THE HARROWING OF HELL

HEC LAUS SABBATI SANCTI

This, the best known of the Perugian laude drammatiche, is found in three manuscripts: Perugia, Biblioteca Augusta 955, ff. 47v-49r [mod. num., with the rest of f. 49 and both sides of f. 50 blank] (P), copied for the Confraternity of Sant’Andrea of Perugia, around the middle of the fourteenth century; Rome, Biblioteca Vallicelliana, A.22, ff. 94r-98v [mod. num.] (V), copied at the beginning of the fifteenth century, perhaps for the Confraternity of San Fiorenzo in Perugia, a palimpsest worn from use and marked by occasional drops of wax; and Assisi, Archivio Capitolare di San Rufino, ex Archivio di Santo Stefano, MS 36, ff. 97v-100v (R), transcribed by the Luca Ercolani, a priest in Assisi between 1380 and 1400. P contains only lines 1-168; V contains the texts edited here; and R contains no reference to Christ’s appearance to his Mother before he appears to the Women in the Garden.

The text must have been substantially contaminated before the great laudari P and V were compiled around the middle of the fourteenth century, because the lauda as we have it now is clearly the result of an amalgamation from two originally independent laude, and an imperfect amalgamation at that. The scene in which Christ sends the Good Thief to Heaven is given both in the first part (which consists of six-line stanzas, “a modo passionale”) and in the second part (which consists of eight-line stanzas “a modo pasquale”). The source of the first part, to line 264, is the Gospel of Nicodemus, an apocryphal work dating to about the fourth century. The dramatist has done little more than versify the very dramatic narrative of the Latin A version of that work, Chapters XVIII-XXVII. The second part is a much freer treatment of the same subject.

HEC LAUS SABBATI SANCTI

SANCTI existentes in Limbo. Fiat lux:

Quiste lume mo’ venute procedon da quilla fontana che ne promise la salute de tutta quanta gente umana. Però ciascuno aggia buon cuore ché questo è l’alto suo splendore.

Isaias:

Quisto è ‘l lume del giocondo Figliuol del Pate ch’è nel cielo, del quale io disse, essendo al mondo, che ne lustrava con gran zelo. Or ecco mo’ che n’ha lustrate, essendo ell’ombre dei peccate.

THE PLAY FOR EASTER SATURDAY

The Righteous in Limbo. Let there be light.

These lights\(^1\) which have just appeared originate from that fount that promised us the salvation of all Humankind. So let each of us be of good heart for this is his great splendour.

Isaiah:

This is the light of the joyful Son of the Father in Heaven of whom I spoke, when I was on earth, that he would cleanse us with great zeal. Now behold that he has cleansed us from the shadow of our sins.\(^2\)
SIMEON:

Io, l’antico Simeone,
al tempio el tolse en glie mieie braccia,
e quando apresentato fone,
resguardando ella sua faccia,
disse: “Gli occhie mieie hon vedute
de tutto el mundo la salute!”

Iterum:

Chi se’ tu con faccia lieta
che mostrè a noie tanta onestade?

JOHANNES BAPTISTA:

Io so’ la luce, anco ‘l profeta
de quilla alta maëstade,
ch’al monde venne ’ aparecchiare
la sua via per l’uom salvare.

JOHANNES:

Ma quando el vidde a me venire
per batizzare ell’alto fiume,
con alegrezza el prese a dire:
“Quisto è quillo eternal lume,
agnol de Dio, qua giù mandato,
per trare el mondo dal peccato.”

Iterum:

E batizzato con afetto,
udie gridar lo Spiritu Santo:
“Quisto è ’l mio Figliuol delettio
en cuie m’è compiaciuto tanto.”
Però io vengo a darve segno
che tosto ve darà ’l suo regno.

