WRITES OF PASSAGE: DANTE, JOYCE AND THE DYNAMICS OF LITERARY INITIATION

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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Abstract of Doctoral Thesis

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_Purgatory XXV_ is the pivot around which this comparative study of Dante and Joyce revolves. With the exception of doctrinal studies, this canto has mostly been ignored; yet, it is central to the _Divine Comedy_. Statius tells Virgil and the pilgrim about the development of the embryo up until the moment when a joyful Creator breathes in a self-reflecting soul and, in that moment, the embryo transforms into a _fante_, a speaker.

In the preceding canto, the Dantean pilgrim recounts that when he senses the _spira_ of _Amor_, he takes note and records it as poetry. Juxtaposed in the narrative, the divine _spira_ of the embryo canto, and the divine _spira_ inspiring poetics, together establish the essential contribution _Purgatorio XXV_ makes to the poetics of the _Commedia_.

Through close textual analysis, the following study demonstrates that Dante's definition of his poetic practice focuses attention on the embryo canto. Dante has constructed his poem so that the final canto—when he encounters God—is superimposed upon the embryo canto where he first encountered God. Thus, the _Divine Comedy_ is a write of passage: the symbolic death at the poem's conclusion corresponds with the return to the womb of _Purgatorio XXV_.

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A Portrait and Ulysses resonate with the dynamics of initiation. The term "dynamic" serves to indicate that the write of passage potentially transforms the reader into a writer. Joyce recognizes the implications of Dante's return to the embryo and he integrates it into his own art of textual transformation. An initiatory focus provides a new forum for analyzing and discussing perennial issues, one of the most dominant in this study being the complex relationship between the intertext that mentors the literary novice and his need to sever this bond that renders him silent while the intertext sings. The question that propels the following study is what sort of initiation does the pilgrim undergo to become the poet?
For my beloved parents, with gratitude.
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Finally, this dissertation is dedicated to my parents, David and Janet Fraser. They are Renaissance patrons, fine, fine parents, and loving guides in my life. This work would never have begun or ended without their support.
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La lecture des poètes eut des effets plus bouleversant encore: je ne suis pas sûr que la découverte de l'amour soit nécessairement plus délicieuse que celle de la poésie. Celle-ci me transforma: l'initiation à la mort ne m'introduira pas plus loin dans un autre monde que tel crépuscule de Virgile.

*Mémoires d'Hadrien*, Marguerite Yourcenar
The moment that the poet Virgil appears on the scene of the *Divine Comedy*, in order to assist the pilgrim Dante through a crisis, a significant paradigm shift occurs in intertextual relationships. In a paradoxical reversal of influence, Dante simultaneously reads and writes his source Virgil. At moments, the poet of the *Aeneid* acts as an initiatory elder who guides the novice Dante through narrative trials; at other moments, Virgil appears in the role of mother from whom the pilgrim must textually separate in order to activate rebirth. Dante's revolutionary treatment of intertextual relationships made a telling impression on James Joyce: *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses* bear the ritual scars of a Dantean initiation.

I use the term initiation to refer to the metamorphosis from pilgrim to poet, or to put this textual transformation into the more forceful terms of initiatory ritual: the birth of the author superimposed upon the death of the character.\(^1\) When speaking of Dante's poetry, T. S. Eliot uses the verb "to initiate"; in the same essay, when discussing religion he uses the verb "to instruct."\(^2\) Eliot's provocative verb choice alerts us to the transformation---even a practising Catholic---may seek through reading literature.\(^3\)

Wolfgang Iser regards transformations as integral to the literary process. He imagines literature *staging* those aspects of existence which are "sealed off from access." The impulse behind staging results from "man's decentered position: we are, but do not have ourselves."\(^4\) Initiation---whether a ritual or a textual memoir---reacts to this decentered position of being but not having ourselves. Literary initiation seeks to reclaim the self by re-enacting birth and death in order to generate a textual origin and conclusion. The self that *is*, takes its shape from historical time, the physical union of one's parents, the community's beliefs. In contrast, the self that *has*, participates in a write of passage which deals a death blow to the reading self and thus allows for the emergence of the writer.\(^5\) The initiatory writer holds the protean moment still so that the reader may glimpse the remarkable metamorphosis.

Jerome Bruner discusses the transformative moment in a child's development when he or she recognizes that the ability to narrate one's experience---"telling the right story"---is as fundamental as the event itself.\(^6\) The capacity to narrate one's own experience often involves
drowning out competing narratives (those of a sibling for instance) which contradict one's interpretation of what happened. Bruner's insight into children's narrative development corresponds with the tension Dante creates between his own story and the competing tale told by Virgil. In *Ulysses*, Joyce self-reflexively continues the narrative competition.

