Table Talk

Table Talk:
Perspectives on Food
in Medieval Italian Literature

Edited by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Part IV: Political Perspectives

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INTRODUCTION

CHRISTIANA PURDY MOUDARRES

This volume is comprised of a selection of revised and expanded papers presented at *Table Talk: Perspectives on Food in Medieval Italian Literature*, a panel held at the 40th annual convention of the Northeast Modern Language Association (Boston, February 26 - March 1, 2009). Taken together, these essays explore the multifaceted role of food within medieval Italian culture through a variety of literary genres, from the poetry and prose of Dante and Boccaccio to the medical and religious writings of Michele Savonarola and Catherine of Siena. By examining the complexity of food consumption and distribution in the late medieval cultural imagination, the authors seek to advance the recent movement of medieval foodways from the margins of social history to a fertile cross-section of the humanities and social sciences.

Thanks to the pioneering work of such eminent scholars as Caroline Walker Bynum, Paul Freedman, Bruno Laurioux, Massimo Montanari and Terence Scully, the Middle Ages have drawn considerable attention over the past two decades within the rapidly growing field of food studies. Among the geographically focused publications of recent years, England, France and Germany have figured more prominently than their Mediterranean neighbors. An overarching goal of the essays collected in the present volume is to reflect Italy's stance at the vanguard of late medieval Europe's dynamic foodways.

Home to the rebirth of a classical medical tradition that gave pride of place to dietetics, Southern Italy was a wellspring of dietetic literature in both poetry and prose by the turn of the twelfth century. Part and parcel of the general interest this literature inspired was the boldness of its claims, which extended beyond the preservation and restoration of health. A proper regimen, to be determined not only according to the properties of various foodstuffs, but by the complexion, or humoral disposition, of the consumer appears to have been limitless in its applications, from the infusion of moral virtue and increased intelligence to the sex determination of one's offspring and reversal of the effects of aging. The extravagance of dietetics' claims found an eager audience in the increasingly learned,

socially mobile, and commerce-driven society that emerged from the city-states of central and northern Italy over the course of the thirteenth century. While the medical masters of Italy's burgeoning universities penned dietaries in the vernacular for popular consumption, a widening pool of private physicians composed personal regimens for wealthy patrons.

Fascination with the properties of various foods and their effects upon both body and mind was accompanied by a renewed attention to food's preparation, borne out by the appearance of the first recipe collections since the ancient Roman *De re coquinaria*. While the line between dietetics and cookery in these collections is often difficult to discern, the medieval banquets at which they were showcased did not tend towards temperance. It was not only overindulgence in food and drink that concerned religious authorities, but the ostentation of trompe l'oeil culinary creations and exotica imported from the east. The multi-sensory pleasures of the table gave rise to the so-called *pungilingua*, an innovative system for classifying the various sins of the tongue. At the same time, the increased instances and intricacies of communal dining presented writers with a new paradigm for social order, codified by the etiquette manuals composed toward the end of the thirteenth century.

The contemporaneous flowering of vernacular literature has afforded the authors of the present volume critical insights into the multivalence of food in late medieval Italy. The four sections into which the essays are divided reflect the range of their perspectives—medical, religious, social and political. Part One focuses on the influence of medieval dietetics on contemporary notions of identity. Christiana Purdy Moudarres examines Dante's treatment of gluttony in *Inferno* 6 in light of late medieval anxieties over the body's susceptibility to food and its effects on traditional understandings of earthly and otherworldly identity. Drawing on the rival theories of food assimilation elaborated by physicians and natural philosophers over the course of the thirteenth century, she argues that while the gluttons' *contrapasso* reenacts the physiology of their sin, their anonymity reflects its direst consequences. In the essay that follows, Martin Marafioti engages the intersection of dietetics and obstetrics in fifteenth-century Ferrara. Through his examination of Michele Savonarola's *De regimine pregnantium*, one the earliest obstetrical treatises written in the vernacular, Marafioti illustrates the degree to which the diet of expecting mothers was believed to shape the physical and psychological characteristics of their offspring. While reinforcing the relationship between dietetics and identity posited by his medical precursors, Savonarola's dietary advice to the ladies of Ferrara significantly raises the ethical stakes of motherhood.

Part Two explores the ambivalence of food as reality and metaphor for two fourteenth-century Dominican writers. Maria Clara Iglesias engages Domenico Cavalca's use of food-related rhetoric to elucidate the various virtues and vices born from the tongue. Through her comparative analysis of two of Cavalca's treatises on moral theology, the *Pungilingua*, which focuses on the capital sin of gluttony and its connections to a range of verbal sins, and the *Frutti della lingua*, which focuses on the spiritual food of contemplation and the means by which it is attained, Iglesias demonstrates the centrality of the semantic field of food to the Dominican preacher's pastoral objectives, namely, the integration of popular instruction with the abstract nature of Christian doctrine. Lisa Vitale's essay explores the relationship between bodily and spiritual nourishment in the life and works of Catherine of Siena. Focusing on the interplay of ascetic extremism and Eucharistic piety that emerges from the saint's contemporary biographies, letters, and mystical *Dialogue*, Vitale identifies the dialectic of deprivation and fullness as a vital link between Catherine's mystical Christology and her public ministry to the body of Christ.

