

DANTE'S ULYSSES: DAMNATION AND SALVATION
IN THE *COMMEDIA*

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Edgar C. Gordyn

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IN THE *COMMEDIA*

Thesis Supervisors:

Rebecca Raphael, Ph.D.
Philosophy / Religious Studies
Department

Daniel T. Lochman, Ph.D.
English Department

Approved:

Heather C. Galloway, Ph.D.
Director of the University Honors Program

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Abstract

Dante's *Commedia* is a Christian allegory for the soul's journey to God. Dante depicts himself as the Christian pilgrim learning, through his journey, how to live his earthly life properly. But Dante also depicts his journey as a revelation of the world beyond; as such, he depicts himself as a prophet. The *Commedia* becomes Dante's God's word transcribed through Dante, who throughout his journey earns, in addition to spiritual salvation, the poetic/prophetic authority ("*auctoritas*") to write of his vision of God. Ulysses, who in *Inferno* 26 describes his drowning, is key in Dante's transformation from false prophet to true, as shown by Dante's several references to Ulysses throughout the *Commedia*. Ulysses' misuse of his intelligence and his rhetorical ability (as Dante depicts it, from his incomplete understanding of the Odysseus/Ulysses tradition in literature) parallels Dante's misuse of his poetic talent ("*ingegno*") when he composed his philosophical *Convivio*, which he abandoned to write the *Commedia*. Likewise, Ulysses' damnation parallels Dante's when he devoted himself to philosophy rather than to God, and which error led Dante to the despair that impelled the *Commedia*. Such a parallel reveals *Inferno* 26 as a matrix of Dante's key themes in the *Commedia*, in which Dante transforms himself from false prophet to true, who is qualified to see and write of seeing God face to face.

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Introductory: Dante's Ulysses and *Inferno* 26

Dantists tend to agree on only one thing: that *Inferno* 26, where Ulysses describes his death, is the most studied of the *Commedia's* 100 cantos. Anthony Cassell's landmark bibliography "Ulisseana" lists 292 articles on Dante's Ulysses published between 1865 and 1980. *Inferno* 26 is perhaps no more elaborate than any of the other cantos, though it echoes throughout the *Commedia* in unique and important ways. Some of the most obvious echoes occur in *Purgatorio* 1 and 19, and in *Paradiso* 26, 27, and 29, where direct references to Ulysses, images, themes, and even exact phrases from *Inferno* 26 appear. While a characteristic of epic poems is their internal unity that echoing themes and phrases create, these echoes are significant in the *Commedia* for emphasizing its central themes of flight, salvation and damnation, and poetic/prophetic authority. Dante juxtaposes these themes in *Inferno* 26 to depict his spiritual condition in contrast to Ulysses', so that this canto becomes a crux in Dante's spiritual transformation, which is ongoing throughout the *Commedia*.

Ulysses' final sea journey and his drowning in a whirlpool represent his wicked life in the Ulysses tradition in literature (as Dante interprets it, with his incomplete awareness of this literary tradition). But Ulysses also represents Dante's erroneous former course of composing his philosophical *Convivio*, which he abandoned incomplete before beginning the *Commedia* in earnest. Ulysses'

“wild flight” that terminates in a whirlpool parallels Dante’s own that led him into spiritual despair: the terrifying “shadowed forest” he describes at the beginning of the *Commedia*. Dante’s Ulysses’ pride and transgression parallel characteristics that Dante seems to have identified in himself. Ulysses’ powerful intelligence and his rhetorical skill seem to represent Dante’s own talents, which he misused to write philosophy rather than to glorify his God. Misusing his talent that God had given Dante was the sin for which he seems to have believed he would be damned. His turn to the *Commedia* and its long journey through the afterlife represent Dante’s salvation, by which Dante eventually earns such poetic/prophetic authority (“*auctoritas*”) that he may see and write of seeing God face to face.

Inferno 26 depicts the moment in the *Commedia* where Dante transforms himself from his former Ulyssean state to his later saved. The qualities that Dante shares with Ulysses—rhetorical skill and visiting the world beyond—are the very ones that earn him his prophetic status. As such, Dante’s Ulysses represents the direct antithesis of the proper Christian course, which Dante’s own journey represents. His references to Ulysses at key moments in the *Commedia* serve to emphasize the rightness of his path towards God. Important to note is that this path parallels Dante with other major biblical speakers and prophets, notably Elijah and John of Revelation. This being the case, the themes surrounding Ulysses in *Inferno* 26 serve not only to unify the *Commedia* aesthetically, but also as Dante’s spiritual touchstones by which he maintains his election to see God and to write of his otherworldly visions.

Convivial Thinking and Comedic Sentiment

Considering the *Commedia*'s major themes in light of Dante's immediately-preceding *Convivio* illuminates important points about Dante's treatment of Ulysses. Dante planned sixteen volumes for *Convivio*, and completed four before abandoning the work. At that time, he presumably concentrated his energies on the *Commedia*. Robert Hollander speculates the dates of *Convivio*'s composition to be 1304—1307 (*A Life* 46), and follows Petrocchi's timeline for *Inferno* as 1304—1308, with Dante completing most of his work 1306—1308 (90). Dante finally completed the *Commedia* in 1321 (91). *Convivio* is a philosophical and intellectual work, "clearly meant to praise the virtues of philosophizing," as well as "to magnify [Dante's literary] reputation among the literate citizens of Italy" (Hollander, *A Life* 46, 47). It was, as Hollander describes it, an immense project where Dante attempted "to put into one place all human knowledge" (87). The *Commedia*, by contrast, is a religious and spiritual work that praises the Christian God, an allegory that demonstrates the Christian's proper life, and the punishments and rewards for improper and proper living. Insofar as a Christian is expected to live in humility and in love for God, *Convivio*'s philosophizing ("philosophy": love of wisdom) celebrates not God, but the human intellect; *Convivio*'s presumptuousness (Freccero 163) and display of erudition represent not Dante's humility, but his earthly pride. (Pride is the sin for which Dante fears he will be

punished, as he tells at *Purg.* 13.133-38.) In light of Dante's later emphasis on the correctness of his comedic journey, one might view *Convivio* as Dante's erroneous life course, the course that led him to find himself lost in the terrifying "shadowed forest" he describes at the beginning of the *Commedia* (*Inf.* 1.2). As David Thompson writes, "The *Convivio* is unfinished because it represented a *via non vera* ["untrue way"] that led toward spiritual shipwreck" (54). By contrast, the *Commedia* "begins where the shipwreck of Ulysses ends, with the survival of a metaphoric shipwreck" (Freccero 166):

And just as he who, with exhausted breath,
 having escaped from sea to shore, turns back
 to watch the dangerous waters he has quit,
 so did my spirit, still a fugitive,
 turn back to look intently at the pass
 that never has let any man survive. (*Inf.* 1.22-27)

The *Commedia* as a whole demonstrates Dante's spiritual reparations for his former errors, one of the gravest of which was his devotion to philosophy while writing *Convivio*.

Two significant parallels tie together the *Convivio* and the *Commedia*, inviting speculations about Dante's concerns in turning from the former to the latter work. First, the encyclopedic nature of *Convivio* parallels that of the *Commedia*, with the difference being that *Convivio* delivers instructive *ideas*, where the *Commedia* shows instructive *examples*. These numerous examples of mostly

historical lives are models for a Christian's proper or improper life, and the spiritual consequences of both. *Convivio*, on the other hand, is concerned with right living as the human intellect conceives it, and the human ideal as what Aristotle in *Nicomachean Ethics* calls the life of contemplation (194-95). This reveals *Convivio*'s essential flaw for Dante, for its roots in classical philosophy, especially Aristotle (Ascoli 52), came from pagan Greeks ignorant of the Christian God's word. *Convivio* is all the more erroneous and antithetical to Dante's God's will for pursuing knowledge through philosophy, a misdirected love, and celebrates not God's splendor, but human intellectual ability. The second main parallel between *Convivio* and the *Commedia*, is that Dante composed both in the Italian vernacular, rather than in the formal Latin that was used for religious and philosophical discourse (Mazzotta "Lecture Three"). As John Scott writes, "Latin would have served only scholars and intellectuals—literally, one in a thousand ([*Convivio*] I, ix, 2)—whereas Dante wishes to reach the widest possible audience in his native land" (33). Hollander points out Dante's explanation in *Convivio* I for his choice of the Italian vernacular over Latin, where Dante declares that he chose Italian "out of a desire to avoid ordering things inappropriately (v-vii), out of generosity of spirit (viii-ix), and out of his natural love for his native tongue (x-xiii)" (*A Life* 53). The *Commedia*'s extension of these sentiments makes it too accessible to all. This contributes to the poem's rightness as much as it contributes to *Convivio*'s erroneousess; for, to the extent that *Convivio* diverged from God's truth, Dante led its readers astray. This error urged Dante all the more onto the

right path of composing the *Commedia*, which leads his readers towards a vision of God.

