seeing as integral to defining transforming experiences such as love” (3).
Ceiling and the captives of Julius’s tomb (160). In preparing the Sistine Ceiling, and possibly through his advisor, Michelangelo would have come to know the two texts that would become the clearest references to Augustine in Michelangelo’s art: the Confessions and De civitate dei (three copies of the latter were in the library of Pope Julius II) (149); in Gill’s final analysis, “both artist and advisor made choices that privileged Augustine” (150).

In addition to the discrete Augustinian ideas on Genesis and creation that appear in the Sistine Ceiling, there is another theological paradigm, an eschatology reflected in the Last Judgement that also informs Michelangelo’s poetry. This mystical and moral schema permeates many Augustinian works, from which it has been deduced and extrapolated. One version of the seven-stage conception of the soul’s journey to God figures in De quantitate animae. A more general seven-stage spiritual itinerary inspired by Isaiah 11:210 links the gifts of the Holy Spirit to each phase of the soul’s progress:

Having bestowed pride of place on wisdom (the unfailing light of the mind), the prophet Isaiah placed understanding next, as if someone asked him, “What is the way to reach wisdom?” and he answered, “By way of understanding.” “And understanding?” “By way of counsel.” “And counsel?” “By way of fortitude.” “And fortitude?” “By way of knowledge.” “And knowledge?” “By way of piety.” “And piety?” “By way of fear.” Therefore, one reaches wisdom by way of fear, because “the beginning of wisdom is fear of the Lord.” One travels up from the vale of tears to the mountain of peace.11

4.3 Augustine’s Spirituality and the Mystico-Moral Ascent

In his study on Augustine’s Isaian interpretation and commentary, “The Teaching of St. Augustine on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit from the Text of Isaiah 11:2-3,” Cardinal Petrus Canisius van Lierde discusses the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit as enumerated by Isaiah in the passage. In his lengthy study, he draws on twenty-three of Augustine’s texts to reveal the depth and breadth of this vision in Augustinian thought and spirituality – a conception of salvation through ascent that is both mystical and moral and that Augustine charts in his Confessions.

The first gift of the Holy Spirit is fear, the seventh is wisdom. In Augustine, the Christian soul moves from an experience of fear (the first gift) to wisdom (the seventh gift)

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9 As major parallels between the Sistine Ceiling and Augustine, Gill cites the phenomenon of creation ex nihilo (184), the notion of seeds awaiting development (185,187), the idea that “created forms first dwell in the divine mind” (194), and, that it is “the will, not the body, [that] determined the elect” (197).
10 “And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord.”
11 From Sermo CCCXLVII II, reproduced here from Henry B. Syvinski’s “The Ascent of the Soul,” an illustration of the Isaian-cum-Augustinian ascent from fear, up the mountain to “the heavenly Jerusalem” (2).
through the operation of grace and the agency and guidance of the Holy Spirit: “Augustine clearly states that we must ascend though the same stages that Isaiah enumerates in descending order. In this ascent, fear is precisely designated as the *terminus a quo*, and wisdom as the end or *terminus ad quem*” (10). Ascent takes place in the heart; Christ and the other saints descended from heaven so that we might ascend through them in our hearts (12). It is God who “disposes this ascent in the humble and contrite heart” and St. Thomas Aquinas “faithfully followed Augustine in this explanation of the Holy Spirit”(13).

Humility is an important prerequisite to ascent (a natural corollary being that human pride is its largest impediment). The role of grace has been variously interpreted. The key point of divergence between the thought and spirituality of Plotinus and that of Augustine is that for Plotinus, “human strength effects purgation,” while for Augustine, “divine assistance” is “necessary” – Augustine “radically transformed Neoplatonic ideas [...] the spirit of the teaching is far different from that of pure Neoplatonism” (22). In the *Confessions*, Augustine laments his weakness in achieving divine vision, asserting that his strength comes from God; his conversion from Neoplatonic to Pauline thought parallels a conversion proper in Book VII (23). The Scriptures played a part in this conversion since “the epistles of St. Paul healed him of his Pride, which had been bolstered by the reading of the Platonists; he investigates all the remedies of the Scripture” (30).

The seven-stage ascent is subdivided into two phases comprised of three and four steps, respectively. In this schema, the first four stages constitute phase one and they are viewed as a preparation for phase two (the subsequent three stages). The first four stages (comprising phase one) focus on moral correction (one might see in this division of four and three a calque of or allusion to the quadrivium and the trivium as venues to knowledge; there is also an allusion to the four cardinal and three theological virtues). At the fourth stage lies conversion: a mystico-moral transformation. The change is moral and the means is mystical in that it involves the operation of divine grace, the prerequisite for conversion and a turning to God, as well as the vehicle for this manifestation. In other words, conversion is a step in the mystical ascent (29).

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12 Cf. “We must proceed from fear to wisdom, but his labor is perfected in the inner dwelling of the heart. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are infused through baptism, into the regenerated soul together with charity and the other virtues” (41).
13 This opinion is echoed in an article by Robert E. Herrera on Augustine as a Neoplatonist and a Christian thinker, “Augustine: a Spiritual Centaur?,” in which the scholar asserts that “Augustine was *not* a spiritual centaur” in that he “progressively distanced himself from [the Neoplatonists], who were ignorant of sin and lacked humility” (172).
Augustine refers to the gifts of the Holy Spirit as virtues (32) and as necessary offerings to a human being if he is to successfully exercise these virtues for which the Holy Spirit stands (36). The number seven, denoting “perfection, totality, sanctification” as well as “sanctity,” pertains to the Holy Spirit (36-37); “it is altogether certain that Augustine understood the number seven figuratively as the fullness of the gifts of the Holy Spirit”(39). Just as “Isaiah in teaching descends from wisdom down to fear [...] just as he descends, we ought to ascend [...] ‘ascending from that vale up the spiritual mountain where the holy city Jerusalem, our mother, is founded’” (40).

According to Cardinal van Lierde’s definition of Augustine’s seven stages, the first step corresponds to the gift of Holy Fear “by which the soul, dreading death and punishment after death, and at the same time, sacrificing a contrite and humble heart to God with trembling, is converted to God through humility” (42). Through the second gift, that of piety, “the soul is rendered docile, unresistant to the will of God, submissive to the authority of Sacred Scripture” (45). At this stage, through humility and compunction, hardness softens, inflexibility diminishes, and “coldness changes into submission”; for Augustine, “meekness connotes non-resistance” to the divine will (45):

The Holy Spirit works, enlightens, moves, and draws, but always requires the cooperation of the soul. But such cooperation consists precisely in the will’s acceptance and non-resistance to the initiation and guidance of the Holy Spirit [...] The soul manifests its meekness by piously seeking the will of the father in all things. (46).

Through the third gift of the Holy Spirit, that is, knowledge, “the soul zealously recognizes the lowliness of the mundane, together with its own weakness, and experiences holy sorrow” (48). During this phase, the soul “begins to understand how the world controls it with bonds of carnal custom and sin” (48). “In quest of God [the soul] wishes to make progress in its own perfection, but its course is still impeded by natural weakness” (48). The flesh still struggles against the spirit and the soul, only partially free, still succumbs to beauty, but “the soul is unable to delight in the carnal because of the love for the eternal with which the Holy Spirit has enriched it – a love which draws it invisibly” (48). In Augustine’s understanding of the Holy Spirit, grief is the effect of the gift of knowledge (61).

The next step coincides with conversion and the overcoming of sloth, or accidia: “the soul withdraws from the mundane and the carnal and turns to the love of the eternal” (49). But the purification of sin is a laborious process and so “the Holy Spirit has not completed this work
by the end of the fourth stage” (52). This “conversion” thus marks the beginning of yet another journey, for the soul is not yet liberated: it remains “too weak and infirm to free itself from such entanglements on its own recognizance” (52).

With the fifth gift of counsel, “the soul continues the work of its purification, especially practicing love of neighbor” (51). At the sixth stage, which corresponds to the gift of understanding, “the eye of the heart has been purified” and the soul “attains a certain vision of God” (53) that is permissible because the soul has left behind pride and self-love (54). The soul is granted a personal intuition of God, an experience of direct presence that corresponds to an experience of faith rather than one of vision, as the soul still sees “through a glass” (55). While the heart has been purified, the eye is still stained. The sixth stage is the final one of true purification; as Lierde summarizes:

This purification really is the last purgation of the soul, and surpasses in intensity all preceding purifications. Indeed, at previous stages, the soul courageously resisted all carnal temptation and worldly pleasure. Thereafter, it purged itself of base appetite, sordid thoughts, and other defects, while seriously disciplining itself in true love of neighbor. But in this last purification, the inmost power of the soul, namely, the understanding, is seized, changed, and purged by the Holy Spirit in such wise that, after every impulse of pride and self-love has been crushed, the soul cleaves to God alone because of the purity of its desire and perception (54)

With the seventh and final gift of wisdom, “the soul contemplates the Truth and experiences total peace; its likeness to God is restored” (55). An individual may secure this experience for his soul after death through his actions in this life, but the soul may not experience it while the individual is still alive: the experience itself is reserved for the afterlife. For Augustine, the embodied, incarnate soul cannot surpass the sixth level in terms of earthly experience, though it can guarantee in this life such an experience of the direct vision of God for itself after death.14 A few additional comments on Augustine’s eschatological system are worth exploring.

According to Augustine, all seven gifts of the Holy Spirit are infused simultaneously at baptism (61), but they unfold in time. There is both a punctual and a durative aspect, a singularity and a multiplicity to grace, which is one in essence, but plural in action and effect; momentary in infusion, durative in emanation and operation. Friendship plays in important role in this vision; “Augustine proposes a new understanding of friendship, one that relates

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14 In “St. Augustine and the Vision of God,” Roland J. Teske asserts that though it is not the norm, on occasion, “the mind can be taken up by God from this life to the life of the angels, before it is freed from the flesh by [...] common death” (293).
friendship to grace” (210). Additionally, it must be underscored that for Augustine the journey to love and God is both intellectual and affective. Finally, Augustine’s salvific scheme is deeply Christocentric: by the end of book X of the Confessions, “Augustine finds healing in the Eucharist of the incarnate Christ” (Russell, “Augustine,” 18).

As regards conversion, for Augustine it is a lifelong process. It is likewise the third and culminating phase of a three-stage process that progresses from a phase of formatio (phase one) to one of recreatio (phase two), and that centres upon love: “Conversion is the historical process in which the various human loves seek integration with the love of God” (20). The degree to which one possesses charity corresponds to a “weight” of the soul that leads it to its proper place in the universe; “Augustine contrasts the loves diffused in our hearts by the Holy Spirit with the cupidity that pulls us down” (21). Perhaps the most important element in Augustine’s view of conversion is recidivism:

The experience of those who were making progress (proficientes) was always liable to setbacks [...] The convert achieved a vision of moral and spiritual enlightenment, only to have that vision quickly recede in a kind of intellectually and psychologically destabilizing striptease. God’s revealing and concealing could lead to almost unbearable tension. Indeed, the fear of recidivism, of backsliding from a moment of enlightenment, was so terrifyingly real for Augustine that he rhetorically exaggerated his ups and downs. True conversion could only be effected through incessant pain (23-24)

This overall framework, the unique and idiosyncratic elements of weight and habit, weakness and will, the role of grace and the Holy Spirit and Christ in enabling moral change through conversion as well as the affective experience of the intellectual journey of sanctification to the visio dei in the next life, all have obvious correlatives in Michelangelo’s Rime, in individual poems, but also in the progression of the lyrics themselves. Following a

15 This is the central argument in Joseph T. Lienhard’s “Friendship with God, Friendship in God: Traces in St. Augustine.” The point is elaborated in a discussion of G59 and Michelangelo’s inspired relationship with Tommaso de’ Cavalieri.

16 John M. Quinn emphasizes this point in his study of the Confessions that aims to determine the extent to which Augustine may have been a mystic (“Mysticism in the Confessiones,” p. 252). It is widely held that Augustine conception of the journey to God included the intellectual and the affective realm of experience. In “St. Augustine and the Vision of God,” Roland J. Teske makes the same argument, referring to Dom Cuthbert Butler’s earlier assessment that “Augustine, Prince of the mystics, is unique in uniting two elements of mystical experience – intellectual vision, love of God as consuming passion” (287). Similarly, in “Mysticism in the Confessiones – a Controversy Revisited,” Frederick von Fleiteren comments on Augustine’s experience of ascension as narrated in the Confessiones and in light of his understanding of the Platonists and visio dei: “Augustine’s in not a two-tiered universe. Platonists saw the ultimate goal of human existence but not the means to attain it [...] Christ is the key – the Neoplatonic philosophers attained the vision of the divine fleetingly in this life; Christians only and through the grace of God can attain the vision in perpetuity in the next – Christianity is vera philosophia” (310).

discussion of Dante’s Augustinian eschatology in the *Commedia*, the remainder of the present chapter will explore the Augustinian eschatology within the *Rime* in particular with reference to the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit and the corresponding stages of spiritual evolution in Augustine’s mystico-moral vision of salvation and *visio dei*. The poems analyzed will be considered, where appropriate, in light of the Dante of the *Commedia* and of Landino’s Platonizing commentary of the *Commedia*, as well as in relation to Augustine’s own writings, principally the *Confessions*.

### 4.4 An Important Precursor: Dante’s Augustinian Eschatology

Despite Augustine’s seemingly small role in Dante’s epic, the bishop of Hippo is not a minor source for the *Commedia*. In his article on “The Influence of Augustine’s Mysticism on Dante” (1994), James J. Collins observed that Pietro Alighieri’s commentary to the *Commedia* cites Augustine 142 times (457) and that the *Commedia* itself contains over one hundred references to Augustine, who is not granted a speaking part by Dante in the epic, where, seated tacit among the blessed, his importance is neither emphasized nor dismissed (460). Addressing the longstanding view that Dante followed other theologians more closely than Augustine, Collins affirms: Dante “cannot be easily classified as Thomist, Bonaventurian, Aristotelian, Neoplatonist or Averroist, but he is ‘always Augustinian’” (459). Both Dante and Augustine share an identity as mystagogues whose exempla as spiritual initiates and converts serve to “instruct and edify” (460). More specifically, “both Augustine and Dante often describe their spiritual journeys with images drawn from travel over dangerous seas, symbols of their spiritual turmoil. Both men were deeply enamoured of Virgil’s description of Aeneas’ journey to Rome” (461).

According to Collins, Dante’s three guides are informed by Augustine’s three lights of human reason (*lumen rationis*), faith (*lumen fidei*), and mystical union (*lumen gloriae*), which in turn find expression in three forms of Augustinian vision in the *Commedia* as Satan (*Inferno*), the Griffin (*Purgatorio*), and Christ (*Paradiso*) (466). Dante’s representation of the holy Trinity as three rings (*Par. XXXIII, vv. 115-120*) recalls Augustine’s golden rings in *De trinitate* IX, iv, 7 (466). And “Dante seems to follow the Augustinian principle of biblical interpretation” (172). Collins also credits Augustine for Dante’s depiction of “morality as a dynamics of love;” for the

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18 “Even though Augustine does not converse with Dante in paradise, all the main themes of paradise such as light, beauty, praise and love derive either directly or indirectly from Augustine” (460).
spiritual journey conceived of as failure and success in loving (with failure denoted by the darkness and ice in *Inferno*, and success by the light and love (fire) so characteristic of *Paradiso*); and the portrayal of ascension on wings, navigation towards one’s native place, of fire rising, and of God as the archer (478-479). In brief, “Dante’s theology of redemption follows closely Augustine’s” (479). This conclusion is the departure point for Edmund Gardner’s analysis of the Augustinian dimension of the *Commedia*.

In *Dante and the Mystics* (1913), Gardner cites the seven stages of the soul’s progress in Augustine’s *De quantitate animae* as the source of Dante’s conception of the pilgrim’s ascent to God (44), with *Purgatorio* corresponding to the forth stage (that of fortitude and conversion in Lierde’s study), and Earthly Paradise to the fifth stage of “tranquility or complete trust in God where it reforms the soul” (45). An overriding thesis of his study is that “the moral basis of the *Purgatorio*, its central conception of setting love in order, and the threefold division founded thereon, as also the spiritual law of ascent by which Dante mounts from sphere to sphere in the *Paradiso*, all have a direct Augustinian source” (54-55).

A more recent publication on the matter of Augustine in Dante confirms Collins’s and Gardner’s general conclusions. In “The Weight of Love: Augustinian Metaphors of Movement in Dante’s Souls” (2006), philosopher Phillip Cary ventures the persuasive thesis that Dante’s portrayal of Hell, Purgatory and Paradise is based on the experience of the will and not the disembodied soul of the afterlife:

Ice and fire, immobility and ascent, weight and rest, make visible the trajectories of love in Dante’s world. We need sensible metaphors for this, because love is a movement not in space but in will, a psychological rather than a corporeal dimension which we can experience and understand but cannot literally imagine [...] the truth of the poem lies in the representation of will, not bodies. (16).

It is on account of this Augustinian organizational principle of the *Commedia* that the metaphors orchestrating the epic seem counter-intuitive, with Hell depicted as an icy prison and Heaven as a fiery abode:

It is no accident that the bottom of Dante’s hell is cold. The core of eternal punishment in the *Commedia* is not a furnace of fire but a lake of ice where sinners are frozen hard and fast forever [...] Charity in Augustine is spiritual fire, an ardent desire raising the soul toward God. The movements of Dante’s souls are governed by this metaphor of fiery charity. The lake of solid ice at the bottom of the universe just works out its negative implications: the descent into hell means leaving warmth and light behind. (15)
Augustine is not only the source for Dante’s portrayal of the will’s movements in terms of weight and fire, but for the metaphor of light and its connection to the intellect (29-30):

The full power of the metaphor of light does not come into view, however, until we see its connection with the metaphor of fire [...] The metaphor of fire goes though Augustine to Cicero, whereas the metaphor of light goes back through Augustine to Plato. It concerns specifically the intellect rather than the will – the eyes by which the intellect sees, rather than the love with which it burns [...] In connecting the two metaphors of fire and light Dante creates a powerful way of relating will and intellect. It is as if the light of the intellect kindles the fire of the will.” (29-30)

In addition to these more global studies on Augustine’s presence in the Commedia, a couple of more narrow analyses should be included in the present discussion.

No discussion of Augustine in the Commedia would be complete without mentioning John Freccero’s close examination of Inferno I, “Dante’s Prologue Scene,” which successfully reveals “that the landscape in which the pilgrim finds himself bears a striking, indeed at times, textual resemblance to the ‘region of unlikeness’ in which the young Augustine finds himself in the seventh book of the Confessions” (189). According to Freccero, the attempted climb of the monte dilettoso of Inferno I constitutes a failed conversion for the wayfarer whose presumption to ascend without undergoing the necessary spiritual illumination constitutes a sinful act of pride. A similar thesis is advanced in “Failure, Pride, and Conversion in Inferno I: A Reinterpretation” by Anthony T. Cassell, who argues that the pilgrim’s “conversion manquée” in the first canto of the Commedia is a result of the wayfarer’s failure to recognize the need for grace or for guides, a factor of his innate intellectual arrogance or pride (1) and lack of fear (16). This fear, which he will soon experience in the dark wood, is a gift from the Holy Spirit that will lead the wayfarer to wisdom and the visio dei; “pride, though the volition and commission of the sinner, is also mystically the correcting will of God” (18-19). Though Aquinian, the paradigm has its roots in Augustine.

Building on both of these studies, Rudy S. Spraycar echoes the view that Inferno I constitutes “the beginning of Dante’s spiritual renovation” because, as Cassel revealed, “Dante is to progress through the seven steps which Augustine and Gregory the Great perceive in the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit” (2). Like Caly, Spraycar views the frozen water of Hell and the fire of Paradise as metaphors of the will. Drawing on Gregory the Great, Spraycar links the frozen lake Cocytus, the wayfarer’s “lago del cor” (Inf. I, v. 20), which stands for the heart
“frozen in sin” (5), and its subsequent melting in *Purgatorio* XXX to show that the wayfarer’s journey unfolds in the heart.

### 4.5 Michelangelo and Dante

Thanks to his inclusion in Donato Giannotti’s *Dialogi* (1529) where he figures as a knowledgeable interlocutor on Dante’s *Commedia*, Michelangelo has long been considered a *gran dantista*. As a result, there has been an historical scholarly trend of over-emphasizing the influence of Dante on Michelangelo *grosso modo*; as B. H. Sumner observed in “Michelangelo and Dante” (1938):

> When Borinski expounds to us the eighty-six references to the *Divina Commedia* which he finds in Michelangelo’s paintings, drawings and sculpture; when Steinmann and Kallab assure us that in the *Last Judgment* alone there are twenty-seven such references (half of which escaped Borinski); when Thode refutes or leaves doubtful all but a bare half-dozen of them; when Scheffler discovers that the only way to understand the Sistine Chapel vault is to read, not Dante, but Plato; when Holroyd shews us Dante in the *Last Judgment* ‘thirsting for deepest mysteries, his face positively thrust between St. Peter and St. Paul,’ and Steinmann shews us Dante in an opposite corner of the same fresco with Vergil bending over him and proceeds to note with devastating relevance that his group is almost unrecognizably destroyed in the original; when clever and learned men behave thus, we can almost wish that Michelangelo had never heard of Dante. (157).

If one limits the discussion of Dantean influence to Michelangelo’s poetry, it becomes easier to comment. According to Clements, “the first and foremost influence on Michelangelo was of course Dante” (*The Poetry*, 315); yet the same scholar asserts that “reflections of Dante in Michelangelo’s poetry, cited by Varchi as numerous, are indirect rather than direct” (318). He concludes that “the poetic skill of Dante [...] influenced Michelangelo’s vocabulary and metaphor in a general way” (318). More recently, Charles Adelin Fiorato, editor of a 2002 French translation of the *Rime*, presented a divergent and more detailed opinion on the matter of literary influence in “‘Fuss’io pur lui!’: Michelangelo all’ascolto di Dante’” (1990). Drawing on the scholarship of Renzo Lo Cascio, Luigi Baldacci, Walter Binni, and Enzo Noè Girardi,

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19 Sumner subsequently lists those Michelangelo creations that are in fact plausibly inspired by Dante: “From Michelangelo’s own lifetime onwards, all that is agreed (and even so with certain reservations) is: that the figures of Charon and Minos in the *Last Judgment* are suggested by the description of them in the *Inferno*; that the two statues in San Pietro in Vincoli representing Active and Contemplative Life are suggested by Leah and Rachel in *Purgatorio* xxvii; and that a design of a Pietà made for Vittoria Colonna (now known only in copies) contains on the cross the line from *Paradiso* (xxix, 91) ‘Non vi si pensa quanto sangue costa’” (157). Clements cites the *Last Judgement*, the statues of Leah and Rachel, or the Active and Contemplative Lives, the *Bruto, Il sogno della vita umana* as creations by Michelangelo that are of Dantean inspiration (*The Poetry*, 317).
Fiorato affirms that embedded in Michelangelo’s *Rime* one finds many direct and identifiable borrowings or traces: “precisi riscontri lessicali-simbolici, che si focalizzano particolarmente sulla rima dantesca, di echi danteschi che si estendono talvolta a versi interi, di temi verbali di tipo simbolico ideale o psicologico affettivi” (95). Furthermore, key borrowed words suffice to lend a Dantean tone to Michelangelo’s verse: “una singola ‘parola-cosa,’ o ‘una parola-idea’ derivata da Dante, o coniata secondo il suo modello, basti a conferire una tonalità dantesca al verso di Michelangelo” (96).

