

**THE UNDIVINE COMEDY: DETHEOLOGIZING DANTE**  
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**Chapter 03: "Ulysses, Geryon and the Aeronautics of Narrative Transition"**

What Song the Syrens sang, or what name Achilles assumed  
when he hid himself among women, though puzzling  
Questions are not beyond all conjecture.

(Sir Thomas Browne, *Hydriotaphia, or Urne-Burial*)

The sin of man is that he seeks to make himself God.

(Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*)

Io mi credea del tutto esser partito  
da queste nostre rime, messer Cino,  
che si conviene omai altro cammino  
a la mia nave piu lungi dal lito

(*Dante to Cino da Pistoia*)

Su per la costa, Amor, de l'alto monte,  
drieto a lo stil del nostro ragionare  
or chi potra montare,  
poi che son rotte l'ale d'ogni ingegno?

(*Cino da Pistoia on Dante's death*)

ULYSSES IS AS fundamental to the *Commedia* as the voyage theme that he incarnates and dramatizes, as irrepressible as the trope whose most living embodiment within the poem he is. He is linked to the poem's metaphorization of desire as flight, a metaphor whose origin is the celebrated verse from Ulysses' oration, in which the adventurer indicates the extent of the enthusiasm he had solicited from his aged crew by saying "de' remi facemmo ali al folle volo" ("of our oars we made wings for the mad flight" [*Inf.*26.125]). [01] Ulysses and his surrogates, other failed flyers like Phaeton and Icarus, are thus connected to one of the *Commedia's* most basic metaphorical assumptions: if we desire sufficiently, we fly. In other words, if we desire sufficiently, our quest takes on wings; if we desire sufficiently, we vault all obstacles, we cross all boundaries (perhaps we even trans-gress, vaulting in a *varco folle*). Thus the passage in the *Purgatorio* in which the narrator overtly establishes the metaphorical identity between desire and flight, saying that in order to climb the steep grade of lower purgatory one needs to fly with the wings of desire: "ma qui convien ch'om voli; / dico con l'ale snelle e con le piume / del gran disio" ("but here a man must fly--I mean with the slender wings and with the feathers of great desire" [*Purg.* 4.27-29]). The pilgrim flies on the "piume del gran disio," and the saturation of the *Commedia* with flight imagery--Ulyssean flight imagery--is due to the importance of desire as the impulse that governs all questing, all voyaging, all coming to know. Desire and the search for understanding are intimately linked, indeed ultimately one: desire is spiritual motion, "disire e moto spiritale." This equivalence, desire = spiritual motion, crucially recasts in the metaphorical language of voyage and pilgrimage the Aristotelian

precept that stands on the *Convivio's* threshold, where we already find articulated the link between *desiderio* and *sapere*: "tutti li uomini naturalmente desiderano di sapere" ("all men naturally desire to know" [*Conv.* 1.1.1]). The treatise's abstract conceptual pairing returns in the *Commedia's* metaphorical copulae: the winged oars, the plumage of great desire. Desire-- Ulyssean *arDoré*--is the motor propelling all voyage: both right voyages, conversions, and those that, like Ulysses' own, tend toward the left, the "lato mancino" (*Inf.* 26.126). Readings of Dante's Ulysses thus focus on his desires as appropriate or transgressive, as well as on the way his desires reflect those of the poem's other voyager, Dante himself.

Dante criticism has been divided on the subject of Ulysses essentially since its inception. Among the early commentators, Buti takes a moralizing position critical of the Homeric hero, while Benvenuto sees him as exciting Dante's admiration. [02] We could sketch the positions of various modern critics around the same polarity: there is a pro-Ulysses group, spearheaded by Fubini, who maintains that Dante feels only admiration for the *folle volo*, the desire for knowledge it represents, and the oration that justifies it; [03] and there is a less unified group that emphasizes the Greek hero's sinfulness and seeks to determine the primary cause for his infernal abode (rendered less clear by the poet's avoidance of the eighth *bolgia's* label until the end of his colloquy with Guido da Montefeltro in the next canto). [04] This second group could be divided into those who see the *folle volo* itself as the chief of Ulysses' sins, and those who concentrate instead on the sin of fraudulent counsel as described by Guido and the hero's rhetorical deceitfulness as manifested in the *orazion picciola*. [05] Most influential in the first category has been the position of Nardi, who argues that Dante's Ulysses is a new Adam, a new Lucifer, and that his sin is precisely Adam's, namely "il trapassar del segno." [06] Ulysses is thus a transgressor, whose pride incites him to seek a knowledge that is beyond the limits set for man by God, in the same way that Adam's pride drove him to a similar transgression, also in pursuit of a knowledge that would make him Godlike. Ulysses rebels against the limits marked by the pillars of Hercules, and his rebellion is akin to that of Lucifer and the rebel angels. To account for Ulysses' heroic stature within the poem, Nardi posits a split within Dante himself, whereby the poet is moved by what the theologian condemns. [07] Nardi's reading has much in common with that of an earlier critic, Luigi Valli, who also considered Ulysses deeply embedded within the symbolism of the *Commedia* and representative of the perilous pride that besets mankind. [08] Valli too sees the sin of Dante's Ulysses as akin to Adam's eating of the tree of knowledge, as a *trapassar del segno* analogous to the original sin. The key difference between the two is that Valli relates the figure of Ulysses to Dante's sense of a peril within himself, rather than arguing for an unconsciously divided Dante; indeed, Valli goes so far as to invoke the *Convivio* as an example of Dante's own propensities toward intellectual pride, thus anticipating the positions of such critics as Freccero, Thompson, and Corti. [09]

As is frequently the case in Dante criticism, the Ulysses *querelle* abounds in ironies, which in this instance are centered on the much bandied charge of romantic reading. Fubini and Sapegno attempt to discredit Nardi by charging him with imposing an anachronistically Promethean shape onto Dante's character, with unwittingly falling into a romantic trap, the nonmedieval pitfall of glorifying the quest for knowledge and the rebellious hero who pursues it. [10] By invoking antiromanticism in the name of a purer medievalism, critics who are at pains to demonstrate that Ulysses is not a typical sinner, that he is instead someone for whom Dante feels a special admiration, draw very near to those who originally were at the furthest remove from them on the ideological spectrum, namely the sternest moralists: those, like Anthony Cassell, who deny any special importance to Ulysses at all. [11] For, if at one extreme we place those who argue that Dante feels only admiration for Ulysses' voyage and that it has nothing whatever to do with his damnation (and here the hero's crimes as listed by Vergil and the issue of the nature of this *bolgia* and Ulysses' relation to Guido are brought into play), since his shipwreck cannot be considered a punishment nor the pillars of Hercules to be limits, [12] at the other extreme we find those who urge us not to be taken in by the hero's rhetoric, who tell us that the poet feels nothing but scorn for his creature and that to see anything else at work in the canto is to read it through romantic, DeSanctisian eyes. Ironically, both these extreme positions use an alleged romanticism as their foil: the pro-Ulysseans by insisting that to make the *folle volo* into a sin is to romanticize it, and the moralists by claiming that to see anything special or positive about the hero is to invest him with an anachronistic romantic glamour. These extreme readings have yet more in common: both rob the episode of its tension and deflate it of its energy, on the one hand by making the fact that Ulysses is in hell irrelevant, and on the other by denying that this particular sinner means more to the poem than do his companions. Fubini's simple admiration fails to deal with the fact that Dante places Ulysses in hell; Cassell's simple condemnation fails to take into account the structural and thematic significance that the Greek hero bears for the whole poem.

In a further irony, it should be noted that Nardi and Fubini, despite their critical wrangling, share a major conviction, to wit that Ulysses cannot be entirely defined by the *bolgia* in which we find him, that he is a thematic pillar of the poem who cannot be reduced but must be understood in his complex integrity. A key sign of Ulysses' irreducibility, of the fact that he is not just any sinner in Malebolge, is his sustained presence in the poem: he is the only single-episode sinner--with the exception of Nimrod, whom I consider an echoing talisman of overweening pride in human endeavor [13]-- to be named in each canticle. The fact that Ulysses has been invested with a significance that goes beyond one *bolgia*, or even one *cantica*, is thus a matter of record, not of impressionistic interpretation: if, to the unique number of episodes in which he is referred to by name (*Inferno* 26, *Purgatorio* 19, *Paradiso* 27), we add the many instances in which he is invoked-- through surrogate figures like Phaeton and Icarus; through semantic tags like *folle*, that Dante has taken care to associate with him; and, most encompassingly, through Ulyssean flight imagery--our sense of his textual weight is confirmed. [14] The many readers who have glorified Ulysses (like those who have glorified Francesca , Farinata , Brunetto, and Ugolino) were privileging a figure who is indeed privileged by the poet, not morally or eschatologically but textually and poetically. Rather than argue against the testimony of centuries of readers who tell us that they react more passionately to this particular narrative, it seems more profitable to ask why the poet confers on some of his characters a greater textual resonance, a more inviolate ability to seduce. Dante deliberately manipulates the level of his poem's textual tension by making it more difficult not to react affectively to some sinners than to others. Moreover, such sinners invariably signify in a "larger," more metaphoric mode than their fellows (and are frequently coordinated in a textual *variatio* with souls who signify more simply and literally, as Francesca with Ciaccio and Ulysses with Guido): not simply lust, in Francesca's case, but an *in malo* exploration of the poem's basic premises--the possibility of transcendence through love and the salvific mission of the word; not simply fraudulent counsel, in Ulysses' case, but the seductive dangers of disobedience and transgression, and a meditation on pride as the sin most capable of bringing the life-voyage to disaster. The textual privileging of these sinners is, accordingly, a way of underlining them, of pointing to the significance they bear--and that love and pride bear--for life and for the *Commedia* as a whole. This notion of textual privileging could be seen, moreover, as a reformulation of Croce's fundamental insight. There are indeed narrative highs and lows in the *Commedia*, but since these are a function of narrative itself--one could not have the one without the other--it makes little sense to accord value as "poesia" and "non poesia" to what is all part of the same narrative continuum. [15]

In my opinion, then, the *folle volo* cannot be overlooked in an assessment of Ulysses' role within the poem, and to this extent I follow Nardi, whose reading echoes those of Dante's contemporaries. Dante's Adam explains that his banishment was caused by his overreaching, a trespass the poem has long coded as Ulyssean: "non il gustar del legno / fu per se la cagion di tanto essilio, / ma solamente il trapassar del segno" ("the tasting of the tree was not in itself the cause of so long an exile, but solely the going beyond the bound" [*Par.* 26.115-17]). Boccaccio echoes the Adamic "trapassar del segno" in his characterization of the Greek hero, who "per voler veder trapasso il segno / dal qual nessun pote mai in qua reddire" ("in his desire to see went beyond the bound from which no one has ever been able to return" [*Amorosa visione*, redaction A, 27.86-87]). For Petrarch, too, Ulysses "desio del mondo veder troppo" ("desired to see too much of the world" [*Triumphus fame* 2.18]). Far from being anachronistic, as claimed by Fubini, Nardi is reviving a contemporary insight when he associates Ulysses with Adam. [16] I disagree, however, with Nardi's formulation of an unconsciously divided poet, believing instead that Ulysses reflects Dante's conscious concern for himself. The perception of a profound autobiographical alignment between the poet and his creation seems also to have early roots; Umberto Bosco shows that Dante's intransigence in not accepting Florentine terms for repatriation despite the suffering of his family elicited contrasting reactions from Boccaccio, who defended him, and Petrarch, whose criticism implicitly brands him a Ulysses. [17] In sum, then, the Dante who is implicated in the figure of Ulysses is not solely the Dante of the *Convivio*, a Dante of the past, but also the Dante of the *Commedia*. By the Dante of the *Commedia*, I refer not to the pilgrim, who, as many studies have shown, is related to Ulysses as an inverse type, his negative double. [18] I refer rather to the poet, who has embarked on a voyage whose Ulyssean component he recognizes, fears, and never fully overcomes.[19]

Ulysses is the lightning rod Dante places in his poem to attract and defuse his own consciousness of the presumption involved in anointing oneself God's scribe. In other words, Ulysses documents Dante's self-awareness: Dante *knows* that, in constructing a system whose fiction is that it is not fictional, he has given himself a license to write the world, to play God unchecked. In the "Amor mi spira" passage of *Purgatorio* 24,

Dante establishes a conduit between himself and Love, transcendent authority and poetic dictator, which is precisely analogous to the conduit established in *Paradiso* 10 between himself and God, also a poetic dictator, the *dittatore* of "quella materia ond'io son fatto scriba" ("that matter of which I am made the scribe" [27]). [20] As Amor's inspiration gives the poet the vantage to assess the history of the love lyric, so his scribal relation to God--also Amor, indeed "l'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle" ("the love that moves the sun and the other stars" [*Par.* 33.145])--permits an assessment of universal history. The vantage of *scriba Dei* confers a breathtaking advantage. [21] From it the poet is able to claim knowledge of the truth not only with respect to the historical moment but also *sub specie aeternitatis*, for to know what happens after death, in the context of the Christian afterlife, is to know what every action really accomplished, what every thought really contributed, what every thing, in short, really signifies. "Vo significando" is no exaggeration in this context. I cannot, as none of us can, speak authoritatively regarding what Dante believed he saw; in my opinion, he believed that he was inspired by God with a true vision. However, although I believe that he believed, I do not think Dante was an unconscious visionary; on the contrary I think he was fully aware--and afraid--of the implications that follow from believing that what one writes is true. The Ulyssean component of the poem is thus related to the basic representational *impresa* of the *Commedia*, which involves transgressing the boundary between life and death: "che non e impresa da pigliare a gabbo / discriver fondo a tutto l'universo" ("for it is not an enterprise to take in jest, to describe the bottom of all the universe" [*Inf.* 32.74]). [22] The Ulysses theme, as Dante uses it, is in fact intimately related to the practical exigencies of writing the *Commedia*, if by practical we refer to the actual praxis of the poet in the construction and composition of a text that claims to tell truth.