While *Convivio* and the *Commedia* are similar in their accessibility to all audiences and in their encyclopedic qualities, a critical difference separates them. Dante composed each work in a different form: *Convivio* in prose and the *Commedia* in poetry. This suggests a development in his beliefs about the word's purposes and power. Giuseppe Mazzotta explains this radical change: "poetry . . . contains the world and expresses it" (qtd. in Scott 50); "Dante writes a poem that retrieves history, the passions of his own life, fables, and theology together in the conviction, first, that poetry is the path to take to come to the vision of God and, second, that the poetic imagination is the faculty empowered to resurrect and glue together the fragments of a broken world" (qtd. in Scott 56). Through poetry's music and grace, an individual may all the readily reach full understanding of God's universe. Indeed, the poetics of the *Commedia* increasingly reflect this grace and harmony as Dante moves closer to God, as Joan Ferrante and Piero Boitano demonstrate. Further, the hymn-like quality of the poetic form transforms the *Commedia* into a sustained praise of God that, like church hymns, unites its readers or singers in the simple truth of God's word. *Convivio*'s prose, on the other hand, concerns itself more with presenting ideas than with graceful expression. Further, *Convivio* subjugates poetry to prose, as Hollander explains: "*Convivio* [and other of Dante's earlier works] all put prose in the service of controlling and explaining verse" (*A Life* 91). This suggests Dante's early emphasis on the mind's

rational faculty rather than on its inspirational, suggesting that Dante believed the human intellect to be the highest human faculty. Dante reverses this emphasis when conceiving the *Commedia* as poetry. Indeed, the climax of the *Commedia*, where Dante sees God face to face, demonstrates the limits of rational thinking and the power of inspiration:

As the geometer intently seeks
to square the circle, but he cannot reach,
through thought on thought, the principle he needs,
so I searched that strange sight: I wished to see
the way in which our human effigy
suited the circle and found place in it—
and my own wings were far too weak for that.
But then my mind was struck by light that flashed
and, with this light, received what it had asked.
Here force failed my high fantasy; but my
desire and will were moved already—like
a wheel revolving uniformly—by
the Love that moves the sun and the other stars.

(*Par.* 33.133-45)

Hollander explains: “the concluding verses of *Paradiso* . . . [imply] that, against the rationalist confines of *Convivio*, the *Comedy* allows a mystical possibility for the ‘squaring of the circle’” (90) (a “proverbially insoluble mathematical puzzle”

[Mandelbaum 422]). Poetry by its very nature harmonizes the incongruous angles of rational thinking, thus Dante's metaphor for God as the book that binds the universe together in love (*Par.* 33.82-90). Joan Ferrante explains the effects of Dante's poetics in his move towards harmony: "Dante uses sound to impress a meaning on our subliminal minds, saying more with the sound than he says with the substance of the words" (198). Scott too explains poetry's potential for unity: "poetry's ability to engage not only our rational faculty but every part of our complex being lies at the very heart of the 'poema sacro / al quale ha posto mano e cielo e terra'" ("this sacred poem [*Commedia*]— / this work so shared by heaven and by earth"; *Par.* 25.1-2; 50). Poetry is divine language, expressing both rational and religious ideas and feelings. Dante's shift from the prose of *Convivio* to the poetry of the *Commedia* demonstrates his desire for total union with his God, which he makes possible as well for his readers.

Insofar as *Convivio* exposed to Dante the tangles of rational thinking, it compelled the *Commedia*, which can be interpreted partly as Dante's act of recoiling from the mazes of philosophical thinking. These mazes were, presumably, irreconcilable within themselves, as well as with Dante's Christian faith. Scott raises the question: "does the *Convivio* represent a stage in Dante's life when he became besotted with the study of philosophy to such an extent that he later felt it necessary to repent of such a passion in his Christian masterpiece?" (42). In considering Dante's occasional polemic with his own previous works, Hollander notes that it is "helpful to observe that the later poem at times tackles

the task of clearing the record of errors in *Convivio*” (*A Life* 90). His point raises the issue of Dante’s concern with his use and misuse of his talent, or *ingegno*, as Dante calls it, which he seems to have considered in some respects to have been a divine gift. Mazzotta points out *ingegno*’s root in the Latin *ingenium*: “innate talent, genius,” and, Mazzotta specifies, “poetic faculty” (“Ulysses” 355). Mario Trovato posits Dante’s conception of *ingegno* as a human faculty with three primary characteristics:

- (1) [*ingegno* is] an instinct produced by nature; (2) an intuitive faculty used to investigate reality, to perceive sense impressions (positive or negative), and to transmit them to the memory; and (3) if not controlled by reason, like any other instinct it may determine the direction of our minds toward a distorted object with subsequent ethical, moral, and spiritual implications. (258)

This third characteristic is perhaps the most important in considering Dante’s sense of his spiritual condition. If Dante came to believe he had misused his *ingegno* for erroneous philosophical pursuits, then he had discorded himself with the harmony of God’s universe. Further, if Dante meant for *Convivio* to enhance his reputation among the Italian literati, then composing it was the sin of pride for which he would be punished.

On Dante’s implications for the use and misuse of *ingegno*, Trovato offers an important interpretation. In *Inferno* 26, Dante describes the flames in the eighth circle of Hell (the circle containing fraudulent counselors, where Ulysses

walks in a flame) as like the fireflies that appear in the evening “just when the fly gives way to the mosquito” (*Inf.* 26.28). Trovato notes that, “The sinners of this *Bolgia* are abducted by a flame symbolizing both their genius and its perverse activity: subtracting from, rather than generating, the good of others” (264). About Dante’s three similes of flies, Trovato speculates:

“the fly,” in this context . . . [represents] those who surrendered their reason to low instincts. The specific characteristic of the gnat [mosquito] is that it sucks blood, while the firefly generates and consumes its own light; thus these insects designate the sinners who used their . . . genius for parasitical self-gratification rather than for the political and intellectual betterment of the community as a whole. (264)

Dante’s fireflies also represent light that is false, ineffectual, and transient. While they may be beautiful aesthetic phenomena, they do not compare to the stars they resemble, being unstable and unable to endure through any but a few seasons, whereas the stars in Dante’s medieval cosmology are fixed and endure through all seasons. Further, the fireflies’ lights are subsumed under daylight. Interpreting daylight as Dante’s metaphor for God’s truth (Mazzeo 247) shows how the fireflies represent false and transient thinking characteristic of fraudulent counselors. (Margherita Frankel links Dante’s fly similes to Ulysses: “We should always remember that Dante is travelling towards God and that in God’s perspective, Ulysses’ glory could be no less insignificant than the light of a firefly, unable to

break through the darkness of night and capable only of luring his deluded followers into error and perdition” [117]. Likewise Dante’s glory that he hoped *Convivio* would earn him.) Carrying Trovato’s argument further demonstrates another of Dante’s cruel ironies in *Inferno*. The parasitic nature of misusing *ingegno*—effectively consuming one’s talent for fruitless purposes—qualifies the sinner to become in the afterlife mere fuel for a purposeless fire. In Dante’s frigid Hell, this fire is as ineffectual as are the fireflies’ lights in God’s brilliant world. Similarly, Dante’s misuse of his *ingegno* to write philosophy parallels the fireflies’ ineffectual light, for it would have earned him nothing more than temporary earthly glory, and led his readers astray.

Many *dantists* note the particular way that Dante revises and explains earlier ideas in later works. *La Vita Nuova* is one example, where Dante writes prose passages to explain poetry he wrote as much as ten years previous. Hollander speculates about this work that, “The poems may have meant or suggested one thing when they were written; their prose integuments put them to a service that may have been quite different from that originally envisioned” (*A Life* 13). The *Commedia* too demonstrates this self-corrective quality, as Hollander observes (*A Life* 90). Such self-consciousness as Dante evinces in his characteristic self-revision and self-correcting speaks partly of the high responsibility with which he handled the gift of his *ingegno*. This responsibility points to Dante’s concern with *auctoritas*, or “cultural authority (Ascoli 46), responsibility, and origination” (fr. L. *auctor*: “author, originator”). Ascoli argues that *auctoritas* was Dante’s

fundamental concern throughout his career (46), and that the *Commedia*, particularly, “tells the story of how the character-poet ‘Dante’ went from humble disciple of the classical *auctor* Virgil, to a poetic author in his own right, to someone who is not out of place in the company of the most prestigious of all medieval authors, those who were authorized to transcribe the words of God himself in the New Testament” (49). Ascoli’s point raises the important issue of poetry’s prophetic element for Dante, explored in more depth in the last section. As Teodolinda Barolini writes, “the entire poem is a prophesy, a revelation concerning matters hidden to ordinary mortals” (285), such as the makeup of the entire afterlife and cosmos, including its first *Auctor*, God. God is in fact the very source Dante invokes for inspiration in *Inferno* 2, as Hollander explains: “Dante first seeks the skills of poetic expression from traditional sources and then the power of the highest conceptualization from its sole and very source” (“Dante’s Authority” 28). Poetic authority, or *auctoritas*—though it gives Dante a special place in history—is primarily a means by which Dante may express God’s truth and the harmony of his universe.

Dante describes God’s universe as essentially love-motivated (*Par.* 33.145), and love is the overarching theme in the *Commedia*. As such, love is a critical factor in Dante’s *auctoritas*, which, we must remember, is confirmation for his true spiritual path. Ascoli argues:

Love [is] the central . . . force that, in conjunction with Beatrice, dominates Dante’s life, [and] is not an externalized being at all, but a

part of himself. To the extent that Love [is] transformed into a positive, inspiring force, with roots in divinity, [it represents] something located personally in Dante-*dicitore* [“speaker”] on his way to true authorial status. (52)

Love is as natural a component of Dante’s *ingegno* as it is of God’s universe, which further emphasizes Dante’s error in devoting his *ingegno* to philosophy. By devoting his *ingegno* to God, on the other hand, Dante becomes a *scriptor Dei* (“writer of/for God”), a transcriber of divine events and words, thereby earning *auctoritas*. Writing *Convivio* had led readers into irreconcilable philosophical tangles, and Dante had to abandon this work lest he become a fraudulent counselor. Humbling his *ingegno* to God accords Dante’s will with God’s, and eventually earns Dante such *auctoritas* that he may see—and write of seeing—God face to face.