Part Three is devoted to literary reflections and refractions of food and drink as instruments of social exchange in two *novelle* of Boccaccio's *Decameron*. In their reading of the tale of Federigo degli Alberighi (*Decameron* V.9), a declassed nobleman who seeks to honor his beloved Monna Giovanna by serving her his most prized possession when she makes an unexpected visit, Dario Del Puppo and Salvatore Musumeci highlight the contents and preparation of the unlikely meal that wins Federigo the wealthy widow's hand in marriage. Drawing on the anthropological and medical significance attached to falcons and falconry in late medieval culture, the authors present this transformative repast as a *mise en abime* of the entanglement of chivalric values with those of a burgeoning consumer society. In the companion piece by Salvatore Musumeci and Christopher Strand, wine is read as a potent surrogate for speech in the tale of Alatiel (*Decameron* II.7), a Babylonian princess whose shipwreck en route to her betrothed leads her into the beds of nine different men before she returns home with her chastity reputedly intact. By exploring the secular and sacred significance of wine in medieval Christian and Islamic culture, the authors present Alatiel's intoxication at the court of her first captor as a form of deliverance from the cultural enslavement of her past.

The fourth and final part explores the political dimension of table fellowship and its disintegration in the epics of Dante and Luigi Pulci. Carol Chiodo interprets Dante's portrayal of the banquet as the locus of betrayal in *Inferno* 33 by concentrating on the shade of Fra Alberigo.

Condemned to the lowest region of hell for the murder of his relative and political rival under the auspices of a conciliatory dinner, the Jovial Friar is shown to express his identity through an organic metaphor that sheds light on both the underlying nature of his betrayal and on the logic of his otherworldly fate. In the volume's concluding essay, Pina Palma examines the body politic of Medicean Florence through the giant Morgante of Pulci's eponymous epic. The focus of her analysis is Morgante's liberation of Florinetta, an abducted princess who describes her seven years of woodland captivity as a fall from the heights of culinary refinement. Demonstrating the indebtedness of Florinetta's speech to the dietetic literature that shaped courtly aesthetics, such as Ficino's *De vita*, Palma illustrates Pulci's critical perspective on the relationship between dietary and political regimes in the court of Lorenzo de' Medici.

The variety of authors, genres and critical perspectives engaged throughout this volume intends to serve as an academic *amuse bouche*. In embracing the interdisciplinarity that distinguishes food studies as a growing area of scholarly inquiry, the authors of the following essays do not pretend to provide comprehensive answers to the often elemental questions which they raise. Rather, they seek to stimulate further inquiry into the fertile field of food in medieval Italian culture.

PART I:

MEDICAL PERSPECTIVES

DEVOURING SELVES IN THE CIRCLE OF GLUTTONY: A GLOSS ON THE CONTRAPASSO OF *INFERNO* 6

CHRISTIANA PURDY MOUDARRES

In the third circle of Dante's *Inferno*, an unusually solitary sinner emerges from an anonymous throng of rain beaten shades and prophesies for the pilgrim the political fate of their native city. The first panel in the political triptych formed by the sixth cantos of each canticle of the *Commedia* and the first premonition of Florence's demise, Ciacco's prophecy has intrigued modern readers of *Inferno* 6 as much as the canto's moral and theological context has left them cold. With good reason. Dante's gluttons are perhaps the least vivid of the damned; their pseudonymous prophet, unrecognizable to the pilgrim, is no exception. Among them, we find no names, no faces and, strangest of all, given the representational standards of *Inferno*, no bodies. As the wayfarer and his guide walk along their "vanità che par persona" [their emptiness, which seems real bodies] (36),[1] we catch our first and last glimpse of the aerial body until the pilgrim's failed embrace of Casella on the shores of Mount Purgatory. The gluttons' insubstantiality is reinforced by Virgil's unlikely exposition of the resurrection at the canto's end in which he points to those features of the aerial body anatomized by Statius in *Purgatorio* 25 – not by chance, on the terrace of gluttony. Dante's consistent preoccupation with eschatology in the context of gluttony lends this sin a gravity that has not been duly acknowledged.

The ease with which the gluttons slip from our memory is not accidental. As I hope to show in the pages that follow, the insubstantiality to which the poet calls our attention reflects the peculiar anxieties over eating and identity that riddled late medieval culture.[2] The twelfth-century

[1] All Italian and English citations of the *Commedia* are from *The Divine Comedy*, trans. Charles S. Singleton (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970-75).

[2] For an excellent overview, see Philip Lyndon Reynolds, *Food and the Body: Some Peculiar Questions in High Medieval Theology* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 1999).

renaissance of classical dietetics, on the one hand, closely followed by that of Aristotelian biology, on the other, gave rise to competing theories of the body's susceptibility to the effects of food, kindling a debate that extended beyond Europe's burgeoning medical schools and well into the fourteenth century. Under its influence, traditional Christian notions of the self, both earthly and otherworldly, underwent various revisions, with unsettling results. The purpose of this essay is to define the terms of this debate and to argue for its inspiration of the gluttons' notoriously incoherent contrapasso.

The punishment of the gluttons is often regarded as the least satisfying in hell. Ciacco's statement of the contrapasso reveals little of its logic: "per la dannosa colpa della gola/ alla piogga mi fiacco" [for the ruinous fault of gluttony, as you see, I am broken by the rain] (53-4). A string of untelling adjectives—*etterna*, *maladetta*, *fredda*, *greve*—does little to infernalize the downpour, while the pity expressed by the pilgrim ("s'altra è maggio, nullo è sì spiacente" [if any is greater, none is so loathsome] (48)) only adds to our suspicion that we are missing something. Accordingly, critical resignations to incoherence have been interspersed with various contaminations of an otherwise untreacherous deluge, the most widely accepted being scatological.[3] Questionable textual evidence aside, such a reading, as Pézard noted,[4] imputes Dante with an unlikely redundancy: submersion in excrement is, after all, the fate of the flatterers in *Inferno* 18.