The Ulysses theme, if looked at from the angle of the poet rather than the pilgrim, forces us to challenge the theological grid with which we read the *Commedia* (following interpretative guidelines suggested by the text itself), whereby whatever happens in hell is "bad," problematic, and whatever happens in heaven is "good," problem-free. As noted in the first chapter, this formulation may be accurate with respect to the text's content, its plot, but it need not be accurate with respect to its form. Critics who have posited the Ulyssean tendencies of the poet have generally been led by the theological grid to a reading that confuses what the poet says he is doing with what he has actually done, forgetting that how Dante chooses to portray the experience of writing the *Commedia*--how the poet chooses to describe being a poet--is one thing, while the actual experience of being the *Commedia's* author, to the extent that it can be reconstructed from the evidence of the poem, is another. Thus, it has been argued that Dante-poet's Ulyssean tendencies are confronted in the *Inferno* and resolved before we reach the other canticles: Peter Hawkins claims that the Ulyssean virtuosity displayed in the *bolgia* of the thieves is corrected later in the poem; Karla Taylor, too, while going further than Hawkins in recognizing the hubris that underlies the humility of the terrace of pride, simply postpones the venue of correction, moving it from *Purgatorio* to *Paradiso*. [23] Giuliana Carugati, who insists on the poet as a Ulyssean maker of *menzogna*, nonetheless believes that the mendacious texture of Dante's poetic language is progressively frayed as he approaches the redemptive silence of *Paradiso*. [24] The critical assumptions that back up these readings are stated straightforwardly by James T. Chiampì: "Because it is the key to the poem's immanent typology, the *Paradiso* is to the *Inferno* as criticism is to poetry. The *Paradiso* is the very center of the poem's structure of values because it is the locus of the proper object of representation, the good." [25] Once again, form and content have been conflated, and we have forgotten that a "good" object of representation does not guarantee a "good" representation. As Marguerite Mills Chiarenza puts it in her salutary reminder: "In the *Inferno* and the *Purgatorio* the poet's struggle is secondary to the pilgrim's and the danger is essentially in the voyage. In the *Paradiso* it is the poet who struggles while the pilgrim is safe." [26]

The poetic humility of which the later canticles tell cannot simply be taken at face value. Such a procedure constitutes an extrapolation from the content--the declared humility that overwhelms both pilgrim and poet in paradise--to a conclusion for which there is no textual basis, namely that Dante-poet actually is more humble in writing *Paradiso*. I see no signs of this oft-imputed humility; indeed, the only real way to have practiced humility in writing *Paradiso* would have been not to write it. By the same token, the silence that the *Paradiso* will eventually attain cannot be factored in before it occurs, which is not until the entire *Paradiso*--not incidentally, the longest of the three canticles--has been written. The real story of the *Paradiso* is in the words that are written, not in the incapacity to find such words of which its author repeatedly writes. Neither Carugati's notion of a mystical passage through linguistic fraudulence to silence, nor Jeremy Tambling's Derridean paraphrasing of Dante's own ineffability *topoi*, whereby *Paradiso* has "given up the possibility of literal referentiality," [27] deal with the reality of Dante's struggle with referentiality in the third canticle, where

rather than surrendering at the outset he seeks repeatedly to wed the "esempio" to the "esemplare." Dante himself tells us that he cannot represent his vision; rather than paraphrase him, it seems more worthwhile to try to understand how Dante did what he said could not be done, how he vaults the limits that he was the first to declare.

Nor does the intractable problem of self-legitimization, self-investiture, disappear in the *Paradiso*: again, Dante is aware of a fact that we tend to forget, namely that he is writing what Bonagiunta says, what Beatrice says, what Cacciaguida says, what St. Peter says. Far from diminishing as the pilgrim draws nearer to his goal, the poet's problems become ever more acute: if the pilgrim learns to be not like Ulysses; the poet is conscious of having to be ever more like him. The *Paradiso*, if it is to exist at all, cannot fail to be transgressive; its poet cannot fail to be a Ulysses, since only a *trapassar del segno* will be able to render the experience of *trasumanar*. In a context where "significar per verba / non si poria" ("signifying through words cannot be done" [Par. 1.70-71 ]), and where "l'esempio / e l'esemplare non vanno d'un modo" ("the model and the copy do not match" [Par. 28.5556]), a representational process that is avowedly based on the principles of mimesis, on the seamless match of "esempio" and "esemplare," becomes ever more arduous. In such a context signs must be trespassed, since only a trespass of the sign can render an experience for which no signs are sufficient. If the poet cannot express a thousandth part of the truth of Beatrice's smile ("al millesmo del vero / non si verria, cantando il santo riso" [Par. 23.58-59]), his only solution is a going beyond the sign, the poetic equivalent of the *varcare* (passing beyond, crossing over) associated with Ulysses and his mad flight: "il varco / folle d'Ulisse" (Par. 27.82-83). And so the poem is forced to jump ("convien saltar lo sacrato poema")--saltare being a kind of homely "comedic" version of *varcare*--as the narrator announces the need to trespass the normative linearity of narrative signifying in the Ulyssean outburst of *Paradiso 23*:

e cosi, figurando il paradiso,  
convien saltar lo sacrato poema,  
come chi trova suo cammin riciso.  
Ma chi pensasse il ponderoso tema  
e l'omero mortal che se ne carica,  
nol biasmerebbe se sott'esso trema:  
non e pareggio da picciola barca  
quel che fendendo va l'ardita prora,  
ne da nocchier ch'a se medesmo parca.

And so, figuring paradise, the sacred poem is forced to jump, like one who finds his path cut off. But he who thinks of the ponderous theme and the mortal shoulder that is burdened with it will not blame it for trembling beneath the load; it is not a crossing for a little boat, this which my bold prow now cleaves, nor for a helmsman who would spare himself.

(Par. 23.61-69)

The *Paradiso's* Ulyssean *materia* first manifests itself in the great address to the reader that stands at the cantic's threshold, where Dante (putting a new spin on the rhetoric of persuasion) challenges us to follow him by telling us that we are not up to the task:[\[28\]](#)

O voi che siete in piccioletta barca,  
desiderosi d'ascoltar, seguiti  
dietro al mio legno che cantando varca,  
tornate a riveder li vostri liti:  
non vi mettete in pelago, che forse,  
perdendo me, rimarreste smarriti.  
L'acqua ch'io prendo gia mai non si corse;  
Minerva spira, e conducemi Appollo,  
e nove Muse mi dimostran l'Orse.  
Voialtri pochi che drizzaste il collo  
per tempo al pan de li angeli, del quale

vivesi qui ma non sen vien satollo,  
 metter potete ben per l'alto sale  
 vostro navigio, servando mio solco  
 dinanzi a l'acqua che ritorna equale.  
 Que' gloriosi che passaro al Colco  
 non s'ammiraron come voi farete  
 , quando Iason vider fatto bifolco.

O you that are in little boats, desiring to hear, having followed behind my ship that singing leaps, turn back to see again your shores; don't set out for the deep lest, perhaps, losing me, you find yourselves astray. The water that I draw has never yet been coursed; Minerva breathes and Apollo guides me, and nine [new][29] Muses show me the Bears. You other few who straightened your necks in time for the bread of the angels (on which you live here without ever growing sated), you may indeed set your course for the high sea, keeping to my wake ahead of the water that always comes back equal. Those glorious ones who crossed to Colchis were not as amazed as you will be, when they saw Jason turned ploughman. (*Par.* 2.1-18)

Here Ulyssean imagery is fused around a specific mythological figure, Jason, whose metamorphosis into a ploughman will cause his crew no greater amazement than that for which the reader of the *Paradiso* is destined; there is an implicit analogy between Jason, a sailor, and the poet, also a sailor on his "legno che cantando varca," whose account will awaken wonder in us. Jason returns in the poem's last canto, where the compound of oblivion and remembered wonder experienced by the pilgrim at his momentary insight into the universal form of creation is rendered by analogy with Neptune, who was similarly struck with wonder at the sight of the first ship passing overhead: "Un punto solo m'e maggior letargo / che venticinque secoli a la 'mpresa / che fe Nettuno ammirar l'ombra d'Argon ("A single moment is to me greater oblivion than are twenty-five centuries to the enterprise that made Neptune wonder at the shadow of the Argo" [*Par.* 33.94-96]). Both pilgrim and god experience an astounding vision--an ultimately new thing, as indeed the Argo is a literal *cosa nova*-- which is irretrievable but whose impress remains indelibly: the pilgrim's amazement at what he perceives about the "great sea of being" ("gran mar de l'essere" [*Par.* 1.113]), the metaphorical waters of the cosmos, finds its counterpart in Neptune's amazement at seeing the uncharted waters over his head shadowed for the first time by a ship. Here too then, as in the earlier address to the reader, although the reference is to the pilgrim's experience, which is compared to Neptune's, it is the poet's ability to recount that experience, to create the "legno che cantando varca" that will rescue it from oblivion, that is at stake. If the pilgrim is like Neptune (by virtue of the *trasumanar* that has made him a sea god, made him, like Glaucus, a lesser Neptune), then the poet is like Jason, a Ulysses bent on his most daring impresa. [30]

The Ulysses theme enters the *Commedia* in its first verse, in the word *cammino*, and more pointedly in its first simile, in which the pilgrim compares himself to one who (unlike Dante's Ulysses) emerges from dangerous waters, "del pelago a la riva" ("from the deep to the shore" [*Inf.* 1.23]) and turns to look at what he has escaped: "si volse a retro a rimirar lo passo / che non lascio gia mai persona viva" ("he turned back to look at the pass that never yet let any go alive" [26-27]).[31] The beginnings of a contrastive Ulyssean lexicon are here established: from "pelago" to "passo," which will be given its Ulyssean twist in canto 2 when Dante asks his guide to ascertain his courage before entrusting him to the "alto passo" (12), thus anticipating the "alto passo" (*Inf.* 26.132) that leads to Ulysses' death. It is the task of *Infemo* 2 to show us, in retrospect, that the pilgrim is not Ulysses, that his *mpresa* and Ulysses'--their respective *alti passi*--are related as inverse types. Recapitulating what is by now critical dogma, the pilgrim is an anti-Ulysses, whose voyage is charted in great part by a counter-Ulyssean emulation: "se del venire io m'abbandono, / temo che la venuta non sia folle" ("if I yield and come, I fear that my coming may be mad" [*Inf.* 2.34-35]). He is afraid of abandoning himself to this voyage, as he had in the past abandoned the true path ("che la verace via abbandonai"[*Inf.* 1.12]), and as Phaeton abandoned the chariot reins that served to keep his horses on the straight way ("abbandono li freni" [*Inf.* 17.107]). All this fear, which it is the agenda of *Inferno* 2 to defuse, keeps us focused on the difference between the self-willed adventurer and the pilgrim touched by grace, but it should also alert us to the poet's awareness of his potentially Ulyssean trespasses: if there were no such potential, there would be no need of a Ulyssean agenda to defuse it, no need for the poet to stage the pilgrim's momentary disconversion, his fear that he is not Aeneas or St. Paul. Indeed, the pilgrim's concern that "Io non Enea, io non Paulo sono" (*Inf.* 2.32) is a supreme example of the double bind in which Dante is placed as the guarantor of his own prophetic status: the

very act by which the pilgrim demonstrates humility serves the poet as a vehicle for recording his visionary models and for telling us, essentially, that "Io *si* Enea, io *si* Paulo sono."<sup>[32]</sup> Thus, the poet's voyage runs not counter to Ulysses' but parallel to it: Ulysses persuades his tired old men to pass the markers set by Hercules, "dov' *Ercule* segno li suoi riguardi" (*Inf.* 26.108); Dante persuades us to pass the markers set by death. Both are linguistic transgressions, grounded in the "trespass of the sign": "il trapassar del segno" hearkens back to the Ulysses episode, where we find not only *segnare* but also an injunction containing *oltre* (Hercules places his markers "accio che l'uom piu oltre non si metta" ["so that man should not pass beyond" (109)]), a term that works throughout the *Commedia* as the adverbial correlative of *trapassare*.