In a Freudian treatment of narrative time, Peter Brooks argues that the transformative moment for the child is when he or she takes an active role in the disappearance of the mother, re-enacting in imagination her arrival and departure. The three, briefly mentioned, theories of narrative (Iser, Bruner, Brooks) all contribute to our understanding of the dynamics of textual initiation. For, in writes of passage, the author cannot gain access to his birth and death; the author struggles to tell a story that silences competing narratives; and the author strives to resurrect the maternal intertext and yet make it disappear. The initiatory writer creates a fictional world which stages these crises, transforms them into narrative, and examines that literary act of transformation. Staging one's break from the maternal, symbolically enacting one's birth and death, and attempting to drown out influential intertexts, all evince a desire to claim authority over those forces which generate and designate meaning, but which are essentially cut off from access. These initiatory acts occur within the narrative process itself.

Peter Brooks configures the narrative space of "retard, postponement, error, and partial revelation" as the place of transformation: "where the problems posed to and by initiatory desire are worked out and worked through." However, an initiatory text, paradoxically enough, differs from what Brooks discovers as a feature of narrative, for the initiatory desire is *not* worked out nor worked through as a reader concludes the text; rather, the initiatory desire is activated so that the reader is challenged to become the writer.

* * *

The canto which leads me to designate Dante's epic poem "initiatory" is *Purgatorio* XXV. I believe that Dante reveals in this canto the fundamental structure underlying the whole of the *Commedia*: his journey towards God, which progresses through the three canticles, is simultaneously a journey back in time to the first encounter he had with God in
the womb. Comparable to an initiation rite, Dante's narrative movement towards the "death" he experiences in his vision of God, parallels a return to an embryonic state, a return to the womb.

In an article whose title reveals its relevance to the following work, "Flesh, Spirit, and Rebirth at the Center of Dante's Comedy," Aldo Bernardo interprets the embryo canto as contributing to the theme of death and rebirth in the Purgatorio. For Bernardo, canto XXV acts as one stage in a three-part treatment of the thematics of death and rebirth; thus he examines "the birth and nature of the human soul" in Purgatory XVI, and the allegorical procession at the summit of the mountain in Purgatory XXXII. Alternatively, in the following study neither of these episodes are mentioned. I approach Dante's construct of death and rebirth more as a textual enactment than as a motif, initiation as a literary ritual rather than as a theme.

Dante's treatment of death and rebirth compares to a ritual of initiation since, as A. C. Charity has succinctly expressed it, "the reading that the Comedy requires is an active and dramatic one, that the reader is supposed to be changed." Dante's epic poem describes an initiatory process for the pilgrim and offers a transformative experience to the reader. A. C. Charity elaborates on this process in spiritual terms:

The seriousness of [righting the will] and intensity of its pursuit make it all but impossible to take the poem as merely a representation of what Dante saw or claims to have seen in the beyond. It is rather that this representation itself is to be a means of righting the will, of bringing about change of life. The description of Dante's journey is for us, as in the poem the journey itself is for him, a way of effecting that change.

Although I concur with the above quote, this work investigates the affect of the Commedia on the reader's literary-self rather than in spiritual terms. Thus, it is irrelevant whether or not Dante leads the reader to right his will; my interpretation will examine whether Dante's epic poem leads the reader to write. In order to assess the initiatory impact of the Divine Comedy, we will look at the transformation effected in one particular reader, James Joyce.

Dante constructs a model of the transformative capacity of literature within his own epic poem: the Dantean pilgrim leans upon his guide Virgil—the intertext of the Aeneid—in
order to overcome a narrative crisis and set in motion his own epic poem. Thus, written into
the very structure of his initiatory poem is a blue print of the way in which Dante strives to
transform his reader. The Dantec pilgrim's dependence on the intertext of the \textit{Aeneid}---he
literally follows in Virgil's footsteps---becomes the Dantean poet's need to sever the ties that
bind him to his poetic master. Dante paradoxically cannot write without his narrative guide
Virgil and yet he cannot write with Virgil as his narrative guide. The fraught intertextual
relationship between the two poets dominates the initiatory dynamic of the \textit{Commedia}.

My use of the term \textit{initiatory dynamic} is illuminated when we take the Dantec model
and examine its active unfolding in Joyce's textual realm. For, just as Virgil initiates Dante,
Dante initiates Joyce. The transformative impact of reading these kinds of texts never results
in a stasis: when the reader attempts closure by concluding an initiatory work, the ending
sends him/her to the beginning. The reader finishes the \textit{Commedia} with the knowledge that
the end of the journey of the poem signals the inception of the poem's writing: the Dantean
pilgrim transforms at the end of the \textit{Divine Comedy} into the Dantean poet who will record the
experience of his pilgrimage.

