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ULYSSES' « FOLLE VOLO »: THE BURDEN OF HISTORY

That Dante did not know Homer's *Odyssey* directly is beyond doubt; that he did not know the medieval résumés of the Troy story, where an approximate version of the Homeric account of Ulysses' return to Ithaca plays a large part is, however, far from certain [1]. The majority of modern commentators maintain that Dante remained blissfully ignorant of the traditional account, on the grounds that if he had known it, he could not, in his reverence for authority, have so drastically altered the ending. However, some of the old commentators and a few of the modern ones as well find this impossible to believe [2]. It is indeed difficult to en-

[1] In the Middle Ages Dictys' *Ephemeris Belli Troiani* and Dares' *De Excidio Troiae Historia* were considered the standard works on the Trojan War (Homer's works were virtually unknown in the West). Both these impostors claimed to have taken part in the Trojan War and hence purported to give the true version of what took place at Troy and, in Dictys' case, at the subsequent homecomings of the various Greek heroes, as opposed to Homer's inaccurate poetic rendering of the facts. In the twelfth century Benoit de Sainte-Maure based his *Le Roman de Troie* on these two authors, and a century later the Sicilian judge, Guido delle Colonne, whose Italian poems Dante mentions in the *De Vulgari Eloquentia* (I xii 2, II v 4, vi 6), modelled his influential *Historia Destructionis Troiae* on these authors as well as on Benoit. Both Benoit and Guido delle Colonne give Dictys' version of Ulysses' accidental murder by his son, Telegonus, in Ithaca. It is difficult to believe that Dante had not read at least one if not all of these texts, especially that of Guido delle Colonne, whose other works he knew. For Dictys' Dares', Benoit's and Guido delle Colonne's depictions of Ulysses, see Chapter XII, " Ulysses and the Discrediting of Homer ", pp. 146-158, and Appendix B, " Ulysses in the Medieval Troy Tale ", pp. 283-295 in W. B. Stanford's *The Ulysses Theme: A Study in the Adaptability of a Traditional Hero* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1968), an invaluable survey of the rich, complex and contradictory tradition that grew around Homer's adaptable and versatile hero over the centuries.

[2] Among the old commentators who hold this view are Jacopo di Dante, *Chiose alla Cantica dell'Inferno di Dante Alighieri, Attribuite a Iacopo suo figlio* (Firenze: Tipografia di Tommaso Baracchi, 1848), pp. 86-87; L'Ottimo, *L'Ottimo Commento della Divina Commedia*, a cura di Alessandro Torri, vol. I (Pisa: Presso

visage how a learned and cultured man like Dante could have ignored, even if he had not read the résumés, what was a matter of common knowledge in his day, « something that even children and the illiterate knew », as Benvenuto [3] remarks sarcastically.

As the accredited medieval version had it, Ulysses returned safely to Ithaca after many adventures and much suffering, and there in the ebbing tide of a sleek age met his death at the hands of Telegonus, his son by Circe. Whether one believes that Dante knew the traditional story or not, the fundamental question remains the same: how did Dante come to conceive of an outward bound, centrifugal Ulysses, when the weight of the tradition substantiated the Homeric portrait of a centripetal, homeward bound figure, irrevocably drawn towards the past, towards home and Penelope? Only after this initial question has been answered can one broach the related and more vexing one: what does the episode mean?

The impulse of the critics has been to hunt for sources in order to discover who or what deflected Ulysses' frail bark off course. The results have been fruitful: Cicero, Virgil, Horace, Ovid, Seneca, Statius, Servius, perhaps even Pliny and Claudian, and others not yet tracked down all had a hand, each in his own

Niccolò Capurro, 1827-1829), p. 452; Benvenuti de Rambaldis de Imola, *Comentum Super Dantis Aldigherij Comoediam*, curante Jacopo Philippo Lacaita, Tomus Secundus (Florentiae: Typis G. Barbèra, 1887), pp. 293-294, and Francesco da Buti, *Commento di Francesco da Buti sopra la Divina Commedia di Dante Alighieri*, per cura di Crescentino Giannini, vol. I (Pisa: Pei Fratelli Nistri, 1858-1862), pp. 679-680. According to these commentators, although Dante probably knew Ulysses' traditional fate, he chose to invent a new one because, as l'Ottimo says, « della morte di Ulisse non s'ebbe certezza, però qui di lui l'Autore introduce un possibile modo di morire, e credibile, assai occulto fine ... Se vero non è, almeno è cosa credibile ». Among the modern critics who share this attitude are Antonino Pagliaro, " Ulisse ", in *Ulisse: Ricerche semantiche sulla « Divina Commedia »*, Primo Tomo (Messina-Firenze: Casa Editrice G. D'Anna, 1966), pp. 399-401, and David Thompson, *Dante's Ulysses and the Allegorical Journey*, " Dante Studies ", LXXXV, 1967, p. 40.

[3] Benvenuto da Imola, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 294: « Verumtamen quicquid dicatur, nulla persuasione possum adduci ad credendum, quod auctor ignoraverit illud quod sciunt etiam pueri et ignari; ideo dico, quod hoc potius auctor de industria finxit, et licuit sibi fingere de novo, sicut aliis poetis propter aliquod propositum ostendendum ».

way, in shaping Dante's conception [4]. Not only literary sources but even historical events could have kindled Dante's imagination. The expedition of the Vivaldi brothers, who in 1291 set off from Genoa across the ocean in search of new lands, never to be heard of again, may have left a lasting impression on Dante's mind and contributed to his representation of Ulysses [5]. In the last analysis, however, these sources, taken individually or collectively, can at best illuminate certain details and idiosyncracies of Dante's Ulysses, but they can never account for the beauty, power, or overall conception of the episode that Dante's powerful fantasy wrought. More decisive than sources in determining Dante's ultimate conception of Ulysses are attitude, *forma mentis*, and world-view, In the rest of this paper, I would like to use the Ulysses episode as a touchstone as I investigate Dante's conception of history and man's responsibility in history [6].

[4] For an exhaustive survey of the possible sources that could conceivably have had a bearing on Dante's vision of Ulysses, see Giorgio Padoan's *Ulisse 'Fandi Factor' e le Vie della Sapienza*, « Studi Danteschi », XXXVII, 1960, pp. 21-61. Also useful in this respect are Antonino Pagliaro, *op. cit.*, especially pp. 401-409, and apegno's copious notes to the canto in his commentary on the *Divine Comedy*, vol. I (Firenze: La Nuova Italia Editrice, 1970), especially pp. 292-293.

[5] On this possibility see Edward Moore, *Studies in Dante*, First Series, *Scripture and Classical Authors in Dante* (1896; rpt. New York; Greenwood Press, 1968), p. 264, n. 2, and especially, Bruno Nardi, " La Tragedia d'Ulisse ", in *Dante e la cultura medievale* (Bari: Laterza, 1949), pp. 153-154. A historical reconstruction of the Vivaldi brothers' « mad track past Gades » in 1291 is given by Francis M. Rogers, *The Vivaldi Expedition*, « The Seventy-Third Annual Report of the Dante Society » (1955), pp. 31-45.

[6] Although Dante's conception of history is often touched upon by critics dealing with other facets of Dante criticism, few studies have been dedicated to the subject itself. Among works in this area, from a variety of points of view, are: W.H.V. Reade, *Dante's Vision of History*, « Proceedings of the British Academy », XXV, 1939, pp. 187-215; Erich Auerbach, " Figura ", in *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature: Six Essays*, trans. Ralph Manheim, Catherine Garvin, and Erich Auerbach (New York: Meridian Books, 1959), pp. 11-76; Romano Guardini, " La conscience de l'histoire chez Dante ", in *Dante Visionnaire de l'Eternité*, traduit de l'allemand par Jeanne Ancelet-Hustage (Paris: Seuil, 1958), pp. 202-213; Charles S. Singleton, " The Pattern at the Center ", in *Dante Studies 1, Commedia: Elements of Structure* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), pp. 45-60; Alan C. Charity, *Events and Their Afterlife: The Dialectics of Christian Typology in the Bible and Dante* (Cambridge: At the University

Carlo Diano, in a fascinating book entitled *Forma ed Evento* [7], asserts that the two underlying principles of Greek civilization are epitomized in the heroes of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. According to Diano, Achilles stands for the static, sculptorial, formal element in Greek culture; Ulysses, on the other hand, represents the dynamic, pictorial, reflective force of the civilization. In short, Achilles is the hero of " form ", Ulysses the hero of " event ". As such, Ulysses possesses a depth that Achilles, who is pure form and hence surface, does not have: « Se l'eroe dell'*Iliade* è un eroe della forma e però della forza, l'eroe dell'*Odissea* è un eroe dell'evento e, come tale, dell'intelligenza: perché la forma è immediabile, ma l'evento è tutto nella mediazione » [8]. Although Ulysses is an infinitely more complex and ambiguous character than Achilles, he nevertheless exists primarily on the surface, as foreground, at the level of style. Furthermore, although Ulysses may represent the dynamic force in Greek culture, he remains, as Jean Daniélou has observed, locked in the realm of myth, and exists in a time framework « which turns on its own axis, which perpetually comes back to its origin, but which in the end has no direction, ends nowhere and goes nowhere, and remains turned towards the past [9] ». In the *Odyssey* Ulysses develops and changes no more than Achilles does in the *Iliad*. He is defined by his epithets: " crafty ", " resourceful ", " long-suffering ", " the man of many ways ", " equal to Zeus in council ". In this respect Ulysses is no different from any of Homer's other heroes, of whom Auerbach says, « [they] wake every morning as if it were the first day of their lives: their emotions, though strong, are simple and find expression instantly » [10]. The destiny of these heroes is clearly

Press, 1966), pp. 167-261; Peter G. Bietenholtz, *Clio and Thalia: The Place of History in Dante's* Comedy, « Canadian Journal of History », I, 2, 1966, pp. 1-25; and, Robert Hollander, *Allegory in Dante's Commedia* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969), especially pp. 57-103 and 192-232.

[7] Carlo Diano, *Forma ed evento: Principii per una interpretazione del mondo greco* (Venezia: Neri Pozza Editore, 1960).

[8] *Op. cit.*, p. 66.

[9] Jean Daniélou, S. J., " Christianity and Non-Christian Religions ", in *Introduction to Great Religions*, trans. Albert J. La Mothe, Jr. (Notre Dame, Indiana: Fides Publishers, 1964), p. 26.

