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Misdirected Love

And of that second kingdom will I sing
Wherein the human spirit doth purge itself,
And to ascend to heaven becometh worthy. (*Purg.* I)

In popular parlance, Purgatory is a place or state of temporary suffering that may be experienced by the living – a definition to which many of Scorsese’s protagonists could certainly relate. As Hans Urs von Balthasar indicates, the Mountain of Purgatory in Dante’s *The Divine Comedy* ‘is properly the place for the two worlds [Heaven and Hell] to meet and intermingle’ (1986: 28) – and it is a prime location for an investigation of Scorsese’s characters who ‘seem to view their earthly lives as mere prep work for the hereafter, and are thus frequently tormented with guilt and fraught with desire for punishment and expiation of their sins’ (Lohr 2015: 203). In the opening minutes of the documentary *American Boy* (1978), in which Steven Prince and Scorsese are chatting in a hot tub, the director is heard to say, ‘We’re all guilty, God knows.’

The theology of Purgatory was developed at the Second Council of Lyons in 1274 and defined at the Council of Trent (1543–63) as a place of temporal punishment for those who depart this life in God’s grace but are not entirely free from venial faults, or who have not fully paid the satisfaction due to their transgressions. Through the fires of Purgatory ‘the souls of the pious are purified by a temporary punishment so that an entrance may be opened for them into the eternal country in which nothing stained can enter’ (in Turner 1993: 127). Martin Luther kept Hell but got rid of Purgatory but it has remained in Catholic theology. In *Who’s That Knocking at My Door*, Scorsese’s camera focuses on an image in St Patrick’s Old Cathedral of the Holy Souls in Purgatory reaching out for Salvation from the flames. (**Figure 4.1**)

Dante’s Pilgrim enters *Purgatorio* on Easter Sunday (10 April 1300) and remains there until midday on Wednesday, for he and Virgil may climb the

Figure 4.1 The souls in Purgatory in St Patrick's Old Cathedral in *Who's That Knocking at My Door*.

mountain only in the sunlight, a fact that delays their journey. According to Catholic teaching it was assumed that all people would go to Purgatory except the very holy (the saints and martyrs) and the irredeemably evil. Joseph Ratzinger clarifies that 'Purgatory is not, as Tertullian thought, some kind of supra-worldly concentration camp where man is forced to undergo punishment in a more or less arbitrary fashion. Rather it is the inwardly necessary process of transformation in which a person becomes capable of Christ, capable of God and thus capable of unity with the whole communion of saints' (1988: 230). Critics have pointed out that the promotion of Purgatory 'became a way of increasing control over this life, through the twin institutions of prayers for the dead and the sale of indulgences' (Shaw 2014).

Taking the image of Dante's Mountain of Purgatory as its backdrop, Part Two of this book pays particular attention to Scorsese's imperfect protagonists who often express remorse for their faults, rather than the outright killers and fraudsters who were discussed in Part One. Robin Parry underlines the fact that 'in the Bible sins are differentiated in degrees of seriousness: not all sins are as bad as each other, and not all deserve the same punishment' (in Burk et al. 2016: 53). The identification of the Seven Deadly Sins that form the structure of Dante's Mountain of Purgatory is attributed to Pope Gregory the Great (540–604): pride, envy, avarice, wrath, sloth, gluttony and lust. As stated in *The Baltimore Catechism* (1941) which was the standard text used in Catholic education in the United States when Scorsese was at school, 'they

are the chief reasons why men [*sic*] commit sin'. In a medieval play, the Seven Deadly Sins would have been recognized by means of the attire worn by the actors: 'Pride wears a sceptre and a crown; Envy is well dressed with spectacles; Gluttony, well dressed with things to eat; Anger is in armor; Lust, a woman with a mirror; Avarice has a scholar's robes and carries a purse; and Sloth wears droopy breeches and carries a pillow' (Turner 1993: 123). Scorsese has added a wonderful range of characters who betray their sinful attributes through their different personalities while wearing a vast array of costumes, including sharp suits in *Mean Streets* and luxurious ball gowns in *The Age of Innocence*.

Although Dante condemns some of the lustful, gluttonous, avaricious and wrathful characters to the upper circles of his *Inferno*, other characters are given the chance to be purified of their sins in *Purgatorio*. In *The Divine Comedy* the Passport to Purgatory is repentance and the people 'who repent and seek forgiveness, even at the last moment before death, are saved from damnation, though the process of purgation they undergo may last for centuries' (Reynolds 2006: 253).

Scorsese once pondered on the fact of his divorces: 'I've been divorced a few times – therefore, technically, I'm excommunicated' (in Occhiogrosso 1987: 96). In fact, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* encourages divorced Catholics to 'not consider themselves separated from the Church, in whose life they can and must participate as baptized persons' (1993: 1651). However, Dante even has a solution for those people who have actually received official notice of their excommunication, as they are not denied Heaven in his poem but are sentenced to pass thirty times the number of years that they had spent excluded from the sacraments in *Purgatorio*:

True is it, who in contumacy dies
Of Holy Church, though penitent at last,
Must wait upon the outside this bank
Thirty times told the time that he has been
In his presumption, unless such decree
Shorter by means of righteous prayers become. (*Purg.* III)