OMNES SANCTI:

Senza dubio ciascun sia
che vesiterà noie, suoie amice,
sì co’ el disse Moïsie
e Giovagne ancora el dice,
e ciascun ne sia sceguro
che ne trarà de quisto scuro.
SATAN ad Infernum veniens ab extra:

Tosto t’aparecchia, Enferno, per quillo che s’è già gloriato ch’è Figliuol de Dio Eterno ed hamme ’l popol mio turbato, e fesse tristo molto forte vedendo apressar la morte.

SATAN to Infernus, coming in from outside:

Get ready quickly, Infernus for him who has already boasted that he is the Son of Eternal God and has disrupted my people, and he became very wretched at the sight of death approaching.

Iterum:

Esso è stato sempre averso de la mia somma potenza, ed alcun ch’io avea converso a luie ha fatto reverenza, e molte de quiglie che n’avate per suo mal fare glie n’ha furate.

He has always been opposed to my supreme power, and some whom I had converted have bowed down to him, and many of those whom you held he has wickedly stolen from us.

INFERNUS ad eum:

Chi è quisto uom de tal fortezza che teme morte e te contrasta? Saem ch’on’uom, per tua prodezza, non può fuggire la tua dura asta, ché quanto è stato al mondo forte a noi l’hai dato per la morte.

Who is this man of such strength that he fears death and yet defies you? We know that by your prowess no man can flee your sharp lance, and however mighty he was on earth you have delivered him to us to die.

Iterum:

Adonqua, si se’ si potente, bene è forte chi t’ofende! E veramente è onnipotente che te per suoie parole prende, dicendo ch’eglie aggia paura d’una morte tanto dura.

Well, if you are so mighty, anyone who opposes you must be very strong! And truly he is omnipotent if he conquers you with his words, saying that he is afraid of such a harsh death.

SATAN ad Infernum:

De luie già non dubitare, ch’io el tentaie ello deserto, e mo’ gli ho fatto aparecchiare la croce, dua ei sarà uferto, e menerollo a te legato per la virtù mia conculcato.

Do not be afraid of him, for I tempted him in the desert and just now I have prepared the cross where he will be offered up and I shall bring him to you bound, and trampled by my virtue.
INFERNUS:

Tu ne dice che n’ha tolte
de quieie che tu qua giù renchiude?

Respondet SATAN:

Biene alcun! N’ha tolte molte,
ma non che sia per sua vertude,
ma per lo suo orare espresso
l’Alto Edio glie l’ha commesso.

INFERNUS:

Ma egli colla sua parola
senza prece glì ha refatte,
e come aquila che vola
glie lor legame ha già desfatte,
e colla lor molta alegrezza
hon rota tutta mia fortezza.

Iterum:

Seria quisto quil che trasse
Lazzaro morto de quattro dine,
e come ucello che via volasse,
tra tutte noie de fuore uscine?
Essendo el corpo già fetente
rendèlo vivo ai suoie parente.

SATAN:

Veramente è quisto esso,
etisto non è el primo male.

INFERNUS ei:

Noie te scongiuramo espresso
per la tua sedia principale,
per la vertù qual è en tene,
ch’a me coluie nonne viène,

INFERNUS:

You say that he’s taken from us
some of those whom you keep imprisoned
down here?

Satan replies:

Not just some! He’s taken many,
but not by virtue of his own powers,
but by virtue of his express prayer
Almighty God granted it to him.

INFERNUS

But by his own word
without prayer he restored them,
and as swift as an eagle
he broke their bonds
and with their great rejoicing
they totally destroyed my power.

INFERNUS continues:

Could this be the man who raised
Lazarus, dead four days before,
and swift as a bird in flight
he appeared among us?
Although his corpse was already rotting,
he returned him alive to his family.

SATAN:

Indeed it is he,
and that’s not the worst of the matter.

INFERNUS says to him:

We beseech you now expressly,
by virtue of your princely throne,
by virtue of the powers within you,
that he should not come before me,
Iterum:
ché quando udie el comandamento
che Lazzar tosto luie ubedisse,
sentie alora un gran pavento
che tutte nostre ufizi aflisse;
e quando ello tra noie se mosse,
tutte ruppe nostre posse.

