

The Power of Great To Shape Character and Dante, Humboldt,



*Domenico di Michelino, "Dante Alighieri Reading His Poem,"
1465, Cathedral of Florence, Florence, Italy.*

Alinari/Art Resource, NY

*This article was prepared from a speech delivered to the
semi-annual conference of the Schiller Institute held at
Reston, Virginia, on February 18-19, 1996.*

Poetry Build the Nation: and Helen Keller

by Muriel Mirak Weissbach

One of the main reasons why the American population seems to be in the state it is in today, is that it seems to have lost the capacity to debate real issues in a literate way. If you were to ask the average American, what the great drama of the day is—and Lyndon LaRouche has done this frequently, using the example of *Hamlet*—that average American might be bewildered and say, “Well, since the O.J. Simpson trial is gone, there’s not very much drama around. But we have high hopes that something might come up in the Grand Jury with Hillary.”

The American population—and this *is* a tragedy—has lost its capacity to thrash out ideas, in the form which literate language makes possible.

Now, this was not always so. The people who founded this republic were not a bunch of illiterate backwoodsmen who came here to develop the frontier. The founders of the American Republic, who built this nation, were philosophers, *literate people*.

The population of the early colonies and the early republic, was, indeed, the most literate in the world of its day. If you read the works of Tom Paine, one of the compatriots of the Revolution in constitutional process, and you see his account of how the Constitution was discussed in this country, it’s absolutely mind-boggling. Because he describes how, from the Constitutional Convention, ideas, drafts, proposals for the Constitution, would be sent out into the population, into the different states. They would be discussed, debated, in town meetings, in homes, on farms. Ideas would be added, contributed; criticism would be made, and this process would go back into the central discussion in Philadelphia and elsewhere.

This was a population which had been raised on the



Courtesy of Perkins School for the Blind

Helen Keller as a young girl.

great works of literature in the English language. This was a population that had been brought up on Shakespeare, on Marlowe; a profoundly religious, Christian population, whose mind was imbued with the ideas and the language of the great King James Version of the Bible.

What that population had, which the population today has lost—although not irrevocably—was what Dante Alighieri called a “*vulgare illustre*,” an “illustrious vernacular.” That is, the mother-tongue of a people, elevated through great poetry, great drama, great literature, to become a vehicle for communicating what Shelley would call “impassioned ideas respecting man and nature.” America has indeed lost this—but it’s part of our commitment to revive it now.

I want to use the example of Dante Alighieri, to show what goes into developing a literate language.

First of all, who was Dante? He lived at the end of the Thirteenth century. He was a political figure, a literary figure, who had assimilated universal history up to that point, and had realized that the civilization he lived in was doomed. And he was right: Only half a century later, Europe was to go into the greatest collapse that it had experienced up until that time, a collapse of the banking system through the usury of the Venetian banks, a collapse of civilization which led to the spread of deadly diseases, epidemics, the Black Plague, which wiped out half the population of Europe.

Although he could not foresee the form in which this collapse would come, Dante *knew* that it was coming—because he saw the corruption, the rottenness, the betrayal, the treachery, the stupidity, the ignorance of the population around him, and of the leadership of political institutions.

FIGURE 1. “Combed” and “hairy” words identified by Dante in *De Vulgare Eloquentia*.

‘Combed’ words

<i>amore</i>	love
<i>donna</i>	lady
<i>disio</i>	desire
<i>virtute</i>	virtue
<i>donare</i>	contribute, give
<i>letizia</i>	happiness
<i>salute</i>	health
<i>securitate</i>	security
<i>difesa</i>	defense

‘Hairy’ words

<i>terra</i>	earth, land
<i>honore</i>	honor
<i>speranza</i>	hope
<i>gravitate</i>	gravity
<i>alleviato</i>	alleviated
<i>impossibilitate</i>	impossibility
<i>benaventuratissimo</i>	very fortunate
<i>aventuratissimamente</i>	very fortunately
<i>disaventuratissimamente</i>	very unfortunately
<i>sovramagnificentissimamente</i>	very super-magnificently

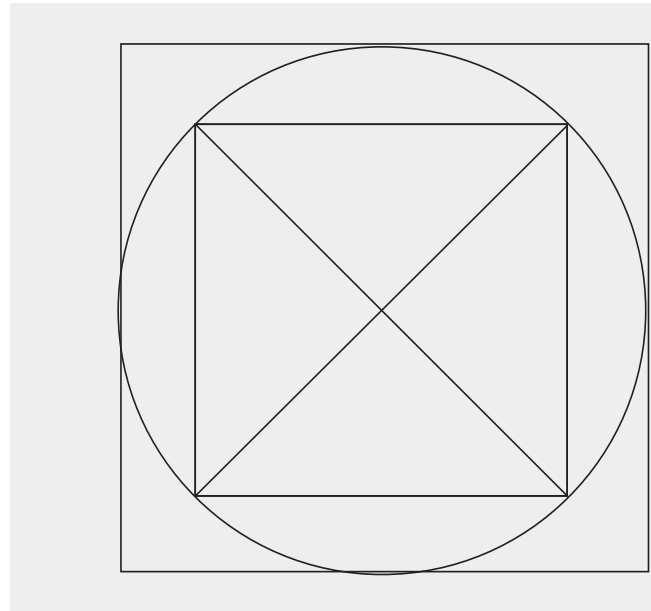
So, what did Dante do? He was exiled, naturally; he was an oddball, who was, therefore, completely ostracized from polite society. What could he do? He couldn’t intervene politically. He called himself the “Party of One,” “*Il Partito d’Uno*,” because he was alone.

He decided to write a poem which would establish a national language, and would develop some fundamental ideas, to sow the seeds for the future regeneration of culture in a country whose civilization, he saw, was doomed.

His aim in writing this great work, the *Divina Commedia*, or *Divine Comedy*, and in developing the linguistic-poetical means to do it, was to *change the way in which people thought*. To change the axioms of the Italians, and to create the basis for a national identity by creating a true national language.

Poetry Uplifts the People To Become a Nation

Dante elaborated a general theory of language and of poetry, which was to become the foundation, not only for the Italian language, but, by extension, for all national languages. In his work *De Vulgare Eloquentia*, which is on the eloquence of the vernacular, the mother-tongue, Dante surveyed the Italian landscape at the time, which



was made up of thousands of petty fiefdoms, thousands of little groups of feudal nobles who were jealously guarding their particular turf, their particular power. There were about thirty thousand different dialects of what you could call Italian. Not only did *every city* have its own dialect, but, as Dante points out, the Bolognese (the people of Bologna) of one neighborhood, Borgo di San Felice, spoke a slightly different dialect than the Bolognese who lived on the main street in the city—and they were proud of it!

Not only were there many dialects, but most of them were very ugly. So, Dante used musical criteria to judge each dialect, seeking out the most harmonious. He said, first, “Since the Romans [the inhabitants of the city of Rome] consider themselves first in everything, we will consider them first in cursing—the language—and say that the vernacular spoken by the Romans, or, better, their sad language [*questo triste parlare*] is the ugliest of all the vernaculars.” (Of course, Dante had not been to Dallas, Texas, or the Bronx, so this was his frame of reference.) And he adds: “No wonder the Romans speak such an *ugly* language, since their habits and their customs stink.”

The dialects of the Milanese and the Bergomaschi (from Bergamo), he discards as “grating to the ear.” The Sardinians do not even merit to be considered as a dialect, because what they speak, he says, “is no proper vernacular. It’s rather a bastardized imitation of Latin,” which Dante knew to be an artificial language. The Genoese, he said, “would be totally mute, if one were to force them not to use the ‘z’ sound, because they put it in every word.”

Having gone through the gamut of these dialects, Dante asks himself: “Just as all numbers, multiplicity, must be measured in reference to unity—the One—there

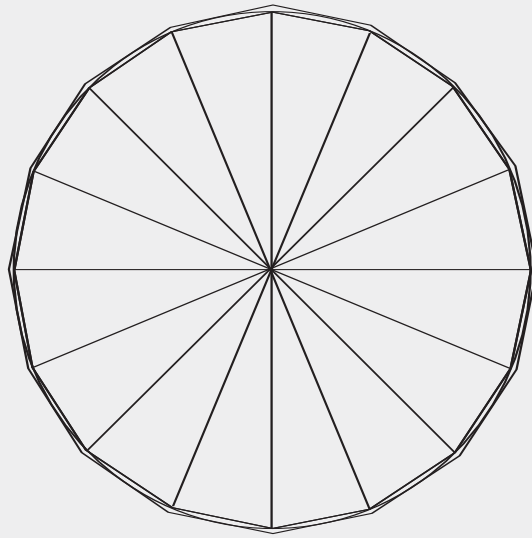
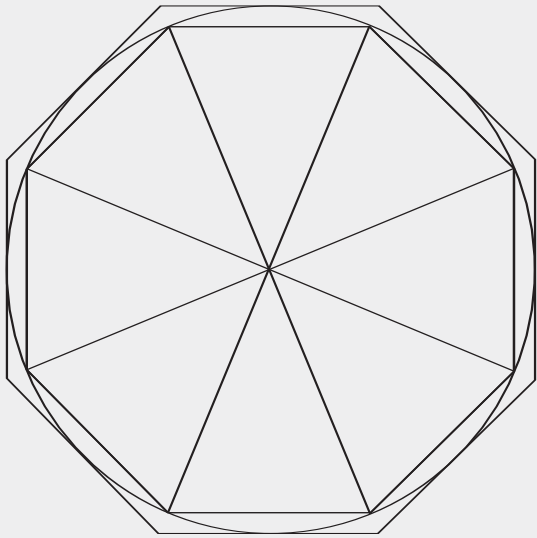


FIGURE 2.
Estimating the area
of a square
approximately
equal to that of a
given circle, as the
average area of two
regular polygons
(from Lyndon H.
LaRouche, Jr., “On
the Subject of
Metaphor”).

must be a vernacular which appears in every city, but lives, rests, in no single one.” In other words, he was asking himself the question: “What is the One which corresponds to the Many of these dialects?” This One did not exist in its manifest form. So, Dante had to create it, applying the harmonic criteria of music. Thus, he identified the five pure vowel sounds that are primary in the Italian language (actually, in all languages): /a/, /e/, /i/, /o/, /u/*—as opposed to, for example, the Turinese dialect, where they say “eu” for /u/, or the Milanese, where they say “eh” instead of /e/.

And he considered the beauty of the words according to the purity of their sound.

The most beautiful words, which Dante called “combed”—with a comb, not “dishevelled”—are those of about three syllables, without harsh sounds, or double consonants [SEE Figure 1]. Words like “*amore*,” “*donna*,” “*disio*,” “*virtute*,” “*donare*,” “*letizia*,” “*salute*,” “*securitate*,” “*difesa*.” Not only do these words correspond to the formal musical criteria, but also, from the standpoint of their content, they are noble words: love, woman, desire, virtue, giving, happiness, health, security, defense—concepts that are proper to moral persons and a moral ordering of society.

Other kinds of words, which Dante called “*irsute*,” “hairy,” include both monosyllabic (but necessary) ones, and a category of decorative, ornate words of many, many syllables, that contain very harsh sounds and double consonants [SEE Figure 1]. These included “*ter-ra*”

* The sequence of vowel sounds indicated here is not that of the “long” English vowels, but of the singing vowels. In order, the sound sequence of the Italian /a/, /e/, /i/, /o/, /u/ is close to the vowels in the English words *father*, *weigh*, *he*, *no*, and *who*—Ed.