In his autobiographical book *The Seven Storey Mountain* Thomas Merton writes of the impression that Dante's epic poem made upon him: 'It seems to me that I was armored and locked in within my own defectible and blinded self by seven layers of imperviousness, the capital sins which only the fires of Purgatory or of Divine Love (they are about the same) can burn away' (1998: 135). However, rather than trekking a path up seven individual levels when analysing Scorsese's

films from a 'sin' perspective, this section is inspired by the dissection of 'rational love' announced by Virgil in Canto XVII of Dante's *Purgatorio*. According to this philosophy, love may lead to transgression in three ways: by choosing the wrong goal, by lack of intensity, or by excessive zeal. Here the seven storeys (terraces) of Dante's *Purgatorio* are converted into three stories of love: (i) misdirected love; (ii) insufficient love and (iii) excessive love:

The natural was ever without error;
 But err the other may by evil object,
 Or by too much, or by too little vigour.
 While in the first it well directed is,
 And in the second moderates itself,
 It cannot be the cause of sinful pleasure;
 But when to ill it turns, and, with more care
 Or lesser than it ought, runs after good,
 'Gainst the Creator works his own creation.
 Hence thou mayst comprehend that love must be
 The seed within yourselves of every virtue,
 And every act that merits punishment.

Although this is love that has gone awry, there are signs of hope despite the difficulties. Mary Pat Kelly argues that 'Scorsese's films are about the search for redemption in a fallen world where evil is real and violence can erupt at any moment' (1980: 124). As Ratzinger explains, 'Man is the recipient of the divine mercy, yet this does not exonerate him from the need to be transformed' (1988: 231). Here are the characters who are striving to survive in very trying circumstances in which 'Light has been given you for good and evil' (*Purg.* XVI).

Guilt and penance

Scorsese was interested in Catholic saints as a child, and the statuary and stained glass windows in St Patrick's Old Cathedral surrounded him with visual representations of sanctity. He once wanted to make a film about Mother Cabrini, the first American saint (canonized in 1946) who cared for Italian immigrants, and her picture appears on the wall of Jake La Motta's apartment in *Raging Bull*; and he was also attracted to the story of Father Damien (the Belgian priest canonized in 2009) who ministered to the lepers on the Hawaiian island of Molokai. At one point Scorsese was intending to go to Italy to make films

about the lives of the saints for RAI Television (see Ebert 2008: 164). However, although these plans did not come to fruition, he has succeeded in projecting 'the idea that everyday people can achieve a measure of sainthood or transcendence as they go about their ostensibly commonplace lives, usually after undergoing a mortification of the flesh that prepares the way' (Sterritt 2015: 104).

The title of *Mean Streets* is inspired by Raymond Chandler: 'Down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid. ... He must be, to use a rather weathered phrase, a man of honor – by instinct, by inevitability, without thought of it, and certainly without saying it' (in Sterritt 2015: 97). Scorsese considered *Mean Streets* to be 'a story of a modern saint, a saint in his own society, but his society happens to be gangsters' (in Kelly 1996: 71). The film asks: 'How do you lead a good life, a good, moral, ethical life, when everything around you works the absolutely opposite way?' (in Occhiogrosso 1987: 92). If Charlie strives to be a man of honour, it is not certain that all his friends are honourable men. Charlie lives in a world of omertà – 'the criminal code of silence' (Gambino 2011: 129). It is an Italian American society in which the qualities of 'manliness' go back to the medieval times in which Dante was living.

In *Purgatorio* the Pilgrim comes to three steps outside the gates of Purgatory:

Thither did we approach; and the first stair
Was marble white, so polished and so smooth,
I mirrored myself therein as I appear.

The second, tinct of deeper hue than perse,
Was of a calcined and uneven stone,
Cracked all asunder lengthwise and across.

The third, that uppermost rests massively,
Porphyry seemed to me, as flaming red
As blood that from a vein is spirting forth. (*Purg.* IX)

The three steps represent three stages of repentance: self-examination, sorrow and penance (see Musa 1995: 244) as the Pilgrim appeals for admission:

Devoutly at the holy feet I cast me,
For mercy's sake besought that he would open,
But first upon my breast three times I smote. (*Purg.* IX)

The famous opening lines of *Mean Streets*, spoken by Scorsese himself against a black screen, appear to be the thoughts of his alter ego Charlie (Harvey Keitel), who is awakening from a troubled sleep. In *Purgatorio* Dante speaks of the kind

of dream that occurs just before waking in the morning, which 'was thought to be the most clearly prophetic' in medieval times (Royal 1999: 122):

As sleep is broken, when upon a sudden
 New light strikes in upon the eyelids closed,
 And broken quivers ere it dieth wholly,
 So this imagining of mine fell down
 As soon as the effulgence smote my face,
 Greater by far than what is in our wont. (*Purg.* XVII)

It appears that Charlie's conscience is in conflict with the events surrounding him as he talks of sin and penance: 'You don't make up for your sins in church. You do it in the streets. You do it at home.' The tri-partite editing as Charlie's head hits the pillow indicates the disjunction. Scorsese is – like Dante – interested in numbers and shares a particular penchant for the number three with the Italian poet. For example, Dante divides his poem into three major sections; and he writes of three approaches to love:

The love that yields itself too much to this
 Above us is lamented in three circles;
 But how tripartite it may be described,
 I say not, that thou seek it for thyself. (*Purg.* XVII)

While Dante's interest in the number three is Trinitarian, Scorsese was impressed by a scene in François Truffaut's *Shoot the Pianist* (1960) 'when the girl is pressing the door button, carrying the violin case. He cuts three times, coming in closer each time. The shot's in every picture I make, and I don't know why' (in Wernblad 2011: 19). In the opening song on the soundtrack of *Mean Streets*, 'Be My Baby' by the Ronettes, there is a reference to three kisses that follows the triple dimension to the locations mentioned in the opening statement: church, street and home.