In sum, then, the Ulyssean component of the poem is ultimately related to the *impresa* of the *Commedia* itself, to the poet's transgressing of the boundary between life and death, between God and man.<sup>[33]</sup> The Ulysses episode is not unique in reflecting Dante's awareness of the dangers of his position: such awareness informs the canto of the false prophets, for instance, which is governed by a need to disavow any connection with what Dante knows he could be considered.<sup>[34]</sup> The diviners also seek to cross the boundary between divine and human prerogatives; their attempt to read the future in God's "magno volume" (*Par.* 15.50) is an attempt to reach a vantage from which they, like God, "Colui che mai non vide cosa nova," will never see a new thing.<sup>[35]</sup> And so, these sinners, who would have obliterated by foretelling all the new things before they occurred, whose attitude of conquest toward life's manifold *cose nove* is like Ulysses' toward the "nova terra" (*Inf.* 26.137) he burns to reach,<sup>[36]</sup> are reduced to being one more instance of the new on the poet's narrative path: "Di nova pena mi conven far versi" (*Inf.* 20.1). But most important from this perspective is Ulysses, most important because the poet makes him so, investing him not only with the unforgettable language of *Inferno* 26 but making his name a hermeneutic lodestone of the *Commedia*, associating it with the voyage metaphor that keeps the Ulyssean thematic alive even in the hero's absence. Ulysses is designed as a recurring presence because the issue of the *trapassar del segno* of Adam's sin conceived not literally as the eating of the tree but metaphorically as a transgression, is one that Dante cannot discount. It is an issue that does not belong safely to the past, like the *Convivio* and his excessive adoration of Lady Philosophy. No matter how orthodox his theology (and it is not so orthodox), no matter how fervently Dante believes in and claims the status of true prophet, of directly inspired poet, of *scriba Dei*, the very fiber of the *Commedia* consists of a going beyond. Thus Ulysses dies, over and over again, for Dante's sins.

The locus classicus for textual self-awareness in the *Commedia* is the passage in *Inferno* 16 where the poet announces the arrival of Geryon, a monster derived from classical mythology whose patently fictional characteristics Dante first heightens and then uses as the stake on which to gamble the veracity of his poem:

Sempre a quel ver c'ha faccia di menzogna  
 de' l'uom chiuder le labbra fin ch'el puote,  
 pero che senza colpa la vergogna;  
 ma qui tacer nol posso; e per le note  
 di questa comedia, lettor, ti giuro,  
 s'elle non sien di lunga grazia vote,  
 ch'i' vidi per quell'aere grosso e scuro  
 venir notando una figura in suso,  
 maravigliosa ad ogne cor sicuro

To that truth which has the face of a lie a man should always close his lips as long as he can, since without fault it brings him shame, but here I cannot be silent; and by the notes of this comedy, reader, I swear to you-- so may they not be empty of long grace--that I saw through that dense and dark air a figure come swimming upward, a cause for marvel to even the most secure of hearts

(*Inf.* 16.124-32)

Keeping in mind that "narrative verisimilitude tends to flaunt rather than mask its fictitious nature," and that there is a "constant coincidence between textual features declaring the fictionality of a story and a reassertion of

the truth of that story,"[37]I propose that Geryon serves as an outrageously paradoxical authenticating device: one that, by being so overtly inauthentic--so literally a figure for inauthenticity, a figure for "fraud"-- confronts and attempts to defuse the belatedness or inauthenticity to which the need for an authenticating device necessarily testifies. Geryon also serves as the poem's very baptismal font: this is the passage in which Dante first anoints his poem a *comedia*, using a term that he will contrast to *tragedia* later in the *Inferno*. In the *Paradiso* this same term will be implicitly redefined a *sacrato poema*, indeed a *teodia*. Without attempting to reproduce the detail of my earlier argumentation on this subject,[38] I will simply note that the poet achieves his redefinition of the term *comedia* by contextualizing it vis-a-vis *tragedia* in ways that align *comedia* (Dante) with truth, and *tragedia* (Vergil) with falsehood, *menzogna*. Key to this process of redefinition and to the significance with which the poet intends to endow his "new" genre--the *comedia/teodia* for which he has invented both a new lifebased form and a new truth-based content--is the phrase used to designate the act of representing Geryon: the discourse that undertakes to represent that incredible beast is a "ver c'ha faccia di menzogna," a "truth that has the face of a lie." In other words, although a *comedia* may at times, as when representing Geryon, have the "face of a lie"--give the appearance of lying-- it is intractably always truth: "VER c'ha faccia di menzogna." By explicitly confronting the inauthenticity inherent in all narrative, Dante attempts to neutralize it with respect to his own narrative truth claims.

The Geryon episode is fundamental to the *Commedia's* poetics, which is a poetics of realism, with its concomitant surrealism, not a poetics of naturalism. It establishes a precedent that has important repercussions for the rest of the poem: the least credible (i.e., least naturalistic) of Dante's representations will be supported by the most unyielding and overt of authorial interventions. This is the poetics of the "mira vera," true marvels, to use the expression Dante coins in his second eclogue for another encounter with a magically heightened reality, in this case a miraculous flute that produces not sounds but sung words. Here Dante, personified as the aged Tityrus, receives the young Melibeus, who plays him Mopsus's (Giovanni del Virgilio's) new eclogue on his flute. The wonder is that, when Melibeus lifts the instrument to his lips, it sings Mopsus's opening verse; describing this miracle of the singing flute, the narrator inserts the phrase, "I tell of marvels, but they are nonetheless true" ("mira loquar, sed vera tamen" [4.40]).[39] The poetics of the incredible and nonetheless true--"Io diro cosa incredibile e vera" says Cacciaguida in *Par.* 16.124--is the poetics of the "ver c'ha faccia di menzogna." The oxymoronic formulations--"mira vera," "incredibile e vera"--demonstrate the poet's awareness of his own intransigence and correspond precisely to the equally oxymoronic juxtaposition of "maravigliosa" ("mira") with "io vidi" ("vera") in the Geryon episode. Far from giving quarter, backing off when the materia being represented is too "maravigliosa" to be credible, Dante raises the ante by using such moments to underscore his poem's veracity, its status as historical scribal record of what he saw. Thus, just as in the Geryon episode Dante weds "maravigliosa" with "vidi," thereby closing off all escape routes to himself and his reader by insisting that he actually sees something that he acknowledges is "maravigliosa"-- fantastic, incredible--so, faced with the equally fantastic sight of the thieves' metamorphoses, the poet opts for another bold frontal attack on the reader's credulity, again arming himself with the verb *vedere*: [40]. "Se tu se' or, lettore, a creder lento / cio ch'io diro, non sara maraviglia, / che io che 'l vidi, a pena il mi consento" ("If you are now, reader, slow to believe what I will say, it is no wonder, since I who saw it hardly consent to it myself" [*Inf.* 25.46-48]). Similarly, in another of the *Inferno's* moments of greatest *maraviglia*, as the narrator sets out to represent the headless Bertran de Born, he reapplies the Geryon principle, once again challenging the reader to disbelieve him:

Ma io rimasi a riguardar lo stuolo,  
e vidi cosa ch'io avrei paura,  
sanza piu prova, di contarla solo;  
se non che coscienza m'assicura,  
la buona compagnia che l'uom francheggia  
sotto l'asbergo del sentirsi pura.  
Io vidi certo, e ancor *Par* ch'io l veggia,  
un busto sanza capo...

But I remained to look over the troop, and I saw a thing that I would be afraid even to recount without more proof, except that my conscience--the good companion that gives a man courage under the hauberk of feeling itself pure--reassures me. I certainly saw, and still seem to see, a trunk without a head...

(*Inf.* 28.112-19)

Dante's strategy is bold, but it is also logical. By underlining what is apparently least verisimilar in his representation, and by letting us know that he fully shares our assessment regarding this material's lack of verisimilitude, which he does by posing as reluctant to represent it lest we lose confidence in him, the narrator secures our confidence for the rest of his story. Why is the plight of the lustful or the gluttonous any more verisimilar, or any more credible, than the plight of the thieves or the schismatics? Is being blown for all eternity by an infernal wind or pelted by filthy rain really more verisimilar than exchanging shapes with a serpent or carrying one's head in one's hand? By urging us to identify heightened drama with decreased verisimilitude and credibility, Dante is subtly encouraging us to accept his text's basic fictions and assumptions: sodomites dancing in a circle under a pouring rain of fire or usurers sitting on the edge of an abyss with purses around their necks (to mention just the groups of sinners who bracket Geryon's arrival) are acceptable, but flying monsters are not and therefore require the author's direct intervention. In this way the poet becomes the arbiter of our skepticism, allowing it to blossom forth only in authorially-sanctioned moments of high drama. Far from demonstrating humor or Ariostesque irony (as per Hollander's suggestion that the Geryon episode involves an "authorial wink"),<sup>[41]</sup> these passages are the most exposed weapons in a massive and unrelenting campaign to coerce our suspension of disbelief, a campaign that the history of the *Commedia's* reception shows to have been remarkably successful. The Geryon episode, however, constitutes an even more profound poetic gamble for the poet of the *Commedia* than we have hitherto noted, for its emblematic verse is a double-edged sword and may be approached from the perspective of its last word, "menzogna," as well as from the perspective of its first word, "ver." Rather than emphasize the poet's claim that his poem is a *ver* and remains such no matter what marvels it is forced to recount, we could ask: Why does this truth, this *comedia*, have a *faccia di menzogna*? The answer is that even a *comedia*, in order to come into existence as text, must to some extent accommodate that human and thus ultimately fraudulent construct, language.

Within the metapoetic discourse that this supremely self-conscious author has inscribed into his poem, Geryon, "quella sozza imagine di froda" ("that filthy image of fraud" [*Inf.* 17.7] ), is, as Franco Ferrucci has noted, an image of representational fraud:<sup>[42]</sup> he is the vehicle required for the naming--the coming into being--of even this text. Let us look at the verses that precede the monster's arrival. The sequence begins with the crux in which Dante removes from his waist a cord of whose existence we were previously unaware; specifying that with this cord he once thought to take the painted leopard, in an overt reference to the second of the opening canto's three beasts, he hands the knotted skein to Vergil at his guide's behest:

Io avea una corda intorno cinta,  
e con essa pensai alcuna volta  
prender la lonza a la pelle dipinta.  
Poscia ch'io l'ebbi tutta da me sciolta,  
si come 'l duca m'avea comandato,  
porsila a lui aggroppata e ravvolta.

I had a cord tied around me, and with it I on occasion thought to take the leopard with the painted skin. After I had completely loosened it from me, as my leader had commanded, I handed it to him knotted and coiled. (*Inf.* 16.106-11)

Vergil throws the cord into the abyss, while the pilgrim thinks about the novelty that so remarkable a signal must command:

Ond'ei si volse inver lo destro lato,  
e alquanto di lunge da la sponda  
la gitto giuso in quell'alto burrato.  
"E' pur convien che novita risponda,"  
dicea fra me medesmo, "al novo cenno  
che 'l maestro con l'occhio si seconda."

Then he turned to the right and threw it some distance from the edge down into that deep ravine. "Surely," I said to myself, "something strange [new] must answer to the strange [new] sign that my master follows with his eye."