[10] Erich Auerbach, " Odysseus' Scar ", in *Mimesis: The Representation of*

defined, and it has no meaning beyond a purely personal one: to acquire glory in battle, to accumulate wealth, to return home.

Although there is a touch of " event " in Ulysses, he remains essentially " form ", for the essence of Greek civilization, or Greekhood, as Moses Hadas calls it [11], lies in a perfection of style, not an ideal of history, either sacred or national. The Greeks lacked the convinction that sustained the Hebrews and the Romans, the profound belief that they were a divinely chosen people with a special destiny. The true hero of " event " can exist only in the context of a civilization that stresses history and man's responsibility before the events of history. Abraham, although he too emerges from the depths of myth, is perhaps the prototype of historical man, endowed with an acute sense of history and of purpose [12]. Because of their belief in a single powerful God who acted and shaped a history in which they were the elect, the scribes who codified the legends about the origins of the Hebrew people and God's covenant with them transformed even the mythic beginnings into history. Abraham became the hero of " event ", and as a result, he was oriented towards the future, not the past. Eschatology replaced myth. « Abraham leaves Ur of the Chaldees, but he is never to return. He leaves Ur relying on the promise of God that He will give him the land of promise, and, confident in this promise, he enters into the adventure of time with all of its unknowns; he leaves the world of experience, the world of the known, and moves towards the unknown relying only on faith » [13].

Reality in Western Literature, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 12.

[11] In *The Living Tradition* (New York and Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1969), p. 68.

[12] For the appropriateness and further implications of the comparison between Ulysses and Abraham, see Erich Auerbach, *op. cit.*, Jean Daniélou, *op. cit.*, especially 2-27, and Theodore Haecker, " Odysseus and Aeneas ", in *Virgil: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Steele Commager (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1966), pp. 68-74.

[13] Jean Daniélou, *op cit.*, p. 26. Cf. Jean Héring, *Le Royaume de Dieu et Sa venue: Étude sur l'espérance de Jésus et de l'apôtre Paul* (Paris: Librairie Félix Alcan, 1937), pp. 150-151. Héring in his analysis of Paul's *Epistle to the Hebrews* sees Abraham as a prototype of Christian man as opposed to the pagan, the man of myth: « Le prototype du chrétien, ce n'est pas pour lui [Paul] la princesse envoyée en exil et aspirante au retour, c'est Abraham qui se met en route *vers*

The mythic pattern of the return is broken and replaced by the ideal of the departure, the quest. Unlike the Homeric hero who exists as " foreground " and whose meaning is exhausted at the level of form, at the level of the ornate and enchanting word, Abraham and Biblical man in general, is, as Auerbach aptly puts it, " fraught with background " [14] and mystery.

The closest pagan analogue to Abraham is Virgil's Aeneas [15], who is also driven by a deep-rooted sense of destiny: he is to be the founder of the empire which will cradle Augustus and bring justice, order and peace to the world. Such in any case is the Limbo-shackled Virgil's imperial and humanistic vision. For Dante, Aeneas ' providential journey has even weightier consequences. Aeneas' pilgrimage west across the Mediterranean is as determining in God's unfolding plan as Abraham's desert wanderings. Because of Aeneas' unselfish and perfect response to the will of the gods, to the call of history itself, Rome rose from the ashes of Troy and became *caput mundi*, the seat of both the empire and the papacy, the two institutions established directly by God in order to assure world order. Moreover, Imperial Rome created propitious conditions for the Incarnation, for God to send His only Son in order that He might reconcile sinful man unto Himself [16]. Aeneas stayed within the bounds set by the gods and, like his Biblical counterpart, obeyed at every turn. If Aeneas's odyssey is poetic fiction, it is fiction which possesses profound historical consciousness [17]. Al-

un pays nouveau que Dieu lui montrera. *La mystique du retour est remplacée par la mystique du départ.* Départ vers une région que nul homme n'a habitée auparavant, et qui, au point de vue religieux, n'a jamais existé encore ».

[14] *Op. cit.*, p. 12.

[15] On this point, see Theodore Haecker, *op. cit.*, especially pp. 69-70, and T.S. Eliot, "Virgil and the Christian World", in *On Poetry and Poets* (New York: Noonday Press, 1969), pp. 135-148.

[16] For Dante's explicit statements on the role of Rome in providential history, see especially Book II of the *Monarchia*, but also *Convivio* IV, iv-v and Justinian's epic account of the history of Rome from its foundation to the time of Charlemagne in *Paradiso* VI.

[17] Although the language of *Inferno* II, 10-33, as Sapegno points out in his commentary on these verses, *op. cit.*, pp. 19-21, suggests that Dante realized that the *Aeneid* was a fiction or at least that the historicity of Virgil's poem was not as certain as the historicity of the Bible, Dante read Virgil as a "historian" and not as a poet. Virgil's acute historical sensibility, his teleological view of history, and his seriousness of purpose all conspired to make Virgil a supreme *auctoritas* for Dante, second only to Holy Scripture. For Dante's reading of Virgil and other

though Virgil remains faithful to Homer's ideal of style, and his *Aeneid* is indeed an " alta tragedia " stylistically, the code of style is no longer the guiding principle. It is only the form appropriate to the loftiness of the context. Virgil may invoke Calliope but his other and chief muse is Clio, and his epic poem is a celebration of the Roman Empire and the *pietas* and *labor* that helped establish it.

If Abraham plays a relatively small part in the *Divine Comedy* [18], Israel, the nation of whom he is the first, plays a much larger role. Dante realized that in order to fulfil the practical and didactic end of this great ethical work, which was « to remove the living from the state of misery in this life and to guide them to a state of happiness » (*Epistle* XIII, 15) [19], he would have to universalize the agent, the pilgrim who undertakes the journey through the three realms of the other world. The " I " of Dante, the man, poet, and Florentine exile of the fourteenth century, had to become the " we " of humanity and carry the burden of everyman. Autobiography had to reflect and to summarize universal history. Dante does this by falling back on the methods of Biblical exegesis and using them in an original and creative manner. By casting his journey within the framework of the Easter liturgy and invoking liturgical imagery from the outset, Dante assimilates his experience to that of Christ and Israel [20]. The bond that is esta-

pagan poets as " historians ", see Hollander, *op. cit.*, p. 53 *et passim.* For the tendency in the later Middle Ages to ignore or to blur the distinction between fact and fiction, history and metaphor, things and words, allegory of the poets and allegory of the theologians, and to read fiction, or at least some fiction, theologically, see Judson Boyce Allen, *The Friar as Critic: Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1971), p. 25 *et passim.*

[18] Abraham is only mentioned once by Dante in the *Commedia* in *Inferno* IV, 58.

[19] The Latin is: « ... finis totius et partis est removere viventes in hac vita de statu miserie et perducere ad statum felicitatis ». All quotations from Dante's minor works are taken from the critical edition of the Società Dantesca Italiana, *Le Opere di Dante* (Firenze: Nella Sede della Società, 1960); all quotations from the *Commedia* are from the new critical text of the Società Dantesca Italiana, *La Commedia secondo l'antica vulgata,* a cura di Giorgio Petrocchi (4 vols.; Milano: Mondadori, 1966-1967).

[20] On the liturgical mold in wich the poem is cast, see Charles S. Singleton, *In Exitu Israel de Aegypto,* « Seventy-Eighth Annual Report of the Dante Society

blished is " typological " in nature [21]. Dante adds weight and authority to his other world pilgrimage by backshadowing or postfiguring the Exodus and its New Testament fulfilment in the dramatic events of Easter week. Consequently, the wanderings of the people of Israel are at the very core of the allegorical structure of the poem. But Dante does not abandon his other chosen people, the Romans. His pagan archetype is, of course, the hero of the *Aeneid* for his anagogical goal is a " Romanized " Celestial Jerusalem: « quella Roma onde Cristo è romano » (*Purg.* XXXII, 102). In order to underscore the equally important role of the Roman people in God's plan and further universalize himself, Dante in *Inferno* II, when he is still on the slope of the mountain in this world, compares his otherwordly voyage to that of Aeneas and Paul:

> Io non Enëa, io non Paulo sono;
> me degno a ciò né io né altri 'l crede.
> (*Inf.* II, 32-33)

Virgil reassures him. The « alto passo » (*Inf.* II, 12), the journey through the eternal realms, which Dante is about to begin, is not an act of pride and folly, as he fears: « temo che la venuta non sia folle » (*Inf.* II, 35). Dante's journey, like Aeneas' and Paul's, is willed by God, made possible through special grace, in order to bring the sons of Adam back onto the right path, to lead them back to the Edenic state, symbolized in the poem by the new, redeemed Earthly Paradise at the top of Mount Purgatory [22]. Like

of America » (1960), pp. 1-24, and Dunstan Tucker, O. S. B., *In exitu Israel de Aegypto:* The Divine Comedy *in the Light of the Easter Liturgy*, in « The American Benedictine Review », XI, 1960, pp. 43-61.

[21] On Dante's innovative use of typology in the *Commedia* with respect to its use in the Bible, see Alan C. Charity, *op. cit.*, pp. 167-261. In the *Commedia*, unlike the Bible, it is not a matter of " prefiguration " but rather " postfiguration ". See also Jean Pépin, *Dante et la tradition de l'allégorie* (Montréal: Inst. d'Études Médiévales, 1970), especially pp. 15-51, where he discusses the relationship between allegory, symbolism, and typology, and the various ways Dante criticism has posed the problem of typology in the *Commedia*.

[22] On the significance of the Earthly Paradise, see *Monarchia* III, xvi. According to Dante in the *Monarchia*, man's goal is twofold. The first goal is « happiness in this life », figured by the Earthly Paradise; the second goal is « the happiness of eternal life », figured by the Celestial Paradise. For a detailed

Abraham and Aeneas, and in a more profund sense, like Paul, Dante is an exile, not only as a citizen of Florence, but also as a true Christian, whose condition is to be forever outward bound in search of spiritual fulfilment. The Florentine tossed about in the turbulent seas of his disordered times never regains the port of his terrestrial home on the unnavigable waters of the Arno, but the Christian does manage after a stormy beginning to steer his vessel (metaphorically the poem itself) [23] to the port of the true celestial homeland.