Likewise, Joycean endings are characterized by what John Paul Riquelme calls a
return to origins with \textit{Ulysses} as a particularly fine instance. He thus affirms: "Spatially as
well as temporally \textit{Ulysses} moves back towards its beginning."\textsuperscript{11} The thrust of Riquelme's
work is to chart the merger that occurs between "the citizen and the artist, the writer and the
reader."\textsuperscript{12} Clearly these are modern terms for Dante's pilgrim and poet. Without recognizing
that Joyce is acting under the influence of his initiatory mentor Dante, Richard Ellmann
examines Joyce's dual artistic self according to the terms of ritual initiation:

\begin{quote}
Mother-sea and father-ocean, whom Stephen had
joined, are matched by Bloom's implicit coupling
of mother earth and fatherland. Birth-death and
death-birth join like land and water. The lying in
of birth coincides with the laying out for death.\textsuperscript{13}
\end{quote}

Plunging into the watery maternal realm of the baptismal font, superimposed upon the
emergence out of these drowning waters, not only activates initiatory dynamics, but it does
so according to the Dantec intertext.
In the *Divine Comedy*, the pilgrim returns to the watery womb where he dies and is reborn as the poet. Apparent in the work of both authors, the merger of birth and death, coupled with the superimposition of pilgrim and poet, which constantly requires a dual level of reading, signals the initiatory intertextual relationship between Dante and Joyce. Mary Reynolds, whose extensive work on the shaping force of Dante's poetry on Joyce's imagination, recognizes Dante's "allegorical narrative" of the self as crucial to Joyce's *Portrait* and *Ulysses*. The protagonist Dante finds a counterpart in the protagonist Stephen, both characters preclude, anticipate, resemble their authors. The way in which the fictional figure undergoes a textual initiation to become the writer informs the otherwise diverse literary projects of Dante and Joyce and thus invites comparison between them.

While Buck Mulligan mocks Stephen, he unwittingly utters textual truths in reference to Stephen's creator. Therefore, he laughingly tells Haines that Stephen plans to write something in ten years. Not only does ten years mark the beginning and end of Odysseus's epic journey, it also accords with the creation of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* as recorded in the temporal signing of the text: 1904-1914. In the comic circle drawn by Buck, Stephen looks like a fool; Joyce however has the last laugh. Mulligan tells Haines that Stephen will never be a poet since he is unable to write in initiatory terms: "the white death and the ruddy birth [...] The joy of creation." (*U* 10, 1073-5). Once again, Mulligan mocks the literary pilgrim while he simultaneously acts as a mouthpiece for the poet's truth.

In "Aeolus," the theme of the dual literary self appears in Stephen's musing on rhymes: "Rhymes: two men dressed the same, looking the same, two by two." Duality then translates into trinity: Stephen quotes three *terza rima* rhymes from Dante's *Commedia*. The dual rhyme brings back to the poet's mind his composition earlier that morning; notably, the rhymes condense the initiatory thematic: "tomb womb" (*U* 7, 714-724). Death of the pilgrim and rebirth as the poet; death of the character, rebirth as the novelist.

In both Dante and Joyce, as one reads forward, the narrative leads one back: the conclusion is superimposed upon the beginning or in initiatory terms, death occurs simultaneously with a return to origins. The death of the Dantean pilgrim at the end of the poem corresponds with his primary beginning in the womb. The dazzling vision of God in the final canto of the *Paradiso* parallels the moment in the womb when God breathed into the
embryo a soul. Following quotes from the *Divine Comedy*, Stephen makes his own poetic gesture---"tomb womb"---which intriguingly sets up the thematics of literary initiation, and in that context, foregrounds Joyce's reading of the *Commedia*.

Several works have concentrated specifically on the initiatory dynamic of Joyce's *Ulysses*. In an article on the "Paradigm of Initiation," Erwin Steinberg follows a classical scholar's map of the initiation of Homer's Telemachus and compares it, step by step, to Joyce's Telemachus, Stephen Dedalus. An interesting approach, but I find it ultimately forced and schematic. More persuasive is Jean Kimball's work which illustrates how artistic rebirth takes place in *Ulysses* through verbal correspondences.