Reflecting on the respective characters of Michelangelo and Dante, Clements observes that the parallels are noteworthy:

Certainly there was every reason for the artist to sense an affinity with Dante. Intensity of feeling, nostalgia of an ‘expatriate,’ deep-felt religiosity, dedication to an art, these were only a few of the many components of their characters which allied them. Probably no poet so affected him in the reading. (*The Poetry*, 317)

This view is so widely held, that in her 2007 article “Michelangelo e Dante,” Grazia Dolores Folliero-Metz qualifies the intention of her study as a re-examination of a critical topos: “un topos della critica letteraria iniziato in epoca rinascimentale e continuato fino ad oggi, ossia la *Wahlverwandshaft*, o peculiare affinità di spirito fra Michelangelo e Dante” (32).

Michelangelo’s partiality for Dante was more than mere affinity for a fellow exile and poet, more than convention or a reverent act of homage to a great writer or noble citizen (the conventional interpretation for the shared essence of Michelangelo and Dante). Depending on how one reads the poems on Dante in the *Rime* (G248, G250), it could be argued that Michelangelo’s appreciation of Dante more closely corresponds to the respect an apprentice might bear towards a mentor, or a budding mystic might hold for a more accomplished master. In both G248 and G250 there is a quatrain describing Dante’s descent into Hell for the purposes of enlightening his readers:

\begin{quote}
Dal ciel discese, e col mortal suo, poi
che visto ebbe l’inferno giusto e ’l pio,
ritornò vivo a contemplare Dio,
per dar di tutto il vero lume a noi.
\end{quote}
\vspace{-2mm}

(G248, vv. 1-4)

\footnote{One thinks immediately of the Dantean neologism “invoglia.”}

\footnote{Various facets of this affinity are explored in Corrado Gizzi’s *Michelangelo e Dante* (1995).}
The portrayal in sonnet G250 of Dante as a saintly figure who descended to Hell for the benefit of humanity (vv. 5-6) is a clear reference to Dante as a mystagogue. In G248, Dante is portrayed as a wayfarer who, having seen Hell and then encountered Christ (v. 2), ascended to the beatific vision. The fact that the opening lines are dedicated to a description of Dante the mystic casts new light on Michelangelo’s exclamation “Fuss’io pur lui” (G248, v. 12), and on the entire closing tercet, in which Michelangelo juxtaposes the pilgrim’s “harsh exile” (from Florence or God?) to his “virtue” (“virtute” – talent or good?).

Michelangelo defined himself in terms of Dante, comparing his journey to that of Dante.

The following sections will show that the speaker of the Rime charts, if not gauges, his spiritual progress in terms of Dante of the Commedia – both the medieval and Renaissance versions.

4.6 “Il mare e ’l monte e ’l foco colla spada”: Michelangelo’s Augustinian Pilgrimage?

The first extended intertextual reference to Dante in Michelangelo’s Rime is G18. Written on the reverse of a letter dated 27 April 1522, the irregular seven-verse poem employs a plurality of key images from both Augustine and the first canto of Inferno. The speaker has been captured by earthly love (trapped by carnal desire) and his soul has struggled fruitlessly to return to its earlier road (vv. 1-3). Now amid “the sea, mountain, and the fire with the sword,” the poet, “deprived of intellect and reason,” is unable to make the climb (vv. 4-7):

Mille rimedi invan l’anima tenta:
poi ch’i’ fu’ preso alla prestina strada,
di ritornare endarno s’argumenta.
Il mare e ’l monte e ’l foco colla spada:
in mezzo a questi insieme vivo.
Al monte non mi lascia chi m’ha privo
dell’intelletto e tolto la ragione.

(G18)

22 “Fuss’io pur lui! c’a tal fortuna nato, / per l’aspro esilio suo, co’ la virtute, / dare’ del mondo il più felice sorte.” (G248, vv. 12-14)
23 Sumner goes so far as to assert in this regard that “Michelangelo as seen through his poetry is the reverse of Dante” (“Michelangelo and Dante,” 167).
The “prestina strada” of v. 2 recalls the opening of the *Commedia*, where Dante the pilgrim, having lost the true path midway through life, finds himself lost in a dark wood: “Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita / mi ritrovar per una selva oscura, / che la diritta via era smarrita” (*Inf.* I, vv. 1-3). Like *Inferno* I, Michelangelo’s poem features both a mountain and a body of water. The twice repeated “monte” (v. 4 and v. 6) evokes Dante’s “monte dilettoso” (*Inf.* I, v. 77).24 and like his medieval predecessor, Michelangelo’s poet is prevented from making the climb (symbol of both the vertical path to salvation and the mystical ascent to divine union). The “mare” in v. 4, in turn, recalls Dante’s “lago del cuor” (the symbolic receptacle of “all human passions,” including fear25):

Allor fu la paura queta,  
che nel lago del cor m’era durata  
la notte ch’i’ passai con tanta pieta.

(*Inf.* I, vv. 19-21)

By visual analogy, it also suggests the “aqua perigliosa” (v. 24) of *Inferno* I:

E come quei che con lena affannata,  
uscito fuor del pelago a la riva,  
si volge a l’acqua perigliosa e guata,  
   così l’animo mio, ch’ancor fuggiva,  
si volse a retro a rimarir lo passo  
che non lasciò già mai persona viva.

(*Inf.* I, vv. 22-27)

Michelangelo’s “mare” thus not only recalls the fear-filled beginning of Dante the pilgrim’s journey to salvation and the *visio dei*, but also evokes the medieval wayfarer’s ultimately successful passage: Dante completed the perilous voyage that few survive. If the symbol of the fire with the sword is interpreted as the flaming sword placed by God following the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden to prevent them from accessing the Tree of Life26 (and the direct presence of God), then the temporal progression of mare-monte-foco/spada follows the Dantean model, encompassing, analogically, the wayfarer’s spiritual journey of purgation: the passage from Hell to the ascent of Mount of Purgatory to the gates of earthly paradise, if not ultimate union and final rapture.

Dante successfully navigates the “cruel” waters between Hell and the Mount of Purgatory, the climbing of which renders man “worthy”:  

Per correr miglior acque alza le vele  
onmai la navicella del mio ingegno,  
che lascia dietro a sé mar sì crudele;  
e canterò di quel secondo regno  
dove l’umano spirito si purga  
e di salire al ciel diventa degna. 

(Purg. I, vv. 1-6)

The sea that Dante crosses successfully is the same turbulent body of water in which Ulysses perished in Inferno XXVI (vv. 91-142), “com’altrui piacque” (v. 141) – as pleased another (as was willed by God) – a line that appears in the narration of Dante the pilgrim’s meritorious arrival at the Mount of Purgatory (Purg. I, v. 133), just as it described Ulysses’s divinely-willed drowning. If one adopts a cyclical reading of the Commedia, then Dante’s questioning by St. John in Paradiso XXVI becomes all the more significant by comparison.

Asking by St. John in the sphere of the Fixed Stars to define charity, Dante the pilgrim explains that his own experience of charity was in suffering the pain that leads one to turn to God: “Però ricominciai: ‘Tutti quei morsi / che posson far lo cor volgere a Dio, / a la mia caritate son concorsi [’]”(vv. 55-57). Christ and his sacrifice, in which the wayfarer hopes (vv. 58-60), together with the Holy Spirit (“la predetta conoscenza viva,” v. 61), are responsible for the rescue of the itinerant sinner from the “sea” of misdirected love and his delivery to the “shore” of “right” love (that is, of Purgatory): “tratto m’hanno del mar de l’amor torto, / e del diritto m’han posto a la riva” (vv. 62-63). In this same canto, following St. John’s interrogation of Dante, the wayfarer encounters Adam, thus coming face to face with Original Sin, which he is now free to address as a “justified” outsider; thanks to the crucifixion Dante has been purged in the fire of the Holy Spirit and set free from the flames of unholy desire, from which the figurative sword of the Spirit has liberated him.

While Dante the pilgrim ultimately achieves the lofty goal of divine union, Michelangelo’s poet remains at the allegorical foot of the hill “dove ’l sol tace” (Inf. I, v. 60), prey to the wrong kind of love (G18, vv. 6-7). At this stage in his life’s journey, the speaker of G18 is not permitted ascent. Both the purgative and illuminative ways are denied him and the

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27 For a discussion of purgation as a “quasi navigatio ad patriam” in Augustine’s De Doctrina Christiana, see Gardner, Dante and the Mystics, 61.
gates of heavenly Jerusalem, symbolized by the flaming sword, are closed to him. In v. 4, Michelangelo alludes to the entire eschatological vision of human redemption, from ill-wrought love (sea) to charity, from figurative blindness to sight and knowledge (mountain), as well as to the grace (fire and sword) that enables the transforming ascent. It is significant that this cryptic poem – one of the rare ones in which Michelangelo employs allegory\(^\text{28}\) – was written in 1522. At that time, Michelangelo had been back in Florence for a few years. In 1520, Pope Leo X had cancelled the San Lorenzo façade project, and Michelangelo had begun work on the Medici Chapel. It was a period that William E. Wallace describes as “one of the low points of the artist’s life” (Michelangelo, 119). In this same year, 1520, Michelangelo met Gherardo Perini, one of the two young men (known to posterity) to whom Michelangelo was attracted (the other being Febo del Poggio) prior to his meeting Tommaso de’ Cavalieri (1532). Though it is not certain that Michelangelo’s G18 was inspired by Perini (G36 being the only one widely accepted as occasioned by this relationship), it is plausible that the poem was inspired by the circumstances surrounding his frustrated and lustful longing for Perini, with whom he was corresponding in January and February 1522, the same year that Michelangelo composed the poem.\(^\text{29}\)

If Meredith J. Gill’s assessment that by 1508 Michelangelo was well-versed in Augustinian thought is correct, then by 1522 the poet most certainly would have been familiar with the content of Augustine’s writings, namely the *Confessions* and *De civitate dei*, if not with the works themselves, especially given that the four years he had spent working on the Sistine Ceiling (1508-1512) had long since unfolded and passed. It is possible that Michelangelo had not read the *Confessions* and that he may have “read” Augustine only indirectly: the Church Father was echoed and reflected in both Petrarch and Dante. It is entirely plausible that Michelangelo would have read Augustine’s *Confessions* since key passages on creation and *Genesis* are contained in books XI through XIII. Certainly, the *Confessions* and the *Commedia* seem to have jointly and directly inspired G18, especially for its structural idiosyncrasies and lexical choices, and the likely relation of these to Michelangelo’s portrayal of and allusion to grace:

\[
\text{Mille rimedi invan l’anima tenta} \\
\text{poi ch’i’ fu’ preso alla pristina strada,}
\]

\(^\text{28}\) Saslow’s observation (Buonarroti, *The Poetry of Michelangelo*, 88).

\(^\text{29}\) Saslow (Buonarroti, *The Poetry of Michelangelo*, 88).
The fact that G18 consists of only seven verses has mystified many Michelangelo scholars who have noted the irregular poetic form, but not explored possible reasons for it. In his critical apparatus to Michelangelo’s lyrics, Girardi refers to the composition as a “gruppo di versi, metricamente indefinibile e di significato oscuro,” noting that it “appare scritto frettolosamente” (Buonarroti, Rime, 169). In Girardi’s view, then, G18 was not a polished piece – nor was it subsequently edited or prepared for publication. James Saslow notes that “the form is irregular and perhaps incomplete” (Buonarroti, The Poetry, 88). While the poem is manifestly uncanonical, it is arguably complete. Seven is the number of the Holy Spirit, whose means of drawing man back to God is through its seven gifts – a number and a fact that Augustine highlighted in his writings. Michelangelo’s unusual seven-line poem might thus well be read in light of Augustine’s vision of ascension through grace and seven stages.

Though he does not mention the formal irregularity of the piece, Christopher Ryan notes that the poem “begins strongly with the inversion of subject and object and the separation of the adverb and verb, enabling the poet to highlight the futility of the fierce struggle against love,” concluding that “the force of that line soon fades into impenetrably obscure imagery” (The Poetry, 53). The speaker’s doomed battle against love and his soul’s failed attempts to heal itself (“rimedi” v. 1) and return to the straight path echo the beginning of the pilgrim’s journey in the dark wood, that is, the wayfarer’s experience of the first gift of holy fear by which the Holy Spirit draws man back to God. The substantive “rimedi” (v. 1) denotes a primary function of the Holy Spirit as God’s love and gift to man. The rhetoric of healing is Augustinian, as is the powerlessness of will implied by “invan” (v.1), an adverb of stasis whose visual position in the middle of the verse serves to underscore its centrality to the argument, while the stress that befalls it evokes the weight of the will for which it stands. The poet’s description of having been taken (“fu’ preso,” v. 2) from the earlier path communicates his sense of victimization by the world around him, and his vain reasoning/attempting (“endarno s’argomenta,” v. 3) recalls the “invan” of v. 1, while highlighting the utter powerlessness of the poet’s intellect over his will.
The allegorical reference to the three phases of the soul’s earthly Christian voyage (“mare,” “monte,” and “foco colla spada”) constitutes the fourth verse of the poem. It falls halfway through the composition, with the number four corresponding to the stage in the soul’s journey where Augustine posits true conversion to take place. The logic of the argument as well as the punctuation of this verse support such a division. The rhyme scheme ABAB CCD further suggests logical division of the poem into a quatrain and a tercet. The concluding word of each stanza seems to contain its own message. In the quatrain, “tenta-strada-s’argomenta-spada” suggests the poet’s failed attempt (“tenta” and “s’argomenta”) to fight (“spada”) his way back to the earlier path (“strada”). It is worth noting that “prestina” (v. 2) may signify “interior,” as well as “earlier,” and thus the path the poet seeks to regain may be an inner one (Augustine’s journey to God happens in the heart). The closing tercet spells an even more sorrowful picture if the final words of each verse are read together: “vivo-privo-[di] ragione.”

The beloved who has compromised the poet’s reason stands, like Dante’s three bestie on the mountain of Inferno I (the perceived salvific way), between the sea (the sin of carnal love), and the fire and the sword (spiritual victory and the purgative way that ensure/enable it), an obstacle to conversion and salvation (“non mi lascia,” v. 6). The poet’s deficient reason is mentioned in the final verse of the poem, line seven, which in the present paradigm refers to the seventh gift of wisdom to which the first gift of fear ultimately leads: weak reason cannot lead to wisdom. Neither Augustine nor Dante could ascend to the visio dei by their own power; another path was required: a Christian path illuminated and enabled by grace, not the guideless human path of platonic ascent. Augustine’s moment of conversion, and Dante’s recollection of his own, both coincide with their subjective apprehension of this insight. Dante’s apparent descent was in fact a divinely orchestrated climb, but by a different route – one that could be pursued only by following a guide and by possessing the humility that ensues from sacrificing one’s lust and pride. If gifts of the Holy Spirit are infused all at once into man at baptism, their activation in the life of the sinner unfolds in time (a point highlighted in section three of the present chapter). Might it be because of the promise of these gifts that the poet lives simultaneously (“a questi tutti insieme vivo,” v. 5) amid the sea, the mountain and the fire/sword?

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4.7 “Il mare”: The Vicissitudes of Disordered Love

Michelangelo would lament his cursed lust many times before achieving, in old age, the kind of fleeting moments of peace alluded to in G290 – a state he communicates by means of the allegory of the soul as a ship:

Scarco d’un’importuna e greve salma,
Signor mie caro, e dal mondo disciolto,
qual fragil legno a te stanco rivolto
da l’orribil procella in dolce calma.

(G290, vv. 1-4)

This nautical image, so central to the Commedia and the final boat allegory to appear in Michelangelo’s Rime, features a conspicuous reversal31 of Purgatorio I, vv. 1-3 that sadly emphasizes the failure of the poet Michelangelo to achieve in life the much aspired mystical vision:

Troppa bonaccia sgonfia sì le vele,
che senza vento in mar perde la via
la debile mie barca, e par che sia
una festuca in mar rozz’è crudele.

(G299, vv. 5-8)

Per correr miglior acque alza le vele
omai la navicella32 del mio ingegno,
che lascia dietro a sé mar sì crudele;

(Purg. I, vv. 1-3)

While the sails of Dante’s ship are raised, those of Michelangelo are windless – raised, but powerless to move the boat. This is entirely consistent with Augustine’s view that the visio dei can be secured in this life for the next, but not experienced by the living.

In his chiosa to Purg. I, v. 3 and Dante’s “mar sì crudele,” Cristoforo Landino addressed the nautical theme in the Commedia. According to Landino’s gloss, the sea is “cruel” because it stands for vice and the human appetites that lead to vice:

31 The allusion to Dante is noted by Saslow in Buonarroti, The Poetry of Michelangelo, 497.
32 Michelangelo uses the substantive “navicella” in an incomplete poetic composition on the death of his brother Buonarrotto, G45; wishing that he could see his deceased sibling, the poet laments that he cannot leave his body: “Onde la navicella mie non passa, / com’io vorrei, a vederti a quella riva / che ’l corpo per a tempo di qua lassa” (vv. 13-15).
mare sí crudele: benché la considerazione del vitio chome habbiamo decto sia buona, nientedimeno el vitio è la piú crudel chosa che sia perché uccide l’anima, la qual nessuna altra chosa può uccidere. Né indoctamente dixe mare, perché sí chome dicemmo nelle virgiliane allegorie ogni appetito è simile al mare, nessuno è piú crudele, né da piú contrarii venti combattuto, che quello che mena al vitio.33 (Comento, Purg. I, vv. 1-6, ll. 75-81)34

His analysis contains a more detailed discussion of the storm alluded to by the epithet “crudele.”

In imaging the tempest, Landino turns his eye to the symbolism of the wind – an image that does not figure in the Dantean passage in question (save, perhaps, by association with the sail, but this is not the connection that receives treatment by the Renaissance scholar). Landino states not only that there is nothing crueler than that which leads to vice (the sea), but that nothing is more “battered” by “contrary winds” than the path to vice (l. 80). Expounding on the allegory, he further characterizes the sea in terms of the habit of vice and the corresponding experience of Hell, both literal (by the damned) and figurative (by those who are brought to contemplate vices):

Imperoché non solo chi va allo ’nferno, cioè nell’habito de’ vitii, è sommerso da turbulenta tempesta in tale mare, ma ancora chi va per contemplare la natura del vitio spesso combactuto dalle lusinghe di varie voluptà appena fugge e pericolosi scogli et l’occulte secche de tal mare. (Comento, Purg. I, vv. 1-6, ll. 81-84)

Even those who, in the Commedia, are brought by God’s grace to contemplate their sins barely escape the “dangerous rocks” and the “hidden shoals” of the sea (l. 84). In a pointedly Augustinian reading of the passage, Landino designates the ship as a symbol of the will (which in Augustine constitutes a faculty of the soul, as does the intellect), and the port as a symbol of knowledge or wisdom sought (the hidden shoals likely denote the “inscrutable”35 cause of the divided or impotent will):

el poeta dice la navicella del mio ingegno. Imperochè chome la nave porta l’huomo per mare al disiato porto, chosi la volontà porta lo ’ngegno et la mente nostra alla cognitione della cosa che desideriamo sapere [...] Adunque havendo in questo luogo decto navicella dixe acqua perché in quella usiamo la nave, dixe vele perché senza vele non va la nave.

33 Cf. Commenting on Genesis 1-2, Augustine asserts that on day three of creation, “the soul insulates the mind against the ruinous tempest of carnal temptation [...] the downfall and turbulence of carnal temptations, just as dry land is protected from convulsions of the sea” (Lierde, “The Teaching,” 24-25).
34 All excerpts from Landino are taken from Paolo Procaccioli’s four-volume edition of Cristoforo Landino’s Comento sopra la Comedia. “Comento, Purg. I, vv. 1-6, ll. 75-81” should be read as “lines 75-81 of Landino’s gloss to Purg. I, vv. 1-6, in [Procaccioli’s edition of] the Comento.” This method of citation has been favoured over volume and page number indications to facilitate the location of the excerpts quoted.
35 On the “inscrutability” of the will, in Augustine, Petrarch and Michelangelo, see Thomas E. Mussio.
According to Landino’s allegory, without the sail the will is powerless to direct the ship of the intellect towards divine ideas, or God. Augustine’s *Confessions* centres upon this impotence of a divided will. This Landinian gloss may well shed light on Michelangelo’s reference to windless sails in G299, vv. 5-8.

In his gloss to *Purgatorio* I, Landino builds upon his *chiosa* to the pilgrim’s self-description in *Inferno* I in which the first simile of the *Commedia* equates the wayfarer to a man who barely escaped death by drowning and has arrived safely on the shore whence he now looks back in fear at the waters (vv. 21-30). Having “lost” the “sails of reason”, the sinner is “carried” by the “impetuous waves of the sea,” which stand for the “wild perturbations and passions that proceed from appetite and sensuality,” and so it is with “the greatest difficulty that he arrives at shore:”

Et veramente non è in minore vexatione et exagitatione l’animo el quale perduto ogni temone et vela di ragione è traportato dalle impetuose onde del mare, cioè da furiose perturbationi et passioni che procedono dall’appetito et dalla sensualità, le quali lo fanno rompere ne gli scogli de’ vitii, onde chon grandissima difficoltà si può condurre a rriva. Et certo mentre che l’animo nostro havendo perduto la ragione è traportato dal disordinato appetito, o da una vana letitia, o da grave dolore, o da troppo timore, o da smisurata cupidità, è simile alla nave posta in grave tempesta. (*Comento*, Purg. I, vv. 22-30, ll. 5-12)

The soul of the sinner, whose senses and sensual desires are not checked by reason, is akin to “the ship placed in a harsh storm” (l. 12).

Landino’s analysis of the *Commedia*’s nautical imagery concludes in *Paradiso* XXVI with Dante’s description of Charity as that which brought the wayfarer across the waters of carnal love to the shores of spiritual love: “Con la predecta cognoscenza viva / tracto m’hanno del mare de l’amor torto, / et nel diricto m’han posto alla riva” (vv. 61-63). The particular appetite that led the pilgrim to the vice of intemperance was an amorous one (as opposed to a sensuous one, such as gluttony – an example of a physical appetite that would also have required the exercise of continence on the part of the wayfarer in order to avoid becoming intemperate). In his gloss on the passage, Landino explicitly parallels the experience of earthly love to being thrown into a stormy sea from which heavenly love leads the lover to lasting peace: “perché chome l’amore mondano sempre ci perchuote in tempestoso mare con varie
perturbations, le quali giorno et notte tormentono la mente, chosi l’amore divino ci conduce in questo porto d’etherna tranquilità” (*Comento*, Par. XXVI, vv. 55-66, ll. 11-16).