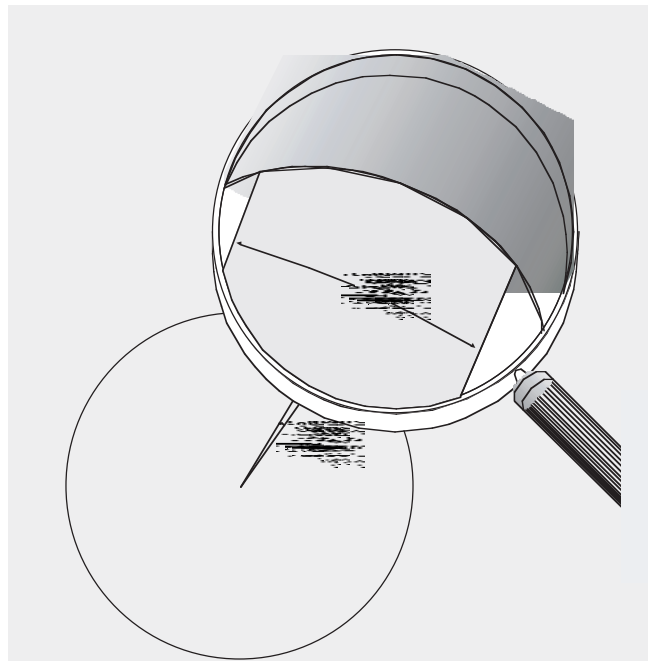


FIGURE 3. An inscribed polygon of 2^{16} (65,536) sides may seem to closely approach a circle. But the perimeter of the polygon can never become congruent with the circle’s perimeter (from Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr., “On the Subject of Metaphor”).

(“*te-r-r-r-a*”); or “*h-onore*,” where the “h” was aspirated; or “*impossibilitate*.” Dante points out that the last word listed in Figure 1, “*sovramagnificentissimamente*,” is a word of eleven syllables, a metrical hendecasyllable. This is the maximum length for a word in the Italian language—for reasons you can appreciate if you struggle to say it! Dante calls this length “the most celebrated, stateliest by reason of the length of time it occupies, and

the extent of subject, construction, and language which it is capable of.” This is because it embodies the metrical characteristics of the language, with stresses falling on the second, sixth, and tenth syllables, or variations thereof, although the tenth syllable is always accented.

Dante did not take all of these words and make rules, or compile a dictionary, as, for example, Dr. Samuel Johnson in Eighteenth-century England did. It was not the *formal* question of communication; it was not the *formal* question of conjugation, syntax, or rules. But, it was the question of shaping a linguistic medium capable of communicating creative scientific ideas.

Dante forged this vehicle on the basis of harmonic criteria, in order to create the language of science, which is called Poetry. He elaborated the science of composition of poetry—and therefore music, which derives from poetry, *not only* for the Italian language, but, implicitly, for *all* languages.

In doing so, Dante understood that the vehicle for communicating a creative idea, is a *metaphor*. What do we mean by a metaphor? Look at the geometrical diagram in Figure 2. Lyndon LaRouche has used this drawing many times as an example. On the top left is a circle with an inscribed, and circumscribed square. The squares inside and outside the circle are continually divided up to form new polygons, and, with each side being divided, the total number of sides becomes multiplied.

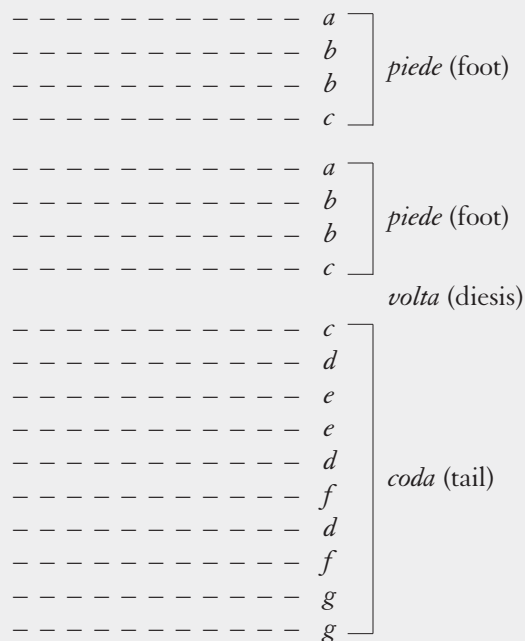
The idea behind this process is to try to bring the polygons into coherence with the circle—to square the circle. But the more successful we are in this process, however, the farther away from our aim we actually get. In the microscopic view shown in Figure 3, you see that what happens when we continue this process of multiplication, by trying to approach the circle asymptotically. You see, that you are multiplying the number of singularities, the number of angles—which is the characteristic of the polygon. Whereas the circle is characterized by the fact that it has no angles. So, the more successful you are, the closer you come, the farther away you actually are; which *proves* that the circle is of an *other and superior characteristic*, as compared to the polygon.

Having gone through this, you can now put a name to this, and call it “squaring the circle,” or the attempted proof of squaring the circle.

We call this naming process, a *metaphor*. That is, a *metaphor* is a name that you give to a scientific discovery. After having gone through the process of replicating that discovery, or making it originally for the first time, you attach a name to it, and that name then becomes a referent for the process you have just gone through. This is what poetry does.

Dante saw, in the form of the strophic poem, the key to all poetic composition. He called it the “*canzone*,” from

FIGURE 4. Schematic rendering, Dante canzone, typical stanza.



the verb “*cantare*,” to sing; *canzone* is song. As LaRouche has written, “the tradition of vocalization of Classical strophic poetry, is the probable origin of what we know as scientific thought and scientific method today.” This is something that Dante understood, that he had intuited. He understood that strophic poetry held the key to the transmission of certain specific scientific ideas.

Dante talks about the *canzone* in the following terms. What is the *canzone*? he asks. Well, it’s the “action” or “passion” of singing. The “action on the part of him who creates it—the composer—and the passion on the part of him who recites or sings it.” The *canzone*, furthermore, is very different from and superior to other poetical forms, like the ballad or the sonnet. Because the *canzone* is “made up of harmonized words,” harmonically composed and combined words which are “apt to be sung.” In other words, it contains its musicality *in itself*, and requires no musical setting or accompaniment, as did the ballad and the sonnet.

What is the form of the *canzone*? Dante says it is a “conjugation,” a word you would usually use in describing a verb. He says it is a “conjugation of stanzas which tend toward a statement, a single idea, a concept.” The key in the *canzone* is the *stanza*, which he calls the heart of the *canzone*, its art—“all of the art of the *canzone* is contained in the *stanza*.”

And, what is the *stanza*? In Italian, *stanza*, means room. Formally, the *stanza* is a number of poetical lines, which may be divided according to length of syllables—

FIGURE 5. Dante canzone, using a “sestina” verse form, in which the same line ending-words are re-ordered in each subsequent stanza, according to a fixed rule (SEE p. 28 for English translation).

Al poco giorno e al gran cerchio d’ombra
son giunto, lasso!, ed al bianchir de’ colli,
quando si perde lo color ne l’erba;
e ’l mio disio però non cangia il verde,
sì è barbato ne la dura petra,
che parla e sente come fosse donna.

Similmente questa nuova donna
si sta gelata come neve a l’ombra;
che non la move, se non come petra,
il dolce tempo che riscalda i colli
e che li fa tornar di bianco in verde
perché li copre di fioretti e d’erba.

Quand’ella ha in testa una ghirlanda d’erba
trae de la mente nostra ogn’altra donna;
perché si mischia il crespo giallo e ’l verde
sì bel, ch’Amor li viene a stare a l’ombra,
che m’ha serrato intra piccoli colli
più forte assai che la calcina petra.

La sua bellezza han più vertù che petra,
e ’l colpo suo non può sanar per erba;
ch’io son fuggito per piani e per colli,
per potere scampar da cotal donna;
e dal suo lume non mi può far ombra
poggio né muro mai né fronda verde.

Io l’ho veduta già vestita a verde
si fatta, ch’ella avrebbe messo in petra
l’amor ch’io porto pur a la sua ombra;
ond’io l’ho chesta in un bel prato d’erba
innamorata, com’anco fu donna,
e chiuso intorno d’altissimi colli.

Ma ben ritorneranno i fiumi a’ colli
prima che questo legno molle e verde
s’infiammi come suol far bella donna,
di me; che mi torrei dormire in petra
tutto il mio tempo e gir pascendo l’erba,
sol per veder do’ suoi panni fanno ombra.

Quandunque i colli fanno più nera ombra,
sotto un bel verde la giovane donna
la fa sparer, com’uom petra sott’erba.

eleven syllables, seven syllables, nine syllables, and so on—and organized into groups. For example, Figure 4 shows a schematic rendering of what Dante calls a “typical stanza.” There are four lines at the beginning, each of

eleven syllables, rhyming *abc*. Dante calls this subdivision of the stanza, a “foot” (“*pie*de”). Then, the same scheme is repeated: same length of lines, rhyming *abc*. That’s another foot.

Then, there is a long part, which has a different rhyme scheme: *cdee, ddfj, gg*. This is called the “*coda*,” or “tail.” Note, that across the division between the second foot and the *coda*, there is a rhyming line: *c* and *c*. Dante calls this the “*diesis*.”

The stanza form will be repeated many times in the course of a *canzone*. Dante says that, “Each stanza is harmonized to receive a certain *oda*,” a certain musical idea, which is reflected in the rhyme or song. “Sometimes the stanza will continue according to one musical idea to the end, without repetition or division.” (The particular stanza form shown in Figure 4 has both repetition and division.) Dante defines division as, “that which moves from one musical idea to another.” This is called “*volta*,” (“turn”), or *diesis*—which is the semitone, the musical sharp, used to modulate from one key to another. That’s what happens across the division from the second foot to the *coda*, where the lines rhyme *c* to *c*—there is a modulation to a new musical idea.

Figure 5 shows an example of a stanza harmonized to receive a certain *oda*, or song, which continues without changing. The lines do not rhyme, but the same end-words are repeated in each subsequent stanza, in a changing order. In the first stanza, the order of the end-words, is “*ombra, colli, erba, verde, petra, donna*.” In the next stanza, the order is “*donna, ombra, petra, colli, verde, erba*.” And then, “*erba, donna, verde, ombra, colli, petra*.” And so on. It is very difficult to write a meaningful poem, while respecting these kinds of limitations. But, nonetheless, this is an example of a *canzone* which does *not* change.

