To M. Salomon Reinach
with the writer's respects

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Notes on Dante's *Inferno.*

VI[1].

La selva oscura.

(*Inf.* I, 2.)

There has never, it appears, been much doubt about the correct allegorical interpretation of the "dark forest" in which the poet finds himself at the outset of his marvelous journey. No enquiry seems to have been made so far into the literal meaning which must be supposed, according to the poet's well-known system, to be at the basis of all the other possible interpretations. In other words, Does there exist any tradition connecting the entrance to the Netherworld with thick and dark forests?

Again, in the seventh circle[2] the poet finds such a forest, that of the suicides, occupying a well-defined and fairly extensive space in Hell. The allegorical purpose of this particular conception is too well-known to need explanation; so is its classical source[3]. Yet it may be questioned whether Dante had any precedent in planting such a forest in the realm of the shades.

I believe that here as in many other places the *Aeneid* furnished the model. There, in the sixth book, the Sybil gives Aeneas a description of the difficulties which will beset his path into Avernus:

131 Tenent media omnia *silvae*
Cocytosque sinu labens circumvenit atro.

136 latet arbore opaca
aureus et foliis et lento vimine ramus,
Iunoni infernae dictus sacer; hunc tegit omnis
lucus et obscuris claudunt convallibus umbrae.

[1] See above, VI, 376—85. The text is not entirely free from misprints; it is difficult for the continental printer to handle an English text and not always convenient for the author to use a continental language.

[2] *Inf.* XIII, 1 ff.

[3] See above, pp. 376 ff.

154 sic demum *lucos* Stygis et regna invia vivis
aspicies.

179 itur in antiquam *silvam*, stabula alta ferarum,

185 atque haec ipse suo tristi corde volutat,
aspectans *silvam* immensam, ...
si nunc se nobis ille aureus arbore ramus
ostendat *nemore* in tanto.

237 spelunca alta fuit vastoque immanis hiatu,
scrupea, tuta lacu nigro *nemorumque* tenebris,

259 totoque absistite *luco*.

Nor was Dante the first mediæval poet to adopt these *données* of Vergil. In the tenth century, a parodist, probably a German by nationality, narrated, in elegant Latin verse, a journey he claimed to have undertaken to Heaven and Hell; of the latter place he states that it is surrounded by many dense forests[1]:

Inde cum multas
referret causas,
subiunxit totum
esse infernum
accinctum densis
undique silvis.

There is of course no need whatsoever for supposing Dante to have known this particular vision. The Vergilian passages more than explain the occurrence of forests in and about his Inferno. It is not even to be expected that he and the unknown Teutonic versifier were the only ones who thus imitated a peculiar feature of the *Aeneid*. Jacob Grimm was hardly justified in citing the anonymous as a possible witness for an ancient Teutonic conception of the kingdom of the dead[2].

VII.

Lonza, leone, lupa.

(*Inf.* I, 32 sqq.)

So much has been written of late on the true meaning of the three animals that it may seem bold to add still more. Three facts may be said to stand out clearly, to wit (1) the conception is of Old Testamental

[1] K. Müllenhoff und W. Scherer, *Denkmäler deutscher Poesie und Prosa*, Berlin 1873, p. 40.

[2] J. Grimm, *Deutsche Mythologie*, p. 668.

origin[1] (2) they form the basis of a multiple allegory, i. e. of a number of allegories in juxtaposition and (3) one of these allegories has a direct reference to the author's own life.