Landino’s gloss finds an echo in Michelangelo’s famed sonnet G285 that opens with a metaphor of the poet’s life as a fragile ship on a stormy sea headed toward the port of death and final Judgement:

> Giunto è già ’l corso della vita mia,  
> con tempestoso mar, per fragil barca,  
> al commun porto, ov’a render si varca  
> conto e ragion d’ogni opra trista e pia.  

(G285, vv. 1-4)

The poet’s self-questioning in vv. 9-10 on whether he is nearing two deaths as a result of his amorous thoughts (“gli amorosi pensier, già vani e lieti, / che fien or, s’a duo morte m’avvicino?”) recalls Landino’s gloss to *Inferno* I in which he describes the Platonic double death

36 (Stamento, Inf. I, vv. 1-21, ll. 101-105) that, despite being drawn from Macrobius rather than Augustine, nevertheless supports the idea that Michelangelo was prone – occasionally, though not exclusively – to reading Dante through Landino’s eyes and Augustinian glosses.

Parallels to the Landinian allegory are similarly identifiable in the excerpts of navigational imagery in the *Rime* examined above. In the first quatrain of G290, for example, the poet turns to the Lord “as a tired and fragile boat, / heads from the frightful tempest toward sweet calm:”

> Scarco d’un’importuna e greve salma,  
> Signor mie caro, e dal mondo disciolto,  
> qual fragil legno a te stanco rivolto  
> da l’orribil procella in dolce calma.  

(G290, vv. 1-4)

Likewise, in the second quatrain of sonnet G299, the poet’s sails are deflated by an absence of wind and so the poet flounders, powerless, like a piece of straw on a rough sea:

> Troppa bonaccia sgonfia si le vele,  
> che senza vento in mar perde la via  
> la debile mie barca, e par che sia

36 Cf. G43, vv. 12-14: “In mezzo di duo mort’ è ’l mie signore: / questa non voglio e questa non comprendo: / cosi sospeso, el corpo e l’alma muore.” The sonnet lacks nautical imagery and metaphor, yet the mention of “not wanting” and “not understanding” together with the suspended state (presumably of divided will) in which the poet finds himself echo Augustine of the *Confessions* as well as Landino’s Augustinian *allegoresis*. The use of negatives is significant. It relates to the negative theology of mysticism.

37 Saslow’s translation (Buonarroti, *The Poetry of Michelangelo*, 484).
una festuca in mar rozz’ e crudele.

(G299, vv. 5-8)

There is one poetic composition that cannot be dismissed as too general in its lexicon and character to ascertain a Landinian (or Augustinian) influence: G70 – a sestina that was dismissed by Frey as illegible, but that Girardi includes in his critical edition.

Michelangelo’s first true nautical metaphor occurs in the first and second stanzas of G70:

né si travaglia chiara stella in cielo
dal giorno [in qua?] [sic.] che mie vela disciolse,
ond’io errando e vagabondo andai,
qual vano legno gira a tutti i venti.

Or son qui, lasso, e all’incesi venti
convien varar mie legno, e senza arbitrio
solcar l’alte onde ove mai sempre andai.

(G70, vv. 3-9)

The sestina is based on the repetition of the six key words – “arbitrio,” “lega,” “cielo,” “disciolse,” “andai,” “venti” – each of which concludes a line of each stanza. The poet laments that his free will has been overpowered and that his volition is no longer his own because it has been bound by his beloved (presumably by his own obsession with the young nobleman Tommaso de’ Cavalieri). Navigational imagery is linked to the poet’s prayer for salvation.

In the opening stanza, the poet curses first the ruling planet at his birth and then his own will because, since he and his free will were born, he has had no star, simply choice (power to choose) and volition (will to choose), which have led him astray:

Crudele stella, anzi crudele arbitrio
che ’l potere e ’l voler mi stringe e lega;
né si travaglia chiara stella in cielo
dal giorno [in qua?] [sic.] che mie vela disciolse,
ond’io errando e vagabondo andai,
qual vano legno gira a tutti i venti.

Or son qui, lasso, e all’incesi venti
convien varar mie legno, e senza arbitrio
solcar l’alte onde ove mai sempre andai.

Così quagiù si prende, preme e lega
quel che lassù già ’ll’alber si disciolse,
ond’a me tolsi la dote del cielo.

38 According to Mussio, “the replacement of ‘crudele arbitrio’ for ‘crudele stella’ strongly hints that the poet feels no more control over this original will that binds his powers and desire than over the mysterious workings of fortune or of providence” (350).
The boat, tossed about on the rough sea and turning in all winds (v. 6), anticipates the floundering “festuca in mar rozz’e crudele” of G299, v. 8 examined above. In Michelangelo, this nautical imagery constitutes a clear metaphor for the improper use of the will (“arbitrio, v. 8) and the consequences to which this leads. The poet suffers on earth from having succumbed to temptation, which he [the poet] cryptically describes as behaving like Eve who plucked the apple “above” (in the Garden of Eden) – an unmistakeable reference to Genesis and to the devil as serpent explored in the Last Judgement, if not to Augustine’s own writings on creation.

The poet feels deprived of his will, over which he is now powerless, and wonders if he can even be blamed, for he was ignorant in his choices. He thus feels like a victim ensnared in his beloved’s net:

Qui non mi regge e non mi spinge il cielo, ma potenti e terrestri e duri venti, ch’è sopra me non so qual si disciolse per [dargli mano?] e tormi del mio arbitrio. Così fuor di mie rete altri mi lega. mie colpa è, ch’ignorando a quello andai? (G70, vv. 13-18)

The stars are to blame, though they do not control the heart and soul caught in “contrary winds” (Landino’s ‘contrarii venti’?) by binding an individual to choose one way or another, for to accept this would be to deny the existence of free will:

Maladetto [sie] ’l di che ìo andai col segno che correva su nel cielo! Se non ch’ì’ so che ’l giorno el cor non lega, né sforza l’alma, ne’ contrari venti, contra al nostro largito e sciolto arbitrio, perché [...] e pruove ci disciolse. (G70, vv. 19-24)

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39 Dante’s Minos is located at the entrance to the circle of the lustful. It is here, in canto V of Inferno, that we encounter the famous lovers – Paolo and Francesca – whom also Michelangelo included in his Last Judgment and whose kiss while reading the romance of Lancelot and Guinevere led to their death at the hands of Francesca’s husband and their eternal damnation for not having the time to repent. Their punishment is to be forever bound to each other and buffeted about by winds symbolic of their passion (vv. 28-33, 43-45).
The poet’s recognition that man errs of his own choosing is Augustinian, as is the mystery of how this is so.\(^\text{40}\) The poet’s conclusion that only testing can unbind man is also Augustinian. For Augustine, it is only through trials and tribulations that the soul may return to God.

In his early discussions on *Genesis* in book two “Against the Manichees,”\(^\text{41}\) Augustine interprets the significance of the flaming sword, which stands for “temporal punishments,” as well as for the purification of the sinner:

The flaming moveable sword means temporal punishments [...] it is called ‘flaming’ because every tribulation burns somehow or another [...] But it is one thing to be burned until consumed, and another to be burned until purified [...] And those tribulations that the just suffer pertain to the flaming sword, ‘because gold and silver are tried in fire, and worthy men in the furnace of humiliation.’ And again, ‘the kiln tests the vessels of the potter, and the trial the tribulation just men’ [...] Hence we read, and we hear, and we should believe, that the fullness of knowledge, and the flaming sword guard the tree of life. No one can come to the tree of life except by these two ways, that is, by the endurance of troubles and the fullness of knowledge. (131)\(^\text{42}\)

For Augustine, fullness of knowledge is as important as the endurance of troubles on the journey to salvation and the heavenly city.

The poet, sighing from pain and caught in the hot winds of his passion, turns to that which is beyond human will:

\[
\text{Dunque, se mai dolor del cor disciolse,} \quad 25 \\
\text{sospiri ardenti, o se orando andai} \\
\text{fra caldi venti a quel ch’è fuor d’arbitrio,} \\
\text{[...], pietoso de’ miei caldi venti,} \\
\text{vede, ode e sente e non m’è contra ’l cielo;} \\
\text{ché scior non si può chi se stesso lega.} \quad 30 \\
\text{(G70, vv. 25-30)}
\]

God, seeing, hearing, and feeling the poet, takes pity on his lustful passions, recognizing that the sinner, having bound himself through his own choices, cannot undo himself without assistance –

\(^{40}\) Mussio posits this “inscrutability” of the will as one of the five Augustinian features of the *Rime*. See p. 351 in particular.

\(^{41}\) In Teske’s translation of Augustine’s *De Genesi contra Manicheaos* (Saint Augustine, *On Genesis*).

\(^{42}\) This passage may well have inspired G63, especially the analogy of the kiln in v.5: “Si amico al freddo sasso è ’l foco interno / che, di quel tratto, se lo circumscrive, / che l’arda è spezzi, in qualche modo vive, / legando con sé gli altri in loco eterno. // E se ’n furnace dura, istate e verno / vince, e ’n più pregio che prima s’ascrive, / come purgata infra l’altrè alte e dive/ alma nel ciel tornasse da l’inferno. // Così tratto di me, se mi dissolve / il foco, che m’è dentro occulto gioco, / arso e po’ spento aver più vita posso. // Dunque, s’i’ vivo, fatto fummo e polve, / eterno ben sarò, s’indo vol foco; / da tale oro e non ferro son percossos. G62, which was written at the same time also possesses a pointedly Augustinian dimension: “O ver, s’al cielo ascende per natura, / al suo elemento, e ch’io converse in foco / sie, come fie che seco non mi porti?” (vv. 12-14).
a fact twice repeated: above, in vv. 29-30, and again in vv. 31-32: “Così l’atti suo perde chi si lega, / e salvo sé nessun ma’ si disciolse”.

Like Augustine of the *Confessions* who also came to appreciate the need for divine aid to free himself from sin, Michelangelo’s poet offers a prayer that his little will become subsumed under the greater will of God:

E come arbor va retto verso il cielo,
ti prego, Signor mio, se mai andai,
ritorni, come quel che non ha venti,
sotto el tuo grande el mio arbitrio.

(G70, vv. 33-36)

Michelangelo renders the poetic voice’s supplication by means of a simile: like a tree growing straight up to heaven, so the poet turns to the Lord (vv. 33-34). The image recalls *Purgatorio* XXXIII, vv. 142-145 and the tree that ascends to the stars that Edmund Gardner sees as symbolic of Augustine’s fifth stage of the soul. The seemingly cryptic analogy makes sense if one considers G70 as an Augustinian confession. In Augustine, evil and corruption result from the will, while all good stems from nature. Man is naturally drawn back to God by that which is good in him even if this is none other than God’s presence in man through the operation of grace. The tree naturally rises to meet its maker, just as the poet spontaneously turns to God. While the tree, as nature, reflects God’s image and will, and so ascends effortlessly, man needs to be prepared for his ascent because the corruption of his will keeps him from rising; man’s “unlikeness” to God must first be addressed. Curiously, the poet’s will must become like a sail without wind in order to be subjugated to that of God (v. 35) – an image repeated later in G299: “che senza vento in mar perde la via / la debile mie barca” (vv. 6-7).

Sonnet G299 may be seen as Michelangelo’s ulterior revisiting of the Augustinian elements examined in G70. As we have seen in the analysis of the incomplete sestina G70, two images link the poem to the second stanza of sonnet G299. The useless boat turning in all directions in G70 (v. 6) is paralleled by the wisp of straw floundering on the cruel sea of G299 (v. 8), while the windless sails required for the poet’s will to submit to that of God (v. 35) recall the deflated, windless sails of G299 (vv. 5-6). The meanings of windlessness in the two poems are nevertheless quite distinct.

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If one considers that for Augustine tribulation was the way to God and that the boat of G299 becomes lost at sea due to good weather (by the absence of storms and of wind), one might conclude that the poet’s soul is lost on a rough and cruel sea because he lacks the tormenting passions (winds) – instruments of holy suffering – that ultimately propel his vessel to God. The paradox of temperate skies and a stormy sea is only apparent. There is a double register to the discourse, one spiritual, the other worldly. The contrast between the two highlights the value of tribulation and the danger of calm for the fate of the non-temperate individual, that is, of the sinner who remains stuck in some degree of continence and incontinence, unable to free himself, but insufficiently troubled to beg for grace. The interpretation is consistent with Augustinian thought as well as with Landino’s gloss to navigational imagery in the *Commedia*.

In G70, the speaker’s self-portrayal as a ship, wayward and wandering since its birth (vv. 4-5), twisting in the sea by every which wind (v.6), powerless to direct its own course against the fiery winds (vv. 7-8), because its will is impotent (v. 8), all point in the direction of Landino’s *Comento*. In *Inferno* III and V, Landino expands his nautical allegory to include, in addition to the discussion of habit and vice already addressed, an explanation of the relationship among human will, choice, desire and salvation, the rendering of which constitutes a deeply Augustinian discourse and portrayal of the Christian soul.

### 4.8 Landino’s Augustinian Allegoresis: Hell as Habit

To mitigate the harsher passages of *Inferno*, thus rendering the text more palatable to its late fifteenth-century readership, Landino superimposed on Dante’s text a level of allegorical meaning that was not only Neoplatonic, but psychological and Augustinian in nature.\(^{44}\) It is plausible that Landino’s ideas about choice, volition, free will and the conscience, as he read them in the *Commedia*, were the source of the Dantian dimension of Michelangelo’s *Last Judgement*.\(^{45}\) In light of the present hypothesis that Michelangelo’s speaker gauged and represented his spiritual journey in terms of Dante of the *Commedia*, it is worth examining

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\(^{44}\) For a detailed discussion of the “psychologized allegoresis,” see Gilson, *Dante and Renaissance Florence*, 200. Gilson and Parker both discuss the Neoplatonic and psychological dimension of the commentary. Parker suggests that Landino revised the allegorical level of interpretation so as “to blunt the apparent cruelty” of the text (Parker, *Commentary and Ideology*, 93). Elsewhere Gilson names Augustine as one of three classical sources of Landino’s Neoplatonism – a mediated Platonism similar to that of Ficino, who also relied on Augustine as a source.

\(^{45}\) See my article “Michelangelo Reading Landino? The ‘Devil’ in Michelangelo’s *Last Judgment.*”
Landino’s gloss to _Inferno_ I, where the pilgrim’s journey begins and where the nature of the voyage and its parameters are expounded by the famed Platonizing commentator.

In his commentary on _Inferno_ I, Landino recalls that man is composed of body and soul: “È l’huomo composto d’animo et di corpo” (_Comento_, Inf. I, vv. 1-21, l. 91). The soul is made in the image of God and so it is divine; full of light, it may rise to contemplate the divine and behold God: “Et perchè è prodocto da Dio a sua imagine, et similitudine, è divino, et pieno di luce, et è capace per la contemplazione di venire alla cognizione delle chose divine, et fruire Iddio” (_Comento_, Inf. I, vv. 1-21, ll. 96-98). The body, on the other hand, is material, and so corruptible; unlike the soul, which is full of light, it [the body] is opaque and full of shadows: “El corpo per l’opposto essendo composto di materia de’ quattro elementi, di sua natura è corruptibile, obscuro et pieno di tenebre” (_Comento_, Inf. I, vv. 1-21, ll. 98-100). Landino’s assessment is both moral and metaphysical. The body is a “dark prison” in which the soul, having lost its “celestial vigour,” as well as the light of reason, may well be considered “buried:” “L’animo adunque sommerso in questo obscuro carcere perde quasi ogni suo celeste vigore, et per le tenebre del corpo rimane quasi privato d’ogni luce di ragione, et puossi dire quello essere sepulto sotto la corporea mole” (_Comento_, Inf. I, vv. 1-21, l. 101). The “obscurso carcere” recalls the verse from Petrarch’s _Trionfo della Morte_ that Michelangelo transcribed on a sheet of figure sketches (while working on the David?) in 1501: “La morte è ’l fin d’una prigione scura” (A1); naturally, for Petrarch it was life and not the body in which the soul served its time.

According to Landino, it is because the soul may lose its power and become buried in the mass of the body that Plato made a distinction between two types of death: “Onde sapientemente el divino Platone pone due spetie di morte” (_Comento_, Inf. I, vv. 1-21, l. 101). The first kind is physical death, which involves the separation of the body and soul: “et l’una chiama morte d’animale, cosa nota a tutti, la quale allhora viene, quando l’anima dal corpo si separa” (_Comento_, Inf. I, vv. 1-21, ll. 101-103). The second death is the neutralization of the soul within a living being: “L’altra è morte d’anima, et questa è quando l’anima chome già habbiamo decto sommersa dal pondo et obscurità del corpo, perde tanto di vigore, che nessuna delle sue excellenti potentie può adoperare” (_Comento_, Inf. I, vv. 1-21, ll. 103-105). It is because of this death that youth live primarily through their senses and do not believe that they consist of anything more than their body – a state of ignorance in which they remain until maturity, when they finally realize that they are in a “dark wood:”
Il perché l’huomo non solamente ne’ primi anni infantili et puerili, ma in gran parte della adolescenzia et gioventù vivere solamente secondo el senso. Et perché non conosce altro che quello, non crede sè essere altro, et niente reputa bene, se non quelle chose che dilectano e corporei sensi; nè alcuna chosa male se non quella che gl’atrista. Et chome ebbo et da profonda sonnolentia oppresso nè sè conosce, nè ad che fine sia prodotto intende, nè conosce la ignorantia sua nè la sua miseria in sino a tanto che, arrivato all’età già matura, parte per la experiencia de molte cose, parte per alchuna doctrina acquistata et per precepti da’ più savi di sè avuti, comincia a destare la ragione, et allora finalmente conosce sè essere in obscura selva, cioè l’animo suo essere oppreso da ignorantia et da vitii per la contagione del corpo.”

(Dimento, Inf. I, vv. 1-21, ll. 106-116)

Dante the wayfarer’s self-discovery in a dark wood signifies for Landino that the pilgrim’s soul became aware that it had become lost, corrupted by the shadows of materiality: “È adunque la sententia del testo io mi ritrovai in una selva obscura, il che importa ‘io m'accorsi l’animo mio essere sommerso nel corpo per la contagione et tenebre del quale havea perduto la diritta et vera via’” (Dimento, Inf. I, vv. 1-21, ll. 117-119). It is midway through life, according to Landino, that a sense of discernment begins to awaken in man: “Nel mezo del camino di nostra vita, cioè nel mezo del corso della vita humana, nel qual tempo la discrezione comincia destarsi ne l’huomo, la quale in sino a quel termine era stata quasi spenta” (Dimento, Inf. I, vv. 1-21, ll. 119-122). Yet, the soul’s awareness of its error will lead it to the path of salvation only if the soul has not been conquered by sensuality:

Et desta s’accorge dell’errore et prende la via salutare, se già non si lascia tanto vincere alla sensualità che non che proceda avanti, ma più tosto ritorna in drieto nella obscurità della selva, dalla quale miseria priega David el Signore che ’l guardi, dicendo: “O Signore, non mi richiamare indrieto nel mezo de’ miei giorni.”

(Dimento, Inf. I, vv. 1-21, ll. 122-126)

The earth is heavy and he who can loosen the soul from the “contagion of the body and of sensuality” is truly blessed:

Et certamente è beato chi può ronpere e legami della grave terra et sciogliere l’animo dalla contagione del corpo et dalla sensualità et elevarsi alle chose celesti. Il perché e Greci chiamano el corpo “demas” perchè “demin” significa legare, et el corpo chome è decto è legame dell’anima.”

(Dimento, Inf. I, vv. 1-21, ll. 149-153)

“Romper,” “sciogliere,” “legare,” and “grave terra” merit highlighting in Landino’s gloss; they constitute noteworthy elements of the lexical and semantic field of Michelangelo’s Rime and in
G70 in particular. Freeing oneself is as psychological an experience as it may be spiritual. Landino’s commentary likewise addresses the psychological experience of the spiritual, or second, death he describes. His concept of damnation encompasses the conscience and the role of habit.

In his gloss on *Inferno* I, vv. 4-6, ”selva selvaggia e aspra e forte,” Landino interprets the darkness of the “selva” as both clouds of ignorance and the contagion of the body, explaining that it is “silvaggia,” because the body of the sinner is infected with vice, “aspra,” like the conscience of the fearful sinner, and “forte,” like the habit that is both consequent to and responsible for the sinning (x). The pilgrim’s experience of the dark wood “et tanto amara ch’è poco più morte” (*Inf.*, I, v. 7) because “bitterness” characterizes the “vice-filled life of the man still inhabiting a living body,” and death is only slightly more bitter because once the sinner is dead, there is no longer hope for redemption. In his discussion of the dark wood in *Inferno* I, Landino opens a parenthesis on continence and temperance with respect to salvation, perdition, and Dante’s pilgrim, whom he describes as “incontinent” but not “intemperate,” and so redeemable (*Inferno* I, vv. 1-21)

In the dark wood Dante felt sorrow for his sinful state: the night he spent there was full of “pietà,” which, Landino emphasizes, denotes lamentation apt to inspire compassion. Though the pilgrim had succumbed to vice, he had not yet formed a habit of it, and so he was incontinent but not intemperate: “nientedimeno non havea facto anchora fermo habito di quello; onde più facilmente se ne potè sviluppare. Era adunque non intemperato ma incontinente” (*Comento*, Inf. I, vv. 1-21, ll. 346-348). For Landino, temperance (“true virtue”) and

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46 “*aspra*: certo è aspra la selva de’ vitii, imperoché chome nessuna chosa è più soave che havere pura conscientia, la quale tiene l’animo tranquillo et lieto et sanza alcuno pavento, chosi el vitio del continuo ci stimola chon continue paure o delle future pene eterehe ordinate all’anima del peccatore, o delle pene presenti delle quali le civili et morali legge ci minacciano. Nè ondeggiono o ribollono tanto le ’nfiamate caverne d’Ethna o di Mongibello, quanto la conscientia del peccatore” (*Comento*, Inf. I, vv. 1-21, ll. 182-188).


48 *Et tanto amara ch’è poco più morte; Ma per tractare del ben ch’io vi trovai Dirò dell’altre chose ch’io v’ho scorte: [...] la selva è amara perchè tale è la vita vitiosa dell’huomo anchora vivente nel corpo. Ma per che ha redemzione et può convertirsi ad Dio et operare el bene, seguita che sia più amara la morte pocho di sopra decta perchè è fuori d’ogni speranza” (*Comento*, Inf. I, vv. 1-21, ll. 196-197, 205-208).