Iterum:
S’ei fa adonqua cotai segne,
che con suo dir ciascun fa sano,
s’ei descendesse a’ nostre regne
faria ciascun legame vano,
e quieie che noi tenem legate
serian da luie deliberate.

INFERNUS continues:
for when I heard his command
that Lazarus should obey him at once,
I felt then a great fear
that touched all our ministries,
and when he moved among us
he destroyed all my power.

INFERNUS continues:
Well, if he performs such miracles that he
can restore men to health with his words,
if he came down to our realms
he would render all our fetters useless,
and those whom we have kept
in bondage would be freed by him.

THE VOICE OF THE ANGEL to Infernus:
O imprisoned prince,
open your gates.9
And you, eternal gates now closed,
open forth.
For the King of Glory will come soon,
he will enter this hidden place.

INFERNUS to Satan:
Now Satan, begone
from my throne at once
and use your wiles to fight
lest the King of Glory appear here,
and someone lock those gates
as strongly as possible.

SATAN to the Devils:
O my beloved legions,
do not let this man pass.
Each take up his position,
some above and some below.

ALL THE RIGHTEOUS
Open at once and do not close them,
for now you will see him come.
DAVID:

Già io, David, al mondo disse
che onne uomo el confessasse.
Ei gran legame forte e spesse
seron per luie e rotte e casse,
e noie tràrà de scuritade
e de la via d’eniquitade.

ISAIAH:

Ed io, vivendo anco, Isàia,
disse ch’ei morte suscitava,
e molte monementa apria,
e ’n terra onn’uom si alegrava
che venia per l’uom salvare,
e tutto el mondo consolare.

OMNES SANCTI ad Infernum:

Apre, Enferno, ché se’ vento!
Da Gesù se’ conculcato,
serà el tuo nome al mondo espento
da cuie onn’uomo era legato,
che non podea niun passare
che nol menasse a te scaldare.

VOX ANGELI ad Infernum:

O voie, princepe de male,
aprite quiste vostre porte!
Comando a voie, porte eternale,
che de levare siate acorte,
che quill’alto Gloria Renepentrare qua entro viene.

INFERNUS:

Chi è l’uom cusi fervente,
qual è Re de Gloria ditto?

DAVID:

È signor forte e potente
che ’n bataglia v’ha sconfitto,
però conosce esto gridare
che me l’odiste mentovare.

DAVID:

I, David, in my lifetime said
that all men should believe in him.
Our fetters, great and strong and heavy,
will by shattered and broken by him,
and he will lead us forth from darkness
and from the path of iniquity.

ISAIAH:

And I, Isaiah, when I was alive
said that he would raise men from the dead,
and would open many tombs
and on earth all men would rejoice
for he would come to save mankind
and console all the world.10

ALL THE RIGHTEOUS to Infernus:

Open up, Hell, for you are vanquished!
You have been trampled down by Jesus.
Your name will be expunged on earth,
the name which kept men in bondage,
for no man could avoid
being brought to your fires.

THE VOICE OF THE ANGEL to Infernus:

O you, prince of evil,
open these gates of yours.
I command you, eternal gates,
to be raised up,
for the great King of Glory
is coming to enter here.

INFERNUS:

Who is this man so fired up
that he is called the King of Glory?

DAVID:

He is a strong and mighty lord
who has defeated you in battle,
wherefore recognize this shout,
for you heard me prophesy it.11
DAVID:

Ma esso re ci ha resguardato
ed èccie en terra per odiere
el pianto de ciascun piagato,
e rompere tutte lor martire.
Ed egli lor legame forte
descioglierà el Figliuol da morte.

GESTAS:

Oimè, dolente, io so’ dannato
per lo troppo mio mal fare!
De robare sempre era usato,
e d’ucidere e de furare.
Essendo en croce, a Gesù disse
che, sé scampando, ne sciogliesse.