Kimball asserts that a "new man" emerges from the individuals Stephen and Bloom. The merger corresponds with the "hypostatic union" which conveys Christ's dual nature:

> When Zoe asks Stephen, "What day were you born?"
> Stephen replies, "Thursday. Today" (*U* 562), which states a double truth. James Joyce, whose vital statistics before Bloomsday have coincided with Stephen Dedalus, was born on February 2, 1882, which was a Thursday. On Bloomsday, June 16, 1904 also a Thursday, he was reborn, "made a man."

Joyce has his literary birth days correspond with his literal birthday. The physical arrival of Joyce into the world creates a powerful analogy to the rebirth experience he undergoes metaphysically with the birth of his books. When he highlights the merging of his actual self with his textually created self, Joyce consciously patterns his work on Dante's. For the pilgrim is the medieval Dante Alighieri whose journey transforms into the timeless text of Dante, the poet.

The merger that occurs in Joyce's work corresponds to the one that infuses the *Divine Comedy*. John Freccero expresses the Dantesan merger as: "the conversion from the Dante who was into the poet whose work we read." We can integrate Riquelme's terms in order to translate from the Dantesan realm to the Joycean one: the transformation from the citizen Stephen who was into the artist Joyce whose work we read. Immediately the translation becomes problematic since the word conversion does not rest easily in the Joycean cosmos. The term conversion presupposes the question: conversion to what or to whom? The response
to the conversion question does not concern the following study; hence, *initiation* will take its place. Nonetheless, a sharp line does not divide Dante's spiritual project from his textual process, nor do I think such a distinct barrier effectively functions to describe Joyce's literary designs. Without question, Dante's conversion which charges his epic poem with significance is his conversion to God, but Joyce also believes fundamentally in the spiritual dimension of his art. In an early letter, he writes:

> All things are inconstant except faith in the soul, which changes all things and fills their inconstancy with light. And though I seem to have been driven out of my country here as a misbeliever I have found no man yet with a faith like mine.\(^{18}\)

When arguing with publishers and printers about various deletions they require in his *Dubliners* collection, Joyce explains:

> I fight to retain them because I believe that in composing my chapter of moral history in exactly the way that I have composed it I have taken the first step towards the spiritual liberation of my country.\(^ {19}\)

Thus, Joyce does not only possess a strong spiritual sense, but more importantly, he sees his literary work as a significant contribution to the spiritual life of his readers. Both Dante and Joyce struggle violently with ecclesiastical Catholicism; however, the light that courses through Dante's medieval poem and Joyce's modernist novels is meant to shine in the reader's darkness, illuminating matter with spirit.

* * *

The key to the intertextual relationship between Dante and Joyce is that both authors structure their initiatory works according to a dual level: the reader must follow their textual paths on two distinct levels. Reading Dante and Joyce is like riding a tandem bicycle: one rider spins the pilgrim's wheel while the other sets in motion the poet's wheel. Thus, it is appropriate that the following study divide into two separately revolving wheels. The first
section will focus exclusively on the *Divine Comedy*; the second section, will investigate the
Dantean initiatory intertext as Joyce applies it in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and
*Ulysses*. The first section strives to establish a new way of reading Dante's *Commedia* as a
poem which enacts a symbolic death while it simultaneously superimposes it upon a return to
the womb. The second section looks at the dynamic of textual death and rebirth in terms of
Joyce's application of the Dantean model of intertextual initiation.

This study of the intertextual relationship between Dante and Joyce is
constructed like a diptych with initiation as the hinge that holds these works together. The
first portrait is of Dante; whereas the companion portrait more closely resembles a holograph
of Joyce with the shade of the *Divine Comedy* hovering in the background. Vicki Mahaffey
captures the holograph effect generated in a study of initiatory texts:

> The reciprocity of past and present, living and dead, is best illustrated by the processes of reading and writing: a present reader and an absent author are asked to change places, so that the author becomes imaginatively present and the reader absent, until the reader reasserts his or her presence through criticism that can potentially reshape our image of the written reality, making that writing once again contemporaneous.\(^\text{20}\)

Constructing a study of Dante and Joyce, participants in a perpetually dynamic exchange,
seems appropriate since the intertextual relationship between them requires recognition of
two simultaneous narrative levels: the journey of the pilgrim which leads the reader forward
and the tale of the poet which sends the reader back.