The substantial continuity between the sin and the punishment suggested by this line of interpretation harks back to some of the early commentators, including Boccaccio, for whom the third circle's hostile climate fittingly inverted the *locus amoenus* of the ideal banquet.[5] Other early commentators, however, Pietro Alighieri, Jacopo della Lana and Francesco da Buti among them, perceived an analogous relationship

[3] For two alternative readings, see Robert Dombrowski, "The *Grain of Hell*: A Note on Retribution in Inferno VI," *Dante Studies* 88 (1970): 103-108, who argues that the deluge parodies the rain of manna promised by God in Exodus 16:4: "Ecce ego pluam vobis panes de caelo;" and André Pézard, "Le chant VI de l' 'Enfer': Ciacco et Florence," *Bulletin de la Societé d'Etudes Dantesques du Centre Universitaire Méditerranéen*, XII (1963): 7-34, who draws on parallels with Isaiah 28, elevating the rain to vomit.

[4] André Pézard, "Le chant VI de l' 'Enfer.'"

[5] Giovanni Boccaccio, *Esposizioni sopra la Comedia di Dante*, ed. Giorgio Padoan, in *Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, vol. 6, ed. Vittore Branca (Milan: Mondadori, 1965). Unless otherwise noted, all commentaries have been consulted online at the Dante Dartmouth Project (DDP): http://www.dante.dartmouth.edu.

between the punishment and the sin. According to Pietro, inundation by water and subsequent rot clearly externalizes the behavior of those who "in hoc mundo, vivendo in vitio gule, marcescunt in aquositate humorum."[6] This not particularly lucid analogy is conspicuously absent from modern treatments of the problem despite, or perhaps because of, its solid basis in medieval theories of digestion, according to which all nutriment was, qua nutriment, moisture.

Avicenna's definitive lesson on the subject in the first book of his *Canon*, rehearsed by Dante in *Purgatorio* 25.37-45, describes a threefold process of cooking or "coction" by the body's vital heat, begun in the stomach, continued in the liver, and completed in the blood vessels. The product, those secondary humors to which Pietro refers (not to be confused with the primary humors of blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile), was collectively known as nutrimental moisture which, in the process of assimilation, underwent three forms, ranging from liquid to solid, and dark to light: *ros*, *cambium* and *gluten*. *Ros*, as the name suggests, was sprinkled like dew throughout the body, ready to provide nutriment when needed. As it exited the blood stream, it lost its bloody hue and consistency to become semi-liquid *cambium* and, as it neared the organs, turned to solid *gluten*.[7]

The thorough and proper coction of food within the first phase of digestion was vital to good health. Its greatest impediment was overload. An abundance of food would overburden the body's digestive heat, leaving part of its intake cold and moist and thus subject to putrescence. The ailments medieval physicians ascribed to dietary excess were legion, and are rehearsed ad nauseam by Dante's early commentators: gout, buboes, cyragra, swollen glands, rheumatism, catarrh, fistulas, kidney stones, senility—diseases whose watery causes and debilitating effects in this life are conflated and magnified in the next, where the gluttons wallow in putrid earth.[8]

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[6] *Petri Allegherii super Dantis ipsius genitoris Comoediam Commentarium* (II) 6.7-15, ed. Silvana Pagano. Text transcribed for the DDP by Giovanna Puletti at the Società Dantesca Italiana.

[7] Citations of Avicenna are from *A Treatise on the Canon of Medicine of Avicenna, Incorporating a Translation of the First Book* I.I.4, trans. O. Cameron Gruner (London: Luzac & Co, 1930), 78-92.

[8] On the diseases ascribed to the superfluity of humors, the alleged inspiration of the infernal downpour, see, for instance, Jacopo Alighieri 6.7-12; Pietro Alighieri 6.19; l'Ottimo 6.nota; Guglielmo Maramauro 6.10-12; and Benvenuto da Imola: "et distinguit varia genera morborum qui nascuntur ex gula dicens: grandine grossa: ista sunt apostemata grandia et grossa, fistulae, glandulae, bubones,

The condemnations of gluttony on predominantly medical grounds are striking, though by no means new. The Hippocratic aphorism cited by Benvenuto da Imola—that is, "ut omnis medicina clamat…plures interfecit crapula quam gladius"[9]—reflects the concern for moderation in ancient dietetics that had served Christian ethics since its conception. The evolution of gluttony as a sin was of course nurtured by the medically inspired warnings that permeated the sermons of Church Fathers and, in turn, the earliest commentaries on *Inferno* 6.[10] Though rooted in the early Church, moral condemnations of gluttony on medical grounds were complicated by dietetics' late medieval metamorphosis. Greek and Arabic dietetic literature, translated from as early as the eleventh century and quickly vulgarized through the enormously popular *regimini* in the centuries that followed,[11] was anchored to digestive and nutritional theories that made plain the reality and extent of food's effects upon the body. In doing so, it blurred the fundamental Christian boundaries between food and flesh that grounded late medieval notions of the self.

Christianity had distinguished itself from its infancy by the significance attached to the body by its most basic precepts, from the incarnation to the resurrection of the flesh, but the dualist heresies that emanated from twelfth and thirteenth century Southern France were among the factors that brought this hallowing of the flesh to unprecedented heights. Theological formulations of the reality of Christ's

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podragae, ciragrae et multa similia; aqua tinta, idest humores turbidi et corrupti, neve, humores frigidi, rheumata, catharri, se riversa per l'aire tenebroso, idest per sanguinem turbulentum gulosi pervertentis totam complexionem." *Comentum super Dantis Aldigherij Comoediam, nunc primum integre in lucem editum*, 6.10-12, ed. Jacobo Philippo Lacaita (Florence: G. Barbèra, 1887).