Iterum:

S’io avesse ditto co’ Dimasse,
có’ seri’ andato a godere!

Respondet ei UNUS DEMON capiens eum:

Vien denante a Satanasse,
c’há gran desio de te vedere,
perché se’ stato buon servente
a luie e a tutta la sua gente.

DEMON representans eum ad Satan:

Ecco el vostro servedore,
che sempre è stato a voie ubidire.
Menàllo a voie con grande onore
che ve piaccia luie mertire;
che, se altre è stato a voie ribelle,
costui restette a voie en novelle.

SATAN:

Bien venga, Gestas, el mio deleetto!
Voie che tu gode del mio regno.
Tosto aparecchiate un letto
de fuoco e ghiaccio, ché n’è degno,
ed alcun sià che l’accompagne
ch’imprimà lo scalde e puoie el bagne.

DAVID:

But this king has looked upon us
and has come to earth to heed
the lament of all those wounded by sin,
and put an end to their suffering.
And for them the Son will break
the great bonds of death.\textsuperscript{12}

GESTAS:\textsuperscript{13}

Alas, woe, I am damned
for my excessive wrong doing!
It has always been my custom
to kill and to rob.
When I was on the cross, I said to Jesus
that he should save himself and free us.\textsuperscript{14}

GESTAS continues:

If I had gone along with Dismas,
what joy I would have found now!

A DEVIL seizing him replies to Gestas:

Come before Satan
who greatly desires to see you,
because you have been a good servant
to him and all his people.

THE DEVIL presents him to Satan:

Here is your servant
who has always been obedient to you.
I bring him before you with great honour
if it please you to reward him;
for where others have rebelled against you
he has always remained true to you.

SATAN:

Welcome, Gestas, my beloved!
I want you to enjoy my kingdom.
Prepare him a bed at once,
of fire and ice, for he deserves it,
and let someone go with him
to heat him up and then douse him.
IESUS ad Dimas:

Al paradiso va’, Dimasse,
e porta en collo quisto legno,
e ’l el guardian non te lasse
entrare, glie mostra quisto segno,
e di’ che Cristo t’ha mandato,
e ’n segno de ciò quisto t’ha dato.

DYSMAS to Dysmas:15

Go to Heaven, Dysmas,
and take this wood on your shoulder,
and if the guardian does not let you
enter, show him this sign,
and say that Christ sent you
and as proof he gave you this sign.

DIMAS ad Angelum Gabrielem:

O Gabriello, io so’ mandato
da Cristo, che fo mo’ crucifisso,
ed ecco el segno che m’ha dato
ch’io sia da voie qua entro messo.

DYSMAS to the Angel Gabriel:

O Gabriel, I have been sent
by Christ, who has just been crucified,
and here is the sign he gave me
so that I should be admitted here by you.

GABRIEL ad eum:

Volontier t’apro e sta’ en buen cuore
ch’ei mena Adam coie successore.

GABRIEL to Dysmas:

I am glad to open up for you and be of good
heart,
for he is bringing Adam and his successors.

DAVID:

Poie te dico, Enferno sozzo,
che tu apre a cotal rege.
Apre quisto tuo gran pozzo,
che non te gioverà tua grege.

DAVID:

I tell you, then, filthy Hell,
to open up to such a king.
Open your great pit at once
because your flock will do you no good.

CHRISTUS veniens ad Infernum:

E io, figliuoglie, io so’ venuto
per darve l’alto mio tributo.

CHRIST arrives in Hell:

And I, my children, have come
to pay my great tribute.

INFERNUS ad Christum:

Chi se’ tu che me descioglie
quil che el mortal peccato lega?
Chi se’ tu che ’l Limbo spoglie,
e ’nverso te ciascun si priega?
Chi se’ tu, tal combatetore
ch’haie vento el nostro gran furore?