49 “*la noche*, cioè tutta l’età passata, la quale privata del lume della ragione, et obscurata da ignorantia, meritamente si chiama noche; *pieta*: lament. È prima da notare che in lingua fiorentina si truova ’pietà’ chon accento grave nell’ultima syllaba et significa compassion; onde disotto “qui regna la pietà quando è ben morta”. *Item* ’pietà’ con accento acuto nella penultima, et significa lament apto a commuovere compassion, et in questa significatone la pone el poeta. Nè è sanza ragione che lui dica *la noche ch’io passai chon tanta pieta*, perchè vuole dimostrare che quando s’accorse havere smarrita la strada, se ne dolse; et per questo intenderemo che perchè fussi nel vitio” (*Comento*, Inf. I, vv. 1-21, ll. 337-346).
intemperance ("true vice") are separated by degrees of relative continence and incontinence. The temperate individual, a truly virtuous person, has made a habit of continence so strong that he experiences no internal resistance to abstinence: "Il che acciò che più apertamente s’intenda diciamo essere una virtù decta temperantia, nella quale chi ha facto habito in forma si contiene et abstiene da ogni piacere, et voluptà vitiosa et non honesta, che nessuna difficoltà lo ’impedisce, nè gl’è noia l’abstenersi" (Comento, Inf. I, vv. 1-21, ll. 348-352). The intemperate individual, on the other hand, has given himself entirely over to the vice of lust and experiences neither shame nor remorse of conscience as a result: “Et chosi chi ha facto habito nel vitio della intemperantia si dà tutto alla vita lasciva et voluptuosa et a ogni libidine, sanza alchuno impedimento di vergogna o rimorso di conscientia" (Comento, Inf. I, vv. 1-21, ll. 352-354).

Virtue is, by definition, “a habitual and firm disposition to do good.” (Catechism, par. 1833). A cardinal virtue, temperance is thus one of the four “stable dispositions of the intellect and the will that govern our acts, order our passions, and guide our conduct in accordance with reason and faith” (the other three being prudence, justice and fortitude, Catechism, par. 1834). Neither virtue nor vice can exist without habit: “Et per questo diciamo che et quella è vera virtù, et questa, cioè la intemperantia, è vero vitio, perchè in ciascuna è habito sanza el quale non può essere nè virtù nè vitio” (Comento, Inf. I, vv. 1-21, ll. 354-357).

Continence and incontinence are understood as the two dispositions that lead to virtue and vice, respectively; continence leads to the habit of temperance and thus to the individual’s victory over sin, while incontinence leads to the habit of intemperance and thus to the victory of sin over the individual:

Ma innanzi che l'huomo contragga tali habiti o di temperantia o di intemperantia, habbiamo due dispositioni per le quali sdruccioliamo nell'habito. L'una ci guida alla virtù, et è nominata continentia, imperochè el continente vuole abstenersi dalla vita lasciva, ma non si contiene sanza gran faticha perchè non ha anchora facto habito della temperantia, ma perseverando in questa continentia per lunga operatione in quella fa habito et dipoi sanza difficultà si contiene et non è più continentie, ma temperato. L'altra ci guida al vitio, imperochè lo incontinentie anchora lui non vorrebbe cader nel vitio, et chombatte chon la libidine chome combatteva el continentie; ma non la vince chome el continentie, ma lasciasi vincere. Et dopo molte volte fa habito nella libidine et più non combatte, ma volentieri la seguita, et diventa intemperato.

(Comento, Inf. I, vv. 1-21, ll. 357-368)

With terms like “combattere” and “lasciasi vincere,” Landino frames the development of habit as a battle between good and evil (sin). It is a dynamic and ongoing process. Using Virgil’s
As an example, Landino explains that an individual may become intemperate from a previous state of temperance through the failure to remain continent:

Temperate Aeneas became tempted, and as the flame of his lustful attraction grew, he would fall from continence into incontinence ultimately descending to the lowest and most depraved state ("ruvinare al fondo") of intemperance. For Landino Aeneas serves as a negative example, because his journey of descent contrasts with that of the pilgrim: “Danthe era non intemperato, perchè non havea facto habito del vitio, ma incontinente, perchè benchè combattessi col vitio, nientedimeno si lasciava vincere” (Comento, Inf. I, vv. 1-21, ll. 385-388); yet the wayfarer would become temperate through the exercise of continence. In Landino’s allegory, Dante comes to symbolize sensual desire that grows ever purified as the pilgrim passes through Hell and ascends to Purgatory.

The dark wood represents ignorance and those who escape it are rare: “non lasciò mai persona viva, che, posto che alchuni la passino salvi, nientedimeno son sì pochi che si può dire nessuno ad comperatione del numero infinito el quale vi perisce. Et certo rarissimi sono quegli che della obscurità della ignorantia eschano in forma che arrivino alla luce della vera cognizione” (Comento, Inf. I, vv. 1-21, ll. 34-38). This Augustinian platitude is accompanied in Landino’s’ allegory by another defining feature of Augustine’s vision of mystical ascent, with respect to his Neoplatonic sources: the need for help. Recognizing his own ignorance, the individual sets about climbing the mountain (the Neoplatonic ascent towards knowledge), but
the weakness of the flesh holds him back from this desired end despite his ardent desire and readiness:

dimostra el poeta, in che modo l’humana mente arrivata a gli anni della discretione s’accorge della selva nella quale si truova, et della sua ignorantia, et veduto el sole della ragione nella sommità del monte, si mette a ssalire alla contemplatione, per conoscere le cose le quali la posson fare beata. Dipo ci ha facto docti che benchè la volontà nostra sia ardente a tale impresa, et l’animo sia prompto, nientedimeno la infirmità della carne ci ’mpedisce la salita, et hora le voluptà et piaceri di quella, hora la gloria et le pompe del mondo, hora l’avaritia è tale obstacolo, che per noi medesimi se qualche soccorso non ci è dato non possiamo arrivare al disiato fine.

(Comento, Inf. I, vv. 61-66, ll. 3-11)

In order to reach knowledge, wisdom and the visio dei, the individual must first recognize his sins and purge himself of them, but owing to human weakness (“imbecilità”), this task requires a guide:

In quello che seguita pone l’aiuto ricevuto. Il perchè sobgiugne che mentre che ricadeva abbasso, non potendo resistere alla lupa, gli apparve nel diserto Virgilio, al quale lui si raccomandò et da llui impetrò aiuto. Dicemo disopra [vv. 37-39] che posto che la nostra beatitudine sia collocata nell’alteza del monte, cioè nella contemplatione delle chose divine, nientedimeno non può la mente humana farsi apta et idonea a tale ascenso et salita se prima non si purga da ogni vitio, chome di sopra habbiamo dimostro [vv. 1-3]; nè si può purgare da’ vitii se prima non gli cognosce. Di qui seguita che Danthe non potea arrivare al cielo, cioè alla cognitione delle chose celesti, se non andava prima nell’inferno et pel purgatorio, cioè se prima non cognosceva e vitii, et dipoi conosciutogli da quegli non si purgava. Et perché la imbecillità nostra fa che sia o impossibile, o molto difficile fare questo camino sanza duce et guida.”

(Comento, Inf. I, vv. 61-66, ll. 17-29)

Both Dante and Augustine narrate their “conversion” in terms of a turning away from a purely philosophical approach to wisdom powered by one’s own ability (the Platonic/Neoplatonic ascent) to the Christian way of ascent through grace. For both journeymen conversion follows closely upon the recognition and admission of their own helplessness, their powerlessness (imbecillitas?) to proceed (and/or to change), and thus their need for outside assistance.

50 Habit and sin are described in terms of light and darkness, of illumination and ignorance: “ [...] Ma è da notare che el poeta pone questa entrata dello ’inferno obscura, ma non al tutto privata di lume, a dinotare che quando l’huomo passa nel peccato, ha cominciato a perdere el lume della ragione, ma non è in tutto al buio, perché nel principio non ha anchora facto abito, et restagli alquanto di lume di ragione, dal quale è rimorso l’animo nostro [...] Et di qui nasce che da principio facciamo qualche resistentiala alla temptatione, benché alla fine ci lasciamo vincere, et duolci errare. Ma poi che è facto l’habito, perché restiamo al tutto nelle tenebre, non v’è più rimorso di conscientia, et pecchiamo volentieri” (Comento, Inf. III, vv. 70-81, ll. 83-93).
Landino’s explanation of the guidance required and the reason for it are deeply Augustinian. For Landino, as for Augustine, habit rather than nature is the cause of sin:

Et saviamente dixe *costume*. Imperoché ogni nostra operatione è mossa o dalla natura, o dal costume, cioè dalla consuetudine. La natura è optìma guida a chi la seguita. Et sempre arriva bene al vero bene. Ma la captiva consuetudine spesso la corrompe. Onde gl’huomini seguendo quella lasciano la virtù, et dannosi al vitio. Et questo espresse el Petrarca dicendo: “nostra natura vinta dal costume”

(Comento, Inf. III, vv. 70-81, ll. 59-65)

Sin results from the (repeated) faulty exercise of man’s free will, and so it is not surprising to see that Landino cites Petrarch as a literary example. Consistent with Augustinian thought, Landino asserts that the pilgrim requires divine grace, because free will depends on such grace to be set straight:

andare nel peccato può ogni huomo per sé medesimo chol suo libero arbitrio; ma acquistare virtú, et vivere sanza peccato, non può l’huomo con suo libero arbitrio solo sanza divina grazia [...] la quale diriza el libero arbitrio al bene.

(Comento, Inf. III, vv. 82-99, ll. 59-61, 86-87)

If one errs, it is by one’s own choosing. Having erred, it is by God’s grace alone that one is set aright.

In Landino’s allegorical interpretation, intemperance is a form of Hell. In addition to constituting a physical dwelling place for the damned, Hell is a psychological space of the sinner. If the state of temperance, characterized by a lack of desire to sin, is a figurative Heaven, then the states of continence (characterized by a sinful desire that one resists) and incontinence (by a sinful desire that one fails to resist) are Hell (intemperance, by neither resistance to nor guilt from indulgence in said desire, pertains to those who will be damned after death – figurative Hell does not exist for them, just the physical one). It is significant that in the *allegoresis*, both continence and incontinence are characterized by a double-desire or divided will: the will to sin, and to refrain from sinning – the hallmark of Augustine’s *Confessiones*. As in Augustine’s conception of ascension, in Landino’s understanding of the context in which the pilgrims’ journey unfolds, continence and incontinence give rise to sorrow, though one imagines that the incontinent individual is in a graver spiritual state than the continent one because, so long as one battles there is hope and if one dies while losing the war (against sin), it is salvation as well as life that has been lost.
In Landino’s *allegoresis*, he who has made a habit of virtue descends to Hell ("colui scende nell’inferno che cade nel vitio, et da quello si lascia vincere, come fanno tutti e peccatori," (Comento, Inf. III, vv. 121-129, ll. 20-22). The man who examines himself also enters Hell: “Scende ancora chi entra a contemplare e vitii per conoscergli et guardarsene, chome finge Homero d’Ulixe, et Virgilio d’Enea, et Danthe di se medesimo” (Comento, Inf. III, vv. 121-129, ll. 22-24). In *Inferno*, both types – the sinners and Dante – enter Hell by journeying with the ferryman of the damned, Charon, across the Acheron, the former, “perchè la nave, cioè la loro depravata volontà guidata dal libero arbitrio, gli conduce” and the latter “sono condotti dalla volontà portata dall’angelo, cioè dalla gratia di Dio, la qual diriza el libero arbitrio a volere, et eleggere, el vero bene” (Comento, Inf. III, vv. 121-129, ll. 25-27). As noted above, nautical imagery in Landino’s *allegoresis* pertains to the use (or misuse) of free will (as the case may be) and the consequent destiny of the Christian soul (a topic to be explored in greater detail in the following section).

Those who enter Hell to examine their sins have not yet conquered them. Because they have subjugated their senses to reason, they require grace to exit Hell:

chi scende nello ‘nferno per tornare, cioè entra nella speculatione de’ vitii per guardarsene, bisogna che sia per abstractione di mente, et che e sensi rimanghino consopiti tanto che s’avvezzino a ubbidire alla ragione senza alcuna repugnantia. Imperoché chi considera e dilecti corporei et quali sono ne’ vitii, et non habbi anch’ora la sensualità sobtoposta alla ragione, spesso trova la serpe occultata tra’ fiori. Onde el Petrarcha: “questa vita terrena è quasi un prato Che ’l serpente fra fiori e l’herbe iace Et s’alchuna sua vista a gli occhi piace È per la sciar più l’animo inviscato”. Rimane allacciato, et preso da’ dilecti carnali, et avelenato dal morso serpentino del peccato. [...] Et invero non potrebbon per sè sole l’humane forze sanza el divino aiuto passare nell’inferno, et tornare.”

(Comento, Inf. III, vv. 130-136, ll. 2-19)

Landino distinguishes between malice and weakness (“imbecilità”) in his discourse on souls who pass through Hell.

Those who sin out of ignorance or fear merit compassion, while those who operate from bad intentions are denied God’s mercy: “Pecca adunque non per malignità, la quale non merita misericordia, ma per timidità et imbecillità, alla quale Dio spesso ha grande compassionne, perché ‘vidit Deus figmentum nostrum et misertus est nostri’” (Comento, Inf. III, vv. 130-136, ll. 19-22). Those who attract the greatest compassion and mercy from God are those who implore him with tears asking for his help: “Maxime a chi implora, et chon lachrime adomanda...
l’aiuto suo” (Comento, Inf. III, vv. 130-136, l. 22). Augustine argues similarly in the 
Confessions, where he links the strength to overcome continence with divine supplication:

and I did not think of Your mercy as a healing medicine for that weakness, because I had 
ever tried it. I thought that continency was a matter of our own strength: for in my utter 
foolishness I did not know that word of Your Scripture that none can be continent unless 
You give it. And truly You would have given it if with groaning spirit I assailed Your 
ears and with settled faith had cast my care upon You.

(Confessions, VI, xi, 20)

For Landino, as for Augustine, God frees those who supplicate with honest sorrow. He 
bends to them with his grace to enable their ascension: “Il che niente altro dinota se non che la 
gratia divina suplisse alla nostra fragilità, et sepera et abstrae la mente et lo 'ntelлектo da' sensi, 
acciò che possi innalzarsi a speculare le grandi chose alle quali è nato” (Comento, Inf. III, vv. 
130-136, ll. 23-26). Dante is granted grace because his sins arise from weakness: “abbiamo 
dimostro s’io non erro che 'l peccato di Danthe procede non da malignità di non volere, ma da 
disperatione di non potere” (Comento, Inf. III, vv. 130-136, l. 40-41). The tearful earth and a 
dancing red light symbolize supplication and grace, respectively:

Da che nacque che la terra lacrimosa diede vento, i. le lacrime della terra, cioè della 
sensualità nostra, diede vento, i. feciono movimento, cioè commossono Dio a 
misericordia; che, cioè el quale vento, balonò una luce vermiglia: cioè produce una luce 
fochosa con quella velocità che viene un baleno. Questa luce è la divina gratia, la quale 
Idio, veduta la buona volontà di quegli che si vorrebbono condurre alla salute vacillare 
per timidità, manda di subito a corroborare et addirizzare tal volontà. Et è questa gratia luce, perchè illumina la mente et mostragli la vera via, et è vermgiglia, cioè focosa, perchè 
oltre al dimostrargli la via, il che è opera cherubica, l'accende et infiamma dell'amore 
seraphico di quella. Et è necessario nella speculazione delle gran chose, perchè non si 
faccendo quelle sanza laboriosa difficoltà, se l'huomo non se ne innamorassi non 
sopporterebbe tanta faticha.

(Comento, Inf. III, vv. 130-136, ll. 41-53)

The frozen lake Cocytus and the rocky middle of the Earth where Satan fell and remained stand 
in contrast to this fire imagery of grace and salvation. For Landino, those who have made a habit 
of sin are hard like stone (and by analogy, ice?). In treating of the rock containing Lucifer in 
Inferno XXXIV, Landino notes “et allegoricamente [the rock containing Lucifer] chi è allo 
’inferno che è dannatione de’ vitii ha facto habito de’ vitii. Il che su può aguagliare a un saxo” 
(Comento, Inf. XXXIV, vv. 70-87, ll. 23-25). Like Aeneas, whom Landino describes as “drilling
his way down” from incontinence into intemperance, so Satan plummets to the middle of the earth according to the weight of his sins. The paradigm is Augustinian:

A body tends by its weight towards the place proper to it – weight does not necessarily tend toward the lowest place but towards its proper place. Fire tends upwards, stone downwards. By their weight they are moved and seek their proper place [...] Things out of their place are in motion: they come to their place and are at rest [...] My love is my weight: wherever I go, my love is what brings me there. By Your Gift we are on fire and borne upwards: we flame and we ascend [...] It is by Your fire, Your beneficent fire, that we burn and we rise towards the peace of Jerusalem.

(Confessions, XIII, ix, 10)

In his comment to this passage in the Confessions, Michael P. Foley notes that in Augustinian thought, “original sin distorts our loves, requiring their reordering and reorchestration by the Holy Spirit for their perfection and hence ‘rest’” and because of this, “the natural phenomena mentioned in this paragraph have biblical links to the Holy Spirit: fire (Acts 2:3), love (Rom. 5:5), weight (Wis. 11:21), oil (1 John 2:20; Exod. 30:25), and water (Mark 1:10)” (295). If the fire, ice and stone of Dante’s Commedia were not originally Augustinian in conception, they become so through Landino. The development of Landino’s Augustinian allegoresis finds its maximal expression in Inferno III and V and in the characters of Charon and Minos, two figures who also appear in Michelangelo’s Last Judgement – a univocova l and universally agreed upon direct borrowing from Dante by Michelangelo.

4.9 Landino’s Charon and Minos: An Allegory of Free Will, Choice, Volition

Dante’s Minos stands in the entrance to Hell, growling, examining sins, judging the guilty and assigning them to the appropriate circle by twirling his tail: the number of times it turns equals the circle to which the sinner must descend; when sinners appear before him they confess everything. He warns Dante to mind the entrance, which is wide, but deceiving (because the exit is narrow). Commentators who preceded Landino were consistent in interpreting the literal and moral meaning of the passage: Dante’s Minos was the same son of Zeus and Europa

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51 This section and the ensuing four sections repeat arguments presented in my article “Michelangelo Reading Landino? The ‘Devil’ in Michelangelo’s Last Judgment.”
52 “Stavvi Minòs orribilmente, e ringhia: / essamina le colpe ne l’intrata; / giudica e manda secondo ch’avvinghia. / Dico che quando l’anima mal nata / li vien dinanzi, tutta si confessa; / e quel conoscitor de le peccata / vede qual loco d’inferno è da essa; / cignesi con la coda tante volte / quantunque gradi vuol che giù sia messa. // Sempre dinanzi a lui ne stanno molte: / vanno a vicenda ciascuna al giudizio, / dicono e odono e poi son giù volte. / “O tu che vieni al doloroso ospizio,” / disse Minòs a me quando mi vide, / lasciando l’atto di cotanto offizio / “guarda com’ entri e di cui tu t’fide; / non t’inganni l’ampiezza de l’intrare!” (Inf. V, vv. 4-20)
described by Virgil in the *Aeneid* (VI, 568-572); he symbolized Divine Justice.\(^{53}\) Landino, however, added an entirely innovative and psychological significance to the passage.\(^{54}\)

In his gloss of vv. 4-6, Landino argues that Minos stands for the conscience of the damned man:

Nè è altro Minos che el giudicio della conscientia [...] Questo è da Virgilio discripto in forma d'huomo, ma Danthe lo configura chome bestia dandogli la coda et el ringhio, che è proprio del cane. Ma non è sanza cagione, perchè intende per Minos la conscientia dell'huomo dannato, cioè che ha già facto habitio de' vitii, perchè chostoro sono rimorsi dalla conscientia, la quale non è più huomo, perchè tale rimordimento non gli rimuta dal male operare. Imperochè hanno spento in loro el lume della ragione, per la quale siamo huomini, ma solamente gli stimola, et fagli diventare furiosi. Onde si può dire che la conscientia ne' dannati et in quegli che hanno facto habitio de' vitii sia una crudelissima fiera.

*(Comento, Inf. V, vv. 1-15, ll. 35-45)*

Landino writes that, although Virgil described Minos as a man, Dante presents him as an animal (“bestia”), growling (“el ringhio”) and with tail (“la coda”), because, the conscience of sinners is like a snarling dog (“cane”) that goads them (“perchè chostoro sono rimorsi dalla conscientia”). Sinners are no longer men, Landino clarifies, because the goading/remorse (*rimordimento*) of their conscience failed to change their mind and stop them from behaving badly (“non gli rimuta del male operare”). “Perchè chostoro sono rimorsi dalla conscientia;”

Landino plays upon the twin uses of the verb “rimordere” (“rimorsi”), which signifies “to bite again” or “to bite back,” on the one hand, and indicates the pricking action of the conscience when one feels regret or remorse, on the other. Landino explains that since the light of reason (“el lume della ragione”) that makes us human (“per la quale siamo huomini”) is extinguished (“spento”) in the damned, the conscience of sinners only stimulates them (“ma solamente gli stimola”), causing them to become furious/wild (“et fagli diventare furiosi”). In sum, the conscience of the damned, those who made a habit of vices, is an incredibly cruel wild beast (“la conscientia ne' dannati et in quegli che hanno facto habitio de' vitii sia una crudelissima fiera”).

Commenting on the “horribilmente ringhia” of *Inferno* V, v. 4, Landino specifies that there is nothing that snarls and barks and threatens more than the conscience, which stimulates night and day the minds of those who have committed sins: “nessuna chosa è che più

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\(^{53}\) Landino relied heavily on Francesco da Buti’s commentary. See Procaccioli’s introduction to the *Comento*, 55.

\(^{54}\) Landino divides the Minos passage into two parts for analysis – ll. 1-15, and 16-24 respectively. See the *Comento*, 444-449.

It is not the smart of the sensible body nor fear of the pangs to come that torments, but horror of abysmal guilt [...] the pains of Hell are but the shame and remorse of the sinner made aware of his state; the undying worm spoken of in the Gospels (Mark 9:44) is not applied physical torture but psychic agony.55

Landino goes further than the psychological discussion of man’s conscience in his analysis of Dante’s Minos. He enters, rather, through key words in the Italian version of the epic, into a discussion on free will and grace in which he clarifies that by the “house of suffering” (“doloroso ospizio,” *Inf.* V, v. 16) Dante meant the act of contemplating vices (“cioè al doloroso albergho, cioè alla contemplatione de' vitii” (*Comento*, Inf. V, vv. 16-24, ll. 10-11). Landino specifies that man can enter into vices by himself through free will, but cannot escape them without divine grace: “Può l'huomo per se medesimo col suo libero arbitrio entrare ne' vitii, ma non può sanza la divina gratia uscirne” (*Comento*, Inf. V, vv. 16-24, ll. 16-17). His allegorical interpretation of Charon in the *Commedia* likewise centres upon the matter of free will and its use.

