

Putting *Inferno* IV back into context, we find that Vergil is indeed supreme—in the first circle of Hell. This is to state baldly the problematic that will now engage us, namely the paradox of Vergil's situation. In terms of *Inferno* IV, we remember that *onore* bears not only positive but also negative connotations, since it functions as both the sign of Limbo's difference from the rest of Hell, and the sign of its difference from Heaven, whose currency is not "honor" but "joy" and "ineffable gladness" (*Par.* XXVII, 7). Vergil resides within this limbo of perpetual tension, of simultaneously positive and negative significance; to emphasize either one of these two poles of meaning is to distort Dante's creation, which depends on the simultaneous conjunction of opposites, of being and nonbeing. It is therefore not so much theologically vain as poetically unrealistic to speculate about Vergil's possible salvation, since it is an essential condition of his existence in the poem that he shall also cease to exist: his presence is predicated on his talent for absence. Because of his function as a paradox at the heart of the poem, there is a potential adversative at the end of any statement about Vergil, an insistent *tamen* that this eschatological world has imposed on the Latin poet's own, more humanly scaled, *for-san*.¹⁴ Vergil embodies the most that natural man can attain, yet he is not saved; he is the greatest of poets, yet the lesser Statius can replace him. In the following pages, I will attempt to show how the Vergilian paradox operates at the level of narrative, resulting in two distinct but tightly coordinated storylines: as one maps the progressive undermining of Vergil's

¹⁴ In his Introduction to *Virgil: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1966), Steele Commager discusses the *Aeneid*'s deep ambivalence, remarking that "A perpetual *for-san*, 'perhaps,' hovers over the *Aeneid*," and reminding us that "Virgil added the word [*for-san*] to Homer in his famous imitation: *for-san et haec olim meminisse iuvabit*, 'perhaps, some day, it will be a pleasure to remember these things' " (p. 13). Dorothy Sayers' remark on paradox in the *Comedy*, that because of it "problems and ambiguities in the interpretation of [its] allegorical symbolism can seldom be settled by an 'either-or,' but on the contrary usually demand an answer involving 'both-and' (from "The Paradoxes of the *Comedy*," in *Introductory Papers on Dante* [London: Methuen, 1954], p. 182), is a critical principle that applies eminently to Vergil, himself one of the *Comedy*'s chief paradoxes.

authority, i.e. of his appeal to the intellect, the other records the simultaneous growth in the pilgrim's love for him, i.e. in his appeal to the will. Given these complementary and contradictory lines of development, it will be apparent that Dante has used the figure of Vergil to structure an inescapable dialectic into his text.

Vergil: "Poeta fui"

It is no secret that Dante's imitation of the *Aeneid* decreases as the *Comedy* progresses. Whitfield points out that of the two hundred uses of Vergil claimed by Moore, "90 of these passages concern the *Inferno*, 34 the *Purgatorio*, and 13 the *Paradiso*, while the rest are scattered in Dante's other writings."¹⁵ Petrocchi establishes a pattern of inverse relation between Dante's use of translations from the *Aeneid* and his use of translations from the Bible: while translations from the Roman text occur seven times in the *Inferno*, five times in the *Purgatorio*, and only once in the *Paradiso*, translations from the Christian text occur twelve times in the *Paradiso*, eight times in the *Purgatorio*, and only twice in the *Inferno*.¹⁶ The *Inferno* is thus Ver-

¹⁵ J. H. Whitfield, *Dante and Virgil* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1949), pp. 73-74.

¹⁶ Giorgio Petrocchi, "Itinerari nella *Commedia*," *Studi danteschi*, 41 (1964), 68. As we would expect, Vergil is by far the most translated poet in the *Comedy*; indeed, his only rival is not another poet, but the Bible. According to the statistics compiled by Felicina Groppi, *Dante traduttore*, 2d ed. rev. (Rome: Tipografia Poliglotta Vaticana, 1962), Vergil's verse is translated in the *Comedy* thirteen times (this figure does not include Vergilian reminiscences, like Casella's attempt to embrace the pilgrim, or the episodes of Vergilian inspiration, like that of Pier della Vigna), while the text contains only three other translations of classical authors: one from Cicero's *De Amicitia* (the probable source for Thaïs' dialogue in *Inferno* XVIII, 133-135), and two from Lucan's *Pharsalia* (neither of the passages adduced by Groppi strike me as direct translations, however). There are twenty-two translations from the Bible. On this subject, see also: Alessandro Ronconi, "Parole di Dante: per una semantica dei virgilianismi," *Lingua nostra*, 11 (1950), 81-85; Enzo Esposito, "Dante traduttore di Virgilio," *L'Italia che scrive*, 48 (1965), 335-336; and, on Dante as translator in the *Convivio*, Mario Marti, "Aspetti stilistici di Dante traduttore," in *Realismo dantesco e altri studi*, pp. 108-125.

gil's canticle, dominated by his presence and saturated with his text. Nonetheless, despite Vergil's very real preeminence in the first canticle, he is not immune from an implicit critique even within its bounds; in other words, he does not lose his authority all at once, at the beginning of the *Purgatorio* when Cato rebukes him, but in a more subtle fashion, step by step from the moment he enters the poem.¹⁷ When Vergil arrives an hourglass is set, and the grains of sand fall one by one until, in *Purgatorio* XXX, the glass is empty.

The stature that the text will work to diminish must first be established, at the poem's outset: in canto I, where Vergil's authority is unassailable, even in his evident exclusion; in canto II, where Beatrice initiates, with reference to the Latin poet, the use of the *captatio benevolentiae* tied to the theme of earthly fame; in canto III, which openly adopts the mechanisms of the Vergilian afterlife for the *Comedy*; and in canto IV, where Vergil is hailed by his august comrades. If *Inferno* III contains more crude Vergilian echoes than any other canto in the poem, *Inferno* IV less blatantly evokes the *Aeneid*; the description of Limbo's "nobile castello," surrounded by its seven walls and dry riverbed, is reminiscent of the symbolic architecture and topography found in *Aeneid* VI.¹⁸ Dante seems to be deliberately imitating a mode whose trappings he will gradually shed as the

¹⁷ In his definitive study on *Inferno* I, 63, the crux in which Vergil is described as "chi per lungo silenzio pareva fioco," Robert Hollander concludes that Vergil is silent because he did not bear witness to the Truth, an interpretation that lends support to the notion that the *Comedy*'s undermining of Vergil begins with its first presentation of him. See the first chapter of *Il Virgilio dantesco: Tragedia nella Commedia* (Florence: Olschki, 1983). Vergil's lack of faith is discussed from a theological point of view by Kenelm Foster, "The Two Dantes," in *The Two Dantes and Other Studies* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: U. of California Press, 1977), pp. 156-253.

¹⁸ D'Ovidio mentions the influence of Vergil's Elysian fields on Dante's conception of the *nobile castello* in "Non soltanto lo bello stile tolse da lui," *Studi sulla Divina Commedia*, p. 226. The "simbolismo figurativo" of the characterizations in *Inferno* IV is discussed by Forti, "Il limbo e i megalopsicoidi della Nicomachea," p. 31, and the "allegorical focus" of the topography of Limbo is treated by John Guzzardo, "The Noble Castle and the Eighth Gate," *MLN*, 94 (1979), 137-145.

exigencies of his own art take over, as though to underscore the point that after joining the classical poets and becoming one of their fraternity, he will keep on going, leaving them behind. Dramatically, the relation between Vergil and his charge in these first cantos is a formal one: if we consider the use of the emblematic nouns assigned to Vergil at the end of canto II, in the verse "tu duca, tu signore e tu maestro" ("You the leader, you the lord, and you the master" [140]), we note that Vergil is regularly called *buon maestro* and *duca mio*, without any additional affective terminology; he is also referred to simply as *poeta*. The tenor of the rapport between the pilgrim and his guide during the first stage of their journey is best summed up by the recurrent expressions denoting absolute confidence in Vergil's judgment and understanding: he is all-knowing ("quel savio gentil, che tutto seppe" "that gentle sage, who knew all" [*Inf.* VII, 3]), and the sea of all wisdom ("E io mi volsi al mar di tutto 'l senno" "And I turned to the sea of all wisdom" [*Inf.* VIII, 7]).¹⁹

Interestingly, both these hyperbolic tributes to Vergil's wisdom precede the encounter with the devils at the gates of Dis, the first episode to seriously call into question Vergil's abilities as guide. When Dante turns to Vergil, "al mar di tutto 'l senno," he does so in order to ask his guide the meaning of the signals being exchanged by the Stygian watchtowers, signals that effectively mark the beginning of a series of events whose culmination will be the advent of the heavenly intercessor toward

¹⁹ Perhaps Dante's phrase, "mar di tutto 'l senno," is related to the following etymology of Vergil's last name reported by Domenico Comparetti: "Marone ei fu detto dal mare, perchè siccome il mare abbonda di acque, così abbondava in lui la sapienza, più che in ogni altro" (*Virgilio nel medio evo*, new ed. rev. by Giorgio Pasquali, 2 vols. [1872; repr. Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1943-1946], vol. I, p. 179). Another word used to denote Vergil in the early cantos of the *Inferno* is *magnanimo*, used only twice in the poem, for Vergil in *Inferno* II and Farinata in *Inferno* X. The term seems particularly appropriate for Vergil in that it reached the Middle Ages, as John Scott shows, already burdened with a contradictory semantic value, i.e. both positive and negative connotations; see "Dante magnanimo," in *Dante magnanimo: studi sulla Commedia* (Florence: Olschki, 1977), pp. 239-345.

the end of canto IX. The pilgrim's query is followed by the arrival of the boatman Phlegyas, who eventually deposits the travelers at the entrance to Dis; it is preceded by a unique instance of flashback in the *Comedy's* narration: although Dante and Vergil arrive at the foot of a tower in the last verse of canto VII, canto VIII begins by explaining that long before they had arrived at the tower they saw the exchange of signals between it and a more distant companion. Rather than minimize this narrative occurrence, the poet does everything in his power to emphasize it, opening canto VIII with a self-conscious insistence on both the new beginning and the use of flashback: "Io dico, seguitando, ch'assai prima / che noi fossimo al piè de l'alta torre" ("I say, continuing, that long before we had arrived at the foot of the high tower" [*Inf.* VIII, 1-2]). In fact, canto VIII's exordium is so pronounced that in order to account for it the early commentators came up with a biographical explanation, according to which Dante composed the first seven cantos of the *Inferno* before his exile and returned to canto VIII after a long interruption.²⁰ Even more unusual than the exposed narrative link, "Io dico, seguitando," is the retrograde narration, which causes Benvenuto to comment that the author here "turns back in an artificial order."²¹ I would suggest that these narrative jolts are deliberately employed by Dante in order to mark an ideological jolt, indeed a crucial ideological turning point: namely, the moment in which we begin to realize that Vergil is not infallible, nor, as he has been viewed up to now, the fount of all wisdom.

Rehearsing certain features of Vergil's behavior in canto IX, we recall that the intransigence of the devils causes his mo-

²⁰ Benvenuto relates with great relish the story of the seven cantos left behind by Dante when he was exiled, how (because divine providence did not wish so excellent a work to be lost) they were found among his papers and taken to a citizen famous for his eloquence, who recognized their perfection and sent them to Marchese Malaspina, with whom Dante was staying; he concludes "and he began to proceed anew and to join together the unformed material, saying: *Io dico seguitando*, i.e. continuing with the material interrupted by exile" (vol. I, p. 274).

²¹ "Et hic nota quod autor retrocedit ordine artificiali" (vol. I, p. 275).

mentary lack of faith in Beatrice, rendered by his use of doubting expressions, as in "Pur a noi converrà vincer la punga" ("Yet we must be the ones to win this fight" [*Inf.* IX, 7]), followed by the uncompleted "se non . . ." ("unless . . ." [8]); his doubts and confusion lead to his inability to bypass the devils who block the way. Vergil's failure is carefully linked to his classical identity;²² the episode is stocked with classical characters, whose names reverberate throughout the canto ("quella Eritón cruda," "le feroci Erine," "Megera," "Aletto," "Tesifón," "Medusa," "Tesëo," "Gorgón," "Cerberò vostro"), and who are thematically connected to the canto's key revelation regarding the Latin poet. In order to reassure his charge, Vergil now reveals that he has made this trip before, at the behest of a sorceress from the *Pharsalia*, Erichtho: "congiurato da quella Eritón cruda / che richiamava l'ombre a' corpi sui" ("conjured by that cruel Erichtho who called back the shades to their bodies" [*Inf.* IX, 23-24]). Thus, under the pretext of allaying the pilgrim's fears, Dante raises far greater fears regarding his guide; the astonishing invention here related, whereby the Thessalian witch from Lucan's poem once deployed Vergil for one of her nefarious missions, casts a long and intentional shadow over the Roman poet.²³ We note, moreover, that Vergil is portrayed as

²² Mark Musa links Vergil's "defeatist attitude" and his paganism in "At the Gates of Dis," *Advent at the Gates*, pp. 65-84. The classical literary ambience of *Inferno* IX is discussed by David Quint, "Epic Tradition and *Inferno* IX," *Dante Studies*, 93 (1975), 201-207.

²³ In this I disagree with D'Ovidio, who argues that Dante invents Erichtho precisely to emphasize Vergil's innocence of magic arts, since if he were a true magician he would hardly be at her beck and call: "[Dante vuole] insinuare come il preteso mago fosse stato lui all'occorrenza zimbello d'una vera maga" ("Dante e la magia," in *Studi sulla Divina Commedia*, pp. 100-101). À propos of D'Ovidio's interpretation, I would like to draw attention to a curious exchange from the pages of the *Classical Journal* that dramatically, if unwittingly, illuminates the problems inherent in Dante's treatment of Vergil. The debate was sparked by one Anna P. MacVay who, totally innocent of Dante scholarship, points to the episodes in the *Comedy* she considers most damning to her favorite author's reputation; she mentions Beatrice's "fake promise" to Vergil in *Inferno* II, the invention of a link between Vergil and the hateful Erichtho, the revision of the *Aeneid's* account of the founding of Mantova, the presence of saved

taking his lack of free will and Erichtho's power over him entirely for granted, a fact Dante emphasizes by having him say "ella mi fece intrar dentr' a quel muro" ("she made me enter within that wall" [26; italics mine]), and that he now displays the same flaccid attitude in dealing with Medusa; he never doubts her ability to deaden the pilgrim's will—in literal terms, to petrify him—as Erichtho had once deadened his: "ché se 'l Gorgón si mostra e tu 'l vedessi, / nulla sarebbe di tornar mai suso" ("for if the Gorgon shows herself and you were to see her, there would be no more returning above" [56-57]).²⁴ Erich-

pagans, especially "the minor poet Statius"—in short, she hits the crucial passages for the Vergilian problematic throughout the *Comedy*, in defense of her thesis that Dante's love for Vergil is mere lip service, and that he selfishly mistreats his *auctor* in order to enhance himself ("Dante's Strange Treatment of Vergil," *Classical Journal*, 43 [1948], 233-235). MacVay's arguments are countered in the following volume by R. V. Schoder, S.J., who is well acquainted with scholarship on the *Comedy* and whose rebuttals frequently take the form of reading the various episodes allegorically; in the case of Erichtho he follows D'Ovidio, pointing out that Vergil is merely a helpless victim ("Vergil in the *Divine Comedy*," *Classical Journal*, 44 [1949], 413-422). The exchange is instructive because, although Schoder's defense of Dante is fundamentally sound—Dante does love Vergil—he is forced to justify episodes in which, as MacVay rightly perceived, Vergil is being undermined.