(*Inf.* 16.112-17)

At this point the poet interrupts the action with a tercet on the caution that should govern our behavior in the company of those who can read our thoughts, followed by Vergil's confirmation that he has in fact divined the pilgrim's excitement regarding the "novita" that will respond to the "novo cenno." He announces the arrival of such a thing as dreams are made of, such a thing as the writer fishes for in the deep waters of the imagination with the thin cord of reason: "Tosto verra di sopra / cio ch'io attendo e che il tuo pensier sogna; / tosto convien ch'al tuo viso si scovra" ("Soon will come up what I await and what your mind dreams; soon it must be discovered to your sight" [*Inf.* 16.121-23]). This long crescendo concludes with the verses cited earlier, in which the narrator first compares himself to one who should keep silent but cannot, then appeals directly to the reader, and finally presents Geryon. The canto closes with a brief simile in which the monster is compared to a diver who returns from the depths of the sea.

Because of the intrusion of elements that seem entirely disconnected from the literal story line, this passage has always been read allegorically; besides Buti, who takes the cord as the Franciscan cordon and thus proof of Dante's belonging to minor orders, interpretations range from the cord as a symbol of chastity contrasted to lust (the leopard), the cord as truth contrasted to fraud (Geryon), and the cord as the pity that the pilgrim must shed before venturing into lower hell. [43] In a study that analyzes the language of the Geryon episode for its biblical and patristic valences, Roberto Mercuri proposes that taking off the cord represents a renunciation of sin as the pilgrim completes the conversion begun in the poem's first canto. [44] I would advance instead the following metapoetic interpretation, based on the traditional interpretation of the cord as a symbol of fraud.[45] The cord is knotted and tortuous ("aggroppata e ravvolta"), signifying the deceit of language; it was used for catching the leopard, lust, because Dante comes out of a tradition where language serves to deal with--capture--eros: his major previous experience with poetic language is the experience of love poetry. He hands the cord to Vergil, thus signifying the development of his discourse, its enlargement from the lyric to the epic--"Vergilian"--mode. Only this mode can provide the new language, the new signs ("novo cenno") required to bring forth a *novita*, because only this mode imitates life, defined as a path punctuated by the continual arrival of new things. The use of a *novo cenno* to elicit a *novita* is thus a paradigm for the writing of a new kind of poetry, a poetry founded on the poetics of the new. The knotty skein of an exclusively erotic textuality (of Petrarchan *dolci nodi*) calls forth the even knottier, supremely embellished emblem of a new and larger textuality:

lo dosso e 'l petto e ambedue le coste  
dipinti avea di nodi e di rotelle.  
Con piu color, sommesse e sovrapposte  
non fer mai drappi Tartari ne Turchi,  
ne fuor tai tele per Aragne imposte.

His back and chest and both his sides were painted with knots and circlets. Never did Tartars or Turks make fabrics with more colors, more threads of warp and woof; nor were such webs loomed by Arachne.

(*Inf.* 17.14-18)

Everything about this description speaks to the identification of "la sozza imagine di froda" with textuality ("imagine" virtually authorizes us to read Geryon in a representational key, as does this canto's unusually high proportion of *imagines*, i.e., similes):[46] the monster's knotty surface, reminiscent of the knots of discourse that imprison Pier della Vigna; [47] the emphasis on painting and color, reminiscent of the *colores retorici*; [01] the reference to weaving, to the warp and woof of a woven fabric, which reminds us that the poet on occasion speaks of his *testo* in terms of weaving or *tessere*, the activity that lies at the etymological roots of textuality; [49] and finally, the name that brings all the above into focus, that of Arachne. By comparing the designs woven on Geryon's flanks to the *tele* woven by Arachne, Dante summons the mythological figure who more than any other is an emblem for textuality, for weaving the webs of discourse. Her *tele* are the webs of

textuality, of art: they signify the inherent deceptiveness of an art that can deceive through its mimetic perfection, its achievement of verisimilitude (art therefore, as "craft" in both its senses, as handiwork and Ulyssean guile), also, because Arachne challenged Minerva, her webs signify our hubris (again Ulyssean), our will to challenge, to go beyond. In other words, Arachne is the textual/ artistic correlative of Ulysses, and also therefore of those surrogates for Ulysses who figure so prominently at the end of the Geryon episode. In his own moment of flight, Dante likens the fear he experiences on Geryon's back first to that of Phaeton when he let go the reins and doomed his ride in his father's chariot to perdition--"Maggior paura non credo che fosse / quando Fetonte abbandonò li freni" ("Greater fear I do not think there was when Phaeton abandoned the reins" [*Inf.* 17.1067] )--and then to that of Icarus, as his wings melt: "ne quando Icaro misero le reni / senti spennar per la scaldata cera, / gridando il padre a lui 'Mala via tieni!'" ("nor while poor Icarus felt his sides unfeathering on account of the heated wax, while his father cried to him 'You're on the wrong path!'" [*Inf.* 17.109-11]). Thus, Ulysses is proleptically evoked in the Geryon episode: first by Arachne, at the beginning of canto 17, and then by Phaeton and Icarus, at the canto's end.[50]

It is worth noting, moreover, that the image cluster we associate with Ulysses, the conflation of sailing with flying epitomized by "de' remi facemmo ali al folle volo," is also used for the presentation of Geryon. As we recall, Geryon both flies and swims, or rather--although we know that he is flying, since the element in which he navigates is air, not water--he is presented as swimming. The narrator recounts seeing "per quell'aere grosso e scuro / venir *notando* una figura in suso" and then reinforces the swimming image with the simile of the diver that closes canto 16:

si come torna colui che va giuso  
talora a solver l'ancora ch'aggrappa  
o scoglio o altro che nel mare e chiuso,  
che 'n su si stende e da pie si rattrappa.

as one returns who sometimes goes down to release the anchor caught on a reef or on something else hidden in the sea, who stretches himself upward and pushes off with his feet.

(*Inf.* 16.13336)

In the opening sequence of canto 17, describing the monster's position on the edge of the abyss, the poet compares him first to boats that are banked on the shore, part in the water and part on land, and then to the beaver:

Come talvolta stanno a riva i burchi,  
che parte sono in acqua e parte in terra,  
e come la tra li Tedeschi lurchi  
lo bivero s'assetta a far sua guerra

as boats sometimes lie along the shore, part in the water and part on land, and as there among the gluttonous Germans the beaver makes ready to wage its war

(*Inf.* 17.1922)

And, in order to describe the way in which Geryon backs up from the edge and turns around, Dante again pairs the image of a boat, a "navicella," with a marine animal, the eel:

Come la navicella esce di loco  
in dietro in dietro, si quindi si tolse;  
e poi ch'al tutto si senti a gioco,  
la 'v'era 'l petto, la coda rivolve,  
e quella tesa, come anguilla, mosse,  
e con le branche l'aere a se raccolse.

As the little ship backs out of its place a little at a time, so did Geryon take himself from there; and as soon as he felt himself completely in the clear he turned his tail to where his chest had been and, having stretched it, moved it like an eel and with his paws gathered the air to himself (*Inf.* 17.100-105)

In the passage that follows Dante reconfirms navigation by air and by sea, telling us that the *fera* "sen va notando lenta lenta; / rota e discende, ma non me n'accorgo / se non che al viso e di sotto mi venta" ("goes swimming slowly on; he wheels and descends, but I can make out nothing but the wind blowing on my face and from below" [17.115-17]). The canto closes with an image of unadulterated flight; as though to balance the ascent of the swimming diver at the end of canto 16, here we find the descent of a flying falcon.

From this welter of navigational images, I would like to isolate one as particularly important for my present purposes, that of the *navicella*. The word occurs only thrice in the poem; undoubtedly the most conspicuous of its three appearances is that of *Purgatorio* 1, where it serves in the canticle's second verse as an image for the text itself, about to sail onto better waters: "Per correr miglior acque alza le vele / omai la navicella del mio ingegno, / che lascia dietro a se mar si crudele" ("To course over better waters the little ship of my intellect now lifts its sails, leaving behind her a sea so cruel" [Purg. 1 .1-3] ) [51] I would suggest that there is an analogy between the poem, "la navicella del mio ingegno," sailed by Dante poet, and Geryon, also a "navicella," sailed by Dante pilgrim. Much of what is said about Geryon in *Inferno* 16 and 17 could be taken as a description of the poem. Geryon-- who like God, Lucifer, and the *Commedia* possesses both a single and a triple nature (the Latin poets call him *tergeminus*, threefold, three-bodied)--concedes his strong shoulders (the "omeri forti" of *Inf* 17.42 bring to mind the poet's "omero mortal" in the metapoetic Ulyssean passage of *Paradiso* 23) for a spiraling voyage that synthesizes the journey through hell: the verses "lo scendere e 'l girar per li gran mali / che s'appressavan da *diversi canti*" ("the descending and the turning through the great evils that drew near on different sides" [*Inf.* 17.125-26]) provide a punning description not only of the pilgrim's flight but of the reader's narrative descent through the text's *diversi canti*. [52] We have already noted the emblematic value for the poem as a whole of "quel ver c'ha faccia di menzogna," a phrase that prepares the reader for Geryon; also significant are Vergil's words describing the unknown new object as "cio ch'io attendo e che il tuo pensier sogna," which cast Dante as a visionary and Geryon as what he has created, envisioned, imagined, dreamed up. As we shall see, there are ample grounds for believing that Dante viewed his vision as the product of a waking dream, and himself as akin both to St. Paul, confused regarding the status of his otherworldly experience, and to Christ's disciples upon witnessing their master's transfiguration; it is worth noting that Guido da Pisa glosses "ver c'ha faccia di menzogna" with the examples of Paul's *raptus*, which he dared not reveal lest it be thought a lie, and the disciples' similar concern to hide what they had seen until after the resurrection, lest their truth be considered false.[53] Finally, if we look at the similes of the diver and the falcon in this light, we are struck by the extent to which they are paradigms for the action of the poem as a whole. Thus, Geryon arrives "si come torna colui che va giuso / talora a solver l'ancora ch'aggrappa / o scoglio o altro che nel mare e chiuso," in verses that seem to gloss the return of the pilgrim from hell, that "mar si crudele" into which he dove in order to free his own ship's anchor from the reef of sin. Likewise, the image of the falcon that falls to earth without having seen its master's lure-- "Come 'l falcon ch'e stato assai su l'ali, / che senza veder logoro o uccello / fa dire al falconiere 'Ome, tu cali!'" ("As the falcon that has been long upon the wing, that without seeing lure or bird makes the falconer cry Alas, you fall!'" [*Inf* 17.127-29])-- glosses the fall of the soul that refuses the upward lure set out by God and insists on heading downward, a condition Dante refers to, using the same falcon imagery, in the *Purgatorio*. [54]

With respect to the analogy between Geryon and the Ulyssean "navicella del mio ingegno," I would argue that Geryon both is the poem and is its antithesis, in the same way that Ulysses both is Dante and is his antithesis. On the one hand, the poem is defined as truth, Geryon is defined as mendacity, fraud; therefore, Geryon and the poem are opposites, Geryon is the *Commedia's* antithesis. A passage with great bearing on this reading may be found, significantly, immediately preceding Geryon's arrival, in the context of the pilgrim's meeting with the three noble Florentine sodomites. To their request for a statement regarding the condition of Florence, the pilgrim replies with the famous verses about the "gente nuova e i subiti guadagni" ("new people and sudden gains" [*Inf.* 16.73]) that have corrupted his city. Less noted are the verses that follow, in which Dante characterizes himself as one who speaks in the posture of an angry prophet-- "Cosi gridai con la faccia levata" ("So I cried with uplifted face" [76])--and with a prophet's claim to truth: "e i tre, che cio inteser per risposta, / guardar l'un l'altro *com'al ver si guata*" ("and the three, who took this as my answer, looked at each *other as one*

looks at the truth" [77-78] ). This "ver," like the "ver c'ha faccia di menzogna" to be introduced shortly, is the part of the poem that will triumph over the fraudulence of the medium to which it is tied, because its truth has been secured by one who transcends the mendacity of language. Because, in fact, he is using the lying medium of language to write a truth, Dante dares to confront the "faccia di menzogna" that is his necessary vehicle, which he does precisely by tackling head-on the representation of the vehicle itself: Geryon. Thus it is not surprising that Vergil should much later single out the ride on Geryon, the ride that made Dante akin to Phaeton and Icarus, the ride that made him a Ulyssean aeronaut, as emblematic of all the dangers they have encountered together in the course of their journey: "Ricorditi, ricorditi! E se io / sovrasso Gerion ti guidai salvo, / che faro ora presso piu a Dio?" ("Remember, remember! And if on Geryon I guided you safely, what shall I do now nearer to God?" [*Purg.* 27.22-24]). The encounter with Geryon dramatizes the text's confrontation with its own necessary representational fraud, and as such is the moment of maximum peril, when the text gambles all on being accepted as a "ver c'ha faccia di menzoga," a *comedia*. Dante establishes the parallel between Geryon and Ulysses because he knows that with respect to the textual voyage the Ulyssean component is finally inevitable: the text is a ship, a "navicella" identified with Geryon, and it is sailed by a Dante afraid of being Ulysses, a Dante who hears in simile the words "Mala via tieni!" shouted by Daedalus at his erring son and fears lest they be directed at him.