As is well known, the mediæval commentators are pretty well agreed in pointing out that the first of the three animals is a symbol of luxury (in its old meaning), while the second represents pride. Both vices are known, according to the poet's own confession and his general attitude of proud disdain, the attitude of the intellectual aristocrat, to have been among his most conspicuous shortcomings, and the allegory of both *lonza* and *leone* is therefore perfectly clear and in place. The difficulty begins with the interpretation of the *lupa*, which the ancient commentators unanimously regard as a symbol of greed (avarizia); for so far as we know, Dante was not only free from that vice but most emphatically considered himself so[2]. The true solution must therefore be sought in the direction of a wider interpretation of that symbol, as already pointed out by Henri Hauvette[3]. He believed to see in the she-wolf a symbol of incontinence generally, not only of incontinence in money-matters. This interpretation is however not as plausible as may appear at first sight. In the first place, the sin of luxury would then be represented twice, and the clear logical division, so dear to a mediæval student such as Dante was, would immediately be lost. In the second place, it is difficult to see what the great Unifier of Italy, represented by the *veltro*, a mediæval *re galantuomo* (be he an emperor or, as my own teacher, H. Morf, believed, a pope) could do against strictly private vices such as gluttony and luxury which are both comprised (also in M. Hauvette's thought) under the general heading of incontinence. Lastly, why should Dante, who felt himself free from gluttony and greed and guilty only of luxury, regard the general vice of incontinence as his most dangerous enemy, after he had taken care to intimate by a separate symbol his proclivity toward luxury? I believe, therefore, that M. Hauvette's explanation does not altogether fit the case and leaves room for another.

According to the interpretation which I venture to propose, there is no need for replacing the English term of greed by a better one; but it must be borne in mind that *greed* is not the exact equivalent of the Italian *avarizia*, which we have seen is out of the question

[1] *Jeremiah* V, 6.

[2] This question is of course intimately connected with the credence to be given to the trumped-up charge of peculation for which the poet suffered exile.

[3] H. Hauvette, *Dante*, Paris 1912, p. 290 f.

because it denotes "greed for possession or riches". There exist however different kinds of greed, one of which is most prone to thrive in democracies such as Florence was; I refer to the greed or lust for power (cupiditas regni sive imperii), which in republics is usually a greed for office, and I believe that it is this very vice, the capital vice of politicians, which Dante had in mind and wished to symbolise in his *lupa*. Such a view will be in fair harmony with what we know of Dante's life before 1300; it will also fit excellently the entire context of the first canto.

The time from 1295 to 1301 was marked by the poet's political rôle which ended with his exile. There can be no question but that he was far too honest, far too idealistic and had far too high a conception of his own worth and dignity to make a successful politician. He was moreover temperamentally unfit for such a rôle, since he could never overcome the innate contempt of the intellectual for the *aurea mediocritas* which of necessity triumphs in every democracy. Nor is there much justification in blaming the Florentines for their action; on the contrary, it is safe to say that had Dante lived in a modern democracy he would not even have attained to an office which could in any way be compared with the priorate. It is equally certain, however, that his six years of politics not only took most of his time, thus keeping him from the pursuits of philosophy, but they compelled him more than once to approve of measures which his conscience told him were wrong. In fact, he would have been the first politician who could play this dangerous and undignified game for six years without doing frequent violence to his conscience. Further, we know that his political rôle was not imposed upon him without his really wanting it, forcing him, as it were, into active life. Nothing would be farther from the truth. It was he, Dante, who with youthful ambition and a poor realisation of what it would lead to, deliberately entered upon the political career by registering his consent to the state of things and his approval of the recent democratic revolution when he had his name inscribed in one of the guild registers. It was a deliberate act of his, which no doubt exposed him also to censure; for a number of aristocratic families, the Donati, for instance, never stooped to make such a concession, preferring to stay "out" and trusting rather to a violent revolution to win back their rights. If Dante acted differently, he was evidently actuated by what some people are pleased to call "ambition", in reality, lust for power, lust for office, the desire to play an important rôle in the history of his native city, to be sought after, to be courted — and feared. To people who still have illusions about this sort of thing, such an ambition may appear justified; Dante, with the insight he had gained

as time went on, could only condemn it, and we know from a number of passages that he did condemn it. In 1300, when his political career reached its climax, this lust for power doubtless threatened to absorb his entire life; it kept him from his duties as a man and as a Christian: it was thus of far greater danger to him personally, i. e. to his soul, than either luxury or pride had ever been: hence the conspicuous rôle given to the *lupa*, more dangerous by far than the other animals.