²⁴ D'Ovidio's thesis that Vergil was Erichtho's stooge, that he sees himself as her victim and speaks of her with resentment ("verso la quale insomma si atpeggia a vittima" [99]), is precisely to the point; he was her victim, but he should not have been. D'Ovidio's further observation that the spirits summoned by Erichtho in the *Pharsalia* come unwillingly, a fact that he brings to Vergil's defense, serves only to highlight the difference between Lucan's text and Dante's, where there is finally no such thing as constraint to do evil: "ché volontà, se non vuol, non s'ammorza" ("for will, if it does not will, is not put out" [Par. IV, 76]). Similarly, Lucan's depiction of Erichtho as one who is outside the law, to whom the gods concede all that is normally forbidden—"omne nefas superi prima iam voce precantis / concedunt carmenque timent audire secundum" ("Already at the first sound of her prayer the gods grant every evil, and fear to hear a second spell" [Pharsalia VI, 527-528])—would strengthen Dante's belief that a Christian, serving the Christian God, would never succumb to her. On the Erichtho episode in the *Pharsalia*, and the *Pharsalia* as an anti-Aeneid, see Lao Paoletti, "Lucano magico e Virgilio," *Atene e Roma*, 8 (1963), 11-26. Lucan's text is from *M. Annaei Lucani, Belli Civilis Libri X*, ed. A. E. Housman (1926; repr. Oxford: Blackwell, 1958).

tho derived her power over Vergil from his passive participation; had he not in some way subscribed to the imaginative constructs that sustained her, lending them his credence and his will, she would have been as powerless over him as the devils are now in the face of the heavenly intercessor. It seems not accidental that the angel opens the gates with a *verghetta*, thus accomplishing with a diminutive Vergil (a not improbable *double-entendre*, given the association of Vergil's name with the Latin *virga*) what the full-sized Vergil cannot do for himself.²⁵

In the interpolated episode of Filippo Argenti, which takes place immediately before this series of events at the city's gates, while the travelers are crossing the Styx, Vergil not only behaves "correctly" in his harsh treatment of the wrathful Florentine, but even echoes the Gospel in his approbation of the pilgrim's equally harsh behavior: "Alma sdegnosa, / benedetta colei che 'n te s'incinse!" ("Disdainful soul, blessed is she who bore you!" [Inf. VIII, 44-45]).²⁶ The inflated evangelical language adopted by Vergil in this scene and the almost excessive

²⁵ In *The Classical Tradition* (1949; repr. New York: Oxford U. Press, 1957), Gilbert Highet comments as follows on the spelling "Virgilius": "This misspelling began at a very early date, perhaps because of Vergil's nickname Parthenias, 'Miss Purity.' . . . In the Middle Ages the name was taken to refer to Vergil's powers as a magician, because *virga* means wand" (p. 584). Perhaps the later tradition was influenced by Suetonius' account, found in Donatus' commentary, of the poplar branch—"virga populea"—which was planted according to custom in Vergil's place of birth and quickly equalled in size trees planted long before; it became known as Vergil's tree—"arbor Vergilii"—and was an object of veneration for pregnant women (this story and the Latin quotations are from the *Vita Vergili* in the Loeb Classical Library edition of Suetonius, trans. J. C. Rolfe, 2 vols. [London: William Heinemann and New York: The Macmillan Co., 1913-1914], vol. II, pp. 464-465). Regarding Dante's own usage, R. Sabbadini concludes that he used the learned form of his day, namely "Virgilio" ("Dante scriveva 'Virgilio' o 'Virgilio'?", *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*, 35 [1900], 456). In "The Tragedy of Divination in *Inferno XX*," *Studies in Dante*, pp. 131-218, Robert Hollander traces the various *virgae* of Dante's classical poets and the *verghe* of the *Comedy* (pp. 175-184), noting that "*virga* may have seemed to Dante to have its close ties with the very orthography of the name of his greatest *auctor*" (p. 182).

²⁶ Vergil echoes Luke 11:27: "Beatus venter qui te portavit" ("Blessed is the womb that bore you").

approval he extends to the pilgrim are designed to align him with Christian principles, showing his distance from the sinners and his endorsement of divine judgment; however, by the same token, they are also designed to highlight his subsequent pagan failure in canto IX. The events of *Inferno* IX are doubtless intended as a decisive first fall from grace; nonetheless, since Dante's strategy toward Vergil is to create a sense of intimate contradiction in the character by approaching him through a lens of dialectically shifting perspectives, it should not surprise us to find him hard at work attenuating the damage of canto IX in a subsequent canto. Thus, canto XII is, in its treatment of Vergil, an inverse replay of canto IX; it contains many of the same elements found in the earlier canto, but they have been rearranged to cast Vergil in a positive rather than negative light. The first sign of the upcoming Vergilian thematic in canto XII is the simile of the alpine rockslide beginning in the canto's fourth line, where the use of the word *ruina* prefaces a discussion of the infernal *ruine* in lines 31 through 45. Because the *ruine* were caused by Christ's harrowing of Hell, they are the physical sign of Hell's defeat and can be counted on to bring out the worst in its denizens: the "ira bestial" of the Minotaur here in canto XII; the fraud of Malacoda and his band of devils later in canto XXI. Because Vergil made his first trip through Hell before its harrowing, the *ruine* function as pointers to his ignorance, and hence are signs of his defeat as well: Malacoda exploits Vergil's ignorance regarding the bridges and the *ruine* in order to deceive him. Vergil's problem is that he doesn't really exist in A.D. time, Christological time (as witnessed by his B.C. deference to Medusa), with the result that the *ruine*—A.D. referents in a B.C. world—will work against rather than for him.

In canto XII, however, Vergil successfully diverts the Minotaur's attention, so that he and the pilgrim can descend the ravine into the seventh circle. In answer to Dante's unspoken question regarding the *ruina* whose slope they are negotiating, Vergil offers an explanation, prefaced with the explicit reminder that this matter is ultimately out of his ken, since it is not part of his previous experience of lower Hell:

Or vo' che sappi che l'altra fiata
ch'i' discesi qua giù nel basso inferno,
questa roccia non era ancor cascata.

I want you to know that the other time I came down here
to lower Hell, this rock had not yet fallen.

(*Inf.* XII, 34-36)

Proceeding cautiously on this unfamiliar terrain ("se ben discerno" in line 37), Vergil notes that shortly before the arrival of "the one who took the great booty of the uppermost circle" (i.e. Christ) the earth quaked; he explains the quake in terms of the Empedoclean doctrine whereby order depends on the discord of the elements, and chaos would result from their concord: "da tutte parti l'alta valle feda / tremò sì, ch'i' pensai che l'universo / sentisse amor . . ." ("on all sides the deep foul valley trembled so, that I thought the universe felt love" [40-42]). Although Vergil is technically wrong in ascribing the earth's tremor to the concord of the elements, in saying that the universe "felt love" he has in fact intuited the correct cause of the quake: the universe felt love in that it felt the arrival of Christ. This intuitive triumph on Vergil's part is complemented by his competent handling of the classical creatures who stand in his way, first the Minotaur and then the centaur Nessus. The difference between his handling of these classical guardians and those who perched on the ramparts of Dis (whom we were told Vergil knew so well [*Inf.* IX, 43]—too well perhaps?) is underlined by the invocation of two classical heroes who also figured in canto IX: in dealing with the Minotaur, Vergil taunts him by reminding him of Theseus, "l' duca d'Atene, / che sù nel mondo la morte ti porse" ("the duke of Athens, who gave you death up in the world" [17-18]); later, in castigating Nessus for the evil brought about by his impulsive will, he rehearses for the pilgrim the centaur's relation to Deianira, the wife of Hercules, who killed Nessus for attempting to rape her (66-69). Both Theseus and Hercules are *figurae Christi*, heroes who descended to the underworld to rob it of its booty, and as such both are mentioned in *Inferno* IX: Theseus by the Furies, who

still clamor for revenge ("mal non vengiammo in Tesëo l'assalto" "badly did we not avenge ourselves on Theseus" [Inf. IX, 54]);²⁷ and Hercules implicitly by the angel, who reminds the devils of Cerberus' ill-fated attempt to withstand the hero:

Che giova ne le fata dar di cozzo?
Cerbero vostro, se ben vi ricorda,
ne porta ancor pelato il mento e 'l gozzo.

What profits it to butt against the fates? Your Cerberus, if you remember well, still bears his chin and throat peeled for this.

(Inf. IX, 97-99)

Theseus and Hercules are classical forerunners of Christ, early harrowers of Hell whose actions symbolize infernal defeat. By invoking them in canto XII, Vergil shows how well he has absorbed the lesson of the *nesso celeste* from canto IX. Vergil is nothing if not a quick study: he now knows how to deal with the Minotaur and the centaur, showing contempt for his classical counterparts; he even is able to explain the *ruine*. However, just as his explanation of the *ruine* is only in part correct, so too is his newly recovered authority severely limited.²⁸ Vergil can be taught how to deal with classical monsters, but not how to deal with devils, as the pilgrim reminds him, referring to his

²⁷ Giorgio Padoan discusses the Furies' line, "mal non vengiammo in Tesëo l'assalto," with relation to Theseus as a *figura Christi* in "Teseo 'figura Redemptoris' e il cristianesimo di Stazio," orig. 1959, repr. in *Il pio Enea, l'empio Ulisse*, pp. 125-150.

²⁸ Vergil's previous shows of authority with the classical monsters Charon (Inf. III, 94-96), Minos (Inf. V, 21-24), Cerberus (Inf. VI, 25-27), and Plutus (Inf. VII, 7-12) all precede his debilitating encounter with the devils at the gates of Dis. These earlier exchanges, with their ritualistic repetition of the formula "vuolsi così colà dove si puote / ciò che si vuole, e più non dimandare" (III, 95-96; V, 23-24), have a curiously stylized "learned" quality about them, as if Vergil were carefully executing previously memorized instructions without being quite sure of the results. Judging from the fact that Vergil's warnings become longer and more original (in the last encounter, with Plutus, he dispenses with the old formula altogether, substituting a new version perhaps of his own invention), there seems to be a gradual increase in his confidence, which makes his subsequent failure all the more glaring.

teacher less than tactfully as one who can overcome all but the devils at the gate: "Maestro, tu che vinci / tutte le cose, fuor che ' demon duri / ch'a l'intrar de la porta incontra uscinci" ("Master, you who conquer all things, except for the tough demons who came out against us at the entrance of the gate" [Inf. XIV, 43-45]). This seemingly unnecessary periphrasis in canto XIV testifies to Dante's unwillingness to let his character off the hook for very long, and in fact, canto XIV's undermining of Vergil and classical culture does not cease with the pilgrim's remark about the devils. Here we find the shabby figure of Capaneus (whom Vergil treats with a vehemence perhaps intensified by the pilgrim's stinging words), reduced from the heroic if blasphemous proportions that were his in the *Thebaid*, as well as the Old Man of Crete, a textual construct that revises classical sources, primarily the *Aeneid* and the *Metamorphoses*, by conflating them with the Biblical account of Nebuchadnezzar's dream. Most interestingly, from our point of view, is the revision of the *Aeneid* that Dante puts into Vergil's mouth with respect to the rivers of Hell.²⁹ After Vergil has explained that Acheron, Styx, Phlegethon, and Cocytus all derive from the statue's tears, the pilgrim remains confused regarding the whereabouts of Phlegethon and Lethe, in the case of Phlegethon because he does not realize he has already seen it as the river of blood surrounding the seventh circle, and in the case of Lethe because Vergil has not mentioned it. As a result, Vergil must explain that Lethe, which in the *Aeneid* he placed in the Elysian fields, in fact does not belong to the underworld at all—"Letè vedrai, ma fuor di questa fossa" ("Lethe you shall see, but outside of this ditch" [Inf. XIV, 136])—thus reversing his own earlier statement.

Such corrections, not of Vergil's poetic persona, but of his text, the *Aeneid*, occur with increasing frequency as the travelers proceed through Hell. These corrections raise fundamental

²⁹ In his reading of *Inferno* XIV, now in *Tradizione e struttura in Dante*, pp. 221-249, Ettore Paratore discusses Capaneus, the Old Man of Crete, and the rivers of Hell; vis-à-vis the latter, he remarks that Dante's silence regarding Phlegethon when it first appears seems designed to provoke a later conversation with Vergil on the subject (pp. 237-239).

questions regarding the status of Vergil's poem, and indeed, since the *Aeneid* is the chief text to have appeared before the *Comedy*, regarding textuality in general: questions of belief and disbelief, falsity and truth. Paradigmatic in this respect is the reference to the *Aeneid* in *Inferno* XIII, where Vergil responds to Pier della Vigna's rebuke by explaining that it was necessary for the pilgrim to break one of his branches in order to believe him possible; for although a similar marvel is recounted in the *Aeneid*, the pilgrim's belief in so remarkable a transformation could not have been secured simply by a reading of that text:

"S'elli avesse potuto creder prima,"
rispuose 'l savio mio, "anima lesa,
ciò c'ha veduto pur con la mia rima,
non averebbe in te la man distesa;
ma la cosa incredibile mi fece
indurlo ad ovra ch'a me stesso pesa. . . ."

My sage replied: "If he had been able to believe before, O wounded soul, that which he has seen only with my verses, he would not have stretched out his hand against you; but the unbelievable thing made me lead him to a deed that weighs upon me. . . ."

(*Inf.* XIII, 46-51)

The fact that a man has become a tree is termed a "cosa incredibile," something that by its nature cannot be accepted on the basis of a prior account, no matter how authoritative, but which, if it is to be believed, must be verified through one's own actions and experience. Therefore, because Vergil's book is in-credible, Dante must break the branch. But, the question arises: if Dante cannot believe Vergil's text, why should we believe Dante's? Why is Pier della Vigna less in-credible than his prototype, Polydorus? Any answer to such questions involves the basic poetic strategies of the *Comedy*, and, foremost among them, its choice of an allegorical mode in which the literal level is perceived as true, i.e. as that which, by definition, must be believed.

Although the truth is not always immediately believable, it will always ultimately command belief, simply because it is true. It is not coincidence that Dante first defines his poem, calling it a *comedia*, in the context of an episode that raises these same issues of truth and falsehood, belief and disbelief. When the monster Geryon swims up through the murky air at the end of canto XVI, the poet tells us that he is in the position of a man who must recount an unbelievable truth and for whom it would be easier to keep silent, since his story will only bring him the reproaches of his listeners, but who must speak:

Sempre a quel ver c'ha faccia di menzogna
de' l'uom chiuder le labbra fin ch'el puote,
però che senza colpa fa vergogna;
ma qui tacer nol posso . . .

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 . . .

(*Inf.* XVI, 124-127)

Dante here lets us know that he doesn't expect us to believe his account of what he saw, but that nonetheless we must, for his story is "quel ver c'ha faccia di menzogna"—a truth which has the appearance of a lie. Because we are not likely to believe this lying truth, he resorts to an oath, swearing by the notes of his poem, "questa comedia," that he in fact saw what he says he saw: "e per le note / di questa comedia, lettor, ti giuro . . . ch'i' vidi" ("and by the notes of this comedy, reader, I swear to you . . . that I saw" [*Inf.* XVI, 127-130]).³⁰ What has not

³⁰ The use of "vidi" here reflects one of Dante's simplest but most effective strategies for enlisting our belief, i.e. the use of the verb *vedere*, one of the most common verbs in the poem. We have already mentioned a similar technique, the use of the sentence opening "Vero è . . ." It seems not coincidental that in this same canto Dante is praised for his ability to speak the truth clearly and succinctly (*Inf.* XVI, 76-81). When *ver* is used at the end of the canto, in "quel ver c'ha faccia di menzogna," it cannot fail to recall this previous use, in which three souls, on hearing the pilgrim's words about Florence, look at each other "com' al ver si guata" ("as one stares at the truth" [78]).

been sufficiently recognized is that the poem is here defined, not only as a *comedia*, but also as "quel ver c'ha faccia di menzogna," and that this last phrase is nothing but a gloss for the first: a *comedia* is that truth which has the appearance of a lie but which is nonetheless always a truth.³¹ If the *Aeneid* is a *tragedia* instead, according to the definition offered in *Inferno* XX, this is because it is the opposite of the *Comedy*: a truthful lie, rather than a lying truth.