[9] 6.7-9.

[10] On the influence of dietetic medicine on the early Christian development of gluttony as a sin, see Veronika Grimm, *From Feasting to Fasting, the Evolution of a Sin*: *Attitudes to Food in Antiquity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).

[11] I refer to the Hippocratic *De regimen* and to Isaac Israeli's (ca. 832-932) lengthy supplements, *On Universal Diets*, *On Particular Diets*, first translated by Constantinus Africanus (ca. 1020 – 1087). Both gained currency through their incorporation into university medicine's core curriculum, the *Articella*. Derivative thirteenth-century dietaries in the vernacular include Arnald of Villanova's translation of the *Regimen sanitatis salernitanus* and Aldobrandino da Siena's *Regime du corps.* On the contents of the medical curriculum in thirteenth-century Italian universities, see Nancy Siraisi, *Medicine and the Italian Universities 1250-1600* (Leiden; Boston: Brill 2001).

eucharistic presence[12] and preoccupation with the meticulous reassemblage of the earthly body at the resurrection[13] were accompanied by new expressions of popular piety, from eucharistic devotion and asceticism[14] to the proliferation of the cult of saints.[15] In light of the mounting equation of identity with flesh, contemporary medical discussions of the reality and extent of food's interaction with the body in the processes of growth, nutrition and corruption met with deep-seated resistance on the part of the Church.

An early index of the theological anxieties induced by food assimilation and the touchstone for two centuries of debate was a question posed by Peter Lombard (1100-1160) in book II of his *Sentences*, namely, whether food is assimilated into the human substance or, as he later calls it, the *veritas humanae naturae*, the truth of human nature.[16] The phrase, which appears to have been coined by Anselm of Laon (d. 1117) a quarter of a century earlier, was quickly incorporated into discussions of original sin and the resurrection. The medieval equivalent of DNA, the truth of human nature referred to the material locus of identity, both human and individual—a seminal core transmitted from Adam, fixed in the body from

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[12] See Gary Macy, *The Banquet's Wisdom: A Short History of the Theologies of the Lord's Supper* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992).

[13] See Carolyn Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Flesh in Western Christianity, 200-1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, l995).

[14] See Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); and Rudolph Bell, *Holy Anorexia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

[15] See Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

[16] Dist. 30. 15.1, 504-05 in *Magistri Petri Lombardi Parisiensis episcopi Sententiae in IV libris distinctae* (Grottaferrata: Collegii S. Bonaventurae ad Claras Aquas, 1971-1981), opens with the thesis its author seeks to support: "Quod nihil extrinsecum converti in humanam substantiam quae ab Adam est." For his use of the *veritas humanae naturae*, see article 2, cited below. On the origins and evolution of the concept, see W.H. Principe, "*De veritate humanae naturae*: theology in conversation with biology, medicine and philosophy of nature," in *Knowledge and the Sciences in Medical Philosophy: Proceedings of the Eighth International Congress of Medieval Philosophy*, vol. 3, ed. Simo Knuuttila, Reijo Työrinoja, Sten Ebbesen (Helsinki, 1990), 486-94; and the same author's "'The Truth of Human Nature' according to Thomas Aquinas: Theology and Science in Interaction," *Philosophy and the God of Abraham: Essays in Memory of James A. Weisheipl, OP* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1991). Cf. Reynolds, *Food and the Body*, especially 50-66.

conception until the Last Judgment. Wary of its contamination by any external influence, Peter appeals to Biblical authority and reason to argue for its imperviousness to food and its ability to grow through self-multiplication.[17] Thus far, he concurs with contemporaries such as Hugh of St. Victor (1078-1141)[18] and Gilbert of Poitiers (1070-1154).[19] But Peter's view is more nuanced than that of his precursors. In the second half of his *distinctio*, he states that "infitiamus quin cibi et humores in carnem et sanguinem transeant, sed non in veritatem humanae naturae." The still budding concept of a seminal and inalienable core allows Peter to posit a secondary flesh, susceptible to the augmentative, nutritive and morbid effects described by physicians. The seeds sown by Peter's tenuous concession to medicine would bear mixed fruit over the next century, as commentary on his *Sentences* was instituted as the primary vehicle of theological discourse.[20]

As Avicenna's theories of food assimilation gained currency during the thirteenth century,[21] they brought to light a concept which Peter's

[17] The authority cited to support his contention is Jesus' implicit denial of food assimilation in his abjuration of the Jewish dietary laws in Matthew 15:17 ("Omne quat intrat in os, in ventrem vadit et in secessum emittitur"); the rational proof consists of the article of faith that a child who dies at birth will rise at the age of thirty, the age when physical perfection is achieved ("Puer qui statim post ortum moritur, in illa statura resurget, quam habiturus erat si viveret usque ad aetatem triginta annorum, nullo vitio corporis impeditus. Unde ergo illa substantia, quae adeo parva fuit in ortu, in resurrectione tam magna erit, nisi sui in multiplicatione?"), from which he concluded that the human substance is augmented and multiplied independently (*in se*), as in the creation of Eve from Adam's rib (Genesis 2: 21-2) and the miracle of the multiplication of the bread (Mark 6:35-44; John 6:5-13).

[18] See his discussion of the formation of Eve out of Adam's rib, a commonplace in twelfth century treatment of the natural versus supernatural multiplication of human flesh, in *De sacramentis christiane fidei* I.6.36 (PL 176:284D).