Through the *mise en scène* Charlie is identifiable as a Catholic: there is a crucifix on the wall of his bedroom; he wears a cross around his neck and later scenes will reveal other religious iconography around the apartment. A cinema projector (which offers an element of self-reflexivity that is also seen in *Kundun*, *The Aviator* and *Hugo*) shows home movies that capture Italian American family life, with a particular focus on religious events (the San Gennaro festival and the baptism of a child called Christopher) that are interspersed with the life 'on the streets'. A cross made up of light bulbs illuminates the commerce that is taking place in the street festival below; and Charlie is depicted with his neighbourhood

associates outside insalubrious establishments (there is a sign advertising 'Topless' in one window) as well as shaking hands with a Catholic priest dressed in a cassock. In the latter shot, the two men are originally in the shadows on the steps of the church but are encouraged by the person behind the camera to step out into the sunshine. As Charlie puts on his dark glasses to shield his eyes from the bright light, he looks more roguish, giving the handshake between the priest and his presumed parishioner a suspicious aura.

In the opening minutes of *Mean Streets*, the pop lyrics of 'Be My Baby' are replaced by the band music of the San Gennaro festival that takes place in September, giving the action a timescale. Casillo suggests that this kind of ritualized street festival, which celebrates the life of a saint who was reportedly martyred around the year 305, was 'the chief means of mediating the sacred to the individual and community' (2006: 87). The focus shifts from the festivities to a man shooting up in a toilet in Volpe's bar – another example in which religious events conflict with illegal activities, although the owner, Tony, intervenes to throw the man out as drugs are evidently against his morals. Tony has a statue of Jesus in his back room and the red *corno* (horn) in his car as protection against the evil eye (Casillo 2006: 209) as if to cover all bases. Michael is presented as a wiseguy who is lacking in wisdom, having purchased Japanese adaptors in the mistaken belief that they are German lenses, suggesting that he is a fool rather than a criminal mastermind. Nevertheless, he will be responsible for the mayhem at the end of the film. Johnny Boy, who is the target of Michael's wrath, is introduced as a childish criminal, blowing up a US postbox for no apparent reason.

These scenes are followed by the sight of Charlie entering a Catholic church. As the sirens that accompany Johnny's explosive antics segue into the church scene, 'the identity of sound establishes a simultaneity of time' (Bliss 1995: 29) so as to confirm that the two young men are on different paths: Johnny is wreaking havoc as Charlie is saying his prayers. At first the camera dollies behind Charlie, following him in his spiritual quest as if the audience is also a visitor to the church. A higher angle indicates a potential divine interlocutor before Charlie dominates the frame. There are shots of the altar with a crucifix, flanked by statues of the Virgin Mary and St John, with St Mary Magdalene at the foot of the cross.

Mean Streets puts the Catholic Church and the sacrament of confession at the forefront of the narrative, in which Charlie (sometimes through the voice of Scorsese himself) maintains a contact that is ill at ease with his Creator and an audible, but one-way, dialogue with God. Scorsese explains the significance

of the voice-over as 'the whole business of [Charlie's] own relationship with God, his own way of looking at things. And also his guilt' (in Kelly 1996: 72). Conversations with God occur at various points in Scorsese's filmography: in *Who's That Knocking at My Door*, J.R. says his prayers at the time of his confession in St Patrick's Old Cathedral; Jesus pleads with God the Father in *The Last Temptation of Christ*; and Rodrigues tries to communicate with God at various stages in *Silence*. Only Rodrigues gets an explicit response that the audience can also hear.

Charlie goes to the altar rails, where he would kneel to take Communion, and says, 'Lord, I'm not worthy to eat your flesh. I'm not worthy to drink your blood' (with the words spoken in voice-over by Scorsese himself); and then Charlie/Keitel repeats the last words: 'Not worthy to drink your blood.' Scorsese explained that he was thinking of 'an old heretical sect that felt they were not worthy of anything. They would go to confession but would not go to communion because they felt they were not worthy. ... It's a whole guilt thing. No matter where he goes, he's lost' (in Ribera 2017). In the Mass, there is a prayer before Communion (in the 1970 translation): 'Lord, I am not worthy to receive you, but only say the word and I shall be healed.' Charlie misses out any reference to healing at this point.

A long shot of the church shows Charlie as a small figure within the grandeur that is represented by the high Gothic-style pillars and the side altars. Having a choice of where to go to continue his prayers, Charlie walks towards a statue of the Virgin Mary holding her crucified son – a *Pietà* sculpture made famous by Michelangelo's beautiful marble carving in St Peter's in the Vatican. Someone has placed a rose in the carved hand of the Christ figure, and the scene is illuminated by the red and white votive candles.

It is at this point that Charlie offers his thoughts on the sacrament of confession:

OK, OK, I've just come out of confession, right? Right. And the priest gives me the usual penance, right, ten Hail Marys, ten Our Fathers, ten whatever. You know that next week I'm going to come back and he's going to just give me another ten Hail Marys and another ten Our Fathers. And you know how I feel about that shit. Those things, they don't mean anything to me, they're just words.

It is a theme that will be taken up in *Silence* when Kichijiro will ask for forgiveness for his act of apostasy and then go out and repeat the same sin, so that Rodrigues asks him if he really understands what the sacrament means.

Charlie continues with his meditation on the subject: 'Now that may be OK for the others but it just doesn't work for me. I mean, if I do something wrong, I just want to pay for it my way. So I do my own penance for my own sins. What do you say, eh?' Despite his repudiation of the traditional forms of penance, Charlie is not rejecting God. Indeed, he is keeping up a relationship with God with an apparent awareness that he is an 'unworthy sinner'. There is a renunciation of elements of organized religion at the same time as he stands in a church before the *Pietà* that presents an image of the suffering of Jesus.