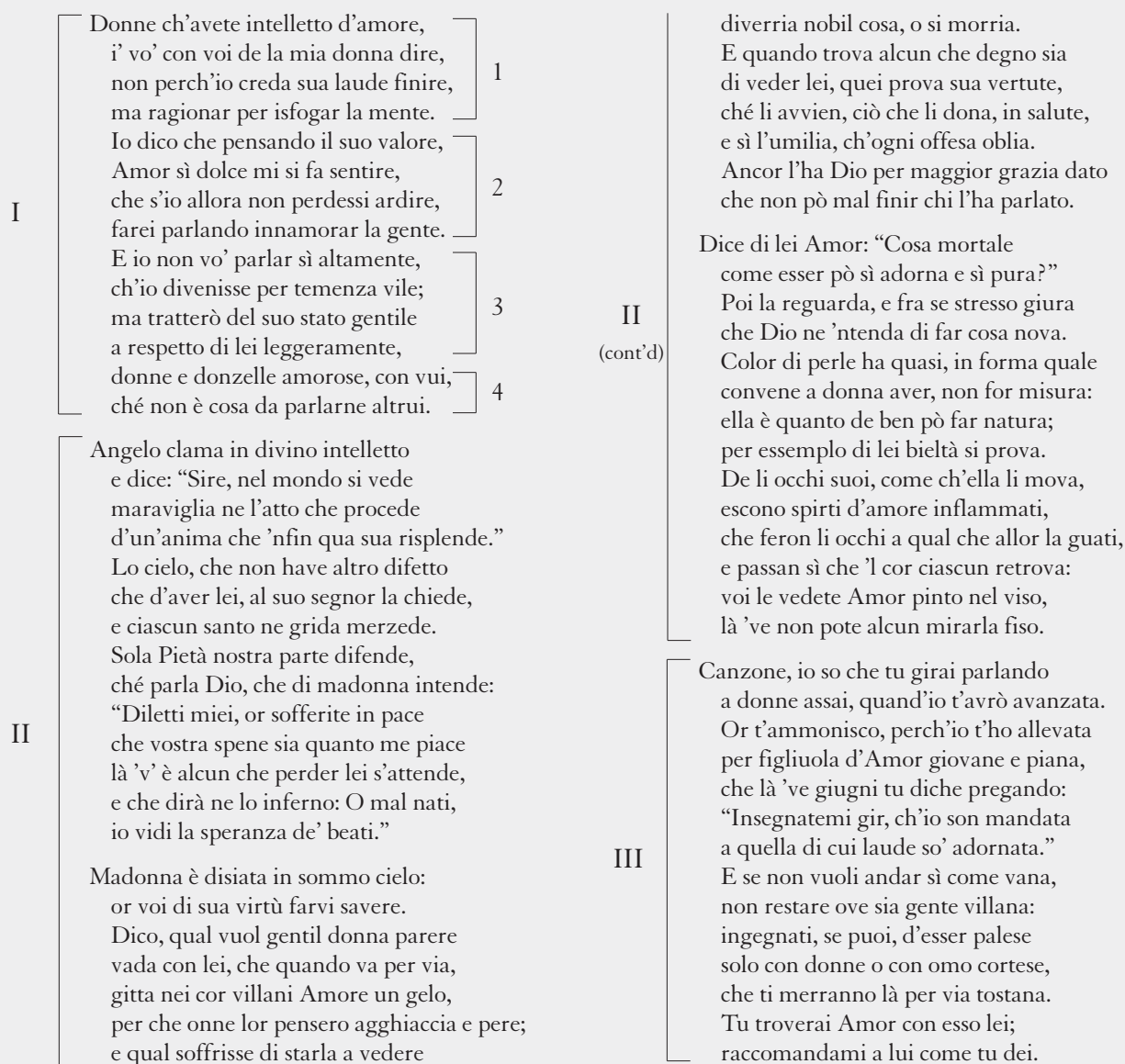
An example of a *canzone* where you *do* have change is shown in Figure 6. This is “*Donne ch’avete intelletto d’amore*,” a *canzone* which is addressed to “Ladies, those of you who have intelligence (the intellect) of love.”

Dante will show that the stanza is not just a formal consideration. It is not an arbitrary form, where you say, “I’ll have five lines here, or four lines there; I’ll rhyme, or I’ll not rhyme.” The stanza is what it is, because it represents a form in which an idea can be put through development—regardless of the number of lines it may have, because there’s a great flexibility in the form.

The basic idea in developing the *canzone*, as LaRouche has referenced in regard to the *sonata* form, is to have a statement, a re-statement or counter-statement, a development, and a recapitulation. This is the form in which human creative thought arises.

The particular *canzone* shown in Figure 6 comes from Dante’s *Vita Nuova* (*The New Life*), his earliest work, in which he was developing the *canzone* form, writing *can-*

FIGURE 6. Dante canzone from the Vita Nuova. Dante's division into parts is discussed in the text (SEE p. 28 for English translation).



zoni and then explaining them in detail. So, it's a very useful work in which to study *how* Dante elaborated this form. The example here has five stanzas, all of the same internal form.

Dante says, in discussing this *canzone*: I've divided it into *three* main parts [marked I, II, and III in the Figure]. The first part [marked I] is the first stanza; it presents the basic idea of my entire poem, which is the prelude, the announcement of the idea. Then, in the second, third, and fourth stanzas [marked II], I elaborate this idea, and actually say in these three stanzas what I said at the beginning I was going to say. And then, Dante says, I recapitulate and summarize the development of the

whole in the last stanza [marked III].

Not only in the *canzone* form as a whole, but also *within the single stanza*, Dante shows that this organization of poetic lines and rhymes corresponds to the process of a developing thought. He says: Take the first stanza. There are *four* divisions [marked 1, 2, 3, and 4 in the Figure]. In the very first part, the first four lines [marked 1], I say to whom I want to speak about my lady, Beatrice, and why. Then, in part 2, I say how I feel when I contemplate her virtue, and how I *know* that if I could express it appropriately, I would make my hearer immediately fall in love. Then, in part 3, I say what I'm going to be saying about her. And finally, in part 4, I say

again to whom I'm speaking, and why. Dante is speaking here to these *donne donzelle*, who have intelligence, that is, an intellect of love, because what he's going to develop, is a matter which not everybody should hear about or talk about. It's not fit for everybody's ears or mind, but only for such persons.

So, here again, if you look at the content, you have the statement; the second statement or re-statement; the elaboration or development; and the recapitulation.

Each stanza has its musical idea, as we've seen, bounded by the syllabic lines. The form is continued, maintained; but the content, of course, changes, develops. It remains in the memory upon which is impressed the form, the musicality of the stanza, and it carries the meaning through, the metaphor forward.

As LaRouche writes in his recent work on Hobbes: "The strophe provides a repeated, yet varied structure for the poem as a whole. The change of vowels and consonants, in contrast of one strophe to each of the others, provides a degree of contrapuntal irony to the repeated common aspect of the successive strophes. The imagery of ideas in the verse as such, provides another degree of contrapuntal irony. It is the juxtaposition of these ironies, which generates paradoxes. The form known as the classical strophic poem, provides the poet, thus, a medium whose potential is a nest of paradoxes: within the stanza, among the stanzas, and in the poem taken as a unit-whole."*

Dante did not invent the stanza, however; he did not invent the *canzone*. It's important to note, particularly since we're concerned with universal history and the contribution of various cultures to what we understand as universal history, to realize that the stanza, the strophic poem, is, firstly, a very ancient form, a form that was found already thousands of years ago in Vedic poetry in Sanskrit. It's abundant in the Greek poetry of the Classical period.

Secondly, it may come as a surprise to you, but, in the modern era, the strophic poem re-entered and began to shape modern vernaculars, through Dante, not first from Italian, but from the *Arabic* language.

The Arabic tradition of poetry, which gave a tremendous impulse to the development of the vernaculars in Europe, was present particularly through the Arabic culture in Islamic Spain, known as *Andalus* (Andalusia). This was a land colonized by the Arabs after 711, when they invaded Spain, and it grew, at least under those humanist leaders which the culture had for many centuries, to be a flourishing culture, a flourishing society, in agriculture,

manufactures, and trade. This was a society which was urban-based, with *hundreds of cities*, and with millions of people—thirty million people in the area which was Andalusia, which is not even all of Spain today.†

It was a culture which had great cities, like Cordova, the capital; Seville, the center of musical instrument production; Toledo, the center of translations; and so on.

The key to the relative success of Andalusian civilization in Spain, was the role that language played in Arabic culture, particularly the role of poetry. This derives from a very particular characteristic of Islam, which is the importance laid on the spoken word.

In the revelation, the book known as the Koran, what are the first words which the prophet hears from God? The first command he is given, is "*Ikra!*"—"Read! Recite!" And this is a revolutionary command, because the prophet, Mohammed, is an illiterate. So this means that the revelation of the word of God, according to Muslims, is presented in the form of the gift of language to man.

As a result of the fact that the holy book of Islam is in Arabic, it means that every Muslim, in order to be a religious Muslim, to pray, must know the Arabic language. He must know *correct* Arabic, the Arabic of the Koran, which is poetical Arabic. Furthermore, in Islam, in the Koran, it is said that one of the many ways of worshipping the Lord, is to develop one's mind, to learn; to acquire wisdom, and to spread it. Therefore, the culture, at least under those enlightened leaders, placed a significant emphasis on education.

There were educational institutions in Andalusia which did not exist at that time in other parts of Europe. In addition to the mosques, which were traditionally like schools, there was the *ḡuttāb*, the elementary school, where basic skills, reading, writing, arithmetic, and so on, were learned, where memorization was stressed.

There were schools that were set up informally in the homes of learned men (*ʿulama*).

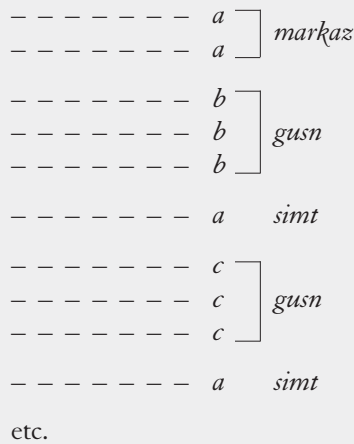
In the Ninth and Tenth centuries, the mosques developed into *bona fide* universities, with scholars from Judaism, from Islam, and from Christianity, thronging to them to teach. There were academies as well: the *Dur al Hikmah*, *Dur al-Ilm*, the house of wisdom, the house of knowledge.

At one period, under Hakem II in the Tenth century, probably the greatest leader of Andalusia, there were state-sponsored schools, lasting into the Eleventh century, schools called *madrasah*. Hakem II was a great scholar

† For a full report on the history and cultural contribution of Islamic Andalusia, see Muriel Mirak Weissbach, "*Andalusien: Tor zu Goldenen Renaissance*" ("*Andalusia: Gateway to the Golden Renaissance*"), *Ibykus*, Vol. 13, Heft 48, 3rd Quarter, pp. 6-22.

* "How Hobbes' Mathematics Misshaped Modern History," *Fidelio*, Vol. V, No. 1, Spring 1996, pp. 6-30.

FIGURE 7. Poetic form of the Arabic muwashsha.



himself, who had a library with 400,000 volumes. He sent people out throughout the civilized world, in search of great books in any language, to bring them back, have them translated, and made available to others. Hakem II is said to have read every one of these books, because he annotated them in the margins.

Hakem II was the first ruler to introduce free elementary schools for children who did not have money to go to other schools, and he set up twenty-seven such elementary schools in Cordova.

Now, this obviously describes a society which, at least in literacy, was advanced relative to the rest of Europe at the time. Remember that even Charlemagne, a great leader of Northern Europe, was not able to read or write.

This emphasis on the written word, on the power of language, which comes directly from the religious worldview embodied in the Koran, was crucial to developing the society of Andalusia. Ironically, this same society did *not* succeed in developing a nation-state. It did *not* succeed in elaborating those institutions which would create a nation around this language-culture, for reasons which have to do with the relationship between the idea of the community of believers (*Umma*) and the nation, as it evolved geographically and historically. And, in a sense, the tension in Arab and Islamic societies between the *Umma* and the nation, has continued to the present day.

Since the language of the Koran, Classical Arabic, was taken to be the language of revelation, it was necessary to make sure that new converts to the religion would also speak the language properly. That meant that philological schools grew up, for example, in Basra, in Kufah, in today's Iraq, already in the Seventh and Eighth centuries. These schools of philology did for the

FIGURE 8. Arabic poem in muwashsha form by the Eleventh-century

رَبِّهِمْ وَالْأَفْحُونَ يَفْتَحُ ، وَالْدُنْيَا تَرْهَرُ
حَدَّثَ عَنِ السُّوسِنِ وَامْدَحَ جَمَالَهُ
وَالْوَرْدُ لَا تَنْسَاهُ وَامْدَحَ دَجَالَهُ
وَجَلَسَ التَّرَجِسُ عَلَى شِمَالِهِ
وَأَغْفَلَ عَنِ الْيَاسْمِينِ حَتَّى يَنْوَرُ

Arabic language, more or less what the Fifth-century B.C. grammarian Panini had done for Sanskrit: they codified the language, elaborating the rules for word formation, and so on, in order to make sure that the language would not degenerate.