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\(^1\) Mircea Eliade concludes his study on initiation by suggesting that Joyce's *Ulysses* is an unconsciously initiatory work. In the following study, I hope to convince readers that both Dante and Joyce consciously construct initiatory texts. Paul Ricoeur, in reference to Mircea Eliade's work, notes the way in which ritual and discourse correspond, 62.
\(^2\) T. S. Eliot, 40-43.
\(^3\) Patricia Merivale examines initiation thematics in various modernist works. However, her focus on educational performances differs markedly from my investigation of the intertextual relationship.
\(^4\) Wolfgang Iser, 244.
\(^5\) Anthropologist J. S. La Fontaine, in an extensive study of initiation, establishes a distinction between a rite and a theatre piece. He argues that while the former "aims to affect the world," the latter is "simply the expression of ideas and social meaning." (184) The following study questions La Fontaine's belief that a transformation only occurs through ritual and not through art.
\(^6\) Jerome Bruner, 39.
7 Peter Brooks, 97-98.
8 ibid, 92.
9 Alan Clifford Charity, 221.
10 ibid, 208.
11 John Paul Riquelme (1983: 219). Ellmann observes that "the first word in the book is Stately and the last Yes, the first and last letters of each being reversed" which is a subtle way of superimposing the end on the beginning (1972: 162).
15 Erwin Steinberg, 300.
16 Jean Kimball (1973: 436). Further support for Kimball's emphasis on the conscious overlap between Joyce's literary works and his birthday can be found in Joyce's letters (See Letters I, 83 and 180). Thus, Ellmann states Joyce "attached much talismanic importance" to his literal birthday and his literary birthdays.
18 James Joyce, November 1902, Letters I, 53.
19 ibid, May 1906, Letters I, 62-63. H. G. Wells comments insightfully on the spiritual component of Joyce's work:

You began Catholic, that is to say you began with a system of values in stark opposition to reality. Your mental existence is obsessed by a monstrous system of contradictions. You really believe in chastity, purity and the personal God and that is why you are always breaking out into cries of cunt, shit and hell. (November 1928) Letters I, 275

20 Vicki Mahaffey, 192.
I Dante
I Charting the Course of the Embryo

Purgatory XXV is most often regarded as a singular Purgatorial canto, a discrete unit of required doctrinal explanation. However, as I will argue, this canto contains profound links with other key passages in the Commedia. Although, I have not come across another critic who reads Purgatory XXV as the basis for an initiatory structure, the work of other scholars succeeds in putting the canto in its medieval setting and thus serves the vital role of exposing the ways in which Dante's version of the generation of the embryo and the creation of the soul stands apart.

Bruno Nardi, to whom almost all critics who follow defer, has written the seminal work on Purgatory XXV. By careful documentation of Dante's sources for the canto, Nardi brings to life the medieval debate which raged around the development of the embryo and creation of the individual soul. Most commentaries on the canto will inform the reader that Dante's source for Statius' exposition on the generation of the embryo draws on Aristotle and his medieval commentaries, in particular, the work of St Thomas Aquinas. Nardi provides a more informed and subtle reading where he discovers that in fact Dante privileges the Aristotelian commentary of St Albert. Scholars are also likely to acknowledge Dante's rejection of Averroes' reading of Aristotle; however, only Nardi puzzles over Dante's condemnation of Averroes' opinion coupled with the Dantean pilgrim's encounter in Paradiso with "Sigieri di Brabante" the foremost supporter of exactly this Avveroistic doctrine. Moreover, Siger is not only saved, but he is saved along with the other significant theorists of the complex issue of the embryo's gestation: St Thomas and St Albert. Differing from Nardi, I read the pilgrim's encounter with these three souls in the Paradiso as Dante's way of acknowledging the theological debate while not allowing it the ultimate word. Clearly in terms of Dantean salvation, it does not matter how a theologian sought to understand the generation of the embryo, since we discover in the Paradiso three theologians who held opposing views on the subject. When examined closely, the imagery (surrounding the pilgrim's meeting with the three debators of the generation of the embryo) reveals a pattern which supports a reading of Purgatorio XXV as a canto which tells the fundamental story of
how one may creatively return to one's encounter with God in the womb.

*   *   *

First, we will look at the embryonic imagery in *Purgatorio* XXV and then we will examine the way in which it corresponds with the pattern of images that structure the canto in *Paradiso* where the pilgrim encounters, the medieval thinkers---Siger, St. Thomas, and St. Albert---who tried to theologically understand the generation of the embryo and its relation to the soul.