In *Inferno* III, vv. 82-87, Charon appears as an old man with white hair in a boat that carries the damned across the Acheron to Hell:

> Ed ecco verso noi venir per nave un vecchio, bianco per antico pelo, gridando: “Guai a voi, anime prave! Non isperate mai veder lo cielo; io vengo per menarvi all'altra riva nelle tenebre eterne, in caldo e 'n gielo.  
>  
> (Inf., V, 82-87)

The demon’s eyes are aflame and he beats with his oar those who are slow to cooperate:

> Caron dimonio, con occhi di bragia loro accennando, tutte le raccoglie;  

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55 Steinberg, “The *Last Judgment* as Merciful Heresy,” 53.
According to Landino, Charon ferrying the damned across the Acheron to the gates of Hell on his boat denoted a comment upon choice and volition:

The river Acheron is the impetus that causes the soul/mind to pass into sin. Charon is free will, the boat is volition, and the oar is choice. Charon on his boat acts in accordance with divine will to carry across the river (of temptation leading to sin) those who have chosen to exercise their will (volition) knowingly and irresponsibly to commit sin. The flames in his eyes symbolize the misguided will of the damned:

A consideration of Landino’s allegories of Minos and Charon together provides a poignant interpretive framework for the Hell scene in Michelangelo’s Last Judgement, which might well be a reminder of how it is that one arrives in the infernal fires: the misuse of free will leads to a guilty and punishing conscience that, after death, ultimately becomes punishment in Hell. These themes of conscience, free will, choice and volition are central to Michelangelo’s poetry contemporary with the Last Judgement. An understanding of their embodiment within the Last Judgement is an important prerequisite to correct interpretation of the lyrics written during this time, especially as they are linked in the fresco to a seemingly personal mystical itinerary that the artist embedded within the Christian masterpiece.
4.10 Michelangelo’s Last Judgement and Landino’s Augustinian Allegoresis

In the panorama of scholarship focusing on Michelangelo’s Last Judgement, some of the most intriguing debates centre upon the fresco’s iconographically atypical Hell-space that features demons and the damned, but no devil proper. The devil is present only by symbolic allusion: a serpent entwined about the figure of Minos, Hell’s judge in Dante’s Commedia, whom Michelangelo places in the bottom right-hand corner of his painting together with Charon, the Ferryman of Inferno. Pre-Renaissance representations of the Last Judgement tended to be static, stratified compositions in which Hell occupied a well-defined space. These Last Judgements typically contained images portraying the physical suffering of damnation. They often included Satan as the Antichrist figure. In Michelangelo’s Last Judgement, however, physical “Hell” is represented synecdotally via a depiction of its entrances: a cryptic cave that has been variously interpreted as Limbo, Purgatory, Hell’s mouth, or Plato’s cave; Charon, who is associated with the first gates of Hell; and Minos, who stands between the first and second circle of Hell – that is, between Limbo and Hell proper – in Dante’s Inferno. Effectively, Michelangelo opted to suggest Hell rather than to depict it, and took the liberty to draw on literary figures to achieve this end.

Michelangelo’s decision to suggest rather than to depict Hell has generated much discussion about the theological ideas at the heart of the fresco. Leo Steinberg has argued that Michelangelo purposefully omitted Hell in the Last Judgement because the artist “disbelieved in

56 This is the thesis of my article “Michelangelo Reading Landino? The ‘Devil’ in Michelangelo’s Last Judgment.”
57 It is generally accepted that Michelangelo’s Minos figure stands for the Antichrist. Iconographically speaking, the figure is a conflation of Minos and Satan: while Minos possesses a serpentine tail capable of twining about, drawing circles in the air, the serpent-as-tail in Michelangelo’s depiction is a clear reference to Lucifer. As Teodolinda Barolini noted, Dante describes only the action of Minos’s tail; its form is left to the reader’s imagination (“Minos’s Tail,” 448). For a detailed discussion of Dante’s Minos, see Barolini. For a discussion of the conflation of Minos and Satan, see Barnes, Michelangelo’s Last Judgment, 118-119. See also Partridge, Michelangelo, 105.
58 For a discussion of Michelangelo’s departures from the Last Judgment tradition, see Barnes, Michelangelo’s Last Judgment, 7-38. Though it was not common to include pagan or literary references in Last Judgment paintings, Michelangelo was not the first artist to incorporate aspects of Dante’s Inferno in his fresco. Luca Signorelli included Charon and Minos in his Last Judgment scene in the Cappella Nuova, Orvieto Cathedral (1499-1504). Unlike Michelangelo, however, Signorelli utilized them in addition to Lucifer, not in lieu of Lucifer. Barnes argues that Michelangelo had intended a second painting in the Chapel that featured Satan (Michelangelo’s Last Judgment, 30). Nevertheless, this does not explain why Minos is granted such a privileged position in the lower-right corner of the fresco in seeming opposition to Christ. Barnes believes that Michelangelo also drew from Dante’s Commedia the figures of Geryon (Inferno 17), Count Ugolino and Archbishop Ruggieri (Inferno 32-33) as additional “gateway[s] to the infernal regions,” Michelangelo’s Last Judgment, 114-116.
59 This observation is not new. Valerie Shrimplin-Evangelidis’s article “Hell in Michelangelo’s Last Judgment” is almost entirely based on this premise. Steinberg remarks that “if there was ever a painting that allocates sites without localizing their whereabouts, it is surely this fresco” (“A corner,” 250).
For Steinberg, then, the *Last Judgement* is philo-Protestant in nature. Loren Partridge challenges Steinberg’s interpretation, arguing that Michelangelo’s masterpiece is thoroughly orthodox. It is not scholarship, but rather Michelangelo’s fresco that is ambiguous. Destined for a male audience of well-educated mainstream Catholics who could devote time to contemplating the details of the work, Michelangelo’s *Last Judgement* nevertheless reflects the same spiritual angst and theological ambivalence present in his poetry. With this premise in mind, this section will offer a plausible explanation of why, in lieu of Satan, Michelangelo’s Hell features Charon and Minos. A comparison of Landino’s *allegoresis* and Michelangelo’s poetry suggests that Minos and Charon were intended to symbolize the psychological experience of damnation.

In canzone G51, composed at the beginning of the 1530s, Michelangelo as poet lamented being ill-prepared for divine Judgement and of having been betrayed by the passage of time and by his own conscience (symbolized by the mirror), which had failed to save him from exercising his free will only to choose sin:

Oilmè, olimè, ch’i’ son tradito
da’ giorni mie fugaci e dallo specchio
che ’l ver dice a ciascun che fiso ’l guarda!
Così n’avvien, chi troppo al fin ritarda,
com’ho fatt’io, che ’l tempo m’è fuggito:
si trova come me ’n un giorno vecchio.
Né mi posso pentir, né m’apparecchio,
né mi consiglio con la morte appresso.

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60 See Steinberg, “The Last Judgment as Merciful Heresy,” 53.
61 In both “The Last Judgment as Merciful Heresy” and “A corner of the Last Judgment,” Steinberg clarifies that he did not intend to suggest that Michelangelo was a heretic, merely that he held philo-Protestant views, which were not deemed heretical until the Council of Trent, which first convened in 1545, four years after the unveiling of Michelangelo’s completed masterpiece on 31 October 1541. For a discussion of the historical and religious context in which Michelangelo operated while creating the *Last Judgment*, see Mayer.
63 Many scholars have highlighted the ambiguity of the fresco. In “The Last Judgment as Merciful Heresy,” Steinberg argues that Michelangelo intended for his Christ to be ambivalent, neither wholly judging nor merciful, neither seated nor standing (50). Barnes also urges that we consider the “ambiguity itself” rather than seek to argue for one interpretation over the other: “What in the image caused contemporaries to interpret it in various ways? What might be the purpose behind the ambiguity? Is there a positive reason for wanting to create a religious image that might be open to multiple interpretations?” *Michelangelo’s Last Judgment*, 73.
64 For a discussion of the Sistine Chapel audience, see Barnes, *Michelangelo’s Last Judgment*, 39-79, in which she shows “how some of the most unusual elements of the Last Judgment might be interpreted by an orthodox Catholic, well-educated, male audience who knew the decorum of the Sistine Chapel and who had the time to make connections between the images there” *Michelangelo’s Last Judgment*, 69.
65 This is my argument in “Michelangelo Reading Landino? The ‘Devil’ in Michelangelo’s Last Judgment.”
While in canzone G51 Michelangelo refers to his imminent death in the reference to time sloughing off the poet’s hide, one immediately identifies what James Saslow termed “an anticipation” of the flayed skin of Saint Bartholomew in the Last Judgement upon which Michelangelo imposed his own portrait. In fact, Leo Steinberg, drawing a line along the face of the flayed skin in the painting discovered that extending the line in both directions, revealed a personal “mystical itinerary” in the Last Judgement that extends from the serpent biting Minos’s genitals, through Charon and the disperato or condemned one (whose thigh bears snake marks), through Christ’s wound and the diameter of the crown of thorns to the head of Christ nailed to the cross.

The alignment of these figures seems too precise to constitute sheer coincidence, especially when one considers that the ideas illustrated in the Last Judgement correspond to those Michelangelo explored in his poetry. Indeed, Berthold Hub argues that in the Last Judgement Michelangelo depicted ascension more so than resurrection. Drawing on Michelangelo’s poetry and the mystical connection between love and death, Hub convincingly states that “the aspect of salvation in Christ’s resurrection is not only the traditional pledge of our all [sic.] redemption but rather a subjective allegory of his own personal experiences and aspirations in love.” In Michelangelo’s fresco, the gates to Hell are the pangs of conscience that result from choosing or desiring wrongly, and so the Hell scene in the Last Judgement is a borrowed allegory of misdirected free will and the guilty conscience that any educated male at

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66 Saslow in Buonarroti, The Poetry of Michelangelo, 136
67 Steinberg, “The Line of Fate,” 431.
68 This is not to suggest that the Hell scene of the Last Judgment represents a personal autobiographical expression so much as the articulation of a topos, the journey of everyman as sinner as it was understood during Michelangelo’s time. This comment may be applied to much (though not all) of Michelangelo’s poetry.
69 Hub, “...e fa dolce la morte,” 107.
the time should have been familiar with. Since the role of tempter is the only one Satan plays in a soul’s journey to, and through, the various entrances to Hell (symbolized in the fresco by the cave, Minos, and Charon), he appears in the Last Judgement, symbolically, as the serpent in the garden.

Steinberg identified in a much more general way the parallels between Michelangelo’s Last Judgement and his subjective experience of life. His scholarly analysis echoes Landino’s psycho-spiritual allegoreses of the Commedia:

The artist himself, as his poems attest, felt unfit for salvation, yet hoped for remission. As a believer, he lived his later years in the throes of uncertainty, between hope sprung from his knowledge of Christ and the consciousness of deserved reflection flowing continually from self-knowledge. And this dualism seems to me to have found expression in the fresco. I refer to the contrast between the depicted experience of the condemned and the response it elicits [...] Charon’s passengers undergo varied emotions – from horror to resignation, from howling despair or shame to calm acquiescence, and from full self-absorption to fraternal aid. The one thought shared by all is that they believe themselves to be verging on Hell, and on a Hell self-inflicted. Self-knowledge attained [...] they see only their earned, imminent exile.70

Steinberg’s view is corroborated by psychological and psychoanalytic interpretations of Michelangelo’s Last Judgement and of drawings the artist produced during the same time period that he was preparing sketches for the fresco.

The American psychiatrist and author Robert S. Liebert provided one of the most detailed analyses of the intrapsychic tensions evidenced in Michelangelo’s Last Judgement.71 Arguing that the artist “successfully masked his own private drama” in the fresco, Liebert observes that the painting contained “not merely a judgment of the external world” (341), but it “also represented a bitterness of a more inner-directed nature” (345). For Liebert, “the question of why Michelangelo felt that he was vulnerable or deserving of damnation is central to the painting” (358-359). Liebert asserts that through the central figures of Christ, the Virgin and Saint Bartholomew (representing Father/Male Other, Mother, and the artist respectively), Michelangelo enacted the drama of “his own inner conflict between forbidden impulses and guilt, reproach and fear of retribution” (355).72 In Liebert’s assessment, “homosexual impulses” were an almost certain element of the artist’s intrapsychic tensions in general and of the “inner

71 Liebert, Michelangelo, 331-360.
72 This particular argument, which develops Wind’s thesis about the myth of Apollo and Marsyas as a key to interpreting the Apollo-like Christ and the flayed Saint Bartholomew, begins on p. 347 and concludes on p. 357.
dialectic that underlies the very center of the drama which constitutes the center of the *Last Judgment* in particular (360). Together with matricidal and patricidal rage (359-360), these homosexual impulses contributed to a guilty conscience and “demanded a reduction in tension through retributive fantasies of damnation” such as the kind suggested by the flayed skin of the excoriated Saint bearing the portrait of Michelangelo” (360).

The forbidden impulse of homoerotic desire has received the most comprehensive scholarly treatment of the plausible causes of Michelangelo’s self-reproach (or in the case of the *Last Judgement* of his self-damnation). It is the only one to have been almost universally accepted. In Saslow’s words, Michelangelo’s “yearning for mystical union with a powerful and supportive man was the distinctive and dominating passion of his life.”\(^73\) Regardless of how sacred or profane might be the expressions to which the drive for union with an idealized/archetypal male figure gave rise, it is indisputable that the artist’s homosexual yearnings engendered a level of subjective distress so significant (and so conscious) as to be pressingly evident in the artist’s letters and poetry and indirectly attested in letters and texts by contemporaries. Psychoanalytic studies of Michelangelo’s artistic production during the 1530s (when the artist was working on the *Last Judgement*) focus on his relationship with Cavalieri, the drawings he gave to the young nobleman or were inspired by him, and the theme of sacred and profane love that occupied Michelangelo in those years. Saslow’s seminal study on the myth of Ganymede in the Renaissance is of particular relevance for its treatment of the operation of homosexual desire within Michelangelo’s psyche and as it is reflected and portrayed in his artistic output.

**4.11 Michelangelo and the Cavalieri Period: Between Grace and Non-Grace**

In his chapter on Michelangelo in *Ganymede in the Renaissance*, Saslow analyses six of Michelangelo’s drawings in the context of the artist’s contemporary relationship with Cavalieri (*Ganymede, Tityos, Fall of Phaethon, the Children’s Bacchanal, Archers Shooting at a Herm, and The Dream*), highlighting the psychological dynamics at play.\(^74\) On the one hand, the artist’s letters, poems, and drawings for Cavalieri “constitute a single, multilayered homage to the ideals

\(^{73}\) Saslow, *Ganymede in the Renaissance*, 52.

\(^{74}\) Saslow is not the first to see inner conflict arising from homosexual impulses as a dialectic underpinning drawings the artist presented to Cavalieri. Liebert himself makes similar connections in his treatment of the *Last Judgment*. Saslow’s study is nevertheless the first detailed, comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon. His major contribution is in considering the drawings not only as discrete works, but also in relation to each other (34-47) and as they reflect the artist’s intrapsychic dynamics (51-59).
of Platonic love as exemplified for Michelangelo” by Cavalieri, who seems to have “satisfied” the poet’s “deep longing for an earthly love that foreshadows the divine” (28). On the other hand, the drawings are also characterized by their eroticism. As an example, the *Ganymede* that was offered privately to Cavalieri and that is supposed to symbolize the poet’s feelings for the young man possessed a dual iconographical significance: though the myth of Ganymede represented (mystical ascent through) Platonic love and could thus denote longing for divine union (especially in humanist circles of the Quattrocento), it also served as “an embodiment of homosexuality” and was widely known as an “archetype of the sexual attraction of a mature man to a youth” (29). The juxtaposition of sacred and profane longing in the presentation drawing for Cavalieri is not without tension: Michelangelo’s *Ganymede* “is shadowed […] by the darker emotions of ambivalence, guilt, and fear of punishment” (33).

The *Last Judgement* years clearly coincide with the Cavalieri period for Michelangelo, not just temporally, but as regards the artist’s psycho-spiritual preoccupations. The *Ganymede* is not the sole work to embody this intrapsychic conflict. As Saslow himself notes, *The Dream* also narrates the artist’s “awareness of the conflict between sexual temptations and the dictates of divine will” (45). In fact, of the six Cavalieri drawings, *The Dream* (1533) makes the most comprehensive autobiographical statement.

Maria Ruvoldt’s iconographic analysis of the drawing, which she believes to have been prepared for presentation to Cavalieri, reveals not only how conscious Michelangelo was of his conflicting desires for mystical and homoerotic union, but also how aware he was of his own melancholic nature and its attendant strengths and dangers. *The Dream* features a nude youth (symbol of the human mind/soul) reclining against a ball (symbolizing the Earth) that sits atop a box on which the male is perched and in which there are a number of masks, including a self-portrait of Michelangelo. An angelic visitor descends towards the reclining nude with a trumpet aimed at the young man’s forehead while in the background clouds are peppered with illustrations of vices, particularly erotic ones.

As “an allegory of the human soul awakened to virtue from vice,”75 the image portrays the nude youth awakening from “sleep to melancholic rapture” upon sight of the approaching angelic trumpeter. Though the iconography of the drawing lends itself to multiple interpretations relevant to Michelangelo as a man and artist (such as a consideration of the nude as a dreamer capable of saintly visions and possessing strong powers of invention), the young man clearly

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75 Ruvoldt, *The Italian Renaissance Imagery of Inspiration*, 142.
stands for melancholy – for the melancholic temperament and for “melancholic inspiration as a blend of positive gifts and dangerous temptations” (148). As Ruvoldt summarizes, Michelangelo’s *The Dream* depicts the self-portrait of “a melancholic figure simultaneously blessed by divine inspiration and tempted by sinful inclinations” of an erotic nature (152).

### 4.12 “Il monte:” Accidia and the Mind’s Presumption to Flight

Commenting on Michelangelo’s experience of love prior to meeting Cavalieri, Konrad Eisenbichler astutely notes that the poet was unsuccessful at enjoying his earthly attractions at the same time as he failed to achieve a spiritually gratifying Neoplatonic ascent:

Gherardo Perini and Febo del Poggi represent for Michelangelo the turmoils and delusions of an unfulfilling and failed physical love. Michelangelo was unable, with either man, to take advantage of the relationship in order to rise to a higher level (G99), or, at the very least, to enjoy a pleasant memory (G36). The necessary support system for either Neoplatonic ascension or an idyllic Petrarchan recollection had, in fact, been lacking and the experience developed, as it had started, along the death-oriented path of the physical world. (126)

Michelangelo was caught in a perilous state of incontinence, where he could neither indulge in, nor escape from his earthly longings. Because he was unable to go beyond his mortal guides to access the divine, Michelangelo’s love stopped short at the creature: “che fie di me? Qual guida o qual scorta / fie che con teco ma’ mi gioi o vaglia, / s’appresso m’ardi e nel partir m’uccidi?” (G80, vv. 12-14); “ché tardi e doppo il danno, chi consiglia?” (G99, v. 14). When he met Tommaso de’ Cavalieri in 1532, however, the poet found a solution and was able to alter his manner of loving, moving past the creature to reach the Creator.

In his handling of mystical sublimation in Michelangelo’s poetry, Eisenbichler observes that the poet “was obliged to search for a new mode of expression” and, consequently, that he “sublimated his sexual interests in [Cavalieri]” in two ways: “first by emphasizing the spiritual nature of his love, and eventually by underlining how this love leads the lover to a fuller appreciation of the divinity” (126). As evidence of this, Eisenbichler examines G60 and the poet’s reference, in the closing tercet of that sonnet, to loving that which is beyond the creature: “Quel che nel tuo bel volto bramo e ’mparo, / e mal compres’ è dagli umani ingegni, / chi ’l vuol saper convien che prima mora” (vv. 12-14). It seems that Michelangelo began to conceive of his relationship with the Roman nobleman as a friendship in God – an important stage in Augustine’s eschatological vision.
In “Friendship with God, Friendship in God: Traces in St. Augustine,” the theologian Joseph T. Lienhard emphasizes how the Holy Spirit, as the binding love between the Father and the Son, is a form of friendship: the Holy Spirit, the consubstantial and coeternal communion of the Father and the Son, may be called amicitia” (218). Once “purified in his moral character,” explains Lienard, man becomes capable of a friendship with God (215). The friendship is “constituted by grace” and the very transformation required to enable friendship with God is “brought about by justifying grace” (215). Once the friendship has been established, the soul is further transformed through grace: “and because the just man begins to be a friend of God, he himself is changed” (215). Lienhard then adds that in addition to a friendship with God Augustine also identifies a kind of human to human relationship that can be characterized as “friendship in God” (217). This kind of friendship consists of an unitas spiritus, the conception of which can be traced back to Acts 4:32: “They had one soul and one heart in the Lord [...] many men have many souls. If they love each other, theirs is one soul” – anima una et cor unum (219). According to Lienhard, this conception of friendship is to be understood “not morally, but metaphysically.” In the Confessiones, friendship in God is said to be constituted by the Holy Spirit which, as charity, serves as glue: “gluten or charity causes true friendship between human beings” and “Christian friends (who alone can be true friends) tend toward, but can never attain, a true unity of heart and soul.” This is precisely the conception and sentiment informing G59, a sonnet written for Cavalieri (together with G60 referenced above) that depicts a longing for union in amorous terms, but pointing towards a spiritual end:

S’un casto amor, s’una pietà superna,
s’una fortuna infra due amanti equale,
s’un’aspra sorte all’un dell’altro cale,
s’un spirito, s’un voler duo cor governa;
  s’un’anima in duo corpi è fatta eterna,  5
ambo levando al cielo e con pari ale;
s’Amor d’un colpo e d’un dorato strale
le viscer di duo petti arda e discerna;
  s’aman l’un l’altro e nessun se medesmo,
  d’un gusto e d’un diletto, e tal mercede
  c’a un fin voglia l’uno e l’altro porre:
  se mille e mille, non sarien centesmo
a tal nodo d’amore, a tanta fede;
e sol l’isdegno il può rompere e sciorre.
  10

(G59)
The references to one will governing two hearts (v. 4) and to one soul made eternal in two bodies echoes Acts 4:32. The emphasis on chaste love (by virtue of its position in v. 1) bespeaks a deeply Augustinian view of relating, which is further confirmed by the twin images of the united soul ascending to heaven on shared wings (v. 6) and to love’s golden arrow (v. 7), with wings and arrows figuring in the Confessions to describe the intellect’s return flight to God.

The spiritualizing of Michelangelo’s relationship with Cavalieri coincides with a divinizing of the young nobleman such that he becomes a Christ-like figure not only in the poet’s world, but in that of the artist as well. As Eisenbichler notes:

Tommaso’s role in Michelangelo’s ascension towards the divinity [...] becomes closely tied with the figure of Christ, so much so that occasionally a fusion of the two figures seems to occur, a fusion which is visually exemplified in the Sistine Fresco of the Final Judgement: Tommaso de’ Cavalieri becomes the actual model for the Christus Judex (127)

In the economy of the Rime, Cavalieri becomes someone to whom the poet might profitably turn for grace.

This fusion between Cavalieri and Christ is evident in Michelangelo’s poetry, as well. The sonnet Vorrei voler (G87), composed in the early 1530s, was inspired by Cavalieri but is seemingly addressed to Christ. The opening two quatrains describe how the poet’s will is perilously divided and how, unable to love the Lord, he knows not where to look for grace:

Vorrei voler, Signor, quel ch’io non voglio:  
tra ‘l foco e ‘l cor di ghiaccia un vel s’asconde  
che ‘l foco ammorza, onde non corrisponde  
la penna all’opre, e fa bugiardo ‘l foglio.  
I’ t’amò con la lingua, e poi mi doglio  
c’amor non giunge al cor; né so ben onde  
apra l’uscio alla grazia che s’infonde  
nel cor, che scacci ogni spietato orgoglio.  

