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AN UMBRIAN LAUDA

OF THE FIRST SUNDAY

OF ADVENT

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The dramatic lauda was one of the early theatrical forms to emerge in Italy during the transition from liturgical drama of the eleventh and twelfth centuries to sacred lay theater in the vernacular of the thirteenth century. However, the dramatic lauda did not evolve directly from liturgical drama; instead it arose from the lyrical poetic form, the lauda, a religious hymn of praise, which, in turn, was derived from the name of the hour of the Divine Office devoted to praise: Lauds or Matins.¹ The dramatic lauda, which was originated in Perugia around 1260 by the Disciplinati (or Flagellants), a lay group dedicated to penance by flagellation and to singing laude, usually depicted biblical stories and was presented for the public in the main piazza on a stage with costumed actors and musical accompaniment.² This new form of lauda appeared in Perugia because of the Flagellants’ preference for dramatization over hymns of praise. The dramatic lauda has been examined carefully by such scholars as DeBartholomaeis, D’Ancona, and Varanini as an early document of Italian theater.³ However, a detailed study of the specific elements of the dramatic lauda that mark an effort on the part of the composers to appeal emotionally to an audi-
ence through an accentuation of conflict and characterization has not been undertaken. Therefore, the focus of this paper will be on these dramatic elements.

For this study of the dramatic elements, the lauda of the first Sunday of Advent of thirteenth-century Perugia\(^4\) has been chosen to be compared with the biblical version\(^5\) of the episode of the Last Judgment, in order to discover how drama was being created in the lauda through its variances from the biblical version. This lauda is based on the gospel of St. Matthew 24 and 25.

In the scene of the Last Judgment of the lauda of Advent,\(^6\) the dramatic or representational elements are accentuated in comparison with the biblical version, which employs a narrative or chronical approach. The biblical version seeks to illustrate a criterion of judgment—the principle of mercy; the characters and their questions serve to elaborate this basic principle. The dramatic lauda instead seeks to involve the listeners in the process of judgment by evoking their emotion of fear and by creating characters motivated by deep feelings of justice, anger, compassion, and self-preservation. For instance, the emphasis on the condemned souls in the dramatic lauda is a means of frightening the listeners by dramatizing the finality of judgment; in the biblical version, by contrast, there is a balanced presentation of the just and the unjust. This dwelling upon the aspect of fear in the dramatic lauda is in keeping with the mentality of the Flagellants who were its main composers.\(^7\) Here are the instances in which this variance from the Bible (in order to stress the negative element and the dramatization of retribution) occur: 1) at the convocation of the judgment, 2) during the judgment of the just, and 3) during the judgment of the damned.

In the Bible the convocation is initiated with this passage:

And when the Son of man shall come in his majesty, and all the angels with him, then shall he sit upon the seat of his majesty:
And all nations shall be gathered together before him, and he shall separate them one from another, as the shepherd separateth the sheep from the goats:
And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on his left. (Matt. 25, 31-33)

In keeping with the instructive nature of this episode, the scene
is set in such a way that the Son of man’s authority is established by the reference to the seat of majesty upon which He will sit. The universal relevance of the judgment is suggested by the reference to the presence of all nations. The moral principle to be explained is introduced by the reference to the image of a divided group of sheep and goats.

In the lauda of Advent, the same scene is presented in this manner:

Christ says walking:
I have suffered so much time
[from ] the misdeeds of sinners
that it is necessary certainly by now
that I give them anguish and suffering;
I want to go to judge each man according to his deeds.

Christ sitting on the throne showing His wounds to sinners:
Behold the even recent wounds
which I sustained for you on the cross. (121-128)

O sinner, do not make excuse,
since everyone today accuses you!

Christ showing the cross:
Here is the blood-covered cross
where I wished to die for you. (137-140)

Today I want to examine you.

On the right side are the just,
the sinners on the left.8 (144-146)

In this excerpt from the convocation of judgment in the dramatic lauda, the authors have tried to involve the audience with the scene by evoking fear through the threatening tone of Christ’s speech: “O sinner, do not make excuse” (122) and “Today I want to examine you.” (144) This speech, which does not appear in the biblical episode, stresses the ideals of retribution (“I have suffered so much time ... that it is necessary ... that I give them anguish and suffering” 121, 123) and of personal involvement of Christ with every person present at judgment (“Behold the ... wounds which I sustained for you on the cross” 127 and “Here is the ... cross where I wished to die for you”
139-140). Through this speech, directly addressed to them, the audience is made aware of the motivations of Christ for judgment: His desire for justice and, more importantly, His desire to award the gratitude and ingratitudine for His sacrifice on the cross. Thus, at this point in the *lauda*, the composers have added a dramatic element to this episode as compared to its biblical counterpart by the more thorough presentation of the motives of the main character, Christ, by providing a direct-address dramatic technique.

