

ISCAD ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY: *Contrapasso*

L. Faibisoff
(Toronto, CMS)

Last update: May 1st, 2019

Main References to *Contrapasso* in Dante's Works (and possible sources)

1. Thomas Aquinas (1265-74). "Videtur quod iustum sit simpliciter idem quod contrapassum. Iudicium enim divinum est simpliciter iustum. Sed haec est forma divini iudicii ut secundum quod aliquis fecit patiat, secundum illud Matth. VII, vers. 2: *In quo iudicio iudicaveritis, iudicabimini; et in qua mensura mensi fueritis, remetiatur vobis.* Ergo iustum est simpliciter idem quod contrapassum." (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* IIa-IIae, Quaestio 61, article 4)
2. Dante, *Inferno* 6, 53-57: per la dannosa colpa de la gola,/come tu vedi, a la piggia mi fiacco./E io anima trista non son sola,/ché tutte queste a simil pena stanno per simil colpa.
3. Dante, *Inferno* 26, 55-57: Rispuose a me: Là dentro si martira/Ulisse e Diomede, e così insieme/a la vendetta vanno come a l'ira
4. Dante, *Inferno* 28, 139-142: Perch'io parti' così giunte persone,/partito porto il mio cerebro, lasso!./dal suo principio ch'è in questo troncone./Cosi s'osserva in me lo contrapasso (Also see, *Inferno* 13.105-108; *Inferno* 20, 38-39; *Purgatorio* 11, 52-54).

Main Definitions in Dante Studies

1. Guido da Pisa (1327). "Qui separate alios, seu amicitia seu parentela coniunctos, caput a corpore portat divisum [...] et sic observatur in eo contrapassus [sic], quia debet recipere id quod fecit."
2. Pietro Alighieri (1340-44). "Post hec auctor intelligendis est loqui de dictis vulnerationibus harum animarum potius per hanc rationem, quod pena sit conformis delicto, quam per allegoriam"
3. Anonimo Fiorentino (c. 1400). "Egli è differenza fra giustizia e contrapasso: giustizia si dice quando l'uomo ha morto et egli è poi morto; in qualunque modo muoia si dice giustizia. Contrapasso ha in se più severità e ragione; ché vuole che nella esecuzione della giustizia tutte le cose occorran che sono occorse nella offesa; ché vuole che l'uomo omicida sia morto quell'ora del dì ch'elli uccise, per il modo, et in quel luogo, et con quelli ordini, et similia."

4. Cristoforo Landino (1481). “Come verbi gratia chi taglia la mano a uno vuole tal legge che a lui similmente sia tagliato la mano. Et questo così punito in latino e contrapassus, perché ha patito alloncontro quello che havea inferito ad altri.”
5. Lodovico Castelvetro (1570). “con quella misura, che io ho misturato ad altrui, ora è rimisurato a me, e questa è la legge della pena del pari, che si domanda in latino poena talionis.”
6. Niccolò Tommaseo (1854). “Questa legge in tutti quasi i supplizii di Dante s’osserva.”
7. Giovanni Andrea Scartazzini (1874). “la legge del taglione, che vuole che tal sia punito qual fece [...] Secondo questa legge Dante distribuisce nel suo Inferno tutte le pene.”
8. Francesco D’Ovidio (1906). “[...] le pene infernali rimbeccano direttamente le colpe, o per analogia o per contrasto [...] or quasi taglione or quasi sarcasmo della giustizia divina sia attuato in modo quasi sempre necessariamente imperfetto [...]”
9. Carlo Steiner (1921). “da contrapati; parola che esprime il rapporto che corre tra il castigo in quanto è effetto della colpa. Questo rapporto domina l’oltretomba dantesca nei due regni dell’Inferno e del Purgatorio, e consiste particolarmente nel rapporto per analogia o per contrasto, tra la natura del castigo e quella del peccato.”
10. G.A. Scartazzini and G. Vandelli (1929). “E intesa così largamente, la parola contrapasso esprime il concetto fondamentale a cui sono informate le pene dell’Inferno e del Purgatorio dantesco. E in questo è compreso anche il concetto biblico della pena, quello del taglione.”
11. Natalino Sapegno (1955-57). “la norma per cui la pena si adegua con esatta proporzione alla colpa. Il termine era usato dagli scolastici e traduceva un vocabolo di Aristotele.”
12. Giorgio Padoan (1967). “il tipo di punizione ha attinenza, per analogia o per contrasto, con la colpa commessa.”
13. Teodolinda Barolini (2000). “... contrapasso [is] the principle whereby the punishment fits the crime. For Dante, the contrapasso frequently takes the form of literalizing a metaphor ... punishment is not something inflicted by God but the consequence, indeed the enactment, of the sin itself [...] Overall, Dante effectively uses the contrapasso to deflect any sense of randomness or arbitrariness and to suffuse his text with a sense of God’s order and justice.”
14. Davide Bolognesi (2010). “... il contrapassum (inteso come principio retributivo della pena) non è semplicemente una conseguenza del peccato, ma piuttosto (inteso come concetto che presiede alla dinamica commutativa) viene a chiarire il background logico, la premessa su cui Dante sviluppa la nona bolgia quale luogo deputato a raccogliere i responsabili di una colpa specifica. In altre parole, il contrapassum, dal punto di vista dell’invenzione poetica, è una causa, non una conseguenza; e logicamente precede la colpa, non la segue. Perciò dico che la parola contrapasso è portata necessariamente da Dante in punta di canto: perché rivela quasi l’ipotesi, il laboratorio del suo lavoro poetico, e la premessa concettuale di questa sezione del poema.”
15. Justin Steinberg (2014). “the ‘contrapasso’ should not be considered the ‘law’ of Dante’s justice as he evokes it precisely to demonstrates the limits of that law, especially in extreme and unprecedented cases.”