Clement of Alexandria, writing in the second century A.D., contrasts the attitude of Ulysses with that of the Christian in the following manner: « Men attach themselves to this world as certain kinds of seaweed cling to the rocks by the seashore. They care little about life eternal, for like the ancient from Ithaca they do not hunger for the truth or for their heavenly homeland, but only for the smoke of their earthly homes » [24]. Dante's Ulysses, however, does not return home; nor does he yearn for the sunny shores of Ithaca and his great high-roofed house. Instead he abandons family and country, and ventures into the vastness of the sea in search of virtue and knowledge.

Dante rips Ulysses out of the mold of myth and plunges him into the uncertainties and irreversability of history. A man like Homer's long-suffering hero, who after a series of lusty adventures returns home, alone but a conqueror, to find an exemplary wife, a courageous son, a proud and loving father, and even his faith-

analysis of this pivotal motif in the structure of the *Divine Comedy, see* A. Bartlett Giamatti, *The Earthly Paradise and the Renaissance Epic* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969), pp. 94-122.

[23] For Dante's use of nautical metaphors to refer to his poem, see Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1963), pp. 128-130. Dante the poet is a sailor and his poem is a ship. Dante's references to the *Commedia* as a ship (e.g. *Purg.* I, 1-6; *Par.* II, 1-15) reinforce the link, almost typological in nature, that exists between Dante and Ulysses Metaphorically, both are sailors and both poets. On this point, see Harvey D. Goldstein, *Enea e Paolo: A Reading of the 26th Canto of Dante's* Inferno, « Symposium » XIX, 1965, pp. 316-327, and Robert Hollander, *op. cit.*, pp. 220-232.

[24] *Prothepticus*, IX, 9, 86, 2. Quoted by Hugo Rahner, S.J., in " Odysseus at the Mast ", *Greek Myths and Christian Mystery* (London: Burns and Oates, 1963), p. 328.

ful dog, would have delighted but not satisfied Dante. Ulysses' tale lacked the depth and seriousness of purpose that the grave-minded Dante of the *Commedia* demanded of a story. Dante is steeped in a concept of universal history. His view of history is linear not cyclic, and he works within a time framework oriented towards the future, not the past, or more precisely, poised between faith in the past and hope for the future [25]. Knowingly or unknowingly, Dante pierces the circle, stretches it out across the sea and sends Ulysses sailing across it to his doom. Dante filters everything through the lens of Christianity, and his figures, whether pagan or Christian, historical or mythical, remain in their essence profoundly Christian [26].

However, Dante does not create his Ulysses *ex nihilo*; he takes up and develops, according to his Christian sensibility, elements latent in the complex tradition that had grown around Homer's Protean hero. The most striking residue from the tradition lies in the styles of the episode. In this respect Dante's Ulysses does not represent a break with the past. Even in the afterlife Ulysses continues to ride the crest of his own eloquence, and facile verses flow from his lips [27]. Ulysses spins a tale that, had he been able to tell it, would have astounded the Phaeacians (*Odyssey* XI, 333 ff).

[25] On the relationship between myth and history, and the Christian concept of history, the following works are especially illuminating: Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return, or, Cosmos and History*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1971); Lynn White, Jr., *Christian Myth and Christian History*, « Journal of the History of Ideas », III, 2, 1942, pp. 14-158; Alan W. Watts, *Myth and Ritual in Christianity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971); Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time: The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History*, rev. ed., trans. Floyd V. Filson (London: S.C.M. Press, 1965), and, Rudolf Bulman, *History and Eschatology: The Presence of Eternity* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1962).

[26] Cf. Reade, *op. cit.*, p. 212, and with specific reference to Ulysses, Tilde Nardi, *Il canto XXVI dell'Inferno* (Torino: S.E.I., 1959), p. 20.

[27] Both tradition and medieval poetics dictated that Ulysses be represented as eloquent. See, for example, Matthew of Vendôme's example of a description of Homer's epic hero in *Ars Versificatoria*, 52, contained in Edmond Faral's *Les arts poétiques du XII^e et du XIII^e siècle* (Paris: Librairie Honoré Champion, 1962), pp. 123-125, and l'Ottimo, whose reaction to the lofty, epic style of the episode is typical of Dante's early commentators, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 454: « Fu

In tone and style, Ulysses' epic flight rises far above the surrounding episodes and indeed any episode in the *Inferno*, just as Homer soars like an eagle high above the other poets of Limbo (*Inf.* IV, 86-88, 94-96). At this point in Dante's *Commedia* the classical tradition with its ideal of the separation and purity of styles completely overwhelms the Christian tradition and its ideal of a mixed, intermediate style which dominates the rest of the poem [28]. Dante the poet draws attention to the shift in stylistic code by making Virgil address Ulysses. Dante's poetic strategy is subtle; he pretends that he, as a modern, cannot penetrate the distant world of Homer. Not only does he speak a different language, a modern language, but even his ideal of style is different. The stylistic norm of his poem is not the aristocratic epic style, cherised by the Greeks and Romans, but the humble and unpretentious style of the Christian tradition. In the Ulysses' episode, Virgil, the greatest Latin poet, must assume the role of interpreter and bridge the enormous gap, not only cultural and linguistic but also stylistic, which divides the Greek and Christian worlds:

> ... « La tua preghiera è degna
> di molta loda, e io però l'accetto;
> ma fa che la tua lingua si sostegna.
>
> Lascia parlare a me, ch'i' ho concetto
> ciò che tu vuoi; ch'ei sarebbero schivi,
> perch' e' fuor greci, forse del tuo detto ».
> (*Inf.* XXVI, 70-75)

Ulysses ornatissimo favellatore, e facundo, e grazioso; contro al quale disse Aiace Telamone, libro decimo terzo *Metamorphoseos*: né a me è in pronto il dire, come a te, né a te il fare, come a me; e questa piccola diceria ebbe cotanto frutto, quanto il testo mostra ».

[28] As E. G. Parodi, *Il Canto XX dell'Inferno* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1934), p. 18, and, with specific reference to the Ulysses episode, Augustin Renaudet, *Dante humaniste* (Paris: Société d'édition " Les Belles Lettres ", 1952) pp. 448-458, have noted, the style of the *Commedia* rises immediately, regardless of the context, with the introduction into the poem of a classical figure of epic stature. A striking example of this procedure is the presentation of Jason in *Inferno* XVIII; the Ulysses episode, however, is the most sustained example of the high, " tragic ", " classical " style in the *Commedia*. For a more detailed discussion of stylistic levels in the *Divine Comedy* see Amilcare A. Iannucci, *Dante's Theory of Genres and the* Divina Commedia, « Dante Studies », XCI, 1973, pp. 1-25.

In fact, the Greeks' haughtiness, to which Virgil appeals in order to justify his intervention, is due precisely to their scorn and intolerance of anyone who does not conform to their code of style, which in turn reflects an ideal of culture. For the Greek, what distinguishes man from animal is speech, and superiority among men is gauged by articulate speech and rationality [29]. As it turns out, Ulysses speaks to Virgil neither in Greek nor in Latin, but in Italian. However, if Ulysses abandons his native tongue in conversing with Virgil in Dante's underworld, he does not forsake the Greek code of style. The Italian he utters is the illustrious vernacular which Dante deemed appropriate for the tragic style, although it may be added that the substance of Ulysses' words does not proclaim " Salus, Amor, et Virtus ", but instead reveals his *hubris*.

In the Ulysses episode Dante consciously fashions his own " alta tragedia ", as he and medieval poetics understood the term. But if the vehicle of expression is the best classical style that a medieval writing in the illustrious vernacular of the Italian language could summon, the content remains at its heart deeply Christian [30]. For this reason, Dante in this episode outdoes both Homer and Virgil, just as in the metamorphoses, he had outdone Ovid and Lucan [31]. Although Ulysses is a pagan who lived before the event, before the crack in time, ultimately he is judged in terms of that event, because he is set within the context of a work solidly anchored in Christian ethics, which mirrors in the

[29] On this point, see Moses Hadas, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

[30] Dante's Ulysses is an excellent literary example of the phenomenon that Erwin Panofsky in *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), p. 84, has defined in art history as the « principle of disjunction »: « Wherever in the high and later Middle Ages a work of art borrows its form from a classical model, this form is almost invariably invested with a non-classical, normally Christian, signification ».

[31] For a discussion of the " outdoing " trope in medieval literature, with particular reference to the intricate use of the schema in *Inferno* XXV, see Ernst Robert Curtius, *op. cit.*, pp. 162-165. For the profound Christian significance of the *topos* in this context, see Romano Guardini, " Les métamorphoses dans l'enfer des voleurs ", in *op. cit.*, pp. 229-246. For its more subtle application in *Inferno* XXVI, see Goldstein, *op. cit.*, pp. 319-320, and Padoan, *op. cit.*, pp. 53-54.

realm of eschatology God's unfolding plan. Ulysses becomes a hero of " event ", and as a result, his ornate and enchanting words gain flesh and weight. In the process, however, his pagan " comedy " turns into a Christian " tragedy ", and one that goes beyond Dante's own definition of tragedy. It goes beyond *contrapasso* and poetic justice; it is more than an elegant epic account of the downfall of a great man. In the economy of its fifty-three lines, it contains all the essential, dramatic qualities of a true Christian tragedy.

Dante the wayfarer seems to care little for the *contrapasso* in this episode [32]. He grasps intuitively the relationship between sin and punishment, even before Virgil articulates it: « Maestro mio... già m'era avviso / che così fosse... » (vv. 49-51). Once he has learned that Ulysses is one of the souls trapped in the horned flame, he is seized by an ardent desire (vv. 64-69) to discover were Homer's wandering hero finally died, « dove, per lui, perduto a morir gissi » (v. 84). Although Dictys' strange account of Ulysses' violent death in Ithaca was the prevailing one in the Middle Ages, Dante could have read elsewhere, in Seneca [33], for example, that there was much speculation about Ulysses' last days and the whereabouts of his final resting place. The confusion originated in Teiresias' two prophecies in Book XI of the *Odyssey*,

[32] For a useful survey of the old commentators' views on the elusive nature of the *contrapasso* in this episode, see Pagliaro, *op. cit.*, especially pp. 371-394. For an important discussion of the typological and structural significance of the *contrapasso* in the poem, see Charity, *op. cit.*, pp. 189-198.