Although the *Aeneid* tells a truth, its truth was not intended by its author, but was revealed retrospectively through the unfolding of divine providence. By the same token, although the *Aeneid* partakes of historical verities, it is ignorant of the greatest of historical verities, namely the birth of Christ. Because it is, in this sense, a truthful lie, the *Aeneid* can and must be corrected.³² The *Comedy*'s most sustained correction of the *Aeneid*

³¹ I do not mean to deny that *comedia* may also encompass the typical rhetorical components of the genre as described in the Epistle to Cangrande, namely a style that is not consistently sublime and a happy ending, but I do mean to suggest that Dante intends much more by these terms in the *Comedy* than he indicates in the Epistle. For a similar reading of Geryon's arrival, which stresses the parallelism between Geryon's "faccia d'uom giusto" (*Inf.* XVII, 10) and the "ver c'ha faccia di menzogna," as well as noting the connections between *Inferno* XVI and *Inferno* XX, see Franco Ferrucci, "Comedia," *Yearbook of Italian Studies*, 1 (1971), 29-52, repr. as "The Meeting with Geryon," in *The Poetics of Disguise: The Autobiography of the Work in Homer, Dante, and Shakespeare*, trans. Ann Dunnigan (Ithaca: Cornell U. Press, 1980), pp. 66-102. The results of our similar readings are, however, divergent, since Ferrucci takes the episode as Dante's indication to us that his poem is merely metaphoric, made of "lies," while I take it as his claim that the poem, which may at times appear to be lying, is always telling the "truth." In this I agree with Hollander, who responds to Ferrucci's arguments by writing that "If he [Geryon] is a poetic *menzogna*, in Dante's treatment he becomes a *menzogna vera* ('Dante Theologus-Poeta,' *Studies in Dante*, p. 76). Indeed, the parallelism, mentioned above, between Geryon's "faccia d'uom giusto" and the "ver c'ha faccia di menzogna" is instructive in this regard, since it constitutes an inversion: on the one hand is Geryon's "honest face," which masks a deceitful core; on the other is the poem's "lying face," which masks the truth. Thus Geryon and the *comedia* are opposites; it follows that, since Geryon is falsehood (Dante goes out of his way to label him "quella sozza imagine di froda" [*Inf.* XVII, 7]), the *comedia* must be truth.

³² Hollander's suggestion that Dante viewed the *Aeneid* as "quasi-historical"

occurs in *Inferno* XX, in the *bolgia* of the diviners and false prophets, where Dante systematically invokes each of his Latin *auctores*: Statius, Ovid, Lucan, and Vergil. The canto is dominated by Vergil, who begins to speak in line 27 and, but for a six-line break in which Dante asks a question, does not give up the floor until the canto's penultimate verse, line 129. After harshly reprimanding the pilgrim for his tears, elicited by the grotesque and twisted shapes of this *bolgia*'s inhabitants, Vergil presents the various soothsayers and, concomitantly, the texts of his *auctores*: Amphiaraus from the *Thebaid*, Tiresias from the *Metamorphoses*, Arruns from the *Pharsalia*, and finally Manto from the *Aeneid*.³³ Because of her connection to his natal city, introduced by the verse "poscia si puose là dove nacqu'io" ("then she settled in the place where I was born" [*Inf.* XX, 56]), Vergil has more to say about Manto than about the others, and so begins the lengthy account of Mantova's pre-history for which this canto is famous. Carefully tracing the movement of the waters in northern Italy from Lake Garda to the swampy area in which Mantova was built, he describes the arrival of the "vergine cruda" (the phrase echoes "Eritón cruda" from *Inferno* IX) to the chosen spot, her settling there, living there, and dying

(as compared to Lucan's text, which he considered historical, and Ovid's, which he considered fictional) corresponds to my formulation of the *Aeneid*, in Dantesque terms, as a "truthful lie" (see "Dante Theologus-Poeta," p. 63). On Dante's deliberate revisionism of Vergil's text, see Hollander's *Il Virgilio dantesco*, chap. II.

³³ Although both Tiresias and Manto appear in more than one of these poems, and Manto is mentioned only briefly in the *Aeneid*, it is evident that Dante intends to associate each diviner with a particular text, and that Manto is associated with Vergil's; E. G. Parodi recognizes the correspondences between sinners and texts in "La critica della poesia classica nel ventesimo canto dell'*Inferno*," *Atene e Roma*, 11 (1908), 183-195 and 237-250, writing "Dante ha voluto che fosse rappresentato con un suo personaggio ciascuno dei quattro massimi poeti latini che conosceva" (p. 194), and noting that these poets are evoked in *Inferno* XX in order to be corrected. For a detailed analysis of Dante's "misreadings" of these texts, see Hollander's "The Tragedy of Divination in *Inferno* XX"; for a reading that focuses more on the canto's early events than on the later corrections of classical texts, see Marino Barchiesi, "Catarsi classica e 'medicina' dantesca (del canto XX dell'*Inferno*)," *Lecture classensi* (Ravenna: Longo, 1973), vol. IV, pp. 11-124.

there: "e visse, e vi lasciò suo corpo vano" ("and she lived [there], and left there her empty body" [87]). Because the settlers from the surrounding regions noticed that the swamps formed a natural bulwark, they moved in after her death, and they—not she—built the city: "Fer la città sovra quell' ossa morte" ("they built the city over those dead bones" [91]). The binary structure of line 91—the men who make the city on one side, and those dead bones on the other—mimics the line with which Vergil began this discussion, "poscia si puose là dove nacqu' io," whose two halves succinctly express an insuperable barrier: Manto may have settled there, but Vergil was born there.

The disjunction thus established between Manto's squalid resting-place and Vergil's beloved birthplace is underscored by an even more profound disjunction between the story as Vergil now tells it and the story in the *Aeneid*, where the prophetess bears a child, Ocnus, who founds the city and gives it his mother's name: "qui muros matrisque dedit tibi, Mantua, nomen" ("who gave you walls and the name of his mother, O Mantua" [*Aeneid* X, 200]).³⁴ Such a revision of the *Aeneid* is particularly

³⁴ The text of the *Aeneid* is from *P. Vergili Maronis Opera*, ed. F. A. Hirtzel (1900; repr. Oxford: Clarendon, 1966). On Dante's use of *Aeneid* X in *Inferno* XX, see Ettore Paratore, "Il canto XX dell'*Inferno*," *Studi danteschi*, 52 (1979-1980), 149-169. In my "True and False See-ers in *Inferno* XX," *California Lectura Dantis*, ed. Allen Mandelbaum (U. of California Press, forthcoming), I further develop thematic correspondences between *Aeneid* X and *Inferno* XX as well as showing that Dante's revision of the *Aeneid* in canto XX goes far beyond the Latin poem's content to invest the crucial issue of its style: rather than compose Vergil's most personal speech in the poem in a way that would approximate his renowned seamlessness of line, Dante inverts his master's style by granting him a particularly long and clumsy string of end-stopped *terzine*. Returning to the *Comedy*'s revision of the *Aeneid*'s content, I would like to draw attention to the related issue of Vergil's and Dante's ethnic origins. By denying, implicitly, the existence of Manto's son Ocnus, Dante also denies Manto's relation with the river god Tiber, Ocnus' illustrious father: "fatidicae Mantus et Tusci filius amnis" ("the son of prophetic Manto and of the Etruscan river" [*Aen.* X, 199]). Vergil's reference to the Tiber as the "Etruscan river" (the same expression for the Tiber is used in *Aeneid* VIII, 473) serves to emphasize Mantova's Etruscan origins and political affiliations. Vergil's insistence on this issue is such that he proceeds to tell us that the people of Mantova

noteworthy in the light of Vergil's closing injunction to the pilgrim to disregard all other accounts of Mantova's founding. Since the only true story is the one Vergil has just taught him, the pilgrim must "let no lie defraud the truth," i.e. he must reject all other accounts as falsehoods:

Però t'assenno che, se tu mai odi
originar la mia terra altrimenti,
la verità nulla menzogna frodi.

Therefore I charge you that, if you ever hear it said that
my city originated otherwise, let no lie defraud the truth.
(*Inf.* XX, 97-99)

But in what source could Dante find the story of "mia terra" told "altrimenti," if not in the *Aeneid*? According to Vergil's own statement then, the *Aeneid* is a text that—like the false prophets of this *bolgia*—is capable of defrauding the truth. The language of line 99, with its harsh juxtaposition of *verità* and *menzogna*, as well as the appearance in line 113 of *tragedia*, the *Comedy*'s second genre term, indicate the close ties which bind this episode to that of canto XVI: Vergil's poem, defined as a *tragedia*, is, at least at times, a lie that defrauds the truth, while Dante's poem is a truth that sometimes bears the face of

are not all of one stock, but of three races, each of which is subdivided into four peoples; however, the city's strength derives from its Etruscan blood: "Tusco de sanguine vires" (*Aen.* X, 203). In this way, Vergil lets his readers know that Mantova, although north of the Po, belonged to the Etruscan confederacy that came to Aeneas' aid, thus insuring his city a place in the founding of the Roman Empire. The *Aeneid*'s intentions are reversed in *Inferno* I, 68, where Vergil's identification of his Mantuan parents as "lombardi" implies that they are not Etruscans, and again in *Inferno* XX, where the Tuscan connection is removed, with Ocnus, from the account of Mantova's founding. This excision of Mantova's Tuscan roots is particularly intriguing in the light of Dante's references, throughout the *Comedy*, to himself as a Tuscan and to Vergil as a Lombard. Upon perusal of Dante's uses of *tosco* and *lombardo* throughout the *Comedy*, I am convinced of what I cannot now take the space to demonstrate: namely that these terms have been endowed with programmatic political connotations carefully developed over the course of the poem, and that the association of Vergil with Lombardy is actually in the spirit of the Latin poet's own earlier association of himself with Tuscany, since Lombardy is the region Dante links to Italy's imperial hopes.

a lie. Such a poetic truth is, as we already know, a *comedia*, a term Dante will now use for the last time in the opening verses of canto XXI. We note the progressive unfolding of information: first the implicit association of the *Aeneid* with *menzogna* in XX, 99; then Vergil's reference to his poem as "l'alta mia tragedia" in XX, 113, which results in the alignment of *menzogna* and *tragedia*; and finally, safely distanced from the tragedies of the ancients by the boundary between cantos XX and XXI, the reference to Dante's poem as "la mia comedia" in XXI, 2, which confirms that his poem is the opposite of the *Aeneid* and therefore also of *menzogna*.

If Vergil's text is capable of falsehood, Dante, by revising it, restores truth to it. And, as exegetes of canto XX have claimed from D'Ovidio on, Dante not only restores Vergil's text, but—by allowing Vergil to vociferously condemn and thus dissociate himself from the diviners he sees here—rescues Vergil himself from any guilt by association.³⁵ Thus, when the pilgrim weeps, Vergil lacerates him with the question "Ancor se' tu de li altri sciocchi?" ("Are you still among the other fools?" [Inf. XX, 27]), implying that he, unlike Dante, is completely unmoved by the vision that has so shaken his charge. Throughout his presentation of the soothsayers Vergil uses the language of prophecy, relying on strong imperatives and verbs of sight, linguistic markers that the *Comedy's* author hands his character

³⁵ This thesis was put forth by D'Ovidio in "Dante e la magia" and "Ancora Dante e la magia," *Studi sulla Divina Commedia*, pp. 76-112 and 113-149. Padoan points out that of the three possible explanations for Aeneas' descent to the underworld available to Dante (he went in a mental vision, he went corporally through the agency of necromancy, he went corporally through the agency of divine grace), Dante chose the latter and most radical ("Enea," *Enciclopedia Dantesca*, vol. II, pp. 677-679); not only is such an explanation necessary if the classical hero is to serve as an antecedent of the pilgrim, but it also serves to further distance the *Aeneid* from necromantic practices. An interesting corollary to this issue is provided by Giuseppe Bolognese, "Fra i maghi danteschi: Michele Scotto," *Alighieri*, 17 (1976), 71-74, who suggests that Vergil's damning assertion regarding Michael Scot, "che veramente / de le magiche frode seppe 'l gioco" ("who truly knew the game of magic frauds" [Inf. XX, 116-117]), is motivated by the Scot's inclusion of Vergil as a great magician in his astrology manual, the *Liber Introductorius*.

deliberately: because what Vergil sees is the truth, such language is legitimate. He may speak as a prophet, because he is in a world where his prophecy is guaranteed true, because he is no longer a *vates*—a term used for Vergil in the *Monarchia*, and significantly omitted from the *Comedy*—but a *scriba*. In this way, Dante works to rehabilitate his preferred *auctor* and his text. And yet, his methods are typically double-edged. Is not Vergil, rather than the pilgrim, one of the "altri sciocchi," to the extent that he passively submitted to Erichtho's evil will? His informed tirade against the diviners is thus bought at a heavy price. Analogously, Vergil's text is preserved, but only at the cost of being revealed false. If Dante had simply wanted to distance his Vergil from the necromancer of medieval legend, the best course would surely have been to ignore completely any such insinuations, not to feed them by inventing a post-humous connection between the sage and so infamous a practitioner of the black arts as Erichtho.³⁶ His behavior suggests

³⁶ Dante could surely have found a way to give his guide prior knowledge of Hell without associating him with the most bloodcurdling scene in Latin literature. On the legends surrounding Vergil, see Comparetti, *Virgilio nel medio evo*, and John Webster Spargo, *Virgil the Necromancer* (Cambridge: Harvard U. Press, 1934). Far from being Neapolitan folktales as Comparetti thought, Spargo shows that these legends originate outside of Italy in the twelfth century, in learned authors like John of Salisbury. By Dante's time they were circulating in Italy and it seems reasonable to assume that Dante was aware of them, since Cino draws on the legend of the bronze fly fabricated by Vergil to keep all other flies out of Naples (first mentioned by John in the *Policraticus*; see Spargo, p. 8 and pp. 70-79) in his canzone-satire on Naples, where he rebukes Vergil as follows:

O sommo vate, quanto mal facesti
(non t'era me' morire
a Piettola, colà dove nascesti?),
quando la mosca, per l'altre fuggire,
in tal loco ponesti

O supreme seer, how much evil you did (was it not better for you to die in Pietola, where you were born?) when you put in such a place the fly, in order to drive the others away

("Deh, quando rivedrò 'l dolce paese," 13-17)

These verses, most likely composed late in Cino's career (he was in Naples in 1330-1331), show that, despite his devotion to Dante, Cino was capable of

that he had a different goal in mind, that of distinguishing between three kinds of prophet: the utterly false prophet, housed in the fourth *bolgia* and exemplified by its inhabitants; the unwitting prophet, who is unknowingly a carrier of both truth and falsehood, a type exemplified by Vergil, whom Dante both accepts and corrects according to his perception of whether he is dealing with *verità* or *menzogna*; and the unconditionally true prophet, whose vision is divinely sanctioned, exemplified by Dante himself.³⁷

adopting a very different, and more current, attitude toward his friend's guide. Extremely suggestive is his ironic reference to Pietola, mentioned reverently as Vergil's birthplace in *Purgatorio* XVIII, 82-83, and his use of the expression "O sommo vate"; perhaps Dante's avoidance of *vate* in the *Comedy*, for Vergil and even for himself (the word is never used), reflects his belief that in the popular mind *vate* is associated more with witchcraft than with the providential calling it describes in the *Monarchia*.

³⁷ Dante's view of himself as a true prophet is evidenced by his Epistle to the Florentines, where his warning of imminent destruction begins with the claim to have a "prophetic mind"—"presaga mens"—instructed by "truth-telling signs": "Et si presaga mens mea non fallitur, sic signis veridicis sicut inexpugnabilibus argumentis instructa prenuntians . . ." ("And if my prophetic mind does not err, that announces the future instructed both by truth-telling signs and by unassailable arguments" [*Epistola* VI, 17]). Interestingly, the commentaries to the Epistles point to a passage from none other than *Aeneid* X as the source for Dante's "presaga mens," thus indirectly relating this prophetic moment in the Epistle to Dante's gloss on *Aeneid* X and chief text on prophecy: *Inferno* XX. As I show in "True and False Seers in *Inferno* XX," canto XX is enormously important for Dante's views on textuality, since prophecy is for Dante essentially a textual issue: a *profeta* is one who fore-tells, who reads in the "magno volume" of God's mind (*Par.* XV, 50) and deciphers the book of the future. The chief concern of *Inferno* XX is thus precisely the truth or falsity—*verità* or *menzogna*—of a statement, reading, or text; this problematic is then focused on two representative texts: the *Aeneid* and the *Comedy*. For more general discussions of Dante and prophecy, see: Bruno Nardi, "Dante profeta," in *Dante e la cultura medievale*, pp. 336-416; Joseph Anthony Mazzeo, "Dante's Conception of Poetic Expression," in *Structure and Thought in the Paradiso* (1958; repr. New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), pp. 25-49; Nicolò Mineo, *Profetismo e apocalittica in Dante* (Catania: U. di Catania, 1968), esp. pp. 297-354; Marjorie Reeves, "Dante and the Prophetic View of History," in *The World of Dante*, pp. 44-60. Mineo points out that Vergil was in fact known in the Middle Ages as a *propheta nescius*, an unwitting prophet (p. 340).