The role of poetry in Andalusia was something absolutely unique, because poetry was not something for poets alone. Poetry was for everybody. It was a means of expression, of communication. Not only were statesmen cited for their poetical production, but “every peasant was obsessed by the gift of improvisation, and even the farmer behind the plow would make verses about any subject whatsoever.”*

Chronicles report that poetry was an indispensable tool for every aspect of social and political life. “Poems that wound around the columns in walls as decoration, constituted a major decoration in all the palaces; and even in the government chancelleries, the art of poetry played a role. . . . Men from the humblest position rose to the highest honored positions, to royal consideration even, solely through their poetical talent. Verses gave the signal for bloody combat, and disarmed as well the rage of the victor. Poetry had to lay its weight in the balance in order to lend more energy to diplomatic negotiations.” A leading figure would send a poet to negotiate as his ambassador, and “a happy improvisation often broke open the jail gates for a prisoner, or saved the life of one condemned to death.”

What kind of poetry was it, that was sung by the population in Andalusia? It was a strophic poem, the predecessor to the *canzone*, a strophic poem known as a *muwashsha*, or *muwashshahat* in the plural, whose poetic form is shown in Figure 7. The form of the stanza is

* Quotations from Adolf Friedrich Graf von Schack, *Poesie und Kunst der Araber in Spanien und Sizilien* (Stuttgart: J.G. Cotta'sche Buchhandlung, 1877), pp. 72-73.

Andalusian poet Ibn Guzman.

Transliteration:

Al-arḏu qad maddat bisāṭan ahḏar
Wa ʿl-aqḥuwān yaftaḥ, wa ʿd-dunyā tazhar:

Ḥaddaṭ ʿan as-sūsān wʿamdah ḡamālu
Wa al-ward lā tansāḥ wʿamdah diḡālu
Wa ḡalas an-narḡas ʿalā šimālu

Wa ʿgfil ʿani ʿl-yāsmīn ḥattā yanawwar!

English translation:

The earth spreads out a green carpet,
The daisies open up and the world blossoms:

Speak of the white lily and praise its beauty,
And forget not the magnificence of the rose,
And place the narcissus on the left.

And mention not the jasmine, until it blooms.

organized as follows. It begins with two lines which rhyme: “*ahḏar, tazhar.*” Then, three lines with a different rhyme: “*ḡamālu, diḡālu, šimālu.*” And last, a final line, which rhymes with the opening lines: “*yanawwar.*” The Arabic names for the parts of the stanza are: first, *markaz*; second, *gusn*; and last, *simt*.

Figure 8 shows an example of a *muwashsha* in Arabic script, transliterated into the Roman alphabet, and translated into English.

The *muwashsha* form was a new development in the history of the Arabic language. Classical Arabic poetry had a continuous rhyme, without this internal division, this organization into thought-objects, so to speak. This revolution was introduced into the Arabic language in Spain and in Arabia more or less at the same time, in the Ninth century. From there, it spread like wildfire throughout the courts of Europe, through the troubadours, through the German minstrels (*Minnesänger*), and so on.

Figure 9 shows some examples of the *muwashsha* form in the languages which were emerging as vernaculars in Europe at that time, including Spanish, Italian, Provençal, and German.

In the Spanish poem beginning “*Vivo ledo con razon,*” for example, you can see that the stanza is organized into the same parts, with Spanish names for the corresponding Arabic ones.

Amongst the Italian examples, the one that begins “*Morte villana, di pietà nemica,*” comes from Dante’s *Vita Nuova*. This is exactly a *muwashsha* stanza, the exactly same form that you find in the Arabic. It demonstrates that Dante knew the Arabic *muwashsha* form directly.

Most of the poems in Andalusia, in this tradition, were poems of courtly love. They were poems that praised the qualities of the damsel, of the lady, the beloved. Some of them, however, were ironical; some of them were social-critical, polemical; and some of them were epigrammatic.

For example, from the Thirteenth century, the following poem by Ibn al-Khabazza is called “The King Who Died Young”:

Your life was of the order true
Of Arab eloquence:
The tale was brief, the words were few;
The meaning was immense.*

Another, called “Mutability,” is by one of the greatest poets in Andalusia, Ibn Hazm, who lived in the late-Tenth and early-Eleventh centuries:

Let not my jealous foes
Exult in my disgrace;
For Fortune comes and goes
Nor tarries in one place.

A free man is like gold
Now cast for hammering,
But presently, behold!
A crown upon a king.

Among the religious poets, who were a large number in Andalusia, the mystics in Islam, there was a poetical form that developed, which was a form of a dialogue between the believer and God. And the idea behind this poetry was to try to reach oneness—unity—with God. This is the poetry that particularly influenced Raymond Lull (Raimundus Lullus) (c.1235–1316), who in fact wrote an entire series of poems based on this model, called *The Book of the Friend and the Beloved*, in which he develops what he calls spiritual metaphors—365, one for each day of the year—between himself, the friend, and the beloved, God. It’s a very beautiful collection.

* English translations from A.J. Arberry, *Moorish Poetry: A translation of The Pennants, an Anthology compiled in 1243 by the Andalusian Ibn Saʿid* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1953).

FIGURE 9. *Arabic Muwashsha poetic form, as used in early European vernaculars.*

Spanish

Vivo ledo con razon Amigos, toda sazon.	}	<i>estribillo</i>	I live in joy for a reason, friends, every moment.
Vivo ledo e sin pesar, pues amor me fizo amar a la que podré llamar	}	<i>mudanzas</i>	I am gay and without sorrow, for love has made me love her whom I would call
mas bella de cuantas son.	}	<i>vuelta</i>	the loveliest of them all.
Vivo ledo e veviré pues que de amor alcancé que servire' a la que sé	}	<i>mudanzas</i>	Happy I am, and shall be, for love has granted me to love her who I know
que me dara galardón.	}	<i>vuelta</i>	shall requite me.

Italian

Patre beato, per tua caridade, Ensegnaci a fare la tua bontade.	Blessed Father, for thy charity Teach us to do thy good.
Benigno Patre, per tuo gran dolcezza, Contra li vizii danne fortezza, Che nostra carne per suo fragilezza	Benevolent Father, for thy sweetness, Against vices, give us strength, As our flesh, being weak
Sempre ne cessa da tua amistade.	Always ceases with thy friendship.
Spesso superbia a noi abbonda, Che ne fa perder tuo grazia gicconda. Dolce Signore, nostra menta fonda	Often pride abounds in us, Which makes us lose thy lovely grace. Sweet Lord, thrust our spirit
Sempre in perfetta umilitade.	Always in perfect humility.

Provençal (*Troubadour*)

Farai chansoneta nueve
ans que vent ni gel ni plueva;
ma dona m'assai' e.m prueva
quossi de qual guiza l'am;
e ja per plag que m'an mueva
no.m solvera de son liam.

Thou wilt fashion a new song
Before the cold and rain arrive;
I am put to such great tests
The sparks fly from my soul;
Despite the pain that moves me
These bonds will not dissolve.

Middle High German (*Minnesänger*)

Got hat wonders vil gewundert
manich tusedt manich hundred
eynes han ich uz gesundert
das is wunderbare.

God hast wrought full many wonders
Many thousand many hundred
One alone from these I've chosen
Who is wonderful.

Italian (*from Dante's Vita Nuova; first stanza only*)

Morte villana, di pietà nemica,
di dolor madre antica,
guidicio incontestabile gravoso,
poi che hai data matera al cor doglioso
ond'io vado pensoso,
di te blasmar la lingua s'affatica.

Villainous Death, enemy to pity,
ancient mother of pain,
incontestable grave judgment,
since thou hast given substance to the grieved
heart
which is why I am engulfed in thought,
my tongue grows weary of censuring thee.

Llull was fascinated by this culture. He was a Christian, a missionary, who dedicated his entire life to evangelization, to converting Muslims to Christianity. But he understood that in order to take on the task he had carved out for himself, he had to have an understanding of the culture of the people he was talking to.

So Llull spent ten years doing nothing but studying Arabic, with a freed slave who became his teacher. He studied the Arabic language, he studied the philosophy, the philology, the history, and all the literary texts he could find. And, of course, he studied the religion of Islam. As a result of immersing himself in Arab and Islamic culture, Llull shaped his writings, ecumenical dialogues and other works addressing Muslims, from a standpoint that no other Christian writer could quite approximate. Because he got “inside the mind” of the culture, so to speak.

The same can be said of Dante Alighieri. The influence on Dante of the Islamic culture of Spain and also of Sicily, at the court of Friedrich II, has been much *under-estimated*. Those who have documented it have been ridiculed, because the Dante scholars in Italy, the “Dantisti,” would prefer to think that Dante didn’t owe anything to anybody outside of Italy. However, this culture had a tremendous influence on Dante, and his response to the culture was similar to Llull’s, although far greater, and far more important in consequence.

Dante saw that here was a vibrant culture in Spain, based on Islam—a religious belief which he held to be untrue. His commitment was to show the superiority of Christian belief, particularly of the Trinity, which is that which divides Christianity and Islam theologically; and to show it in terms which would outstrip the cultural achievements, so to speak, of Islam.

It is significant to see that Dante, in shaping his *Commedia*, used a motif which comes out of Islamic literature: the motif of the journey into Paradise. The motif of the journey into Hell, on the other hand, goes back to the pre-Christian religions. But, Dante received the specific motif of a believer going into

Paradise, through his teacher Brunetto Latini, in works that had been translated out of the Arabic. Because there is an episode in the *Koran* that tells of Mohammed the Prophet’s ascension to Heaven. It is a very brief episode, known as the *Mir’aj*; but, on the basis of that episode, an enormous literature developed. There were poems which celebrated this event, and Dante knew many of them, through Brunetto Latini.

Instead of having the Prophet go to Paradise, Dante chose for his motif, the pilgrim, the believer, the poet, the political protagonist—that is, Dante himself—going to Paradise. It’s a different journey, and a different kind of Paradise. But this is Dante’s response, in a certain sense, to the influence of Islam.

Dante’s *Commedia*: The Soul’s Journey from Darkness to the Light

The *Commedia* is organized as a great strophic poem. It’s much longer than any of Dante’s *canzoni*, of course; but it’s organized in three great stanzas, known as canticles.

Each of these stanzas—*Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso*—is divided into 33, or, in the case of *Inferno*, 34 cantos (*canti*=songs). So the *Commedia* replicates, on a much vaster scale, the same kind of organization that you find in the *canzone*.

Figure 10 shows a graphical representation, a “map,” of the universe as it’s represented in the *Commedia*. You have the Earth and, going from the top down, you see a spiral descent—that’s Hell. Then, coming up off the other side, at the bottom, you see a mountain—that’s Purgatory, which you climb up. And around, you see Paradise—the heavens, the Solar System, which is Paradise.