Annotated Bibliography

19th century

Tommaseo, Niccolò. *La Comedia di Dante Allighieri col commento di N. Tommaseo*. Naples: Cioffi, 1839. 208.

Tommaseo's note to the *terzina* in Inferno where Bertran utters the word 'contrapasso' was influential established a long tradition of considering the contrapasso as the general 'law' of the *Commedia* that governs all the punishments of Hell and the penances of Purgatory.

Scartazzini, Giovanni Andrea. *La Divina Commedia di Dante Alighieri riveduta nel testo e commentate da G. A. Scartazzini*, I. *L'Inferno*. Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1874. 338

Scartazzini's note was also influential and further established the contrapasso as the *lex talionis* which governs all of the *Commedia*.

1900s

D'Ovidio, Francesco. *Nuovi studi danteschi. Il Purgatorio e il suo preludeo*. Milan: Hoepli, 1906. 197-208.

D'Ovidio affirms earlier notes that the punishment corresponds directly to the sin either by analogy or contrast while maintaining that the application of the contrapasso is not always perfect.

Filomusi Guelfi, Lorenzo. *Studi su Dante*. Città di Castello: Lapi, 1908. 331-340.

This chapter marks the beginning of the fundamental debate in modern Dante studies regarding Dante's intended meaning in his use of the word 'contrapasso.' Filomusi Guelfi asserts that, in his use of the word contrapasso, Dante did not intend the restricted, *lex talionis* sense of the word, correctly pointing out that, in the *Summa*, Aquinas actually goes on later to reject the proposition that the contrapassum is "simply" divine judgement ("[...] probat non quodlibet iustum esse contrapassum," *Summa* IIa-IIAB, quaestio 6, article 4 s. c.). Filomusi Guelfi concludes that it would have been a considerable diversion from Aquinas if Dante had intended his contrapasso to be extended from the specific commutative case of Bertran to the rest of Hell and to Purgatory as a fundamental principle of justice. Placing the word in the mouth of Bertran de Born, Filomusi argues, Dante intended a broader, metaphorical meaning, not the true philosophical/theological sense of the word.

1920s

Steiner, Carlo. *La Divina Commedia commento da Carlo Steiner*. Turin: Paravia, 1921. [repr. 1960] 370.



See Steiner's note to *Inferno* 28, vv. 139-142, which asserts the fundamentality of the contrapasso as a general law of the *Commedia*.

D'Ovidio, Francesco. "Così si osserva in me lo contrapasso." In *L'ultimo volume dantesco*. Rome: A.P.E., 1926.

D'Ovidio responds in this essay to Filmusi Guelfi (1908), acknowledging that for Aquinas the contrapasso is strictly speaking a form of divine justice rendered commutatively. However, D'Ovidio maintains that contrapasso in the *Inferno* is not simply metaphorical because it seen there to be inflicted on the bodies and souls of the damned. The *lex talionis*, D'Ovidio maintains, is a precondition of Dante's poetics.