Vergil thus inhabits a middle ground, a limbo of dialectical possibility, and the key to him seems to be his passivity: he can function *in malo*, working for Erichtho, or *in bono*, working for Beatrice. In *Inferno* XX Dante wants to teach us that Vergil is not an *auctoritas* whose statements can be unquestioningly accepted, and so he revises Vergil's text first regarding the founding of Mantova and secondly regarding the status of Eurypylus, a minor character from the *Aeneid* presented as an augur in canto XX. The episode belongs to the *Aeneid*'s second book: in order to persuade the Trojans to take the fateful horse into their city, Sinon invents his deceitful tale, claiming that the Greeks were going to offer him in sacrifice to Apollo; Eurypylus is the soldier who, according to Sinon, was sent to consult the oracle, which would respond by demanding a Greek life: "suspensi Eurypylum scitatum oracula Phoebi / mittimus" ("Uncertain, we send Eurypylus to consult the oracle of Phoebus" [*Aeneid* II, 114-115]). In canto XX Dante transforms this harmless messenger into a partner of the seer Calchas, responsible with Calchas for the sacrifice of Iphigenia at Aulis, and has Vergil insist on this identification by pointing to the *Aeneid* as its source and stressing Dante's thorough knowledge of that text, a poem that he is said to know in its entirety, "tutta quanta":

Euripilo ebbe nome, e così 'l canta
l'alta mia tragedia in alcun loco:
ben lo sai tu che la sai tutta quanta.

Eurypylus was his name, and so my high tragedy sings of him in a certain passage—well do you know this, since you know the whole of it.

(*Inf.* XX, 112-114)

Arguing that Dante knew full well that Eurypylus was not an augur in the *Aeneid* ("ben lo sai tu che la sai tutta quanta"), Hollander claims that Dante here shows himself "to be what poets have always been called, 'liar,' in order to better serve the truth."³⁸ Once more, then, the *Comedy* is "un ver c'ha faccia

³⁸ "The Tragedy of Divination in *Inferno* XX," p. 203. Regarding the problem

di menzogna." And, if the *Comedy's* version of Eurypylus is true, then the *Aeneid's* version is not, with the result that Vergil's text is reduced to being in this instance the equivalent of Sinon's story: a lie.

By the time we finish *Inferno* XX, Dante has presented us with all the key elements of his Vergilian strategy; indeed, the *Inferno* from this point on becomes in part a running commentary on Vergil, for which we are prepared by the episodes already discussed. Interestingly, the true/false opposition runs through this commentary, suggesting that it is an integral and essential component of the Vergilian problematic. Thus, in cantos XXI to XXIII, Malacoda's lie is tied to the issue of the *ruine*, which, as we have seen, function as a kind of yardstick by which Vergil is measured. Canto XXI contains all the ingredients of cantos IX and XII: upon seeing the devils who torment the *barattieri*, Vergil reassures Dante by reminding him that he has been here before, in a reference to his journey for Erichtho: "non temer tu, ch'i' ho le cose conte, / per ch'altra volta fui a tal baratta" ("Do not fear, for I have things under control, since I was in a similar fray once before" [*Inf.* XXI, 62-63]). As though oblivious of the events of canto IX, he shows excessive confidence in his ability to handle the devils, and, as though to underscore the fact that his success in canto XII was of a superficial nature, precisely the *ruine* will now prove his undoing.³⁹ Malacoda's lie consists in telling the travelers that there

of Eurypylus in *Inferno* XX, D'Ovidio suggests that, for Dante, Sinon's pairing of Calchas and Eurypylus in his story reflects their actual participation at Aulis; thus, Dante is not correcting the *Aeneid* but cleverly drawing out its intended but unstated meaning ("Ancora Dante e la magia," *Studi sulla Divina Commedia*, pp. 147-149).

³⁹ Vergil's ignorance with regard to the devils, and the resulting overconfidence in his handling of them, are treated by C. J. Ryan, "Inferno XXI: Virgil and Dante: A Study in Contrasts," *Italica*, 59 (1982), 16-31. Sam Guyler discusses Vergil's insufficiencies in *Inferno* XXIII, the canto in which Dante and his guide are forced to flee Malacoda's troop, in "Virgil the Hypocrite—Almost: A Re-interpretation of *Inferno* XXIII," *Dante Studies*, 90 (1972), 25-42. (I disagree, however, with the thesis that Vergil's excessive confidence is part of a hypocritical attempt to preserve the façade of his authority.) In an article that concentrates on the critique of Vergil in *Purgatorio* XXX, Chris-

is a bridge still leading out of this *bolgia*, although the one ahead of them collapsed in the earthquake that accompanied the Crucifixion; he is able to deceive Vergil because the poet's first trip antedates the earthquake, and because he accompanies his lie with a great truth, the date of the death of Christ. We could stretch a point to say that Malacoda's truthful lie is a lie that has the appearance of truth—"una menzogna c'ha faccia di vero"—and that Vergil is susceptible to it because he is himself a teller of truthful lies. And Vergil, of course, knows nothing about devils—those lying truths—as is evident from the truism with which the hypocrite Catalano apprises him of Malacoda's deceit (the extent of Vergil's ignorance of Christian truths is emphasized in this very *bolgia*, where we see him marvel over the crucifixion of Caiphas); using the key word which has figured in all these Vergilian passages, *menzogna*, Catalano explains that devils are liars: "ch'elli è bugiardo e padre di menzogna" ("for he is a liar and the father of lies" [*Inf.* XXIII, 144]).

If cantos XXI through XXIII revive the theme of Vergil's failure in the face of Christian devils and Christian ruins, cantos XXIV and XXV return to the revision and outdoing of classical authors. The famous vaunts of canto XXV, in which Dante boasts that his metamorphoses are superior to those of Lucan and Ovid, emerge from the *Comedy's* fundamental polemic vis-à-vis ancient texts: they fail to deal in truth. The metamorphoses of canto XXV are part of a series of perverted religious motifs that runs through lower Hell, moving from "nostra imagine . . . sì torta" ("our image so twisted" [*Inf.* XX, 22-23]), to the "crucifixion" of Caiphas, the "resurrection" of Vanni Fucci, the "Eucharist" of Ugolino, and culminating in Lucifer, a perverse image of God Himself. Canto XXV fits into this scheme by way of the Christological focus of the metamorphoses, a focus that

topher J. Ryan begins by demonstrating that the events of *Inferno* VIII and XXI are examples of "the limitation in Virgil's knowledge with respect to evil" (p. 5); see "Virgil's Wisdom in the *Divine Comedy*," *Medievalia et Humanistica*, 11 (1982), 1-38. Giuseppe Baglivi and Garrett McCutchan have written on Malacoda and the *ruine* in "Dante, Christ, and the Fallen Bridges," *Italica*, 54 (1977), 250-262.

is rendered linguistically through the canto's insistence on the motif of "two in one";⁴⁰ while the miracle of Christ is to be simultaneously two *and* one, this infernal inversion results in a creature that is neither two nor one: "Vedi che già non se' né due né uno" ("You see that you are already neither two nor one" [Inf. XXV, 69]), remarks a thief, whose observation is confirmed by the poet's subsequent comment, "due e nessun l'immagine perversa / pare" ("both two and nothing the perverse image seemed" [77-78]). Also connected to Christ is the key word that Dante uses for the second of his two metamorphoses; while for the first he uses *mutare*, for the second he uses *trasmutare*, a verb that strongly suggests a higher kind of transfiguration: the prefix *tras*, which stands at the threshold of Paradise in Dante's coinage *trasmunar*, is linked in the *Comedy* to the *Paradiso*, where it is used insistently, and thus with religious transmutation. Moreover, Dante's criticism of Ovid—"ché due nature mai a fronte a fronte / non trasmutò sì ch'amendue le forme / a cambiar lor materia fosser pronte" ("for he never transmuted two natures front to front so that both forms were ready to change their substance" [100-102])—will be echoed by the description of Christ in the purgatorial procession, where the pilgrim marvels at the griffin's ability to be still while simultaneously being transformed: "ne l'idolo suo si trasmutava" ("in its image it was changing" [Purg. XXXI, 126]). In short, the superiority of Dante's metamorphoses derives from that which they parody; as negative versions of one of the greatest of Christian mysteries, the dual nature of Christ, they resonate with a power not available to their classical counterparts.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Paratore notes the importance of this motif in his reading, "Il canto XXV dell'*Inferno*," in *Tradizione e struttura in Dante*, pp. 250-280.

⁴¹ Piero Floriani, "Mutare e trasmutare: alcune osservazioni sul canto XXV dell'*Inferno*," *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*, 149 (1972), 324-332, notes in the canto "una religiosità non neoplatonica, anche sentimentalmente fondata sopra la resurrezione della carne" (p. 327, n. 8). Although Dante's vaunted superiority over Lucan and Ovid is generally viewed as a reference to purely technical mastery (see, for instance, Richard Terdiman, "Problematic Virtuosity: Dante's Depiction of the Thieves," *Dante Studies*, 91 [1973], 27-45), the Christological underpinnings of the metamorphoses are noted by James

Also noteworthy about the apostrophes to Lucan and Ovid is that Dante concentrates his criticism on the latter, specifying that Ovid was never able to transmute two natures into new substances. Dante makes much of Ovid as the poet of metamorphosis throughout this section of the *Inferno*: in canto XXIV the description of the phoenix, "che . . . more e poi rinasce" ("that dies and is then reborn" [107]), derives primarily from the *Metamorphoses*; in canto XXV Ovid is one who "converts by poetizing" ("converte poetando" [99]); in canto XXIX Dante invokes Ovid's story of the Myrmidons, according to which the dead population of Aegina, "le genti antiche" (62), destroyed by Juno's plague, is miraculously replaced by ants transformed into men: "si ristorar di seme di formiche" ("they were restored from seed of ants" [64]). The verbs that Dante associates with Ovid in each of these passages—*rinascere*, *convertire*, *ristorarsi*—are all verbs that adumbrate the Christian mystery of true metamorphosis: rebirth. Because the poet of transformations did not, however, deal with the ultimate transformation, Dante envelops each of Ovid's metamorphoses in expressions of doubt, indicating that they fell short: in canto XXIV the phoenix is introduced with "Così per li gran savi si confessa" ("So by the great sages it is stated" [106]); in canto XXV Ovid's transformations of Cadmus into a serpent and Arethusa into a fountain are countered by Dante's explicit "io non lo 'nvidio" ("I do not envy him" [99]); in canto XXIX the creation of the Myrmidons is prefaced by the subtly distancing "secondo che i poeti hanno per fermo" ("as the poets hold for certain" [63]). Not only is Dante here throwing doubt on the veracity of classical legend, but he is using classical material to suggest a type of negative or infernal metamorphosis that leads nowhere, that is repetitive rather than redemptive. Thus, the Ovidian tale of the Myrmidons serves as a term of comparison for the diseased inhabitants of the tenth *bolgia*, who will *not* be revived, and

Thomas Chiampì, *Shadowy Prefaces: Conversion and Writing in the Divine Comedy* (Ravenna: Longo, 1981), chap. 2, esp. pp. 96-98. For a complementary reading of the "Ovidian poesis" of *Inferno* XXIV-XXV, see Peter S. Hawkins, "Virtuosity and Virtue: Poetic Self-Reflection in the *Commedia*," *Dante Studies*, 98 (1980), 1-18.

whose movements are rendered by a perverse and nonrestorative use of *trasmutare*: "e qual carpone / si trasmutava per lo tristo calle" ("and some on all fours moved along the sad path" [68-69]). Particularly suggestive is the positioning of "secondo che i poeti hanno per fermo" immediately after "le genti antiche"; this last phrase will recur in *Paradiso* VIII, where the error of "le genti antiche ne l'antico errore" is precisely their belief in classical myth. Given that in *Convivio* IV, xxvii Dante recounts the story of King Aeacus and the Myrmidons with evident sympathy, explaining that Aeacus wisely turned to God ("esso saviamente ricorse a Dio" [17]), and that as a result his people were restored to him ("lo suo popolo ristorato li fu" [17]), it would seem that *Inferno* XXIX rehearses the same transition that we find in *Paradiso* VIII: here too the *Convivio*'s classical truth has become the *Comedy*'s falsehood.

Besides implying that classical metamorphoses, because they hide no Christian mysteries of consubstantiation, are less true than Dantesque transmutations, canto XXV also presents us—albeit less spectacularly—with another installment in the ongoing story of Vergil correcting his own text. Cacus the fraudulent centaur who stole Hercules' cattle is among the thieves in this *bolgia*; whereas in the *Aeneid* the hero strangles the thief, Vergil here recounts that Hercules beat him to death, thus following Ovid's version instead of his own.⁴² By substituting a Vergilian story with an Ovidian one shortly before announcing his definitive primacy over Ovid, Dante may be implying his primacy over Vergil as well. A final infernal revision of the *Aeneid* may be found in *Inferno* XXXI, where the travelers view the giants before being placed by one of them on the floor of the lowest circle. These creatures are introduced as "li orribili giganti, cui minaccia / Giove del cielo ancora quando tuona" ("the horrible giants, whom Jove still threatens from heaven when he thunders" [*Inf.* XXXI, 44-45]), which is to say that

⁴² Paratore notes the use of Ovid instead of Vergil, calling it "tanto più notevole in quanto il ricordo dell'episodio è posto proprio in bocca a Virgilio" ("Il canto XXV dell'*Inferno*," p. 257).

they are introduced as classical figures. In fact, except for Nimrod, whose origin is Biblical, all Dante's giants come from his classical *auctores*; he emphasizes their classical background from the start in the periphrasis about Jove, who still threatens them with his thunderbolts on account of their ill-fated attack on Mount Olympus. (*Giove* is referred to again in line 92, thus adding to the canto's classical flavor.) But, as he did earlier with Capaneus, who also invokes the battle of Phlegra, Dante reduces the giants by destroying the fabulous aura that surrounds them in classical literature, treating them rationally as nothing but enormous hulks of brute matter. This strategy involves the poet in complicated attempts to describe the size of the giants in natural terms—thus the face that is the size of Saint Peter's bronze pine cone, and the ostentatiously "mathematical" expressions such as "trenta gran palmi" ("thirty great palms" [65]), and "ben cinque alle" ("a good five ells" [113]); it also involves him in a correction of the *Aeneid*, where the giant Briareus is described as a creature having one hundred arms and fifty heads. In the *Comedy*, Briareus is described by Vergil as identical to the other giants, although somewhat more ferocious in appearance: "ed è legato e fatto come questo, / salvo che più feroce par nel volto" ("and he is bound and shaped like this one, except that his face seems more ferocious" [104-105]). This canto's reduction of Briareus to huge but natural proportions is part of a strategy of mathematical precision that Dante uses to point—as always—to the reality or truth of his characters as compared to those of his classical precursors.⁴³

⁴³ As Dante earlier follows Ovid instead of Vergil, here he follows Statius, who describes Briareus simply as "immensus" (*Thebaid* II, 596). Two further examples of Dante's transposition of his classical sources in order to achieve greater "realism" involve Geryon and Cacus: while in the *Aeneid* Geryon is described as "threefold" or "three-bodied" (VIII, 202), in the *Comedy* he has one body articulated in three species; while in the *Aeneid* Cacus breathes flames from his jaws (VIII, 252), in the *Comedy* flames are provided by the dragon that sits on his shoulders. It would not be surprising were Dante to connect these two figures, since Vergil explicitly does so: Hercules enters the fray against Cacus as a recent victor over Geryon; indeed the cattle stolen by Cacus was part of Hercules' prize after defeating Geryon (*Aen.* VIII, 201-204). In drawing

There are two further episodes in the *Inferno* that undermine the status of Vergil's text; although they operate more subtly than actual revisions, I hope to show that they are in fact continuations of *Inferno* XX, since they share the same goal: these episodes are intended to disturb the attentive reader, to make him doubt the established value of terms like *tragedia* and *comedia*, and ultimately to make him suspect that here the context has dictated new meanings, whereby the humble *comedia* is viewed as superior to the *alta tragedia*. The first of these episodes is marked precisely by the use of the adjective *alto*, which we have seen referred to Vergil throughout the *Inferno*: he is the *altissimo poeta*, his poem an *alta tragedia*. We are in the *bolgia* of the fraudulent counselors, where Vergil tells the pilgrim to let him address Ulysses and Diomedes—"Lascia parlare a me"—because, being Greeks, they may disdain Dante's speech: "ch'ei sarebbero schivi, / perch' e' fuor greci, forse del tuo detto" ("for perhaps, because they were Greeks, they would be disdainful of your speech" [*Inf.* XXVI, 74-75]). Vergil then breaks into the *Inferno*'s most explicit example of his *parola ornata*, a *captatio benevolentiae* modeled on the epic style and replete with anaphora, translation from the *Aeneid*, and a reference to his own "alti versi," and to which moreover Dante draws attention by noting that "*in questa forma lui parlare audivi*" ("*in this form I heard him speak*" [78; italics mine]):⁴⁴

"O voi che siete due dentro ad un foco,
s'io merita di voi mentre ch'io vissi,
s'io merita di voi assai o poco
quando nel mondo li alti versi scrissi . . ."

on and revising two Vergilian monsters both slain by Hercules, a figure of Christ, Dante may be reminding us of Vergil's first great failure at the gates of Dis, an event surrounded by classical monsters and marked by the evocation of Hercules.

