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## The Analysis of Meeting Lucifer Scene

One might say that Dante's meeting with Lucifer is an anti-climax because of the contrast between it and the trials he has faced throughout the rest of Hell. Having been shut out of the city of Dis and only allowed in through the intervention of a heavenly messenger, carried into the Maleborge by Geryon himself, manipulated and later pursued by the Rotklors gang of demons, and finally lowered into the Ninth Circle by the giant Antaeus, Dante's adventure has been action-packed and dangerous throughout, becoming increasingly more so as he descends further. Therefore, although he does very little to describe Lucifer or to predict what their encounter will be like throughout the *Inferno*, it is easy to get the impression that there will be a showdown or a tense encounter of some sort, as it would be a fitting end to the *Cantica*. In fact, by both avoiding a premature description of Lucifer (to the extent that is almost a shock when Virgil finally announces 'Ecco Dite...ed ecci il loco/ove convien che di fortezza t'armi' (Now see! Great Dis! Now see the place where you will need to put on all your strength (34.20-21))) and placing him in the deepest, least accessible region of Hell, Dante cloaks him in mystery and thereby creates a good deal of anticipation and suspense, which Lucifer's passive nature fails to satisfy; the fact that Dante is simply able to climb up his fur and leave without resistance is a disappointment to any who would have expected some form of showdown or finale with Lucifer. Therefore, Dante's encounter with Lucifer initially seems to be an anti-climax because of its brevity, lack of intensity and the ease through which Dante leaves Hell at what one would imagine to be the final trial, having made such a precarious descent.

However, Dante's meeting with Lucifer is extremely poignant because it acts as the culmination of the image of evil that Dante has painted throughout the *Inferno*. Dante's evil is not a powerful force that is alluring through its potential to seemingly augment human lives at the cost of morality (an impression which we easily may receive from both the context of most modern depictions and older texts, including the Bible itself ('8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 9 "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me.'" – Matthew 4.8-9)), but rather a void of goodness, productivity and creativity that is tempting through how easy a path it is to turn to. Whilst he does examine wicked deeds themselves in no small detail, Dante's underlying focus is the detrimental effect that these deeds have on human potential. As Dante says through the mouthpiece of Brunetto Latini, 'ed è ragion, ché tra li lazzi sorbi/si disconvien fruttare al dolce fico' (That much is logical: no luscious fig can rightly thrive where small, sour sorbus grows. (15.65-66)); evil is not just another word for 'malicious occurrences', it is a force that restricts human capacity for goodness. Lucifer is devoid of all goodness and potential, so his encounter with Dante is by no means underwhelming because Lucifer is the definition of evil as Dante sees it – scorned by God and empty of all good things.

This approach adds further poignancy to the words on the door in Canto 3 through which Dante and Virgil enter Hell - 'Lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch'intrate' (surrender every hope you have as you enter (3.9)) – since it becomes clear that this instruction refers not only to the despair and inescapability of Hell, which makes hope futile (and therefore a torment), but also to the fact that evil is so devoid of constructive feelings that there is literally no place for hope, only resignation; Satan does not behave as though he has any aspirations of salvation or escape, but does nothing but mindlessly flap his wings to keep the Ninth Circle of Hell frozen and chew

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on Judas, Brutus, and Cassius.

In order to understand Canto 34 as a climax, one must first understand Dante and his mission – Dante is not a hero, but only a narrator; it is easy to get the impression that he is on some form of valiant quest but he is actually imagining himself as a pilgrim making his way through Hell and recording what he sees (the two are quite firmly differentiated when Virgil instructs Dante to hide behind a rock while negotiating with the Rotklors gang – and instruction that Dante willingly obeys due to his fear ('Accio che non si paia/che tu si sia...giu t'acquatta/dopo uno scheggio, ch'alcun schermo t'aia (Seem not to be here, just hunker down behind a spur of roc. It may still offer you some place to hide (21.58-60))). The difference between *Inferno* as a quest and *Inferno* as a journey is that the quest demands a finale or showdown, whereas the journey is simply a purposeful, unpretentious occurrence. Therefore, Dante's meeting with Lucifer can easily be viewed as an anti-climax if one perceives it as the conclusion of Dante's quest through Hell since it is not an epic finale and Lucifer is not portrayed as an arch-villain. However, since this perception is invalid due to the falsity of the quest *Inferno*, so that there is no real reason why Canto 34 could be seen as an anti-climax. In fact, from the perspective of Dante the pilgrim, it is poignant to the extent that it could easily be considered a climax; the Catholic Church defines Hell not primarily as a place of evil, but as a place for those abandoned by God's grace. Out of all the characters Dante encounters in Hell, Lucifer is the starkest example of a being that has been completely forsaken by God, for the simple reason that he completely lacks purpose. Every single other denizen of Hell that Dante encounters, regardless of how severely damned they are, retains a degree of purpose, from the insolent defiance of Vanni Fucci ('Togli Dio, ch'a te le squadro!' (Take that! I'm aiming, God, at you! (24.3)) right up to Ugolino in Circle 9, who still has the determination and resolve to gnaw on the skull of Archbishop Ruggieri 'denti/che furo a l'osso, come d'un can, forti' (his teeth, like any dog's teeth, strong against the bone (33.77-78)) despite the fact that he is frozen in ice.

However, Lucifer has no true purpose (his endless flapping and chewing are mindless functions) and, despite the fact that he is neither remarked on as being unintelligent or illogical (he is, in fact, sentient enough to weep ('Con sei occhi piangea' (he wept from all six eyes (34.53))), this reduces him to a meaningless husk. He is not a beast – the hideous aesthetic is arbitrary and most likely used to be in keeping with the Church's usual demonic imagery, and therefore to ensure that Dante's Lucifer is easy to identify – or an antagonist in an actively malicious sense, but rather a terrible and terrifying example of what evil truly means and what it can do to a person – one of the most important lines in the whole poem is 'S'ell fu si bel com' elli è ora brutto...ben dee da lui procedure ogne lutto.' (If, once, he was as lovely as now vile...then truly grief must all proceed from him (34.34-36)), since it conveys not only Lucifer's current, deplorable state, but also the amount of potential and greatness that evil and God's total withdrawal of grace and salvation reduced him to. In this way, Dante's encounter with Lucifer is not only starkly poignant, but also a reflection of his disgust at Florence (and, indeed, Italy) for also squandering potential – the lines 'La gente nuova e i subiti guadagni/orgoglio e dismisura han generata,/Fiorenza, in te, sic he tu gia ten piagni' (That race of newly rich, and rapid gains, these seeds, Fiorenza, bring to flower in you excess and pride. And you already weep for that (16. 73-75)) are just as meaningful here as they are in Canto 16.