(G87, 1-8)

The Augustinian theme of the divided will exemplified in the incipit is central to other poems written by Michelangelo during the poetic season known as the Cavalieri period that began a few years before he accepted the Last Judgement commission. The fire and ice of v. 2 function in an analogous manner to the images in Augustine and Dante for whom Hell – an

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76 For a discussion of the divided will in Michelangelo’s poetry, see Mussio, “The Augustinian Conflict in the Lyrics of Michelangelo,” 341-344.
experience of the will by those who have made a habit of vice – is rendered by the metaphor of ice, and where fire stands for the purifying love of God as the Holy Spirit. In Michelangelo’s sonnet, a veil of ice stands between fire (charity) and the poet’s heart and this renders him a liar: expressing one thing and feeling another, the poet is dishonest in his double-desire and this brings him sorrow (vv. 3-5). Because of the poet’s stubborn pride (v. 8), love does not reach his heart (v. 6), and so he looks for a way to experience the very grace that he simultaneously and fundamentally resists.

In the concluding tercets of the sonnet, new metaphors – of light and stone – are invoked to bring resolution to the quandary presented in the opening quatrains. Like a mystic, the poet beseeches the Lord to shed his light, symbol of grace and of the power to illuminate. This grace-full light of knowledge should break the wall (v. 2) that surrounds the poet’s heart and, more generally, occults the divine presence in the world (v. 3):

Squarcia ’l vel tu, Signor, rompi quel muro che con la suo durezza ne ritarda il sol della tuo luce, al mondo spenta!  
Manda ’l preditto lume a noi venturo, alla tuo bella sposa, acciò ch’io arda il cor senz’alcun dubbio, e te sol senta.

(G87, 9-14)

The poet refers to himself as a bride of Christ who longs to feel the divine presence (vv. 12-14), rather than just know it intellectually. The “sol” of vv. 11 and 14 links the image of Christ as sun (one thinks of the Apollo-like Christ at the heart of the Last Judgement, as well as the depiction of Christ in the first centuries of Christianity), with the unifocus of the poet’s desire: love of Christ alone (“te sol senta,” v. 14). The poet does not just seek to feel and to love Christ, but to love only him. What Michelangelo’s poet seeks is freedom from accidia, or sloth: the fourth deadly sin that in an Augustinian context, as well as in the Commedia, amounts to a failure to achieve pure and complete love of God.

Accidia is the topic of Virgil’s speech to Dante the wayfarer in Pugatorio XVII, vv. 85-139 while they journey from the third to the fourth terrace of the Mount of Purgatory. The fourth terrace is where the fourth deadly sin of sloth, or insufficient loving of the good, is

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77 For a detailed analysis of sloth in the Commedia, see Pamela Williams’ “Acedia as Dante’s sin in the Commedia” in Through human love to God, 19-34. Williams provides an important semantic clarification regarding the terms accidia and sloth: “Acedia or accidie, both in the Oxford English Dictionary, are not used in discussions of human behaviour and character any more. In its modern rendering, sloth, it is perhaps not as close as the other so-called deadly sins to its medieval meaning, especially in a theological context” (19).
corrected: “Ed elli a me: ‘L’amor del bene, scemo / del suo dover, qui ritta si ristora; / qui si ribatte il mal tardato remo” (vv. 85-87). Virgil explains the Augustinian concept of natural and mental love, the former of which is flawless, while the latter may err in aim or intensity (both too great and too little):

“Né creator né creatura mai,”
cominciò el, “figliuol, fu sanza amore,
o naturale o d’animo; e tu ’l sai.

Lo naturale è sempre sanza errore,
ma l’altro puote errar per male obietto
o per troppo o per poco vigore.

Mentre ch’elli è nel primo ben diretto,
e ne’ secondi sé stesso misura,
esser non può cagion di mal diletto;

ma quando al mal si torce, o con più cura
o con men che non dee corre nel bene,
contra ’l fattor adovra sua fattura.

(vv. 91-102)

Clarifying the nature of loving the good, which most do in a distorted or confused way, Virgil explains that the next terrace (the fourth) punishes those who, though loving the good, do so too slowly:

Ciascun confusamente un bene apprende
nel qual si queti l’animo, e disira;
per che di giugner lui ciascun contende.

Se lento amore a lui veder vi tira
o a lui quistar, acquesta cornice,
dopo giusto penter, ve ne martira.

(vv. 127-132).

Effectively, accidia may consist of loving too weakly (“per pocho vigore,” v. 96), or being too slow to love (“se lento amore a lui veder vi tira,” v. 130).

In his chiosa to the passage, Landino defines sloth as not loving God, “el vitio dell’accidia, non amare Dio.” Referring to the “pocho vigore” of v. 96, Landino explains lack of love as a coldness, clarifying that God, as the highest good, is honesty containing all virtues:

“che è quando quello che merita esser amato sommamente et sopra ogn’altra cosa, è amato pocho et freddamente, chome è Idio sommo bene, et l’honestà la qual contiene tutte le virtù.”

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78 The oar of v. 87 will become replaced by the metaphor of the wing; navigational imagery gives way to images of flight, as the poet’s will is redirected and his intellect restored.
79 Edmund Gartner discusses the Augustinian source of this discourse in *Dante and the Mystics*, 62-63.
Given Michelangelo’s juxtaposition, in sonnet G87, of ice, inability to love, and dishonesty, it is safe to assume that he was familiar not only with the allegory of *Purgatorio* XVII but also with Landino’s gloss of that canto. This may not be the only Dantesque passage from which Michelangelo drew – consciously or unconsciously – in elaborating G87.

Dante the wayfarer exits Purgatory and enters Earthly Paradise atop the mountain in *Purgatorio* XXVII, when his will has been freed, straightened and healed (v. 140: “libero, dritto e sano è tuo arbitrio”). Before reaching Earthly Paradise, the pilgrim must pass through the purifying flames. Afraid and resistant to this final purgation, Dante hesitates, but Virgil encourages him to enter with confidence the flames that consume but do not kill:

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[“]Pon giù om, pon giù ogne temenza;
volgiti in qua e vieni: entra sicuro!”
E io pur fermo e contra consciënsa.
Quando mi vide star pur fermo e duro,
turbato un poco disse: “Or vedi, figlio:
tra Bëatrice e te è questo muro” 35
(vv. 31-36)
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On the threshold of Earthly Paradise there is a final battle between reason (Virgil) and senses (Dante) as the will of the poet delays its final transformation. The poet is not just firm, but obstinate, hard (“duro”) before the purifying flames. This resistance constitutes a wall between the poet and his beloved, between the poet and grace (Beatrice). The parallels between this canto and G87 may well have been intentional on Michelangelo’s part.

In sonnet G87, the poet’s inability to love Christ may well result not only for reasons of intensity – of the lack of vigour characterizing the poet’s divided will – but of aim: if Cavalieri is really the point of departure for the composition, then the poet’s challenge is as much to love the creator more than the creature in whom His beauty is reflected as it is to love passionately. The veil of ice between the poet’s heart and grace (fire) is also explained by the poet’s pride (v. 8). In the *Commedia*, pride and humility are linked to accidia. More specifically, in canto X of *Purgatorio*, on the terrace of the proud, the wayfarer succeeds in submitting his senses to reason for the love of God; according to Landino, he succeeds because he was attentive to the examples of humility he witnessed there (“era attento Danthe, a gl’exampli de humilità”).

In *Purgatorio* X, the pilgrim encounters the proud who are laden with heavy weights (which Landino describes as “saxi di gran peso”) and whose minds are described as ill because

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they do not yearn for the Good (“mente infermi,” v.122).\textsuperscript{81} Owing to the heavy weight of their souls and their infirm intellects, it is presumptuous for the proud (as it was for Ulysses) to attempt flight to the divine. In canto X of \textit{Purgatorio}, Dante chastises the Christians for their pride and presumption; the readiness to ascend to the divine through earthly beauty by those who have not yet subjected their senses fully to reason is likened to a caterpillar (\textit{verme}) before it has attained its final form (\textit{farfalla}):

\begin{center}
O superbi cristian, miser lassi, 
che, de la vista de la mente infermi, 
fidanza avete ne’ retrosi passi, 
non v’accorge voi che noi siam vermi 
nati a formar l’angelica farfalla, 
che vola a la giustizia sanza schermi? 
Di che l’animo vostro in alto galla, 
poi siete quasi antomata in fidetto, 
sí come vermo in cui formazion falla? 
\end{center}

(\textit{vv. 121-129})

In his gloss to v. 124, Landino focuses his discussion on the silkworm in particular: “sono molti vermi e \textit{maxime} e bigotti, che fanno la seta, e quali benché sieno animali imperfecti, nientedimeno concepono in sé una farfalla, la quale crepando, el vermine esce, et vola via.” (17-20, vol. 3, p. 1212). In Landino’s understanding, the butterfly is our soul and the silkworm our body, which we shed upon death (21-23, vol. 3, p. 1212); if we are inclined to virtue, our soul, like the butterfly, rises to God, but if we are disposed to vice, the weight of these vices will cause the soul to fall by its weight into Hell (23-26, vol. 3, pp. 1212-1213): “Ma se escie lorda di vitii, el peso di quegli l’aggrava, et falla rovinare allo ’nferno” (25-26, vol. 3, pp. 1212-1213). The Landinian gloss to this canto may have been another source of Michelangelo’s poetry from the Cavalieri period.

Sonnet G94, written in Rome in 1535, is also assumed to have been composed for Tommaso de’ Cavalieri. The opening quatrain takes as its subject the silkworm and its fate. A lowly creature, the silkworm is hard on himself but kind to others, whom he works and sacrifices to clothe by stripping himself of his own skin:

\begin{center}
D’altrui pietoso e sol di sé spietato
\end{center}

\textsuperscript{81} Cf. Michelangelo’s sonnet of the night, G102, which may also be read in term of Augustinian thought based on its semantic focus on healing and remedies: “intelletto intero” (v. 4), “infirma parte” (v. 7), “buon rimedio” (v. 11; cf. G18, v. 1), and “tu renda sana nostra carn’inferma” (v. 12).
Like the silkworm, the poet wishes to clothe the beloved with his (the poet’s) own skin because in losing this mortal sheathing the poet would die and thus have a chance at transformation:

Così volesse al mie signor mie fato
vestir suo viva di mie morta spoglia,
che, come serpe al sasso si discoglia,
pur per morte potria cangiar mie stato.

(G94, vv. 4-8)

This sonnet is frequently referenced in discussions of the Last Judgement and for the artist’s decision to include a self-portrait in the flayed skin of St. Bartholomew.\textsuperscript{82} If, in fact, Cavalieri was the model for Christ in the fresco, then the importance of this sonnet to the discussion at hand is even greater.

The snake of G94 who sheds its skin on a rock occurs in another poem of the period, sestina G33, in which the poet expresses his sorrowful desire to be stripped of his old habit and renewed:

Qual vecchio serpe per istretto loco
passar poss’io, lasciando le vecchie arme,
e dal costume rinnovata e tolta
sie l’alma in vita e d’ogni umana cosa,
coprendo sé con più sicuro scudo,
ché tutto el mondo a morte è men che nulla.

(G33, vv. 6-12)

The poet longs to replace its current sheathing (skin) with a stronger one (shield). The Augustinian language and metaphors are ubiquitous.

In the opening stanza, the poet laments his powerlessness to defend himself. The images of the sword and shield echo Ephesians 6:16-18,\textsuperscript{83} but the mention of bad habit (v. 5) and of

\textsuperscript{82} Kevin Brownlee’s scholarship on the deificatio (“trasumanar”) of the wayfarer in Paradiso I (vv. 70-72) suggests the flaying of Marsyas as a point of reference for the pilgrim’s spiritual metamorphosis (“Pauline Vision and Ovidian Speech in Paradiso I,” 213).

\textsuperscript{83} “Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God: praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit.” In his discussion of Genesis in Book 2 of De Genesi ad Manicheos examined in section 4.6 of this dissertation. Augustine also provides an allegorical interpretation of the fall that emphasizes the
descending grace (v. 6) are both reminiscent of Augustine of the *Confessions*. So too is the image of grace descending from above like water (*Confessions*, IX, x, 23) that was later appropriated by Dante in the *Commedia* (Par. III, v. 90, Par. XXIV, v. 91) and that also appears in G33 (v. 6):

> But with the mouth of our heart we panted for the high waters of Your fountain, the fountain of life which is with You: that being sprinkled from that fountain according to our capacity, we might in some sense meditate upon so great a matter.  

*(Confessions, IX, x, 23)*

> Chiaro mi fu allor come ogne dove  
> in cielo è paradiso,  
> del sommo ben d’un modo non vi piove.  

*(Par. III, vv. 88-90)*

need to love God with one’s whole heart, mind and soul: “If he should at some point turn to God by way of the flaming sword, that is, through temporal tribulations, acknowledging and grieving over his sins and accusing himself, not some foreign nature which does not exist, he might merit pardon. Then, by way of the fullness of knowledge, which is charity, loving God who is immutable above all things and loving him with his whole heart, and his whole soul, and with his whole mind, and loving his neighbour as himself, he will arrive at the tree of life and will live for eternity (136). In the same section he refers to Eph. 6:16-17 and the helmet of salvation, shield of faith, sword of the spirit.

84 *Confessions*, IX, X, 23-25 narrates Augustine’s vision at Ostia while he and his mother were discussing God in His presence (“in the presence of Truth, which You are,” 23). It would appear that the sprinkling water stands for grace as the gift of knowledge, for Augustine and his mother were wondering “what the eternal life of the saints could be like” (23). The Latin original reads “Sed inhiabamus ore cordis in superna fluenta fontis tui, fontis vitae, qui est apud te, ut inde pro captu nostro adpersi quoquo modo rem tantam cogitaremus;” cf. Giuliani Vigini’s Italian translation “Ma intanto, con la bocca del cuore spalancata, anelavamo alle acque che scorrono dall’alto della tua sorgente, la sorgente di vita che è in te, affinché, dissetati secondo la nostra capacità, potessimo in qualche modo concepire una realtà così grande.” Both the Latin and Italian text are reproduced from Giuliani Vigini’s edition of the *Confessiones: Le Confessioni di Sant’Agostino*.

85 In *Paradiso* III, Piccarda Donati explains how each soul is assigned its place in the Sphere of the Moon through its harmony with divine will. Charity tempers the will so that the blessed thirst only for that which they have: “Fratre, la nostra volonta quieta / virtù di carità, che fa volder / sol quel ch’avemo, e d’altro non ci asseta” (vv. 70-72). The souls in this first Heaven desire only that which God wills: “Se disïassimo esser più superne, / foran discordi li nostri disiri / dal voler di colui che ne cerne; / che vedrai non capere in questi giri” (vv. 73-76). The state of beatitude corresponds to keeping oneself within that which the divine wills: “Anzi formale ad esto beato esse / tennersi dentro a la divina voglia, / per ch’una fansi nostre voglie stesse” (vv. 79-81). Donati employs a nautical metaphor to convey the peace of the blessed: “E’n la sua volontade è nostra pace; / ell’ è quel mare al qual tutto si move / ciò ch’ella cria o che natura face” (vv. 85-87). It is at this point in the canto that the pilgrim apprehends “how grace does not rain down upon each soul in the same way” (“del sommo bene d’un modo non vi piove,” v. 90). The dialogue is manifestly Augustinian for its discussion of the will and for the need of man to submit his will to that of the divine, a feat that he can only achieve through grace and charity. This point is the thesis fleshed out in G70 from the experiential point of view of the speaker’s subjective distress at being unable to control and direct his will and his love instinct. *Paradiso* III seems to wink at *Confessions* IX, x, 23. This is supported by Landino’s analysis of the passage in which he explicitly names St. Augustine (l. 31) and his theory of creation *ex nihilo* (*Comento*, Par. III, vv. 70-87, II. 18-32).
onde ti venne?” E io: “La larga ploia
de lo Spirito Santo, ch’è diffusa
in su le vecchie e ’n su le nuove cuoia”86

(Par. XXIV, vv. 88-93)

Sie pur, fuor di mie proprie, c’ogni alt’arme
defender par ogni mie cara cosa;
altra spada, altra lancia e altro scudo
fuor delle proprie forze non son nulla,
tant’è la trista usanza, che m’ha tolta
la grazie che ’l ciel piove in ogni loco.

(G33, vv. 1-6).

This sestina is the first in the Rime (the second is G70, which was explored in detail above for its navigational imagery and open discussion of the personal will in relation to that of the divine). G33 likewise constitutes the first appeal for grace in the Rime.

Amore, i’ sento già di me far nulla;
natura del peccat’ è ’n ogni loco.
Spoglia di me me stesso, e col tuo scudo,
colla pietra e tuo vere e dolci arme,
difendimi da me, c’ogni altra cosa
è come non istata, in brieve tolta.

Mentre c’al corpo l’alma non è tolta,
Signor, che l’universo puo’ far nulla,
fattor, governator, re d’ogni cosa,
poco ti fie aver dentr’a me loco;

(G33, vv. 12-21)

Similar to the ubiquity of the grace that rains in all places (v. 6), and so all parts of the poet are full of sin (v. 13). The poet needs someone to change and to protect him (vv. 14-16), so he asks to be stripped of himself (v. 14) and for the Lord to reside in him (v. 21).87

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86 Cf. Landino, Comento, Par. XXIV, vv. 88-99, ll. 1-5: “Domanda Pietro Danthe onde gli venne la fede et onde fu el principio, et lui risponde che gli venne della larga ploia, cioè piova, i. dalla summa abondantia, dello Spirito sancto, el quale infondendosi in molti sancti huomini et illuminandogli della verità loro, la scripsono nelle nuove et nelle vecchie cuoia, cioè carte”

87 Similar themes reappear in the madrigal G161 (1538-1541), where the poet seeks to change his hide but cannot overcome his habit of sin (“Ch’ancor ch’i’ cangi ’l pelo / per gli ultim’anni e corti, / cangiar non posso il vecchio mie antico uso,” vv. 7-9) and so turns to the Lord asking to be taken from himself and remade (“Signor, nell’ore streme, / stendi ver’ me le tue piotose braccia, / tomm’a me stesso e famm’un che ti piaccia” (vv. 15-17). At the stage when G33 and G94 were written, the element of divine refashioning has not yet entered Michelangelo’s poetry. This comes later, during the Colonna period.
An analysis of G90 reveals that the spiritual influence of Tommaso de’ Cavalieri on the poet had great impact, but did not last. On the surface, this sonnet from the Cavalieri period resembles the later poems dedicated to Colonna above:

I’ mi son caro assai più ch’i’ non soglio;
poi ch’i’ t’ebbi nel cor più di me vaglio,
come pietra c’aggiuntovi l’intaglio
è di più pregio che ’l suo primo scoglio.

O come scritta o pinta carta o foglio
più si riguarda d’ogni straccio o taglio,
tal di me fo, da po’ ch’i’ fu’ berzaglio
segnato dal tuo viso, e non mi doglio.

Sicur con tale stampa in ogni loco
vo, come quel c’ha incanti o arme seco,
c’ogni periglo gli fan venir meno.

I’ vaglio contr’a l’acqua e contr’al foco,
col segno tuo rallonno ogni cieco,
e col mie sputo sano ogni veleno.

(G90)

The poet concedes to having grown more precious to himself since having received the beloved (Cavalieri) in his heart. The poet’s value has increased like the worth of a stone that has been engraved, or a sheet or paper that has been written on or painted. Just as the paper embellished with the written word or paint bears the mark of the author or artist that adorned it, so too does the poet bear the mark of his beloved, which empowers him to fear nothing and to perform divine miracles in service of mankind. Cavalieri, like Colonna, served as a muse for Michelangelo, who drew upon the same images, employed as similes, to convey their inspiring effect on him: stone and carving, paper and writing. Yet, the ultimate message is essentially distinct.

In G90, the focus remains on the physical, corporeal realm: a carved stone has more worth than a plain one because it has been adorned, and a sheet or paper has more worth than a scrap of paper because it is more refined. The focus of the discourse is on the ennobling effect of the beloved and what he adds to the base matter that was the poet before meeting him. There is no sense of transformation or metamorphosis, just embellishment, ornamentation. While the miracles performed by the poet are akin to those expected from Christ or a saint, the utterance of the quatrain, its global meaning, communicates grandeur rather than spiritual height. The poet does not ascend. He is not healed and there is no mention of restoration, moral or spiritual.
There is no talk of grace, or mercy, or the fate of the soul. The base matter (stone, paper) that symbolizes the poet before meeting the beloved remains fundamentally unchanged after their encounter: the stone is still a rock, only prettier; there is no alchemical transformation, merely beautification. As Cavalieri was an attractive and gracious nobleman, this poem seems true to the essence of how Michelangelo, an older man, relatively unattractive and rough around the edges would have felt in his presence.

Though he was strongly impacted from his connection to Cavalieri, Michelangelo remained a “rock, only prettier.” There was no lasting inner “alchemical transformation, merely beautification” nor even a subtle re-orientation of the intellect. Christopher Ryan remarked upon the “notable difference in tone” between the poems dedicated to Vittoria Colonna and those dedicated to Cavalieri, with “the two groups of poems show[ing] that the two friendships nourished different aspects of Michelangelo’s religious life;” for Ryan, Colonna, whom the poet addresses with the same reverence he approaches Christ and God in his lyrics, is the true cause of the poet’s moral improvement and regeneration, and “she is portrayed as the immediate source of his movement from evil to good, from life to death,” thus constituting not only a muse, but an instrument of divine grace.88

Christopher Ryan’s conclusions and the observations had been previously stated by Konrad Eisenbichler (1987) in his treatment of mystical sublimation in the Rime: “There really is no final intellectual or spiritual elevation, no resolution for the unfulfilled physical urges and pains the poet feels for his beloved [Cavalieri]. The philosophical frame offered by the Platonic ladder of love is still very much constructed on physical attractions and forces, still resting upon the senses” (128). While the poet begins through Cavalieri to direct his attention to God, he is not able to do so fully, he does not transcend accidia: his aim is rectified, but he remains slow to love and weakly enflamed. Michelangelo begins to heal this infirmity (imbecillitas) through his friendship with Colonna primarily because, as Eisenbichler affirms, “first and foremost, Vittoria was a woman and Michelangelo was obliged to re-examine his concepts of beauty and love [...] In his affection for Vittoria Colonna, Michelangelo considered her femininity and, ultimately, discounted it; he was not attracted to her for her physical beauty [...], but rather by her spirit and her intellect” (128).