INFERNUS to Christ:

Who are you who free from me
those whom mortal sin holds bound?
Who are you who plunder Limbo
and to whom all men pray?
Who are you, such a warrior
that you have vanquished our great rage?
**Iterum:**

Chi se’ tu che tanta luce
daie a quiste scure parte?
Chi se’ tu che mo’ conduce?
Sopra de noie haie tal carte!
E non te basta che n’avete,
ma quil che noie legam scioglete?

**Infernus continues:**

Who are you who now come giving
so much light to these dark parts?
Who are you who now lead?
You have such power over us.
Is not what you have enough, without you
having to free those whom we hold bound?

**Iterum:**

Chi se’ tu, cotanto chiaro?
Chi se’ tu, cotanto bello?
Chi se’ tu ch’al mondo amaro
daie così mortal flagello?
Chi se’ tu, senza peccato?
Chi se’ tu in mondo immacolato?

**Infernus continues:**

Who are you, so very bright?
Who are you, so very fair?
Who are you, who in the harsh world
weild the mortal scourge so hard?
Who are you, without sin?
Who are you, a spotless mortal?\(^{16}\)

**Iterum:**

Se’ tu quil de cuie deceia
el prence nostro, dura testa,
ch’esso tògliar ne deveia
de tutto el mondo la podesta,
e per morir esso nel legno
a ciascun dava l’alto regno?

**Infernus continues:**

Are you the one of whom
our thick-head prince spoke, saying
that he was going to take away from us
power over the whole world,
and by dying on the tree
he would open his great kindom to all?

**Iesus ad Satan ligans eum:**

Satàn, tu haie data molta pena
a l’uom per longo temporale.
Legan te vòie con mia catena
che tu non faccie a lor più male.
Enfin al novissimo dine
per mia vertù staraie cusine.

**Jesus to Satan as he binds him:**

Satan, you have caused much suffering
to Mankind for a long time.
I will bind you with my chain\(^{17}\)
so that you do him no further harm.
Until Judgement Day
my might will hold you that way.

**Iesus ad Infernum:**

Esto è ’l vostro re legato.
Per signor tenete luie.

**Jesus to Infernum:**

Here is your King, in chains.
Keep him as your Lord.

**Demones reprendentes Satan:**

O prence d’onne ben privato,
com’ofendeie tu a custuie?
Tu n’haie fatto mo’ spogliare
del nostro ben, per tuo mal fare.

**Demones reproaching Satan:**

O prince devoid of every good,
how could you offend this man?
Now you’ve made him strip us
of all we had, through your wrong doing.
DEMONES ad Satan:

O Satàn, de male attore!
O Satàn, signor de morte!
Resguardiam quanto splendore
ha date a quiste sozze sorte,\(^{18}\)
e tu cusi el deveie pensare
ennante ch’el fesse pigliare.

Iesus ad Infernum:

In omnia secula seculorum
Satàn sia en vostra podestade.
Vadin el luoco anco costoro
già per vostra redetade.

Iesus omnibus Sanctis ibi adstantibus:

E voie, Sante mieie, venite,
quie a mia ’magene fatte sete!

Iesus ad Sanctos:

Voie sete mo’ recomparate
per lo legno crucïato,
ch’eravate prima dannate
per lo legno già vetato.
O Adam, mo’ pace sia
a te colla tua compagnia!

Iterum:

E voie, che foste el primo pate,
viën de fuore imprimamente,
e voie, figliuoglie, el seguitate:
Abel, Abethe, buon servente,
David, Aronne e Moïsesse,
Isàia cogli altre qua giù messe.

THE DEVILS to Satan:

O Satan, doer of evil!
O Satan, Lord of death!
We can see how much light
he brings to these filthy realms,
and you should have thought about it
before you had him taken.

Jesus to Infernum:

For ever and ever
let Satan be in your power.
Let them go in there too,
as your inheritance.

Jesus to all the Righteous standing there:

And come, my Righteous ones,
who are made in my image.