Presumably, Dante came to understand that composing *Convivio* was a perversion of love that consumed his *ingegno* for the wrong purposes: not to glorify God, but to glorify the human intellect, and to promote his own reputation. As Dante’s faith in the power of the human intellect weakened the more he studied it while writing *Convivio*, his faith in God’s ultimate wisdom strengthened. Dante realized that even the greatest literary achievement of humankind of his time—a 16-volume encyclopedia containing all human knowledge—meant nothing compared to the simple truth of God’s love. Further, Dante understood that using his divine gift of *ingegno* for fruitless and selfish purposes was sinning against God

by retarding God's will. Lost and despairing, Dante turned to the *Commedia* to repent for his sinning, to save his soul, and to glorify his God. Scott (44) points out how Dante himself explains to St. John his turn onto his true path:

“By philosophic arguments
and by authority whose source is here [in Heaven],
that love must be imprinted in me; for
the good, once it is understood as such,
enkindles love; and in accord with more
goodness comes greater love.” (*Par.* 26.25-30)

Dante's Ulysses: Whirlpools, Whirlwinds, and Damnation and Salvation

Having considered Dante's turn from *Convivio* to the *Commedia*, and a few of Dante's major concerns for his career and spiritual condition, we turn now to his treatment of Ulysses. Ulysses appears in canto 26 of *Inferno*, in the eighth circle of Hell, that of the fraudulent counselors. There, consumed in a double-horned flame with Diomedes, Ulysses relates to Virgil and Dante the event of his drowning within sight of the mountain of Purgatory, after following a “wild flight” *folle volo* in pursuit of “worth and knowledge” *virtute e canoscenza* beyond the Rocks of Gibraltar. This canto, particularly Ulysses' relation of his drowning, is the locus of key themes in Dante's *Commedia* to which he refers throughout his journey

(Mazzotta, “Ulysses” 348). For example, when Dante reaches the mountain of Purgatory in *Purgatorio* 1, he echoes Ulysses’ words and recalls the scene of his shipwreck, as well as his own metaphor of drowning in fear in *Inferno* 1. In *Purgatorio* 19, Dante in a dream grows enchanted with the siren who claims to have “turned aside Ulysses” (*Purg.* 19.22), until Virgil awakens him. (This is one of Dante’s several inventions in the Ulysses theme, as Mario Rossi reminds us: “Dante did not know Homer’s version [of Ulysses’/Odysseus’ encounter with the siren] well enough to know and remember that Ulysses had been tied to the mainmast and therefore *did not* bend his course” [198].) Dante’s encounter in *Paradiso* 26 with Adam—another transgressor and authoritative speaker—parallels Dante’s encounter with Ulysses, both dramatically and thematically. In *Paradiso* 27, Dante enters the Ninth Heaven after surveying the long distance he has covered in his journey, and he sees “beyond Cadiz . . . Ulysses’ mad course” (*Par.* 27.82-83). Such references point back to Dante’s complex Ulysses episode in *Inferno* 26, which encapsulates and amplifies key themes in his *Commedia*.

When Dante and Virgil reach the eighth circle of Hell in *Inferno* 26, Dante describes his perilous curiosity about the flames beneath with an allegory for the use of the human mind and the spiritual consequences of misuse: “I stood upon the bridge and leaned straight out / to see; and if I had not gripped a rock, / I should have fallen off—without a push” (*Inf.* 26.43-45). Gabriel Pihás (10-14) interprets Dante’s curiosity in light of St. Thomas Aquinas’s distinction between *studiositas* (the thoughtful appetite for knowledge) and *curiositas* (an ill-advised

appetite for knowledge). The former describes the responsible use of one's mental powers, in contrast to the latter, which describes the irresponsible use that leads to no worthwhile end. Regarding Dante's near-fall, Pihas suggests that Dante is recalling lines by his former friend and teacher, Brunetto Latini: "When virtue exerts itself beyond its power for no good reason, then it falls perilously" (qtd. 4). In light of the parallel between Dante and Ulysses as intellectual explorers, Pihas argues that "[Dante's] own curiosity is similar to that of Ulysses and almost brings about his literal downfall, just as it does Ulysses" (4). This suggests Dante's high irony in this episode, for by calling attention to his intense curiosity, Dante generates curiosity in the reader (Pihas 4). When Virgil intuits that Dante wants to know merely where one of these souls went to die, the anticlimax mocks this interest in both Dante and the reader, as well as underplays Ulysses' story. Pihas explains Dante's suggestion here of Seneca, "who had attacked exactly this type of desire" (4-5), and goes so far as to suggest that Seneca's letter 88 "is the main source of inspiration for the canto of Ulysses and perhaps for the opening of the *Divine Comedy* itself" (5). In letter 88, Seneca "attacks the liberal artists who study literature," including such fruitless pursuits as the various Ulysses stories that seek to discover where Ulysses died, which Seneca mentions specifically (qtd. 5). What thinkers should be doing, Seneca writes, is "teaching . . . how [to] attain such a love for my country, my father, and my wife, and keep on course for those ideals even after shipwreck" (qtd. 5). Insofar as Seneca's letter 88 did influence Dante, Dante seems to parallel his own philosophical explorations with the literary

pursuits that Seneca disparages. In light of the relationship between *Convivio* and the *Commedia*, Dante's peril on the bridge alludes to his spiritual condition when writing the former philosophical work. This peril included misusing his *ingegno* to the point of being in danger of falling into exactly the same circle where Ulysses walks, that of the fraudulent counselors. Dante's scene neatly demonstrates his own peril as well as warns readers of their comparable peril as Dante imagines it.

Fraudulent counsel is Dante's Ulysses' most serious sin (Cassell 115), though by no means his only. Virgil names as Ulysses' sins his creation of the Trojan Horse, his and Diomedes' persuasion of Achilles to leave his family and join the Trojan War, though they knew the prophesy of Achilles' death (Nicole Pinsky, *Inferno* 415), and his theft of the Trojans' Palladium (*Inf.* 26.58-63). Another of Dante's Ulysses' major sins—and an important link between them—is Ulysses' transgression. Like Dante when he devoted his *ingegno* to philosophy, Ulysses transgressed spiritual boundaries when he sought “experience of the world / and of the vices and the worth of men” (*Inf.* 26.98-99). W. B. Stanford explains that Dante's Ulysses is “a symbol of sinful desire for forbidden knowledge. This gives Dante his ultimate reason for condemning him as a false counselor, because by persuading his comrades to follow him in the quest for knowledge he led them to destruction” (181). Presumably for Dante, Ulysses with his powerful intelligence should have and indeed did know better than to transgress the limits of human ability. Dante symbolizes these limits with the Strait of Gibraltar, which Ulysses himself acknowledges is a prescribed boundary when he describes it as: “the

narrows / where Hercules set down his boundary stones / that men might heed and never reach beyond” (*Inf.* 26.107-09). Though Ulysses knows these are the proper limits of human exploration, he cannot resist his longing “to gain experience of the world / and of the vices and the worth of men” (*Inf.* 26.98-99). Conscious that he is betraying his son, his father, and Penelope (*Inf.* 26.94-96), Ulysses sets out “with but one ship and that small company / of those who never had deserted me” (*Inf.* 26.101-02). Though Ulysses and his crew travel far beyond the Strait of Gibraltar, Ulysses spurs his men further with a speech:

“Brothers,’ I said, ‘o you, who having crossed
a hundred thousand dangers, reach the west,
to this brief waking-time that still is left
unto your senses, you must not deny
experience of that which lies beyond
the sun, and of the world that is unpeopled.

Consider well the seed that gave you birth:
you were not made to live your lives as brutes
but to be followers of worth and knowledge ‘*virtute e canoscenza.*”
(*Inf.* 26.112-20)

About this speech, Mazzotta argues: “Ulysses casts himself as the rhetorician who fashions moral life: an Orpheus or a civilizing agent who assuages the beast within and sees life as an educational process” (“Ulysses” 350). This recalls Dante’s stated purpose in *Convivio*: “The true gift of this commentary lies in the meaning of the

canzoni for which it is made, meaning which is intended above all to lead men to knowledge and virtue ‘*a scienza e a virtù*’” (*Conv.* 1.9.7). (The reversed word order of Ulysses’ “*virtute e canoscenza*” and Dante’s “*a scienza e a virtù*” suggests Dante’s divergence from Ulysses, and their opposite spiritual courses, which Dante may have intended when he composed Ulysses’ speech.) On Dante’s and Ulysses’ parallel attitudes, Frankel notes:

Ulysses’ attitude echoes Dante’s earlier writings, specifically the *Convivio* (I, i, 7-8, and IV, v, 9), where he expresses an analogous contempt for the likes of the *villano*, that is, ignorant men who do not aspire to *scienza*. . . . Dante seems to have abandoned in the *Commedia* his earlier stand on the importance of knowledge. . . . By means of similes such as those in . . . [*Inferno*] XXVI, 25-33 [the flies, as above] . . . Dante may be recanting the arrogance displayed in his own *Convivio* and acknowledging the need for humility both moral and intellectual as a pre-condition for salvation. Nowhere more than in Ulysses does Dante incarnate his own previous self, full of intellectual pride and, by damning him, he demonstrates his present rejection of that sinful attitude. (106)