1950s

Vazzana, Steno. *Il contrapasso nella Divina Commedia*. Rome: M. Ciarnna, 1959.

Vazzana presents a series of readings and interpretations of the individual 'contrapassi' of *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso*.

1960s

Nicolai, Giovanni. "Il canto delle 'ombre triste smozzicate'." In *Lecture dell' "Inferno,"* edited by Vittorio Vettori. Milan: Marzorati, 1963. 230-255.

In this essay, Nicolai reads and interprets the law of contrapasso in canto 28 through verse 6 of canto 29 ("là giù tra l'ombre triste smozzicate"), arguing the entire canto is structured around a sense of mercy ('la pietade'). Nicolai focuses in particular on the word 'triste,' which appears 3 times with reference to the 'ombre smozzicate' of canto 28 (v. 26, "l' tristo sacco"; v. 111 "come persona trista e matta"; v. 120 "la trista greggia"). Dante uses the word 'triste' not in the simple sense of 'dolore', but rather something so painful that it voids every other thought. Appearing 37 times in *Inferno*, Nicolai argues, Dante's uses the word always in conjunction with his sense of commiseration for the sinners' plight – that is, where divine justice rouses Dante the man's sense of pity. Nicolai shows how Dante's sense of mercy for the sinners of canto 28 gradually increases as he encounters them.

1970s

Pasquazi, Silvio. In *Enciclopedia dantesca*, edited by Umberto Bosco, s.v. "Contrapasso." Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 1970 (various reprints). Web: [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/contrapasso_\(Enciclopedia-Dantesca\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/contrapasso_(Enciclopedia-Dantesca)/)

In this often-cited entry, Pasquazi defines contrapasso as Dante's application of the ancient juridical/moral principle of the *lex talionis* (as formulated in Exodus 21, Leviticus 24, and Deuteronomy 19). It is understood by Dante's early commentators to function either by analogy or contrast and is the rule applied, not always perfectly, to all the punishments of Hell and Purgatory.

P. Norton, Glyn. "'Contrapasso' and the Archetypal Metamorphoses in the Seventh 'Bolgia' of Dante's *Inferno*." *Symposium* 25 (1971): 162-170.



This essay considers the nature of retribution in the seventh Bolgia, reading the metamorphosis and transmutation of serpents as manifestations of the contrapasso there.

Fineo, S. “Il contrapasso nei sommersi.” In Idem, *Studi danteschi*, Florence: Le Monnier, 1972. 49-48.

A consideration of the significance of the contrapasso in four cases where sinners are “submerged”: 1) the slothful in the Styx, *Inferno* 8; 2) homicides in a river of blood, *Inferno* 12; 3) barraters in thick tar, *Inferno* 22; and 4) traitors in ice, *Inferno* 32.

Trovato, Mario. “Il contrapasso nell’ottava bolgia.” *Dante Studies* 94 (1976): 47-60. **Web:** https://www.jstor.org/stable/40166207?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents

This essay offers an analysis of the meaning of the contrapasso in the Ulysses episode (*Inferno* 26).

1980s

Cassell, Anthony K. *Dante’s Fearful Art of Justice*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984.

Cassell maintains that the contrapasso (“the justice of retaliatory punishment”) is at the center of the *Commedia*, both poetically and philosophically. The author reasserts the idea that Dante’s primary source was Aquinas’ *Summa* and the idea of the *lex talionis*. As “rigida giustizia,” Cassell argues, Dante intends readers to consider contrapasso as a reflection of a form of justice which is lacking in mercy.

Gross, Kenneth. “Infernal Metamorphoses: An interpretation of Dante’s ‘Counterpass.’” *Modern Language Notes* 100, 1 (1985): 42-69. **Web:** https://www.jstor.org/stable/2905667?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents

Gross cautions the use of the term ‘contrapasso’ to refer to Dante’s entire theory of punishment and the structure of the *Commedia* given that Dante chose to put the word in the mouth of a damned soul. The author points out that Aquinas chose to render the Greek phrase meaning “he who has suffered something in return” with the Latin word ‘contrapassum,’ joining the prefix contra with the noun passum (step) instead of passio (suffering). Thus, Gross interprets Bertran’s evocation of the word in *Inferno* 28 specifically as ‘counterpass.’ Infernal punishment does not so much correct sin as perpetuate the spiritual disorder which constitutes sin. Thus, in the mouth of Bertran, ‘contrapasso’ literally means something like “step away from,” reflecting a misunderstanding of his condition. Gross then considers Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, and finds the poet’s treatment of the principle of symbolic change reflect in Dante’s ‘counterpass.’ Finally, Gross provides close analyses of *Inferno* 24 and 21 to demonstrate his thesis regarding the ‘counterpass.’