At the beginning of his journey, *Inferno*, Dante finds himself in Hell, as many people do at a certain

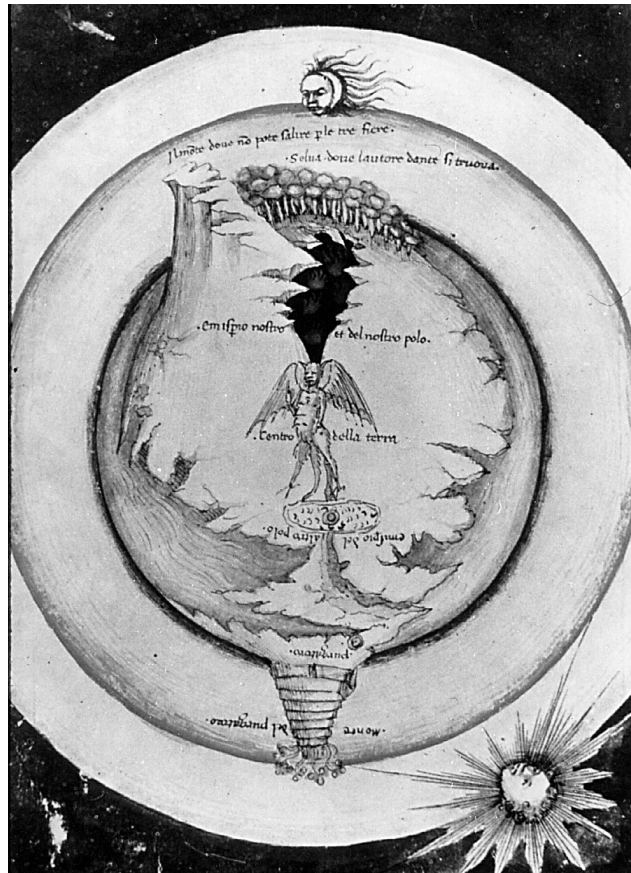


FIGURE 10. *The universe of Dante’s Divina Commedia.*

moment in their lives. He finds himself, as he says, lost in the forest, having lost the true path, and nothing but animals, ferocious beasts, surround him and threaten him [SEE Figure 11], until he is visited by Virgil, the great poet of Latin literature [SEE Figure 12]. Virgil tells him, “Dante, I have been sent here by Beatrice, a woman who is in Heaven, in Paradise, who knows of your plight, and who has sent me here in order to guide you to Paradise.”

Dante, who is immediately overcome by fear, a sense of inadequacy, says, “Why me? I’m not a hero.” He overcomes this initial fear, through the thought that there’s someone who loves him sufficiently to undertake this enterprise, and he decides he has to go along with Virgil

into Paradise. And then Virgil tells him, “Well, of course, I didn’t explain it to you before, but the route goes through Hell.” Dante again is a little bit hesitant, but, urged on by the loving support of Virgil, he undertakes to journey through Hell.

Now, what is Hell? It is the reign of Hobbesian man. Hell is not a place, but the mind, where “human nature,” so-called, resides. It is the mind of the irrational individual, who is driven by *nothing but* lust, fear, greed, hatred, rage, desire. And therefore, it is a mind incapable of thinking, a mind incapable of contributing anything positive. It is a mind that is *fixed in its own categories*; and in fact, Hell is beautifully organized in Aristotelean categories, down to the last detail, which is Dante’s comment on Aristotle’s philosophical system.

As he travels through, Dante meets sinners who have ended up in Hell, who were imprisoned in their lifetime by these irrational passions, people who were not able to overcome them, and who, even in Hell, in many cases, have been condemned to continue acting out this irrational insanity. For example, he finds the Blasphemers, those who swear against God and Christ. They are condemned to submersion, in a

lake of excrement, which stinks. And one of these Blasphemers, a man known to Dante, when he sees the boat of Dante and Virgil come along, raises his hand up above the excrement, in order to shout out again, his ultimate blasphemy. In other words, these are minds incapable of change, condemned to repeat their fixedness into infinity.

Dante meets up with the Homosexuals, who are pelted by a rain of



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FIGURE 11. *Inferno*, Canto I.



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FIGURE 12. *Inferno*, Canto I.



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FIGURE 13. *Inferno*, Canto XVI.

fire [SEE Figure 13]. He meets up with the Usurers [SEE Figure 14]—the I.M.F., Chase Manhattan, and Citi-Bank of their day. Each of the shields bears the insignia of one of Dante’s contemporary Italian banks. The Usurers, by the way, are in the same area as the Homosexuals, because they are both guilty of having violated the laws of nature.



FIGURE 14. *Inferno*, Canto XVII.

Dante comes across many people he knows in current-day Italy, people who are responsible for the catastrophe that he knows is about to descend on the entire country. And he names them by name as he goes, descending, from circle to circle, in Hell. He’ll even name the pope, Bonifazio, as one who is guilty of simony, of having sold Church indulgences. Dante finds the Simoniacs buried, with only their burning feet sticking up out of the ground [SEE Figure 15].

At the very bottom of Hell, in the Lake of Ice, where the sinners are frozen in position for all eternity, Dante meets the Traitors, like Conte Ugolino [SEE Figure 16]; and finally, he comes upon Satan himself.

In every one of these cases in Hell, what Dante does, and what you, the reader, do as a result, is to confront this irrationality in the form of the metaphor, the form of the sinner that he sees before him; and Dante recognizes in himself, or hears in himself, echoes of that same irrationality. And, by confronting this, Dante goes through a process of self-reflection and self-confrontation, which is the precondition for knowledge. He has to rid himself of this irrationality, of this fixedness, of tradition—of the “good old ways”—and free his mind to become creative.

In *Purgatorio*, the process is completely different. Here, the process is one of ascent. But it is not heavenly



FIGURE 15. *Inferno*, Canto XIX.



FIGURE 16. *Inferno*, Canto XXXIII.

ascent; it is ascent through *hard work*, ascent through duty. Virgil and Dante go up the mountain of Purgatory, plodding away. And Dante many, many times wants to stop, because it’s so hard, so tiring.

At each circle in Purgatory, Dante meets sinners, as he had in Hell. The difference with these sinners, however, is that they are repentant. They are people who have become self-conscious of

their sins, and therefore are working to overcome their state of sin, in order to be able to enter Paradise. So their emotional attitude is markedly different, and the attitude

Illustrations, facing pages: Gerolamo Guglielmi, illuminations to the Urbino Codex of the Divine Comedy, c.1480, Apostolic Library, Vatican City.



FIGURE 17. *Paradiso, Canto II.*

that Dante has to them is markedly different. He is not repelled, he is not shocked, he is not horrified; he is compassionate. And he expatiates his own sins, through this compassion for the sinners whom he meets [SEE illustration, inside Front Cover, this issue].

As he goes up, circle after circle, the journey becomes lighter and lighter. He is relieved of his sin in the form of the sign “*peccato*” on his forehead, and is ready to enter Paradise. But the precondition for his entering Paradise, is to go through a Wall of Fire [SEE illustration, inside Front Cover, this issue]. And the reason why he has to go through the Wall of Fire, is that he has to overcome this mere adherence to duty, which is characteristic of Purgatory, and to bring his emotions into coherence with his ideas. He must do that which he knows to be right to do, not because he’s forcing himself to do it (as he has been in Purgatory), but because there is an emotional commitment that flows towards this duty to do good.

Beatrice is on the other side of the fire. It is the name of Beatrice, uttered by Virgil, which allows Dante to overcome his fear of the fire. Once Dante focusses on his love for the Other, he can overcome the block within himself. And so, Beatrice now becomes his guide [SEE illustration, inside Front Cover, this issue]. Because, although Virgil guided him through Hell and Purgatory, you need a different metaphor to enter into Paradise. A different kind of relationship is required for the experience reported in *Paradiso*.

Dante begins his journey, ascending with Beatrice from the surface of the Earth to the moon [SEE Figure

17]. On the surface of the moon, there begins a series of questions, which is the characteristic of Paradise. You see, in Paradise, Dante no longer meets up with the kinds of individuals he’s encountered before in the previous canticles. His mind has become freed of the infantilism, the irrationality of Hell. Confronted with certain phenomena in the physical universe, he is now free to ask questions about the laws of nature; which is what he does.

For example, he asks Beatrice, “Why are there those dark spots on the moon?” (It’s a good question!) And Beatrice says, “Well,” (she doesn’t just give him the answer), “Why? Why do *you* think there are dark spots on the moon?” And Dante says, “Well, I think probably it’s because there are certain areas of the moon that are thicker, and certain areas of the moon that are thinner. So that’s why they’re dark and light.”

And Beatrice says, “Well, that’s not right. Because if that were the case, when there were an eclipse of the moon, the rays of the sun would shine through those parts which were thinner, more transparent, wouldn’t they?” Dante says, “That’s true, isn’t it? So, there must be another reason.” Beatrice replies, “Yes, there is. What’s the other reason?” And he says, “Well, I think that, probably, there are craters on the moon. There are certain areas of the moon’s surface which are ‘dug out,’ so to speak, and those are darker because they’re farther away from the light, so they don’t reflect the light in the same way.”

And Beatrice says at this point, “Well, why don’t you try an experiment in order to see if your theory is valid? [SEE Figure 18.] Take three mirrors, and place them at a distance. Place two of them at a certain distance behind you, and the third much further back. And then place a

Illustrations, facing pages: Giovanni di Paolo, illuminations to the Yates-Thompson Codex of Dante’s Divine Comedy (Paradiso), c.1445, The British Library.

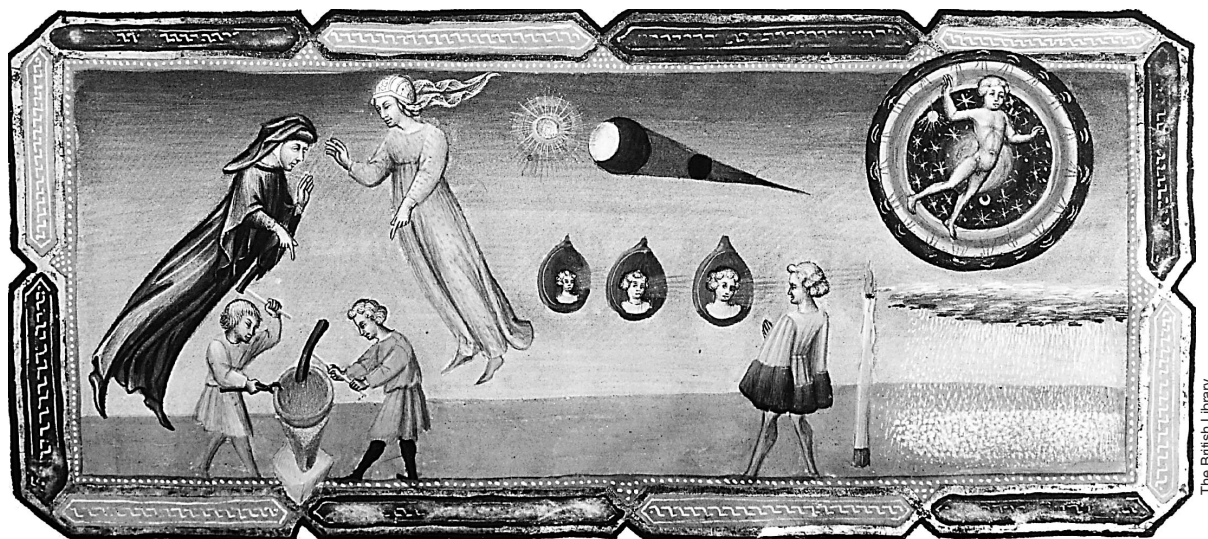


FIGURE 18. *Paradiso, Canto II.*

candle in the front. And look, observe to see what kind of a reflection the candle will cast in the three mirrors. You'll find," she says—and they do the experiment—"that the size of the candle flame in this mirror that is farthest away will be smaller, yes, because it's farther away. But the *intensity* will be the same. So that means that your theory about the craters on the surface of the moon is wrong."

So, Dante says, "All right. You tell me, why are there dark spots on the moon?" And Beatrice goes through an explanation which she will repeat in different forms throughout the journey through Paradise, which has nothing to do with the physical, empirical substance of the moon, but has to do with the principle of the creation of the universe. And what she tells him, in brief, is: "The Creator has created the Universe as a unity. However, the Creator, in the process of Creation, has introduced multiplicity in the unity. He has introduced differentiation in all parts of the physical universe. And just as you," she says, "have different members of your body—arms, legs, head, and so on—with different functions, different *vertú*, capacities; so, too, everything in the physical universe is differentiated according to its *vertú*. Therefore, what you see in the dark spots on the moon, has nothing to do with the surface of the moon, but is instead a reflection of the principle of multiplicity and unity, which is a principle of the Creation of the Universe."

And Dante says, "Aha! I understand." And in that moment, through that process, he moves up with her, to the next celestial body.