Ulysses’ implication in his speech is that amassing experience leads to greater worth “*virtute*” (fr. L. *virtus*: “excellence, worth, virtue”) and knowledge “*canoscenza*,” which are developments beyond mere bestiality. But Ulysses is fashioning his and his crewmen’s lives not in accordance with God’s will, but in

order to satisfy his own longing for experience. Further, any amount of experience he and his men may attain will serve no one but themselves, for they are “old and slow” (*Inf.* 26.107), with but a “brief waking time that still is left / unto [their] senses” (*Inf.* 26.114-15). Ulysses states no intention of taking knowledge back to civilization, but rather of driving forward into “the world that is unpeopled” (*Inf.* 26.117). Their journey is thus self-indulgent and unproductive, inward-focused rather than focused outward on the betterment of their society. W. B. Stanford explains Ulysses’ desire as a de-unifying force (181-82), centrifugal in nature, symbolizing an “anarchic element” in human society: “When [Dante] condemned this Ulysses he condemned what he thought to be a destructive force in society. Perhaps, too . . . he was also condemning a tendency to over-adventurous speculation and research in his own mind” (182). Dante’s Ulysses’ self-gratifying longing for experience, worth, and knowledge is destructive because it leads him to abandon his proper role as husband, father, son, and king, which role was of prime importance, as Dante learned from Seneca. Nonetheless, in the face of these sins, Ulysses boasts to Virgil and Dante:

“I spurred my comrades with [my] brief address
to meet the journey with such eagerness
that I could hardly, then, have held them back;
and having turned our stern toward the morning, we
made wings out of our oars in a wild flight *‘folle volo’*
and always gained upon our left-hand side.” (*Inf.* 26.121-26)

Having eschewed his former life, his father, his son, and his wife, Ulysses forges ahead towards new, undiscovered lands on the wooden wings of his oars. His terminus in a whirlpool within sight of the mountain of Purgatory, which might be the path to his salvation (as it is Dante's), is for Dante the appropriate end of such a gross transgression. If, as Hollander speculates, *Convivio* indeed represents "[Dante's] own past *folle volo*" (qtd. in Scott 43), then we see Dante's direct self-representation in the figure of his Ulysses. Considering Dante's arduous process throughout the *Commedia* of saving his soul, his complex Ulysses episode appears as the locus of key themes pertinent to his salvation. Dante's transgression was his pursuit of philosophy rather than love for God. Ulysses' was his insatiable desire to experience the world.

Transgression is one of Dante's Ulysses' major sins, but Ulysses roams the circle of fraudulent counselors. To elucidate the nature of Ulysses' fraudulence, it is helpful to consider Virgil's and Homer's treatments of Ulysses/Odysseus. Thompson (44-45) shows how Dante models Ulysses' speech to his crew on Aeneas' speech to his crew at *Aeneid* 1.276-89, where Aeneas encourages and instills hope in his men after their shipwreck in the whirlpool that Juno instigates (*Aen.* 1.162-71). As Macrobius shows in *Saturnalia* 11.4 (a work which was available to Dante, as Thompson points out [45]), Virgil modeled Aeneas' speech on Odysseus' exhortation to his men when they approach the dangers of Scylla and Charybdis, where Odysseus emboldens his balking men as they approach Charybdis' whirlpool (*Od.* 12.226-40). Important to note is that Odysseus has been

warned of the two dangers in this narrow strait. Charybdis is certain destruction to Odysseus' ship, his crew, and himself, whereas Scylla poses certain death to no more than six of Odysseus' crew. Odysseus keeps this knowledge to himself, and urges his men towards Scylla's crags, away from Charybdis' whirlpool, telling his men, "we will live to remember *this* [brave feat] someday" (*Od.* 12.231). He goes on to relate:

"So I shouted [orders to them]. . . .

No mention of Scylla—how to fight that nightmare?—

for fear the men would panic, desert their oars

and huddle down and stow themselves away." (*Od.* 12.241-44)

Odysseus openly acknowledges that he is withholding information from his men out of necessity. If Dante knew these scenes through Macrobius, or versions of them from another author, then presumably it deepened his conception of Ulysses' fraudulence.

To further elucidate Dante's Ulysses' fraudulence, Cassell speculates about Ulysses' oars metaphor (*Inf.* 26.125): "The 'wing' metaphors point directly to the true nature of the sin punished in this *bolgia*: they are 'wings of fraud,' particularly, the wings of ambition and fraudulent counsel" ("Lesson" 123). Cassell further posits (123-24) that Dante developed this conception of fraudulence from Richard of St. Victor's 12th Century work *De Eruditione Hominis Interioris*, concluding that, for Dante as for Richard, "Fraudulence . . . is born of 'ambition,' the pursuit of worldly honor" (124). That Dante's Ulysses seeks "the reputation of great and honorable

counsel” (125), which for him means power over his crew in their dangerous venture (123), is his further sin beyond his fraudulence to his men. This personal honor is dangerous for its self-serving nature, for “such sinners are known to sacrifice familial and divine interests to an ardent pursuit of worldly purpose and honor” (125), as St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Gregory the Great explain (131). Ulysses’ ambition for personal honor and experience drives him to goad his men into eagerness with speech that is not fraudulent *per se*, but contains fraudulent motives. He does not tell his men all that he desires, but fashions his speech to prompt desires in them. Recalling Hollander’s speculation about Dante’s ambitions for *Convivio*, that Dante meant for the work to bring him honor by “[magnifying] his reputation among the literate citizens of Italy” (*A Life* 47), shows another of Dante’s subtle self-parallels with Ulysses, and the danger of their parallel fraudulent counsels; for, if Dante, like Ulysses, intended *Convivio* “above all to lead men to knowledge and virtue ‘a scienza e a virtù’” (*Conv.* 1.9.7), then Dante too was guilty of fraudulent counsel by leading his readers away from love for God.

Charybdis and her whirlpool seem to have evoked in Dante’s mind other of Ulysses’ sins. Ulysses’ fraudulence in his first pass through the Scylla-Charybdis strait, where he withholds the danger of Scylla from his crew, is his first sin. For Dante, Ulysses commits another sin shortly after passing through this strait the second time. At this point in the *Odyssey*, Zeus destroys Odysseus’ ship and crew with a lightning bolt (*Od.* 12.460-83), and Odysseus, alone, nearly drowns in

Charybdis' whirlpool. Afterward, clinging to a piece of driftwood from his destroyed ship, Odysseus drifts for ten days until he arrives on Calypso's island, where he is trapped for seven years. Insofar as this liaison with Calypso recalls Odysseus' previous one with Circe, it evokes the themes of sensual indulgence and betrayal of his proper husbandly role that Dante would have scorned. Stories in the Ulysses tradition wherein Ulysses had a son by Circe (Stanford 88) compounded this irresponsibility for Dante. (Dante's unfamiliarity with the *Odyssey* led him to misinterpret Odysseus' attitudes to Circe and Calypso, for in the *Odyssey*, Odysseus is always trying to reach home, and is so unhappy with Calypso that he weeps almost constantly [*Od.* 5.93-95]. He consents to join Circe in her bed in exchange for her oath that she "never plot some new intrigue to harm [him]" [*Od.* 10.382].) In light of Dante's conception of Ulysses'/Odysseus' several sins, the image of the whirlpool becomes in Dante's mind the image of Ulysses' damnation. Dante invents his episode in the Ulysses tradition to deliver Ulysses the fate that Dante seems to have believed Ulysses deserved. To the extent that Dante's intellectual identification with Ulysses led him to the damnation that *Convivio* represents, Dante in his salvific *Commedia* inverts this whirlpool image to depict his own salvation. As such a dual symbol, the whirlpool becomes one of the most significant images in the *Commedia*.

Dante uses the whirlpool shape to represent both damnation and salvation. Ulysses' descent to Hell through the whirlpool that shipwrecks him as he approaches the mountain of Purgatory is a direct inversion of Dante's ascent

towards God from the top of this mountain. It also parallels Dante's journey through Hell to this mountain's shores. Further, Dante associates the whirlpool image with *auctoritas* and prophetic ability, as his allusion to the prophet Elijah at *Inferno* 26.34-42 shows (explored below). By this whirlpool image, Dante indicates his pattern of parallel figures that highlights his concern with salvation/damnation and poetic/prophetic *auctoritas*. First, I will establish the whirlpool image in Ulysses' drowning scene, then turn to the whirlpool shape as an image of spiritual damnation and salvation, before considering in the next section Dante's conception of poetry as prophesy.

Inferno 26 contains no explicit reference to a whirlpool, though one should note that Ulysses describes the shipwreck. Dante pointedly limits Ulysses' perspective in a number of ways, as Mazzotta argues (353), so Ulysses' ignorance of the aquatic phenomenon should not be surprising. As Singleton notes (471), Dante models Ulysses' description of his shipwreck on Virgil's shipwreck in *Aeneid* 1, where Aeneas loses much of his fleet and is pushed off-course towards Dido's kingdom. In Virgil, the god Aeolus, at Juno's urging, strikes out of a mountain the raging winds imprisoned there (*Aen.* 1.75-130), which violently churn the sea Aeneas is sailing.

Before Aeneas' eyes a massive breaker
 smashes upon its stern the ship that carries
 the Lycian crewmen led by true Orontes.
 The helmsman is beaten down; he is whirled headlong.

Three times at that same spot the waters twist
 and wheel the ship around until a swift
 whirlpool has swallowed it beneath the swell.
 And here and there upon the wide abyss
 among the waves, are swimmers, weapons, planks,
 and Trojan treasure. (*Aen.* 1.162-71)

Compare Ulysses' description from *Inferno* 26:

“there before us rose a mountain, dark
 because of distance, and it seemed to me
 the highest mountain I had ever seen.