In his discussion of American films in *A Personal Journey* (1995), Scorsese acknowledges the effect of the *Pietà* imagery in the final death scene in *The Roaring Twenties* (Raoul Walsh 1939); and the *Pietà* appears on several occasions in the church scene in *Who's That Knocking at My Door*. It is one of the many statues that contain a narrative in themselves. When Teresa (Amy Robinson), Charlie's girlfriend, has an epileptic fit and falls to the floor in a tenement building, a neighbour (played by Catherine Scorsese) comes to her aid and holds her in a *Pietà* pose. Discussing the dream sequence when Magdalene bathes Jesus's wounded body in *The Last Temptation of Christ*, Scorsese describes it as 'a kind of *pietà* in reverse. Instead of being laid in earth, he is being washed, cared for. His wounds are healed as she touches him. It's a scene that moves me because as a child I adored Jesus, and I didn't like to see him beaten and ill-treated' (in Wilson 2011: 155).

Nevertheless, there is a stark contrast between Charlie's musings on life and death and the naked flesh of the dancing girls in the bar that he frequents. The hands of the dancer reach out as if enticing him to join her in carnal pleasures, while the lyrics of the song ('Tell Me (You're Coming Back)' by The Rolling Stones) suggest that Charlie is being drawn away from his religious ponderings into a more sensuous world of alcohol and sex.

The question of penance 'at home' or 'in the streets' continues with Charlie's relationship with Johnny, which is 'a family thing'. Charlie watches Johnny acting the fool, entering Volpe's bar to the tune of 'Jumpin' Jack Flash' with his trousers in his hands. (De Niro will also be seen in his office without his trousers in the role of Sam Rothstein in *Casino*, although on that occasion he has hung them up to maintain the creases rather than as a joke.) Charlie's inner voice says: 'OK, thanks a lot, Lord, thanks a lot for opening my eyes. You talk about penance and you send this through the door. Well, we play by your rules, don't we? Well, don't we?' Rather than saying prayers, Charlie believes that looking after Johnny is a practical way of earning remission for his sins.

In this world in which payment of debts is recommended, Johnny owes Michael a good deal of money. Inspired by Jesus's teaching on anger and the advice to settle with your opponent (Mt. 5.26), Charlie reflects on the situation: 'Amen I say to thee. Thou will not come out from it 'til thou has paid the last penny.' As Charlie explains to Johnny, Michael is unsympathetic ('What is he, your priest?'), and it seems likely that he will 'hand you over to the judge, and the judge will hand you over to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison' (Mt. 5.25). When Johnny is lying to try to save his own neck ('I swear to my mother. I swear to Christ'), he suddenly changes the oath: 'Not on my mother but on Jesus Christ.' As a liar, he realizes the immediate danger to his mother but he will take a chance on later divine retribution.

According to Scorsese, Charlie 'takes in the Johnny Boy character as a penance. But he is really doing it for his own pride' (in Lourdeaux 1990: 242). Misdirected love causes harm by accident or design in a world in which 'pride is the reservoir of sin' as the Book of Ecclesiasticus states (10.13). Scorsese makes the biblical link himself with regard to *Mean Streets*: 'My brother's keeper – it's my brother's keeper! And it goes beyond your brother. Are we responsible for other people? What is our obligation, when somebody does something that is so upsetting? ... Do you really have to do it because they're a brother, or you're related, or you made vows of marriage? What is the right thing to do for the other person, and for yourself?' (in Elie 2016). It is the very question that Balthasar asks in relation to a person's eventual destination in the Afterlife, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Can a Christian allow himself to utter those murderous words? And which man is not my brother?' (1988: 212).

While Charlie is supporting his friend Johnny he is also acting as a loan shark for his Uncle Giovanni and looking for money from the owner of Oscar's restaurant. Catholic imagery surrounds Charlie and his relative as they talk of shootings and debt collecting, underlining the moral conflict. There is a painting of the Crucifixion, alongside photographs of (the Catholic) President John F. Kennedy, Bobby Kennedy and Pope John XXIII (who died in June 1963) on the wall, indicating that the film has a pre-Vatican II setting in the early 1960s (see Casillo 2006: 482).

Charlie is torn between Hell and Heaven: Should he follow his uncle or his Catholic conscience? When Giovanni warns Charlie against Johnny (because 'honourable men go with honourable men') and describes Teresa as 'sick in the head', Charlie holds his hand over a flame on the stove in the restaurant kitchen and says 'Fine.' Scorsese explains that Charlie is a character who 'did the worst

thing he could do which was to put everything off, put all the confrontations off, until everything explodes' (in Ribera 2017).

His friends clearly see that he has pretensions to lead a good life and mock him gently. When Charlie visits a Pool hall to collect money that is owed, he receives a comical greeting ('St Charles is here') from his friend Joey (George Memmoli), who asks for a benediction and genuflects before him, making the sign of the cross. Charlie stretches out his hands as a sign of blessing and asks him to rise, before fooling around and blessing his acquaintances, the pool cues and the balls. However, the fact that he keeps holding his hand over flames shows that he is conflicted about the meaning of such symbolic gestures. When a fight later breaks out, Charlie holds up his 'bare hand' but is punched in the face for his attempt at pacifism.