Vergil, when explaining the pernicious character of the she-wolf, points to the ruin she has brought upon Italy[1]. His words fit in well with the conception that it stood for avarice; they fit still better, I believe, the new interpretation. Even more than private greed, the lust for power had converted Italy into one great battle-field. It was lust for temporal power which had driven the Papal See ever to enlarge its possessions; it was lust for power which set one city-state against the other with a view to subjugating it. It was lust for power, lust for office, which was at the bottom of the party warfare in each city. An analytic mind such as Dante's could not help noticing all this, as Machiavelli noticed it two centuries later and expressed it in scientific form, while Dante had recourse to symbolism and allegory.

There is still more. The *veltro*, whatever sort of liberator it may denote, was certainly meant to be the great unifier of Italy. As such he could in any case do little to check private greed (avarizia). Yet he could, and Dante most earnestly wanted him to, stop the lust for power of the small city-states and potentates, ever ready to tear one another to pieces. The proof is furnished by a passage in the treatise *De Monarchia*. There Dante points out that a complete absence of greed is the *conditio sine qua non* for the reign of justice, and only he is free from greed who possesses everything, i. e. the universal monarch. What he meant was not, of course, that the universal monarch cannot be avaricious according to civil law, because he owns everything[2]. His knowledge of history would have taught him better. What he does mean is that the universal monarch is free from all lust for power because all power is vested in him. In other words, his term *cupiditas* refers to public, not to private, law; the presence of a universal monarch would, in his thought, put a stop to the constant wars of the territorial powers, city-states and princelings, always bent upon self-aggrandisement. In that sense and in that sense alone the *veltro* can truly be said to drive the she-wolf from earth.

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[1] *Inf.* I, 94 ff.

[2] *De Monarchia*, I. 11. 78: ubi non est quod possit optari, impossibile est ibi cipiditatem esse.

In short, I believe that an interpretation of the *lupa* as the symbol of a particular kind of greed, of the lust for power or (in a city-state) for office (cupiditas regni sive imperii) will remove the difficulties which have so far beset this particular passage of the poem.

VIII.

Il Veltro.

(*Inf.* I, 101 sqq.)

More than fifteen years ago, my own unforgettable master, Heinrich Morf, when approaching this most difficult of all Dante problems, wrote these words:

> Für den, der nicht Dantist von Beruf ist — d. h. für den, der außer mit Dante sich auch noch mit anderem wissenschaftlich zu beschäftigen hat — ist es unmöglich, die um solche Danteprobleme sich häufende Literatur zu verfolgen.

I cannot claim to have followed even the larger part of the publications come to light on the occasion of the Dante centennary. Neither do I pretend, however, to add new material to the ***interpretation*** of this symbol; it is merely to the probable origin of the ***form*** that I wish to draw the attention of the generous reader.

In the *Commedia,* as is really unnecessary to recall, the poet finds himself at bay, being pressed by three animals, of which the she-wolf (lupa) proves the most dangerous. Vergil's sudden appearance helps him out of this difficult situation. He is told that he need not consider himself the only victim of the *lupa,* which has on the contrary made many victims and is to make still more

> infin che il Veltro
> Verrà, che la farà morir con doglia.

The episode of the three animals, *lonza, leone, lupa,* is doubtless derived from an Old Testamental passage, which fails however to mention any dog to drive them away or even to check their progress. A similar allegory occurs in an Old French monument which Dante certainly knew quite intimately since he alludes to it elsewhere in his poem, the *Song of Roland.* I refer to one of the allegorical dreams of Charlemagne, which I have discussed elsewhere more at length [1].

> 725 Aprés iceste, altre avison sonjat:
> Qu'eret en France a sa chapele ad Ais,
> E'l destre braz li morst uns vers si mals.

[1] *Public. Mod. Lang. Assoc.* (America), XXXVI (1921), pp. 134—41.