And we were glad, but this soon turned to sorrow,
 for out of that new land a whirlwind rose
 and hammered at our ship, against her bow.

Three times it turned her round with all the waters;
 and at the fourth, it lifted up the stern
 so that our prow plunged deep, as pleased an Other,
 until the sea again closed—over us.” (*Inf.* 26.133-42)

The strongest similarity is each ship's triple spin before sinking, though other allusions also link the scenes. The “Other” whom Ulysses imagines has generated the whirlwind is presumably one of the gods in his pantheon, which parallels Virgil's pantheon that contains Aeolus and Juno. Ulysses' description of this nameless, vengeful god as an Other indicates his restricted spiritual perspective,

which parallels his restricted physical perspective (Ulysses does not see the whirlpool). Another similarity comes by Dante's inversion of these heroes' stories. Aeneas's shipwreck steers him towards Dido's kingdom, where Aeneas dallies building Carthage, the false Rome, until he receives the vision that returns him to his fateful course (*Aen.* 3.353-69). By contrast, Dante's Ulysses' doomed journey occurs after he lingered with the sensual Circe for "more than a year" (*Inf.* 26.92). If Dante knew the story of Ulysses' son by Circe, then he may have conceived this liaison as a false family that contrasts Ulysses' proper family at home in Ithaca. This parallels the false Rome that Aeneas builds in Dido's kingdom, which would have been his false fate as well as that of all of his Roman descendants. One sees here Dante's possible implications for his own false pursuit of philosophy when writing *Convivio*, which he abandoned, as Aeneas abandoned Carthage, for his *Commedia*. A third parallel is that Ulysses' Other evidently resents Ulysses' approach to what turns out to be the mountain of Purgatory, and generates the whirlwind to prevent his approach. This recalls the *Aeneid*, where the vengeful Juno resents Aeneas' approach to Italy after he escapes the burning Troy (*Aen.* 1.51-74), and, in order to drive Aeneas off course, incites Aeolus to release the winds from the Aeolian mountain containing them (*Aen.* 1.95-109). By such parallels, Dante links himself to Virgil in the poetic tradition, and to Ulysses in the spiritual-intellectual tradition. Damning Ulysses is an important way by which Dante frees himself from his former *folle volo*.

The whirlpool shape is Dante's image for his own salvation as much as it is the image of Ulysses' damnation. Much as Virgil depicted Aeneas as an anti-Ulysses (Thompson 45), Dante depicts himself as an anti-Ulysses. Dante passes through the whirlpool shape four times on his journey towards God: first down into Hell in *Inferno*, second up the mountain of Purgatory in *Purgatorio*, and third outward towards the Empyrean in *Paradiso*. Dante's fourth and last journey is inward towards God, whom Dante describes as the book that binds together all the disparate elements of the universe (*Par.* 33.85-90). The *Inferno* journey is exactly the whirlpool shape, with Dante and Virgil descending circular terraces into the center of Hell. The *Purgatorio* journey is an inverted whirlpool, with Dante and Virgil ascending terraces towards the Garden of Eden at the top. Both of these journeys are centripetal, moving from outer limits inward, and Dante undertakes both while he is still sinful, having not yet been properly cleansed. As Shankland notes, only after Dante has climbed the mountain of Purgatory does he wear "the purity of Man before the Fall; poised in full feather on the mountaintop, he is at last ready to 'levar suso' ["uplift himself"] in the path of Beatrice as she—a serene Daedalus—flies on ahead" ("Aliger and Ulysses" 26). The journey in *Paradiso* is centrifugal, where Dante moves outward through the heavenly spheres of the medieval cosmos into the Empyrean, towards God's infiniteness. *Paradiso* culminates in Dante's full recognition that all the universe centers upon God's light and love, in yet another whirlpool image where all things radiate from, or gravitate into, that center.

Each of Dante's journeys emphasizes his spiritual condition at a given time. In *Inferno*, Dante pays his heaviest penance, and to be released from his tortuous condition, to go up, he must go down, in the characteristic Christian posture of humility. Mazzotta explains: "The way up is down and this is something that marks the difference between philosophical presumption and the notion of a spiritual Christian humility that [Dante] has to pursue and wants to pursue" ("Lecture Three"). In *Purgatorio*, Dante still must pay penance, so the basic direction of the journey is the same: from outer limits inward, but with the promise of a human paradise—Eden—at the center. Once Dante has sufficiently cleansed himself of sin, he is released from these centripetal journeys into the centrifugal Empyrean, with the promise of ultimate paradise—God's immediate presence—at the end. The whirlpool shape permeates each of these three journeys as the symbol of Dante's spiritual condition. It is significant that Dante, like Ulysses, never describes his journeys as whirlpool-like. He perceives the image of radiant inwardness only at the climax of *Paradiso*, where he is purified to the point where he may see God face to face. Until then, Dante's perspective is as limited as Ulysses', implying his spiritual limitations, as well as the abiding danger of falling if his will falters. Dante's journey into the Empyrean in *Paradiso* 1 inverts Ulysses' journey into Hell. Dante parallels his and Ulysses' journeys with their imperfect understanding of what is happening to them, for which Beatrice chides Dante: "You make yourself / obtuse with false imagining; you can / not see what you

would see if you dispelled it” (*Par.* 1.88-90). Dante cannot see that he is wrapped in light, just as Ulysses could not see he was drowning in a whirlpool.

Dante’s limited knowledge of the Odysseus/Ulysses tradition in literature led him to create a remarkably complicated character within a very short space. It also permitted him to identify extensively with Ulysses, both during his former *folle volo* when writing *Convivio*, and during his proper spiritual course in composing the *Commedia*. Thompson speculates that Dante “adapted [the Ulysses story] to depict his own spiritual history” (54). While the sins of Dante’s Ulysses include false counsel, pride, and transgression, they are more than mere allegorical examples: they also parallel Dante’s own sins as he depicts them in the *Commedia*, and from which he frees himself through his long, penitent journey towards total salvation. Dante’s pride and pursuit of personal glory led him from “the path that does not stray” (*Inf.* 1.3-4)—i.e., the path that God laid out—into the “shadowed forest” (*Inf.* 1.2) of philosophical and literary concerns. This misuse of his *ingegno* parallels Ulysses’ misuse in his pursuit of experience, and in misleading his men to serve only his own ends. These analogies elucidate Ulysses’ major role in the *Commedia*, making Ulysses Dante’s spiritual touchstone that continually reminds him of his former *folle volo*.

Poetic Authority: False and True Prophets

Damnation and salvation are bound up, for Dante, in his conception of the power of, and responsibility for, rhetorical authority. His spiritual salvation ties to his qualification to write poetry, i.e., to lead readers after him in his path. Insofar as Dante's poem is revelatory (Barolini 285), he must possess the authority ("*auctoritas*") to speak of his otherworldly visions. As noted above (Ascoli 46), *auctoritas* is one of Dante's central concerns for his life and his writing. He pursued it through *Convivio*, until realizing the error of that course of rational thinking, whereupon he sought *auctoritas* through aligning himself with God's will. Dante's quest for true poetic authority spurred his urgency to write the *Commedia* rather than *Convivio*. It also intensified his identification with Ulysses, whom Dante damns for misusing his *ingegno* in order to underscore his own proper use.

In *Inferno* 26, Dante establishes a series of parallel figures to emphasize his themes of damnation and salvation, especially as they relate to the proper or improper use of *ingegno*. Perhaps Dante's most obvious duality is Ulysses and Diomedes, "two who move as one within the flame" (*Inf.* 26.79), which Dante describes as "the flame that comes so twinned / above that it would seem to rise out of / the pyre Eteocles shared with his brother" (*Inf.* 26.52-54). Diomedes, with

his unusual silence, has purely symbolic value, whereas the loquacious Ulysses has dramatic value. Diomedes' silence parallels Dante's silence during his encounter with these figures, and calls attention to Dante's quiet role throughout the canto: Dante speaks a mere twelve lines from beginning to end; Ulysses, by contrast, speaks fifty-two. Virgil's list of the three crimes that Ulysses and Diomedes committed together and that earned them the same punishment underscores these figures' duality. With these parallels, Dante introduces his patterns in this canto of twin figures, which patterns emphasize his parallel with and eventual split from Ulysses at this key moment in his spiritual development.

Dante implies his dualities early in the canto when he recalls Elijah and Elisha, the prophet and the flawed apprentice from 2 Kings. Frankel demonstrates how Dante adopts the role of both true and false prophet early in the canto, when he parallels Elisha and Elijah to himself and Ulysses, thereby indicating the division in his spiritual condition, the abiding danger of falling from his spiritual course, and the remaining promise of earning *auctoritas*. Frankel does not go so far as to consider Dante's metamorphosis in this scene, the important way in which he divorces himself from Ulysses to begin developing into a new, true poet/prophet worthy of the authority to speak of his vision of God. Such transformations occur throughout the *Commedia*, until Dante finally receives his vision of God that brings with it the *auctoritas* to write about it. Readers of Revelation recall that even John was prohibited from writing down some of his visions, such as what the thunder said in Rev. 10:4. (John is another prophet with

whom Dante relates himself in the *Commedia*, and even claims to have surpassed, as in *Purgatorio* 29: “And just as you will find them in [Ezekiel’s] pages, / such were they here, except that John’s with me / as to [the number of] their wings; with [Ezekiel], John disagrees” [*Purg.* 29.103-05]. Hollander describes this as “an extraordinary moment” where “John is [Dante’s] witness, and not vice versa” [*A Life* 96].) More to the point, in *Inferno* 26, Dante recalls Elisha and Elijah to emphasize the prophetic quality of *auctoritas* that is the crucial difference between his own and Ulysses’ spiritual conditions, and in order to demonstrate his departure from that figure (Frankel 115).