On another occasion, Charlie enters Volpe's bar with the proclamation: 'Hallelujah! I've come to create order'; and the conversation continues with words from the Mass: 'May God be with you.'/'And with your spirit.' He holds his fingers over a glass as the bartender splashes JB and soda over them as if he were the altar server pouring water over the priest's hands before the consecration. However, Charlie is evidently confused about the role he has been assigned in life. There follows a parody of the Passion narrative, in which Tony takes on the part of Pilate ('Art thou the king of the Jews?') and Charlie responds with the words of Christ: 'Doest thou say this of thyself? Or have others told thee of me?' and 'My kingdom's not of this world.' Nevertheless, during his earlier visit to the restaurant, when he overhears a 'sit down' discussion about a murder that took place in Volpe's bar, Charlie is in the washroom, cleaning his hands carefully like Pilate.

Scorsese reveals that some of the original religious references were cut from the final version of *Mean Streets*. 'It's like the Pharisees, the guys who used to give money to the poor and blow trumpets so everybody could turn around and watch them give money to the poor. Christ said they had already received their own reward because they had received their reward on earth. Something like that. We had tons of that in there, that kind of thing' (in Woods 2005: 32). Indeed, in an early draft of the screenplay (then entitled *The Season of the Witch*), there was a fancy dress ball in which Charlie was to appear 'dressed as Christ, blessing everyone' (in Wilson 2011: 35).

Charlie's 'hero' is St Francis of Assisi, to whom is attributed the famous exhortation: 'Preach the gospel at all times and, when necessary, use words.' It is notable that St Francis led a 'carefree life of indulgence' before making the

decision 'to wed Lady Poverty' (Stanford 2015: 156) – a change of direction to which Dante pays tribute in Canto XI of *Paradiso*:

For he in youth his father's wrath incurred
 For certain Dame, to whom, as unto death,
 The gate of pleasure no one doth unlock;
 And was before his spiritual court
 'Et coram patre' unto her united;
 Then day by day more fervently he loved her.
 She, reft of her first husband, scorned, obscure,
 One thousand and one hundred years and more,
 Waited without a suitor till he came.
 Naught it availed to hear, that with Amyclas
 Found her unmoved at sounding of his voice
 He who struck terror into all the world;
 Naught it availed being constant and undaunted,
 So that, when Mary still remained below,
 She mounted up with Christ upon the cross.
 But that too darkly I may not proceed,
 Francis and Poverty for these two lovers
 Take thou henceforward in my speech diffuse.

The encouraging story of St Francis's metamorphosis offers a suggestion that Charlie might change his approach. However, a scene by the waterfront with his girlfriend Teresa rather undermines any hope of future canonization. Charlie expresses his admiration for St Francis and his desire to help Johnny: 'Who's gonna help him if I don't? What's the matter? Nobody tries anymore. Tries to help, that's all, to help people.' Yet, in an earlier scene in the streets, Charlie and his friends have mocked and berated a homeless man who is looking for money. When Charlie continues to voice his respect for the saint ('Francis of Assisi had it all down. He knew'), his girlfriend Teresa laughs at him, reminding him that 'St Francis didn't run numbers.' Charlie defends himself ('Me neither, I don't run numbers') but he does several dubious things while trying to lead a good life, thereby earning Johnny's mockery: 'Charlie likes everybody, everybody likes Charlie.'

As Charlie drives Teresa and Johnny away from the city, he continues his conversation with God ('I guess you could safely say that thing's haven't gone so well tonight. But I'm trying Lord, I'm trying') to his friends' amusement; and he sings along to a Neapolitan song called 'Scapricciatiello' in which a mother goes to church to pray (see Muscio 2015: 265). It is at this point that Michael pulls

up in a car beside them and his associate Shorty kisses his gun and pulls the trigger, resulting in the car crashing into a water hydrant with the connotations of a baptism. Charlie is injured in the hand, so that he will have a wound like St Francis's stigmata, while Johnny is shot in the neck – the sort of wounds that the souls display in Dante's *Purgatorio* as they finally turn to God:

After I had my body lacerated
 By these two mortal stabs, I gave myself
 Weeping to Him, who willingly doth pardon.
 Horrible my iniquities had been;
 But Infinite Goodness hath such ample arms,
 That it receives whatever turns to it. (*Purg.* III)

Scorsese points out that some critics thought that Charlie had betrayed Johnny rather than attempting to help him escape, or that one or both men died, but that such readings were false: 'They're not dead. The fact is they have to go on. That's the worst part' (in Kelly 1980: 18). But Charlie falls to his knees as if in prayer (**Figure 4.2**), which might support Scorsese's suggestion that the three friends 'all learn something at the end of *Mean Streets*, only they have to get it from, again, the hand of God' (in Keyser 1992: 40). Indeed, Dante's *Purgatorio* offers some consolation to a character like Charlie in his hopes for the Afterlife:

Here of such pride is paid the forfeiture;
 And yet I should not be here, were it not
 That, having power to sin, I turned to God. (*Purg.* XI)

Figure 4.2 Charlie: an everyday saint among gangsters in *Mean Streets*.

Some of the concluding words in English from the San Gennaro festival are, 'Good night, good luck and God bless you.' They have a poignancy for Charlie and his friends.

The wrong goal

A number of Scorsese's films deal with artists (singers, musicians, comedians or painters) in which 'the wrong goal' causes unhappiness, leaving the protagonists in their private Purgatories as they wait for recognition – their own gateway to heaven – in the outside world.

The prologue of *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore* (1974) – with its surreal homage to *The Wizard of Oz* and *Gone with the Wind* – presents Monterey as the Promised Land to which Alice Hyatt (Ellen Burstyn) wishes to return throughout her adult life. Following her preliminary presentation as a rather petulant child who desires to be a singer, Alice is reintroduced in a form of exile in Socorro, New Mexico, as a housewife with an unresponsive husband (Billy Green Bush) and an obstreperous son named Tommy (Alfred Lutter).