In the Bible, the judgment of the just is related in the following fashion:

Then shall the king say to them that shall be on his right hand: Come, ye blessed of my Father, possess you the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave me to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me to drink; I was a stranger, and you took me in; Naked, and you covered me: sick, and you visited me: I was in prison, and you came to me.
Then shall the just answer him, saying: Lord when did we see thee hungry, and fed thee; thirsty, and gave thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and covered thee?
Or when did we see thee sick or in prison, and came to thee?
And the king answering, shall say to them: Amen I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to me. (Matt. 25,34-40)

In this biblical recount of the judgment of the just, the speech of Christ and the question of the just serve to underline two principles which the narrator is trying to point out: the identification of Christ with all creatures and the necessity of the practice of mercy. The list of works of mercy places importance on the principle of fulfilling the needs of others. The question of the just, “Lord, when did we see thee hungry?” (Matt. 25, 37), allows for the introduction of the second principle (through Christ’s response): Christ’s personal identification with the recipients of good deeds.

In the Perugian *lauda* of Advent, the judgment of the just is presented in the following way:

Christ to the just:
Blessed of my Father,
come to possess the kingdom,
Make yourselves happy, rise up  
to enjoy my inheritance!  
I have preserved heaven open to you  
since the beginning of the world.

The works of piety you did happily;  
those in necessity  
you assisted devotedly,  
and my harsh Passion  
[by ] crying over it you did not forget [it].

The just enter into heaven and say:  
Praise and glory we render you,  
Lord, of such kindness!  
That we have blessing,  
Son of the Virgin Mary,  
we come into heaven with sweet songs  
to reign with the other saints. (151-168)⁹

In the lauda, in contrast to the Bible, the purpose of the judgment is not so much to instruct as to involve the audience with the eternal fate of the just. The first stanza is a description of the award which awaits the just. The last stanza is the joyful acceptance speech of the just as they enter heaven. In the second stanza, Christ points briefly to the grounds upon which the just have been judged: works of piety done happily and remembrance of Christ’s Passion. More so than in the biblical episode, in the lauda the personal connection of every man with the Passion is particularly stressed through the direct dialogue between the two parties, Christ, the just. Thus, the dramatic possibilities of the judgment of the just have been exploited in the lauda both with a direct-address and direct-dialogue technique that underscores the more thorough characterization of the feelings of the just and the more human portrayal of Christ as a person Who wants expression of gratitude for His Passion from the people assembled at judgment.

In St. Matthew’s gospel, the condemnation of the damned is treated thus:

Then he shall say to them also that shall be on his left hand:  
Depart from me, you cursed into everlasting fire which was  
prepared for the devil and his angels.  
For I was hungry, and you gave me not to eat: I was thirsty,
and you gave me not to drink. I was a stranger, and you took me not in; naked, and you covered me not: sick and in prison, and you did not visit me.

Then they also shall answer him, saying: Lord, when did we see thee hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister to thee?

Then he shall answer them, saying: Amen I say to you, as long as you did it not to one of these least, neither did you do it to me.

And these shall go into everlasting punishment: but the just, into life everlasting. (Matt. 25, 41-46)

In this biblical version of the judgment of the damned, the presentation is analogous to that of the judgment of the just: the speech of Christ reciting the works of mercy not performed, the question of the damned allowing for Christ's explanation that He identifies with every person in need. The biblical episode is concluded immediately after this presentation by the statement that those who did works of mercy will go to eternal life while those who did not will go to eternal punishment. The lesson of the episode is reconfirmed in the final statement by the identification of award with the just and punishment with the unjust. The characters in the episode—the just and the unjust—function in terms of helping to illustrate through their examples the positive value of mercy and the negative value of neglect of the needy. The potential elements of drama, such as the suggested antipathy between Christ and the damned, are not exploited. Nor are the feelings of the just and the reactions of the unjust to their respective sentences revealed. Clearly, emphasis is on instruction rather than dramatic representation.

In the lauda of Advent, the judgment of the damned is handled in a similar way up to the point cited below:

Christ to the damned:
And go, damned ones,
to that eternal fire! (169-170)

You saw me to have hunger and thirst:
and you did not give me to eat and drink;
for the impiety you have,
that you did not wish to help me,
I pronounce sentence against you
and give you to the hand of the enemy.
Guest and pilgrim I was:
You did not deign to give me shelter;
I went naked through the street:
You wished [to turn] the back of your face [head] to
me as though you had never seen me;
by you I was unknown. (175-186)

... 