Dante parallels Elisha when he crosses the bridge above the eighth circle and can see below only the flames that consume the sinners, not the figures within them:

so many were the flames that glittered in
the eighth abyss; I made this out as soon
as I had come to where one sees the bottom.

Even as he who was avenged by bears
saw, as it left, Elijah’s chariot—
its horses rearing, rising right to heaven—

when he could not keep track of it except
by watching one lone flame in its ascent,
just like a little cloud that climbs on high:

so, through the gullet of that ditch, each flame

must make its way; no flame displays its prey,
 though every flame has carried off a sinner. (*Inf.* 26.31-42)

In 2 Kings, Elisha can see only Elijah's whirlwind and the chariots of fire, not Elijah himself:

When they had crossed [the Jordan], Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me what I may do for you, before I am taken from you." Elisha said, "Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit." He responded, "You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it will be granted you; if not, it will not." As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind to heaven. Elisha kept watching and crying out, "Father, father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" But when he could no longer see him, he grasped his own clothes and tore them in two pieces. (2 Kings 2:9-12; NRSV except where indicated)

Presumably, Dante understands that Elisha did not see Elijah, only the whirlwind enrapturing him to Heaven. Frankel argues that Dante, for his purposes in *Inferno* 26, "identifies [Elisha] exclusively with the failure to see his master in the ascending flame and with the [later] act of revenge upon the little children" (113), which 2 Kings 2:23-24 relates:

[Elisha] went up from [Jericho] to Bethel; and while he was going up on the way, some small boys came out of the city and jeered at him,

saying, “Go away, baldhead! Go away, baldhead!” When he turned around and saw them, he cursed them in the name of the Lord. Then two she-bears came out of the woods and mauled forty-two of the boys. (2 Kings 2:23-24)

Elisha’s misuse of his power—cursing the boys “in the name of the Lord”—parallels Dante’s misuse of his *ingegno* when writing *Convivio*, as well as Ulysses’ misuse of his rhetorical power to encourage his men to transgress. Returning to Frankel’s consideration of Dante/Elisha, she describes Dante’s self-parallel with this imperfect apprentice watching the true prophet ascend to Heaven:

Dante . . . may see himself as Elisha’s counterpart in lay terms, [for he] has also been endowed with a God-given faculty, namely, a keen ‘*ingegno*.’ But for him, as for Elisha . . . there is the danger of a culpable abuse of power in the exercise of his intellect. Both he and Elisha had their respective aspirations. For Elisha the ambition was to be more than Elijah. For Dante it was to emulate Ulysses . . . the man who, with the sole help of his superior mind, had talked his way through countless perils before and after Troy. But, while Dante undoubtedly admired this awesome intelligence, at the same time he was keenly aware of how much fraud and deceit had been involved in Ulysses’ victories. Like Elisha in the case of the mocking children, Ulysses also had unscrupulously exercised his power causing sorrow and death along his path. (114-15)

Shankland sees a similar Dante/Elisha connection, though he interprets the bears' mauling the boys as "[God's vengeance of] a true prophet against those who mock his sacred mission" ("Aliger and Ulysses" 32).

It was God's pleasure that Ulysses should go down in a whirlwind . . . just as it was God's pleasure that Elijah (and later Dante) should be rapt up to heaven. . . . In *Inferno* 26 the fateful trajectories of the prophet of Jehova and the pagan Greek are boldly opposed. . . . Even Elisha's losing sight of the form of the prophet's flaming chariot in the sky . . . is paralleled by the disappearance of all trace of Ulysses and his ship in the great shroud of the sea. ("Aliger and Ulysses" 31)

Trovato takes a somewhat different tack when he suggests that Dante is using the Elisha simile to assert that he is not violating his own *ingegno*. His point is important in considering Dante's divorce from Ulysses in this scene, for it shows that Dante, by curbing his intellectual powers, retains the promise of salvation through one of Christianity's main qualifications: humility. Trovato writes: "Elisha's effort is justifiable as long as the object is proportionate to his visual power. He becomes vain and presumptuous if he attempts to see beyond the *nuvoletta* or the limit of human knowledge" (265), as Ulysses did, and Dante restrained himself from doing when he abandoned *Convivio*. Insofar as Dante realized he could never attain all knowledge, much less reconcile it all with his faith, then he acted with appropriate Christian humility by limiting his scope to what lay already before him: God's word. That Dante shifted his gaze from the

illusion of acquiring all human knowledge, to reflecting God's truth through his poetry, qualifies him to attain salvation, as well as the poetic/prophetic *auctoritas* to speak of his vision of God. Conversely, Ulysses' misuse of his rhetorical abilities is the crime that earned him utter perdition. Similarly for Elisha, at least in Dante's judgment, for Elisha did curse the boys "in the name of the Lord." With such a concern in mind, Dante takes care at the beginning of Canto 26 to exhort himself to "more than usual . . . curb my talent, / that it not run where virtue does not guide" (*Inf.* 26.21-22) (Cassell 125). This is the opposite of Ulysses' speech to his crewmen, whom Ulysses "spurred . . . with [his] brief address / to meet the journey with such eagerness / that [he] could hardly, then, have held them back" (*Inf.* 26.121-23). Ulysses' terminus demonstrates the spiritual peril of undisciplined speech, hence Dante's self-exhortation early in this canto to choose his words carefully.

Returning to Dante's consideration of true and false prophets shows his metamorphosis in this scene. Frankel writes:

Elisha, though protected to some extent by God's irrevocable election as His prophet, had nonetheless committed an analogous transgression [to Ulysses' transgression]. He had wickedly arrogated to himself, for the sake of his wounded ego, a power that had been given him solely to serve God. . . . The slaying of the children . . . may have appeared, in Dante's eyes, as the direct consequence of a fatal

flaw in Elisha brought about by his inability to see the ascending
Elijah. (115)

Frankel goes on to show how Dante very subtly—one might say humbly—aligns himself with Elijah. Her implication that Dante sees Elisha as irresponsible aligns Elisha with Ulysses, whom Dante clearly depicts as irresponsibly abusing his power to speak. (Mazzotta makes similar observations [“Ulysses” 354].) Dante, by invoking the Elisha/Elijah pair with their crucial difference, and by paralleling his own restrained speech with Ulysses’ extravagant, implies his overarching theme of the responsible use of *ingegno*, inherent in *auctoritas*, that qualifies him to become a true prophet authorized to speak of his vision of the afterlife.

Though Dante invokes Elisha, he more closely resembles Elijah by using his *ingegno* with proper reverence, as Frankel shows. Dante’s former misuse parallels him with Ulysses, who shares with Elisha the characteristic of lacking self-control. Elijah’s and Dante’s responsible uses of their *ingegnos*—at least the Dante who evolves throughout the *Commedia*—parallels these two. Significantly, both Elijah and Dante ascend to Heaven while still alive (Frankel 116). Anthony Cassell further elucidates the point:

Elijah who rejected the senses and attained heaven while in this life, is indeed the antithesis of Ulysses, the pursuer of the life of the senses. As Elijah fled from the unchaste Jezebel, “the outpouring of vanity,” Ulysses stayed with Circe who delayed him “[for more than a year].” Just as the “ardor of the Lord” burned in the heart of the

Prophet allowing him to perform eight miracles by his virtues . . . so there burned in the heart of the Greek the “ardor of the world,” the seed of his own destruction. As Elijah united families by raising the dead . . . so Ulysses broke the bonds of family, both those of Achilles who never returned alive to Deidamia and those of his own.

(“Lesson” 120)

Regarding the whirlpool image that is Dante’s critical symbol, Cassell writes:

the motif of the “turbo” [“whirlwind” from the mountain of Purgatory (*Inf.* 26.137)] in Dante must obviously be seen in the same context: Elijah was assumed into the heavens; Ulysses is absorbed into the abyss of Hell. The whirlwind of the Holy Spirit which rapt Elijah heavenward is the same tool of destruction which brings damnation to the Greek hero; the pattern is neat and plain.

(“Lesson” 120)

By several complex allusions, Dante transforms Ulysses into an anti-prophet, and himself into a true one. The whirlwind that Ulysses describes suggests, as Cassell shows, the whirlwind that rapt Elijah upward to Heaven. Ulysses’ journey, by contrast, is downward to Hell via the whirlpool that the whirlwind creates. His element is water where Elijah’s is air (and, secondarily for both, fire). Dante elaborates his patterns of dualities further by encasing Ulysses permanently in the whirlpool shape as a “horn of flame” (*Inf.* 26.85). This alludes to Dante’s Lucifer—Christianity’s greatest false counselor—who sits encased in ice in the center of the

whirlpool-shaped Hell, beating his six wings by which he keeps Hell cold (*Inf.* 34.38-52). (Recall that in Dante's cosmology, Lucifer created the conical shape of Hell when he struck the earth after being cast out of Heaven.) Lucifer is, like Ulysses, forever encased in the whirlpool shape, though Lucifer's element is ice, not Ulysses' fire. By these ingenious contrasts and contraries, Dante creates examples of righteous and damned figures, and emphasizes the spiritual rewards of righteousness, which true path he himself exemplifies in his journey through the *Commedia*.