After the ten plagues strike the Egyptians in the Book of Exodus, the Israelites set out on their journey – a theme that is addressed by Dante in Canto II of *Purgatorio*:

'In exitu Israel de Aegypto!'
They chanted all together in one voice,
With whatso in that psalm is after written.

When Alice's husband is killed in a road accident, Scorsese also saw the effect of divine intervention: 'Here God comes in and takes him away. Now what do you do?' (in Schickel 2013). The fact that the Israelites took forty years to make an eleven-day trip (Deut. 1.2) might be evoked in Alice's own attempt to return to her family farm. It is a road movie in which Monterey is the red-hued destination that Alice hopes to regain but, as several critics have noted, she seems to take the long route via Tucson (see Kelly 1980: 180) and appears to be going backwards. It is a lack of progress that is familiar to Dante's souls in *Purgatorio*:

Along the solitary plain we went
As one who unto the lost road returns,
And till he finds it seems to go in vain. (*Purg.* I)

and

We still were on the border of the sea,
Like people who are thinking of their road,
Who go in heart and with the body stay ... (*Purg.* II)

When the word Monterey appeared serendipitously in the final scene as an advertisement – ‘It was like God put it here,’ said Scorsese (in Brunette 1999: 43) – the choice was made to leave it, with the effect that ‘semiologists could spend weeks determining if it was ironic, symbolic or totemic’ (Keyser 1992: 60).

Alice is a sympathetic character who meets unsympathetic people on her travels, including the aggressive Ben (Harvey Keitel) with whom she unwittingly commits adultery. Just as Dante’s Pilgrim encounters some (once) unpleasant personalities as he makes his way up the mountain, so too Alice comes across people ‘who seem obsessed, greedy, or vengeful’ (Bliss 1995: 42). However, there are also some happier episodes along the way. In the diner where she works as a waitress (with her singing career on hold again), Alice finds friendship with Flo (Diane Ladd), a kind woman with an occasionally vulgar demeanour, who wears a cross made of safety pins. On one occasion when she comforts Alice, Flo explains the significance of the Christian symbol: ‘Honey, that’s what holds me together.’ When Lee Lourdeaux asked Scorsese about the blue walls in the scene, a colour scheme that he had chosen himself, he replied: ‘Mary, I never realized’ (in Lourdeaux 1990: 249–50). Scorsese admitted that the role of Alice – for which Ellen Burstyn won an Academy Award for Best Actress – was a departure ‘from the idea of femininity to which he had been socialized in his Catholic, Sicilian-American upbringing’ (Baker 2015: 120). In *Alice Doesn’t Live Here Anymore*, the women – who are still far from sainthood – are ‘their sister’s keeper’ as they support each other in their times of trouble.

While Alice’s dreams of being a professional singer are restricted to playing the piano in small bars, the characters in *New York, New York* (1977) are respected musicians who face their own sense of stagnation. Francine (Liza Minnelli) and her husband Jimmy (Robert De Niro) are enclosed by the classical framing, which Scorsese embraced as he celebrated the Hollywood films of an earlier era: ‘That’s where the problem came – because of the grating of the two worlds together, the intimate, personal film with the big splashy spectacle’ (in Kelly 1980: 26). Francine sings ‘But the World Goes Round’ but when she and her husband Jimmy try to break free (through the improvisation of the actors), their efforts get out of hand and pride gets in the way.

New York, New York offers a landscape of artificial trees and fake snow within which very raw human emotions are exposed. In fact, during filming, the improvised anger became so traumatic that some of the crew found it frightening to watch the scene in which the couple argue about Francine's pregnancy (see Keyser 1992: 91). Jean-Luc Godard saw the film as 'about the impossibility of two creative people in a relationship – the jealousies, the envy, the temperament' (in Kelly 1996: 111–12). Here are two people who love each other but are in competition rather than harmony because of their respective talents. In fact, Michel Cieutat suggests that Jimmy sacrifices his family on the altar of his saxophone (1986: 135).

Dante points out that 'the pride and competitiveness amongst artists [is] just as grievous as the pride in the social or political sphere' (Royal 1999: 130). It is a theme that is addressed in a number of Scorsese's films, where there is an onscreen conflict between a loving relationship and artistic ambition. In *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore*, the titular protagonist must make the decision whether to stay with her lover David (Kris Kristofferson) or to head (eventually) to Monterey and a singing career; and, on a grander scale, there are tensions between Howard Hughes's and Katharine Hepburn's respective fame in *The Aviator*. In the latter case, Scorsese thinks of Icarus who 'flies too close to the sun and the wings melt, and he comes down. There's a Hughes metaphor there. His pride and his ego destroyed him, too' (in Schickel 2013) – a myth that inspired Dante when he wrote of the moment 'when the wretched Icarus his flanks / Felt stripped of feathers by the melting wax' (*Inf.* XVII). Lionel Dobie also suffers for his ambition to go further in *Life Lessons*. His 'arms and forehead are smeared over with paint, which looks like dried blood' (Pomerance 2015: 325), as if he is living out his own Passion narrative in which the antipathy of his muse Paulette (Rosanna Arquette) serves to inspire him to greater glory.

In *The King of Comedy* (1983), celebrity is in danger of usurping religion, offering a clear case of misdirected love from a Christian perspective. Jerry Langford (Jerry Lewis) has the aura of a Saviour figure for his fans, as 'coast to coast' the television spreads the words of Jerry (rather than the Word). The members of the public outside the television studio recognize each other, as if they are regular members of a church congregation, but there are screams and flashing cameras (rather than prayerful devotion) as the people see their Messiah. Women fall at Jerry's feet (to the tune of 'Come Rain or Come Shine' with the lyrics that declare unprecedented and unsurpassed love); and Masha (Sandra Bernhard) is a female follower, trying to touch the hem of Jerry's garment (Mt.