⁴⁴ H. D. Goldstein discusses the language of *Inferno* XXVI in "Enea e Paolo: A Reading of the 26th Canto of Dante's *Inferno*," *Symposium*, 19 (1965), 316-326, concluding that "Canto XXVI employs pagan 'high verse' to achieve anti pagan high verse and becomes, in this way, Dante's 'anti epic'" (p. 320).

"O you who are two within one fire, if I deserved from you while I lived, if I deserved from you much or little when in the world I wrote the high verses . . ."

(*Inf.* XXVI, 79-82)

To speak to Ulysses, a hero of epic poetry, Vergil has recourse to epic language, the language of his own "alti versi," suggesting that the pilgrim's language is not appropriate because it is not sufficiently lofty. A stylistic disjunction between Dante and Vergil is thus established, and will be reemphasized in the following canto, where Vergil instructs Dante to speak to Guido da Montefeltro; because Guido is a contemporary Italian, rather than a Greek hero, he does not merit an address in the high style, and so Dante can approach him on his own.

The canto of Guido da Montefeltro functions in many ways as an unmasking of the canto of Ulysses, following a rule that is fairly constant throughout the *Inferno*, whereby a sinner who is treated in a particularly metaphorical key is offset by one who is treated with a harsher literalism: thus, Francesca is followed by Ciaccio, Pier della Vigna by Capaneo, and—turning to characters who committed the same sin—Brunetto is followed by the three noble Florentines. In the same way that the canto of Brunetto goes far beyond the issue of literal sodomy to invest a metaphorical sterility, caused by predicating the eternity of one's soul upon a text, so the Ulysses canto goes beyond the issue of fraudulent counsel into the nexus of ideas subsumed under the heading of "il trapassar del segno" (*Par.* XXVI, 117). As *Inferno* XVI serves to demythologize *Inferno* XV, pointing to the political and social consequences of corruption among society's elite, and focusing on the physical suffering of the sinners in a way that compensates for the comparative lack of such description in canto XV, so *Inferno* XXVII demythologizes *Inferno* XXVI: Guido's story clarifies the low and ignoble side of Ulysses' sin, the prosaic deceit practiced on his old companions, which the canto's high language—and the hero's "high" sin—had conspired to gloss over. The difference between Dante's treatment of Ulysses and his treatment of Guido is immediately

apparent; the travelers are beginning to move off after Ulysses has finished speaking, when another flame comes after them, emitting a "confuso suon" (Inf. XXVII, 6): instead of Vergil's lengthy *captatio benevolentiae*, here the sinner begs them to remain, and instead of Ulysses' sonorous exordium, here there is only a confused sound. Dante now elaborates on the *modus operandi* of this speaking flame, something he chose not to do in canto XXVI, and there follows the graphic horror of the simile of the Sicilian bull, the bronze bull in which the tyrant Phalaris would roast his victims, whose shrieks would be transformed by the machine into the bellowing of a bull; as the tortured victims in the bull attempt to speak, but have their speech transformed into bellowing, so the soul within the flame attempts to speak, but can find no outlet for his voice. Only now do we understand that Ulysses' voice, like Guido's, must have been physically degraded by the effort of speaking; we learn the full import of the description "gittò voce di fuori" ("he threw forth a voice" [Inf. XXVI, 90]) and realize that Ulysses' eloquence, like Pier della Vigna's, was accompanied by great pain.⁴⁵

The simile of the Sicilian bull functions as a transforming medium stationed at the outset of canto XXVII in order to "lower" the discourse, to accomplish the transition from high to low. This transition is articulated at the level of language, a key thematic concern in this *bolgia* inhabited by tongues of fire.⁴⁶ The simile stresses the transition from speech, in this context a "high" sound, to the "low" sound of the bull's bellows; the verb *mugghiare* is used twice, first in the simile's incipit ("Come 'l bue cilian che mugghiò prima" "As the

⁴⁵ On the pairing of Ulysses and Guido, see James G. Truscott, "Ulysses and Guido: *Inferno* XXVI and XXVII," *Dante Studies*, 91 (1973), 47-72, and Richard Kay, "Two Pairs of Tricks: Ulysses and Guido in Dante's *Inferno* XXVI-XXVII," *Quaderni d'italianistica*, 1 (1980), 107-124.

⁴⁶ Dante plays on the metaphor of the fraudulent counselors as tongues of fire; thus, the *bolgia* itself is a throat ("la gola / del fosso" [XXVI, 40-41]), and the movement of Ulysses' flame is likened to that of a tongue ("come fosse la lingua che parlasse [XXVI, 89]).

Sicilian bull which bellowed first" [Inf. XXVII, 7]), and then in the line that points to the transformation from voice to bellow: "*mugghiava con la voce de l'afflitto*" ("it bellowed with the voice of the afflicted one" [10; italics mine]). The simile's second term describes the "conversion" of Guido's struggling words into "its language," i.e. the sounds of the flame as they actually come forth:

così, per non aver via né forame
dal principio nel foco, in suo linguaggio
si convertian le parole grame.

So, because at first they could find no way or outlet in the fire, his sorrowful words converted themselves into its language.

(Inf. XXVII, 13-15; italics mine)

This passage is followed by another *terzina* describing the mechanics of Guido's speech act, and then, finally, by his first words, which are addressed to Vergil and refer to the *maestro's* recent dismissal of Ulysses. If it is surprising to learn that Vergil, who had addressed the hero with such respect, should dismiss him with the words "Go away now," it is nothing short of shocking to hear that these words were spoken—far from the high style of the *captatio benevolentiae*!—in a coarse Lombard dialect, faithfully reproduced by Dante, and explicitly noted by Guido da Montefeltro: "O tu a cu' io drizzo / la voce e che parlavi mo lombardo, / dicendo 'Istra ten va, più non t'adizzo'" ("O you to whom I raise my voice, and who were just now speaking Lombard, saying 'Go away now, I urge you no more'" [19-21]). We now see what transformation the Sicilian bull has prepared us to accept: Vergil's "S'io meritai di voi" has become "Istra ten va"; the high style has been converted to the low style.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Commentators have been distracted from the main point of Guido's subversive apostrophe by the issue of language, attempting to ascertain what they will never know, i.e. in what language Vergil spoke to Ulysses. Although linguistic diversity is a fictional premise of Dante's afterlife, inhabited by people

Vergil is associated with Ulysses and the high style; Dante is associated with Guido and the low style, so much so that Vergil orders Dante to speak to Guido, saying "Parla tu; questi è latino" ("You speak, this one is Italian" [*Inf.* XXVII, 33]). And, as already noted, the pilgrim's conversation, beginning with his lack of awe or hesitation and his use of the simple periphrasis "O anima che se' là giù nascosta" ("O soul that are hidden down there" [36]), will result in a revelation regarding the previous episode. For, while in canto XXVI Vergil's *alti versi* set the tone for a discourse that enables Ulysses to mask

who speak "Diverse lingue, orribili favelle" ("Different languages, horrible tongues" [*Inf.* III, 25]), it is not a narrative premise, in that almost everyone speaks in the language in which the poem is written. Dante frequently approximates the speech of his characters in his Italian (a gallicism for Hugh Capet, regional dialectisms where appropriate), and occasionally employs other languages (Provençal for Arnaut Daniel, Latin for Cacciaguada), but, as Pagliaro points out: "si tratta di caratterizzazione di ordine, non linguistico, ma stilistico" ("Dialects and languages in the poem," in *Ulysses*, vol. II, p. 451; on this topic, see also Braccini, "Paralipomeni al 'Personaggio-Poeta'"). A stylistic issue is precisely what is at stake in *Inferno* XXVII as well; for although we do not know in what language Vergil originally spoke to Ulysses (i.e. whether Guido's reference to Vergil's "Lombard" applies only to his last remark, or to his previous address as well), we do know that he originally spoke in a high style, and is now represented as speaking in a low one. A similar point of view is that of Angelo Lipari, "Parla tu; questi è latino," *Italica*, 23 (1946), 73-81; see also Benvenuto Terracini, "Il canto XXVII dell'*Inferno*," in *Lecture dantesche: Inferno*, ed. Giovanni Getto (Florence: Sansoni, 1955), pp. 517-545. Pagliaro's contribution to the question of Vergil's speech in *Inferno* XXVII is to place it in an ethnic and historical context, suggesting that Vergil is designated a Lombard because as such he is less offensive to Ulysses than is Dante, a Tuscan, i.e. a member of that race which came to Aeneas' aid; although I do not consider this thesis a solution to the problems posed by the opening of *Inferno* XXVII, I believe that it has interesting implications for other aspects of Dante's treatment of Vergil, as demonstrated above in note 34. Finally, on the question of language, in Chapter II, note 83, I indicated my fundamental agreement with Paratore, who suggests that Vergil would speak, according to Dante, a vernacular form of the *gramatica* in which he wrote, i.e. a vernacular form of Latin (see "Il latino di Dante"). I therefore suggest that Vergil's "Lombard" is a reference to the vernacular Latin he would have spoken while alive, a "Lombard Latin" as it were. The argument that, for Dante, Roman Vergil spoke the Lombard dialect of the thirteenth century contradicts, as Pagliaro points out, Dante's expressly stated views on the mutability of language.

his sin, enveloping it in rhetoric, in canto XXVII the low conversation between Dante and Guido cuts through the high rhetoric, just as Guido previously pierced the cocoon of Vergil's high language.⁴⁸ In other words, the low style reveals the truth, while the high style hides it. By initiating a rhetorical style that Ulysses will exploit, Vergil abets the propagation of grandiloquent falsehoods; in fact, his very use of the expression *alti versi* paves the way for Ulysses' reliance on the opposition "high" vs. "low" (converted by him to "high" vs. "small"), terms that function as the key semantic underpinnings of his discourse: whatever it serves his purpose to discount is called "small," while whatever he desires is "high." Thus, on the one side we find his small group of companions ("quella compagna / picciola" [*Inf.* XXVI, 101-102]), the brief life span that is all that remains to them ("questa tanto picciola vigilia / d'i nostri sensi ch'è del rimanente" [114-115]), and the little oration with which he seduces them ("con questa orazion picciola" [122]); on the other, we find the deep open sea ("l'alto mare aperto" [100]), their glorious enterprise ("l'alto passo" [132]), and his goal, which promises to be the first conquest that will finally satisfy all his desires, because it is "higher" than anything he has ever seen before: "una montagna . . . alta tanto / quanto veduta non avèa alcuna" (133-135). To the extent that Vergil's *alti versi* lay the rhetorical premise of this discourse, he partakes in its lies, and the fraudulent nature of Vergil's speech—as well as of Ulysses—is therefore revealed in canto XXVII, where Dante once more makes the connection between high verses and *menzogna*. The transition from "S'io merita di voi" to "Istra ten va" is thus the transition from a heroic mythos to a quotidian Logos, from *tragedia* to *comedia*, and—returning to the leitmotif of these episodes—from falsehood to truth.

The last infernal episode we shall consider is also marked by the juxtaposition of a classical with a contemporary figure, the classical figure being, not coincidentally, that same Sinon to

⁴⁸ Mazzotta discusses the stress in *Inferno* XXVI on rhetoric as that which hides, as "thievery," in *Dante, Poet of the Desert*, pp. 90-96.

whose lying story the *Aeneid* is implicitly compared in *Inferno* XX. Sinon is presented by the counterfeiter, maestro Adamo, in his full classical regalia as "l falso Sinon greco di Troia" ("false Sinon, the Greek from Troy" [*Inf.* XXX, 98]), where the contradiction inherent in the expression "greco di Troia" neatly summarizes the duplicity of Sinon's position. Sinon's violent reaction to maestro Adamo's description of him leads to an exchange of insults between the two sinners that is similar to the earlier exchange between the pilgrim and Filippo Argenti; both altercations are regularly invoked as examples of the *Comedy's* low style, inherited from the *tenzone* with Forese Donati. It has, in fact, been suggested that the events of canto XXX serve as a palinode of the *tenzone*, that Vergil's rebuke to the pilgrim for his interest in the altercation reflects the poet's uneasiness at this own poetic past.⁴⁹ In my opinion, such a reading, while appropriate in the Forese cantos of the *Purgatorio*, is less appropriate here, in *Inferno* XXX, where the altercation between Sinon and maestro Adamo functions not as a pointer to Dante's personal poetic history (like the meeting with Forese), but as an important moment in the reader's ongoing reeducation. As a sequel to canto XXVII, canto XXX poses the same issues regarding the low style and the new value that is being assigned to it; therefore, the opening of *Inferno* XXX rehearses, in compressed form, the same shift from classical/high to Dantesque/low that we saw in the shift from canto XXVI to canto XXVII. Moreover, the quarrel at the canto's end is marked by precisely that terminology which we have seen to be associated with the issue of *comedia* vs. *tragedia* throughout the *Inferno*: the terms "true" and "false" are used insistently, hurled at each other by the injured participants of this dispute with the obsessive repetition that characterizes abusive medieval genres both inside and outside of the *Comedy*.

⁴⁹ Bosco comments on Vergil's rebuke: "Ciò sembra importare un ripudio di quella giovanile poesia" (*Inferno*, p. 426). Contini, while including "il trobar clus sulla feccia di Sinone e maestro Adamo" among the textual sins for which *Purgatorio* XXIII makes amends, focuses on Forese as the center of palinodic energy: "Forese è una liquidazione per tutti" ("Dante come personaggio-poeta della *Commedia*," pp. 52-53).