88 For Ryan references, see chapter two of the present dissertation, section 2.5, pp. 65-66.
4.13 “Il foco colla spada”: Colonna, Grace, and Divine Refashioning

The second chapter of this thesis examined the poetry Michelangelo composed for Vittoria Colonna or was inspired by her in light of the network of Reform-minded intellectuals known as the Spirituali. Many observations from this earlier analysis are relevant to the argument at hand. The first is that for the Spirituali “relationships became a locus of salvation” as well as a vehicle for “relational self-transformation.”

Second, we noted that Colonna understood her spiritual friendship with Cardinal Reginald Pole in mystical terms as “an intimate friend” of Christ (“sposo”) who “prepares her” (9). Third, Colonna’s “letters as well as her writings seem to have served an almost dogmatic spiritual function echoing Valdés’ guidance [...] to seek advice from those who been illuminated through the light of others that they may illuminate you in turn” – an intention not dissimilar to the edification of people sought by both Augustine and Dante as mystagogues (9). More specifically, chapter two highlighted Abigail Brundin’s study on the famed noblewoman and her conclusion that Colonna’s poetic gift manuscript for Michelangelo was intended to fulfill a didactic function uniquely tailored to the artist’s personal concerns (11).

As regards Michelangelo’s poetry dedicated to and/or inspired by Colonna, the second chapter also furnished insights particular to the matter in question. It showed, for example, that sonnet G151 illustrates the difficulty, if not the impossibility, of ascending to God by one’s own contemplation alone (33). It reveals that only the lady can extract good deeds from the poet because he lacks the will and strength to complete the task for himself (33). Madrigal G153 reveals that it is only through the woman full of grace that purification takes place (34) and adds that the poet must first be torn down and broken before he can be filled and ultimately made perfect (35). Poem G235, the well-known madrigal “Un uomo in una donna, anzi uno dio” addressed to Colonna, claims that a god speaks through the beloved and the poet states that he has been made other than himself as a result (49). Sonnet G236, a seeming extended discourse on the Holy Spirit, explains how the poet, who possessed little worth, was reborn to great value through his beloved’s efforts, much like a rough stone that becomes a work of art through the efforts of an artist (50). Eisenbichler similarly notes: 1) “In the poems addressed to Vittoria, the recurring image is not that of the artist’s own ascension through love to the divine, but rather Vittoria’s own moulding of Michelangelo to reshape him into a better, worthier creature. The

89 Quotes are from Furey; see chapter two of the present dissertation, section 2.2, pp. 49-50.
90 Unless otherwise indicated, page numbers in this paragraph refer to chapter two of this dissertation and comments about the poems are conclusions arrived at through analysis in chapter two.
previous direction of interest has changed; instead of the poet rising to the divine, the divine is bending over to re-form the poet;” and, 2) “The Neoplatonic theory of the ‘concetto’ that is revealed by removing the excess covering that envelops it is now turned towards Michelangelo himself. Michelangelo becomes the passive raw material which is ennobled by an active exterior force” (129).

In madrigal G111, one of the first of the Colonna compositions, the poet who is slow to love (“per virtù propria tardi s’innamora,” v. 10) invites the lady (Colonna) to draw the image of her divinity into him (“Disegna in me di fuora, / com’io fo in pietra od in candido foglio, / che nulla ha dentro, e èvvi ciò ch’io voglio,” vv. 11-13); through her “grace and mercy” the poet is freed from doubt (“cessato il dubbio, tuo grazia e mercede,” v. 6). An analysis of the madrigal in chapter two revealed a poignant message, that it would be a sin for the poet to deny himself the experience of being transformed for the better by refusing to follow his lady where she leads (27-28). She leads him to heaven. Through her, Michelangelo accesses the “grace that rains down from heaven,” but that his “bad habit” prevented him from receiving in G33 (vv. 5-6). In G159, Colonna becomes the source of this grace (“la grazia, che da voi divina piove,” v. 2); in Eisenbichler’s words, “Vittoria’s effect on Michelangelo is seen as a heavenly grace which descends upon the unworthy lover; it is a freely-given gift, not a reward for earthly achievements” (129).

In madrigal G264, supposed navigational imagery (vv. 7-8) follows the poet’s announcement to the beloved that he wishes Love would imprint on his soul the image of her that he has long carried in his heart so that he might be set free from the weight of his body (vv. 1-6):

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Come portato ho già più tempo in seno
l’immagin, donna, del tuo volto impressa,
or che morte s’appressa,
con previlegio Amore ne stampi l’alma,
che del carcer terreno
felice sie ’l dipor suo grieve salma.
Per procella o per calma
con tal segno sicura,
sie come croce contro a’ suo avversari;
e donde in ciel ti rubò la natura,
ritorni, norma agli angeli alti ed chiari,
c’a rinnovar s’impari
là sù pel mondo un spirito in carne involto,
che dopo te gli resti il tuo bel volto.
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(G264)
The madrigal is fourteen verses in length and it consists of two sentences. The second, partially reproduced above, expresses the poet’s hope that the sign of the beloved (a kind of anointing?), once imprinted on the soul, might serve as a cross and thus secure the pilgrim’s safety in fair or foul weather. It recalls madrigal G162 (examined in chapter two) in which the poet, seeking salvation, offers himself as a blank sheet to the beloved’s “divine ink” so that mercy might “write the truth” into him (39). The soteriological scheme of ascent is combined with a process of divine intervention that is uniquely Augustinian in its fusion of Neoplatonic and Christian symbols.

If during the Cavalieri period the poet did not know where to find grace (G80, G99), in G162 it is clear that he may access it through Colonna and the connection they share. Through her grace a part of him dies (v.8):

Non men gran grazia, donna, che gran doglia
ancide alcun, che ’l furto a morte mena,
privo di speme e ghiacciato ogni vena,
se vien subito scampo che ’l discioglia.

Simil se tuo mercé , più che ma’ soglia,
nella miseria mie d’affanni piena,
con superchia pietà mi rasserena,
par, più che ’l pianger, la vita mi toglia.

(G150, vv. 5-8)

She enables his soul to ascend, “Tanto sopra me stesso / mi fai, donna, salire: (G154, v. 1-2). With her grace his soul escapes its death: “Se non ch’i’ sia diviso / dall’alma per tuo grazia, e che quest’una / fugga teco suo morte, è mie fortuna” (G154, vv. 12-14). She is the vehicle by which the Holy Spirit become manifest in the poet’s life. With Colonna, the poet experiences transformations particular to the second gift of the Holy Spirit in Augustine’s schema – what is hard becomes soft, what is rigid becomes flexible, and what is cold becomes warm.

In the opening quatrains of G257, an incomplete sonnet possibly addressed to Colonna in the year or two prior to her death (1547), the poet wonders why the firm faith and inner ardour

91 Cf. G87 and the poet’s declaration that his divided will, in preventing him from truly loving the Lord, “makes his page a liar” (v. 4).
92 Cf. Confessions, VIII, ix, 21: “It is therefore not monstrousness, partly to will, partly not to will, but a sickness of the soul so weighted down by custom that it cannot wholly rise even with the support of truth. Thus there are two wills in us, because neither of them is entire: and what is lacking in one is present in the other” (155).
that lifts his heart beyond the heights to which it can rise of its own accord do not come more frequently or in a more timely manner:

Perché sì tardi e perché non più spesso  
con ferma fede quell’interno ardore  
che mi lieva di terra e porta ’l core  
dove per suo virtù non gli è concesso?

(G257, vv. 1-4)

Pondering the long intervals between the lady’s offerings of love, the poet concludes that it must be because distance and desire increase value:

Forse c’ogn’ intervallo n’è promesso  
da l’uno a l’altro tuo messo d’amore,  
perc’ ogni raro ha più forz’e valore  
quant’è più desïato e meno appresso.

(G257, vv. 5-8)

The love the poet receives from the lady is both valuable and rare because it is divine: “La notte è intervallo, e ’l di la luce: / l’una m’aghìaccia ’l cor, l’altro l’inflammà / d’amor, di fede e d’un celeste foco (G257, vv. 9-11). The night that freezes the poet’s heart and the day that warms it correspond to the respective absence and presence of love, faith and heavenly fire. The antitheses of night and day, and of freezing and burning, convey the concept of interval. In the context of the metonymic equations whereby day as light stands for heat and sun, and night denotes the absence of these, the interval of v. 10 indicates conditions of both darkness and the cold, which could well symbolize Hell as the habit of vice, a situation that is resolved by a third element, the presence of the beloved and the heavenly triune experience she engenders. If the heavenly fire is taken to be the Holy Spirit and love is interpreted as charity, then it can be said that the divine beloved affects the poet in such a way that he experiences faith, hope and charity and it can be said that through Colonna not only is Michelangelo’s hard outer shell (habit of vice) shattered, but the poet himself overcomes his earlier accidia, or the non-love of God.

Given the purification and re-creation of the poet through the agency of the beloved with whom he shared a profound spiritual friendship, one might also venture to suggest that, during

93 “Non pur d’argento o d’oro / vinto dal foco esser po’ piena aspetta, / vota d’opra prefetta, / la forma, che sol fratta il tragge fora; / tal io, col foco ancora / d’amor dentro ristoro il desir voto di beltà infinita / [...] / Alta donna e gradita / in me discende per si brevi spazi, / c’a trarla fuor convien mi rompa e strazi” (G153, vv. 1-6, 9-12)
94 Cf. G87 in which the poet expresses his frustrated longing to feel the light of God in his heart.
these years, counsel, the fifth gift of the Holy Spirit was operative in the poet’s life: “Se ’l poco accresce, e ’l mie superchio lima / vostra mercé, qual penitenzia aspetta / mie fiero ardor, se mi gastiga e ’nsegna (G236, vv. 12-14). Thus Michelangelo’s poetry from the Colonna period also meets the criteria of the fifth stage in Augustine’s eschatology: “the soul continues its work of purification, especially practicing love of neighbour.”

Chapter two pointed out that following Colonna’s death Michelangelo would do away with intermediaries (such as a real or fictitious beloveds) as well as with his cryptic or seemingly codified language and turn to address God or Christ openly (52). Eisenbichler perhaps states it best when he asserts that, after Colonna’s death, Michelangelo “devote[d] his energies to a greater, more demanding lover: Christ himself” (130). These observations indicate a wayfarer who has been freed of accidia: “the soul withdraws from the mundane and the carnal and turns to the love of the eternal” (Lierde, “The Teaching,” 49). The christocentric poems of Michelangelo’s final years reflect the spiritual experiences corresponding to the sixth stage of Augustine’s eschatology and to the gift of understanding: “the eye of the heart has been purified” and “the soul attains a certain vision of God;” the soul is granted a personal intuition of God that consists of an experience of faith (rather than one of vision) (Leirde, “The Teaching,” 53).

4.14 The Final Years: Christ and The Gift of Understanding

In the poetry of Michelangelo’s later years, the poet increasingly refers to direct experiences of the divine, beginning with the “divine pruove” of G273 (v. 8). The poet beseeches the Lord to make himself visible everywhere so that he might burn with charity, as he has done before:

\[
\text{Deh fammiti vedere in ogni loco!} \\
\text{Se da mortal bellezza arder mi sento,} \\
\text{appresso al tuo mi sarà foco ispento,} \\
\text{e io nel tuo sarò, com’ero, in foco.} \\
\text{(G274, vv. 1-4).}
\]

The poet asks Christ to have mercy on him as he has had in the past: “miserere di me, da ch’io son nato / a la tuo legge; e non fie cosa nuova” (G280, vv. 7-8). Echoing both Augustine and Petrarch, Michelangelo’s poet despairs lest the Lord not return to him with his customary graciousness: “Ma che poss’io, Signor, s’a me non vieni /coll’usata ineffabil cortesia” (G286,
vv. 5-6). In an optimistic quatrain, the poet affirms that he is sure of extra help during times of extreme suffering because the Lord has been his support and guide since he was young:

\[
\text{Di giorno in giorno insin da’ mie prim’anni,} \\
\text{Signor, soccorso tu mi fusti e guida,} \\
\text{onde l’anima mia ancor si fida} \\
\text{di doppia aita ne’ mie doppi affanni.} \\
\text{(G287)}
\]

In the final poem of the *Rime*, the unfinished sonnet G301, the poet asks for Christ’s help in securing pardon, reminding the Lord that he must promise this since he owes it to those souls to whom he has shown himself:

\[
\text{Del mie tristo uso e dagli esempli rei,} \\
\text{fra le tenebre folte, dov’i’ sono,} \\
\text{spero aita trovar non che perdono,} \\
\text{c’a chi ti mostri, tal prometter dei.} \\
\text{(G301, vv. 4-8)}
\]

As the verses of the final poem of Michelangelo’s *Rime*, the poet’s journey of sanctification was far from complete. Together with these poems of divine presence, one finds evidence of the continued journey of purgation from sin through guidance and divine refashioning. The poet still sees himself as full of sin and appears haunted by a deeply rooted habit of vice:

\[
\text{Carico d’anni e di peccato pieno,} \\
\text{e col trist’uso radicato e forte,} \\
\text{vicin mi veggio a l’una e l’altra morte,} \\
\text{e parte ’l cor nutrico di veleno.} \\
\text{(G293, vv. 1-4)}
\]

He laments that in his final years his thoughts *should* (“dovrien”) turn to one point alone, but this experience eludes him:

\[
\text{Gl’infiniti pensier mie d’error pieni,} \\
\text{negli ultim’anni della vita mia,} \\
\text{restringer si dovrien ’n un sol che sia} \\
\text{guida agli eterni suo giorni sereni.} \\
\text{(G286, vv. 1-4)}
\]
The poet, still lacking the strength he needs to avoid recidivism and to remain free from the vice of *accidita*, turns to the Lord for guidance and intervention:

\[ \text{Né proprie forze ho, c’al bisogno siéno} \\
\text{per cangiart vita, amor, costume o sorte,} \\
\text{senza le tue divine e chiare scorte,} \\
\text{d’ogni fallace corso guida e freno.} \]

(G293, vv. 5-8)

The poet’s appeal for assistance is similarly echoed by admonitions to Christ to shorten the poet’s uphill journey:

\[ \text{Anzi che del mortal la privi e spogli,} \\
\text{prego m’ammezzi l’alta e erta via,} \\
\text{e fie più chiara e certa la tornata.} \]

(G293, vv. 12-14)

\[ \text{Ammezzami la strada c’al ciel sale,} \\
\text{Signor mie caro, e a quel mezzo solo} \\
\text{Salir m’è bisogno la tuo ‘ita} \]

(G288, vv. 9-11)

The poet laments that he has sinned despite the presence of grace: “né sol le grazie suo poste in oblio, / ma con lor, più che senza, a peccar volto” (G288, vv. 3-4). Though the poet does not reach full and abiding presence of the divine in this life, Michelangelo does commence a purgative journey and his transformation, though incomplete from one perspective, is nevertheless profound.

A comparison of G84 (Cavalieri Period), G151 (Colonna Period), and G273 (Christ Period) charts the metamorphosis of the poet in terms of his intellect and that which he draws from the Other as a result. In G84, the poet addresses a mortal beloved and concludes that if the desired individual exhibits both humility and pride, the poet is doomed to experience pride, because it is mirrored within him:

\[ \text{così, signor mie car, nel petto vostro,} \\
\text{quante l’orgoglio è forse ogni atto umile;} \\
\text{ma io sol quel c’a me proprio è simile} \\
\text{ne traggo, come fuor nel viso mostro.} \]

(G84, vv. 5-8)
In G151, by contrast, the beloved is a “donna leggiadra, altera e diva” (v. 6), a divine and idealized love object. An analogy of drawing forth from the beloved that which is most similar to oneself is repeated in the closing tercet:

se dentro del tuo cor morte e pietate
porti in un tempo, e che ’l mio basso ingegno
non sappia, ardendo, trarne altro che morte.

(G151, vv. 12-14)

In this later sonnet, it is not pride or humility that the poet sees in the beloved’s chest/breast (“petto,” G84, v. 5), but death or mercy that he intuits in her heart; in other words, it is not the human vice of pride and its virtue humility that the poet contemplates gazing upon the beloved, but the divine consequences of these: death and mercy, respectively.

The incomplete sonnet G273 constitutes a metaphysical reflection on the same topic that was given a personal expression in G84 and G151. The poet states that God reveals himself to individuals differently and that his grace rains down on them in different amounts (vv. 3-4) according to the relative health of their intellect, “in proportion to how much one’s sickness has dulled one’s mind to evidence of the divinity”:\n
A me d’un modo e d’altri in ogni altrove:
più e men chiaro o più lucente e terso,
secondo l’egritudin, che disperso
ha l’intelletto a le divine pruove.

(G273, vv. 5-8)

The poet has evolved in his will (which no longer aims at a mortal beloved, but at the divine) and his intellect. In Augustine’s system, the sixth stage is the final stage of true purification. Michelangelo reaches the heights of this lofty phase, and yet it appears that he fails to surpass it, even if one presumes that he, like Augustine, exaggerated his spiritual turmoils as a pious exercise. Perhaps, following his death, Michelangelo achieved the seventh level of wisdom wherein “the soul contemplates the Truth and experiences total peace; its likeness to God is restored.”

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95 Saslow’s translation (Buonarroti, The Poetry, 462).
4.15 Michelangelo, Petrarch and the “navigatio ad patriam”: A Point of Difference

Many of Michelangelo’s poems echo or evoke passages from Augustine’s Confessions, especially those rhymes that speak of guilt and grace. Many of these are directly or indirectly linked to Petrarch’s Canzoniere, which Michelangelo knew thoroughly. It is because of Augustine’s presence in Petrarch’s Canzoniere and Secretum that the fourteenth-century Italian poet is considered the vehicle through which Augustine of the Confessions reached Renaissance society. Ideas on guilt and grace, as well as other discrete elements of Augustinian thought, are deeply present in the psychologically afflicted and morally conflicted speaker of Petrarch’s Canzoniere. These ideas and their Petrarchan expression find an indisputable echo in Michelangelo’s Rime. As we have seen, there is also in the Rime an overarching conception of the journey of the human soul from birth to death and into the afterlife that is strikingly Augustinian. Augustine’s eschatology centres upon the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit in relation to the seven stages of spiritual ascent. A correlative of this vision is likewise at the heart of the Commedia. Michelangelo refers to these important moments in Dante’s grand epic via intertextual references, with or without commentary, to indicate both parallels and differences between the pilgrim and the speaker of the Rime.

Dante is by no means the only premoder Italian poet to employ the boat as a metaphor for the journey of the soul. Petrarch had also employed the same image. The points of similarity and contrast between Dante’s use of nautical imagery and metaphor and Petrarch’s use are neither casual nor insignificant: Petrarch employed them in conscious reference to Dante’s works, with which the Petrarchan corpus dialogues on the topics of both writing and redemption. This dialogue of Petrarchan texts with their Dantean precursors, specifically the one between the Canzoniere and the Commedia, heightens the importance for Michelangelo’s readers of understanding the mechanics of the figurative hall of mirrors operating within the orders of influence informing the Rime given their dual inspiration in Dante and Petrarch. The fact that Dante and Petrarch were both readers of Augustine makes it even more relevant for the present discussion to consider the influence of the one upon the other.

In Zygmunt G. Barański and Theodore J. Cachey, Jr’s recent collection of articles, Petrarch & Dante: Anti-Dantism, Metaphysics, Tradition (2009), Giuseppe Mazzotta recalls

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96 Mussio’s “The Augustinian Conflict in the Lyrics of Michelangelo” is a seminal publication in this respect.
97 On this topic, see Gill’s Augustine in the Italian Renaissance, chapter 3, “Petrarch’s Pocket” (94-124).
that “Dante’s work remained a steady point of reference” for Petrarch, and that “explicit acknowledgments and echoes of Dante’s language and thought can be found everywhere in Petrarch’s texts;” in the *Canzoniere* in particular, “Dante’s lexicon is systematically employed” (“Petrarch’s Dialogue,” 178). This general observation holds particularly true for nautical imagery and metaphors in Petrarch. As regards navigational imagery in the *Canzoniere*, three poems merit extended analysis: Petrarch’s sestina 80, and sonnets 189 and 235 respectively. Of these three, only one, *RVF* 235, foregrounds the poet’s spiritual life.

Sestina 80 is constructed on six substantives “vita,” “scogli,” “legno,” “fine,” “porto,” and “vela,” four of which explicitly pertain to the semantic field of navigation. The speaker, meditating upon his experience of “amorous life” (“amorosa vita,” v. 8) by means of the analogy of a sailor at sea laments that, despite hoping to arrive at a better port, he has been carried repeatedly onto the rocks (“et sperando venire a miglior porto, / poi mi condusse in più di mille scogli,” vv. 9-10) because the poet was travelling in a “blind ship” (“cieco legno,” v.13). It pleased God (“poi piacque a lui che mi produsse in vita,” v. 16) to call the poet back from the rocks far enough that he might see the destined port ( vv. 17-18). In spite of this divine assistance, the poet, who is still at sea, fears for his “frail ship” (“fraile legno,” v. 28) because it is not easy for him to abandon his accustomed life (“usata vita,” v. 36). And so the speaker prays directly to God for his ship to be directed to a good port before it crashes into the rocks: “Signor de la mia fine et de la vita: / prima ch’i’ fiacchi il legno tra li scogli / drizza a buon porto l’affannata vela” (vv. 37-39). The “fraile legno” and “usata vita” are Augustinian elements that later appear in Michelangelo’s *Rime*, but little more of *RVF* 80 transfers in a direct way to Michelangelo’s lyrics other than, perhaps, the sestina form of G70, which contains a navigational metaphor featuring wind and powerlessness. While “scogli” are central to Petrarch’s navigational imagery, Michelangelo does not include rocks in his nautical metaphors.