[33] *Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales*, LXXXVIII, 7: « ...Quaeris Ulixes ubi erraverit, potius quam efficias, ne nos semper erremus? Non vacat audire, utrum inter Italiam et Siciliam iactatus sit an extra notum nobis orbem, neque enim potuit in tam angusto error esse tam longus; tempestates nos animi cotidie iactant et nequitia in omnia Ulixis mala inpellit ». This epistle is found in Volume V of the ten volume Seneca in the Loeb classical series, trans. Richard M. Gummere (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970). On the uncertainty surrounding Ulysses' death as sufficient cause for Dante to invoke poetic licence and invent his own ending, see note 2. For the crucial importance of Seneca's passage for Dante's conception of Ulysses, see *Petri Allegherii Super Dantis Ipsius Genitoris Comoediam: Commentarium*, curante Vincentio Nannucci (Florentiae: Apud Guilielmum Piatti, 1845), p. 237. More recently, Rocco Montano, *Il 'Folle Volo' di Ulisse*, « Delta », N. S., 2, 1952, pp. 10-32 uses the passage to develop his theory that Dante condemns in Ulysses any sort of *curiositas vitiosa*. See especially pp. 22-25.

one about a last voyage Ulysses had to undertake in order to appease the unrelenting wrath of Poseidon, the other, couched in more ambiguous language, concerning the hero's death. Both prophecies remained unfulfilled at the end of the *Odyssey*, although the impression left by Homer is that Ulysses undertook the burden of one more journey, returned, and died among his prosperous people in a wise old age. Ingenious writers, however, were not reluctant to exploit the ambiguity, and to supply details, thereby compounding the confusion [34]. Dante had read and perhaps even heard conflicting reports about Ulysses' final fate and he wanted to set the record straight for his Christian readers. The tale had exemplary value. Resorting to a technique he uses often in the *Commedia*, Dante has the hero himself, from the perspective of eternity, tell the authentic and definitive story of his last journey. Dante's version resembles neither Teiresias' fanciful tale of a journey to some landlocked place where the inhabitants mistake Ulysses' car for a winnowing fan (*Odyssey* XI, 119 ff.), nor the fantastic and sordid sequels fabricated by Homer's elaborators. Dante's Ulysses braves the open sea not to placate the anger of a powerful god, nor the whim of an ingenious poet, but in the name of " virtute e canoscenza ", and he does so of his own free will, as Castelvetro acutely points out: « Or questa è cosa nuova, che Ulisse andasse per lo mondo errando di volontà, e non di necessità, essendo sospinto da fortuna; e contrasta con tutti gli scrittori, che parlano di lui »[35]. Dante is the first to depict Ulysses as a willing rather than a forced wanderer.

Ulysses's epic account of his " folle volo " unfolds in three distinct movements. It rises, crests, and falls like the motion of the waves that are his ultimate undoing. The first movement depicts a man loosening himself from the wheel of time and breaking out of the world of myth. Dante's hero abruptly and unceremoniously abandons all the values cherised by Homer's:

[34] On this point see Stanford, *op cit.*, especially pp. 81-89, and Félix Buffière, *Les mythes d'Homère et la pensée grecque* (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1956), pp. 365-391.

[35] *Sposizione di Ludovico Castelvetro a XXX canti dell'*Inferno *dantesco*, ora per la prima volta in luce da Giovanni Franciosi (Modena: Coi Tipi Della Società Tipografica, 1886), p. 346.

né dolcezza di figlio, né la pieta
del vecchio padre, né 'l debito amore
lo qual dovea Penelopè far lieta,

vincer potero dentro a me l'ardore
ch'i' ebbi a divenir del mondo esperto
e de li vizi umani e del valore.
(vv. 94-99)

The man who suffers great hardships in order to return home is suddenly thrust forward, motivated by a burning desire to know all things. The contours of a familiar coastline, north and south, and the islands that bask in the waters of the western Mediterranean recede irrevocably into the past (vv. 103-105). Ulysses and his crew are soon at the limits of the known world, beyond which it is forbidden to go, « dov' Ercule segnò li suoi riguardi / acciò che l'uom più oltre non si metta » (vv. 108-109) [36]. The process of historicization and Christianization has begun.

In Homer's world the gods exert absolute control over the fate of mortals, thereby rendering responsible moral action impossible. However, they have no grand plan for mankind, nor are their actions motivated by any purpose beyond the immediate and egoistic. The Olympians are created in the image of man, and behave like men. For this reason, the vertical plane is absorbed into the horizontal, and loses its depth, seriousness, and mystery. In Dante's world, by contrast, there is one omnipotent God. He emerges from a mysterious background and acts in history, imposes His will on history, yet does not destroy man's free will. Whether a man is saved or damned, drifts in Limbo or suffers in the eigth *bolgia* of the Malebolge, is determined by his own actions on earth, in other words, by his response to God's plan, to history itself. The allegorical subject of the work as Dante himself states in the *Letter to Cangrande,* is indeed « man, as according to his merits or demerits in the exercise of free will, he is deserving to reward or punishment by justice » (*Epistle* XIII, 11) [37]. God rarely inter-

[36] Cf. Brunetto Latini, *Tesoretto,* vv. 1043-1056, and Dante's *Questio de Aqua et Terra,* 54.

[37] « ...totius operis allegorice sumpti subiectum est homo prout merendo et demerendo per arbitrii libertatem est iustitie premiandi et puniendi obnoxius... ».

venes in history directly, but His signs are everywhere. One such sign is the Pillars of Hercules, and its message is clear — one does not go beyond the limits set by Hercules. What this sign meant at the time of the Trojan War, if anything, is irrelevant. What is important is the meaning Dante imparts to it in the episode. To Dante, the Pillars of Hercules embody a directive from God [38].

Certainly the Homeric Ulysses, the unwilling traveller whose ship is dashed about the Mediterranean by an unsympathetic god, would never have dreamed of adventuring into the unknown [39]. Dante's Ulysses is no longer Homer's battered and homesick hero, constantly gazing over his shoulder towards the past. Dante replaces the ideal of the return with that of the quest [40] but in his Christian universe there are limits, and these limits are defined by divine laws and circumscribed by the course of universal history. A tension, therefore, is established between the vertical plane, God's explicit sign, which imposes horizontal limits, and man's push to go beyond the limits. Ulysses defies the sacred decree, persuades his aging and weary crew to do likewise in one last outburst of eloquence (vv. 112-120), and ventures into the world " sanza gente ". Once Ulysses and his companions have breached the divinely imposed limits, catastrophe is inevitable, for man's aspirations, no matter how noble they are or appear to be, are doomed to failure if they are opposed to the will of God. After five months at sea they finally spot land, but their glee soon becomes sorrow:

[38] For a more detailed discussion of the significance of the Pillars of Hercules for Dante and the medieval Christian, see Emilio Mariano, " Il Canto XXVI dell'*Inferno* ", in *Lectura Dantis Scaligera* (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1967), pp. 950-953.

[39] On primitive and mythic man's fear of the unknown, see Eliade, *op. cit.*, pp. 9-10.

[40] Ulysses, like the knights of medieval romance, undertakes a quest and is lost, « perduto »: « dove, per lui, perduto a morir gissi » (v. 84). For the technical meaning of « perduto » in this context, see Pio Rajna, *Dante e i romanzi della Tavola Rotonda,* « Nuova Antologia », vol. CCVI (della Raccolta CCXC), sesta serie (maggio-giugno 1920), p. 224. Although Dante opens the circle and writes a new ending to the Ulysses story, he does not invent a new structure, either in the general outline or in the detail of the episode. D'Arco Silvio Avalle, *L'ultimo viaggio di Ulisse,* « Studi Danteschi », XLIII, 1966, pp. 33-67, tackling the episode from a structuralist point of view, has recently demonstated how Dante's representation of Ulysses' last journey conforms to a structural pattern typical of other stories with a similar theme.

« Noi ci allegrammo, e tosto tornò in pianto » (v. 136). Caught in a whirlwind that issues from the dark, mysterious and inhospitable mountain, their frail ship sinks.

It is difficult not to see in Ulysses' " mad flight ", a conscious act of rebellion against a divine law, and, more specifically, a re-enactment of the Fall [41]. Like Adam's, Ulysses' sin is an overstepping of the bounds, a " trapassar del segno ":

> Or, figliuol mio, non il gustar del legno
> fu per sé la cagion di tanto essilio,
> ma solamente il trapassar del segno.
> (*Par.* XXVI, 115-117)

The first tragic act of disobedience deprived man of the innocence and bliss that he had enjoyed briefly in the Garden of Eden, and turned him into an exile. He became prey to the ravages of time. The gates of Eden were locked and two angels with flaming swords sent to guard them until Christ, the second Adam, should redeem man. The forbidden garden replaced the forbidden fruit. Ulysses unknowingly but instinctively heads towards Eden, drawn there by the irresistible call of the Sirens whom Dante takes pains in the poem to associate with Eve. To complement the Adam-Christ typology, Dante develops, particularly in the *Purgatorio*, the link between Eve and Mary. Because it was a woman who caused the Fall, another woman would bring salvation to the world [42]. Dante

[41] For this interpretazion, see, for exemple, Luigi Pietrobono's commentary on the canto in his edition of the *Divine Comedy* (Torino: S.E.I., 1923); Luigi Valli's two studies on the episode, " Ulisse e la tragedia intellettuale di Dante ", and " Il Canto XXVI dell'*Inferno* ", both reprinted in *La struttura morale dell'universo dantesco* (Roma: Ausonia, 1935), pp. 26-40 and pp. 374-387; and Bruno Nardi, *op. cit.* See also Phillip W. Damon's novel treatment of the subject, " Dante's Ulysses and the Mythic Tradition ", in *Medieval Secular Literature: Four Essays* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1965), pp. 25-45.

[42] The origin of this belief has its roots deep in Genesis (III, 14-15). The idea is succintly but beautifully expressed by Dante in the following *terzina*:

> La piaga che Maria richiuse e unse,
> quella ch'è tanto bella da' suoi piedi
> è colei che l'aperse e che la punse.
> (*Par.* XXXII, 4-6)

underscores the contrast even linguistically by designating an Eve-figure as *femmina* and a madonna-figure as *donna*. The sweet song of the " femmina balba ", turned Siren, lures Ulysses to shipwreck:

> "Io son", cantava, "io son dolce serena,
> che ' marianari in mezzo mar dismago;
> tanto son di piacere a sentir piena!
>
> Io volsi Ulisse del suo cammin vago
> al canto mio; e qual meco s'ausa,
> rado sen parte; sì tutto l'appago!".
> (*Purg.* XIX, 19-24)

The Sirens as Dante learned from Cicero, did not offer gratification of the senses so much as wisdom: « It is knowledge that the Sirens offer, and it was no marvel if a lover of wisdom held this dearer than his home » [43]. Ulysses, in some Christian authors, was considered a Christ-figure precisely because he resisted the temptation of the Sirens [44]. Dante either did not know or purposely disregarded this allegory; his Ulysses falls prey to the enchantment of the Sirens and is a type not of the Second Adam but of the First.