Jesus to the Righteous:

You are now redeemed
by the tree of the cross
just as you were damned before
by the forbidden tree.
O Adam, peace to you now
and to your company.

Christ continues:

And you who were the first father,
come out now first of all,
and you, his sons, follow him:
Abel, Abeth, good servant,
David, Aaron and Moses,
Isaiah and the others sent down here.
CHRISTUS *Adam ad modum pasqualem:* Adam, primo parente, fatte ver me e non star più pensoso.

**ADAM ad Christum:**

O Cristo onnepotente, per mio defetto sceso so’ qua giuso!

CHRISTUS *ad Abraam:*

O Abraam gioioso!

**Responset ABRAAM:**

Veggo, Signor, che la mia carne porte.

CHRISTUS *dicit David:*

Davit, fedele e forte, or suona ‘l tuo salterio ennamorato!

CHRISTUS *Iacob:*

Giacobbe patriarca! O Isac anche, coie tuoie compagnone! Noè, che feste l’arca! Duv’è Isàia, quil che seg·n·ato fone?! O santo Simeone, suglie tuoie braccia foïte uferto.

**SIMEON Christo:**

Segnore, alor foie certo ch’el popol d’Esrael era salvato.

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CHRIST says to Adam in the joyful mode:

Adam, first parent, come towards me, without further thought.

**ADAM to Christ:**

O almighty Christ, for my sin I was down here!

**CHRIST to Abraham:**

O joyful Abraham!

**ABRAHAM replies:**

I see, Lord, that you are of my flesh.

**CHRIST says to David:**

David, faithful and strong, now play your harp filled with love!

**CHRIST to Jacob:**

O patriarch Jacob! O Isaac, too, with your companions! Noah, who made the ark! Where is Isaiah, who was given a sign? O holy Simeon, I was offered into your arms.

**SIMEON to Christ:**

Lord, then I was certain that the people of Israel were saved.
CHRISTUS:
Daniel e Geremia,
e tu, Abel, cogli altri Padri Sante!
O santo Zacaria,
e voie, Profete sante tutte quante,
a ciel con dolce cante
vòie che veniate a far con meco festa!
O Giovagne Batista,
tu lege vecchia e nuova hai confermato.

CHRISTUS Latroni:
Morendo en ella croce,
figliuol Dimasse, tu me confessaste.
Col cuore e colla bocie
la santa misericordia ademandaste.
Perché non me negaste,
lo santo Paradiso t’ho promesso.
Venite voie con esso
che tanto tempo m’avete aspettato.

OMNES eundo cum Christo:
Alleluia cantiamo
che noie andiam co’ Cristo Salvatore!
Tutte te confessiamo
che se’ ‘ncarnato per noie, Redentore.
O benegno Signore,
che per glie peccator sangue haie versato.
Al mondo quisto canto
tu fa’ sentir, che tanto t’è costato.

Hic CHRISTUS ad Paradisum ubi est Serafin cum spata:
O Enoc ed Elia,
quista mia gente sì ve racomando.

Respondent ENOC et ELIA:
O Figliuol de Maria,
donqua per noie ha’ già pagato el bando?

CHRIST:
Daniel and Jeremiah,
and you, Abel, with the other Holy Fathers,
O holy Zachariah,
and you, holy Prophets all,
I want you to come with me to heaven
with sweet song, to rejoice with me.
O John the Baptist,
you have confirmed the old and the new
law.

CHRIST to the Good Thief:
When you died on the cross,
Dysmas, my son, you believed in me.
With your heart and your voice
you asked for holy mercy.
Because you did not deny me,
I promised you holy Paradise.
Come with him, all of you
who have waited for me so long.

ALL THE RIGHTEOUS as they go with Christ:
Let us sing alleluia
as we go with Christ our Saviour.
We all believe in you,
for you took flesh for us, O Redeemer.
O dear Lord,
who shed your blood for sinners.
Make this song heard
in the world, for it cost you so dear.

