

## POSTSCRIPT

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In *Inferno* Dante identifies the logic of the punishments as the law of *contrapasso*, which we may translate as counter-penalty or, perhaps better yet, following Gilbert and Sullivan, letting the punishment fit the crime. Murderers find themselves submerged in a river of blood, and schismatics are split down the middle. The same rationale continues in *Purgatorio*: the prideful carry boulders that push their faces toward the ground; the wrathful must continuously walk through thick, pungent smoke. But heaven, too, has its form of *contrapasso*, not as punishment, but as a justification for reward: following a model that resembles nothing so much as the quantum states of electrons, souls exist at once both in the presence of God and in the sphere appropriate to the level of their love of and faith in God and exemplifying their chief virtue or their particular limitation: in the sphere of Mercury Dante finds those spirits who in life sought earthly glory, and in the sphere of Venus those who remained constant in their earthly loves. Chaucer must have appreciated that design: his pilgrimage includes folk of all sorts, from the brave and true Knight to the scurrilous Pardoner to the dedicated Parson and the Wif. Each engages in the pilgrimage as at once a penance and a source of fun, and for each it may result in more suffering, cleansing, or perhaps even redemption.

When, with the help of MAM, M/MLA, and the Medieval Congress on Medieval Studies at Western Michigan University, we began to assemble a few conference sessions dedicated to the motifs of punishment, penance, and reward that so abound in the Middle Ages, we expected—I don't exactly say hoped—to receive a balance of essays on the three. With Dante as our guide, we aimed to encourage scholarly sojourns amidst the damnable, the patiently purging, and the happy few already enjoying the bliss of their fidelity and spiritual attainment, and through those venues we thought to assemble a balanced and helpful if not comprehensive collection of essays. Notions of moral accountability and cosmic justice pervade medieval art and thought, so we felt eager to encourage our colleagues to take advantage of the opportunity to share their observations and interpretations both in presentations and now, finally, through the generosity of MAM in allowing us this special number of *Enarratio*, in print.

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But just as many readers of Dante in our time proceed little past *Inferno*, we began our collection by getting a heavy serving of punishment, a substantial dollop of penance, and only a light swirl of reward: whether as a function of a contemporary obsession in our entertainments with gruesomeness (which to at least some extent we share with the Middle Ages) or simply of inevitable human nature, most of us apparently like the gory parts best. By the time we began to assemble this volume, we were begging our contributors to include at least a bit more about the felicity of reward and joy well earned. Not that we wanted to settle for Krazy Kat awaiting the latest brickbat from Ignatz the mouse: we know about the plague, the constant wars, the Inquisition (what a show!), and the poverty (thank God for modern showers and antibiotics, if not for bombs, mad-slasher films, and massively-multiplayer online role-playing games). We prepared early for serious reflection on sin, evil, and human-wrought suffering; we also guessed our colleagues (those happy few!) would want to write about the ecstatic joy of mystical experience, salvation, heroes and ring-givers, of victory against impossible odds, of Beatrice at the gate of the Earthly Paradise, and of glimpses of the Eternal in the Empyrean.

The pleasant parts took some coaxing. We finally got some reflection on medieval reward to round out the mix, as well as the personal and especially rewarding experience of working with our colleagues' essays and seeing them happily through to print. Yet dare I suggest we organize a future session or two to focus specifically on the positives of medieval experience: on the perception and appreciation of beauty; on ecstatic transportations; on the occasional note of *carpe diem* that rings out amidst the persistent dirge of *contemptus mundi*? Why not encourage close readings of passages of *Paradiso*, explorations of Muhammed's vision of Paradise, considerations of the effects of raucous ecclesiastical riddles, or sojourns in the carnivals behind the *carnivalesque*?

As I began to reflect on what to include in these brief closing remarks, I went back to my bookshelf for Jean Delumeau's *History of Paradise* (1992. Trans. Matthew O'Connell. Chicago: U of Illinois P, 2000), having forgotten the subtitle, *The Garden of Eden in Myth and Tradition*. The chapters deal more with loss of the earthly paradise than attainment of the heavenly—a fine book, but not of the sort to guide me into the mood for a cheery postscript, given that we lost the Garden and have yet to recover it. But a subsequent volume on medieval joy and

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happy recompense may lead to both productive study and additional pleasurable reading.

Meanwhile, though, we gladly offer this present volume with its range from the rhetoric of penance to the results of torture, from the romantic to the true but merciful understanding of human potentials, from the vicissitudes in fortune of the court poet to the punishments of blood feud. We have managed to provide a considerable variety of topics tracing a scholarly journey from Rome to Iceland, from the ancient world to the verge of the modern. The reward for readers and contributors alike comes, we hope, from participating in the pilgrimage more than in sharing the habits of the subject pilgrims. Chaucer and Dante would, I think, have appreciated that end.

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