

Dante draws on and transforms Ovid's Narcissus (*Met.* 3.339-510) to symbolize the aesthetic project of *La Divina Commedia*, that is, the rejection of sensory pleasure in favor of rational reflection that leads to a transcendent aesthetic experience. Dante places Narcissus in structurally significant junctures, most notably in the thirtieth cantos of *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso*. As the figure of Dante ascends, so does the aesthetic experience.

The importance of Ovid in Dante's work has received increasing attention from scholars (Jacoff and Schnapp 1991; Sowell 1991; Brownlee in Jacoff 1993). While *Inf.* 30.128 is the only explicit reference to Narcissus by name, scholars have drawn attention to the number of allusions to the story of Narcissus that mark the progress of Dante's own spiritual and poetic transformation (Dragonetti 1965; Brownlee 1978; Shoaf 1983; McMahon 1985; McMahon in Sowell 1991). This paper further contributes to the understanding of Narcissus in *La Divina Commedia* in two ways: first, by setting allusions to Narcissus in the context of other Ovidian references that are often overlooked; and second, by bringing into the discussion the treatment of Narcissus offered by Giovanni del Virgilio, who corresponded with Dante and who also wrote a commentary on Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (Ghisalberti 1933).

Narcissus first appears in *Inf.* 30.128 when Dante, the protagonist, becomes entranced by Sinon and Master Adam arguing with each other. Vergil interjects at that moment when Narcissus is mentioned to scold Dante for his fascination with such a base argument (*Inf.* 30.124-48) because, instead of reflecting on the meaning behind their punishment, Dante delights in looking. This allusion to Narcissus is set amongst references to other Ovidian figures who have also fallen prey to their passions. In this same passage, Dante carefully reads and 'corrects' Ovid's stories by portraying such figures as Athamas and Hecuba as animals to reflect their rejection of human reason. For example, instead of turning Myrrha into a tree, as Ovid does, Dante portrays her shade as a wild hog as consequence for surrendering her mind to bestial lust.

In his commentary on Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Giovanni del Virgilio interprets Narcissus as a famous man who trusts too much in ephemeral fame. Although his commentary was published shortly after Dante's death, his reading of Narcissus presents two interpretive possibilities. The first is that Giovanni's commentary provides insight into contemporary thought on Ovid and could explain why Dante portrayed his own poetic pride in the allusion to Narcissus in *Purg.* 12 and the need to humble himself as a 'corrected' Narcissus in *Purg.* 30 (Brownlee 1978: 202). The second possibility is that Giovanni is interpreting Ovid's Narcissus through Dante's identification with Narcissus, illustrating how the appropriation of Ovid's stories by contemporary writers could subsequently affect the reception of those stories. Dante formulates his final response to posterity by transforming Narcissus and the aesthetic experience in *Par.* 30. Unlike Ovid's Narcissus who is never united with the vision he sees, whose insatiable desire is never quenched, Dante, as the transfigured Narcissus, experiences the satiety that is only attained in the vision of God--the ultimate aesthetic experience.