If the canto ends on a "low" note, it begins on a "high" one: in preparation for the madness visited upon the impersonators (one of the four types of falsifier to be found in this *bolgia*), Dante devotes the first twenty-one lines of canto XXX to two classical examples of madness, one Theban and the other Trojan. The first is Athamas who, driven insane by Juno as part of her revenge on Semele, is responsible for the deaths of his wife Ino, Semele's sister, and their two sons (1-12); the second is Hecuba, reduced to barking like a dog by the loss of her home, husband, and children (13-21). These exempla are executed in a deliberately high style: in each case the protagonist, Athamas or Hecuba, is presented only in the fourth line of the exemplum, after an initial *terzina* of background material. Thus, the canto opens with a great mythological panorama, which sets the madness of Athamas within the ongoing narrative of Jove's amours and Juno's anger: "Nel tempo che lunone era crucciata / per Semelè contra 'l sangue tebano" ("In the time when Juno was irate because of Semele against the Theban blood" [1-2]); and Hecuba is preceded by a sweeping evocation of the fall of Troy: "E quando la fortuna volse in basso / l'altezza de' Troian che tutto ardiva" ("And when Fortune brought low the pride of the Trojans that dared all" [13-14]). The canto thus moves progressively forward in time: from remote Thebes, to less distant Troy, and finally to the present, in which the pilgrim sees "due ombre smorte e nude, / che mordendo correvan di quel modo / che 'l porco quando del porcil si schiude" ("two pale and naked shades, who were running and biting like the pig when it is let out of the pigsty" [25-27]). Here Dante presents the *bolgia's* first sinners in a *terzina* whose style is in intentional opposition to the canto's extraordinarily literary exordium;⁵⁰ the unmediated realism of the brief simile of the pig loosened from the pigsty contrasts sharply with the elaborate Ovidian exempla. We note, moreover, that the introduction of low language, such as *porco* and *porcil*, corresponds to the moment in which the

⁵⁰ Contini discusses the literary quality of this exordium in "Sul XXX dell'*Inferno*," *Un'idea di Dante*, pp. 159-170, where he suggests that Dante composed it with Ovid open before him (p. 160).

canto reaches "reality": i.e. the sinners, the events of this *bolgia*. This fact is stressed by the transitional verses, placed between the Trojan vignette and the arrival of Gianni Schicchi, which make the point that nothing in the classical accounts—"Ma né di Tebe furie né troiane" ("But neither the furies of Thebes nor of Troy" [22])—can equal what the pilgrim sees in Hell.

The high style of the canto's opening thus gives way to the low style in which the sinners are presented, and ultimately to the low style of the quarrel at the canto's end. Within the sequence of insults exchanged by Sinon and maestro Adamo, we shall focus on the passage in which *ver* and its opposite—here not *menzogna*, but *falso*—are featured, since these terms are connected to the issue of genre throughout the *Inferno*. In response to Sinon's taunt that maestro Adamo's hands were less agile while he was being led to the stake than while he was coining money, the counterfeiter replies first by acknowledging that the Greek speaks the truth in this—"Tu di' ver di questo" (112)—and then by reminding Sinon of his great untruth, that most notorious of literary lies, the lie that drove Hecuba mad, to the very condition in which we find her at this canto's beginning: "ma tu non fosti sì ver testimonio / là 've del ver fosti a Troia richesto" ("but you were not so true a witness there at Troy where the truth was requested from you" [113-114]). To this insistence on the *ver* that he did not tell, and on his role as a non-true witness, Sinon throws back the generic falsification for which both are damned, further noting that maestro Adamo's crimes, unlike his own, were multiple. While maestro Adamo stresses the word *ver*, Sinon stresses *falso*:

"S'io dissi falso, e tu falsasti il conio,"
disse Sinon; "e son qui per un fallo,
e tu per più ch'alcun altro demonio!"

"If I spoke falsely, you falsified the coin," said Sinon, "and I am here for a single sin, and you for more than any other demon!"

(*Inf.* XXX, 115-117)

In response maestro Adamo again returns to Troy, the scene of Sinon's single but supremely infamous crime, recalling not only the horse—"Ricorditi, spergiuoro, del cavallo" ("Remember, perjurer, the horse" [118])—but in particular the fact that the whole world knows Sinon's sin: "e sieti reo che tutto il mondo sallo!" ("and let it be a torment for you that the whole world knows it!" [120]).

The whole world knows what Sinon did because it is recounted in a poem that the whole world reads: the *Aeneid*. Vergil has already been to some extent implicated in the figure of Sinon; in *Inferno* XX he is made to retell the story of Eurypylos, which is Sinon's story. In canto XX the *Aeneid* is, by implication, denied the status of a "ver testimonio," to use maestro Adamo's expression; like Sinon, the *Aeneid* is—on occasion—a falsifier of the historical truth. The alignment of the *Aeneid* with "l falso Sinon" is marked enough to suggest that the following correspondences may not be entirely fortuitous: on one side we find the classical figure, Sinon, textually connected to the word *falso* ("S'io dissi falso, e tu falsasti il conio") and, on the other, the contemporary figure, maestro Adamo, textually connected to the word *ver* ("Tu di' ver di questo: / ma tu non fosti sì ver testimonio / là 've del ver fosti a Troia richesto"). These alignments suggest that whereas Sinon from the *tragedia* is related to falsehood, maestro Adamo from the *comedia* is related to truth. Such correspondences, it should be noted, have nothing whatever to do with a hierarchy of moral values; I am not suggesting that the counterfeiter is less evil than the liar, but that Dante has structured into the quarrel between these souls a metaphorical statement regarding the status of the genres *comedia* and *tragedia*. Maestro Adamo is related to "truth" in the same way as is Guido da Montefeltro, not because he is "better" than Sinon, but because he is "comedic": drawn not from the literary world of the classical *tragedia*, but from the observed world of contemporary reality. A further implication of this reading regards Vergil's rebuke at the end of canto XXX. Having severely reprimanded his charge for listening too fixedly to the altercation, Vergil explains in the canto's last line that

the urge to listen to such a quarrel is a base one: "ché voler ciò udire è bassa voglia" ("for to want to hear that is a base wish" [148]). This verse has traditionally been interpreted along the palinodic lines mentioned earlier, as representing Dante's explicit condemnation of the low style. I would suggest, instead, that this passage constitutes not a palinode but a vindication of the low style, which a poet *should* use if it is appropriate to do so; the term *bassa* is the opposite of *alta*, and therefore must be viewed not negatively, but positively: the *bassa comedia* stands in opposition to the *alta tragedia*.⁵¹ In other words, Vergil is wrong in chastising the pilgrim, whose intuitive behavior (as previously with the devils) is correct; confirmation of this may be found in the fact that Vergil is caught in a contradiction: here he reprimands Dante for merely listening, while earlier he complimented him for actually participating in the quarrel with Filippo Argenti. Far from being wrong, the pilgrim's wish to listen is right, for his is the comedic desire to confront evil and to bear witness to all of reality, including Hell.

The positive or affective strand of the Vergilian thematic is more subtle than the intellectual erosion on which we have been concentrating; it is to a great extent a function of time—the longer Vergil is present, the more he is loved—and therefore more difficult to demonstrate. We shall begin our presentation of this "other" story with a passage from *Inferno* XXIV, a canto that begins with the drawn-out simile of the *villanello* who despairs at the sight of frost, exchanging it for snow. The simile relates back to the end of the preceding canto, where Vergil has just learned of Malacoda's deceit, a revelation that leaves him,

⁵¹ *Alto* and *basso* were explicitly juxtaposed in this canto's classical exordium ("E quando la fortuna volse in basso / l'altrezza de' Troian che tutto ardiva" [13-14; italics mine]), where the negative valence of *alto* is evident. I do not wish to imply that the word *alto* bears exclusively negative connotations in the *Comedy*, or to suggest that for Dante the high style is always wrong, but rather to point out that in these episodes he goes out of his way to disabuse us of the prejudice with which we most likely began his poem, namely that the high style is the best. Dante's ambivalence regarding the high style, depending on who is using it and for what purposes, is further suggested by his use of *altissimo* in the poem: after referring to Vergil and Homer in *Inferno* IV, it is used only to refer to God, "l'altissimo lume" of *Paradiso* XXXII, 71.

in a notable departure from the Stoic equilibrium displayed on the countenances of Limbo, "turbato un poco d'ira nel sembiante" ("disturbed somewhat by anger in his look" [*Inf.* XXIII, 146]). His anger eventually gives way to a look of tenderness directed at his charge: "lo duca a me si volse con quel piglio / dolce ch'io vidi prima a piè del monte" ("my leader turned to me with that sweet look which I first saw at the foot of the mountain" [*Inf.* XXIV, 20-21]). What is remarkable about this passage is not so much the tenderness of Vergil's regard per se as the author's specification that he first saw such a "sweet look" at the foot of the mountain, i.e. in *Inferno* I, where Dante tries to climb the *colle* and fails. At that point in the narrative there is no indication of any loving demonstration on Vergil's part toward Dante, or of any sweetness in his look; indeed, the meeting between the two poets is described, as we noted previously, in stiff and formal terms, as is their relationship throughout the early cantos of the *Inferno*. Therefore, in specifying that Vergil's "piglio / dolce" (where the enjambement puts *dolce* into relief) is first seen "a piè del monte," Dante is retrospectively rewriting the original meeting of *Inferno* I, instituting an affective tie which at the time was not there; not only are we forced to revisualize the episode of canto I, but also to conjure up many another sweet glance that the narrative has not seen fit to mention. Thus, in two lines Dante inscribes a new thread of affectivity into the texture of the *Inferno*, casting a long sweet light all the way back to canto I.

These two lines do not occur in canto XXIV fortuitously, but as part of a subtle strategy of counterbalancing that dictates most of the moves in Dante's Vergilian narrative; he is forced, by the dialectical principles of the structure he is creating, to rehabilitate what he has himself undone. At the outset of *Inferno* XXIV, Vergil has just emerged severely tarnished from a test that spans three cantos: he has been lied to by Malacoda, and humiliated by the discovery. Precisely at this moment of intellectual defeat, Dante tightens the affective screws; if Vergil is to function as a paradox at the heart of the poem, the reader must not be allowed easily to dismiss him, but instead must be forced, with the pilgrim, into the dilemma of loving and re-

specting that which is fallible, corruptible, and transitory—i.e. into the human experience par excellence. This is accomplished rhetorically by the insinuation of affective language into the narrative at the moments of greatest intellectual stress. Thus, at the end of canto XXIII, after Catalano has informed Vergil that devils are liars, Vergil walks off with great strides in evident anger, and the author concludes the canto as follows: “ond’ io da li ‘ncarcati mi parti’ / dietro a le poste de le care piante” (“so I departed from those burdened ones, behind the prints of the beloved feet” [Inf. XXIII, 147-148]). The reference to Vergil’s “care piante” at this juncture represents an escalation in the tension of the Vergilian dialectic; although the great sage has been treated like a fool by a hypocrite in Hell, his charge loves him not less, but more. The “beloved feet” are in fact an element in an affective crescendo that peaks with the “sweet look” of canto XXIV, and that begins with the simile in which Vergil is compared to the mother who rescues her son from a burning house, a simile that has the effect of neutralizing the event it is illustrating. We remember that in the opening sequence of canto XXIII the pilgrim’s fears regarding the pursuit of the devils are realized, and that he and Vergil must make a rapid escape down the slope into the sixth *bolgia*. Although Vergil, due to his lack of foresight, must be considered responsible for this situation, and although Dante has gone to considerable lengths to create an episode which will reveal Vergil’s weaknesses, at the episode’s dénouement his tactics shift, and he concentrates on the selfless devotion Vergil demonstrates toward the pilgrim: his concern is like that of a mother who flees with her son dressed not even in her shift, “avendo più di lui che di sé cura” (“caring more for him than for herself” [Inf. XXIII, 41]). This redirection of the author’s emphasis is stressed by the line that caps the sequence, in which Vergil is said to carry the pilgrim on his breast, “come suo figlio, non come compagno” (“like his son, not like his companion” [51]). By picking up one of the key terms of the simile, *figlio*, this line serves notice that a new affective tie has in fact been created, and that its existence is not confined to figures of speech.

A similar strategy is employed in the initial cantos of the *Purgatorio*, where Vergil receives from Cato, a fellow Roman, his first explicit corrections.⁵² If Vergil’s severity toward Dante at the end of *Inferno* XXX may be seen as a reflection of his ignorance rather than of the pilgrim’s error, no such view may be applied to Cato’s corrections of Vergil: in canto I Cato repudiates Vergil’s *captatio benevolentiae* involving Marcia, calling it flattery; in canto II his general chastisement of all the souls gathered to listen to Casella’s song falls with particular weight on Vergil, who feels responsible for the behavior of his charge. Canto II ends with Cato’s rebuke and the dispersal of the souls like doves rising in flight; canto III therefore begins with a countermovement: although the others react to Cato with a “subitana fuga” (“sudden flight” [Purg. III, 1]), the pilgrim draws nearer to his guide, “la fida compagna” (“the faithful companion” [4]). This demonstration of the pilgrim’s continued faith in his guide, even in the face of an opposing and higher authority, is then stunningly elaborated by the poet, who breaks in to comment in his own voice on Vergil’s unique capacities: “e come sare’ io senza lui corso? / chi m’avria tratto su per la montagna?” (“And how could I have proceeded without him? Who would have brought me up the mountain?” [5-6]). These rhetorical questions are ideally suited to pointing up the underlying ambiguity: while, theoretically, we must acknowledge that Vergil is not irreplaceable, emotionally he is perceived as such. In the subsequent *terzina* Dante recapitulates the rhetorical strategy of lines 4-6, where a simple statement (“I drew near to my faithful companion”) is followed by two questions, markers of affectivity; in lines 7-9, a one-line statement (regarding Vergil’s self-recriminations) is again followed by two emotive lines, this time in the form of an exclamatory apostrophe to Vergil’s conscience: “o dignitosa coscienza e netta, / come t’è picciol fallo amaro morso!” (“O noble conscience and

⁵² The fact that Cato was a pagan has enormous implications for Vergil, since it shows that all pagans are not *ipso facto* damned, and thus shifts the burden of responsibility for his damnation to Vergil himself. This issue will be further examined with respect to Ripheus at the end of this section.

pure, how bitter a bite is a small fault to you" [8-9]). Again with the authority conveyed by his own voice, the poet places Cato's rebuke into perspective, minimizing as a "picciol fallo" the error that Cato so harshly reprimanded.⁵³

At this point the episode is essentially finished; Vergil has ceased running, leaving the pilgrim free to look about him. There is, however, an inserted line of little seeming importance on the undignified effects of running, which subtly begins the swing of the Vergilian pendulum away from the "pro" side back to the "con," or, more accurately, from the affective back to the intellectual; Vergil's haste has temporarily deprived his actions of their "onestade" (11). Vergil's mistakes are frequently marked by a temporary loss of decorum: in *Inferno* XXIII he avoids the devils by sliding down the *ruina* on his back; here he is compelled to run. Nor can such physical duress be undervalued, since it is an intimate component of nobility that it be marked by a decorous physical bearing; Vergil shows himself highly sensitive to this fact in *Inferno* XVI, where his respect for the former high stations of the three noble Florentines is such that he warns the pilgrim to be more courteous than usual, adding the following remarkable *terzina*:

E se non fosse il foco che saetta
la natura del loco, i' dicerei
che meglio stessee a te che a lor la fretta.

And were it not for the fire that the nature of the place
darts down, I would say that haste would befit you more
than them.

(*Inf.* XVI, 16-18)

The haste of the sodomites is caused by the raining fire that falls down on them; in suggesting that haste is more appropriate to Dante than to them, Vergil is close to forgetting who is damned and who is not, so dazzled is he by earthly greatness.

⁵³ Vergil seems to feel a new anxiety about his role as a result of these events, an anxiety expressed in his question "non credi tu me teco e ch'io ti guidi?" ("Do you not believe that I am with you and that I guide you?" [*Purg.* III, 24]).

His peculiar attitude becomes apparent again shortly thereafter, when the poet recalls that he was tempted to jump down among the sodomites, to pay them homage, "e credo che 'l dottor l'avria sofferto" ("and I believe that my teacher would have allowed it" [48]). Vergil's susceptibility to earthly fame is a leitmotif of his character, dating from Beatrice's original *captatio benevolentiae* of *Inferno* II, which appeals to him on the basis of his lasting fame, and surfacing intermittently from then on, although rarely in as aggravated form as in *Inferno* XVI. It is essentially an infernal characteristic, a trait that he shares with many other damned souls.⁵⁴ By forcing Vergil to run, by depriving him of his physical dignity, the outward manifestation of his earthly greatness, Dante underlines his dependence on earthly greatness for his authority, and his similarity in this regard to other denizens of Hell.