Abrams, Richard. “Against the Contrapasso. Dante’s heretics, schismatics and others.” *Italian Quarterly* 27 (1986): 5-19.

In this article, Abrams reads the contrapasso as an illusion of the damned who proclaim themselves victims of a vengeful, anthropomorphic God. That is, the author argues that contrapasso is not so much an interpretative category as it is indicative of the illusion under which sinners continue to labour in the afterlife. The author applies this idea to readings of the heretics in *Inferno* 10 and finally of Bertran de Born in *Inferno* 28, who cites contrapasso as his own explanation for the divine judgement of an external God.



Artom, Menachem Emanuel. “Precedenti biblici e talmudici del ‘contrapasso.’ In *Dante e la Bibbia*, edited by G. Barblan. Florence: Olschki, 1988. 55-62.

Artom mines Old Testament and Talmudic passages for some specific notions regarding contrapasso, finding in particular that especially in the Talmud the *lex talionis* is valid not only for punishment but also for reward. For the most part, the Talmud deals primarily with contrapasso in life and, in particular, with reference to how to proceed when a woman is suspected of adultery. That is, it infrequently discusses the contrapasso in the afterlife. Discussions of the *lex talionis* in the afterlife appear after the compilation of the Talmud. Artom concludes by suggesting that further study is needed regarding the precise influence of the idea of contrapasso in Jewish literature on the Christian notion and on Dante in particular.

1990s

Casagrande, Gino. “‘Per la dannosa colpa de la gola’. Note sul contrapasso di *Inferno* VI.” *Studi Danteschi* 62 (1990): 39-52.

Beginning with a review of how ancient and modern commentators have understood the contrapasso in *Inferno* 6 (gluttony), Casagrande provides a close reading of some moments in that canto that help to explain the relationship between the sin of gluttony and its punishment as well as the allegorical meaning.

Lucchesi, Valerio. “Giustizia divina e linguaggio umano. Metafore e polisemie del contrapasso dantesco.” *Studi Danteschi* 63 (1991): 53-126.

Lucchesi contributes to the debate regarding the meaning of Dante’s term contrapasso, arguing for the instability of the concept as apparent in Aquinas. The author presents case studies of the semantic particulars of five specific sins and punishments – deceit, anger, pride, theft, fraud. Contrapasso, Lucchesi argues, may be generally understood as the transfer of the abstract sin into a concrete punishment. Polysemy surrounding sin and punishment in *Inferno* accounts for the signification of contrapasso. Lucchesi also provides a useful discussion of many of the scholarly preconceptions associated with the word and some of the ways in which the concept has and has not been studied.

Mazzotta, Giuseppe. “Metaphor and Justice.” In *Dante’s Vision and the Circle of Knowledge*, idem. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993. 75-95.

Mazzotta reads the ‘contrapasso,’ in reference to Bertran de Born in particular, as the ethical principle of justice establishing the symmetrical relationship between the sin and the punishment. Bertran’s punishment, Mazzotta argues, depends on reparative justice, which properly belongs in the sphere of commutative justice. The contrapasso here is considered a reflection of forms of divine justice before the coming of Christ.

Marchesi, Simone. “The ‘Knot of Language’: *Sermocinatio* and *Contrapasso* for the Rhetoricians in Dante’s *Inferno*.” *Romance Languages Annual 1997* 9 (1998): 254-259.

Marchesi considers the particular contrapasso of Pier de la Vigna as offering a key to understanding Dante’s conception of rhetoric.

2000s

Armour, Peter. “Dante’s Contrapasso. Contexts and texts,” *Italian Studies* 55 (2000): 1-20.