Ulysses seeks knowledge, forbidden knowledge symbolized in the poem by the mysterious mountain on top of which is a garden. It is the mountain of Eden from which man had been exiled. Fallen man was to regain that mountain and Eden itself only with the Redemption, when it was transformed into Christian

[43] *De finibus bonorum et malorum*, V. 49: « scientiam pollicentur, quam non erat mirum sapientiae cupido patria esse cariorem », contained in vol. XVII of the twenty-eight volume Cicero in the Loeb classical series, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971). Cf. Horace, *Epistles* I, 2, 17-31 in *Satires, Epistles, Ars Poetica*, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961). On the importance of these two passages for Dante's understanding of the Sirens and the nature of Ulysses' as well as the pre-conversion of Dante's error, see especially Edward Moore, *op. cit.*, pp. 264-266 and Joseph Anthony Mazzeo, « The ' Sirens ' of *Purgatorio* XXXI, 4 », in *Medieval Cultural Tradition in Dante's Comedy* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1960), pp. 205-212, and also C. Marchesi, *Orazio e l'Ulisse dantesco*, " Quaderni ACI ", 7 (Torino: Ediz. Assoc. Cultur. Ital., 1952), pp. 31-45.

[44] On Ulysses as a Christ-figure, see Hugo Rahner, *op. cit.*

Purgatory [45]. But man would not regain all that he had lost [46]. Christian man would not return to the Earthly Paradise in he flesh, but only after death, as a soul. Although Mount Purgatory occupies space in Dante's cosmography, and a symbolic space at that, at the antipodes of Jerusalem, it no longer exists in time, at least not if we use a human frame of reference. It occupies a time dimension penetrable only after the first Easter and at death. Any attempt to reach its shores before the Advent of Christ or before death will fail unless a special concession is made by God, as in Dante's case:

> Venimmo poi in sul lito diserto,
> che mai non vide navicar sue acque
> omo, che di tornar sia poscia esperto.
> (*Purg.* I, 130-132)

Ulysses, for the above tercet is an obvious allusion to his foolish undertaking, came closest to fulfilling this impossible task. But it is not for Ulysses to recover " la nova terra " (v. 137). Here, as elsewhere, Dante plays on the semantic polyvalence of the adjective " nuovo [47] ". The land that Ulysses and his crew sight is " new " and " strange " for it is the " original land " where prelapsarian man lived in innocence and bliss.

The semantic weight of Ulysses' words comes crashing down on his ship, and this added burden is not slow in sinking it [48].

[45] Technically, the mountain that Ulysses and his crew spot looming in the distance before their ship is swallowed by the gaping sea is not Mount Purgatory but the mountain of Eden. For the implication of this subtle distinction, see Bruno Nardi, *op. cit.*, pp. 159-160.

[46] On the concept of the *felix culpa* and on what man did and did not regain with the coming of Christ, see Charles S. Singleton, " Natural Justice ", in *Dante Studies 2: Journey to Beatrice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), pp. 222-253.

[47] For the suggestiveness of the adjective and its association with the Earthly Paradise in the structure of the *Commedia,* see Giamatti, *op. cit.*

[48] Ulysses' vocabulary is negatively charged. The ironic weight of the lexicon of Ulysses' speech is determined to a large extent by its use elsewhere in the poem. The intricate network of verbal echoes and resonances in the *Commedia* builds the context necessary to interpret properly and objectively the meaning of Ulysses' words. On the stylistic pilgrimage, for example, of the word *follia,*

Ulysses' account of his last voyage is shot through with irony which intensifies when he and his companions pass beyond the limits of the known world. Take, for example, the following *terzina*:

> e volta nostra poppa nel mattino,
> de' remi facemmo ali al folle volo,
> sempre acquistando dal lato mancino.
> (vv. 124-126)

On the surface, these verses seem to be nothing more than a series of elegant, " Ulyssean " metaphors to indicate the direction of motion and mode of population of the ship, but beneath the veil of poetry lies another meaning, which is a much more accurate guide to the innermost significance of the episode [49]. By turning away from the sunrise. Ulysses and his companions not only abandon the known world, but they also, metaphorically at any rate, leave the sun behind. And poetically their daring undertaking (" alto passo ") is, in fact, depicted as a nocturnal journey:

> Cinque volte racceso e tante casso
> lo lume era di sotto da la luna,
> poi che 'ntrati eravam ne l'alto passo,
>
> quando n'apparve una montagna, bruna
> per la distanza, a parvemi alta tanto
> quanto veduta non avëa alcuna.
> (vv. 130-135)

The voyage unfolds not under the radiant light of the sun, symbol of divine grace, but rather beneath the shadow of the moon, the symbol of human reason unilluminated by grace. Furthermore, once beyond the Pillars of Hercules, they steer the craft south and hug

its derivation in the *Divine Comedy*, and its association with pride, see Umberto Bosco, *La ' follia ' di Dante*, « Lettere Italiane », X, 1958, pp. 417-430, and Dante Della Terza, *I Canti del disordinato amore. Osservazioni sulla struttura e lo stile del Purgatorio*, « Belfagor », XXI, 1966, pp. 176-77.

[49] This important *terzina*, perhaps more than others in the episode, has suffered from exegesis over the centuries. My interpretation is in many respects similar to the eminently sensible one offered by Valli, " Ulisse e la tragedia intellettuale di Dante ", pp. 35-36.

the coast of Africa, thus moving to the left, the way of sin and perdition, the direction in which Dante and Virgil move as they descend into the pit of Hell.

The beautiful metaphor of the winged cars (« dei remi facemmo ali »), which Dante borrowed from Virgil (*Aeneid* VI, 18-19) and the neoplatonic tradition, where it was used to signify the flight of the soul, through the power of the intellect, back to its heavenly homeland, is turned against Ulysses [50]. Ulysses' flight is " folle "; it is not motivated by the desire to acquire virtue and true wisdom but by philosophical presumption. Hence it ends not in the recovery of paradise but in shipwreck and damnation. The winged oars of Ulysses' ship are in marked contrast to the wings of the celestial helmsman that propel the swift and light vessel carrying repentant souls to the shores of Purgatory:

> Vedi che sdegna li argomenti umani,
> sì che remo non vuol, né altro velo
> che l'ali sue, tra liti sì lontani.
>
> Vedi come l'ha dritte verso 'l cielo,
> trattando l'aere con l'etterne penne,
> che non si mutan come mortal pelo".
> (*Purg.* II, 31-36)

These souls glide across the ocean on the oarless, winged celestial bark to the island of Purgatory, where they will prepare themselves to ascend to the true homeland. In comparison to the image of this graceful, celestial vessel, the metaphor of the winged oars of Ulysses' ship loses its lightness and becomes leaden. The purgatorial neophytes sing, appropriately, Psalm CXIII, « In exitu Isräel de Aegypto » (*Purg.* II, 46) in order to celebrate their release from the bondage of this life and their return to the freedom and innocence of man's original state. It is not Ulysses' fate, as a pagan

[50] On the origins of the metaphor and its interpretation in the neoplatonic tradition, see Pierre Courcelle, *Quelques symboles funéraires du Néo-Platonisme latin - Le vol de Dédale - Ulysse et les Sirènes*, « Revue des Études Anciennes », XLVI, 1, 1944, pp. 65-93. On Dante's adaptation of the metaphor in the Ulysses episode, see John Freccero, *Dante's Prologue Scene*, « Dante Studies », LXXXIV, 1966 , pp. 1-25, especially the second part, " The Wings of Ulysses (*Inf.* XXVI, 125) ", pp. 12-19.

and a sinner, to regain that state. The ocean, « com'altrui piacque », closes around his ship, overburdened as it is by the folly and pride of its captain: « infin che 'l mar fu sovra noi richiuso » (v. 142). The verbal echo in *Purg.* I, 33 underlines the distance between Ulysses and the purgatorial souls as well as that between Ulysses and Dante. Virgil, after cleasing Dante's face of the soot and tears of Hell with the morning dew, girds him « com'altrui piacque » with the pliant reed as a sign of humility (*Purg.* I, 121-136). Because of his submission to the will of God, Dante, after his descent into the depths of Hell, finally gains the shores of Purgatory, where he is to begin his ascent to Heaven. Ulysses, on the other hand, remains shackled by pride and hence never reaches the shores of the mountain of Eden (*Purg.* I, 130-132). Dante dies in baptism to be reborn spiritually; Ulysses, in an obvious parody of baptism, is swallowed by the gaping sea and sinks, never to rise again.

Ulysses' assault on the mountain takes place during that unredeemed period of time between the Fall and the Incarnation, but it is not for that reason alone that it is destined to fail. Ulysses lacks grace, it is true. But there is more. Ulysses' tragedy is not one of ignorance or non-action like that of the virtuous pagans in Limbo. « Non per far, ma per non fare ho perduto / a veder l'alto Sol » (*Purg.* VII, 25-26), Virgil explains to Sordello in Antepurgatory. Ulysses' is a tragedy of action, of the will. The gulf of sin of unchecked pride, separates Limbo from the Malebolge. Ulysses lost Limbo and the limited bliss of the " nobile castello ", the Christian counterpart of the Elysian Fields, because, unlike the virtuous pagans, he did not stop at the *quia* (*Purg.* III, 34-45) [51]. But Ulysses is more than a mere *exemplum* of the unvirtuous pagan; he is the universal figure of the tragic hero. The tragedy of the virtuous pagan, for it is indeed a tragedy to remain unfulfilled spiritually [52] and know it [53], resembles more a Greek tragedy

[51] On this point, see Bruno Nardi, *op. cit.*, pp. 161-162.