On the other hand, Vergil is so inspired a teacher that he learns how to put even his bad qualities to good use;⁵⁵ thus, in *Inferno* XXIV his belief in fame issues into a resounding exhortation which, for all its pagan basis and infernal connotations, serves the proper present purpose of infusing the pilgrim with much needed vigor. Finding Dante exhausted after his climb out of the *bolgia* of the hypocrites, Vergil reminds him that fame cannot be acquired under a coverlet, and that without fame no traces of our existence will remain:

sanza la qual chi sua vita consuma,
cotal vestigio in terra di sé lascia,
qual fummo in aere e in acqua la schiuma.

and he who consumes his life without it [fame] leaves such
vestige of himself on earth as does smoke in air or foam in
water.

(*Inf.* XXIV, 49-51)

⁵⁴ See Silvio Abbadessa, "Trame dantesche: onore e fama," *Italianistica*, 8 (1979), 465-489.

⁵⁵ See Fernando Cento, "Il Virgilio dantesco tipo ideale dell'Educatore," in *L'Umanesimo in Dante*, ed. Giovannangiola Tarugi (Florence: Olschki, 1967), pp. 1-19.

Although Vergil is undoubtedly deluded, since there is no meaningful life but that of the immortal soul, his remarks form part of a statement whose total effect is positive; his success is demonstrated by Dante's rising and saying "Va, ch'i' son forte e ardito" ("Go on, for I am strong and resolute" [60]). In difficult moments or in moments of transition—climbing onto Geryon, or up Lucifer—Vergil successfully draws on his Roman and Stoic convictions to encourage the pilgrim. Another element of his guidance that perhaps derives from his pagan background is his concern with the passing of time, which we first note in *Inferno* XI, where a pause is required to adjust their olfactory senses to lower Hell. Although in this scene it is the pilgrim who first requests that time not be lost while they wait, as the poem progresses the role of timekeeper falls more and more to Vergil; he has found an aspect of their journey that he can handle correctly without Christian knowledge, on the sole basis of his Roman identity. In Purgatory in particular, one feels that Vergil's insistence on time is his attempt to operate within the spiritual context of the second realm; he senses the importance of time here, and although he cannot participate in its true purpose by growing spiritually, he mimics its purpose by insisting on their tardiness.

The use of the word *dolce*, which we may take as a marker of the affective story-line, occurs with increasing frequency as the journey proceeds and as Vergil's return to Limbo becomes more imminent. Such affective terminology makes its first conspicuous appearance, in accordance with our rule regarding its insertion into the text at moments of intellectual stress, immediately preceding Vergil's discomfiture by the devils in *Inferno* IX.⁵⁶ Thus in *Inferno* VIII we find Dante's first reference

⁵⁶ In retrospect, we can see that a pattern based on the application of this formula has been in operation since the beginning of the poem: the first tiff between the pilgrim and his guide (*Inf.* III, 76-81) is followed by Vergil's first "Figliuol mio" (*Inf.* III, 121); the intellectual errors inherent in Vergil's characterization of Limbo are followed by the affective marker "Dimmi, maestro mio, dimmi, signore" (*Inf.* IV, 46), where the use of the personal pronoun contrasts with the earlier "tu duca, tu signore e tu maestro" (*Inf.* II, 140).

to his guide as *padre*, in an expression whose affective resonance is compounded by his use of *dolce* as well; when Vergil leaves the pilgrim to negotiate secretly with the devils, the poet comments as follows: "Così sen van, e quivi m'abbandona / lo dolce padre" ("And so he goes away, my sweet father, and leaves me there" [*Inf.* VIII, 109-110]). In this highly charged and emotional context, we are not surprised to find *caro* applied to Vergil too; in line 97 of canto VIII the pilgrim calls his guide "O caro duca mio." Both of these adjectives, *dolce* and *caro*, reappear in cantos XXIII and XXIV, in the aftermath of Vergil's mis-handled dealings with Malacoda ("care piante" [XXIII, 148], "piglio / dolce" [XXIV, 20-21]), but they do not occur in the *Inferno* with great frequency: *caro* is used to refer to Vergil only on the two occasions mentioned here, and *dolce* is applied to the Roman poet four times in all (besides the two cases referred to above, also "l dolce duca" [XVIII, 44] and "dolce poeta" [XXVII, 3]). In the *Purgatorio*, on the other hand, Vergil is called *dolce* twelve times: "O dolce padre" (IV, 44), "O dolce signor mio" (IV, 109), "l dolce duca" (VI, 71), "l dolce maestro" (X, 47), "il dolce pedagogo" (XII, 3), "dolce padre" (XV, 25), "O dolce padre mio" (XV, 124), "Dolce mio padre" (XVII, 82), "dolce padre caro" (XVIII, 13), "O dolce padre" (XXIII, 13), "lo dolce padre mio" (XXV, 17), "Lo dolce padre mio" (XXVII, 52). We note the crescendo in intensity as the travelers approach the moment of Vergil's departure, rendered by the increased use of the possessive adjective *mio*, and such double-adjectival phrases as "dolce padre caro." The care with which Dante has arranged these expressions is confirmed by his final touch: the first and only use of *dolcissimo* to modify a person in the *Comedy* applies to Vergil in the moment of his disappearance, when he is called "Virgilio dolcissimo patre" (XXX, 50).⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Giovanni Getto points to this passage in *Purgatorio* XXX as the high point in Dante's use of tender language for his guide; see "Dante e Virgilio," *Il Veltro*, 3 (1959), 11-20. *Dolcissimo* is used twice more in the *Comedy*, for the milk of the Muses (*Par.* XXIII, 57), and for the song that marks the completion of the pilgrim's exams (*Par.* XXVI, 67).

The *Purgatorio* works less at gradually undermining Vergil than at gradually replacing him; not only is his authority already effectively shattered by Cato, but Vergil himself admits his ignorance to the newly arrived souls of canto II, saying "noi siam peregrin come voi siete" ("we are pilgrims like you" [63]). One of Vergil's most endearing characteristics at this stage of the journey, and one of the major changes in his behavior, is his ability to openly acknowledge his insufficiencies and yet keep on trying. In *Purgatorio* III, the travelers reach an impasse, not knowing how to find a way up the steep face of the mountain; Vergil looks down to think, while the pilgrim looks around and sees a group of souls approaching. He therefore informs his mentor that help is on its way; now that the guide needs to be guided, they must rely on such encounters with more informed travelers. Linguistically, a change is registered by the fact that the pilgrim addresses his teacher with an imperative, telling him to look up, in a reversal of all the many orders Vergil has given him:

"Leva," diss' io, "maestro, li occhi tuoi:
ecco di qua chi ne darà consiglio,
se tu da te medesimo aver nol puoi."

"Master," I said, "raise your eyes; over here are some
who will give us counsel, if you cannot have it from your-
self."

(*Purg.* III, 61-63)

The imperative of his own with which Vergil replies—"Andiamo in là, ch'ei vegnon piano; / e tu ferma la spene, dolce figlio" ("Let us go over there, for they come slowly; and you strengthen your hope, sweet son" [65-66])—is a good example, along with the precept on time that he offers to the souls when they meet ("ché perder tempo a chi più sa più spiace" "for loss of time displeases most him who knows most" [78]), of the type of Stoic advice in which he now specializes. The same pattern recurs in cantos IV and V: in canto IV Vergil gives the pilgrim a long lesson on astronomy, at the end noting that they

have reached the limits of his understanding ("Più non rispondo, e questo so per vero" "I will answer no more, and this much I know for true" [96]); in canto V Vergil takes advantage of Dante's involvement with the souls who have gathered around to issue one of the *Comedy's* most famous dicta: "sta come torre ferma, che non crolla / già mai la cima per soffiar di venti" ("Stand like a firm tower, which never shakes its summit because of blowing winds [14-15]).⁵⁸ Pathos accrues to Vergil's stern speech because we can see in it his diligent attempt to imitate Cato; he has learned his lesson regarding purgatorial priorities, but to what—other than this one-time journey—can he apply his knowledge?

Canto VI contains the first correction of the *Aeneid* in the *Purgatorio*, vis-à-vis the efficacy of prayer and the immutability of justice; the pilgrim, noting the prayers of the souls they have encountered, reminds his guide of the passage in the *Aeneid* where the Sibyl answers Palinurus' supplications with the harsh injunction: "desine fata deum flecti sperare precando" ("cease to hope that heaven's decrees may be bent by praying" [VI, 376]).⁵⁹ Although Vergil responds that his writing is easily understood, his explanation is not comprehensive, and he concludes by invoking someone who will be able to answer more fully, Beatrice:

Veramente a così alto sospetto
non ti fermar, se quella nol ti dice
che lume fia tra 'l vero e lo 'ntelletto.
Non so se 'ntendi: io dico di Beatrice . . .

Nonetheless you should not remain in so profound a
doubt, but she should tell you about it who will be a light

⁵⁸ The Stoic flavor of these lines may be due to the fact that they derive in part from Brutus' tribute to Cato in *Pharsalia* II, 242-244, as Felicina Groppi points out in *Dante traduttore*. Other possible influences on these lines are the passages in Vergil and Seneca cited by Sapegno, *Purgatorio*, p. 48.

⁵⁹ Hollander discusses the revisionist impulses of this passage in *Il Virgilio dantesco*, pp. 113-115.

between the truth and the intellect. I do not know if you understand: I speak of Beatrice . . .

(*Purg.* VI, 43-46)

In the *Inferno* Vergil was the "sol che sani ogni vista turbata" ("sun that heals every troubled vision" [XI, 91]); earlier in the *Purgatorio* he was "quel condotto / che speranza mi dava e facea lume" ("that leader who gave me hope and made light" [IV, 29-30]). Now Vergil's ability to "make light" is eclipsed by Beatrice, who is herself a *lume*. This passage, which further underscores Vergil's limits by naming the guide who will ultimately take over from him, prepares us for the imminent usurpation of Vergil's role, on a smaller scale, by Sordello. The meeting with Sordello is typical of Dante's Vergilian strategy. Simultaneous with the first formal takeover of Vergil's role as guide, his first explicit demotion from the position he has occupied for so long, comes one of the text's greatest tributes to Vergil as poet and as inspiration for later poets: the scene at the beginning of *Purgatorio* VII in which Sordello, on discovering Vergil's identity, humbly embraces him "where the inferior embraces" (15), calling him the glory of the Latins. Sordello's attention is so exclusively dedicated to Vergil that he never notices that the pilgrim is alive, thus differing from both infernal and purgatorial predecessors; he learns this only in canto VIII, two cantos after his initial meeting with the travelers, when the pilgrim explains his situation to his friend Nino Visconti. Even then, while Nino calls to Currado Malaspina to come see what God has brought about, Sordello returns his gaze to Vergil, for him an object of even greater wonder.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ See *Purgatorio* VIII, 61-66. In "Le tre guide," *Italianistica*, 7 (1978), 499-533, Giuliana Nuvoli comments as follows on the meeting with Sordello: "Il legame emotivo con Virgilio, l'accompagnarsi nel cammino ai protagonisti, la partecipazione al dialogo, sono elementi che, rendendo il suo intervento [di Sordello] molto simile a quello di Stazio, contribuiscono al processo di 'estenuazione' della figura di Virgilio" (p. 501, n. 10). The most marked similarity between Vergil's encounter with Sordello and his later encounter with Statius is that both poets attempt to embrace him: Sordello succeeds; Statius fails. The pattern of embraces in the *Purgatorio* indicates Dante's willingness to manip-

Between the meeting with Sordello and the meeting with Statius, the same patterns continue to operate, albeit somewhat more self-consciously: in *Purgatorio* XII, when Vergil reminds his charge that this day never dawns again, Dante comments on how accustomed he is to these admonitions ("Io era ben del suo ammonir uso / pur di non perder tempo" "I was well used to these warnings not to lose time" [85-86]); in *Purgatorio* XIII we return to the theme of Vergil the apt learner, when he correctly turns to the right and prays to the sun for guidance (13-21); in *Purgatorio* XV the theme of his inadequacies is raised once more. Here we encounter the first of the great discourses that take up the central cantos of the cantic, discourses that function like all other features of the Vergilian problematic, pointing simultaneously in two directions: in that these discourses are put in Vergil's mouth, they are a tribute to his unique wisdom and status; in that he must admit his insufficiencies in the course of delivering them, they underscore his intellectual limitations. One of the signs of Vergil's tentativeness in the discourse of canto XV is his recourse to similes as a means of explanation; later, in canto XXV, when the pilgrim inquires into the relation between man the physical entity and man the metaphysical being, Vergil is able to answer him only with analogies, and must refer him to Statius for a more rigorous logical presentation. Although in canto XV Vergil is still on surer footing than he will be in canto XXV, his use of two brief similes in lines 69 and 75 anticipates his later dependence on analogy. And, although in canto XV he does not need to turn to a purgatorial soul for assistance, he does refer the pilgrim to Beatrice at the end of his speech, as he had in discussing the efficacy of prayer in canto VI. In the last of his great speeches, that of canto XVIII, Vergil refers the pilgrim to Beatrice not once but twice, for the first time at the beginning of his discourse as well as at the end; here he explicitly describes his limited

ulate the laws of his afterworld in order to achieve his ends (as with the sinners in Hell, whose hair can be pulled if the occasion demands): the pathos of Statius' failure to embrace his master is assured by contrast with the unproblematic earlier embrace enjoyed by Sordello.

capacities as compared to hers: "Quanto ragion qui vede, / dir ti poss' io; da indi in là t'aspetta / pur a Beatrice, ch'è opra di fede" ("As far as reason sees here, I can tell you; from there on wait only for Beatrice, for it is a matter of faith" [*Purg.* XVIII, 46-48]).⁶¹ As though to compensate for these disclaimers, the author follows up by paying homage to Vergil, still in canto XVIII, both as poet and as guide; if, to the world, he is "quell' ombra gentil per cui si noma / Pietola più che villa mantoana" ("that noble shade because of whom Pietola is named more than the city of Mantova" [82-83]), for the pilgrim he remains "quei che m'era ad ogni uopo soccorso" ("the one who was my succor in every need" [130]).

These tributes prepare us for the meeting with Statius, the episode that recapitulates all the above, furnishing—with respect to Vergil's persona—simultaneous accolade and displacement, and—with respect to his text—simultaneous citation and revision. For the moment, since *Purgatorio* XXI and XXII will be discussed in greater detail in the next section, we shall confine ourselves to noting what happens as a result of this meeting at the level of plot, in terms of Vergil's ongoing story. As we have seen, Vergil will require Statius' assistance in *Purgatorio* XXV, to explain the generation of the body and soul; thus the last great purgatorial discourse belongs to Statius rather than to Vergil. Statius' preceptorial role is anticipated in canto XXI, where he instructs the pilgrim and his guide as to the reason

⁶¹ Margherita De Bonifis Templer discusses Vergil's inadequacies and the insufficiencies of reason with respect to the pilgrim's second purgatorial dream, that of the *femmina balba*, in "Il Virgilio dantesco e il secondo sogno del *Purgatorio* (*Purg.* XIX)," *Italica*, 59 (1982), 41-53. Vergil has a tendency, as the embodiment of *ratio*, to "rationalize" away that which he cannot explain or understand; particularly notable in this regard is the discrepancy between the violent ec-stasis of the pilgrim's first dream and Vergil's serene narrative account of the same events. Discrepancies between Vergilian expectations and purgatorial realities are noted by Christopher J. Ryan, "Virgil's Wisdom in the *Divine Comedy*," and by Jennifer Petrie ("Dante's Virgil: *Purgatorio* XXX," in *Dante Soundings: Eight Literary and Historical Essays*, ed. David Nolan [Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1981], pp. 130-145); both point to Vergil's mistaken forecasts regarding Beatrice's behavior at the top of the mountain.

for the earthquake and regarding the miraculous nature of purgatorial weather. And, toward the end of canto XXII, after the two poets have been introduced and when Statius is no longer a novelty, the author manufactures a doubt for Vergil, simpler than the one that assails him in canto XXV, but enough to underscore the importance of Statius' presence. Suddenly Vergil is not sure how to proceed up the mountain; despite the many times he has faced this decision before and the fact that he resolved it correctly as far back as canto XIII, he is once more tentative: "*Io credo ch'a lo stremo / le destre spalle volger ne convegna, / girando il monte come far solemo*" ("I think that we should turn our right shoulders to the edge, circling the mountain as we are accustomed to do" [*Purg.* XXII, 121-123; italics mine]). Vergil's hesitation is further emphasized by the poet, who notes that, although they let usage be their guide, they proceeded with less uncertainty because of Statius' assent:

Così l'usanza fu lì nostra insegna,
e prendemmo la via con men sospetto
per l'assentir di quell' anima degna.