Devers Ardene vit venir un leupart,
Son cors deménie molt fierement asalt.
D'enz de la sale uns veltres avalat
Que vint a Charle des galos e les salz,
La destre oreille a'l premier ver trenchat,
Iriedement se combat a'l liepart.
Dient Franceis que grant bataille i at,
Mais il ne sevent li quels d'els la veintrat.

As in the *Commedia* the hero (who has the vision) is thus beset by wild animals, two in number, a boar[1] and a leopard. In his distress he is relieved, not indeed by the ghost of an ancient poet, who merely tells him of his future avenger, the *veltro*, but by that avenger in person, designated also as *uns veltres*. Even the scenery of the dream is in many respects similar to that of the first canto of the *Inferno*; for the "Ardene" corresponds pretty well to the "selva oscura". The meaning of the allegory is slightly different; for in the *Commedia* the wild animals symbolise human vices, whilst the *veltro* alone denotes a person, the Savior of Italy. In the *Roland*, on the other hand, the two wild animals represent the political or personal[2] enemies of Charlemagne, whilst the hunting-dog is most probably Roland.

Under these circumstances it may be regarded as practically certain that if Dante deliberately enlarged upon his model, the verset of *Jeremiah*, he was led to do so by the *Roland* passage. Of course, in his scheme it was no longer possible that the *veltro* should free him as he frees Charlemagne, since in the technique of the *Commedia* this was the logical place for Vergil's entrance upon the scene. So the poet merely transferred the *veltro* episode, putting it in the mouth of the Roman as an event to happen in the distant future, thus giving it, though in a different form, the character of a prophecy which it had in the French original.

IX.

Paolo e Francesca.

(*Inf.* V, 73 sqq.)

Dante's poetische Gerechtigkeit ist nicht die des gesetzlichen Richters. Es ist ein parteiisches, künstlerisches Gericht, das er ab-

[1] T. Atkinson Jenkins, *La Chanson de Roland* (Oxford Version), Boston (1924), whose reading I adopt, gives also a different version in which the reading is *ors* (= bear) for *vers*. See his p. 60 f.

[2] On the various interpretations of the passage cf. Jenkins, p. 60.

hält. Sein Urteil ist aber nicht nur ungesetzlich, es ist auch nicht orthodox. Das Wort „Die Liebe höret nimmer auf" hat keine Geltung für die Hölle, und doch zeigt Dante das Paar Francesca und Paolo auch in der Verdammnis noch liebend verbunden:

Amor . . .
Che, come vedi, ancor non mi abbandona.

Der alte Boccaccio erklärt solche Auffassung als heidnisch:
Secondo la cattolica verità questo non si dee credere und macht noch viele Worte darüber . . .

These words were written, some twelve years ago, by Heinrich Morf in one of the last great studies we have from his pen[1]. The poetic conception, one of the most beautiful of the divine poem, has, it would appear, obscured the heterodoxy involved. Yet it is very much to be doubted whether Dante deliberately chose to flaunt the dogma of the Church; if he did so, the presumption is rather that he was tempted by some more powerful tradition, more powerful, because it was older and more poetic. Now it is a noteworthy fact that classical antiquity knew just such inseparable couples, though, significantly enough, not always of opposite sex, the ancient conception of Friendship often taking the place of the more modern conception of Love. Thus the painter Polygnotus, in a justly famous painting, represented Theseus and Perithous seated side by side, Achilles in a sitting posture and close behind him, standing, Patroclus; further Phocus and Jaseus, but also couples of women friends, Chloris and Thyia, Camiro and Clytie, and lastly even Marsyas with his boy friend Olympus. This Hades scene — for such it is — leaves no doubt about the fact that in Greek popular belief, certainly in the artistic tradition, Death was unable to break the tie of friendship and love.