This is an important contribution with helpful bibliography on the critical history of the term ‘contrapasso.’ Armour briefly summarizes the history of the term beginning with Dante’s early commentators who regarded Dante’s use of it as synonymous with ‘taglione.’ It was only in the nineteenth century, the author argues, that the term was extended to other episodes of the *Commedia* and became a ‘law’ of divine justice and of Dante’s poetic invention. The author also comments on the tendency to regard contrapasso as identical to the biblical *lex talionis* and a vigorous consideration of the debate surrounding Aquinas’ use of the term as well Albertus Magnus’ commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Armour also comments on the effective extension of the term as a critical category from the mouth of Bertran de Born into all the canticles of the *Commedia*, arguing that the Dante’s single use of the term in fact restricts the doctrine to the punishment of sin alone, omitting the positive elements of just retribution and the rewarding of the good. The main categories and subdivisions of sin in *Inferno* are identified in Virgil’s outline of Hell in *Inferno* XI; such labels, Armour argues, do not necessarily need to be deduced by readers based on a device attached precisely to each sin in the *Inferno*.

Pertile, Lino. “Contrapasso.” In *The Dante Encyclopedia*, edited by Richard Lansing, s.v. “Contrapasso.” London and New York: Routledge, 2000. 219-222.

Pertile defines the contrapasso as the principle of justice that determines the precise form of “suffering, either permanent (Hell) or transient (Purgatory), which each soul (excepting those in Limbo) must undergo as punishment or therapy for a particular sin”. Further, Pertile considers the contrapasso a structuring device that gives order to the *Commedia* at the narrative level. Pertile sees suffering in Hell as retributive and eternal while in Purgatory, it is remedial and lasts only as long as it takes the soul to correct itself. Strictly speaking, Pertile adds, there is no contrapasso in Paradise even though the principle is present in the sense that the souls of the blessed are placed in degrees of proximity to God according to their individual merits. Arguing that punishment, for Dante, is the fulfillment of freely chosen destiny by each soul during life, Pertile maintains that Dante translated the term, ultimately deriving from the biblical *lex talionis*, into the vernacular from Thomas Aquinas.

Barolini, Teodolinda. “Medieval Multiculturalism and Dante’s Theology of Hell.” In *The Craft and the Fury: Essays in Memory of Glauco Cambon*, edited by Joseph Francese. West Lafayette, IN: Bordighera Press, 2000. 82-102. **Web:**

<https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=2ahUKEwiJ8PDxqqnFAhWGiIsKHAVNABKgQFjAAegQIBBAC&url=https%3A%2F%2Fpdfs.semanticscholar.org%2F9322%2F4208248a22fb6cc086c2c98e9e4238c7f759.pdf&usg=AOvVaw3pcyrLRVn9oK8oY2efHhsJ>

Barolini discusses Dante’s system of classification of sins and some of the traditions to which he was indebted, arguing finally that Dante’s theology of hell is “laid out by Aristotle, parsed by Aquinas, [... and] most spiritually attuned to Augustine.” There is a succinct discussion of contrapasso and the ways in which some of Dante’s visionary precursors treated the concept at pages 87-89 (*Apocalypse of Paul, Aeneid, Vision of Tundale, Enchiridion*). The discussion throughout is more generally on Dante’s organization of Hell as based on his threading together of classical and Christian traditions. Barolini also cautions against the overly simplistic scholarly consideration that hell and heaven are eternal which purgatory is temporal. Following Boethius, Barolini argues, Dante recognizes a difference between “perpetual endlessness and eternal timelessness.”

Scholl, Dorothea. “Dante und das Groteske.” *Deutsches Dante-Jahrbuch* 77 (2002): 73-105.

Although the term does not appear until 1480, popularized by the discovery of the decorations of the Domus Aurea in Rome, Scholl heuristically applies the term to *Inferno* in order to examine the ‘grotesque’ bodies of Dante’s *Commedia*. For Scholl, the grotesque body is an expression of contrapasso (which Scholl regards as the law by which every sinner must suffer according to the sins he committed in life).



Cardellino, Lodovico. “Il ‘contrapasso’ e il taglione.” In *Dante e la Bibbia*. Bornato in Franciacorte: Sardini, 2007. 97-105.