This is the process that continues throughout Paradise. It's questions and answers. Dante asking questions, fundamental questions about the nature of the universe, and

struggling through discoveries which already had been made, or which he was making at the moment, in order to explain the questions that had been unanswered. Every time that Dante makes this kind of breakthrough, Beatrice seems to become brighter. Her love expands; and his love for her, in turn, expands.

It is through this process that they pass through all the celestial bodies, and reach the Empyreum, the Primum Mobile. And here, Dante sees again all the souls whom he met in his travels through Paradise, now reunited where they really are, which is in the Empyreum.

There is one final question, however, which still plagues him, which he asks in the very last canto. He looks at the light which has been increasing as his mind has been developing through this process of scientific discovery, and he wants to know, "What is the source of the light?" So he looks into the light as intensely as possible, in order to see the source. He's looking for God, the source of Creation. And he sees three concentric spheres: it looks like a rainbow, in a certain sense. He peers more intensely into these three concentric spheres, and he says, "This is the light, the eternal light; the eternal which knows itself, which is knowing, and which is the known. I looked into this light, I peered into this light, and what did I see? I saw emerge from it, the image of my own face—the image of a human face."

And at that moment, he writes, an experience, like that of the geometer who squares the circle, occurs. And then, the vision is lost.

Think about what this is. Lyndon LaRouche has called it the "metaphor of metaphors" of this great poem. This is the moment at which Dante reaches the final vision, which is the understanding of the Trinity. It is the understanding of the Trinity, in this sense: He has tra-

versed Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise. He has come to the point, through the loving relationship with his teacher Beatrice, that he can make fundamental discoveries about the nature of the physical universe, and in so doing, reflect upon the way in which his mind makes such discoveries, such hypotheses.

And in so doing, he realizes that the nature, the process whereby he makes these hypotheses and discoveries, is coherent with that very physical universe that he is discovering. Therefore, he understands, as he says in the last canto, the identity of the Creator, the Created, and the Creating: this is the Trinity.

Now, Dante's poem, before it was given over to the literary critics, had the most fundamental, profound effect on history of any one, single poem. This poem shaped the Renaissance. This is a poem which was in the minds of those great scholars and Churchmen and humanists who gathered at the Council of Florence in 1439.

The *Commedia* was known to every one of the giants of the Renaissance. It was through this poem, through the process of self-development which the poem actually generates in the careful reader, that people like Leonardo, Brunelleschi, Raphael, and others, became what they became. We know that Leonardo considered the *Divina Commedia* as his Bible. In fact, it was in the Renaissance that it took on the name "Divina"—it was Divine, like the Bible. It was read in the churches. It was recited. It was the basis for education in the home. This was a poem which shaped the identity of an entire population, which was Dante's aim, and provided that population with the most advanced language, poetical vehicle, it could desire, to develop the nation.

What this poem did, as you can see in the process through Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise, was to change the mentality of those who truly studied it. It was not a

poem that one merely read and commented on, or wrote a dissertation on. It was a poem that one *worked through*, in the way that literature should work on the minds of human beings.

Helen Keller and Wilhelm von Humboldt: Language Guides the Mind From Darkness to Light

What the *Divina Commedia* transmits, is the paradigm for the most universal human experience that we know: the process of intellectual development, the process of scientific discovery. It is the process of reliving scientific discoveries that constitutes the education of the mind of a child, into a creative adult. And I want to continue our discussion, with what may appear to be a very different subject, the story of the American Helen Keller, for the following reason.

The first fundamental discovery that a child makes is

the discovery of language. Assimilating a language for a child constitutes one of the greatest scientific discoveries one could imagine.

But, first of all, what is a language? Well, it's a given, isn't it? I mean, our language exists, doesn't it? But, which language are we talking about? Well, English, of course. I mean, the Bible is in English, isn't it? Christ spoke English, didn't he? Ted Turner speaks English. . . . Larry King speaks English. . . .

Who gave us this language, if it's "given"? Well, it must be God, no? But, did God give us English alone? Apparently not. Because English is not the only language that exists, there are many other languages. We know, in-



"Suddenly, I felt a misty consciousness as of something forgotten . . . and somehow the mystery of language was revealed to me."—Helen Keller (Scene from the play "The Miracle Worker," starring Anne Bancroft and Patty Duke, 1960.)

Corbis-Bettmann

deed, that human language, the oldest human invention, is, in fact, thousands and thousands of years old. We have the first records from the Vedic hymns, which were transmitted orally for centuries, before they were written down. And since then, in the intervening period, there have been literally thousands of human languages developed, all of them different, but all of them essentially coherent: all of them translatable from one into the other.

So language is a necessary product, a necessary creation, of man. Why? Well, as Dante says very clearly in his *De Vulgare Eloquentia*: “You know, angels don’t have any problem communicating one with another, because they are ethereal beings. They’re purely spiritual, and therefore, they can just think a thought and it will be communicated to the other. We human beings are not only spiritual, but we are also sensual. We have soul and body; therefore, we need some sensuous means in order to communicate that which is in my mind, to your mind. And that’s why God gave man, and *only* man, the capacity for language.”

He says, “God would have given language to animals, but the problem with animals is, among their species, they always fight with each other, so if you gave them language, you would have a *terrible* situation.”

Now, as the great German philologist Wilhelm von Humboldt shows, each language develops its own particular means, in a very ingenious way, to communicate these human thoughts from one mind to another. And it does this through the articulation of a system of sounds which are ordered in such a way, that the sounds among themselves (and Leibniz had already pointed this out) have a certain relationship which reflects the relationship among processes in the physical universe.

Ask yourself, how is it that objects take on names? If you go to John Locke, or David Hume, or Bishop Berkeley, or any of these other people, for the answer, they will tell you that there are two possibilities why, for example, this object is called a “book.” One is, that the name “book” is inherent. You sort of feel it, like a Ouija board, and “book!” comes out.

The other possibility, they say, is that the object could just as well be called “bicycle,” but human convention decided to call it “book.” In other words, Adam and Eve got together at one point, and Adam said, “What is that you have in your hand, Eve?” and she said, “Well, let’s call it an ‘apple.’” And he said, “Okay.” So, it was through convention that some of these things got names.

Well, how do you learn these names? Locke will say that the mind is a *tabula rasa*, the mind is an empty space, an empty blackboard. As he writes in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*: “The souls of the newly born are empty tablets, and only afterwards filled in by obser-

vation and reasoning.” You first need to have sensations, in the form of things that you see or hear, or whatever, in order to have perceptions. These perceptions are inside your mind, which is an empty space that receives all these impressions. They can then be combined, compared, and so on, as to similarity, difference, or whatever; and that is what Locke calls “thought.” It’s very similar to what you would find in a computer.

Locke says this very clearly: “The simple ideas, the materials of all our knowledge, are suggested and furnished to the mind only by those two ways above mentioned [sensations and impressions—MMW]. When the understanding is once stored with these simple ideas, it has the power to repeat, compare, and unite them, even to an almost infinite variety, and can make at pleasure new complex ideas. But it is not in the power of the most exalted wit or enlarged understanding, by any quickness or variety of thoughts, to invent or frame one new simple idea in the mind, not taken in by the ways before mentioned.”

So, there is no possibility of individual creative thought, there is only the possibility of receiving impressions, juggling them around, and making commutations, permutations, and so on.

If this Lockean notion were true, what do you do about a person who doesn’t have access to those senses? What do you do with a child who is blind and cannot see the book? What do you do with a child who is deaf and cannot hear you say “book”? A child who also cannot repeat the word “book,” when he or she hears it?

This is the case, indeed, of Helen Keller, which makes the study of her experience extremely fascinating. Because, if she could learn language, it proves that everything that Locke, Hume, and the other empiricists say about the human mind, is false.

Humboldt, on the other hand, understood very clearly how the process of language actually works. He says, it’s not the sensation which comes into my mind, but subjective activity, which is the subject: “Subjective activity fashions an *object* in thought. For no class of presentations can be regarded as a purely receptive contemplation of a thing already present. The activity of the sense must combine synthetically with the inner action of the mind, and from this combination the presentation is ejected, becomes an object vis-à-vis the subjective power, and, perceived anew as such, returns back to the latter.”*

* Quotations from *Über die Verschiedenheit des menschlichen Sprachbaues und ihren Einfluss auf die geistige Entwicklung des Menschengeschlechts* (1836). English translation by Peter Heath as *On Language: The Diversity of Human Language Structure and Its Influence on the Mental Development of Man* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

In other words, the act of perception is not *passive* reception, but it occurs with an *action of the mind*, which in turn becomes the object of reflection.

“But language,” Humboldt says, “is indispensable for this. For in that the mental striving breaks out through the lips in language, the product of that striving returns back to the speaker’s ear. Thus the presentation becomes transformed into real objectivity, without being deprived of subjectivity on that account. Only language can do this; and without this transformation, occurring constantly with the help of language, even in silence”—occurring *constantly*—“without this transformation . . . into an objectivity that returns to the subject, the act of concept-formation, and with it all true thinking, is impossible. So,” he concludes, “quite regardless of communication between man and man, speech is a necessary condition for the thinking of the individual in solitary seclusion.”

How, then, does this operation actually occur, in the case where the person—Helen Keller—cannot hear, cannot see, and cannot speak—cannot “objectify,” as Humboldt says, the perceived idea?

Helen Keller was born in 1880 in Tuscumbia, Alabama. She was a normal child until she was nineteen months old, at which point she was stricken by a horrible disease, an intestinal illness with accompanying fever, which left her, from one day to the next, blind, deaf, and dumb.

Helen turned into a beast. She was utterly unmanageable. She tyrannized her family, who obviously were helpless as to what to do to help this child. Finally, they found help, because they read in Charles Dickens’ *American Notes*, about the case of a young woman, Laura Bridgman, who had also been blind, deaf, and dumb, and who had acquired the power of language, taught by Dr. Samuel Gridley Howe, at the Perkins Institute for the Blind in Boston.

So Helen’s family, eager to do something to liberate their child from this hell of darkness, found someone from the Perkins Institute for the Blind who would come and teach their child. And the question that emerges at the end of this story, as you will see, is, who is the more extraordinary individual? Helen Keller, the child; or Anne Sullivan, the teacher?

The young woman who was sent to teach this child language, was herself almost blind, and had, for that reason, been at the Perkins Institute for the Blind. She was the daughter of Irish immigrants. Her mother died when she was very young, and her father left. She had been in a poorhouse, and her brother had died there. She had a *terrible* family background. But for some reason, she had a

will to live, to develop, and she had an uncanny understanding of the workings of the human mind—perhaps through her own experience.

She was sent, then, to the Kellers’ home. The child was six years and nine months old. Later, Helen would remember the day that Anne Sullivan came into her life, as “my soul’s birthday.” Her body’s birthday was six years before, but her soul was born the day that this woman came. In fact, in later life, Helen Keller wrote a little poem to describe how it was before she had the power of language. She wrote:

It was not night—it was not day,
But vacancy absorbing space,
And fixedness without a place;
There was no stars—no earth—no time—
No check—no change—no good—no crime.

Anne Sullivan entered her life and changed that, bringing light, and love, and wisdom. How did she do it? How do you have access to the mind of a child who is cut off from most sense perceptions?

What she did, was to begin to spell into the child’s hand words like doll, “d-o-l-l,” not using our alphabet, but using the one developed for the deaf, transcribed, however, into the hand. So Helen received these impressions in her hand.

Helen remembered the delight with which she received these impressions, although she didn’t understand anything about what the impressions actually meant. She later wrote, in her autobiography: “I was at once interested in this finger play. What a wonderful game! And I tried to imitate it. And I did not know that I was spelling a word, or even that words existed. I was simply making my fingers go in monkey-like imitation.”