The description of this painting has come down to us thanks to Pausanias' *Description of Greece*[2], a work unknown to the Latins before the Renaissance. Yet the conception expressed by the artist had lingered on, independently of the written sources, among the Mediterranean people and had even passed over into Christianity, all dogmas to the contrary notwithstanding. As late as the fourth century, Ausonius, whom Dante knew no more than he did Pausanias, mentions a painting which he saw at Trèves and which was but an echo of the same range of ideas[3].

[1] *Aus Dichtung und Sprache der Romanen*, III (Berlin-Leipzig 1922), p. 285. [2] Lib. X, cap. 30.
[3] *Cupido cruciatur*; cp. Salomon Reinach, *Cultes, Mythes et Religions*, II (1906), p. 197.

The passage of Ausonius recalls another circumstance of Dante's immortal scene. Paolo and Francesca are together, not only because their love is stronger than Death, but because together they were in the hour of their death. That conceptions such as these were at the base of this piece of Christian eschatology is proved by Ausonius' description of the ancient heroines in the attitude in which they had left this life[1]:

> Fulmineos Semele decepta puerpera partus
> Deflet et ambustas lacerans per inania cunas
> Ventilat ignavum simulati fulminis ignem . . .
> Vulnera siccat adhuc Procris Cephalique cruentam
> Diligit et percussa manum. Fert fumida testa
> Lumina Sestiaca praeceps de turre puella . . .
> Licia fert glomerata manu deserta Ariadne,
> Respicit abjectas desperans Phaedra tabellas,
> Haec laqueum gerit . . .

The whole poem abounds in conceptions of this class. A rigid logician would perhaps want to carry the underlying idea to its final conclusion and query why Dante did not make Paolo and Francesca take the French novel, which had brought about their undoing, with them to the Lower World. One can only answer that his good taste kept him from such an excess of logic; yet this much may be said: The very fact that Francesca gives so much space to the rôle of that book is doubtless significant. If the novel is not there physically, it is none the less present, if only in the minds of the lovers.

To conclude: If Dante chose to deviate from the dogma of the Church, the reason is that he followed an ancient Mediterranean tradition which goes back to classical antiquity and which the Church had to tolerate and, it would appear, always did tolerate, though perhaps not altogether willingly.

X.

La bufera infernal.

(*Inf.* V, 31.)

The allegorical meaning of the storm, the symbol of the passion which in life drove the voluptuous to and fro, from craving to craving, is too transparent to be in need of much explanation. It is quite another matter to lay hands on the poet's source (if such he had), his model as it were for such a conception, which is certainly not very common in mediæval visions.

[1] *Cupido cruciatur,* 16 sqq.; cp. Reinach, *op. cit.*, p. 198.

The throng of the sinners buffeted to and fro through the black air reminds one of a certain class of local legends, well known also to the Italian reader thanks to the eighth story of the fifth day of the *Decameron*. There, it will be remembered, a knight is condemned to pursue and slay his lady love who by her coldness had driven him to commit suicide. As is well known, Boccaccio merely altered a French original in which the same punishment was inflicted upon a couple precisely on account of their sinful love. In other mediæval versions the couples thus punished are unchaste priests and their mistresses. It is likewise known that the whole conception is secondary, having been grafted on the old Teutonic tale of the Wild Hunt. Just as in the latter the spectral horseman is driven through the air in mad pursuit of something intangible, so the guilty lovers are now pursuing one another, in the midst of the nightly tempest. The fundamental idea has survived in modern folklore. Suffice it to quote a Norman tradition taken down at the beginning of the last century[1]:

> Lorsqu'un prêtre et une religieuse se sont aimés, si la mort vient à les surprendre encore enorgueillis et enivrés de leur crime, c'est-à-dire avant qu'ils aient songé à en accomplir l'expiation, le plus navrant supplice les attend dans l'autre vie. Les amants sacrilèges sont transformés en démons si hideux, que l'enfer même les repousse avec horreur. Chaque soir, ils sont chassés de l'abîme ténébreux, où se voile leur honte, et poursuivis au milieu des airs par un attroupement de démons et de damnés, auxquels ils servent de jouet. Point de reproches humiliants, de dérisions incisives, de sarcasmes cruels, de huées insultantes qui leur soient épargnés. En vain ils tenteraient de se soustraire à ces morsures de la haine et du mépris, la bande démoniaque ne perd pas un seul instant de vue ses victimes. Elle les tient enlacées sans issue, dans les mille détours de son tourbillon impur, et, de chaque souvenir de leur coupable amour, leur fait la piquante blessure d'une flagellation ignominieuse.