Why, Lord, have you condemned us?

Christ to the damned:

When the poor man was begging,
I stood in his person.

Always you have crucified me
and renewed my torment.10 (196-200)

In this judgment scene of the damned of the lauda, the list of deeds of mercy not performed is preserved intact as it appeared in the Bible. The question of the damned has been shortened to one sentence: “Why, Lord, have you condemned us?” (196) probably in order to avoid unnecessary repetition of the works of mercy. From the alterations which have occurred in comparison to the biblical version, it appears that priority has been given to depiction of motivations of the characters: Christ and the damned. In the list of the works of mercy not performed, for instance, the language of Christ is more critical and suggestive of deep antipathy of the damned for Christ: “Guest . . . I was: /You did not give me shelter” (175-176) and “You wished [to turn] the back of your face [head] to me/ as though you had never seen me.” (184-185) The question which the damned pose, “Why, Lord, have you condemned us?” (196) is more personal than the biblical equivalent: “When did we see thee hungry?” (Matt. 25, 37) Christ’s response, too, “When the poor man was begging, I stood in his person,” is more involved with the psychological relationship of Christ with the damned than its biblical versions: “As long as you did it not to one of these least, neither did you do it to me.” (Matt. 25, 45) In the dramatic lauda, the response has been changed in order to dramatize the image of a poor man begging who is equivalent to Christ. The audience is led to picture Christ as a poor man. In addition, the emotional involve-
ment of Christ with the damned is further stressed by the reminder: "Always you have crucified me/ and renewed my torment." (199-200) Thus, in this depiction of the condemnation of the unjust, the composers of the lauda have opted for alterations which bring out the emotional aspects of the characters' reactions: Christ's sense of feeling scorned by the damned while they were living and the condemned souls' concern for their fate (indicated by the question, "Why have you condemned us?") rather than for an understanding of the nature of their conduct (as indicated by the question, "When did we see thee hungry?").

As far as semantic composition is concerned, the biblical presentation and the dramatic lauda's version of this story are parallel to this point. However, after this scene of judgment of the damned, more elements are added to the plot of the lauda in order to heighten its dramatic appeal. Up to this moment, it is possible to point to greater efforts of characterization of Christ, the just, and the damned in the lauda than in the Bible. Beyond this moment the composers of this lauda sought to exploit the conflict suggested in the Bible between the damned and Christ. Through the portrayal of this conflict, the audience also learns more about the personalities of the main characters involved: Christ, Mary, the condemned, and the demons headed by Lucifer. The portrayal of these characters in this lauda is useful to an understanding of the thirteenth century Umbrian perception of these religious figures: Christ the stern and unyielding judge, Mary the compassionate and very mild intercessor, and the condemned a valid embodiment for the Umbrian of the evil of human nature.\textsuperscript{11}

In the dramatic lauda after the scene in which the unjust have been condemned, they turn to Mary to beseech her to intercede for them:

The damned to the Mother of God:
We call on you, Virgin,
Mother full of piety....
If you do not help the condemned ones,
we will be, Mary, completely desperate. (211-212)

Mother to her Son:
For that milk which I gave you
listen to me now again, Son, a little;
hear my humble prayers,
pardon those for whom I solicit. (215-220)
Christ to His Mother:
Mother, do not beseech me
since your prayers cannot be answered: (235-236)

Mother of God to damned:
Now is not the time to plead;
mercy is now suspended.12 (241-242)

Christ, who had just spoken harsh words to the condemned, is here delivering hardhearted words to His mother: "Mother, do not beseech me/ since your prayers cannot be answered." The damned, who had just questioned their sentence to Christ, are here further challenging the judgment by their appeal to Mary. The dramatic function of the Virgin, who was not present in the biblical episode, is to provide a device by which the conflict between the damned and Christ can be extended as well as to help accentuate through exchanges with her the stern quality of Christ and the contentious character of the condemned. Thus the introduction of a new character, such as Mary, and the direct-dialogue technique among several characters intensify the dramatic impact of this compositional scene. In addition, the Virgin represents the one element of mercy in this scene. The triumph of justice over mercy seems also to be intended to evoke a feeling of fear in the audience and a sense of the finality of judgment.

After Christ has rejected His Mother's plea in the lauda, He proceeds to berate individually each of these seven classes of sinners: the gluttonous, the avaricious, the lustful, the vainglorious, the irate, the slothful, the proud, and the sodomites. (The envious are not mentioned.)