Then CHRIST arrives in Paradise where the
Angel waits with a sword:

O Enoch and Elijah,
I commend these my people to you.

ENOC and ELIJAH reply:
O Son of Mary,
so you have already paid the ransom for us?
Laus Sabbati Sancti, Medieval Studies, 1999, p. 13

**Respondent CHRISTUS:**

Col mio sangue versando
ho spolïato el Limbo de lo ‘nferno
e ’l mio regno eterno
a tutte voie el luoco ho aparecchiato.

**CHRISTUS benedicens Adam et alios Sanctos:**

De sopra a voie si sia
la benezon de l’Altissimo Pate,
e depo ciò la mia
e de lo Spirtu Santo vòie ch’agiate
e siate circundate
de tutt’a tre che sonno en una ‘senza.

**Respondent omnes Sancti:**

O divina potenza,
che fàite tre persone congregate.

**OMNES SANCTI:**

Cantiam con nuovo canto
puoie ch’el Signor tal meraveglia mustra,
che col suo bianco manto
estende ei braccia e noi salvando ellustra,
e fè onne mente lustra
deie suoie segrete al mondo entenebrato.
Alleluia biato,
puoie che la mente nostra è dechiarata!

**CHRISTUS Angelo:**

O Gabriello, or mena
quiste Sante Profete ell’alto regno,
che la vita serena
hol acquistata, morendo en el legno.

**CHRIST replies:**

By shedding my blood
I have harrowed Hell,
and have prepared a place for you all
in my eternal kingdom.

**CHRIST blesses Adam and the other Righteous:**

May the blessing of the Almighty Father
be upon you,
and also my own,
and I want you to have that of the Holy Ghost,
and may you be surrounded
by all Three that are one Essence.

**THE RIGHTEOUS reply:**

O divine might
that are three persons gathered in one.

**ALL THE RIGHTEOUS:**

Let us sing a new song
since the Lord reveals such miracles.
In his white robes
he extends his arms and shows us the light
and saves us,
and he cleansed all our hearts
of the secrets of the shadowy world.
Alleluia, blessed one,
for you have shown our hearts the light.

**CHRIST to the Angel:**

O Gabriel, now take
these holy Prophets to the heavenly kingdom,
for I have bought them the serene life
by dying on the cross.
OMNES SANCTI dicunt Christo:

Alto Signor benegno,
gridando mo’, alleluia dicemo
puoi che lassato avemo
el luoco de la gente sì ascurata!

SANCTI ad Enoch et Eliam:

O voie che qui sedete,
che sete che sì vecchie demostrate?

Respondent Enoch et Elia:

Noie se’ glie doie profete
Elie ed Enoch per nome chiamate,
che son qui reservate
per quando al mondo verà Nantecristo.
Combatterim con esso
e luie uciderim per suoie peccate.

SANCTI ad Dima:

E tu che par ladrone,
che se’ che tal segnale en collo porte?

Respondent Dimas:

Ver latro stato sone,
e a lato Cristo en croce ave’ la morte.
Essendo ei segne forte,
disse a luie: “Non me dementecare!”
Ed eie m’avé a parlare:
“Oggie tu’ alma serà en Ciel biata!”

ALL THE RIGHTEOUS say to Christ:

Great, kind Lord,
now we cry out saying, Aleluia,
because we have left
the place of the people who live in darkness.

THE RIGHTEOUS to Enoch and Elijah:

O you who sit here,
who are you that show such signs of age?

ENOCK and ELIJAH reply:

We are two prophets
by the names of Enoch and Elijah,
and we are placed here
for when the Antichrist comes to the world.
We shall fight with him
and we shall kill him for his sins.20

THE RIGHTEOUS to Dysmas:

And you who look like a thief,
who are you with such a sign on your
shoulder?