[19] In the same context, see Gilbert's *Sententiae* 13.51, ed. N.M. Haring, "Die Sententie Magistri Gisleberti Pictavensis Episcopi," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge* 45 (1978), 83-180. The related theories of Hugh of St. Victor and Gilbert of Poitiers are discussed by Reynolds, 35-38.

[20] Commentary on Peter Lombard's *Sentences* was required of all masters of theology at the University of Paris by the first quarter of the thirteenth century. On the Sentential commentary tradition, see Marcia Colish, *Peter Lombard* (Leiden; New York: E.J. Brill, 1994) and G.R. Evans, *Mediaeval Commentaries on the Sentences of Peter Lombard* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2002).

[21] On the *Canon*'s incorporation into university medical teaching, see Nancy Siraisi, *Avicenna in Renaissance Italy: The Canon and Medical Teaching in Italian Universities after 1500* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987).

commentators readily appropriated. In addition to the three forms of nutrimental moisture sketched above, Avicenna posited a fourth humor, "a fluid existent among the tissue elements from birth" which he called "radical."[22] Transmitted seminally, this humor, or moisture, gave shape to the fetus and continuity to its parts. Avicenna illustrated radical moisture's vital role through a soon ubiquitous analogy of the body to an oil lamp, whose vital heat is the flame, nutrimental moisture the oil, and radical moisture the wick. While the oil can be restored, the moisture that binds the wick is of a fixed quantity which, once consumed, cannot be rekindled. Death is therefore a gradual process of dessication, the consumption of the body's radical moisture by its innate heat.[23]

Galenic in origin, the radical moisture theory was used to account for the occurrence of fevers and aging. It became the subject of much discussion and numerous monographs as medical interest in longevity surged in the decades around 1300.[24] By the early fourteenth century, familiarity with the concept extended well beyond the medical schools of Bologna and Montpellier, enough to merit Dante's attention in the fourth book of *Convivio*,[25] and that of the *Commedia*'s early commentators.[26] The

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[22] *Canon* I.I.IV, 78.

[23] On the diffusion of Avicenna's analogy, see Peter H. Niebyl, "Old Age, Fever and the Lamp Metaphor," *Journal of History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 26, (1977), 351-368.

[24] Interest in longevity and treatment of radical moisture were particularly strong at the University of Montpellier, where a relevant treatise of Galen, *De marasmus*, was discovered in the last decade of the thirteenth century and commented by one of the university's preeminent physicians, Bernard of Gordon. His colleague and master of the faculty of medicine, Arnald of Villanova, composed a monograph on radical moisture, *De humido radicalis*, and a treatise on longevity based on its precepts, *De longitudine vitae*. For more on the turn of the century vogue of radical moisture, see Luke Demaitre, "The Medical Notion of 'Withering' from Galen to the Fourteenth Century: the Treatise of *Marasmus* by Bernard of Gordon," *Traditio* 47 (1992): 259-307; Michael McVaugh, "The 'humidum radicale' in Thirteenth Century Medicine," *Traditio* 30 (1974): 259-83; T.S. Hall, "Life, Death and the Radical Moisture," *Clio Medica* 6 (1971): 2-23; and Gerald J. Gruman, *A History of Ideas about the Prolongation of Life* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1966).

[25] See Dante's discussion of the ages of man in *Convivio* 4.23: "Ed è da sapere che questo arco [di giù, come l'arco] di su sarebbe eguale, se la materia de la nostra seminale complessione non impedisse la regola de la umana natura. Ma però ch'è l'umido radicale meno e più, e di migliore qualitade e più ha durare [in uno] che in altro effetto - lo quale è subietto e nutrimento del calore, che è nostra vita -, avviene che l'arco de la vita d'un uomo è di minore e di maggiore tesa che quello

speed with which this medical concept penetrated the cultural imagination is remarkable given its total absence from medical discourse before the 1290s. The theory's general diffusion, in fact, owed less to physicians than it did to theologians who by the mid thirteenth century regularly appealed to radical moisture in their commentaries on Peter's question.[27] The key claims of the truth of human nature—immunity to food, lineage from Adam, material continuity from conception until death—all found a compelling organic basis in Avicenna's fixed quantity of seminal matter without which life could not be sustained. Radical moisture's alien counterpart, nutriment, assumed the comforting, subsidiary role of shielding the body's ultimate life source from too rapid consumption by vital heat. Peter's denial of food's assimilation into the truth of human nature could now be couched in the same medical terms that had inspired it.

The basis of this rigid separation of nutrimental from radical moisture was rather tenuous. Avicenna's text is not at all clear on whether radical moisture can be restored by nutrimental moisture, but its earliest and most influential proponents interpreted it as they saw fit. Decades later, we find physicians such as Arnald of Villanova anxious to correct what theologians had long presented as the "opinio medicorum" without fully understanding the theory behind it.[28] Even under the more rigorous

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de l'altro." *Il Convivio*, ed. Giovanni Busnelli and G. Vandelli in *Opere di Dante* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1964).

[26] Early commentators generally refer to the theory of radical moisture and the lamp metaphor in connection with the linen of Lachesis, the thread instilled by one of the three Furies within each individual to determine the length of life, alluded to in *Purgatorio* 21.25-27 and *Purgatorio* 25.79-81. See, for instance, the Ottimo Commento's gloss on the latter tercet: "Quando Lachesis non ha più del lino…Cioè quando l'umido radicale è tutto consumato, e venuto meno nell'uomo, sciogliesi dalla carne." Cf. Benvenuto da Imola (25.22-24); the *Chiose Vernon* (25.1-30); and Johannis de Serravalle (25.25-30). Benvenuto was the first to attribute the theory and metaphor to Avicenna: "Torris autem madefactus aqua figurat calorem naturalem et humorem radicalem, qui quamdiu durat viget vita; quoniam vita humana, ut dicit Avicenna, est sicut lucerna quae deficit, vel cum ignis consumit oleum, vel cum oleum nimium extinguit ignem."