Rise up, lustful,
go to burn in inferno;
and you with him, slothful,
who despised God eternal:
Lead [them], Satan, bind [them]
to torment [them] with the damned.13 (295-300)

The extension of the sentencing to include specific condemnations of each group of sinners, as of the lustful and the slothful above, helps to give Christ more opportunities to express ire against the condemned and, thus, to prolong the dramatic conflict between Him and the damned. In fact, in the middle of this
diatribe, one of the damned interrupts in order to beseech the Virgin again to implore mercy from Christ. She does, but His response is still negative. And Mary again tells the damned that there is no further hope:

O Queen, be gracious,  
pray and release your prisoner:  
a demon is taking hold of me.  

Mary to Son:  
O Son, I beseech you  

...  
for that man who was condemned  

...  
that he not go among those people  
of demons and serpents.  

Christ to His Mother:  
Mother, do not beseech me,  
as your prayers cannot be answered.\(^{14}\)  

Through the repetition of the request of the condemned to Mary, dramatic characterization is strengthened, inasmuch as the audience is repeatedly confronted with the determined quality in the decision of Christ to condemn these souls, the constantly merciful character of Mary who continues to intercede, and the tenacious streak of the damned who will not cede without a fight. The denouement of the lauda follows this climax of impasse between Christ and the damned and Christ and Mary as all the souls are turned over to Lucifer who submits each of the categories of sinners to more vicious verbal abuse:

To the proud and the tyrants  

...  
o go Satan,  
put them in prison:  
may serpents and scorpions and blows  
be their company.\(^{15}\)  

When the confrontation of the damned with Christ ends, it is replaced by the confrontation of the damned with Lucifer, Satan, and other demons. The lauda ends with the specified recital of punishments that each sinner will receive—
with the speech to the sodomites last. The presentation of the judgment of the condemned is much longer—264 lines—than the judgment of the just—18 lines. Thus, the emphasis in this lauda is definitely upon the condemned's misdeeds as demonstrated both by the clear disproportion between the number of lines devoted to the judgment of the just and the judgment of the condemned, and by the dramatic impact created by the confrontation between Christ and the damned. The greater importance given to the judgment of the unjust seems motivated by a desire to instill fear in the audience rather than confidence—to encourage the listeners not to sympathize with the damned,\textsuperscript{16} nor to identify themselves with the unjust rather than with the just—in order to scare them into proper behavior. To conclude, in the way the lauda has been expanded and conveniently endowed with direct-address and dialogue technique, it has stressed the evil nature of man—a conception in keeping with the Umbrian spirituality of the thirteenth century. At the same time, this desire to expand the episode through dramatic dialogue has produced a fuller characterization of the biblical persons involved, while their conflicts are exploited to their fullest in order to add to the listening value of the story and to create a dramatic presentation.

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Notes

2. Vincenzo DeBartholomaeis, *Origini della poesia drammatic italiana*, pp. 219-234. The dramatic lauda emerged in Perugia, but the composition of dramatic laude occurred between 1260 and 1400 in many Umbrian cities: Orvieto, Gubbio, Assisi, Foligno, Gualdo, Castello, and La Fratta. From its home land of Umbria, the dramatic lauda form was adopted by Disciplinati of other regions in this period: Abruzzo, Rome, Tuscany, the Veneto, and Bologna. The dramatic lauda and the variety of popular dramatic sacred presentations created between 1260 and 1400 were replaced about 1400 by the sacra rappresentazione of Florence—a form of dramatic poetry written in ottava rima. According to DeBartholomaeis, there are approximately two hundred manuscripts of laudari (collections of laude) in existence. *Laude drammatiche e rappresentazioni sacre*, 1. Ed. Vincenzo DeBartholomaeis (Firenze: Felice Le Monnier, 1943), pp. xiv-xxv.

3. Ernesto Monaci is credited with the discovery of the birthplace of the lauda drammatica as Perugia with the publication of his article; Ernesto Monaci, “Uffizi drammatici de’ Disciplinati dell’Umbria,” in *Rivista di Filologia Romana*, vol. I fasc. 4, 1874. Alessandro D’Ancona published several dramatic laude from the original manuscripts in *Origini del teatro italiano*. Torino: Ermanno Loeschner, 1891. DeBartholomaeis in *Laude drammatiche e rappresentazioni sacre* printed several dramatic laude of Umbria in 1943. Giorgio Varanini published several laude—both lyrical and dramatic—of many regions of Italy in *Laude dugentesche* in 1972. Ignazio Baldele has studied the Umbrian lauda from a philological standpoint in *Medioevo volgare da Montecassino all’Umbria*.