Now that we can integrate the Ulysses theme with the issue of new beginnings treated in the preceding chapter, we are in a position to discuss *Inferno* 8-9 and 16-17 as moments of narrative transition. In the wake of the relentless creation of infernal incipits in the opening cantos, by canto 7 the rhythmic pulse of the *Commedia's* forward motion has been somewhat quieted, if only because it has been established as continual and is therefore less noticeable. In cantos 8-9 and 16-17 the text's forward moving energy, its will to begin again, reemerges, channeled by interruptions that require noticeable new beginnings to offset them. These cantos evoke *Inferno* 1 and 2, where too forward motion was coordinated with fearful stasis: cantos 8 and 9 recount the pilgrim's crossing of the Styx and fearful arrival at the city of Dis, his transition from the circles of incontinence to "questo basso inferno" (*Inf.* 8.75), while cantos 16 and 17 narrate his encounter with Geryon and fearful transition from the circle of violence to the realm of fraud. [55] What interests me here is the poet's handling of these transitional cantos, his playing with narrative in ways that expose the lineaments of the narrative journey more than is usual. It is as though Dante wants us to recognize that there is a narrative voyage alongside the pilgrim's voyage, that the text's thematics will always be mirrored by its poetics. In the *Commedia*, the text's attention to itself, to its own voyage, is figured, as we have seen, by nautical, indeed aeronautical, imagery, in the same way that the narrator's presence is figured through Ulyssean language. Although the *Inferno's* boats, beginning with Charon's in canto 3, appear, as is to be expected, in episodes where they are required to assist in physical transition, they also signal increased attention to the poet and his problems. Thus, Charon's Ulyssean characterization of the pilgrim as a sailor, about to board the first of many boats ("Per altra via, per altri porti / verrai a piaggia, non qui, per passare: / piu lieve legno convien che ti porti" ["By another path, by other ports, you will come to shore, not here shall you pass; a lighter ship must carry you" (3.91-93)]) is coordinated with one of the poem's least smooth transitions, accomplished by way of a quake and a swoon; the very roughness of this transition draws attention to the narrating poet, who a few verses later will indulge for the first time in one of his favorite narrative devices, opening a sentence with "Vero e" (4.7). In canto 8 too, the reader finds a boat and a boatman--a "nave" and a "nocchier"[56]--and language that, with hindsight, reveals itself as provocatively metapoetical: no arrow ever coursed through the air as fast as this little ship ("nave piccioletta" [15]) piloted by a furious helmsman ("galeoto" [17], "nocchier" [80]), this boat ("barca" [25]) that cuts through the murky water with its ancient stem ("antica prora" [29]).[57] The arrow simile offers the rudiments of the aeronautics that will be more developed in the cases of Geryon and Ulysses, and fully achieved in the case of the angel's boat in *Purgatorio* 2;[58] that winged sailor, a "celestial nocchiero" (43), will share with Phlegyas, and with no one else, the designation "galeotto" (27). Phlegyas's "nave piccioletta" anticipates the *navicelle* of *Inferno* 17 and *Purgatorio* 1,[59] as well as the "piccioletta barca" of *Paradiso* 2 and the "picciola barca" of *Paradiso* 23, whose more metaphorical "ardita prora" (as compared to Phlegyas's "antica prora") is also guided by a nocchier: the poet.

Nautical language, even at this stage of the poem, where it has not yet achieved the metaphorical resonance it will accrete later on, is linked to the self-conscious presence of the poet, a presence testified to at once by canto 8's uniquely self-conscious opening words, "Io dico" The story the poet tells here is new, a tense drama spread over two cantos that interrupts the pilgrim's progress by invoking the possibility, whose narrative antecedents

derive from canto 2, of his unsuitability for the journey. The encounter with the devils who block the pilgrim's path, who try to send him back unescorted and unfulfilled, is different from the encounters engineered thus far, and so the poet does new and different things with his narrative. Indeed, cantos 8 and 9 are a display of the author's narrative prowess, a resolute breaking with the narrative conventions established heretofore. The first break is the self-conscious authorial flashback that begins canto 8, in which the narrator presents events that occurred before the events narrated at the end of the previous canto; before the travelers reached the foot of the tower described in canto 7's last verse ("Venimmo al pie d'una torre al da sezzo"), they had seen and discussed ominous signals passed between that tower and one further distant:[60]

Io dico, seguitando, ch'assai prima  
che noi fossimo al pie de l'alta torre,  
li occhi nostri n'andar suso a la cima  
per due fiammette che i vedemmo porre,  
e un'altra da lungi render cenno,  
tanto ch'a pena il potea l'occhio torre.

I say, following, that long before we had reached the foot of the high tower, our eyes went up to its top because of two little flames we saw set there, and another tower returned the signal from such a distance that the eye could barely catch it. (*Inf.* 8.1-6)

This flashback requires an overt manipulation of narrative time (as indicated by "Io dico, seguitando, ch'assai prima," where "seguitando," a word that moves forward, is paired with "assai prima," words that look back); it highlights the narrator, the one arranging the sequence according to his own rules, the one who says "Io dico" and who will announce, regarding Filippo Argenti, "Quivi il lasciammo, che piu non ne narro" ("There we left him, and I tell no more of him" [64]). This narrator, a term we use more advisedly than usual, since "narro" in line 64 represents the poem's first instance of the verb *narrare*, is in control: he can withhold or dispense narrative attention, textual time, as he chooses. Canto 8 concludes--it is, significantly, the first canto to end transitionally, *in medias res*--with Vergil's reference to the heavenly messenger whose assistance they anxiously await; his final verses are projected forward, using the adverb *gia* and the future tense to forecast the angel's arrival:[61] "e gia di qua da lei discende l'erta, / passando per li cerchi senza scorta, / tal che per lui ne fia la terra aperta" ("and already on this side of the gate is descending the steep path, passing without guide through the circles, one by whom the city will be opened to us" [128-30]). We note the careful coordination of the canto's beginning and end: at the beginning, the narrator looks into the past, via flashback, while at the end he looks (through Vergil) into the future, via suspense. The beginning goes back, and the end goes forward, creating a kind of narrative spiral and emphasizing, once more, the narrator's control over his text.

The narrator's presence is felt throughout this sequence, which also contains the poem's first two addresses to the reader and, in canto 8, the interpolated episode of Filippo Argenti, which complicates the narrative line in an unprecedented fashion by occurring after Phlegyas has picked up the travelers and before he deposits them at the gates of Dis. [62] Once arrived, the devils suggest that the temerarious pilgrim, "che si ardito intro per questo regno" ("who so daring entered in this kingdom" [*Inf.* 8.90]), return alone on the reckless path by which he came: "Sol si ritorni per la folle strada" (91). By denoting the pilgrim's path as "folle," the devils capitalize on his fears, attempting to diminish his resolve, to reduce him, psychologically, to the condition of canto 2, when he feared that the trip would be Ulyssean: *folle*. [63] The fears that in canto 2 were allayed by Vergil's assurance of grace will soon be swept away by the celestial messenger. But, if the devils are wrong regarding the pilgrim's "folle strada," one wonders if they might not have a point regarding the poet, whose "dead poetry" ("morta poesi" [*Purg.* 1.7]) seems calculated to fill in the blanks of what Vergil now calls, referring to the writing on hell's gate, God's "dead script" ("scritta morta" [*Inf.* 8.127]).[64] Conscious of the Ulyssean dimension of his project, Dante takes particular pains in this episode to distinguish diabolic from angelic sign systems. Besides the relay of threatening diabolic signs with which canto 8 opens,[65] the devils are characterized as creators of "parole maladette" whose effect would be to prevent the pilgrim's progress, to dead-end him: "Pensa, lettore, se io mi sconfortai / nel suon de le *parole maladette*, / che non credetti ritornarci mai" ("Think, reader, if I was discomfited by the sound of the *cursed words*, for I did not think I should ever return here" [*Inf.* 8.94-96]). Conversely, the angel, who appears after the devils have played their semiotic trump card in canto 9 by bringing forth Medusa, is the bearer of "parole sante," words invested with the power to convert a

dead end into a new beginning:[66] "e noi movemmo i piedi inver' la terra, / sicuri appresso le *parole sante*" ("and we moved our feet toward the city, secure in the wake of the *holy words*" [Inf. 9.104-5]). While Vergil, whose own mutilated word ("parola tronca" [Inf. 9.14]) mediates between the *parole maladette* and the *parole sante*, subscribes to the power of the diabolic signifiers and tells the pilgrim to turn back,[67] the angel--God's sign, his messenger--knows that the divine will is never *tronca*, that it is "quella voglia / a cui non puote il fin mai esser mozzo" ("that will whose end can never be cut off" [9 94-95]! Thus, while the devils are destined to remain forever impotently insolent ("Questa lor tracotanza non e nova" ["This their arrogance is not new" (Inf. 8.124)]), forever exchanging signs that accomplish nothing, forever "not new," the poet will successfully navigate his transition, moving forward along the narrative path, along the signpost of the new.

Vergil's heralding of Phlegyas's arrival--"Su per le sucide onde / gia scorder puoi quello che s'aspetta" ("Over the filthy waves you can already discern what is expected" [Inf. 8.10-11])--anticipates his later preannouncement of Geryon: "Tosto verra di sovra / cio ch'io attendo e che il tuo pensier sogna." The metapoetic content of the later verses is less latent, as indeed everything about the poet's meditation on narrative is less latent in cantos 16-17 than it was in cantos 8-9. Once more the poet's concerns have surfaced in a moment of narrative stress; once more he adopts narrative devices that dramatize the very nature of transition as a passing of the baton from the old to the new, a forging of the new out of the old. [68] If we look at the sequence as a whole, we see how the narrative is spliced: canto 16 begins with a new beginning, the waterfall that signals the passage to the eighth circle; this new beginning is staved off by the arrival of the three Florentine sodomites, recommences when Geryon ascends at the canto's end, and is again postponed by the encounter with the usurers in canto 17. These interruptions serve to make the sequence's formal structure a commentary on the nature of ending and beginning: the intercalary narrative underlines the new beginning by simultaneously announcing and delaying it. All this is worked out textually with great care. Canto 16 introduces change with its first word, the proleptic adverb "Gia" that marks the point of transition to the new, an "altro giro": "Gia era in loco onde s'udia 'l rimbombo / de l'acqua che cadea ne l'altro giro" ("Already I was in a place where one could hear the crashing of the water that fell into the next circle" [Inf. 16.1-2]). The Florentine sodomites, representatives not of the new circle of fraud that seemed so imminent but of the old circle of violence, appear within the same sentence, ushered by "quando": "quando tre ombre insieme si partiro, / correndo, d'una torma che passava / sotto la pioggia de l'aspro martiro" ("when three shades together broke off, running, from a troop that was passing under the rain of the fierce torment" [4-6]). This description is calculated to bring us back, mentally, to the condition of the sodomites-- inhabitants of the third *girone* of the seventh circle, a place we thought we were leaving--as presented at the end of the preceding canto, when we watched Brunetto rejoin his companions; the political conversation that ensues with the Florentine nobles also echoes the meeting with Brunetto. This encounter with the old, or with a variation thereof, continues until line 90, when the travelers again set off; they are soon overwhelmed by the sound of crashing water that this time receives its due in a lengthy simile (lines 94-105) whose key element for us is the verb "rimbomba" (100), which echoes "rimbombo" in line 1 and repositions us at the waterfall, precisely where we were at the outset of canto 16: we are once more prepared for a new beginning, which now arrives in the form of Geryon. After Geryon's arrival, however, and after the opening of a new canto that seems to make the new beginning embodied by Geryon definitive, the narrative cuts back to the seventh circle with the pilgrim's visit to the usurers, who represent a more complex intertwining of the old with the new the usurers are a new group-- no longer sodomites--inhabiting the old place, namely the same third ring of the seventh circle. Finally, the actual entry into the new takes place in the last section of canto 17.