[27] Ziegler has documented numerous theological appropriations of the concept radical moisture in the Sentential commentaries on II.30.15 in his "'Ut dicunt medici': Medical Knowledge and Theological Debates in the Second Half of the Thirteenth Century," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 73 (1999): 208-37. Among those who refer to the concept explicitly are Bonaventure, William de la Mare, Aquinas, Innocent V, Giles of Rome, Peter John of Olivi and Richard of Middleton.

[28] *De humido radicalis. Arnaldi de Villanova Opera Medica Omnia*, ed. Michael McVaugh (Granada; Barcelona: Universidad de Barcelona, 1975).

treatment of physicians, however, the concept of radical moisture assured the living organism some criterion for physical continuity without which the foundation of the medieval Christian self would crumble.

Theological faith in the concept of radical moisture was reinforced by wariness over the "opinio philosophorum" on the overarching questions of nourishment and longevity that gained currency around the same time. Aristotle's views on nutrition, while never the subject of an entire treatise, figure prominently in his discussions of generation, growth, and corruption in his *De Anima*, *De generatione et corruptione* and certain of the *Parva naturalia* which were incorporated into University of Arts curricula at Paris in the 1260s after decades of ecclesiastical interference and widely commented by theologians and philosophers alike.[29] The preeminence Aristotle gives heat and moisture in the basic life processes initially invited comparison with Avicenna, but the incompatibility of their views was grasped on closer examination. In a widely commented passage of his *De generatione et corruptione*, Aristotle compares food's effects on the body to the constant addition of water to wine.[30] While the wine's strength will initially overpower the water, it will gradually weaken through dilution, until all that is left is, in fact, water. This loss of original moisture does not, however, entail death. The organism will continue to replenish itself as long as its vital heat persists. What prevents this process from continuing indefinitely is the weakening of that heat through constant assimilation. Ingested nutriment becomes prone to putrefaction in the process, until the heat is extinguished entirely, at which point the organism dies, unable to nourish itself. For Aristotle, death is the qualitative corruption of the whole organism rather than the quantitative consumption of a part.

Aristotle's understanding of food assimilation had much to recommend it. While less fully developed than Avicenna's, it was anchored to a broader and more fully articulated biology of generation, growth, alteration and corruption that radically undercut certain premises of the radical

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[29] See Joan Cadden, *The Medieval Philosophy of Growth: Albertus Magnus, Thomas Aquinas, Albert of Saxony and Marsilius of Inghen on Book I, Chapter V of Aristotle's* De generatione et corruptione (Dissertation: Indiana University, 1972). *De generatione et corruptione* was one of Aristotle's most copied works. Averrroes's epitome and commentary, translated into Latin within the same decade, contributed significantly to its diffusion.

[30] I.5 321a-321b. *Aristotle's De generatione et orruptione*, trans. C.J.F. Williams (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982).

moisture theory.[31] At the same time, the logical conclusion that all the body's matter might, in principle, be replaced by nutriment struck at the heart of that material core of Christian identity which theologians had called on medicine to corroborate. Aquinas articulated the theory's disturbing theological implications in the First Part of the *Summa theologica* by acknowledging the following objection:

> […] if food is changed into the true human nature, there is nothing in man which may not recede or be repaired: If therefore a man lived long enough, it would follow that in the end nothing would be left in him of what had belonged to him in the beginning. Consequently, he would not be numerically the same man throughout his life; since for the thing to be numerically the same, identity of matter is necessary.[32]

If the seminal matter underlying the truth of human nature is vulnerable to wastage and replenishment through nutriment, eating becomes a process of self-alienation. It was precisely for its implication that "homo per nutritionem potest fieri alius numeraliter et individualiter" [man can, through nutriment, become numerically and individually other] that Tempier

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[31] Aristotle's understanding of generation, for example, dealt the theory a devastating blow. If semen was the by-product of food, as he maintained in his refutation of pangenesis in *De generatione animalium*, was the radical moisture it conveyed not always already vulnerable to the effects of food? If food could be converted into radical moisture and therefore into the truth of human nature through generation, why not through nutrition? Accordingly, we see responses as to whether food is assimilated into the truth of human nature evolve from an unqualified no to a more and more tortuously qualified yes. Regarding the embryological objection raised above, outright denials, such as Robert Grosseteste's, gradually gave way to an intermediate position that held semen to be derived partly from nutriment and partly from the parent's actual flesh and that only through generation could such conversion occur, as maintained by Bonaventure and Alexander of Hales. Even Albertus Magnus's full-fledged concession provided that while both generation and corruption could convert food into radical moisture, the former's qualitative inferiority so weakened the body's vital heat that it would give out before the latter could become fully diluted, thereby guaranteeing some modicum of material continuity from conception until death.

[32] I.119.1.5. All English translations of the *Summa theologica* are from the *Summa theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas. Literally Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province*, 5 vols. (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne, ltd., New York: Benziger Brothers, 1920-48).

condemned Aristotle's theory of nutrition in 1277[33] and that theologians from Alexander of Hales[34] to Albertus Magnus[35] clung to its medical counterpart, nipping and tucking it beyond recognition to respond to the challenges posed by Aristotelian nutrition's formidable biological framework.