The Dantean pilgrim addresses a question to the two poets who presently guide him through the purgatorial portion of the afterworld. The pilgrim wonders how it is that souls who are mere shades can grow thin, considering they are beyond any need for nourishment. Virgil responds in surprising terms which we will examine later; the other poet, Statius addresses the pilgrim's question by recounting the development of the embryo:

Anima fatta la virtute attiva qual d'una pianta, in tanto differente, che questa è in via e quella è già a riva, tanto ovra poi che già si move e sente, come fungo marino; e indi imprende ad organar le posse ond'è semente. Or si spiega, figliuolo, or si distende la virtù ch'è dal cor del generante, dove natura a tutte membra intende. Ma come d'animal divenga fante, non vedi tu ancor: quest'è tal punto, che più savio di te fe' già errante, si che per sua dottrina fe' disgiunto da l'anima il possibile intelletto, perché da lui non vide organo assunto. Aprì alla verità che viene il petto; e sappi che, si tosto come al fetò l'articolar del cerebro è perfetto, lo motor primo a lui si volge lieto sovra tant'arte di natura, e spira spirito novo di vertù repleto, che ciò che trova attivo quivi, tira in sua sustanzia, e fassi un'alma sola, che vive e sente e sè in sè rigira.

(The active force having become a soul, like a plant's but so far different that it is on the way and the other already at the shore, then operates to the point that it now moves and feels, like a sea-fungus, and from that goes on to produce organs for the faculties
of which it is the seed. Now, my son, develops and spreads the force that is from the heart of the begetter, where nature makes provision for all the members. But how from an animal it becomes a child you see not yet; this is the point that made [one] wiser than you err, so that in his teaching he made the possible intellect separate from the soul, because he did not see an organ appropriated by it. Open your breast to the truth that follows and know that as soon as the articulation of the brain is perfected in the embryo the First Mover turns to it, rejoicing over such handiwork of nature, and breathes into it a new spirit full of power, which draws into it a new substance that which it finds active there and becomes a single soul that lives and feels and itself revolves upon itself, 52-72).

By stripping Statius' rather dense explanation of the development of the embryo down to the basic codes of imagery, we have a simple process: the embryo begins in plant form (pianta); it then develops into a marine creature (fungo marino); Statius then refers to its animal phase which becomes truly human (fante⁹) when God breathes (spira) into the developed embryo a new soul (spirito novo). Thus, the pattern of imagery in Purgatorio XXV is in its basic form as follows: plant code, marine code, animal code, divine code (the breath of God).¹⁰ Notably, the canto in which we find the debaters of the embryo's development and the soul's creation, Paradiso X, is the only place in the Commedia where these embryonic stages surface in exact sequence in the imagery.

Before I chart the sequence of embryonic allusions in Paradiso X, I need to comment briefly on the crucial Dantean correspondence between the space of the womb and the space of Paradise. Dante imagines Paradiso as a vast sea. One could argue, in each of the three canticles, Dante draws on nautical imagery; in fact he refers to Hell as "mar si crudele" (so cruel a sea). Nonetheless, the way in which Dante imagines the realm of Paradise differs fundamentally from the other two canticles in that the Dantesian pilgrim paradoxically ascends into heaven by plunging into this realm as though it were a sea. The "navicella del [suo] ingegno" (little bark of [his] wit) which charts the waters of Inferno and Purgatorio becomes in Paradiso the poet's comparison of himself to Glaucus who dives into the sea and thus experiences the divine (Par. I, 67-69). No longer skimming along the surface of the sea, in
Paradiso, the Dantean pilgrim plunges into its depths. Thus, the pilgrim encounters souls in Paradiso who appear to him within the element of water (i.e. Par. III, 121-123 or Par. V, 100-104). Even more forceful than the plunge into marine imagery in the final canticle, we hear at the outset of Paradiso, God described as a sea, accompanied by a direct reference to Purgatorio XXV. Piccarda explains to the pilgrim her relationship, and the relationship of all, to God: she depicts God as "that sea" towards which all that is generated (like the embryo and all of nature) and all that is created (like the human soul) move.

E'n la sua volontade è nostra pace: ell'è quel mare al qual tutto si move ciò ch'ella cria e che natura face.
(Par. III, 85-87)

Piccarda describes God as a sea towards which we move and she refers explicitly to the embryo canto where Dante learned from Statius about how nature generates the embryo and how God creates the soul. Dante configures both the womb and heaven as watery realms. When the pilgrim ascends into heaven, which he renders as a plunge into the sea, he alludes to Purgatorio XXV and thus superimposes the encounter with God at the height of Paradiso upon his primary encounter with God in the womb.11

In the Divine Comedy, Dante constructs heaven and the womb as watery spaces. However, in Dante's earlier work---the unfinished philosophical tract, the Convivio---the development of the embryo does not include a water code. In his philosophical Convivio and his spiritual Commedia, Dante narrates the generation of the embryo: the former lacks any reference to water, whereas the latter renders the womb a watery space.12 In the Divine Comedy, Dante describes the realm of the womb and the realm of heaven as watery spaces.