Providing a concise review of earlier scholarship on the matter, Cardellino reads against the scholarship on the mechanism of contrapasso, stating that the contrapasso does not so much represent a divine justice that works by analogy or by contrast – i.e., the punishment of sinners according to their sin – as it does the eternal continuation of sinners’ earthly sins. In *Inferno*, the damned forever suffer the sin to which they had dedicated themselves in life. In *Purgatorio*, the earthly life of sinners is made up for in their glorification of God. That is, souls in Purgatory experience much the same continuation of transgression in their earthly life as do those in Hell.

Gambale, Giacomo. “Dante, l’*Epistula Iacobi*, e il *De peccato linguae*. Per una lettura filosofica di *Inferno* XXVI.” *Studi Danteschi* 74 (2009): 179-198.

This article offers a close-reading considering the figure of Ulysses in *Inferno* 26 and the connection between Ulysses’ shrewd speech/tongue and the flame of fire in which he is wrapped in conjunction with the “Epistle of James.” There, the tongue is described as a small helmsman who guides a ship through diverse situations as well as a flame that can contaminate the body and ignite the course of one’s life. Gambale considers some of the nuanced interpretations of the Epistle in Dante and elsewhere in order to situate the meaning of ‘pravum consilium’ alongside Ulysses’ contrapasso. Ulysses’ sin is of the tongue and, having corrupted the essential purpose of words, he is condemned by means of the flame to control his tongue and to anonymity.

2010s

Bolognesi, Davide. “Il contrapasso come chiasma. Appunti su *Inferno* 28.” *L’Alighieri* n.s. 36, (2010): 5-20. **Web:** <https://www.torrossa.com/resources/an/2631744>

This article, often-cited particularly in Italian scholarship, cautions against a reading of the contrapasso as the generative principle of punishment in the *Commedia*. Instead, Bolognesi argues it is important to read contrapasso in its proper context where it is uttered in the ninth *bolgia* of *Inferno* XVIII, which concerns commutative, not retributive justice (even Dante’s earliest commentators seem to read Dante’s contrapasso with reference to a model of commutative justice as explained in *Nicomachean Ethics* 5). Bolognesi provides a comprehensive commentary on scholarly tendencies regarding contrapasso.

Belliotti, Raymond Angelo. “The Notion of Desert and the Law of ‘Contrapasso.’” In *Dante’s Deadly Sins: Moral Philosophy in Hell*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2011. 73-103, esp. 81-87.

The essay considers contrapasso in terms of moral desert; that is, sins constitute punishment, or punishment is an internal, inherent part of the deeds themselves. Retributive action in the afterlife is a reflection of sinners’ decisions during life. The author suggests that Dante’s law of contrapasso can be understood as Dante’s belief that in both life and the afterlife sinners become their sins. For example, readers of the *Commedia* come to understand the nature of sinners in life based on their sufferings in the afterlife. Their punishment reflects their characters and their transgressions.

Kirkham, Victoria. “Contrapasso: The long wait to *Inferno* 28.” *Modern Language Notes* 127, 1 (2012): 1-12. **Web:** Project Muse, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1353/mln.2012.0028>

This article considers Dante’s long anticipation of the word ‘contrapasso’ in *Inferno* 28, arguing that Dante’s reserve in his use of the term signals his accentuation of the importance of numerological progression. Delay was a poetic strategy intended to emphasize the importance of the number 28, which in Neoplatonic numerology is a number of

'perfection.' Further, the author examines the symbolic progression from the Neoplatonic 'perfect' number 6 to 28 as a deliberate strategy throughout the *Inferno*. The number 28 signals liminal moments in not only *Inferno* but also *Paradiso*, and Dante's precise placement of the word 'contrapasso' indicate his intentionally 'perfect' description of infernal justice.

Pertile, Lino. "Ciaccio, Brunetto and the Voice of God." In *Legato con amore in un volume. Essays in Honour of John A. Scott*, edited by John J. Kinder and Diana Glenn. Florence: Olschki, 2013. 157-174.

The contribution considers the contrapasso of the gluttons in *Inferno* 6, in particular, the connection between their sin and their punishment (pp. 165-169).

Castelli, Daniela. "L'errore rigorista e la 'fisica dell'anima' in una *Commedia senza lex talionis*." *Studi Danteschi* 78 (2013): 154-95.