The first to assert food's full conversion into the truth of human nature, on more than one occasion, Aquinas goes on to reject the concept of radical moisture, presenting Aristotle's water analogy in its stead:

> What is generated from food is united to, by mixing with, the body so nourished, just as water is mixed with wine, as the Philosopher says (*De Gen* 1.5) there by way of example: that which is added, and that to which it is added, cannot be different natures, since they are already made one by being mixed together. Therefore there is no reason for saying that one is destroyed, while the other remains.[36]

He then responds to the aforementioned objection of identity loss on thoroughly Aristotelian grounds: just as a fire remains the same when one log is replaced by another, the replacement of man's original matter through nourishment in no way compromises his identity, which is lodged within his form, or soul.

Aquinas's acceptance of Aristotelian nutrition and his formalist solution to the related problem of identity were far from definitive. Younger contemporaries such as Peter John Olivi (1248-98)[37] and Richard Middleton (1249-1308)[38] remained faithful to Avicenna, attacking the

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[33] Article 145 in Roland Hissette, *Enquête sur les 219 articles condamnés à Paris le 7 mars 1277* (Louvain: Publications universitaires, 1977).

[34] *Quaestiones disputatae "antequam esset frater,"* q. 64. Bibliotecha Franciscana Scholastica Medii Aevi, 19-20, ed. V. Doucet (Quaracchi: Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 1960).

[35] Albert wrote extensively on food assimilation in both theological and natural philosophical contexts. In addition to his *Scripta super sententias* (II. 31.2), see his *De nutrimento et nutribili* and his commentary on Aristotle's *De generatione et corruptione*, *Opera omnia*, ed. August Borgnet (Paris: Ludovicum Vivès, 1890-1895). On his overarching efforts to integrate the theories of Avicenna and Aristotle, see Joan Cadden, "Albertus Magnus's Universal Physiology: the Example of Nutrition," *Albertus Magnus and the Sciences*, ed. James A. Weisheipl (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1980).

[36] I.119.1 ad 2.

[37] *Quaestiones in secundum librum Sententiarum*, q. 53. Bibliotecha Franciscana Scholastica Medii Aevi, 4-6, ed. Bernard Jansen (Quaracchi: Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 1922-28).

[38] *Super quatuor libros Sententiarum*, II.30.5.1 (Frankfurt: Minerva, 1963).

Dominican's solution as heretical. And while Aquinas's formalism was never officially condemned, its support by figures such as Giles of Rome (1243-1316)[39] and Durandus of St. Pourcain (1275-1334)[40] elicited charges of heresy. Identity's extraction from the body remained deeply unsatisfying to a culture whose theological beliefs such as the resurrection of the flesh and devotional practices such as the cult of saints lodged the self so firmly in the flesh.

Among physicians, meanwhile, interest in radical moisture seems to have waxed and waned around 1300, when Aristotle's views on nutrition began garnering the medical support previously reserved for Avicenna. The oil lamp faded from the spotlight as physicians adopted and even altered Aristotle's analogy, comparing food's effects on the body to the addition of cold water to hot. The modification eliminated any qualitative distinction between seminal and nutrimental flesh while underscoring the cold, moist product's vulnerability to corruption with the reduction of the body's vital heat.

The general inclination toward Aristotle's analogy in medical and theological contexts alike, despite the existential concerns it raised, lends clarity and new dimensions to Dante's early commentators' physiological interpretation of the gluttons' punishment, where the Aristotelian imagery of watering, weakening and rot takes on cosmic proportions:

> Io sono al terzo cerchio, della piova
> etterna, maladetta, fredda e greve;
> regola e qualità mai non l'è nova.
> Grandine grossa, acqua tinta e neve
> per l'aere tenebroso si riversa
> pute la terra che questo riceve. (7-12)

[I am in the third circle of the eternal, accursed, cold and heavy rain: its measure and its quality are never new; huge hail, foul water, and snow pour down through the murky air; the ground that receives it stinks.]

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[39] See his *Quaestiones de resurrectione mortuorum*, q. 3, 110-11, in *The Immortality of the Soul and the Resurrection of the Body according to Giles of Rome: Historical Study of the 13th Century Theological Problem*, ed. Kieran Nolan (Rome: Studium Theologicum "Augustinianum," 1967), where he goes beyond Aquinas in arguing that God could reconstruct the same body from any matter or *ex nihilo*.

[40] *In sententias theologicas Petri Lombardi commentariarum libri quatuor*, dist. 44, q. 1 (New Jersey: Gregg Press, 1964).

For modern readers, the "acqua tinta"—usually translated as "foul" or "filthy"[41]–generally provokes more interest than the hail and snow that accompany it. A more literal translation of *tinta* as dark, or red, however, highlights the downpour's resemblance to the nutrimental moisture of Aristotle's water analogy. As noted above, nutriment's three forms, *ros*, *cambium* and *gluten*, ranged in density from liquid to solid and in color from bloody to white. While first posited by Avicenna, this threefold classification of nutriment was appropriated by thinkers as medically disinclined as Aquinas in an effort to fill certain physiological lacunae in Aristotle's biology of growth.[42]

The weakening action of water conveyed by Aristotle's analogy finds its punitive counterpart in the downpour's debilitation of the gluttons, introduced and underscored by an unusual lexical choice "adonare" (34), and reinforced in Ciacco's statement of the contrapasso: "per la dannosa colpa della gola/ alla pioggia mi fiacco" [for the ruinous fault of gluttony, as you see, I am broken by the rain] (53-54). The speaker's emblematic weakness, clinched by the rhyme words Ciacco—fiacco, is figured by the prostrate condition of his fellow sinners, "miseri profani" (21) in the etymological sense of the term, too weak to rise from an earth which is not clearly fecal, as modern translations suggest, but putrid. Modern insistence on the earth's stench ("pute la terra che questo riceve") (12) bypasses the primary significance of *putere*, which was to putrefy. As far as early commentators such as Boccaccio, Benvenuto, and da Buti were concerned, the earth of the third circle was, quite naturally, rotten by excess moisture. As the wayfarer and his guide make their way through the marsh, their path is unobstructed by the shades beneath their feet. The gluttons, indistinguishable from the rot in which they wallow, continue the process of putrefaction they embraced in the "dolce mondo."