In Purgatory XXV, in accordance with theological principles, Dante aptly writes of the plant-like embryo not yet "a riva" (at the shore); yet his choice of imagery also serves to convey a watery landscape which he further reinforces with the term "fungo marino." Critics remark on Dante's choice of "fungo marino" since his source, Aristotle, chose "spunga" (sponge). Another way of expressing this primitive animal form in Italian would have been "medusa" (jelly-fish). Dante's choice of "fungo" (fungus, mushroom---flora belonging to
land) requires the qualifier "marino" which would be a redundant addition to "spunga" or "medusa." Dante chose the unheard of "fungo" 13 precisely because it required a marine modifier and which served once again to draw attention to the aquatic space of the womb. In the Commedia, Dante imagines the generation of the embryo in a watery realm.

In Purgatory XXV, Statius tells the pilgrim about the generation of the embryo. When his discourse is stripped down to codes, Dante has a watery realm in which the embryo passes through a plant phase, and then an animal phase, finally culminating in a human being who becomes a "speaker" with the infusion of God's breath. In Paradiso X, where Dante has placed the souls of the men who all have in common their participation in the debate on the generation of the embryo---Aquinas, Albert, and Siger---once again Dante sets in motion the sequence of embryonic codes.

Purgatorio XXV and Paradiso X are framed in parallel ways. In the canto before Paradiso X, Dante converses with souls in the heaven of Venus: the heaven of "love marred by wantonness," to use Sinclair's quaint phrase. Dante therefore sets up a parallel which serves to trigger our awareness of the connection between the embryo canto and the heaven of the theologians, since in Purgatory XXV, Dante also converses with souls who cleanse away their lust in purgatorial fire. In Paradiso IX, Dante reaches the heavenly equivalent for the souls he encounters loved lustily, but they have succeeded in purifying the wantonness out of their love. Dante uses a corresponding frame to introduce the Purgatorial canto, in which he has Statius recount the story of the embryo's development, and the paradisal canto, in which he places the theologians who debated the embryonic question.

In Paradiso IX, when the soul Folco speaks to Dante, we discover a resurfacing of the embryonic codes from Purgatory XXV. Folco describes the soul next to him with water imagery: the soul "scintilla,/ come raggio di sole in acqua mera" (the soul sparkles like a sunbeam in clear water, 113-114). Next, he condemns Florence by way of plant imagery: "La tua città, che di colui è pianta" (Your city which is a plant of his, 127). Folco then activates the animal code: "c'ha disviâte le pecore e li agni" (that has lead astray the sheep and the lambs, 131). The opening of the next canto completes the embryo's evolution in a watery place from plant to animal. Canto X begins with the breath of God. Dante addresses the
Guardando nel suo Figlio con l'Amore che l'uno e l'altro eternamente spira, lo primo ed ineffabile Valore, quanto per mente e per loco si gira con tant'ordine fé...

(Looking on His son with the Love which the One and the Other eternally breathe forth, the primal and ineffable Power made with such order all that revolves, 1-5).

In Purgatory XXV, Statius refers to divinity as "lo motor primo" (the First Mover); here, in Paradiso X, Dante echoes the earlier representation of God with "lo primo...Valore." A minor detail, yet it carries more weight when we compare the telling rhymes from both passages. At the outset of Paradiso X, Dante rhymes the breath of God with the revolving universe, spira with gira. In Purgatorio XXV, Dante has Statius use the same rhyme scheme to conclude his tale of the embryo's development:

lo motor primo a lui si volge lieto sovra tant'arte di natura, e spira spirito novo di vertù repleto, che ciò che trova attivo quivi, tira in sua sustanza, e fassi un'alma sola, che vive e sente e sè in sè rigira.

In Paradise X, on the macrocosmic level, God's spira (breath) sets the universe revolving (gira). On the microcosmic level of the individual, the breath (spira) of God infuses the foetus with a soul which "sè in sè rigira" (itself revolves upon itself). Although the rhyme spira/ gira appears elsewhere in the Commedia, there are only four places in the epic where the breath issues from God and sets either the soul or the universe revolving.¹⁴ The third and fourth occurrence of this significant rhyme, which we will ultimately examine, appear at the conclusion of the poem in Paradiso XXXIII.

In Paradiso X, the rhyme spira/ gira recalls for the reader the tale of the embryo's evolution. Moreover, if we are sensitive to the pattern of embryonic codes---water, plant, animal, infusion of divine breath---we discover a significant recall of the passage in
Purgatorio where Statius tells Dante about the development of the embryo in the womb. Not only during Folco's words in the ninth canto of Paradise, but in the imagery that follows in Paradiso X, we find once again the same pattern of embryonic codes.