Dante's journey throughout the *Commedia* earns him salvation and *auctoritas*, and is permitted by divine edict for as long as it accords with God's love. By this correlation, Dante emphasizes not his own blessed state, but the natural accord between God's will and a human being's will when he or she uses it properly. As such, *Purgatorio* depicts Dante's journey of spiritual cleansing, which eventually earns him *auctoritas* as the final seal on his spiritual salvation. The shore of Purgatory is an important setting for Dante's dramatizations of salvation and damnation, which themes relate to his *auctoritas*. Dante commences *Purgatorio* with: "To course across more kindly waters now / my talent's little vessel lifts her sails, / leaving behind herself a sea so cruel" (*Purg.* 1.1-3). This cruel sea is that which swallowed Ulysses when he sailed within sight of the mountain of Purgatory, and which would have metaphorically swallowed Dante had he continued pursuing his former *folle volo*. Dante commenced *Inferno* with another sea metaphor, describing himself as terrified as one who has reached shore after

escaping drowning (*Inf.* 1.22-27). This metaphor serves three purposes: it forebodes Ulysses' shipwreck, indicates Dante's former spiritual peril, and points towards his salvation. In *Purgatorio* 1, the lifting of the sails of the vessel of Dante's talent ("*ingegno*" [*Purg.* 1.2]) represents his growing *auctoritas*. At close of *Purgatorio* 1, Dante indicates this growth comes by divine edict when Virgil girds Dante with one of the rushes that grow on the Purgatorial shore.

There, just as pleased another, he girt me.

O wonder! Where he plucked the humble plant

that he had chosen, there that plant sprang up

again, identical, immediately. (*Purg.* 1.133-36)

This recalls Virgil's episode in *Aeneid* 6, where Virgil confirms that he is chosen to enter Tartarus by plucking the golden bough (*Aen.* 6.282-84). Mandelbaum points out, "Like the rushes here, which do not harden (103-106), the golden bough had a 'pliant stem'; and like the rushes, the golden bough is quickly renewed" (*Purgatorio* 308). It is significant that Dante echoes exactly Ulysses' words from *Inferno* 26, where Ulysses reasons his drowning as occurring merely "as pleased an Other" ("*com' altrui piacque*"; *Inf.* 26.141). Similarly, Dante's girding comes "as pleased another" ("*com' altrui piacque*"; *Purg.* 1.133), in this case, "Cato, in accordance with God's will" (Mandelbaum, *Purgatorio* 308). In *Paradiso* 29, Dante uses this phrase again in slightly modified form, when Beatrice explains God's creation of the universe: "as pleased Him '*come i piacque*', / Eternal Love opened into new loves" (*Par.* 29.17-18). These echoes indicate the intrinsic promise of

Dante's path for as long as he moves in accordance with love for God; for, insofar as God's universe is a reflection of his love (*Par.* 29.13-18; Mandelbaum, *Paradiso* 410), all things that accord with this love accord with the divine will. Dante's girding further recalls and inverts his spiraling flight deeper into Hell on Geryon's back. In *Inferno* 16, Dante removes his girdle and hands it to Virgil, "just as my guide commanded me to do" (*Inf.* 16.110), whereupon Virgil drops it into the pit to signal Geryon. Paolo Cherchi speculates that this flight forebodes that of Ulysses (226), and is another suggestion of Dante's *folle volo*. By contrast, Dante's girding by Virgil in *Purgatorio* signifies his permission to climb the mountain, by which Dante will earn spiritual salvation and eventually *auctoritas*, according to Divine edict.

At *Purgatorio*'s beginning, Dante makes further references to Ulysses, thereby emphasizing his divorce from him and the correctness of his own path. Dante describes his first steps upon Purgatory's "deserted shore, / which never yet had seen its waters coursed / by any man who journeyed back again" (*Purg.* 1.130-32). This directly recalls Ulysses' drowning within sight of the high mountain. To emphasize his own upward path versus Ulysses' downward, Dante inverts Ulysses' doomed journey. Standing on the shores of the mountain that Ulysses could not reach, Dante describes how he, "turned to the right, setting my mind / upon the other pole, and saw four stars / not seen before except by the first people [Adam and Eve]" (*Purg.* 1.22-24). This recalls Ulysses' description of his and his crew's *folle volo*: "[we] always gained upon our left-hand side. / At night I now could see the

other pole / and all its stars” (*Inf.* 26.126-28). Dante embeds three direct contrasts in these parallel lines: Ulysses turns towards his left, whereas Dante turns to his right to approach Purgatory; Ulysses sees the South Pole with his eyes—sensory organs of corrupt human flesh—whereas Dante sets his *mind* upon this pole; Ulysses understands the stars to be merely those of “the other pole,” whereas Dante understands them to be the stars above the Garden of Eden—the beacon or ideal to which a Christian might strive, and of which Ulysses is ignorant. These contrasts in *Purgatorio* 1 emphasize the correctness of Dante’s path after his complex division from Ulysses in *Inferno* 26.

As Dante is spiritually purified through his Purgatorial journey, he earns *auctoritas* as his will increasingly accords with God’s. *Auctoritas*, as noted above, is one of Dante’s major concerns throughout his life and the *Commedia* (Ascoli 46, Hollander qtd. in Ascoli 48). Dante calls attention to it in the *Commedia*’s first canto, where he encounters Virgil and credits him for his own poetic standing: “You are my master and my author, you— / the only one from whom my writing drew / the noble style for which I have been honored” (*Inf.* 1.85-87). Here, as Ascoli notes, Dante “[represents] himself and his (Italian) poetry as the linear offspring and heir of the greatest of Latin poets” (47). In *Inferno* 4, Dante notes that the five greatest poets of antiquity, Homer, Horace, Lucan, Ovid, and Virgil, invite Dante “to join their ranks— / I was the sixth among such intellects” (*Inf.* 4.101-2). But this relationship, and especially Dante’s relationship with Virgil, is inherently problematic for as long as these poets remain unsaved. They, including Virgil, are

confined to Limbo, where the souls, as Virgil notes, “are lost, afflicted only this one way: / That having no hope, we live in longing” (*Inf.* 4.31-32). For as long as Dante’s will and *ingegno* must accord with his Christian God’s will and mind, his admiration for Virgil creates a spiritual problem, for it represents another *folle volo*, a turn away from God’s truth. As such, Dante works to separate himself from Virgil as thoroughly as he did from Ulysses.

Ascoli argues that Dante’s first encounter with Virgil “[sets] in motion an elaborate staging of Dante’s relationship to Virgil, which at once betokens immense respect for the greatest of Latin poets and aims to appropriate Virgil’s authority . . . and, indeed, to supersede it” (48). Dante undermines Virgil spiritually by placing him in Limbo, where, it is important to note, Virgil describes having witnessed Christ’s visit to retrieve certain unsaved souls—among them Adam, Noah, and Moses—to take them to Heaven (*Inf.* 4.52-63). This parallels Deuteronomy 34:1-7, where Moses stands atop Pisgah’s crown and sees all the lands that his descendants will inherit, but is himself denied entry into them and dies shortly thereafter. This allusion, in turn, echoes Ulysses’ vision of the mountain of Purgatory shortly before his shipwreck, as well as echoes Elisha’s inability to see Elijah rising in the chariots of fire. Though Virgil is an authoritative guide throughout *Inferno* and much of *Purgatorio*, Dante makes his limits clear early in *Inferno*, as Kevin Brownlee points out: “Virgil’s limits (in authority, in knowledge, and in faith) are strikingly dramatized before the Gates of Dis in *Inferno* 8, 82–*Inferno* 9, 106” (144). Hollander in “Dante’s Authority” demonstrates

how *Inferno* 2 “confirms Dante’s—not Virgil’s—poetic authority” (30) by limiting Virgil’s speech mainly to “verbatim reports of the words of his betters, those of Mary, Lucy, and Beatrice. . . . Virgil’s role as guide in the *Comedy* is allowed by a favoring heaven that he is quick to obey” (34). Virgil guides Dante only until *Purgatorio* 27, where they part when Dante reaches “the place past which [Virgil’s] powers cannot see” (*Purg.* 27.129). At this point, it is important that another major poet who also expresses high admiration for Virgil does cross this border with Dante: the poet Statius.

Statius appears from *Purgatorio* 22 through *Purgatorio* 33, and is Dante’s longest interaction with any poet in the *Commedia* besides Virgil. Further, Statius is one of Dante’s three longest interactions with any character, the other two being Virgil and Beatrice. Statius is an important spiritual mediator between Virgil and Dante that demonstrates the stark spiritual differences between them, and finally demonstrates Virgil’s spiritual limitations. Considering Dante’s concern with *auctoritas* and its relation to a poet’s spiritual condition, Statius’ role is significant. Dante and Virgil first meet Statius in *Purgatorio* 22, immediately after the earthquake that signals Statius has completed his purgation on the fifth terrace for his sin of prodigality. Statius’ spiritual cleansing at this moment represents Dante’s ongoing cleansing. Like Dante, Statius early in his appearance “stresses his absolute dependence on Virgil’s *Aeneid* with regard to classical poetic inspiration and formation” (Brownlee 148). Dante chooses Statius as his spiritual poetic double on the basis of Statius’ epic the *Thebiad*, which begins, as Mandelbaum points out,

with “the struggle between Eteocles and Polynices” (*Purgatorio* xxii), the brothers whose twin pyre Dante compares to Ulysses’ and Diomedes’ twin flame (*Inf.* 26.52-54). This allusion recalls Dante’s patterns of dual figures in *Inferno* 26, with its implications for Dante’s spiritual transformation. Brownlee argues that Dante presents Statius as a Christian *poeta*, who is at the same time fundamentally dependent on Virgil both for his poetic and for his spiritual achievement. This Statius figure is thus an inscribed model who authorizes the new vernacular Christian Dante-*poeta* in the process of defining himself over the course of the *Commedia*’s story of Dante-protagonist. (149)

About the relationship between Virgil, Statius, and Dante, Brownlee writes, “a striking construct of reversal is at issue: Virgil is damned, but his text is salvific [by containing the Fourth *Eclogue*’s theoretical prophesy of the birth of Christ]; Statius is saved [as a Christian], but his [*Thebiad*] seems not to have Christian salvific value” (148), being rather “the epic of destructive civil war *par excellence* [that serves] as a metaphoric textual model for [Dante’s] Hell” (149). These limitations that Dante puts over Statius, like those he puts over Virgil, serve to enhance his own standing as the Christian-*poeta par excellence*, the only poet thus far in the epic tradition authorized to write the highest poem describing the entirety of God’s universe, including God himself.