Employing the term *lex talionis* as equivalent to 'contrapasso,' the author contextualizes Dante's law of retaliation within Christian and pre-Christian apocalyptic traditions, as well as the literature of mercy. Castelli argues that the system of justice in the *Commedia* and its mechanism of justice (*lex talionis*, or contrapasso) is neither arbitrary nor retributive. Rather, both are characteristic of a tradition of mercy which, beginning with Plato and developed by Aristotle, Cicero, Plotinus, Augustine, and Boethius, holds that the 'weight' of the soul (*pondus animae*) is what moves it toward its appropriate location. Thus, it is not the extrinsic justice of the *Commedia* which places sinners in their respective locations in *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso*. Rather, from an axiological point of view, souls are naturally and necessarily pushed toward the locus to which they are entitled.

Steinberg, Justin. "Dante's Justice? A Reappraisal of the Contrapasso." *L'Alighieri* n.s. 44 (2014): 59-74. Web:

https://www.academia.edu/10659378/Dantes_Justice_A_reappraisal_of_the_contrapasso

This essay questions a commonplace in the field of Dante studies that describes the 'contrapasso' as the alignment of sin and punishment. Steinberg suggests that Dante intended it to be limited to the punishments in *Inferno* 28 where sins against the public body are extreme and unprecedented. With a focus on tensions that arise in that canto between public and private justice, the author traces the idea of contrapasso in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and its commentaries by Albertus Magus and Thomas Aquinas. In these texts, retributive justice is deemed imperfect and limited in that it was a form of private reparation and did not take into account 'public' crimes. Thus, Steinberg argues that, in *Inferno* 28, Dante questions the limited nature of the *lex talionis*, or 'tit-for-tat justice' as sufficient punishment for the transgression of divine order and extreme crimes against the 'state.' As a consequence, the contrapasso is not so much the general law of Dante's justice, as it is demonstrative of the limits of the law.

Affatato, Rosa. "Contrapasso e conoscenza allegorica nel 'Purgatorio' secondo alcuni commenti alla 'Divina Commedia' tra XIV e XV secolo." *Critica Letteraria* 43, 168-169 (2015): 563-583.

This article traces fourteenth- and fifteenth-century commentators who considered Dante's contrapasso not as a law (*lex talionis*), but rather as the relationship between actions on earth and those after life. Until as late as 1481, the contrapasso was understood as a logic of exchange (vd. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 5). That is, the contrapasso is the value of sinners' actions in life, extended into the afterlife. The author considers contrapasso specifically in *Purgatorio*, which, she argues, recalls a basic relationship between sin and punishment in *Inferno*, but is more nuanced with its added element of prayer and its efficacy in the context of eternal divine judgment. Unlike in *Inferno*, where divine judgement is eternal, in *Purgatorio* sinners, through prayer, can "pay off" their sins as valued by divine justice. Finally, the author considers the allegorical implications of contrapasso in *Purgatorio* where, as Beatrice explains to Dante, to understand the allegorical as opposed to the literal meaning of contrapasso, is to possess divine knowledge.



Maglio, Gianfranco. “Ordine e giustizia in Dante.” In *Ordine e giustizia in Dante. Il percorso filosofico e teologico*, edited by Gianfranco Maglio. Assago and Padova: Wolters Kluwer-CEDAM, 2015. 85-193.

This book considers “justice” in Dante’s *oeuvre* as an interpretative category within a medieval vision of the world and of history. Within this vision, the human and the divine are expressions of a fundamentally theological order (see especially, pp. 132-73). Thus, the author argues that within the schema of divine justice, Dante takes the fundamentally theological (rather than the juridical) sin into consideration when constructing the *contrapasso* of sinners. Further, Maglio reports a difference between *contrapasso* as evident in *Inferno*, where punishment is eternal, and *contrapasso* in *Purgatorio*, where punishment is provisional and didactic. If the *contrapassi* of *Inferno* are deliberately distinct from those of *Purgatorio*, Maglio suggests that the rewards of *Paradiso* are attributed to blessed souls based on similar criteria. The degree of blessedness that souls enjoy in *Paradiso* has a direct, proportional relationship with the virtue they exercise in life. Thus, the exercise of an imperfect form of virtue entails the enjoyment of proportional blessedness within the appropriate sphere of heaven.

How to quote this paper:

L. Faibisoff, “ISCAD Annotated Bibliography: *Contrapasso*,” *International Seminar on Critical Approaches to Dante. Website*, May 2019. Online: <https://dante.medieval.utoronto.ca/contrapasso/>