The straight narrative line is interrupted in these cantos, much as it was in canto 8 by the various narrative manipulations noted earlier. Like canto 8, canto 16 ends *in medias res*; here we wait not for an arrival, as in the earlier instance, but for an identification of the creature that has just arrived. In canto 17, which begins with Vergil's exclamatory verses identifying Geryon, verses that only make sense if one has read the end of canto 16, the disjunctions of the narrative are rendered even more vividly than in the preceding canto. [69] This is a land of transition, and proximity to the boundary between old and new is stressed: Geryon is on the edge ("su l'orlo" [Inf. 17.24] ) of the abyss, with his tail in the void ("Nel vano" [25]); in order to reach him the travelers must move ten paces along the extremity ("in su lo stremo" [32]). Transition is further dramatized in the overlapping events whereby Vergil stays behind to negotiate with Geryon while Dante goes, "tutto solo" ("all alone" [44] ) for the first time since setting forth on his journey,[70] to gain full knowledge--Ulyssean *esperienza piena*--of this ring at his guide's behest: "Accio che tutta piena / esperienza d'esto giron porti" ("so that you may have full

experience of this ring" [37-38]). By the same token, he will return to find Vergil "gia su la groppa del fiero animale" ("already on the back of the fierce animal" [80] ). Most telling is Dante's presentation of the usurers, who are used as vehicles of narrative transition; as representatives of a third group of sinners within the seventh circle's third *girone*, they are precise embodiments of the grafting of the new onto the old. Thus, they sit next to the edge of the seventh circle ("propinqua al loco scemo" [36] ), so that the pilgrim is obliged to go even further along, "su per la strema testa / di quel settimo cerchio" ("up along the extreme margin of that seventh circle" [43-44]), in order to speak to them. Not only are they geographically positioned on the outer limits of the seventh circle, on the boundary dividing the seventh circle from the eighth as befits practitioners of a sin that seems to partake more of fraud than of violence, but they are linguistically and dramatically characterized in eighth circle terms: the usurers' low language, rough rhymes, vulgar gestures, and desire to incriminate each other are all narrative features of Malebolge. [71] They are the sequence's most explicit incarnations of the problematic Dante is dealing with: how do we distinguish the end from the beginning when all ends are beginnings and all beginnings are endings? How to render the mysterious process whereby time is accreted and a human being comes to say "I fui"--"I was"--the process whereby the new imperceptibly becomes the old and the present imperceptibly becomes the past?[72] This process, represented microcosmically by terza rima, is here dramatized and writ large by the narrative structure of these cantos. Not surprisingly, it is a structure that takes the form of a spiral, i.e., of a dialectic between old and new

The structure of these transitional cantos is spiral-like because transition, history, life itself are spiral-like, ever going backward in order to go forward (as the pilgrim goes anomalously backward from the usurers to Geryon, and as Geryon backs into his spiral),[73] ever finding the new within the old. The poet who designed these cantos was attempting to discover the shape of life, to register the form of things and the rhythm of existence in his verse. He was a Ulysses.

Note al cap. 3°

[http://dante.ilt.columbia.edu/books/undiv\\_com/notes/udc\\_notes\\_three.html](http://dante.ilt.columbia.edu/books/undiv_com/notes/udc_notes_three.html)

### **Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 01**

On flight imagery and the metaphysics of ascent in the *Commedia*, see Hugh Shankland, "Dante 'Aliger,'" *Modern Language Review* 70 (1975): 764--85; Shankland argues persuasively that Dante is aware of the relation between his last name and Vergil's coinage *aliger*, "wing bearing." His later essay focuses on flight imagery and Ulysses; see "Dante Aliger and Ulysses," *Italian Studies* 32 (1977): 2140.

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 02**

The early dichotomy is noted by Natalino Sapegno, "Ulisse," *Lecture classensi* 7 (1979): 93-98. In what follows I make no attempt to give an exhaustive resume of the Ulysses querelle but rather to highlight those critical writings that have proved most useful to me. Ample references may be found in Anthony K. Cassell, "Ulisseana: A Bibliography of Dante's Ulysses to 1981," *Italian Culture* 3 (1981): 23-45. \*

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 03**

Mario Fubini, "11 peccato d'Ulisse" and "11 canto XXVI dell'Inferno," in *11 peccato d'Ulisse e altri scritti danteschi* (Milan: Ricciardi, 1966), 1-76. Much of this material is repeated in Fubini's "Ulisse" in the ED. His supporters include Sapegno, in the previously cited essay, Antonino Pagliaro ("Ulisse," in *Ulisse: Ricerche semantiche sulla "Divina Commedia,"* 2 vols. [Messina: G. D'Anna, 1967], 1: 371-432), Fiorenzo Forti ("Curiositas' o 'fol hardement'7," in *Magnanimitade: Studi su un tema dantesco* [Bologna: Patron, 1977], 161-206), and Lino Pertile, "Dante e l'ingegno di Ulisse," *Stanford Italian Review* 1 (1979): 35-65.

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 04**

John A. Scott, "L'Ulisse dantesco," in *Dante magnanimo* (Florence: Olschki, 1977), 117-93, provides a review of the critical issues raised in the debate over Ulysses; his stated goal is to right the balance that had tipped too far toward Ulysses' heroic aspect. On the problems with knowing what sin to ascribe to this *bolgia*, see John Ahern, "Dante's Slyness: The Unnamed Sin of the Eighth *Bolgia*," *Romanic Review* 73 (1982): 275-91. The

poet's avoidance of a label has provided fertile soil for the collocation fallacy discussed in chapter 1; Pertile, for instance, claims that the nature of Ulysses' discourse is not a cause for damnation, "che se fosse un falsario di parole, dovremmo trovarlo piu giu nell'Inferno insieme al suo commilitone Sinone" ("Dante e l'ingegno d'Ulisse," 42). For another example of the fallacy at work, see note 34 below.

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 05**

Scholars who have emphasized the oration itself as the manifestation of Ulysses' sinfulness include Giorgio Padoan, "Ulisse 'fandi factor' e le vie della sapienza," 1960, rpt. in *11 pio Enea, l'empio Ulisse* (Ravenna: Longo, 1967), 170-99, and Anna Dolfi, "11 canto di Ulisse: occasione per un discorso di esegesi dantesca," *Forum Italicum* 7-8 (1973-1974): 22-45. **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 06**

"La tragedia di Ulisse," 1937, rpt. in *Dante e la cultura medievale*, 2d ed. rev. (Bari: Laterza, 1949), 153-65. Nardi's position is endorsed by Amilcare A. Iannucci, who comments that "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" ("Ulysses' folle volo: The Burden of History," *Medioevo romanzo* 3 [1976]: 410-45; quotation, 426).

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 07**

"Con l'ammirazione per l'eroe che scaglia la sua vita nell'ignoto contrasta appunto, nella coscienza di Dante, la riprovazione del folle ardimento, per parte del teologo" ("La tragedia di Ulisse," 165).

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 08**

"Ulisse e la tragedia intellettuale di Dante," in *La struttura morale dell'universo dantesco* (Rome: Ausonia, 1935), 26-40.

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 09**

For Freccero, Ulysses' voyage is an allegory of Dante's own previous intellectual adventurism, especially as represented by the philosophical detour of the *Convivio*; see "Dante's Prologue Scene," 1966, and "Dante's Ulysses," 1975, rpt. in *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion*, ed. Rachel Jacoff (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986). The same line of argument is pursued by David Thompson in "Dante's Ulysses and the Allegorical Journey," 1967, rpt. in *Dante's Epic Journeys* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974). Maria Corti sees Ulysses as a symbol of the radical Aristotelians, an in malo version of what Siger represents in bono; see *Dante a un nuovo crocevia* (Florence: Libreria Commissionaria Sansoni, 1981), 8597.

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 10**

Fubini writes of "un certo gusto dannunziano a cui inconsapevolmente ha ceduto il severo studioso" (ED, s.v. "Ulisse," 5:806).

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 11**

For Cassell, "Ulysses, far from being the exceptional paragon imagined by romantic-minded critics, was chosen by the Poet as the exemplary ambitious, dissembling pretender to noble counsel, one whose aims and posturing advice were as deceptive as the rest of the 'lordura' held in this ditch of Malebolge"; see *Dante's Fearful Art of Justice* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 95.

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 12**

Fubini's thesis shows obvious strains as he argues that "certo Ulisse va incontro a un limite, a un limite che aveva ignorato e che gli s'impone con quella catastrofe, ma non e, ripeto, una punizione" and that "soprattutto non vi e parola di 'divieto" (ED, s.v. "Ulisse," 5:807, 808).

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 13**

Vergil is also a sinner who is named in each canticle, but as a major protagonist of the poem, rather than as a figure encountered only once. Nimrod appears in *Inf.* 31, is listed among the examples of pride in *Purg.* 12, and is invoked by Adam in *Par.* 26. He attests to the indissoluble link between pride and creativity: our creativity leads to the invention and use of language, and our pride is responsible for its disruption. Another figure mentioned in each canticle is Phaeton, not a sinner in the *Commedia* but a further emblem of the problematic that both Ulysses and Nimrod represent.

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 14**

On Dante's use of folle/follia, associated with excess and intellectual pride, see Umberto Bosco, "La 'follia' di Dante," 1958, rpt. in *Dante vicino*, 2d ed. (Caltanissetta: Sciascia, 1972), 55-75. For textual recalls of Ulyssean motifs, see Franco Fido, "Writing Like God or Better? Symmetries in Dante's 26th and 27th Cantos," *Italica* 63 (1986): 25-64.

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 15**

Croce's strictures against the stretches of "non poesia" in the *Commedia* echo those of Edgar Allan Poe vis-a-vis *Paradise Lost* in "The Philosophy of Composition": "What we term a long poem is, in fact, merely a succession of brief ones—that is to say, of brief poetical effects. It is needless to demonstrate that a poem is such, only inasmuch as it intensely excites, by elevating, the soul; and all intense excitements are, through a psychal necessity, brief. For this reason, at least one half of the *Paradise Lost* is essentially prose—a succession of poetical excitements interspersed, inevitably, with corresponding depressions (*Literary Criticism of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. Robert L. Hough [Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965], 2223).

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 16**

Likewise, vis-a-vis Nardi's alignment of Ulysses with Lucifer, also considered anachronistic, D'Arco Silvio Avalle points out that the *Libro de Alexandre's Alexander the Great* is explicitly compared to Lucifer; see "L'ultimo viaggio di Ulisse," in *Modelli semiologici nella "Commedia" di Dante* (Milan: Bompiani, 1975), 60.

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### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 17**

"Ne dolcezza di figlio," 1965, rpt. in *Dante vicino*, 173-96.

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 18**

I refer the reader to Scott, who demonstrates four fundamental oppositions: Ulysses vs. Aeneas, Ulysses vs. Cato, Ulysses vs. Solomon, and Ulysses vs. Dante. Another way to state the terms of the critical debate would be to divide critics into those who see Ulysses as a precursor of the pilgrim and those who see him as his antithesis; see Adriano Bozzoli, "Ulisse e Dante," *Convivium* 34 (1966): 345-53. Jurij M. Lotman writes "Ulisse e l'originale doppio di Dante" (96); see "11 viaggio di Ulisse nella Divina Commedia di Dante," *Testo e contesto* (Bari: Laterza, 1980), 81-102.

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 19**

Although not elaborated systematically, Giuseppe Mazzotta suggests a similar position: "He will reappear again, even in *Paradiso*, as a constant reminder to the poet of the possible treachery of his own language and the madness of his own journey" (*Dante, Poet of the Desert* [Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press 1979], 105). More explicitly, Giuliana Carugati views Ulysses "come figura emblematica di un tema che, debordando dai confini del canto 26 dell'Inferno, assume valore di struttura portante, di metafora centrale della scrittura dantesca" (*Dalla menzogna al silenzio: La scrittura mistica della "Commedia" di Dante* [Bologna: 11 Mulino, 1991], 89).

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 20**

It is worth noting that an anonymous story ascribing the authorship of the *Commedia* to the holy spirit ("che quello libro di Monarchia si dovesse e potesse bene intitolare a Dante, ma la Comedia piu tosto allo Spirito Sancto che a Dante") offers *Purg.* 24 as its clinching argument: "Non vedi tu che dice qui chiaro che, quando l'amore dello Spirito Sancto lo spira dentro al suo intellecto, che nota la spirazione e poi la significa secondo che esso Spirito gli dicta e dimostra? volendo dimostrare che le cose sottili e profonde, che tratto e tocco in questo libro, non si potevano conoscere senza singulare grazia e dono di Spirito Sancto" (*Dante, secondo la tradizione e i novellatori*, ed. Giovanni Papanti [Leghom: Vigo, 1873], 85-88).