[52] Although the souls of Limbo suffer no physical torment because they are not guilty of a personal sin, their sin (their only shortcoming is that they were not cleansed of the stain of original sin), their punishment remains, as St. Thomas remarks, immense, for its results in the unfulfilment of man's ultimate goal, which is supernatural, not natural, bliss. On St. Thomas's views on the

of necessity than a Christian tragedy of possibility [54]. Although the virtuous pagans are not guilty of any personal sins and do possess great merit, they are fated to dwell eternally in Limbo within the gates of Hell. The responsibility for Ulysses' shipwreck, on the other hand, rests squarely on his shoulders; he could not resist the lure of the Sirens' melodious and hypnotic chant, promising knowledge.

Dante too had been led astray by the sweet song of the Sirens. After Beatrice's death he had abandoned the woman who inspired him to a life of virtue, and instead had succumbed to the Sirens:

> Tuttavia, perché mo vergogna porte
> del tuo terrore, e perché altra volta,
> udendo le serene, sie più forte,
>
> pon giù il seme del piangere e ascolta:
> sì udirai come in contraria parte
> mover dovieti mia carne sepolta.
> (*Purg.* XXXI, 43-48)

nature of Limbo, see A. Gaudel, " Limbes ", *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*, IX-1 (1926), cols. 760-772. Cols. 769-770 are especially pertinent to our discussion. On the relationship between Aquinas' and Dante's conception of Limbo, Tito P. Bottagisio's book, *Il limbo dantesco: Studi filosofici e letterari* (Padova: Tipografia e Libreria Editrice Antoniana, 1898) still remains the most comprehensive study on the subject.

[53] Perhaps Boccaccio in his allegorical exposition of the canto expresses this idea best, *Esposizioni Sopra La Comedia di Dante*, a cura di Giorgio Padoan (Milano: Mondadori, 1965), p. 266: « Né creda alcuno questa pena essere di piccola graveza o poco cocente, cioè il dolersi coì sospiri, senza speranza di alcuno futuro o disiderato riposo; anzi, se ben riguarderemo, è gravissima, e, se se gli spiriti fossero mortali, essi dimosterrebbero intolerabile, sì come i mortali hanno spesse volte mostrato... ».

[54] For this formulation of the fundamental difference between a Greek and a Christian tragedy, see W. H. Auden, *The Christian Tragic Hero*, « The New York Times Books Review », December 16, 1945, p. 1, sections of which are reprinted in William K. Wimsatt, Jr. and Cleanth Brooks, *Literary Criticism: A Short History* (New York: Vintage Books, 1957), pp. 55-56: « Greek tragedy is the tragedy of necessity: i.e., the feeling aroused in the spectator is 'What a pity it had to be this way'; Christian tragedy is the tragedy of possibility, 'What a pity it was this way when it might have been otherwise' » (p. 55).

Instead of soaring on the wings of his intellect, for Dante had been favoured by divine grace above other men in this respect (*Purg.* XXX, 109-117; *Inf.* XXVI, 19-24), he had allowed the false and fleeting pleasures of this world to weigh him down:

> Non ti dovea gravar le penne in giuso,
> ad aspettar più colpo, o pargoletta
> o altra novità con sì breve uso.
> (*Purg.* XXXI,58-60)

But Dante's gravest error, and the one Beatrice refers to in verse 44, is not the poet's love for some slip of a girl, a *pargoletta*, but his excessive and vain desire for knowledge of the things of this world. Dante was seduced not so much by the Sirens offering carnal pleasure, but by those promising knowledge. Ultimately, Dante's error is philosophical presumption, the error of the *Convivio*, in which Dante caresses the *donna gentile* or Lady Philosophy without acknowledging her role as handmaiden to Theology [55]. Dante's betrayal of Theology and flirtation with Philosophy almost led him to perdition. He soon found himself in the *selva oscura* and metaphorically he barely escaped drowing in the river of death, « che non lasciò già mai persona viva » (*Inf.* I, 27). But it was precisely during that terrifying and eventful night in the *selva oscura* that he finally realized his folly. Dante had come to the crossroads; he had reached his Pillars of Hercules. Either he could continue on the path he was following and die spiritually, or he could, after the *hiatus* of the *Convivio*, return, to the right but more arduous path, to the *vita nuova*, signalled by the sun-soaked mountain atop which Beatrice awaited. Dante chose to break with his immediate past, a past filled with wrong decisions, and to return to the way of virtue.

The weight of his past, the habit of error, held him down at first. In his eagerness he stormed the mountain and attempted to scale its radiant heights, relying only on his own frail powers. It

[55] For the idea that Dante's error is that of the *Convivio* and that it is similar to Ulysses' unqualified pursuit of truth by intelligence alone, see among others, Luigi Pietrobono, " Il rifacimento della *Vita Nuova* e le due fasi del pensiero dantesco ", in *Saggi Danteschi*, nuova edizione (Torino: Società Editrice Internazionale, 1954), pp. 25-98; Luigi Valli, " Ulisse e la tragedia intellettuale di Dante "; Joseph Anthony Mazzeo, *op. cit.*; and David Thompson, *op. cit.*, especially pp. 47-54.

was a mad undertaking; he was soon hurled back into the abyss by the she-wolf. But Dante had prepared himself for grace by making the initial decision to abandon the dark forest of error, and grace was not slow in coming. Urged on by the Virgin and Saint Lucy, Beatrice descended into Hell and temporarily " harrowed " Virgil from Limbo so that he might lead Dante out of the *selva oscura* through the Inferno and the Purgatorio and finally back to her. Virgil explained to Dante that the " corto andar " (*Inf.* II, 120) was forbidden him and that in order to return to Beatrice he had to take another, longer journey: « A te convien tenere altro viaggio » (*Inf.* I, 91). Dante could not return to the *vita nuova* by abolishing the past in an instant. Before he could surge forward to the true life which now exists in the future (*nuova* = new) not the past (*nuova* = original), he had to confront, relive and purge himself of the stained past, both his and mankind's. Dante had to return and reaffirm his faith in the absolute, paradigmatic moment of mankind, the moment when history swerved to the right, tragedy became comedy or potential comedy, darkness light, ignorance knowledge, the Word Flesh. Without absolute faith in this event, there is no hope for the future. This moment in Dante's autobiography is identified with Beatrice, and it is Beatrice (as a figure of Christ in His first coming) who descends into Hell and " harrows " her former lover from the Hell of despair that exists in his heart [56]. In order to turn despair into hope, Dante must reject his sinful past and reaffirm his absolute faith in the event, Christ - Beatrice [57]. Dante, through a conscious act of the will, breaks with the past, and in so doing assures his safe return to man's true homeland, to the port of the Heavenly Jerusalem.

[56] The Anonymous Florentine in *Commento alla Divina Commedia d'anonimo fiorentino del secolo XIV*, ora per la prima volta stampato a cura di Pietro Fanfani, vol. I (Bologna: Presso Gaetano Romagnoli, 1866-1874), p. 8, acutely observes that poets write about three different " Hells " in their works: « I poeti s'accordano essere tre inferni: et chiamono l'uno superiore ,il secondo mezzano, il terzo inferno, volendo che 'l superiore sia nella vita presente piena di pene, d'angoscie et di peccati ». This latter Hell, that is, « l'inferno superiore », is completely metaphoric and exists « ne' cuori de' mortali ».

[57] On Beatrice as a Christ-figure in the *Divine Comedy*, see Charles S. Singleton, " Advent of Beatrice ", in *Dante Studies 2: Journey to Beatrice*, pp. 72-85; and Mark Musa, *Advent at the Gates*, « Papers of the Midwest Modern Language Association », I, 1969, pp. 85-93.

Ulysses, on the other hand, jealously clings to error. Even in his old age, when man should occupy himself with his spiritual well-being, Ulysses can not free himself of his tragic flaw, a vain and unnatural desire for *sapientia mundi* [58], sustained by an overweening pride. In Book IV, xxviii of the *Convivio*, Dante states that during *senio*, the fourth and last age of man's life, the noble soul should prepare itself to return to God, « sì come a quello porto onde ella si partio quando venne ad intrare nel mare di questa vita ». Dante cites Guido da Montefeltro as an example of a man who in the twilight of his life abandoned the stormy sea of his past life and sought the calmer waters which lead to God. However, when he meets Guido da Montefeltro in the eighth circle of Hell, Dante discovers that he was wrong. Guido's conversion was insincere; he clung to his past. Although Ulysses had managed to detach himself from the recurrent cycle of myth and the materialistic ideal of home, he, like his Christian counterpart and companion in suffering, failed to break away from his past in the more profound Christian sense. The Greek hero's three acts of fraud, enumerated by Virgil early in the canto (vv. 55-63), characterize and define his past. They constitute the background from which he emerges and against which he must be judged, for he refuses to detach himself from this context. His last act represents a continuation on a grander scale of the misuse of his intellect and his rebellious defiance of the Deity. As a result, the sea opens beneath him, Minos' tail curls eight times, and he is forever engulfed within one of the thieving flames of the eighth *bolgia*. Ulysses' surge forward results not in the opening up of the

[58] On the notion that Ulysses' tragic flaw is a vain desire for *sapientia mundi*, see Padoan, *op cit.*, who skilfully develops an idea first advanced, rather timidly, by Pietro di Dante, *op. cit.*, p. 237, who in order to substantiate his argument that Ulysses' quest is foolish and the knowledge he seeks useless, quotes Seneca, *Epistle* LXXXVIII, 7 (see note 33) and a passage from Saint Augustine: « Et quod dicit, quod sequantur eum post solem sine gente, scilicet ad partem illam, quae sub nobis set, ubi nulla est gens. Unde Augustinus in XVI° de Civitate Dei dicit: nimis absurdum est ut dicatur aliquos homines ex hac in illam partem, Oceani immensitate trajecta, navigare ac pervenire potuisse; ut etiam illic ex uno homine primo gens institueretur humanum ». Dante himself in the *Convivio* (IV, xii, 18-19) distinguishes between *la vera sapienza* and *la vana sapienza* using in essence the metaphor of the cross-roads of life. Cf. Padoan, p. 42 and pp. 52-53.

possibilities of life which he sought but in the closing of any possibility of future development. Ulysses' potential remains unrealized. The bud does not blossom into the rose (*Inf.* II, 127-130); nor does the worm become the butterfly (*Purg.* X, 124-126). The temporal does not yield to the eternal, anagogical fulfilment, freedom in God; the unfulfilled self and the temporal moment, the moment of decision, are fossilized in a static demonic dimension of time.