9.21). When Masha climbs into the car, Rupert appoints himself as an apostle who is protecting the Saviour from unwanted attention (Mt. 19.13). While Catholics treat the relics of saints with reverence, Rupert has his autograph book: 'The more scribbled the name, the bigger the fame,' as he will explain to Rita (Diahnne Abbott), the woman he wants to impress. After the scuffle outside the television studio, Rupert even owns a handkerchief with Jerry's initials, although the blood that covers it is his own, somewhat undermining the sacredness of the souvenir.

Scorsese's film 'was ahead of itself in exposing what motivates our whole culture. Everyone wants to be near the immortals. Today the immortals are the stars. It's very chilling,' claimed Sandra Bernhard (in Kelly 1996: 158). Rupert's fantasies – in which the dream is for the limelight – might initially be mistaken for reality by the audience as happened with the 'hallucination' in *The Last Temptation of Christ*. In the first restaurant scene with Jerry that takes place in Rupert's imagination, the surprising humility of the talk show host may indicate to the spectator that something is amiss. In 'reality' Jerry criticizes other people: 'The crew, the incompetents, those behind the scenes you think are your friends and you're not too sure if you're gonna be there tomorrow because of their incompetence'.

Rupert's life offers a visualization of Purgatory as a waiting room, in which the repeated rejections are his form of penance. He lingers outside a stage door, sits in a reception area or hangs on a public telephone. The Gates of Paradise, outside which he stands, are represented by the reception desk at Jerry's office, and the stillness of the camera emphasizes his lack of progress. When Rupert is told that he may not get a response to his comedy tape for several days, he remains seated in his chair. Rupert's intransience encourages the appropriately named Miss Long (Shelley Hack) to speed up the process in the hope of moving him on, but she believes that he is not yet ready for Heaven.

The King of Comedy depicts a world of lonely people. In fact, Wernblad suggests that the audience never sees Rupert's mother because she is deceased. In his act he says, 'If she were only here today, I'd say, "Hey Mom, what are you doing here? You've been dead for nine years"' (see Wernblad 2011: 94). Rita – who gate crashes Jerry's home with Rupert on the misunderstanding that she has been invited – remarks that the star's grand residence is like 'a funeral parlour' in which he will be dining on his meal for one.

Having kidnapped Jerry as leverage to appear on the Langford show, Rupert finally has the opportunity to give his comic monologue on television as part of the ransom demand, leading to a performance that has been judged by film

critics both positively and negatively (see Keyser 1992: 135). However, Rupert achieves his aim because people notice him, allowing him to live up to his philosophy: 'Better to be king for a night than schmuck for a lifetime.' Dante's Pilgrim meets the inhabitants of the *Inferno* who look for consolation in the idea that people on earth are still talking about them:

Therefore, if thou escape from these dark places,
And come to rebehold the beauteous stars,
When it shall pleasure thee to say, 'I was,'
See that thou speak of us unto the people. (*Inf.* XVI)

Even those souls who have gained entry to *Purgatorio* have the same impulse:

And I implore, by what thou most desirest,
If e'er thou treadest the soil of Tuscany,
Well with my kindred reinstate my fame. (*Purg.* XIII)

The King of Comedy is also a place where wrongs are righted in Rupert's fantasy. He envisions a life in which his high school principal, who saw him as failure, comes to perform his wedding to Rita on television. Here it is the principal who admits his mistake in misjudging Rupert's talent with an impressive mea culpa: 'But we were wrong. And you, Rupert, you were right. And that's why tonight, before the entire nation, we'd like to apologise to you personally and to beg your forgiveness for all the things we did to you. And we'd like to thank you personally – all of us – for the meaning you've given our lives.'

In Dante's *Purgatorio*, the inhabitants manifest some of the sins of which Rupert is guilty: 'Wanting them to be inferior to ourselves (pride). Wanting them not to have the good fortune, talents or possessions they have (envy). Wanting them to be punished for some perceived wrong they have done us (anger)' (Shaw 2014). The final scene, in which Rupert is greeted with applause as he appears on television after his release from prison, could be his entry to Paradise or just another of his own fantasies while he waits.

The Bible also contains a famous caution about misdirected love towards material goods: 'For the love of money is the root of all evils' (1 Tim. 6.10) – a theme that has some resonance for *The Color of Money* (1986), a film about Pool players using underhand methods to increase their financial rewards while also longing for the downfall of their opponents. Eddie Felson (Paul Newman) is the older man who corrupts a naïve protégé called Vincent (Tom Cruise) 'like a serpent in the garden of innocence' (in Schickel 2013), but it is also 'the story of the kid who wants to knock the master off the throne' (Ebert 2008: 91). Eddie

may claim that he ‘gets high on the Man Upstairs’ but he suffers because his glory days are over, as do some of the souls in *Purgatorio*. Dante goes on to relate:

There are, who, by abasement of their neighbour,
 Hope to excel, and therefore only long
 That from his greatness he may be cast down;
 There are, who power, grace, honour, and renown
 Fear they may lose because another rises,
 Thence are so sad that the reverse they love;
 And there are those whom injury seems to chafe,
 So that it makes them greedy for revenge,
 And such must needs shape out another’s harm. (*Purg.* XVII)

The story of ‘Fast Eddie’ also offers elements of a ‘mini-morality’ play that ‘reflects our values: money and success and especially this yuppie thing’ and ‘Don’t put false gods in my place’ (in Keyser 1992: 162). It was also the movie for which Paul Newman finally won an Academy Award for Best Actor – the ‘golden statue’ that eluded Scorsese (in the Best Director category) until he made *The Departed*. When he was a schoolboy, Scorsese heard Fr Principe preach that ‘statues like the Oscar were false gods representing greed, an obsession with worldly goods, and glorification of the ego’ (LoBrutto 2007: 37). However, Scorsese once explained that coming in under budget is ‘the stuff sainthood is made of in Hollywood’ (in Christie and Thompson 2003: 108), which at least was his achievement on *The Color of Money*.