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 21**

The advantage is compounded by the fact that, as Augustine points out, there is no way to check as to the truth of the scribe's transcription: "But how should I know whether what he [Moses] said was true? . . . Since, then, I cannot question Moses, whose words were true because you, the Truth, filled him with yourself, I beseech you,

my God, to forgive my sins and grant me the grace to understand those words, as you granted him, your servant, the grace to speak them" (Conf 11.3- trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin [London: Penguin, 1961]).

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 22**

Impresa is a Ulyssean term in the *Commedia*, appearing twice regarding the pilgrim's undertaking in Inf. 2, once regarding the poet's undertaking in Inf. 32, and in a way calculated to conflate pilgrim and poet in Par. 33.

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 23**

For Hawkins, see "Virtuosity and Virtue: Poetic Self-Reflection in the *Commedia*," *Dante Studies* 98 (1980): 1-18; citing Dante's "chastening conversation with Oderisi" (12), his humble "willingness to fly 'di retro al dittator'" (13), and the "redeemed poesis" (14) of *Paradiso*, Hawkins concludes that "the story of Ulysses is rewritten by the 'tempered' life of the pilgrim and the 'tempered' pen of the poet" (15). For Taylor, see "From *superbo li6n* to *umile Italia*: The Acrostic of *Paradiso* 19," *Stanford Italian Review* 7 (1987): 47-65; since the acrostic of *Purg.* 12 "edges dangerously close to Lucifer's presumption," it "requires revision" (55), which Dante provides in the acrostic of *Par.* 19 (for the manner in which the second acrostic is alleged to correct the first, see chapter 6, note 17).

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 24**

See Dalla menzogna al silenzio, 79; the two poles of Carugati's reading, "mensonge" versus "Silence," are derived from Michel De Certeau's study of the mystical enterprise as a linguistic enterprise, *La fable mystique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1982).

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 25**

"The Fate of Writing: The Punishment of Thieves in the *Inferno*," *Dante Studies* 102 (1984): 51-60; quotation, 55.

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 26**

"The Imageless Vision and Dante's *Paradiso*," *Dante Studies* 90 (1972): 7791; quotation, 81.

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 27**

*Dante and Difference: Writing in the "Commedian"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 125.

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 28**

Of this apostrophe, Anna M. Chiavacci Leonardi writes that "tutto il testo e costruito sulle parole stesse pronunciate da Ulisse nell'*Inferno*" (*La guerra de la pietate* [Naples: Liguori, 1979], 171). For Lucia Battaglia Ricci, the Ulyssean passages cited here indicate that "non e l'eroe Dante a essere l'antagonista di Ulisse, ma il Dante narratore" (*Dante e la tradizione letteraria medievale* [Pisa: Giardini, 1983], 173). Our positions differ however, since Battaglia Ricci couples Ulysses/Dante-narrator in order to set up the same reversal usually operated with respect to Ulysses/ Dante-pilgrim: the Ulyssean imagery used by the poet in the *Paradiso* indicates how confident and secure a guide he is to his readers, how unlike Ulysses to his crew, and how sure of a positive outcome to his voyage. The Ulyssean elements of the address of *Par.* 2 are treated also by Gino Rizzo, "Dante's Ulysses," *Arts: The Journal of the Sydney University Arts Association* 12 (1984): 7-21, and Carugati, *Dalla menzogna al silenzio*, 99-103.

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 29**

It is difficult, in the context of so explicit a statement of poetic originality, not to see a double meaning in the locution "nove Muse."

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 30**

Robert Hollander gathers together all these passages under the rubric of "Dante's Voyage," chapter 5 of *Allegory in Dante's "Commedia"* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1969). For him, however, the Neptune analogy contains the following figural identities: "The Pilgrim is Jason, on the way to getting the Fleece; the Poet is Neptune, watching him do 50" (230-31) . And yet Jason is identified with the poet in *Par.* 2, since it is the poet who will create in us the wonder elicited by Jason from his crew, and there is no doubt that Neptune's wonder serves as a figure for the wonder of the pilgrim in the face of "La forma universal di questo

nodo" (Par.33.91). By the same token, Glaucus serves as a model for the pilgrim, not the poet, in Par. 1: "tal dentro mi fei, / qual si fe Glauco nel gustar de l'erba / che 'I fe consorto in mar de li altri dei" [67-69]). Apropos Glaucus, we might note that his "gustar de l'erba" is a variant of Adam's "gustar del legno," indicating once again how fine is the line between transgression and transformation.

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 31**

On the "words that tie Ulysses' experience to Dante's in the first canto of the poem," see Hollander, *Allegory in Dante's "Commedia,"* 120.

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 32**

Whether registered negatively, as a fear, or positively, as an aspiration, a comparison indicates a likeness, with the result that Inf. 2.32 constitutes a classic example of the content signifying in one way while the form signifies in another.

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 33**

One reader who states this view very clearly is Jorge Luis Borges, in the essay on the *Commedia* contained in *Seven Nights*, trans. Eliot Weinberger (New York: New Directions, 1984): "To what do we owe the tragic weight of this episode? I think there is an explanation, the only valid one, and that is that Dante felt, in some way, that he was Ulysses. I don't know if he felt it in a conscious way<it doesn't matter. In some tercet of the *Commedia* he says that no one is permitted to know the judgments of Providence. We cannot anticipate them; no one can know who will be saved and who condemned. But Dante has dared, through poetry, to do precisely that. He shows us the condemned and the chosen. He must have known that doing so courted danger. He could not ignore that he was anticipating the indecipherable providence of God. For this reason the character of Ulysses has such force, because Ulysses is a mirror of Dante, because Dante felt that perhaps he too deserved this punishment. Writing the poem, whether for good or ill, he was infringing on the mysterious laws of the night, of God, of Divinity" (24).

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 34**

For a reading of the canto in this key, see my "True and False See-ers in *Inferno SX*" *Lectura Dantis: A Forum for Dante Research and Interpretation* 4 (1989): 42-54. Apropos the connection between Ulysses and the diviners, Alessandro Chiappelli demonstrates the collocation fallacy in his denial of any such link: "E se invece fosse colpa quel suo voler veder troppo, come di lui disse il Petrarca, ei forse starebbe invece fra i miseri che fan petto delle spalle" ("*L:Odissea dantesca,*" in *Pagine di critica letteraria* [Florence: Le Monnier; 1911], 314).

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 35**

In seeking to achieve God's perspective, from which there is nothing new to see because everything has been foreseen, the diviners are the opposite of Neptune who sees not no new things but plenty of them: "Tra l'isola di Cipri e di Maiolica / non vide mai si gran fallo Nettuno, / non da pirate, non da gente argolica" (Inf. 28.8244). Note the phrasing "non vide mai," which anticipates "mai non vide" in Purg. 10.94.

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 36**

In light of Rocco Montano's suggestion that Ulysses' quest for knowledge degenerates into *vana curiositas* ("*I modi della narrazione di Dante,*" *Convivium* 26 [1958]: 546-67), it is worth noting that St. Thomas, in his critique of curiosity as a vice that derives from the "inordinateness of the appetite and effort to find out," includes those who seek "to foretell the future by recourse to demons" (ST 2a2ae.167.1; trans. and ed. Thomas Gilby, *Blackfriars* 1972, 44:203). Cato is contrasted to Ulysses by Scott in part for his refusal to ask an oracle for a message and thus go beyond the limits set for human knowledge. On Ulysses and the sin of curiosity, see also Albert E. Wingell, "The Forested Mountaintop in Augustine and Dante," *Dante Studies* 99 (1981): 9-48.

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 37**

See Michael Riffaterre, *Fictional Truth* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 21 and 30, where the author also notes that "signs of fictionality in a text are not veiled or blunted or compensated for by corrective verisimilitude that suspends disbelief; rather, it is these very signs that point to a truth invulnerable to the deficiencies of mimesis or to the reader's resistance to it" (33). Riffaterre's list of "signs pointing to the fictionality of fiction" include many used by Dante: "authors' intrusions; narrators' intrusions; multiple

narrators; humorous narrative that acts as a representation of the author or of a narrator or that suggests an outsider's viewpoint without fully intruding; metalanguage glossing narrative language; generic markers in the titles and subtitles, in prefaces, and in postfaces; emblematic names for characters and places; incompatibilities between narrative voice and viewpoint and characters' voices and viewpoints; incompatibilities between viewpoint and verisimilitude, especially omniscient narrative; signs modifying the narrative's pace and altering the sequence of events (backtracking and anticipation, significant gaps, prolepsis, and analepsis); mimetic excesses, such as unlikely recordings of unimportant speech or thought (unimportant but suggestive of actual happenings, of a live presence, creating atmosphere or characterizing persons); and, finally, diegetic overkill, such as the representation of ostensibly insignificant details, the very insignificance of which is significant in a story as a feature of realism" (29-30).

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 38**

For a full-fledged exposition of the analysis regarding Dante's use of *comedia*, *tragedia*, and *teodia* that informs this paragraph, see the last chapter of Teodolinda Barolini, *Dante's Poets: Textuality and Truth in the "Comedy"* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984).

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 39**

The paradigm that emerges from the *Eclogues* is of particular significance because these works belong to the last years of Dante's life, 1320-1321, and, in the case of the second *eclogue*, perhaps to his last months (see Cecchini's introduction to his edition, 64>49). One could see these texts as proposing a final succinct statement of Dantesque poetics, in which we move from the first *eclogues's* defense of *comica verba* (2.52) to the second's suggestion that the province of such *verba* is *mira vera*.

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 40**

It is significant that both these passages constitute addresses to the reader moments of exposed narrativity, as discussed in chapter 1.

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 41**

"Dante Theologus-Poeta, n 1976, rpt. in *Studies in Dante* (Ravenna: Longo, 1980), 76.

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 42**

"Gerione non rappresenta soltanto la frode come categoria morale, ma anche come categoria estetica: egli è anche la personificazione della menzogna poetica" ("*Comedia*, n 1971; rpt. in *Il poema del desiderio* [Milan: Leonardo, 1990], 99). Ferrucci reads Geryon as Dante's indication to us that his poem is merely metaphorical, made of lies; he is seconded by Carugati, *Dalla menzogna al silenzio*, 68-70. In *Dante's Poets*, 214 and *passim*, I disagree with Ferrucci's position, taking Geryon rather as Dante's paradoxical confirmation that the *comedia*, even when it appears to be lying, always tells truth. A similar position is that of Zygmunt G. Baranski, who claims that Dante makes explicit his poem's sharing in the allegory of theologians "by associating his 'comedy' with Geryon, who, as a divinely created *mirabile* and hence like the Bible and the universe in general was an *allegoria in factis* and not simply *in verbis*" ("*The 'Marvellous' and the 'Comic': Toward a Reading of Infemo XVI*," *Lectura Dantis: A Forum for Dante Research and Interpretation* 7 [1990]: 7295; quotation, 87).

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 43**

The last interpretation is that of Antonio Lanza, who provides a resume of critical reactions in "*L'allegoria della corda nel canto XVI dell'Inferno*," *Rassegna della letteratura italiana* 84 (1980): 97-100.

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 44**

Semantica di Gerione: 11 motivo del viaggio nella "*Commedia*" di Dante (Rome: Bulzoni, 1984). Franco Masciandaro also stresses the relation between the Geryon episode and the first canto in "*Appunti sulla corda di Gerione e la cintura-serpente della dialettica*," *Revue des études italiennes* 25 (1979): 259-72; for him the cord represents the excessively confident intellectualism associated with the *Convivio*.

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 45**

The traditional interpretation is supported by Mario Marti: "Ebbene, direi subito che fra la compatta interpretazione degli antichi, che videro nella corda aggroppata e ravvolta il simbolo della frode, e le

numerosissime spiegazioni dei moderni esegeti, che vi colsero o la buona fede, o la continenza, o la castità (e in questo caso s'identificherebbe col cordiglio francescano), o l'umiltà, o la contrizione, o la mortificazione della carne, o la legge e l'osservanza della legge, o la temperanza, o la dirittura della coscienza morale, o altro ancora, io sto con gli antichi" ("Tematica e dimensione verticale del XVI dell'Inferno," 1968; rpt. in *Studi su Dante* [Galatina: Congedo, 1984], 74).