Stories such as this, it would appear, go back to the period when the Church first made a valiant attempt to enforce the celibacy of priests, that is, to the eleventh century. There can be no question but tales of a similar character and tendency were equally current in Italy, where moreover that struggle over the celibacy of the clergy had been most bitter in the time of Gregory VII. I believe that Dante's

[1] A. Bosquet, *La Normandie romanesque et merveilleuse*, Paris-Rouen 1845, p. 80. The tradition was taken down in 1809.

inspiration for the punishment of the fifth canto of his *Inferno* must be traced to precisely this category of tales.

In conclusion I want to quote an Italian local legend from the neighborhood of Pavia [1], offering a striking similarity with the legend of Paolo and Francesca, though I must confess that I doubt its authenticity. At the Villa Eleonora near Pavia, the story relates, a pair of lovers came to a terrible end (bearing a curious resemblance to the last act of Verdi's *Aïda*). Then it goes on to say:

> Ora quel sotterraneo serve da cantina e non vi si può scendere con nessuna specie di candele accese, perchè la temperatura di laggiù non mantiene la fiamma. I contadini dicono che sono le anime dei due giovani amanti che spengono coi loro soffi le candele, perchè vogliono ancora nascondersi agli sguardi umani. E quando le foglie dei due alberi che fronteggiano la villa, scosse dall' aria notturna, stormiscono, si dice che son sempre quelle due anime innamorate che si abbracciano teneramente e si sussurrano dolci parole.

XI.

Sodomites and Usurers.

(*Inf.* XV–XVII.)

It has often been remarked upon, by various commentators, that the arrangement by which sodomites and usurers are neighbors as it were in the infernal abode must be called fairly artificial, being based upon the consideration that the former did violence to Nature, whilst the latter did so to God by extracting money from Time, which is His property, without any work of their own. However, neither Dante nor Dante's age can be said to have invented this curious *rapprochement* of two vices which to us moderns seem to have absolutely nothing in common.

Since 1892 we have known a curious monument, unearthed from an Egyptian tomb, the *Apocalypse of Peter*, as the name indicates, clearly a Christian work, which goes back to the end of the first or the beginning of the second century. It, too, belongs to the large class of visionary journeys undertaken by the author, who relates what he saw in the other world. In other words, it is one of the precursors of the *Commedia*. In this text we find the following passage which I quote from the work of M. Salomon Reinach, already referred to on these pages [2]:

[1] *Archivo per lo studio delle tradizioni popolari,* XXIII (1906), p. 33.
[2] *Op. cit.,* II, 200 f.

> Dans un autre très grand marais plein de pus et de sang, et bouillant dans ce mélange, se trouvaient des hommes et des femmes enfouis jusqu'aux genoux; c'étaient ceux qui avaient prêté de l'argent et réclamé les intérêts des intérêts. D'autres hommes et d'autres femmes se précipitaient du haut d'un escarpement, puis étaient aussitôt chassés par leurs bourreaux qui les obligeaient de regagner le même sommet d'où ils se précipitaient à nouveau, sans repos ni trêve. Les hommes étaient ceux qui avaient souillé leurs corps en se comportant comme des femmes: les femmes étaient celles qui s'étaient unies entre elles comme l'homme s'unit à la femme.

As will be readily seen, here again we find the two classes of sinners in close neighborhood, which is certainly not the result of an accident. On the contrary, it tends to show that the arrangement, far from being the work of the poet or one of his more immediate predecessors, goes back to the first centuries of Christianity, if not to the Apostolic Age.

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