Pride before a fall

Fr Principe also commented on the effect of Italian Catholicism on Scorsese as a young man: ‘To him, as to most Italians, religion is incarnational, earthy. The worst sins are not the sins of the flesh but rather *superba*, or pride. The sins of the flesh are signs of human weakness. But pride, putting man in God’s place, that was very serious because it’s a direct rejection of God’ (in Kelly 1996: 32). It is notable that Dante places great stress on pride in *Purgatorio*. The Pilgrim and Virgil encounter ‘the souls of the proud, bowed down by boulders, weeping and beating their breasts’ (Reynolds 2006: 272) in Canto X:

‘Master,’ began I, ‘that which I behold
 Moving towards us seems to me not persons,
 And what I know not, so in sight I waver.’

And he to me: 'The grievous quality
 Of this their torment bows them so to earth,
 That my own eyes at first contended with it;
 But look there fixedly, and disentangle
 By sight what cometh underneath those stones;
 Already canst thou see how each is stricken.'
 O ye proud Christians! wretched, weary ones!
 Who, in the vision of the mind infirm
 Confidence have in your backsliding steps,
 Do ye not comprehend that we are worms,
 Born to bring forth the angelic butterfly
 That flieth unto judgment without screen?

Scorsese has also admitted that he finds 'stories about pride taking a fall so interesting' (in Schickel 2013), and it is a theme that runs through his films, whether the focus is on New York Catholics in the 1960s or Jesuit missionaries in the seventeenth century.

In *Silence*, Rodrigues is concerned about the effect that Ferreira's reported apostasy could have on 'reputation': 'If it is true, Father, what would it mean ... for the Jesuits? For the whole of Catholic Europe?' It is an early indication of his personal pride that is uncovered during his journey to Japan, through his letters to Valignano and his (initially one-way) conversations with God. In films such as *GoodFellas* and *Casino*, the voice-over is purposefully aimed at the audience, whereas in *Silence* the audience is 'listening in' rather than directly addressed. Sometimes the spectator is privy to an interior dialogue, perhaps a confession or a prayer, in which the vulnerability of the character is revealed – an approach that Scorsese used in *Mean Streets*.

There is often a sense of superiority in Rodrigues's assessment of the importance of his effect on the Japanese people: 'Christianity brought love. The dignity for the first time of being treated like God's creatures, not animals.' In the beginning he is full of zealous fervour and wants to go to Nagasaki to find Ferreira, while Garupe argues that it is 'too dangerous'. Yet, it is Garupe who will die as a martyr, leaving Rodrigues behind to wait for divine judgement.

When he arrives in the Goto islands to minister to the Christians, Rodrigues records: 'The fear I'd felt on the journey faded away because the joy which greeted me was almost as great as my own.' He is delighted that the people welcome him with warm smiles, bowing down before him as he steps onto the shore. 'And they came to me,' says Rodrigues, with an emphasis on the 'me', although it

should be God who is the focus of attention when the Christians arrive from the surrounding villages to receive the sacraments. As the audience hears Rodrigues say, 'They live like beasts and die like beasts,' he is giving out the consecrated hosts at Communion with his clean hands. 'But Christ did not die for the good and beautiful. That is easy enough,' he claims, never having had to face death at this point. 'The hard thing is to die for the miserable and corrupt.' He is standing above the villagers as they kneel, so that his physical position reflects his inner feeling of importance, despite his addendum: 'But here I knew I was one of them and I shared the hunger of their spirit.'

It is the Interpreter, who assists Rodrigues during his eventual captivity, who shows an awareness of his prisoner's weakness. He toys with the priest and teaches him the Japanese word 'korobu', which means 'fall down, surrender, give up the faith'. The Interpreter explains that Ferreira apostatized and is now a celebrity. 'People in Nagasaki point him out and marvel. He is held in great esteem now. Which, I believe, is why he came here in the first place.' As he leaves Rodrigues in his cell, he says in Japanese: 'Arrogant man. Like all of them. Which means he'll eventually fall.' He is right in his judgement. In the novel, Rodrigues comes to ask himself: 'And yet, am I looking for the true, hidden martyrdom or just for a glorious death? Is it that I want to be honored, to be prayed to, to be called a saint?' (Endo 1969: 119). At least, as a Jesuit, Rodrigues would have the consolation of *The Spiritual Exercises* in which 'the individual, with eyes on the Crucified, reflects on his guilt, to be made aware finally that it is grace, and grace alone, which saves him from the well-deserved everlasting perdition. What remains for us is not knowledge, but rather Christian hope' (Balthasar 1988: 251).

When Scorsese was once speaking of the dangers of believing that 'acting out whatever good I would be doing with a vocation could be done through films' he mentioned the trap of falling into the sin of pride and explained that 'someday I'd like to make a film about a priest who has to deal with the sin of pride – because they're human, too' (in Occhiogrosso 1987: 93). In making *Silence* – in which the pride of Rodrigues is visible before his apostasy – Scorsese has finally achieved that particular aim.