6. The first scene involving the preaching of the Antichrist, his murder of the prophets Elias and Enoch, and Christ’s sending an angel to kill him will not be discussed because it is based upon another text. According to Paul Edward Kretzmann, *The Liturgical Element in the Earliest Forms of the Medieval Drama* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1916), pp. 19-20, the material for this scene comes from the “Liber de Antichristo” probably by Alcuin or Rabanas Maurus; the “Libellus de Antichristo” by Adso; and the “De novissimis, de Antichristo, de quindecim signis praeecedentibus” by Peter Damian who died in 1272. The texts of these accounts are reprinted in J.P. Migne, *Patrologia latina*. 221 volumes. Paris: 1844.

7. For a description of the activities and philosophy of the Flagellants, see “I Flagellanti,” *Origini*, pp. 195-206.
8. “In Dominica de Adventus,” 121-128, 137-140, 144-146. “Christus ambulando dicit: Tanto tempo agio sufterto/ el mal fare dei peccatore/ che convene oramaie per certo/ ch’io lo dia pena e dolore;/ andar voglio a giudicare/ onne uom secondo el suo operare./ Christus sedens in catedra ostendens plagas peccatoribus: Ecc o le piaghe anco riente/ qual per voie sostenne in croce.” “O peccatore, non faite escusa, ché tutto el mondo oggie v’accusa/ Iterum ostendendo crucem;/ Ecco la croce ensanguenata/ là dua per voie volse morire:” “oggie ve voglio ’saminare./ Da parte ritta estieni ei giuste, ei peccator da la man manca;”

9. Ibid., 151-168. “Christus iustis: Benedette dal mio Pate,/ venite al regno a possidere,/ Carteglie dilette, su levete/ la mia redetâ a godere!/ El cielo uperto v’ho serbato/ da puoiie ch’el mondo fo ordenato./ Christus iustis: L’uopere de la pietaie/feste molto alegramente;/ a quí ch’avean necessitate/ sovenite devotevamente/ e la mia dura Passione/ piangendola non ve scordone./ Justi intrant in Celo et dicunt: Laude e gloria te rendemo;/ Segnor, de tanta cortesia!/ Che la benezone avemo;/ figliuolo de la Vergene Maria;/ venimo in Cielo con dolcie cante/ a regnare con gli altre sante.”

10. Ibid., 169-170, 175-186, 196-200. “Christus damnatis: E. voie andate, maledette;/ a quí fuoco sempiterno!” “Vedesteme aver fame e sete;/ mangiare e bere a me non deste;/ per la empezza che voie avete;/ che sovenire no me voleste;/ encontra voie sentenza dico/ e donve in mano del nemico./ Iterum: Osped:o era e pelegrino;/ non me degnaste dare alberg:o;/ nudo andava per camino;/ vogliesteme la faccia in tergo/ co’n non m’avesse maio veduto;/ io da voie era esconsociato,” R. Dammati ad Christum: . . . “Perche, Signore, n’haie maledette? Christus damnatis: Quando el povero demandava/ cie in sua persona stava. Christus damnatis: Sempre m’avete crucifissio/ e renovato el mio tormento.”


13. Ibid., 295-300. “Christus: Lieva su lussurioso,/ vanne ad arder giù lo inferno;/ e tu co lui, accidioso,/ che desprezzaste Dio eterno!/ Ménaie, Satanasse, legate a tormentare con glie dannate.”
14. Ibid., 313-5, 319, 321, 323-324, 325-326. “Unus de dannati ad Matrem Domini: O Rigina, sie cortese, priega e scampa el tuo pregione: un demonio si me prese,” “Maria ad Filium: O figliuolo, or sie pregato/ per quisto uomo ch’era dannato/ ... che non vada fra quilla gente/ deie demonia e deie ser- pente./ Christus ad Matrem: Madre mia, non me pregare,/ ché non puoie essere esaudita.”

15. Ibid., 397, 399-402. “Ai superbe e ai tiranne/ ... o Satane, tosto vanne,/ en un carcer e gli arenserra:/ serpente e botte e scorpione/ aggiate per lor com- pagnone.”

16. For a rendering of the Last Judgment play in which the audience is allowed to sympathize somewhat with the feelings of the condemned souls, see “The Last Judgment, Corpus Christi Cycle,” in Medieval Drama. Ed. David Bevington. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1975), pp. 637-658. This English sacred drama dates from a much later period, probably 1378, ac- cording to Bevington, p. 227.