The pagan myth is swallowed up by the Christian mystery and the sheer weight of conviction erodes away any residue of myth. All that Ulysses retains from his pagan origin is the form, but in its context it too gains weight, and the burden of history and responsibility. Ulysses' polished and articulate speech is pregnant with irony. The abyss that separates the smallness of man from the greatness and inscrutability of God is immense, and it is translated in the irony of the words that flow from Ulysses' charming tongue. Ulysses' is a " compagna picciola " and an " orazion picciola ", and all the future that remains for his and his crew is a " picciola vigilia ". Dante underscores the insignificance and the pettiness of man's aspirations in *Paradiso* XXVII. Before leaving the constellation of Gemini and ascending to the Primum Mobile, Beatrice invites Dante to glance back at the earth. At this point, as Dante loaks down onto the tiny earth from his lofty stellar perch, the image of Ulysses' frail ship flashes across the pages of the poem for the last time:

> ...io vedea di là da Gade il varco
> folle d'Ulisse, e di qua presso il lito
> nel qual si fece Europa dolce carco.
> (*Par.* XXVII, 82-84)

Dante's reference to Ulysses' " folle volo " at this point in the poem, coming as it does soon after Adam's definition of the fall as a « trapassar del segno » (*Par.* XXVI, 115-117), casts Ulysses' journey definitively within the context of the Fall [59]. Shortly Dante, by glancing into the eyes of his lady, will leave the Sphere of the

[59] Cf. Dorothy L. Sayers, *The Divine Comedy*, vol. III: *Paradise*, trans. Dorothy L. Sayers and Barbara Renolds (Baltimore: Penguin, 1966), p. 299.

Fixed Stars and ascend to the Primum Mobile in which time itself has its roots and is measured. Beyond the ninth sphere there is no space or time, but only eternity, the Empyrean, which exists in the Mind of God. Dante, therefore, will soon leave time and penetrate eternity, « ... il punto / a cui tutti li tempi son presenti » (*Par.* XVII, 17-18). Ulysses remains timebound.

Dante distinguishes his own " comedy " from Ulysses' " tragedy " even in a purely physical fashion. Dante's vantage point as he looks down on the world is a position directly over the Pillars of Hercules [60]. Once Dante had ventured beyond these limits and was almost lost. In the Middle Ages, Christ was often seen as a microcosm, and as such, His Body, metaphorically the Church, was superimposed on a version of the T and O map, which was itself not just a geographical but also a spiritual guide to the world [61]. His Body stretched from east to west across the known world, which was divided symbolically into the three continents. His Head was placed in Eden in the east, His Heart was at the very centre of the world in Jerusalem, and His Feet were located

[60] On the ambiguity of the astronomical indications given by Dante in verses 79-87 of *Par.* XXVII, and hence the uncertainty of the wayfarer's exact position as he glances down at the earth (i.e., whether he is exactly over the Pillars of Hercules as vv. 80-81 would indicate, or a position about 40° west of Jerusalem), see Ideale Capasso, *L'astronomia nella « Divina Commedia »* (Pisa: Domus Galilaeana, 1967), pp. 201-203.

[61] On the concept of Christ as microcosm in the Middle Ages, see Cyrill Korvin Krasinski, *Microcosmo e macrocosmo nella storia delle religioni*, traduzione dal tedesco di Aldo Audisio (Milano: Rusconi Editore, 1973), pp. 271-313. On the T and O map and its spiritual implications, see John Kirtland Wright, *The Geographical Lore of the Time of the Crusades: A Study in the History of Medieval Science and Tradition in Western Europe* (1925; rpt. New York: Dover Publications, 1965), pp. 121-124, pp. 147-150, pp. 247-254, and pp. 259-264, as well as Chapter IV of Samuel Y. Edgerton, Jr.'s forthcoming book, *The Renaissance Rediscovery of Linear Perspective: 1425-1435* (New York: Basic Books, Inc.). The immense Ebstorf map (dated 1284) depicts the figure of Christ superimposed on a T and O map. For a facsimile in colour of this map, see Konrad Miller, *Mappaemundi, die ältesten Weltkarten*, vol. V (Stuttgart, 1895-1898). I am not, of course, suggesting that Dante had seen this or similar maps. Besides his location of the Earthly Paradise is not in the east as represented in these maps, but at the antipodes of Jerusalem. What is important, however, is that in Dante's time the idea of geographical limits was associated with spiritual limits and with the idea of Christ as microcosm.

at the Pillars of Hercules. In order to be saved one had to stay within the microcosm, within the Body of Christ. Dante had transgressed the boundary but had returned and modelled his life on Christ's; Ulysses, of course, did not have the example of Christ on which to pattern his life, but God's laws and signs were clear and accessible to him. Ulysses, however, chose to deny God's imperative and to venture into the unknown in pursuit of knowledge; he thus left the known world and, for the medieval Christian, the Body of Christ to come. His journey was doomed.

Ulysses' tragic voyage mirrors in reverse Dante's own journey, and is perhaps the best commentary on it. But Dante's Ulysses is more than a negative typology who from the static dimension of the poem, that of " the state of souls after death ", sheds light on the meaning of the poem's controlling metaphor, Dante's journey through the other world. Dante's Ulysses possesses a life and a dignity of his own, and, unlike the majority of the infernal characters, is rather appealing. In Dante's afterlife, personality is never distorted or annihilated but rather preserved in its quintessential form [62]. The Ulysses that confronts Dante and the reader in Hell retains his stature as epic hero and dignity as a man, and articulate words continue to pour from his tongue. This figural representation of Ulysses has made him one of the most complex, ambiguous and elusive characters of the *Commedia* and certainly one of its most controversial figures. His ambiguous and Janus-like profile has fascinated and baffled readers for centuries. Attempts to resolve the apparent contradiction in Dante's attitude towards Ulysses have taken many shapes [63]. Croce, for example, postulates a tension between the theologian who condemns Ulysses to the eighth *bolgia* and the poet who poetically caresses his

[62] On the figural realism of Dante's *Commedia*, see, of course, Erich Auerbach, " Figura ", in *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature: Six Essays*, and *Dante: Poet of the Secular World*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969).

[63] For a brief survey of the rich literature on Dante's Ulysses and the critical stance that the major commentators have assumed towards him, see the opening pages of Adriano Bozzoli's article, *Ulisse e Dante*, « Convivium », XXXIV, 1966, pp. 345-353. Also useful in this respect is Anna Dolfi's recent study, *Il Canto di Ulisse: occasione per un discorso di esegesi dantesca*, « Forum Italicum », VII, 4-VIII, 1, 1973-1974, pp. 22-45.

creation [64]. More recent interpreters distinguish between the still fallible judgment of Dante the wayfarer and the unerring judgment of the poet who has perceived the ultimate truth [65]. Others isolate two moments in the structure of the episode and two Ulysses [66]. The first moment is poetically functional but static; it presents Ulysses, the fraudulent advisor, and defines *contrapasso* (vv. 19-84). The second moment, on the other hand, shatters the barriers of *contrapasso* and opens into the distant horizon of the Atlantic (vv. 85-142). The image of the fraudulent advisor gives way to that of the ardent seeker of virtue and knowledge. For this latter Ulysses Dante has absolute admiration: « ... non vi è nel racconto di Ulisse ... nulla che lasci supporre nel poeta un sentimento verso il suo eroe, che non sia di ammirazione » [67]. Ulysses's journey failed simply because: « ... la grazia è mancata ad Ulisse, gli è mancata la fede, senza la quale il desiderio di conoscere non può avere il suo compimento ultimo » [68]. Needless to say, interpreters who share this last point of view see Ulysses not as a negative typology whom Dante ultimately rejects, whom Dante in fact must reject in order to undertake his own, very different journey, but as a positive typology and pagan precursor of Dante [69].

However, Ulysses' peculiar Janus-like quality can be explained neither by postulating an external dichotomy between the pilgrim

[64] In *La poesia di Dante* (Bari: Laterza, 1966), pp. 95-96.

[65] See, for example, Rocco Montano, *op. cit.*

[66] The undisputed champion of this thesis, by virtue of his two long studies on the episode, " Il peccato di Ulisse ", and " Il Canto XXVI dell'*Inferno* " is Mario Fubini. Both of these works have recently been reprinted in *Il peccato di Ulisse e altri scritti danteschi* (Milano-Napoli: Ricciardi, 1966), pp. 1-36 and pp. 37-76. Two important recent studies that have elaborated this thesis in an original way are Fiorenzo Forti, *Ulisse*, « Cultura e Scuola », IV, 1965, pp. 499-517, and Parodi, *op. cit.*

[67] Fubini, " Il peccato di Ulisse ", p. 9.

[68] *Ibid.*, p. 19.

[69] In fact a usual corollary to this interpretation is that the Ulysses episode is a more powerful and dramatic realization of the sentiment Dante expresses, but does not develop in Limbo, that is, his admiration for the achievements of pagan civilization, and his bewilderment and sorrow at the thought that the virtuous pagans have to be excluded from the Kingdom of God. See, for example, Fubini, "Il peccato di Ulisse", pp. 21-22, and "Il Canto XXVI dell'*Inferno*", pp. 58-59, and Sapegno, *op. cit.*, pp. 40-41 and. pp. 284-285.

and the narrator nor by hypothesizing a schism in the continuity of the episode, but only by appealing to the laws of tragedy [70]. Ulysses is a man who has violated God's imperative and overstepped the bound, but he is also a man who in the realm of eternity recognizes his folly and suffers for it. Dante seems to go out of his way to emphasize Ulysses' anguish by making Virgil insist on the idea of suffering as he enumerates Ulysses' sins (vv. 55-63). The physical pain inflicted by the *contrapasso* can not equal the pain that a man like Ulysses experiences when he realizes that his last voyage in pursuit of « virtute e canoscenza » was a mad undertaking (« dei remi facemmo ali al folle volo »), and that he was justly punished (« com'altrui piacque »). Ulysses's real *contrapasso* is born of *anagnorisis*; eternity holds the moment of lucidity perpetually before Ulysses' eyes. For Dante, on the other hand, the moment of recognition comes in this world, but in order to purge himself completely of his past mistakes he must relive and re-experience them in the afterlife. In the Ulysses episode Dante is coming to terms with his own past, and certainly the most dangerous aspect of his past. Dante's dramatic confrontation with Ulysses is in effect also a confrontation with the Ulyssean side of his own personality which had led him astray in the past and could still bring him to ruin in the future. At this point in his journey the pilgrim is still vulnerable. Dante underscores his fear of a relapse into error early in the episode. As he is crossing the bridge that spans the eighth *bolgia*, curiosity gets the better of the wayfarer and he almost loses his balance and falls headlong into the pit:

> Io stava sovra 'l ponte a veder surto,
> sì che s'io non avessi un ronchion preso,
> caduto sarei giù sanz'esser urto.
> (vv. 43-45)

Dante identifies strongly with Ulysses. The Greek hero mirrors the preconversion Dante of the *Convivio*, whose unbridled desire for knowledge had plunged him into the abyss of the *selva oscura* [71].