And in fact, she was very quick to pick up these signs. Once she had learned “doll,” she could spell it. And “book,” and “cake,” and “mug,” and “milk,” and so on. And Anne Sullivan would always try to communicate to her at the same time what the corresponding object or action was, which she was spelling into her hand. But the child didn’t get it. She would confuse things. She thought it was a wonderful game, and she even tried to teach her dog to spell. She picked up the paw of her dog and started spelling into the dog’s paw. So she understood this was some form of communication. And Helen would also be inquisitive, and point to things, in order to indicate that she wanted to know what the funny little finger play was that corresponded to that.

The breakthrough came, one day, in a very magnifi-

cent form, as she was going down to the garden with Anne Sullivan. Miss Sullivan had been trying to communicate to her the difference between the two words, “mug” and “milk,” by giving her a mug and milk, but Helen couldn’t get it. Anne Sullivan wrote the following report immediately after the event:

“This morning, while she was washing, she wanted to know the name for ‘water.’ When she wants to know the name for anything, she points to it and pats my hand. I spelled ‘w-a-t-e-r’ and thought no more about it until after breakfast. Then it occurred to me that with the help of this new word, I might succeed in straightening out the ‘mug-milk’ difficulty. We went out to the pump-house, and I made Helen hold the mug under the spout while I pumped. As the cold water gushed forth, filling the mug, I spelled ‘w-a-t-e-r’ in Helen’s free hand. The word coming so close upon the sensation of cold water rushing over her hand seemed to startle her. She dropped the mug and stood as one transfixed. A new light came into her face. She spelled ‘water’ several times. Then she dropped on the ground and asked for its name and pointed to the pump and the trellis, and suddenly turning around she asked for my name. I spelled ‘Teacher.’ Just then the nurse brought Helen’s little sister into the pump-house, and Helen spelled ‘baby’ and pointed to the nurse. All the way back to the house, she was highly excited, and learned the names of every object she touched, so that in a few hours she had added thirty new words to her vocabulary. Here are some of them: Door, open, shut, give, go, come, and a great many more.”

Helen herself also relates this incident, adding a crucial detail. She says, that prior to going into the garden, her teacher had tried to communicate to her the meaning of “doll,” by spelling it, and giving her two dolls; but Helen responded in frustration by smashing the new

doll. “Neither sorrow nor regret followed my passionate outburst,” she wrote. “I had not loved the doll. In the still, dark world in which I lived, there was no strong sentiment or tenderness.”

Then, at the water-pump, she recalled, “I stood still, my whole attention focussed upon the motion of her fingers. Suddenly I felt a misty consciousness as of something forgotten—a thrill of returning thought; and somehow the mystery of language was revealed to me. I knew then that ‘w-a-t-e-r’ meant the wonderful cool something

that was flowing over my hand. That living word awakened my soul, gave it light, hope, joy, set it free! . . . I left the well-house eager to learn. *Everything had a name*, and each name gave birth to a new thought. . . . On entering the door I remembered the doll I had broken . . . and picked up the pieces. I tried vainly to put them together. Then my eyes filled with tears; for I realized what I had done, and for the first time, I felt repentance and sorry.”

So, with this immense breakthrough, which every child has—the breakthrough of the first understanding of the first word—you have the birth as well of the consciousness of emotion. And, in fact, Anne Sullivan adds

in her letter, in a postscript: “I didn’t finish my letter in time to get it posted last night; so I shall add a line. Helen got up this morning like a radiant fairy. She has flitted from object to object, asking the name of everything and kissing me for very gladness. Last night when I got into bed, she stole into my arms of her own accord and kissed me for the first time, and I thought my heart would burst, so full was it of joy.”

It is clear from the versions of this breakthrough—versions that came, in the case of Anne Sullivan, immediately thereafter, so they’re authentic—that the breakthrough came *not* because a word had been repeated five thousand times, as might be the case in some of these



Helen Keller and her teacher Anne Sullivan, 1894.

Courtesy of the American Federation for the Blind. Helen Keller Archives

direct-method teaching routines, for instance, the repetitious “English as a Foreign Language” method developed by the British. Because you don’t teach language that way.

You can see, in the case of Helen Keller, that she didn’t learn language because of repetition. She learned it, because there was the activity of her mind. Because, inherent in the human mind, there is the *capacity for language*—which, after all, is what created human language in the first place. And because that capacity was sparked, among other things, through love. That was what made the breakthrough.

Now, just as Humboldt points out, when Helen learned the first word, it was not merely one word that she was learning, but the entire language. He writes, “The comprehension of *words* is a thing entirely different from the understanding of *unarticulated sounds*”—the sound “book” in and of itself—“and involves much more than the mere mutual evocation of the sound and the object indicated. . . .

“The word . . . can also be taken as an indivisible whole, just as even in writing we recognize the meaning of a word-group, without yet being certain of its alphabetic composition; and it may be possible that the child’s mind proceeds thus in the first beginnings of understanding. But just as not merely the animal’s sensory capacity, but the human power of speech is excited (. . . even in the child. . .), so the *word*, too, is perceived as articulated.”

Furthermore, Humboldt underlines, “what *articulation* adds to the mere evocation of its meaning . . . is that it presents the word directly through its form as part of an infinite whole, a language.” Thus the single word, implicitly, contains the whole of the language.

What was Anne Sullivan’s method in teaching Helen Keller not only words, but the power of speech? In summary, it was to spell *everything* into Helen’s hand. She would try to spell not just individual words, but to do the same thing that a normal parent or adult would do with a child who is *not* deaf, dumb, and blind: to speak full sentences, and hope that the child would then assimilate the organization of the sentence as a whole.

Miss Sullivan would say, yes, I could write “hat,” and “walk,” and Helen would know that she should get her hat, and we would go out for a walk. But instead of that, I would write “Please fetch your hat, we’ll go for a walk,” so that over time, she would learn the entire sentence.

Helen learned words very rapidly. In the space of weeks, her vocabulary grew, multiplied from 100, to 300, 400, 600 words. But they were not only words: They were entire sentences that she began to communicate.

As Humboldt points out, “Even in single words, it is by means of this that we are given the possibility of con-

structing, from the elements of the language, a really indeterminate number of other words according to specific feelings and rules, and thereby to establish among all words, an affinity corresponding to the affinity of concepts.” That is, the geometry of language, the articulation of sounds, lending meaning, on the one hand, and the geometry of concepts.

This would not be possible, Humboldt says, if the “soul . . . did not harbor a power of rendering this possibility actual. . . .” He says, furthermore, that “The *speech-learning* of children is not an assignment of words, to be deposited in memory and rebabbled by rote through the lips, but a growth in linguistic capacity with age and practice. What is heard does more than merely convey information to oneself; it readies the mind also to understand more easily what has not yet been heard; it makes clear what was long ago heard, but then half understood, or not at all, in that a similarity to the new perception suddenly brings light to the power that has since become sharpened; and it enhances the urge and capacity to absorb from what is heard ever more, and more swiftly, into the memory. . . . The advances thus accelerate in a constantly increasing ratio, since the growth of power and the acquisition of material mutually strengthen and enlarge each other.”

The growth in the power of speech is not linear, but, as he says, exponential.

There are several other important points to emphasize in understanding the method that Anne Sullivan used. First, that she never tried to communicate anything for the sake of communicating it, or for the sake of teaching something in itself. She refused to organize formalized lessons for her charge. Instead, she would always follow the course of the curiosity of the child, and speak about those things which the child felt were important, interesting, exciting, thought-provoking. Otherwise, she would not talk about it. She refused conversation for the sake of conversation; but she would always follow the questions of the child. As she wrote:

“Helen’s inquisitiveness was so great during these years that it would have interfered with her progress in the acquisition of language, if a consideration of the questions which were constantly occurring to her had been deferred until the completion of a lesson. In all probability she would have forgotten the question, and a good opportunity to explain something of real interest to her would have been lost. Therefore it has always seemed best to me to teach anything whenever my pupil needed to know it, whether it had any bearing on the projected lesson or not; her inquiries have often led us far away from the subject under immediate consideration.”

Another thing that she tried to do was, to always provoke interest in the child for the outside world, for the real world, and to mediate to her concepts and knowledge about subjects, through direct contact with these realities.

For example, instead of giving her a geography lesson, she would take Helen down to Keller's Landing and they would build dams out of the mud. And that way, she would teach her about rivers, lakes, and so on. Or, the history lesson would begin with a trip to Bunker Hill, and she would tell her about the battle commemorated by the Bunker Hill monument. Or, the biology lesson would consist of having tadpoles in a pool, and feeling the tadpoles every day, to see how they grew into frogs. And, as Helen says in her autobiography, Anne Sullivan always tried not only to mediate to her the beautiful activities of nature, but to communicate to her the beauty in all things in nature, to communicate to her an idea of beauty—an idea to a child who could not see or hear.

Finally, what was very important in the teaching method, was that everything was a game. Anne Sullivan said that the teacher has to be a child, in order to be a teacher. Otherwise, nothing works. So, when she taught the child to read, after the child had learned a certain amount of language, she did it with pieces of paper and raised letters. She taught her our Latin alphabet, and then, later, Braille. C-A-T for cat—and this is to a child who cannot hear “C,” so it's all a very abstract process. But Helen learned it. She mastered it right away, and did so because they were playing games with the pieces of paper and the objects that they represented.

There were games also in the words themselves. For example, Anne Sullivan said Helen would respond in a very interesting way to metaphors and to figurative language. She said, for example, when Helen was told that Hungarians are “born musicians”—(you know, everybody says, it's like Italians are “born actors,” Hungarians are “born musicians”)—Helen asked: “Do they sing when they are born?” And then, when the friend who told her this, added that some of the pupils he had seen in Budapest had more than a hundred tunes in their heads, she said, laughing, “I think their heads must be very noisy!” So Anne Sullivan explains, “She sees the ridiculous quickly, and instead of being seriously troubled by metaphorical language, she is often amused by her own too-literate conception of meaning.”

The issue of metaphor raises the question of how Helen learned abstract concepts. You can more or less understand how “dog,” “cat,” “water,” or whatever could be communicated in the ways that we've seen, how do you communicate a concept like love? Helen writes

about this in her autobiography:

I remember the morning that I first asked the meaning of the word “love.” This was before I knew many words. I had found a few early violets in the garden and brought them to my teacher. She tried to kiss me, but at that time I did not like to have anyone kiss me except my mother. Miss Sullivan put her arm gently around me and spelled into my hand, “I love Helen.”

“What is love?” I asked.

She drew me closer to her and said, “It is here,” pointing to my heart, whose beats I was conscious of for the first time. Her words puzzled me very much, because I did not then understand anything unless I touched it.

I smelt the violets in her hand and asked, half in words, half in signs, a question which meant, “Is love the sweetness of flowers?”

“No,” said my teacher.

Again I thought. The warm sun was shining on us.

“Is this not love?” I asked, pointing in the direction from which the heat came? “Is this not love?”

It seemed to me that there could be nothing more beautiful than the sun, whose warmth makes all things grow. But Miss Sullivan shook her head, and I was greatly puzzled and disappointed. I thought it strange that my teacher could not *show* me love.

A day or two afterward, I was stringing beads of different sizes in symmetrical groups—two large beads, three small ones, and so on. I had made many mistakes, and Miss Sullivan had pointed them out again and again with gentle patience. Finally I noticed a very obvious error in the sequence and for an instant I concentrated my attention on the lesson, and tried to think how I should have arranged the beads. Miss Sullivan touched my forehead and spelled with decided emphasis: “Think.” T-h-i-n-k.

In a flash I knew that the word was the name of the process that was going on in my head. That was my first conscious perception of an abstract idea.

For a long time I was still—I was not thinking of the beads in my lap, but trying to find a meaning for ‘love’ in the light of this new idea. The sun had been under a cloud all day, and there had been a brief showers. But suddenly the sun broke forth in all its southern splendor.