One speaker is critical in the issue of Dante’s *auctoritas*. Dante encounters Adam in *Paradiso* 26, in an episode that recalls his encounter with Ulysses in

Inferno 26. Valuable here is Mazzotta's suggestion of the parallel structure of the *Commedia*'s three books, which invites readers to read the poem "horizontally" as well as "vertically" ("Lecture Three"): that is, rather than reading the *Commedia* from beginning to end, one reads the first canto of each book in order, then the second of each in order, and so on. Read horizontally, *Inferno* 26 and *Paradiso* 26 compliment one another's themes of transgression and *auctoritas*, which characteristics Dante shares with Adam as much as he shares with Ulysses. Adam's transgression of tasting the forbidden fruit parallels Dante's misuse of his *ingegno* when writing *Convivio*, which in turn parallels Ulysses' longing for experience that drove him past the Rocks of Gibraltar. That Adam was the first human speaker parallels Dante's innovation of using the Italian vernacular for his high spiritual poem. This parallels Ulysses' speech to his crew in the previously-uncharted open ocean, which echoes Genesis 1:2-3, where the "spirit of God was hovering over the waters," and spoke the first words on earth: "Let there be light" (NIV). Dante further parallels *Paradiso* 26 with *Inferno* 26 when he describes Adam as engulfed in light, and is unable to see him directly; as in *Inferno* 26, Dante learns who is in the light from his guide, now Beatrice. Dante's inability to see Adam directly recalls Elisha's inability to see the ascending Elijah, so that we see here Dante's indication of his still-imperfect state. Further, Adam intuitively understands Dante's questions much as Virgil intuited Dante's curiosity about Ulysses. A significant difference is that Adam speaks directly to Dante, whereas Ulysses merely flings out a voice (*Inf.* 26.90) when Virgil commands that he or Diomedes speak. Dante portrays his use

of *ingegno* and his spiritual condition with his posture in each episode. In *Inferno* 26, Dante describes how desiring to hear Ulysses and Diomedes causes him to lean perilously towards their flame (*Inf.* 26.69). By contrast, in *Paradiso* 26, Dante describes the straightening effect on him of learning that the light before him contains Adam:

As does a tree that bends its crown because
of winds that gust, and then springs up, raised by
its own sustaining power, so did I
while [Beatrice] was speaking. I, bewildered, [was] then
restored to confidence by that desire
to speak with which I was inflamed (*Par.* 26.85-90)

Dante reveals the full significance of his erect posture in *Paradiso* 29, when Beatrice explains God's motives for creating the world:

“Not to acquire new goodness for himself—
which cannot be—but that his splendor might,
as it shines back to Him, declare ‘*Subsisto*,’ [L. “I stand”]
in His eternity outside of time,
beyond all other borders, as pleased Him, [“*come i piacque*”]
Eternal Love opened into new loves.” (*Par.* 29.13-18)

Dante's encounter with Adam, with its straightening effect, aligns the physical Dante perfectly with God's will, which Beatrice here declares to be love. For as long

as Dante writes his *Commedia* in accordance with God's love, he fulfils his natural role as poet exercising *auctoritas*.

Encountering Adam also aligns Dante mentally with God's will for his *ingegno*, for Adam gives Dante "the final justification for Dante's new illustrious vernacular" (Brownlee, "Why the Angels" 600). Being the first human speaker, Adam is the human tongue's *auctor* ("originator, author"). Brownlee describes Adam as "the ultimate human authority on the origin and status of human language and is thus analogous to Saints Peter, James, and John who are the ultimate human authorities on the three theological virtues" ("Why the Angels" 600). Adam intuits Dante's question about what language he spoke in Eden, and answers that mankind is free to speak whichever tongue it likes: "That man should speak at all is nature's act, / but how you speak—in this tongue or in that— / she leaves to you and to your preference" (*Par.* 26.130-32). This conveys to Dante the authority to deliver his *Commedia* in the Italian vernacular, which raises the vernacular to the level of religious discourse, as Brownlee shows. Regarding this encounter as a whole, it is important to note that it concludes what Ascoli calls Dante's "examination sequence" by "three apostles who are also biblical *auctores* (Saints Peter, James, and John) in cantos 24 through 26 of *Paradiso*. This examination sequence is a high-point in the process of 'authorizing' Dante, putting the apostolic and ecclesiastical . . . seal of approval on his thought and his writing" (48). Adam, the fourth of these figures who are wrapped in light, gives Dante the

final seal and permission to exercise his *ingegno* as he does in the *Commedia*, by explaining humanity's natural freedom to speak which tongue it likes.

One last question should be addressed regarding Dante's *auctoritas*. Readers easily question the veracity of the *Commedia* when confronted with such inventions as the flying worm Geryon, whom Dante verifies he actually saw, and on whose back Dante claims he flew deeper into Hell. Does not such an outrageous claim, even this single one, turn Dante into a liar? If so, what claim can Dante make to his *auctoritas* being authorized finally by God himself, for does not such a claim cast Dante back to his former Ulyssean state for its hubris? Insofar as Dante was conscious of Aquinas's (and others') contentions that poets are liars (Scott 46), Dante could not have ignored the fact that he was constructing a fiction which he claimed to be truth. Nonetheless, Dante claims throughout the *Commedia* that its events actually occurred: "every resource is brought into play in a sustained attempt to convince the reader of the truth of his account" (Scott 35). Particularly valuable here is Hollander's analysis of Dante's invocation of the Muses at *Inferno* 2.7-8. Hollander argues that Dante invokes two powers outside himself and a third from within himself: the Muses, high genius ("*alto ingegno*"), and Dante's own memory, which is "put forward as the power within him that records what *alto ingegno* makes available to it" ("Dante's Authority" 29). Dante's invocation to this *alto ingegno* is the critical element in his claim that his fiction is truth, for it is a disguised—one might say humble—appeal to the mind of God himself. As noted above, "Dante first seeks the skills of poetic expression from

traditional sources [the Muses] and then the power of the highest conceptualization from its sole and very source [*“alto ingegno”*]” (Hollander, “Dante’s Authority” 28). In invoking *alto ingegno*, Dante becomes, in the poetic tradition of bard, a channel through which the Divine speaks, which permits Dante to write as liberally as his *ingegno* imagines. More important, he utterly subjugates his will and words to God’s, becoming the instrument through which God fashions further harmony on earth. This being the case, as Hollander observes:

Dante expects us not to believe that this journey really took place, but rather to note that he has claimed that it did. . . . [The] poet realizes that his readers will not grant for an instant that such things have indeed taken place . . . but that those readers will recognize why the poet must make the outrageous claim: his poem . . . is eventually of the highest purpose and seriousness. (*A Life* 95-96)

As Scott notes, “for a medieval writer and his audience ‘truth’ was not necessarily contingent on what we call ‘reality’ (35), but rather, as William Franke argues (254), on what hearers or readers of prophesy were expected to do with the revelations they received. To the extent that prophetic and other religious discourse is prescriptive, it is revealed “as *to be achieved* by [the audience’s] own efforts” (254). Franke notes that Dante’s method of writing the reader into the text through the use of direct address draws the reader into Dante’s events to such an extent that, “[the] reader accompanies Dante on his journey through the afterlife,

and in a certain sense everything that happens to him is to be realized by his readers in its pertinence to their *own* lives and in the *now* of their act of reading” (254). Dante’s *Commedia* is meant to transform not only Dante spiritually, but his readers as well. If Dante hoped that his poem would show his readers the Christian’s proper course to God, he presumably qualified his inventions on the basis of the beneficial effects of improving his readers’ awareness of God. Here, perhaps, readers must bow to Plato’s “Noble Lie” in order to rise with Dante on his salvific journey.

Conclusion

Dante’s Ulysses is nearly as vital to the *Commedia* as is Dante himself. As Dante’s contrary, Ulysses equally embodies Dante’s themes of flight, spiritual salvation and damnation, and *auctoritas*. Dante parallels his own intellectual pursuits in *Convivio* with Ulysses’ pursuits for knowledge. By drowning Ulysses in a whirlpool, Dante demonstrates the gravity of the error of such a course of life. His own error had led him into despair, from which he could be rescued only by humbling himself to God’s truth. The *Commedia* depicts this humble journey of penitence through which Dante earns salvation and the *auctoritas* to speak as a prophet within the realm of the *Commedia*.

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