And so usage was there our guide, and we took our way
with less doubt because of the assent of that worthy soul.

(*Purg.* XXII, 124-126)

Nonetheless, in canto XXIII Vergil is called "lo più che padre" ("my more than father" [4]), and his irreplaceable gifts as the pilgrim's personal mentor are celebrated in canto XXVII, where he alone knows how to induce Dante to pass through the wall of fire. Here, where he looks back over their journey and reminds the pilgrim of the past dangers they have overcome together ("E se io / sovresso Gerion ti guidai salvo, / che farò ora presso più a Dio?" "And if on Geryon I guided you safely, what shall I do now nearer to God?" [22-23]), Vergil successfully faces his last great challenge as guide.

With this, our story nears its end. The complex intertextual resonance of *Purgatorio* XXX, where Vergil becomes the only poet, besides God, whose text is incorporated without translation

into Dante's own, has been much discussed and does not require further rehearsing here.⁶² Canto XXX, in which Vergil is named five times in the course of being asked to appear by the pilgrim and caused to disappear by the poet, does not, however, constitute the final Vergilian touchstone of the *Comedy*; the Roman poet is also evoked in the poem's last canticle, where he is explicitly referred to on three occasions. Vergil is introduced to the *Paradiso* in terms of his greatness as a poet. The scene is the arrival of Cacciaguida, who presents himself to Dante in the same way that Anchises presented himself to Aeneas in the Elysian fields, according to the account given in *Aeneid* VI.⁶³

Si pïa l'ombra d'Anchise si porse,
se fede merta nostra maggior musa,
quando in Eliso del figlio s'accorse.

So lovingly did the shade of Anchises reach out, if our
greatest muse merits belief, when in Elysium he recognized
his son.

(*Par.* XV, 25-27)

⁶² The incorporated phrase from the *Aeneid*, "manibus date lilia plenis" (VI, 883), immediately follows the famous "tu Marcellus eris" whose reading reportedly caused Octavia to faint (Suetonius, *Vita Vergili*, p. 475). The line appears in the *Comedy* as "Manibus, oh, date lilia plenis!" ("Give lilies with full hands" [*Purg.* XXX, 21]), with the addition of "oh"; although Groppi, *Dante traduttore*, suggests that the interpolated *oh* is intended to bring the line to eleven syllables, it is worth noticing that its presence also insures that no intact textual fragment belonging to another poet makes its way into the *Comedy*. Other Vergilian moments in *Purgatorio* XXX include the translation of Dido's "agnosco veteris vestigia flammae" (IV, 23) with "conosco i segni de l'antica fiamma" ("I know the signs of the ancient flame" [48]), and the evocation of a passage in the *Georgics*: as Moore notes, the triple repetition of Vergil's name in lines 49-51 imitates the placement of Eurydices' name in *Georgics* IV, 525-527 (see *Scripture and Classical Authors in Dante*, p. 21). On these "deliberately skewed" Vergilian echoes of *Purgatorio* XXX, see the comments of John Freccero, in a letter to Harold Bloom cited in *The Anxiety of Influence*, pp. 122-123, and Christopher J. Ryan, "Virgil's Wisdom in the *Divine Comedy*."

⁶³ Cacciaguida's first words to Dante, "O sanguis meus" ("O my blood" [*Par.* XV, 28]), also evoke *Aeneid* VI in that they repeat Anchises' words to the shade of Caesar, in which Anchises begs Caesar to refrain from Civil War and calls him "sanguis meus" (VI, 835).

Whatever we wish to make of the caveat "se fede merta," which seems to allude to the issue of the *Aeneid*'s credibility first touched upon in *Inferno* XIII, the phrase "nostra maggior musa" confirms Vergil's position as the supreme author of the Latin world, echoing the earlier tributes of the *Convivio* and the *Comedy*. In this instance Vergil is evoked by the poet as part of a comparison, while in the next he is named by the pilgrim, who wants to know from his ancestor the meaning of the various prophecies about his future he has heard during his journey through Hell and Purgatory, "mentre ch'io era a Virgilio congiunto" ("while I was joined to Vergil" [*Par.* XVII, 19]). The shift of perspective evidenced in this passage, where Vergil is viewed in terms of his providential function vis-à-vis the pilgrim rather than in his own right, becomes even more marked in *Paradiso* XXVI, where Vergil is mentioned only as part of a periphrasis for Limbo, defined as "that place whence your lady moved Vergil": "Quindi onde mosse tua donna Virgilio" (118). Thus, from this higher vantage, Vergil is seen exclusively as Beatrice's deputy, a stance that reminds us of his passive role throughout the poem: Vergil is always a medium, never an agent. We note, moreover, that Dante deliberately evokes his guide for the last time in the context of Limbo, a locus from which Vergil can be moved, but which he of his own initiative can never leave.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Vergil's radical inactivity is, in a sense, both the *contrapasso* of his sin and, as he defines it, his sin itself, which consists precisely of *non fare*: "Non per far, ma per non fare ho perduto / a veder l'alto Sol che tu disiri" ("Not for doing, but for not doing, have I lost the sight of the high Sun that you desire" [*Purg.* VII, 25-26]). Although Vergil most likely expects this self-description to reflect positively on his character, the author of the *Comedy*, who knows that "the whole Catholic tradition taught . . . the culpability of sins of omission" (Foster, "The Two Dantes," p. 179), undoubtedly intends it as a self-condemnation. Foster further notes the appositeness of St. Thomas' views on grace to Dante's Vergil, citing a passage in which the angelic doctor holds that "a man may hinder himself from receiving grace," and that "they, and they alone, are deprived of grace who themselves put an obstacle to it" ("The Two Dantes," p. 252). A passive hindering, as compared to an active searching, is precisely what is conveyed by the words "Non per far, ma per non fare," when they are taken out of their original context of vice and virtue and put into the context of grace and salvation. It should be mentioned that

Thus we come back to Vergil's passivity, but also to the sense of mystery, reminiscent perhaps of the *mysterium fidei*, generated by Beatrice's promise to praise Vergil to her Lord. After all, Trajan was brought forth from Hell by the prayers of Gregory the Great, and Heaven boasts yet another saved pagan in the person of Ripheus the Trojan, whose dedication to justice is praised in the *Aeneid*.⁶⁵ But the presence of Ripheus is not a salutary one for Vergil, since it implies that Vergil's exile is not simply the result of an impartial dogma. Dante could have reduced the tension surrounding Vergil by tacitly excluding all pagans from Heaven, or at least by including only those whose salvation, like Trajan's, was buttressed by medieval legend.⁶⁶

this point is made, and these passages from St. Thomas are cited, in G. Busnelli, "La colpa del 'non fare' degl' infedeli negativi," *Studi danteschi*, 23 (1938), 79-97. One further point: Vergil's ostentatiously monosyllabic *verso tronco*, "e per null' altro rio / lo ciel perdei che per non aver fé" (*Purg.* VII, 8; italics mine) would seem to offer a stylistic correlative to his condition of being eternally cut off, *tronco*.

⁶⁵ Ripheus is mentioned three times in *Aeneid* II, as part of a carefully orchestrated crescendo of events: he is seen first with a group of young Trojan warriors around Aeneas, among whom is Coroebus, in love with Cassandra (II, 339); then, at Coroebus' instigation, they don the weapons of some fallen Greeks and sally forth among their enemies (II, 394); finally, still in their Greek spoils, they rush to rescue Cassandra and are killed. Only now does Vergil describe Ripheus, in a way intended to heighten the pathos of his premature death: "cadit et Rhipheus, iustissimus unus / qui fuit in Teucris et servantissimus aequi / (dis aliter visum)" ("Ripheus too falls, the most just among the Trojans and most observant of the right—the gods willed otherwise" [II, 426-428]). Paratore has noted that, by saving Ripheus, Dante undoes Vergil's *dis aliter visum*, and corrects the pagan gods' callous indifference to Ripheus' virtue; see "Il canto XX del *Paradiso*," *Tradizione e struttura in Dante*, pp. 281-314, and also Marguerite Chiarenza, "Boethian Themes in Dante's Reading of Virgil," *Stanford Italian Studies*, 3 (1983), 25-35.

⁶⁶ The total omission of pagans from Paradise would not have been problematic, since, according to Foster, contemporary theologians tended to ignore the doctrine of implicit grace: "Catholic theology by and large did not much concern itself with the ultimate destiny, in God's sight, of the pagan world whether before or since the coming of Christ. . . . The concept itself of *fides implicita* was not lacking . . . but it was hardly a central preoccupation of theologians, nor, in particular, do its implications for an assessment of the spiritual state of the world outside Christendom seem to have been taken very seriously" ("The

By placing in Heaven a bit player from Vergil's text, on the sole recommendation of Vergil's text, while excluding the author of that text, Dante does the opposite: he draws attention to the intentionality of Vergil's exclusion.⁶⁷ Ripheus' appearance is intended to shock; the Trojan hero is presented last among the six souls who make up the eye of the eagle, and he is the only one of the six to be introduced with a question:

Chi crederebbe giù nel mondo errante
che Rifèo Troiano in questo tondo
fosse la quinta de le luci sante?

Who down in the erring world would believe that Ripheus
the Trojan was the fifth of the holy lights in this circle?

(*Par.* XX, 67-69)

This is a nonrhetorical rhetorical question, for few indeed would expect that Ripheus could be saved while his *auctor* was damned. Ripheus functions in this respect like an arrow pointing directly at Vergil, a function Dante makes even more explicit in his explanation of Ripheus' miraculous baptism. The Trojan was baptized by the three theological virtues, who are specifically referred to as the same three ladies seen by the pilgrim at the

Two Dantes," pp. 171-172). In other words, Dante's personal concern with this issue is such that he actively courts difficulties by including pagans in heaven, when it would have been far easier, and theologically not unorthodox, to have bypassed the question of pagan salvation altogether.

⁶⁷ The intentionality of Vergil's exclusion becomes an overt issue with the appearance of the saved Cato in *Purgatorio* I; the issue is kept alive by the reference to the salvation of Trajan in *Purgatorio* X, 74-75, and—after the crucial encounter with Statius—it culminates with the presence of Ripheus in heaven. This is a cause of concern to Henri Hauvette, "Les Païens appelés par Dante au Paradis: Pourquoi Virgile en est exclu," *Nouvelle Revue d'Italie*, 18 (1921), 48-54; in order to account for Vergil's inexplicable exclusion from the roster of saved pagans, Hauvette hypothesizes that Dante conceived of saving some pagans only after writing the *Inferno*, and that it was by then too late to save Vergil. Regarding Paratore's claim that Dante's treatment of Ripheus is "l'ultimo e altissimo omaggio tributato da Dante al suo Virgilio" ("Il canto XX del *Paradiso*," p. 281), I would agree only with the caveat that it is the greatest of Dante's double-edged tributes to Vergil.

right wheel of Beatrice's chariot in the Earthly Paradise: "Quelle tre donne li fur per battesimo / che tu vedesti da la destra rota" ("Those three ladies stood for his baptism whom you saw by the right wheel" [*Par.* XX, 127-128]). This reference is designed to take us back mentally to the allegorical procession in the Earthly Paradise, to the place where "Tre donne in giro da la destra rota / venian danzando" ("Three ladies around the right wheel came dancing" [*Purg.* XXIX, 121-122]). At this point in *Purgatorio* XXIX, the virtues dance about the empty chariot awaiting Beatrice's arrival; somewhat earlier in the same canto, we see Vergil for the last time, as the pilgrim, awed by the marching candelabras, turns to his guide: "Io mi rivolsi d'ammirazione pieno / al buon Virgilio" ("I turned around full of amazement to the good Vergil" [55-56]). But Vergil, no longer *duca* or *maestro*, has no advice or comment to offer, since his amazement is as great as the pilgrim's: "ed esso mi rispuose / con vista carca di stupor non meno" ("and he looked back at me with a face laden with no less wonder" [56-57]). The evocation of the purgatorial procession in the heaven of justice thus establishes a last Vergilian paradox: Vergil is a sage, and Ripheus is not, but Vergil's ignorance—his *stupor*—stands in eternal contrast to Ripheus' grace-given knowledge, the knowledge that led him away from Limbo, to baptism and ultimate salvation.

Statius: "Per te poeta fui"

There is no episode that dramatizes the tensions of Vergil's predicament more fully than that of Statius, the Silver Latin poet who appears to the travelers as a newly liberated soul at the beginning of *Purgatorio* XXI. There are, moreover, few issues that have puzzled scholars more than that of Statius' Christianity: "many wonder why our very Christian poet places Statius, a non-Christian, here," says Benvenuto, who offers the explanation that "the poet could conjecture from many signs—

ex multis indiciis—that Statius was a Christian."⁶⁸ Benvenuto's indicia include the fact that Statius witnessed the persecution of the martyrs, along with their miracles (and, the argument goes, if Vergil who lived before Christ sensed something about Him from the songs of the Sibyl, how much more would Statius have felt, living in the time of Domitian); he further adduces a line from the *Thebaid*, and the fact that Statius was "honestissimus et moralissimus in omnibus suis dictis." The pattern that Benvenuto establishes has prevailed into our century, with critics either pointing to the propitious climate in which Statius lived, or, more frequently, searching the *Thebaid* for passages that Dante may have construed as witnesses to his latent Christianity.⁶⁹ Some, but not all, follow Benvenuto's analysis to its

⁶⁸ Benvenuto's remarks on Statius, as cited here and below, are from Lacaita, vol. IV, pp. 3-4.

⁶⁹ The line pointed to by Benvenuto, "primus in orbe deos fecit timor" ("fear first created gods in the world" [III, 661]), is not particularly appropriate, not least because it is spoken by Capaneus. Scevola Mariotti, "Il cristianesimo di Stazio in Dante secondo il Poliziano," in *Letteratura e critica: Studi in onore di N. Sapegno* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1975), vol. II, pp. 149-161, surveys both the critics who have sought clues in the *Thebaid* and the passages on which they have concentrated. Mariotti himself, who begins as an elucidator of Poliziano rather than Dante, concludes that Poliziano's solution to the problem of Statius' Christianity is the best and should be reinstated: Poliziano points to the passage in Book IV in which Tiresias invokes a "triplicis mundi summum" ("the supreme being of the triple world" [516]), and finds in Tiresias' words a covert declaration of Statius' own faith. A slightly different approach is that of C. S. Lewis, "Dante's Statius," *Medium Aevum*, 25 (1956), 133-139, who claims that the *Thebaid* is spiritually more akin to the Christian Middle Ages than the *Aeneid*; he points to Jupiter's almost monotheistic power, the poem's fundamental pessimism regarding human nature, its sexual prudery, the invective against divination, and the contrast between the ethical personifications (*Virtus*, *Pietas*, *Clementia*) on the one side and the diabolical Olympians on the other. Finally, there is the argument that connects Statius' Christianity to an allegorical commentary of the *Thebaid* attributed to Fulgentius, vigorously sustained by Giorgio Padoan in "Teseo 'figura Redemptoris' e il cristianesimo di Stazio"; in the absence of any indication that Dante knew this commentary, Padoan makes much of Dante's Fulgentian reading of the *Aeneid* in the *Convivio*. My problems with this argument are twofold: (1) the allegorical reading of the classics found in the *Convivio* is replaced, in the *Comedy*, with a historical approach; (2) if an allegorical commentary were of such import in Dante's assessments, would