Again I asked my teacher, “Is this not love?”

“Love is something like the clouds that were in the sky before the sun came out,” she replied. Then, in simpler words than these, which at that time I could not have understood, she explained: “You cannot touch the clouds, you know; but you feel the rain and know how glad the flowers and the thirsty earth are to have it after a hot day. You can not touch love either; but you feel the sweetness that it pours into everything. Without love you would not be happy or want to play.”

The beautiful truth burst upon my mind. I felt that there were invisible lines stretched between my spirit and the spirit of others.

Through the relationship between Anne Sullivan and Helen Keller, this young child was educated in the way in which every child which should be educated; although very few have been in this century, in this country. By the time she was an adolescent, Helen had mastered several languages, and not only English. She wrote her first book, her autobiography, at the age of twenty-two. She had also mastered Greek.

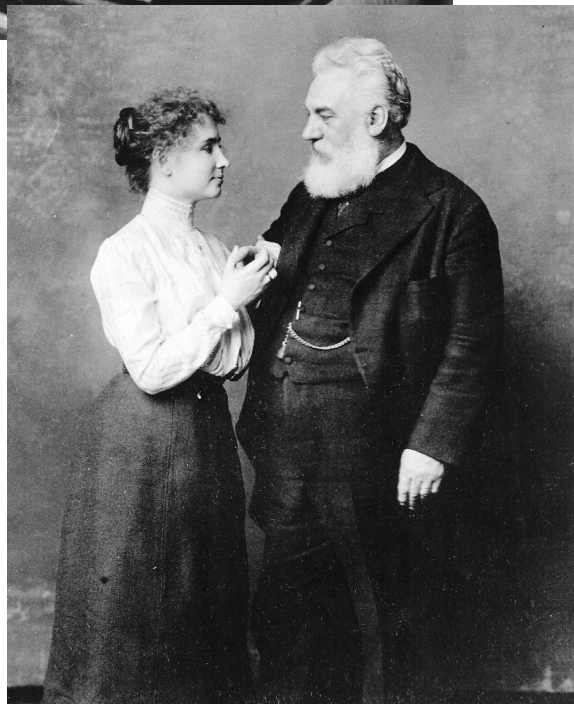
In fact, she had to take an entrance exam in Greek, to be admitted to that hall of learning known as Harvard University, Radcliffe College. They did everything possible to keep her out, but she passed with flying colors in Greek, Latin, geometry, and everything else she had to take as an exam to get in. She knew German, she knew French. Goethe and Schiller were her favorite poets in German. She wrote: “[Victor] Hugo, and Goethe, and Schiller, and all great poets of all great nations, are interpreters of eternal things, and my spirit reverently follows them into the regions where Beauty and Truth and Goodness are one.” Shakespeare was her favorite in English; the Bible was a book that she read so often, that the Braille had been worn down, and she had to get new copies.

When Helen went to Radcliffe, she thought that she was going to enter the halls of learning. She went with Anne Sullivan, who spelled into her hand, in every lecture, everything that the teacher would say, as well as the books that she would read, and so on. She went to Harvard because, she said, “That’s the best, so I want to go to the best, I’ll go to the best.” She passed her examinations, and got in. But then she found out that “[c]ollege is not the universal Athens I thought it was. There one does not meet the great and



Courtesy of the American Federation for the Blind, Helen Keller Archives

Left: Helen Keller plays chess with Anne Sullivan, Radcliffe College, 1900.



Courtesy of the American Federation for the Blind, Helen Keller Archives

Below: Helen Keller and inventor Alexander Graham Bell, 1901.

wise face to face. One does even feel their living touch. They are there, it is true; but they seem mummified.” She was referring to the professors, particularly those who taught her “Literature,” “English Literature.”

What she was taught in these literature courses, of course, was to go through and to define, and analyze, and dissect. And she said quite openly, “Many scholars forget, it seems to me, that our enjoyment of the great works of literature depends more upon the depth of our sympathy than upon our understanding.” (Meaning “understanding” in the formal sense.) And further, referring to books she read, she said, “I read them in the intervals between study and play, with an ever-deepening sense of pleasure. I did not study nor analyze them. I did not know whether

they were well-written or not; I never thought about style or authorship. They laid their treasures at my feet and I accepted them as we accept the sunshine and the love of our friends.”

She complained that professors did not understand this. “Great poetry, whether written in Greek or in English, needs no other interpreter than a responsive heart. . . . It is not necessary that one should be able to

define every word and give it its principal parts and its grammatical position in the sentence, in order to understand and appreciate a fine poem.” And she had particularly pungent things to say about examinations, which she abhorred.

Despite Radcliffe, despite Harvard, despite the literary critics and literature courses, Helen Keller managed to go through that university and, in the course of it, to assimilate the great works of literature, the great works of philosophy, religion, history, geography, and universal history, to the extent that the books were available for her to read. She wrote, concerning her “experiment” at Radcliffe, that she had learned many things. “One of them is the precious science of patience, which teaches us that we should take our education as we would take a walk in the country, leisurely, our minds hospitably open to impressions of every sort. Such knowledge floods the soul unseen with a soundless tidal wave of deepening thought. ‘Knowledge is power.’ Rather, knowledge is happiness, because to have knowledge . . . broad, deep knowledge—is to know true ends from false, and lofty things from low. To know the thoughts and deeds that have marked man’s progress, is to feel the great heart-throbs of humanity through the centuries; and, if one does not feel in these pulsations a heavenward striving, one must indeed be deaf to the harmonies of life.”

Having completed her studies, Helen Keller left Radcliffe, and thereafter continued her self-development independently. She became, probably, the best-educated and the most moral American woman of this century.

Her ability in language was astounding; but, as her



Courtesy of Perkins School for the Blind

Top: Helen Keller visits wounded soldiers, c.1945.



Courtesy of the American Federation for the Blind, Helen Keller Archives

Left: Helen Keller receives an honorary degree from Harvard University, with Chancellor Konrad Adenauer of West Germany, Nathan Pusey, President of Harvard, and James Bryant Conant, President Emeritus of Harvard and U.S. Ambassador to West Germany, June 18, 1955.

teachers and friends pointed out, it was not a “language ability,” it was

her ability *to think*, and it was her ability *to use her mind*.

She did not only read and assimilate ideas, but she also wrote, as soon as she could. She *loved* to write, because it was a wonderful form of communication. She wrote her autobiography; she wrote a biography of her teacher; she wrote a diary after her teacher died. She wrote endless numbers of essays, pamphlets, encouraging children who were blind, deaf, and/or dumb, to fight through and to acquire the power of language.

She campaigned worldwide for the rights of the handicapped, particularly of blind children, to have education. She visited the soldiers on the front, in the hospitals, in World War II, particularly those who had been blinded, in order to encourage them not to give up hope; to take inspiration from her example.

She was passionately involved in the great issues of the day. She was excited about every new invention that came out, and wanted to meet the inventors of the telephone, for example. She met writers, poets, politicians, including most of the U.S. Presidents of her day. It is said that she even succeeded in making Calvin Coolidge smile.

She travelled as much as she could. She was curious about new cultures, new lands; about art, and sculpture. After learning, with enormous effort and practice, to speak, she even tried to learn music.

Lyndon LaRouche has said, "Think of one's life as one might think of a Classical work of poetry or music. Our

efficient individual existence is a metaphor in the form of the Good." This is definitely the case for Helen Keller: her life *is* a metaphor. Helen Keller is one of the few Americans of this century who really touched Dante's Empyreum.

Late in life, Helen was asked by a somewhat imper-tinent journalist, if she thought she had really achieved anything in her life. And her immediate reply was: "I believe, that all through these dark and silent years, God has been using my life for a purpose I do not know, but one day I shall understand. And then I will be satisfied."

English translations to Dante *canzoni*.

Figure 5. "Al poco giorno e al gran cerchio d'ombra," p. 9.

To the short day and the great sweep of shadow have I come, ah me! and to the whitening of the hills, when color vanishes from the grass; and my longing, for all that, changes not its green, so is it barbed in the hard stone that speaks and hears as though it were a woman.

And in like fashion does this wondrous woman stand chill like snow beneath the shadow; for no more moves her than a stone, the sweet season that warms the hills and brings them back from white to green, in that it covers them with flowers and grass.

When on her head she bears a wreath of grass, she banishes from our mind each other woman; for the waving gold is mingled with the green, so beauteous that Love comes there to sojourn in the shadow, who hath riveted me between the little hills, more fast by far than calcined stone.

Her beauty has more virtue than a gem, and her stroke may not be healed by herb; for I have fled o'er plains and hills, that I might escape from such like woman; and against her light availed to give me shadow nor mount nor ever wall nor leaf of green.

Erst have I seen her clad in green, in such guise she would have planted in a stone the love I bear even to her very shadow; wherefore I have wooed her in a beauteous field of grass, enamored as was ever woman, and girt around with loftiest hills.

But of a truth the rivers will return to the hills, or e'er this log, sap-ful and green, each flame, after the wont of fair woman, from me, who would endure to sleep in stone all of my life, and go pasturing on grass, only to look where her garments cast a shadow.

When the hills cast the blackest shadow, under a beauteous green the youthful woman makes it vanish, as one should hide a stone in grass.

Figure 6. "Donne ch'avete intelletto d'amore," p. 10.

Ladies, that have intelligence [the intellect] of love, I would speak with you of my lady; not because I think to exhaust her praises, but to discourse for easment of my mind. I say, that pondering on her worth, Love maketh himself so sweetly felt within me that had I then not lost all my daring, I should enamor folk by my speech. And I will not speak so exaltedly that I should faint through fear; but lightly will I touch on her gentle state in respect of her, amorous dames and damsels, with you, for 'tis not a thing whereof to speak to others.

An angel crieth in its divine intelligence and saith: "Lord, in the world a marvel is displayed in act, emanating from a soul that shineth far as here on high. Heaven, that hath none other lack than to possess her, craveth her of its Lord and every saint crieth for the grace. Pity alone defendeth our cause; for God speaketh, intending my lady: Beloved mine, now suffer in peace that your hope be, so long as it pleaseth me, there, where is one who looketh for to lose her and who in Hell shall say to the damned: I have beheld the hope of the blessed.

My lady is desired in high heaven: now would I make you to know of her virtue. I say: whoso would seem a gentle lady let her go with her; for when she passeth by the way, Love casteth a chill into base hearts whereby every thought of theirs is frozen and perisheth. And whoso should endure to stay and behold her,

would become a noble thing or else would die: and when she findeth one worthy to behold her, he proveth her virtue; for this falleth him, that she giveth him salutation and maketh him so humble that he forgetteth every offence. Also hath God given her for superior grace, that whoso hath spoken with her cannot end ill.

Of her saith Love: How can mortal thing so lovely be and pure? Then gazeth he at her, and within himself doth swear that God intendeth to make in her what ne'er yet was. Suffused is she with hue as of pearls, such as becometh a lady to have, not beyond measure: she is the utmost that Nature can create of goodness: by her ensample beauty is proved. From her eyes, wherso she turn them, issue flaming spirits of Love that smite the eyes of him who then doth look on them and pierce so, that each one touches the heart. Ye see Love painted on her lips where none can gaze on her steadfastly.

Canzone, I know that thou shalt fare speaking with many ladies after I have sped thee: now I admonish thee, for that I have raised thee up to be a daughter of Love young and guileless, that where thou comest thou say beseechingly: Teach me how to fare, for I am sent to her with whose praises I am adorned. And if thou wouldst not go like a vain thing, tarry not where base folk be. Contrive, if thou canst, to be revealed only to courteous woman or man, who shall bring thee by the speedier way. There with her shalt thou find Love; commend me to him as is thy duty.