In sonnet *RVF* 189, “a ship laden with forgetfulness” and steered by the poet’s “lord” and “nemesis” (Love) traverses “a bitter sea at midnight in the winter:”

```
Passa la nave mia colma d’oblio
per aspro mare a mezza notte il verno
enfra Scilla et Caribdi, et al governo
siede ’l signore anzi ’l nimico;
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(*RVF* 189, vv. 1-4)

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98 The English translations of Petrarch are all taken from Robert M. Durling’s *Petrarch’s Lyric Poems*. 
The oars of the figurative boat are “cruel thoughts” that “scorn the tempest and the end:” “à ciascun remo un penser pronto et rio / che la tempesta e ’l fin par ch’abbi a scherno” (vv. 5-6). The sail is broken by the poet’s sighs, hopes and desires, which are conceived of as a “wet, changeless wind:” “la vela rompe un vento umido eterno / di sospir, di speranze, et di desio” (vv. 7-8). The “weary” ropes of the sail “made of error twisted up with ignorance” is soaked and slackened by “a rain of weeping, a mist of distain:” “pioggia di lagrimar, nebbia di sdegni / bagna et rallenta le già stanche sarte / che son d’error con ignoranzia attorto” (vv. 9-11). The poet begins to doubt that he will arrive at the port because his beloved’s eyes are no longer visible, and reason and skill have perished in the waves: “Celansi i duo mei dolci usati segni, / morta fra l’onde è la ragion et l’arte / tal ch’i’ ncomincio a desperar del porto.”

In his commentary on RVF 180-189, John A. Scott notes that winter and night in this “densely allegorical” sonnet stand for the “shadows of the soul” and the absence of divine grace (429), thus suggesting that the “Petrarchan self” is no longer governed by the “Signore” but by “Amore” (430). Referring to the forgetfulness of the incipit (“passa la nave mia colma d’oblio,” [emphasis mine]), Scott recalls Augustinus’s assertion in the Secretum that nothing induces one to forget God like the love of earthly things (429-430). Though the speaker of RVF 189 fears for the fate of his soul, the global discourse nevertheless remains centred on the more psychological experience of tortured love than on its spiritual consequences. Reason and skill are muted by earthly passions. As a result, the desired goal (of salvation) may not be reached: the sail (driving force of the journey) is compromised by the very ignorance from which it has been contracted – the misty blustering that mirrors the poet’s own tears. Aside from the presence of the storm itself, there is little to recommend this sonnet for comparison with Michelangelo’s works, unless one considers the multiple (and hence mutable?) winds of G70, v. 6 (“tutti i venti”) as a conscious choice on the poet’s part to distinguish the speaker of G70 from the one who suffers from a sole “eternal wind” (v. 7) in Petrarch’s RVF 189, but such an interpretation is too tenuous to be plausible.

Petrarch’s sonnet RVF 235, by contrast, narrates the poet’s transport by Love “beyond what is permitted” to an undesired location: “Lasso, Amor mi trasporta ov’ir non voglio, / et ben m’accorgo che ’l dever si varca” (vv. 1-2). The poet’s vessel, driven by “a tearful rain and

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99 “Amore per Laura e l’antichità, pentimento religioso (’RVF’ 180-89),” 415-432.
100 “La stagione invernale e la notte rappresentano le tenebre dell’anima e pertanto l’assenza del sole, simbolo della grazia divina. La barca dell’io è governata dall’Amore, non più ‘signore’ ma ‘nemico’” (Scott, “Amore per Laura e l’antichità, pentimento religioso (’RVF’ 180-89),” 429).
fierce winds of infinite sighs” analogous to the conditions of RVF 189, challenges the helmsman to keep the boat from crashing into the rocks, “as [he] always keeps [his] little bark from the blows of” the beloved’s “harsh pride:”

Né mai saggio nocchier guardò da scoglio,  
nave di merci preziose carca,  
quant’io sempre la debile mia barca  
da le percosse del suo duro orgoglio,  
ma lagrimosa pioggia et fieri venti  
d’infiniti sospiri or l’anno spinta,  
ch’è nel mio mare orribil notte e verno  
(RVF 189, vv. 5-11)

The boat, overcome by the waves, has lost both its sails and its rudder: “da l’onde vinta, / disarmata di vele et di governo” (vv. 13-14).

In an analysis of RVF 235, which he terms “one of the most dramatic realizations of the nautical metaphor in the Canzoniere,” Michelangelo Picone argues that the Petrarchan speaker is a Dantean Ulysses type who, guided by the siren Laura, crosses beyond the limits of “courtly love” (“servizio amoroso”) to the “carnal passion” that leads to “spiritual drowning;” Picone then adds that, unlike RVF 189, this sonnet is not about unrequited love (“amor insoddisfatto”) but rather about “eternal damnation” (508-510). The image in RVF 235 of the powerless boat of the self conquered by the waves of lustful passion likely inspired Michelangelo’s lyrics. In fact, the “debile mia barca” of RVF 235, v. 7 is later echoed by Michelangelo in G299, v. 7 (“debile mie barca”), which constitutes a clear (though not necessarily conscious) lexical appropriation.

In a discussion of the “Augustinian conflict” in the Rime, Thomas E. Mussio argues that Michelangelo’s speaker is modeled after Petrarch of the Canzoniere who doubts the possibility of conversion as narrated by Dante of the Commedia. For Mussio, RVF 80 is one of two poems (the other being RVF 67) that “epitomize” Petrarch’s Augustinian conception of habit (347). In his view, these two Petrarchan lyrical compositions constitute a “criticism of the psychology of conversion in Dante” (347-348) in which RVF 80 “not only serves as a contrast to Dante in the way the poets view the Ulysses story, but [...] also places in relief the two main doubts about the self felt throughout the Canzoniere – doubt about guidance and doubt about the self’s ability to change” (348). Mussio believes that Michelangelo was responsive to Petrarch’s anti-Dantism,

101 “una delle realizzazioni più drammatiche della metafora nautica in tutto il Canzoniere” (Picone, “La forza di Amore e il potere della poesia ‘RVF’ 230-40,” 508).
an opinion that he underscores to support his thesis that Michelangelo read Augustine through Petrarch:

It is Petrarch who links Michelangelo with Augustine, for Michelangelo seems to have been sensitive to Petrarch’s criticism of Dante. While Dante places himself in the position of receiving special grace in ascending all the way to the very presence of God, Petrarch situates himself in a world of flux in which guides are unreliable and mortal. Petrarch repeatedly questions the possibility of such a blessed journey and such a privileged means of conversion [...] While Dante is always reliving the escape from the “naufragio,” Petrarch continues to imagine himself still within it. (356)

Contrasting the relation of the respective Dantean and Petrarchan speakers with respect to their navigational metaphors, Mussio emphasizes the many obstacles to conversion listed in RVF 80, citing them as the reason why in RVF 366 the poet turns to the Virgin Mary to intercede on his behalf:

As in the Commedia the self at sea is a central image of the self in the Canzoniere. But the difference are clear. Dante poet is in firm control of his ‘little bark’ while Petrarch wanders, “chiose gran tempo in questo cieco legno” (80.13). Sestina 80 reveals how many forces conspire to defeat the will of the self at sea – the menacing rocks, storms, and the ship itself, the “cieco legno,” which may represent the poet’s body or desire. It is blindness that is caused by both the mystery of the world and the wrong desire in the will, which turn the speaker at the end of the Canzoniere to adopt at last a supplicating gesture toward God.102

Mussio is one of many scholars to characterize Petrarch’s literary self as a Dantean Ulysses, or as an anti-wayfarer.

Christian Moevs and Theodore J. Cachey, Jr also address the inverted parallel in their contributions to the essay collection Petrarch & Dante: Anti-Dantism, Metaphysics, Tradition (2009). In “Between Petrarch and Dante,” Cachey interprets Petrarch’s navigational metaphors as a rewriting of Dante’s Ulysses that highlights the poets’ “different views of the relation between the human and the divine” (5-6) and notes that for Petrarch, “shipwreck is inevitable” (36). Similarly, in “Subjectivity and Conversion,” Christian Moevs underscores the essential identity between the speaker of the Canzoniere and Ulysses of the Commedia; he concludes that Petrarch’s speaker and Dante the wayfarer had contrasting goals:

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The Petrarchan narrator is Dante’s Ulysses, gripped by the idea that if he learns or experiences one more thing, writes one more book, takes one more trip, he will somehow find the stability, understanding, and virtue that he seeks, even in his last days [...] For the Dantean pilgrim [the ultimate] goal is union with God; for the Petrarchan narrator the goal is simply to stave off shipwreck and rescue the subjective self from floundering in the flux of space and time.” (250)

This argument is different from Mussio’s thesis that Petrarch sought to undermine the validity of Dante’s paradigm of conversion. While Mussio imagines that Petrarch and Dante share the same goal, Moevs maintains that the goal of each narrator was distinct (as does Cachey). In contrast to Mussio, Moevs makes a compelling argument against the view that Petrarch’s turning to God at the end of the *Canzoniere* is entire or that it yields success. Among the evidence he furnishes to support this thesis, Moevs draws attention to the opening sonnet of the collection and the poet’s self-description as a man who is in part a different man than he was before: “in sul mio primo giovenile errore, / quand’era in parte alt’uom da quel ch’i’ sono” (vv. 3-4, [emphasis mine]). For Moevs, v. 4 of *RVF*1 not so subtly undermines the closing religious compositions of the *Canzoniere* and the final *Canzone alla Vergine, RVF 366.*

In that same article, Moevs further contrasts Dante and Petrarch in terms of their understanding of conversion. While “conversion in Dante’s world, as in Saint Augustine’s *Confessions*, is a surrender of the finite self that allows the awakening of the ground of being” and constitutes an “operation of grace, an awakening that seizes the mind and heart, and takes over our experience of what we are,” Petrarch’s faulty conception of conversion precludes an all-encompassing experience of it – despite his yearning for such an experience – and not only because Petrarch’s notion of the phenomenon “becomes almost a parody of Christian conversion” (246), but because Petrarch possesses “an irreducible subjective self, divorced from both the world and God” and so, for him, “there can be no experience of surrender or conversion except by the destruction or abandonment of itself;” in sum, for Petrarch “there is no philosophical or theological framework within which conversion makes sense” (246).

Michelangelo Picone’s conclusion in his explication of *RVF* 233 closely parallels Mussio’s view that Petrarch was a non-believer in the Neoplatonic ascent. In *Il Canzoniere: Lettura micro e macrotestuale*, Picone reveals Petrarch’s skillful “rewriting” of the third chapter of Dante’s *Vita nova* in which the narrator, in the solitude of his bedroom, ponders a cryptic vision he had of Beatrice when he was sleeping: while Dante’s speaker achieves insight into himself and his love in meditation, Petrarch’s poet, by (consciously and carefully chosen)
contrast, is neither able “to know himself” nor to “raise his mind to loftier heights” (506-508). If Picone correctly identifies an anti-Neoplatonic vein in Petrarch, Mussio somewhat erringly presents Michelangelo as an “implicit” critic of Neoplatonism on the basis of the poet’s supposed reading (and appropriation) of Augustine through Petrarch. Michelangelo is no more a critic of Neoplatonism, implied or explicit, than Augustine or Dante were in accepting that the visio dei could not happen without divine grace. What Michelangelo doubts is not the possibility of anyone receiving grace, converting, and becoming sanctified, but the likelihood that he will, though grace, secure the divine vision for himself in the next life. Neoplatonism was not dismissed in the Confessions, but the limits of the philosophy (namely its presumption that the contemplation of divine things is something that man can ascend to by his own skill, unaided) were simply overcome by a reframing of the Neoplatonic ascent in terms of the Christian concept of the Holy Spirit as the salvific grace of God that enables man to rise to levels that his skill and worth alone do not permit.

Though Condivi cites both Dante and Petrarch as equally important sources for Michelangelo, Clements, in The Poetry of Michelangelo, claims that “the influence of Petrarch on Michelangelo was not so dramatic or seminal as was that of Dante,” but concedes that “in its diffused way” Petrarch’s influence “was more sustained – especially up until the mystical poems of Michelangelo’s last years” (319). In Clements’ view, Petrarch “was a good master,” teaching Michelangelo “a vocabulary of poetry” and “instill[ing] in him an occasional moral truth,” yet Michelangelo differed from him in basic “temperament and character.” While Michelangelo was likely drawn to Dante for certain shared traits uniting the two Florentine cultural figures as men and writers, the artist’s interest in Petrarch resided more plausibly in an intuition on Michelangelo’s part that “he might profitably possess more of [Petrarch’s] qualities” as an erudite and professional writer (319).

While a Petrarchan stamp does characterize Michelangelo’s nautical imagery, evidence of direct borrowing is limited to discrete lexical items and phrasing. If one thinks of RVF 80, for example, sestina G70 seems opposite to it in many respects. G70 narrates a cosmic rather than a private drama, foregrounding the journey of the Christian soul and the vicissitudes of the divided will, while the lover’s plight serves only as a context, a background echo. The clearest

103 In Clements’ assessment, Michelangelo purposely “studied” the vernacular Canzoniere and Trionfi and because of this, “he tended to copy from them unconsciously” though “occasionally, and for reasons not certain, he copied directly, literally” (319). Direct and literal borrowings from Petrarch are more easily discerned in Michelangelo’s poetic fragments than in the poems.
instances of intertextual dialogue in Michelangelo’s sestina do not point in the direction of Petrarch as much as they do to Augustine or to Landino’s *Comento sopra la Comedia*. Though the Ulysscean dimension of Petrarch’s navigational poetry does not find a homologue in Michelangelo’s nautical metaphors, the sorrowful incontinence of the speaker in *RVF* 235 certainly does. As regards attendant imagery and metaphor, however, the influence is more subtle and diffuse than manifest. The present micro-study on nautical imagery and metaphor in Dante, Petrarch, and Michelangelo is thus consistent with Clements’s view on the relation of Michelangelo’s *Rime* to the poetry of Dante and Petrarch. As a result, the hypothesis that in his nautical imagery Michelangelo drew from Landino seems a more plausible assumption. Like the Petrarchan narrator, Michelangelo the poet longs for conversion. Unlike the former, however, he is willing to sacrifice himself and his will – something that Petrarch never offers to do. As Pamela Williams notes, in Petrarch’s *canzone* *RVF* 366, the poet “does not choose between Laura and God” (94), he merely “suggests [the possibility of] a resolution through grace” (111).

4.16 Conclusion

In this chapter, the strong Augustinian component of Michelangelo’s *Rime* was brought into focus with respect to individual compositions, on the one hand, and to the evolution of the lyrics as a whole, on the other. Nautical imagery in the *Rime*, the speaker’s narration of the complex interplay of habit, free will, choice and volition, together with the themes of *accidia* and recidivism in Michelangelo’s poems of divine presence were shown to reflect Augustinian spirituality, especially as it is embodied and preserved in the Bishop of Hippo’s *Confessions*, Dante’s *Commedia*, and Cristoforo Landino’s famed Platonizing interpretation of the grand epic. The *Commedia* and the Augustinian *allegoreses* that permeate Landino’s *Comento* are clearly sources as important as Petrarch’s *Canzoniere*, if not more so, of Michelangelo’s Augustinian eschatological vision and of the attendant description by the speaker of the *Rime* of a mystico-moral ascent through conversion. In his *Comento*, Landino treats the four key features that Mussio identifies as shared elements between Augustine’s *Confessions* and Michelangelo’s *Rime*. These Augustinian elements are so central to Landino’s explication of Dante the pilgrim’s salvific journey that they point to Landino rather than to Petrarch and Augustine as the primary source for Michelangelo’s concepts of sin, grace and salvation, as they appear in his poetry. This view is reinforced by the fact that Michelangelo’s poetry frequently alludes to the verses of the *Commedia* on which Landino wrote an Augustinian gloss.
The spiritual trajectory of Michelangelo’s poet-pilgrim is paralleled by the major figures and phases of Michelangelo’s own life. In this, and perhaps because of this, the *Rime* embody a spiritual progression that conforms closely to Augustinian eschatology, rhetoric and symbolism (sea, mountain, fire and sword). More specifically, the present chapter has shown how the Cavalieri period corresponds to the poet’s battle to acquire the first four gifts of the Holy Spirit and their attendant virtues (holy fear, piety, knowledge, and fortitude), and how the Colonna period marks a distinct spiritual shift in his life as the fifth gift of the Holy Spirit (counsel) comes to the fore and the speaker describes experiences of guidance, purification and divine refashioning. With Colonna, and after her passing, Michelangelo leaves behind the psychological (if not the metaphysical) experience of Hell and enters into the more elevated, but equally psychologico-metaphysical experience of Purgatory. In the years following Colonna’s death, Michelangelo’s most intensely religious spiritual lyrics reflect the poet’s plausible attainment of the sixth stage in Augustine’s schema -- having embraced the sixth divine gift (understanding), the poet now alludes to, now names experiences of direct presence of the divine. Michelangelo’s *Rime* is thoroughly Augustinian, both microscopically and macroscopically.
Conclusion

It has long been observed that Vittoria Colonna had a transformative effect on Michelangelo and that in his poetry to her she is described as a divine instrument of his metamorphosis and conversion. The dynamics between the spiritualized lover and beloved in Michelangelo’s poetry replicate patterns of interaction between Italian Evangelicals in light of their new and evolving Christocentrism, as well as of their concept of, and relation to, the Holy Spirit, whom they believed operated within their circle and through its members. In Michelangelo’s poetry inspired by or dedicated to Vittoria Colonna, one discerns two major patterns: a series of theologically endowed Neoplatonic lyrics that juxtapose love and artistic creation; and, poems alluding to grace that are further illuminated when considered in light of the intertextual echoes they contain to Dante’s *Commedia*. These two poetic varieties—lyrics containing theological Neoplatonism, on the one hand, and Dantean allusions, on the other—together illustrate two schemes of salvation that coincide in expressions of Italian Evangelism and in the *Beneficio di Cristo*.

Between 1536 and 1547, Michelangelo was engaged in a process of self-transformation through the Other via his friendship with Vittoria Colonna. During this time, Michelangelo routinely portrays Vittoria Colonna in his poetry as an instrument of grace—of divine refashioning, rebirth and renewal. In the verse composed after her death, Michelangelo requests from Christ, as a source of grace and salvation, the kind of spiritual transport and metamorphosis that in Italian religious verse pre-dating the Quattrocento were most commonly found in paraliturgical texts, such as *laude*, where mystical supplication was granted lyric form. Because of this, the *lauda* tradition is a probable source of inspiration for Michelangelo’s spiritual poetry. As persuasive evidence for this hypothesis, one includes Michelangelo’s direct borrowing of a verse from one of Lorenzo de’ Medici’s *lauda*, combined with historiographical knowledge of the role of the *lauda* in late Quattrocento Florence, on the one hand, and of singing and poetry recitation in the Medici house, on the other.

In Italian religious verse of the Trecento and in the later mystical *laude* of the Quattrocento, both Christ and the Holy Spirit were invoked in order to effect, through grace and divine love, the sinner’s spiritual transformation and regeneration, as well as the Christian soul’s mystical union with God. In the 1480s-90s, when Michelangelo was still a youth, Lorenzo de’ Medici composed lauds and contributed not only to a renewed interest in the *laude* of earlier centuries, but to the revival of the genre in Renaissance Florence. Lorenzo de’ Medici was
clearly a source of poetic inspiration and an example to Michelangelo not only of erudite Neoplatonic poetry, but also of popular Christian mystical verse.

It was not only high poetry from the Laurentian age that nourished Michelangelo as a poet. Laude by famous writers, as well as by minor and unknown poets, served as a rich source of religious and mystical topoi that Michelangelo incorporated into his mystical verse. In the Galletti edition of lauds circulating in Florence of the 1490s, one finds mystical laude that include two soteriological schemes: one ascensional, the other transformational. The topoi particular to these two paradigms are consistent with the respective mysticisms of the Spirit and of Redemption that were discussed in relation to the Catholic Reform in Italy. In appealing to the Holy Spirit to be consumed by divine love as a means of ascension and in invoking Christ to remake them, the poets of these laude requested the kind of intense, personal and transformative communion with the divine that later became a feature of Evangelical devotion in Italy during the Catholic Reformation. Michelangelo’s mystical verse is clearly informed by a Christian literary tradition in the vernacular that begins with the mystical poetry of Jacopone da Todi (Duecento), passes through Giovanni Colombini and Bianco da Siena (Trecento), Leonardo Giustinian and Feo Belcari (early Quattrocento), and Lorenzo de’ Medici (late Quattrocento) to reach Michelangelo himself (Cinquecento).

The presence in Michelangelo’s Rime of navigational metaphors, their discussion of the complex interplay of habit, free will, choice and volition, together with the themes of accidia and recidivism to be found in them clearly reflect Augustinian spirituality, especially as it is embodied and preserved in the Confessions. Dante’s Commedia and Cristoforo Landino’s well-known Platonizing interpretation of it is a likely source of Michelangelo’s knowledge of Augustine. The Commedia and the Augustinian allegoreses that permeate Landino’s Comento are as important as Petrarch’s verse for Michelangelo’s Augustinian eschatological vision and for his descriptions of a mystico-moral ascent through conversion.

Just as Michelangelo lived a unique personal history in the context of his times, so too his verses occupied an atypical space in the history of Italian poetry and its criticism. Michelangelo composed an important body of spiritual verse, yet for decades his poetry was primarily read for the insights it might provide into his artistic production and for what its philosophical character might reveal about his psyche and his soul. Since the 1960s, greater attempts have been made to historicize his verses. All these approaches, however, miss something fundamental about the function of Michelangelo’s poetry in the context of
Michelangelo’s own dialogue with his contemporaries and with the cultural traditions he inherited. Rather than treating the Rime as the literary document for a set of specific historical circumstances, as other analyses have done, the present anthropological and intertextual study approaches Michelangelo’s spiritual poetry as the artefact of a particular cultural and personal context. This has yielded a number of new and original outcomes.

First, the present analysis restores Michelangelo’s mystical verse to its own social and historical context by explaining its uncharacteristic dramatic intensity (which led previous scholars to see it as more closely connected to the poetry of mystics from other generations). More specifically, it reveals that the intensity of Michelangelo’s verse is characteristic of the devotional practices of the spirituali of the Ecclesia viterbiensis and of the laudistic expressions of Pauline and Augustinian theology.

Second, consideration of Pauline and Augustinian influences on Michelangelo’s earlier life in the form of the laude and the Commedia, respectively, provides a fruitful means of elucidating how it is that the poet arrived at the mystically fervent and theologically rich compositions of his later years.

Third, this dissertation confirms an earlier scholarly assessment that, for Michelangelo, Neoplatonism was lived experience. It simultaneously elucidates Michelangelo’s idiosyncratically theologized art metaphors.

Fourth, this study re-frames Dante as a notable inspiration for Michelangelo’s mystical verse by showing that, in his compositions, Michelangelo uses Dante as a reference point for the expression and formulation of theological perspectives that both agree with and differ from his own. This focus on the Commedia in the context of sixteenth-century Italy also points out that Michelangelo’s Dante is a Platonized version with Augustinian tones.

Fifth, this study is unique in accommodating Michelangelo’s spontaneous and fragmentary compositions, as well as his more meditated and conceptual pieces. Both varieties of lyrical expression find a place in the consideration of Michelangelo’s poetry as a medium of devotion on the one hand, and as an ideological and poetic laboratory for the vetting of new forms and ideas, on the other.

Most importantly, this dissertation avoids excising Michelangelo and his poetry from their social and cultural contexts. The anthropological approach pursued in this study provides greater historicization for Michelangelo’s verse by allowing for the examination of non-literary works, and for the consideration of literary works as possessing a devotional function.
Though they do not constitute a spiritual diary, Michelangelo’s lyrical compositions nevertheless chart the evolution not just of a poetics, but of a profoundly spiritual man. For Michelangelo, poetry was both a locus of theological reflection and an instrument of religious devotion – of meditation, oration, and transformation. His effort to express in verse some of his most personal views on his relationship with the divinity, as well as his use of the literary text as a paraliturgical exercise reveal that he was both a fervent Catholic conversant with Italian rhetoric of the Catholic Reformation and an accomplished poet inspired by Paul, Augustine and the Italian lauda tradition. With this more nuanced understanding of Michelangelo, his culture and his times, it is now possible to examine the compositions he revised for a poetry collection that he was elaborating between 1542 and 1546 in light of the possible social and personal functions of such a collection given the role his spiritual verses played as a locus and instrument of his devotion, as well as their Pauline and Augustinian character.
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