Aristotle's analogy provides a useful bridge between the sin of gluttony and the deluge of *Inferno* 6 but, as noted above, Dante's gluttons are not only macerated—they are annihilated. Their punishment is as inspired by Aristotle's water imagery as the identity-related anxieties it induced. The aerial procession of tragic lovers in *Inferno* 5 offsets the

[41] For the former translation, see, for instance, Singleton and Sinclair; for the latter, see, for instance, Robert and Jean Hollander and Robert Durling and Ronald Martinez.

[42] See his discussion of the threefold moisture of man and the integrity of human nature in regard to the resurrection in ST Suppl. 80.3. On Aquinas's use of medical concepts, see Mark Jordan, "Medicine and Natural Philosophy in Aquinas," *Thomas von Aquin: Werk und Kirkung im Licht Neuer Forshungen*, ed. Albert Zimmerman (Berlin; New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1988).

confused, muddy mass the pilgrim surveys as he regains consciousness from the previous circle: "novi tormenti e novi tormentati/mi veggio intorno, e come ch'io mi muova/e ch'io mi volga, e come che io guati" [I see about me new torments and new tormented souls, whichever way I move and turn about to gaze] (4-6). His varied movements and his emphatic *io* accent the undifferentiated throng that churns beneath his feet, effecting a constant superimposition of bodies that only accentuates their anonymity: "dell'un de' lati fanno all'altro schermo;/ volgonsi spesso i miseri profani" [the profane wretches often turn themselves, making one side a screen for the other] (20-1). Here and here alone, Dante foregoes the substantiality so characteristic of his treatment of the damned: "Noi passavam su per l'ombre che adona/ la greve pioggia, e ponevam le piante/ sopra lor vanità che par persona" [their emptiness, which seems real bodies] (34-6). But unlike the individualized aerial bodies of *Purgatorio*, these "vanità" are denied any distinguishing characteristics. Their very status as "persone"–already attenuated by the verb *parere*–is further undermined by the word's interpretative possibilities. Although we encountered "persona" in the previous canto, presumably in the sense of "body," the word's etymological meaning of "mask" is not to be excluded, particularly in light of the "schermi" the shades create of one another in verse 20; nor is the provencal meaning of "no one" to be discounted, especially given the provencal origin of its rhyme word "adona."

The mass of unnamed and unidentifiable shades is broken as Ciacco emerges to address the pilgrim, but his very singularity is undercut by his opening plea for recognition: "'O tu che se' per questo inferno tratto,'/ mi disse, 'riconoscimi se sai;/ tu fosti prima che io disfatto fatto" ['O you that are led through this Hell,' he said to me, 'recognize me if you can: you were made before I was unmade'] (40-2). The pilgrim's failure to identify his older Florentine contemporary has little to do with his muddy countenance: his recognition of the damned typically transcends their disfigurement, as in the case of Filippo Argenti two cantos later. Ciacco, forced to identify himself, proceeds by circumlocution, carefully averting the first person:

> Ed elli a me: "La tua città ch'è piena
> d'invidia sì che già trabocca il sacco,
> seco mi tenne in la vita serena.
> Voi cittadini mi chiamaste Ciacco […]" (49-52)

[And he to me, 'Your city, which is so full of envy that already the sack runs over, held me in it, in the bright life. You citizens called me Ciacco […]']

His only recourse is a nickname imposed on him by those residents of a city to which he has no more claim than to his name. Florence, whose name is similarly withheld, is "la tua città" the land of "voi cittadini," bearers of a communal identity obliquely barred to Ciacco, whose own ties to the city he casts in typically passive terms: "seco mi tenne in la vita serena" (51). The prophecy the pilgrim pries from the sinner fails to distract him from his primary concern, recognition: "Ma quando tu sarai nel dolce mondo/priegoti ch'alla mente altrui mi rechi" ['But when you shall be in the sweet world I pray you recall me to men's memory'] (88-9). Ciacco ends his speech as he began, just before making his curious exit: "Li diritti occhi torse allora in biechi;/ guardommi un poco, e poi chinò la testa:/ cadde con essa a par de li altri ciechi" [Thereon he twisted his straight eyes asquint, looked at me for a moment, then bent his head and fell down with the other blind ones] (91-3). As he falls back, he relinquishes those vestiges of humanity—speech, sight and upright stature—that temporarily distinguished him from the muddy mass.

The twelfth century cast an unforgiving light on the body's vulnerability to the effects of food, diffusing the contours of the Christian self to the subtlety of Dante's "perla in bianca fronte" in *Paradiso* 3. The theory of radical moisture eased a process that Aristotelianism rendered not only impossible but unnecessary. Aquinas's formalist notion of identity failed to allay fears that the loss of one's seminal matter would bear with it the truth of human nature. Seen in this light, Dante's maceration of the gluttons assumes its properly infernal aspect, a validation of the Christian fear that man can, through nutriment, lose his identity. Can, Dante seems to say, with the ascetics of his day, but need not. Devourers of their very selves, the poet's rain drenched gluttons are as pitiably condemned as the pilgrim suggests, still begging for recognition.