[70] On the tragic qualities of Ulysses' fate, see especially Luigi Valli, " Ulisse e la tragedia intellettuale di Dante ", and Bruno Nardi, " La tragedia d'Ulisse ".

[71] On this point, see Luigi Pietrobono, " Il rifacimento della *Vita Nuova* e le due fasi del pensiero dantesco ", pp 74-75, and David Thompson, *op. cit.*

Dante recognizes in Ulysses' error his own and is terrified. He can now perceive how close he himself had come to damnation and how great the dangers of a relapse are. Dante's reaction to the souls of the eighth *bolgia* who abused the superiority of their intellect and to Ulysses in particular is both pity and fear:

> Allor mi dolsi, e ora mi ridoglio
> quando drizzo la mente a ciò ch'io vidi,
> e più lo 'ngegno affreno ch'i' non soglio,
>
> perché non corra che virtù nol guidi;
> sì che, se stella bona o miglior cosa
> m'ha dato 'l ben, ch'io stessi nol m'invidi.
> (vv. 19-24)

The episode provokes in Dante both a moral and poetic catharsis. As in the Francesca episode, Dante in this episode rejects not only the thing signified, that is, lust and worldly knowledge, but also the signifier, the language of profane love, the high epic style. The writing of the episode itself is a cathartic event. Just as the Francesca episode is Dante's romance and anti-romance at the same time, the Ulysses episode is both his epic and his anti-epic [72]. The Ulysses episode represents both the highest expression of the epic or " tragic " style in the *Commedia*, and its demise. The stylistic norm of Dante's *Commedia* is not the lofty, " tragic " style of the classical tradition but the intermediate style of the Christian tradition. In this respect the Ulysses episode, like the Francesca, subtly signals a shift in poetics. Dante's ideal is no longer the beautiful but deceptive Ulyssean word, but the humble and true word of Christ and the Scriptures.

For Dante words and events exist virtually on the same plane of reality [73]. Words become events. Paolo and Francesca's naive

[72] On how Dante turns romance into anti-romance in the Paolo and Francesca episode, see Renato Poggioli, *Tragedy or Romance? A Reading of the Paolo and Francesca Episode in Dante's* Inferno, « PMLA », LXXII, 1957, pp. 313-358. On the irony inherent in the Dantesque Ulysses' eloquence which ultimately makes of his epic an anti-epic, see Harvey D. Goldstein, *op. cit.*

[73] Within the context of Dante's poetics, the reader's or listener's response to the word is a historical and moral act and corresponds to a person's response to a historical event. From this perspective, whether a word is fiction or history.

reading of the romance of Lancelot du Lac turned fiction into experience and sealed their fate for eternity. Events become words. Dante, as scribe, faithfully records the events of his miraculous journey. Dante's word, the poem, not only signifies the event (the literal, historical level of allegory) but also looks back on the past (the typological level) and points forwards towards the future, or better still, the ever-present of the reader (the moral level). Hence the reading process is for Dante a historical and ethical act. Dante's confrontation with Ulysses and the reader's confrontation with the word which signifies the event exist on planes which, if not identical, are virtually the same. Dante's word obliterates the distance between word and event and turns the reading process into experience. The reader, like Dante, is at a cross-roads. He can either read affectively like Ulysses' crew (which falls prey to the eloquence of their captain's " orazion picciola ", vv. 112-120) [74] and enter Ulysses' ship, or he can read dialectically, in terms of the dialectics of catharsis, and enter Dante's ship [75]. From Dante's perspective, the choice before the word ultimately involves the fulfilment of being. The choice can bring either anagogical realization of the self or damnation. To enter Ulysses' ship means not only to misread the signs, ignore the context and disregard Dante's implicit caveats in the episode (vv. 19-24; 43-45) and his later critical references to Ulysses (*Purg.* I, 130-132; *Purg.* XIX, 19-24; *Par.* XXVII, 82-84), but also to misunderstand Dante's epistemo-

a lie or truth, matters little. What is important is the reader's response to the word. From the point of view of audience reception rather than author presentation, the moral level of the allegory is the most important in the *Commedia* It constitutes the door through which the reader enters the poem. Dante's journey there is potentially our journey here. But if we do not read the poem correctly (i.e. "morally"), our journey can easily become Ulysses'. On the historical, ever-present referent of the moral level in Dante's poem, see Charles S. Singleton, *Dante Studies 1: Commedia: Elements of Structure*, especially the first essay, " Allegory ", pp. 1-17.

[74] Some critics, among them Padoan, *op. cit.*, p. 57 and Stanford, *op. cit.*, p. 181, see in Ulysses' eloquence, as epitomized in the « orazion picciola », an ultimate manifestation of the fraudulent advisor.

[75] For an important theoretical statement on the various modes of identifying with the hero in literature, see Hans Robert Jauss, *Levels of Identification of Hero and Audience*, « New Literary History », V, 2, 1974, pp. 283-317.

logy. Ulysses possesses the gift of eloquence but his tongue is a thieving one which robs men of their reason [76], and the light that issues from its flame is neither that of reason nor that of grace. It is rather the light of Lucifer [77] which lures men to seek false knowledge. To enter Dante's ship, on the other hand, is to purge oneself of Ulysses' error, to break with the past, to prepare oneself for another journey leading not to shipwreck but to spiritual fulfilment. Both ships are outward bound, and this is the revolutionary aspect of Dante's concept of Ulysses. However, Ulysses' prideladen ship, unlike Dante's, remains timebound, locked in the static dimension of the poem, in the *Inferno* where the anagogical level is the same as the literal level, that is, the anagogical level is history. Dante's ship pierces time and enters eternity; il travels in a different dimension of the poem, the dynamic one, that of the God-willed journey that leads to true anagogical fulfilment.

For the Christian, Dante's version of Ulysses' final fate constitutes the definitive epilogue to Homer's *Odyssey*. It is not surprising to discover that, despite the relative brevity of the episode, of all the Ulysses that the western mind has created, the most influential, after Homer's is Dante's [78]. The impact of the Dantesque Ulysses on subsequent western literature results no doubt from Dante's unique conception of a centrifugal rather than a centripetal Ulysses, a vision more compatible with the *forma mentis* of modern, historical man. Ernst Bloch's elegant little essay, entitled appropriately enough, ' Odysseus Did Not Die in Ithaca ", perhaps articulates this idea most eloquently and forcefully [79]. It would be an exaggeration, however, to see prefigured in Ulysses, as Bloch and others do, the titans of western literature — a Faust

[76] The image of the tongue of flame which envelops Ulysses may indeed be a parody, as Terence P. Logan has suggested, of « the Holy Ghost [Who] descend upon the apostles and disciples in this form and gave them the gift of tongues and divinely inspired *true* wisdom ». See *The Characterization of Ulysses in Homer, Virgil and Dante: A Study in Sources and Analogues*, « Eighty-Second Annual Report of the Dante Society » (1964), p. 42.

[77] On Dante's use of light imagery in the *Inferno*, see André Pézard, *Dante sous la pluie de feu (Enfer, chant XV)* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1950).

[78] Stanford, *op. cit.*, p. 178.

[79] In *Homer: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. George Steiner and Robert Fagles (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1962), pp. 81-85.

of the sea, a grave Don Quixote, Don Juan — and more — Columbus and the Renaissance explorers, and even the bourgeoisie, which is forever attempting to surmount the barrier [80]. This kind of reading, bringing to the episode as it does hindsight and a modern, secular sensibility, violates the spirit of Dante's conception. Dante replaces the pattern of the return with the ideal of the quest, but it is a quest within limits, within the bounds of Christian ethics. The tragedy of Dante's " historical " and " Christian " Ulysses stems from the fact that Homer's hero refuses to recognize the limits imposed on him by the new Christian framework within which he is cast. He breaks a divine decree knowingly and wilfully and hence becomes a victim of his own *hubris*. Ulysses' tragedy, unlike that of the souls of Limbo, is not one of ignorance, determined solely by an unfortunate trick of fate, that is, having been born in the graceless, unredeemed period of history between the Fall and the Incarnation. It results instead from a deliberate act of free will.

Despite Ulysses' obvious role as a negative typology in the allegorical structure of the poem, he retains at the level of " the state of souls after death " a measure of dignity reserved only for the truly tragic figure. Ulysses is a sinner, a man who has violated the order of nature, but he is also a man who from the vantage point of eternity recognizes his error and suffers. For this reason he evokes a much greater response than either Capaneus or Vanni Fucci, whom Dante also depicts as defying the Deity. Ulysses' tragedy is not delineated by a rigid moral structure where the *contrapasso* rules. Dante develops the episode beyond the limits of poetic justice, beyond a moralistic and legalistic view of crime and punishment, earthly merit and anagogical reward. The earthly *figura* in Ulysses' case is complex and ambiguous, crowded with so much life that the *contrapasso* can not contain it. When only nemesis, the law of retribution, is operative, we have just types and *exempla*, no matter how vivid and striking, not life and its ambiguities, its suffering, its pulsing vitality and paradoxes. Ulysses dramatically and powerfully represents the dignity of man, even in his defeat, and embodies one of the greatest paradoxes of

[80] Bloch, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

Christianity — that of the fortunate fall [81]. Before comedy there must be tragedy, before Christ, Adam, before the Resurrection, the Passion, before the Celestial Rose, the *selva oscura.* Man must face the contingencies of history, must suffer, and even fall before he can become strong and steadfast. Ulysses does not rise from the ocean floor, but Dante, although he too falters along the way, manages to overcome the waters of the deadly *fiumana*, and by following the example of the Second Adam, not the First, to behold the Light of God.

AMILCARE A. JANNUCCI
University of Toronto

[81] On this fundamental Christian concept and its relation to tragedy, see Herbert Weisinger, *Tragedy and the Paradox of the Fortunate Fall* (Michigan State College Press, 1953).