DYSMAS replies:

I was indeed a thief,
and I met my death next to Christ on the
cross.
Because there were great signs,
I said to him: “Do not forget me!”
And he spoke to me:
“Today your soul will be blessed in
paradise.”
E poie me disse: “Porta quisto segno, e fatte el luoco aprire.”
Ed io foie a la porta e vedde el Gabriel de fuor venire.
Ed io glie prese a dire: “Apreme che Cristo m’ha mandato.”
Ed ei non me fo engrato: aprime en quista gloria si bïata.

And then he said to me: “Take this sign, and have the place opened up.”
And I came to the gate and I saw Gabriel come out.
And I started to say: Open up for me, because Christ sent me.”
And he was not ungracious: he opened me into this blessed glory.

Let all men now rejoice and now I go to my Mother.
O pious Magdalene, who wept so much at the tomb.

Endnotes

1. The play refers to two lights, presumably John the Baptist and Jesus Christ, in fulfilment of prophecies from the Old and New Testaments: Isaiah 9:2 (“the people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined”), 40:3 (“the voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God”; 42:7 (God promises to “open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in the darkness of the prison house”)); Luke 2:30 (see note 3 below), 2:79 (Zacharias’ prophecy that John will “give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death”).

2. Isaiah 60:1: “Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of God is risen upon thee.”

3. Luke 2:28: “Then the old man took him in his hands”; and 2:30: “For mine eyes have seen thy salvation which thou has prepared before the face of all people.”

4. In the Acts of Pilate, John says “I am John, the voice and the prophet.” The authors of the play may be working from a source which has lux rather than vox, or they may be developing the rich interplay of light and shadow that is intrinsic to the play.

5. John 1:29: “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.”


7. This stanza replaces Seth’s story of the Oil of Mercy (Latin A, XIX). Like the Latin B version, the story crosses straight to Hell and Satan.
8. Infernus is the personification of Hell; Satan is his Chief Minister.

9. In the Gospel of Nicodemos, it is David (drawing on the end of Psalm 24: 7-10: “Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, he everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the lord mighty in battle. Lift yp your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The lord of hosts, he is the King of Glory. Selah.” The formula *Tollite portas* (‘Lift up your gates’) is used in various processions, especially Palm Sunday and in the dedication of new churches, in which a person hidden in the church and representing the Devil is driven out.

10. Isaiah 26: 19: “Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead.”

11. Psalm 47:5: “God is gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet.”

12. Again, Psalm 102:19-20: “For he hath looked down from the height of his sanctuary; from heaven did the Lord behold the earth; To hear the groaning of the prisoner; to loose those that are appointed to death.”

13. Dysmas and Gestas are the names traditionally given to the Good Thief and the Bad Thief crucified with Christ.


15. In the pictorial tradition, the Good Thief sometimes accompanies Christ to Limbo, carrying the banner. In the *Laus Sabbati Sancti*, which is the result of the fusion of two originally separate *laude*, Christ sends Dysmas to Heaven before he himself arrives at the gates of Hell (lines 187-92) and Dysmas is admitted to Heaven by Gabriel (197-8), but he is still outside heaven in the second part, where he joins the procession of Righteous.

16. The Latin pun on *mundus*, meaning both ‘world’ and ‘clean’, extends into Italian. Here, the manuscripts, which have *imondo*, make the paradox clear: Christ is *in mondo* (‘in the world’) but not *immondo* (‘unclean’). The Gospel of Nicodemos, VI, 1 reads *sine macula e mundus a crimine* (“without stain and guilty of no sin”)

17. The pictorial tradition suggests that when the gates of Hell are finally opened — sometimes raised like a portcullis, sometimes lowered like a drawbridge — the chains are broken, and Satan is trapped and bound by Christ.

18. All three MSS read *sorte* (‘fates’), but ‘porte’ would be a more likely reading.

19. MS has Isaiah in both l. 274 and 276. Isaiah sought a sign (7:11; 55:13); but I know of no sawing.