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 46**

On the Geryon similes, see Richard H. Lansing, *From Image to Idea: A Study of the Simile in Dante's "Commedia"* (Ravenna: Longo, 1977), 124-27. Uberto Limentani notes that *Inf.* 17 contains more similes (15) than any other canto in the poem and suggests that the "constant and exceptionally frequent use of comparisons serves to make Geryon and the circumstances of his extraordinary appearance more credible" (Dante's "Comedy" [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985], 49). Marino Barchiesi comments that canto 17 "è il più ricco di comparazioni, brevi e lunghe, adunate intorno alla presenza simulatrice di Gerione" ("Arte del prologo e arte della transizione," *Studi danteschi* 44 [1967]: 147).

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 47**

The description of the suicides' souls as bound "in questi nocchi" (*Inf.* 13.89) is anticipated by the branches of their wood, "non rami schietti, ma nodosi e 'nvolti" (13.5) .

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 48**

This emphasis is certainly related to "la lonza a la pelle dipinta" (*Inf.* 16.108) "che di pel macolato era coverta" (*Inf.* 1.33).

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 49**

Speaking of the book of his life in *Par.* 17, according to the conflation between life and text that is a hallmark of his poetics from the time of the *Vita Nuova*, Dante writes of Cacciaguada that "si mostro spedita / l'anima santa di metter la trama / in quella tela ch'io le porsi ordita" (100-102).

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 50**

Mercuri sees Phaeton and Icarus as allusions to Ulysses (*Semantica di Gerione*, 85); he connects these two figures to Arachne, writing "Dante e esempio di umiltà antitetico agli 'exempla' di superbia incarnati da Icaro, Fetonte, Aracne e Gerione" (153). On the pilgrim as a "corrected" Phaeton, see Kevin Brownlee, "Phaeton's Fall and Dante's Ascent," *Dante Studies* 102 (1984): 135<sup>4</sup>.

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 51**

The third use of *navicella* occurs in the tableaux of the earthly paradise, where it refers to the chariot that represents the church: "O *navicella* mia, com' mal se' carca!" (*Purg.* 32.129). In these three usages Dante seems to give us instances of three fundamental voyages: the voyage of the individual life in the first, the voyage of the text in the second, and the voyage of providential history in the third.

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 52**

A similar pun occurs in a similarly metapoetic canto, to be discussed shortly, *Inf.* 8: when the pilgrim refers to Vergil as "O caro duca mio, che più di sette / volte m'hai sicurtà renduta e tratto / d'alto periglio che 'ncontra mi stette" (97-99), we are reminded that Vergil has escorted his charge through seven previous cantos.

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 53**

Dante equates himself to Paul in *Par.* 1 and to the disciples in *Purg.* 32; he also draws an analogy between his own visionary experience and that of St. John, to be discussed in chapter 7. Guido da Pisa writes as follows: "Unde ait nos admonens quod illi vero, quod habet faciem mendacii, debemus claudere labia quousque possumus, idest tantum tacere debemus quousque necessitas postulabit. Et ideo beatus Paulus Apostolus, licet raptus fuerit usque ad tertium celum, tamen quia illud verum faciem falsi poterat in auribus audientium generare, ideo illud annis xiiii occultavit. Et Christus mandavit illis tribus apostolis qui suam transfigurationem viderant, quod nemini dicerent visionem quousque ipse fuisset a mortuis suscitatus. Nam si ante suam resurrectionem illam visionem dixissent, audientes nullatenus credidissent. Sed probata et manifestata

resurrectione, illud tale verum iam non habuerit faciem falsi, sed veri" (Expositiones et glose super "Comediam" Dantis, ed. Vincenzo Cioffari [Albany: State University of New York Press, 1974], 306).

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 54**

On Geryon and the falcon imagery of the Purgatorio, see Mercuri, *Semantica di Gerione*, 163-64.

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 55**

Although critics like Mercuri and Masciandaro have made much of the relation between Inf. 16 and Inf. 1, less attention has been paid to the importance of Inf. 8 in this progression of new beginnings. Amilcare A. Iannucci discusses Christ's descent into hell as typological model for both Inf. 2 and 9: "Queste intrusioni divine risolvono il pauroso dilemma del pellegrino e fanno sì che il viaggio prima possa iniziare e poi possa continuare" ("Dottrina e allegoria in Inferno VIII, 67-IX, 105," *Dante e le forme dell'allegoresi*, ed. Michelangelo Picone [Ravenna: Longo, 1987], 122).

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 56**

Both words occur for the first time in canto 3 vis-a-vis Charon, and for the second time in canto 8 vis-a-vis Phlegyas. The third use of *nocchiero* refers to the angel in Purg. 2.

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 57**

This represents the first appearance of *barca*, whose last appearance is in the -' Ulyssean passage of Par. 23; Phlegyas's "barca" is also called "legno," like the ship in the address of Par. 2.

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 58**

In demonstrating that "Dante's aeronautical imagination proves every bit as > lively and exact as Leonardo's," Glauco Cambon compares Geryon's movement to that of the *angelo nocchiero* (Dante's *Craft* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1969], 86). Mercuri notes that "Gerione può essere considerato l'antitesi dell'*angelo nocchiero*" (*Semantica di Gerione*, 22). Shankland makes the comparison to Ulysses, pointing out that "the wing navigation of this 'celestial *nocchiero*' can be i. read as a serene enactment of the extravagant rhetorical phrase which the foolhardy human captain had used to describe the eager start of his adventure" ("Dante Alighieri and Ulysses," 30).

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 59**

The *correre* of the purgatorial ship-text ("Per correr miglior acque alza le vele . / omai la navicella del mio ingegno") echoes the *correre* of Phlegyas's boat in Inf. 8.

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 60**

Mark Musa stresses the suspense generated by the last line of canto 7 and the interruption created by the flashback in canto 8; whereas the flashback is normally interpreted as extending through verse 12 of canto 8, i.e., until the arrival of Phlegyas, Musa argues (unconvincingly, in my opinion) for its extension through 8.81 (see "At the Gates of Dis," in *Advent at the Gates* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1974], 65-84). Aldo Vallone outlines the history of the biographical explanation of the flashback in "A proposito di Inf. VIII, 'lo dico, seguitando,'" *Dal Medioevo al Petrarca: Miscellanea di studi in onore di Vittore Branca* (Florence: Olschki, 1983), 285-87.

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 61**

The use of *già* is important; it signifies forward motion, the antithesis of hell. The *già* at the end of canto 8 looks forward to the emphatic adverb that greets the angel's arrival in canto 9: "E già venia su per le torbide onde / un fracasso d'un suon" (9.64-65). The poet uses *già* to manipulate narrative time, most tellingly in the final verses of the poem, where its use in "ma già volgeva il mio disio e 'l velle" helps create the illusion of all time conflated into an eternal present. Edoardo Sanguineti refers to Dante's *già* as a "'iam" narrative," and notes its frequent use in canto openings (*Interpretazione di Malebolge* [Florence: Olschki, 1961], 72n and 257).

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 62**

G. A. Borgese writes of the Filippo Argenti episode that "structurally, Dante proves able for the first time to handle three persons at once: Argenti, Virgil, and himself" ("The Wrath of Dante," *Speculum* 13 [1938]: 184).

Pride with its Ulyssean connotations is present not only through the devils, but also through the figure of Argenti, whose anger stems from his pride; see Forti, "11 magnate non magnanimo: la praesumptio, n in Magnanimitate, 137-60.

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 63**

"Sol si ritorni per la folle strada" also echoes "io sol uno" in Inf. 2.3, the pilgrim's fear leads him to renounce his journey in canto 2 and again in canto 8: "ritroviam l'orme nostre insieme ratto" (8.102).

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 64**

I do not agree with Kirkpatrick, Dante's "Inferno": Difficulty and Dead Poetry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), that the poet is ashamed of the "dead poetry of hell; rather, being able to emulate God's *scritta morta* is a source of pride. Being aware of the dangers of such pride does not mean that it is not genuine, as we shall see in chapter 6.

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 65**

The semiotic nature of these signals is stressed by the questions the pilgrim addresses to his guide: "Questo che dice? e che risponde / quell'altro foco? e chi son quei che 'l fenno?" (Inf. 8.8-9).

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 66**

Giorgio Barberi Squarotti describes the angel as a source of impetuous movement able to break "l'incanto infernale e demoniaco, che ha congelato così a lungo il movimento"; see "L'interruzione del viaggio," *L'artificio dell'eternità* (Verona: Fiorini, 1972), 225.

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 67**

Vergil's word seems to have lost ground since canto 2, where it was not "parola tronca" but "parola ornata." Although Vergil's cautionary verses ("Volgiti 'n dietro e tien lo viso chiuso; / che se 'l Gorgon si mostra e tu 'l vedessi, / nulla sarebbe di tornar mai suso" [9.55-57]) demonstrate his susceptibility to the pagan Furies, it is possible that his advice—although given for the wrong reasons—is not wrong per se. There are occasions in hell when backward motion is necessary, when the wrong turn becomes the right turn. The principle is best dramatized by the use of hell's denizens—Geryon, Antaeus, and Lucifer—as vehicles in the pilgrim's progress; in fact, the entire journey through hell is itself an example of backward motion becoming forward motion, the wrong way becoming the right way. In hell, a perverse place, the apparently "perverse order" of backward motion, of "andare indietro e non innanzi" ("Ciascuna cosa che da perverso ordine procede e laboriosa, e per conseguente e amara e non dolce, si come dormire lo die e vegghiare la notte, e andare indietro e non innanzi" [Conv. 1.7.4]), may be the most appropriate. It is interesting that both of the *Inferno*'s significant deviations from the pilgrim's usual infernal progress to the left, instances of right rather than left turns, should occur in transitional cantos, cantos 9 and 17: perhaps these "wrong" turns to the right are connected to the need to go backward in order to spiral forward.

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 68**

Barchiesi considers the art of transition in Western literature and the narrative technique of *ordo artificiosus* in "Arte del prologo e arte della transizione," 156-77. Battaglia Ricci characterizes the *Commedia*'s narrative structure as a contamination of medieval *parataxis* (*ordo naturalis*) with epic *hypotaxis* (*ordo artificiosus*) in *Dante e la tradizione letteraria medievale* (156-57). E. H. Wilkins notes the interruptions of cantos 8 and 17 in "Cantos, Regions, and Transitions in the Divine Comedy" (*The Invention of the Sonnet and Other Studies in Italian Literature* [Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1959], 105).

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 69**

Paolo Cherchi notes that Inf. 17 "follows a mortise technique"; see "Geryon's Canto," *Lectura Dantis: A Forum for Dante Research and Interpretation* 2 (1988): 31-44; quotation, 34.

### **The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 70**

Again, the adjective *solo* in canto 17 echoes canto 8 ("Sol si ritorni") and canto 2 ("io sol uno"); the pilgrim is excluded from Vergil's colloquy with Geryon as he was by his guide's negotiations with the devils.

**The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 71**

Marti asks why the symbol of fraud should be treated before the pilgrim has finished exploring the circle of violence, pointing out that the encounter with the usurers and the arrival of Geryon are narrative units that could be substituted for each other without affecting the lengths of their respective cantos. He concludes that Dante wishes to preserve the Florentines of canto 16 from the degradation that makes the usurers quasi participants in the "bassa vita delle incipienti Malebolge" ("Tematica e dimensione verticale del XVI dell'Inferno," 77).

**The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 72**

Canto 16's transitional concerns resonate in the particularly forwardlooking justification of his journey offered by the pilgrim in verses 61-63 ("Lascio lo fele e vo per dolci pomi / promessi a me per lo verace duca- / ma 'nfino al centro pria convien ch'i" torni") and in the sodomites' equally farsighted *captatio benevolentiae*, with its anticipation of Inferno's last verse and reference to a future when the pilgrim will look back on this present as the past: "Pero, se campi d'esti luoghi bui / c torni a riveder le belle stelle, / quando ti giovera dicere '1' fui,' / fa che di noi a la gente favelle" (82-85).

**The Undivine Comedy, ch. 03: 73**

The pilgrim's backward motion from the usurers to Geryon is emphasized "torna'mi in dietro da l'anime lasse" (17.78). Geryon responds to Vergil's instructions to move out and down in a spiral configuration ("moviti omai: / le rote larghe e lo scender sia poco" [97-98] ) by backing up from his berth: "Come la navicella esce di loco / in dietro in dietro" (10> 101).