In Paradiso X, the embryonic motif occurs in the speech of Aquinas who starts it off by telling the pilgrim that any soul who did not respond to his grace would be like "acqua ch'al mar non si cala" (water that does not fall to the sea, 90). Aquinas recognizes that the Dantean pilgrim wishes to know the souls who he sees there, and he describes the pilgrim's desire as: "Tu vuò saper di quai piante s'infiora" (You would know what plants are these that bloom, 91). He then represents himself as: "Io fui delli agni della santa greggia" (I was of the lambs of the holy flock, 93). As in Paradiso IX, we read once again through the codes of the embryo's development: water code, plant code, animal code. However, unlike in Paradiso IX, we do not find the crucial final step, the allusion to divine breath. In order to complete the cycle of embryonic development, we are meant to read in reverse.

In the canto of theologians, the canto where we discover, brought together those who debated the development of the embryo and the creation of the soul, Dante has organized a miniature version of the structure of his poem. The gathering of embryonic imagery leads the reader not only forward, but also backward to the opening of the canto. Thus, Paradiso IX progresses forward to the breath of God; whereas, Paradiso X travels back, through the imagery, to the breath of God at the opening of the canto. The embryonic pattern moves both forward and backward: the breath of God, the spira is at the center, around which revolve, girà, the codes of imagery. In Paradiso IX and X, we have a condensed version of the structure of the Commedia: the tale of the embryo leads forward out of the womb; but this primal pattern also leads back to the womb. The goal is always the divine breath; yet the poet paradoxically writes towards this moment where he encounters God at the summit of Paradiso and creatively remembers back to the moment in the womb when he received his soul from the breath of God.

* * *
A great deal of critical attention has focused on the medieval thinkers who debated about the generation of the embryo and who appear in the tenth canto of heaven. Dante signals the debate by having Statius explain that Averroes, despite his great wisdom, made a crucial error in his understanding of the human soul and its connection to its embryonic stages (*Purg.* XXV, 61-66). As Nardi has shown, and others have reiterated, Dante draws on the work of Aquinas and Albertus Magnus, and he ultimately privileges the latter's reading of this complicated biological/theological issue. However, in *Paradiso* X the pilgrim (and along with him the reader) must realize that, according to Dante, this debate is not all that important. Great minds struggle to interpret the world and God; nevertheless they make human errors. Surrounded by embryonic imagery, the Dantean pilgrim encounters, gathered together, the three divergent thinkers on the subject of the embryo's development. In life they argued with one another, in the afterworld, they unite as a threesome who participate in a great circle of learning. Clearly, there is more to *Purgatorio* XXV than a medieval academic debate. By means of *Paradiso* IX and X, Dante opens up *Purgatory* XXV, the generation of the embryo and the creation of the soul, to further discussion.

*Purgatory* XXV has a vital role to play in expressing the *Commedia*'s dual narrative movement. John Freccero succinctly identifies the dual narrative movement as follows:

> the dramatic double focus that is part of the story: the conversion of the Dante who was into the poet whose work we read.\(^\text{16}\)

Freccero applies, to great effect, the model of conversion; as already stated, the model I wish to apply to the poem is initiatory. Freccero does not focus on the embryo canto; hence, he reads the conclusion of the poem as the death of the Pauline "old man" which allows for the birth of the "new man." In contrast, I read the conclusion of the poem as a death, but a death which Dante superimposes upon a return to the embryonic state which involves an encounter with God. The pilgrim moves forward through the *Inferno, Purgatorio,* and *Paradiso* where he has a vision of God; yet he also travels back in time to the moment in his own personal history when God breathed into him a soul. This dual movement is initiatory: the death occurs simultaneously with a return to the womb and this overlapping moment heralds a
Thus, like an initiatory rite, Dante's epic poem journeys in paradoxically opposed yet corresponding directions. The pilgrim travels towards his end: the vision of God which is metaphorical death; yet he also travels back to his beginning: Dante returns by creative memory to his encounter with God in the womb.

John Freccero states that "for the pilgrim and author to be one and the same requires nothing short of death and resurrection." I would modify the second part of Freccero's statement to read "death and return to the womb." Dante carefully superimposes the symbolic death upon the return to the womb so that these two fundamental moments coincide: the death of the pilgrim allows for the birth of Dante's textual creation the *Divine Comedy*. The birth of the poem centers on recapturing the moment when the embryonic self felt the breath of god in the womb and transformed into a speaker. Dante celebrates that primal transformation. He extends this remarkable moment so that the reader may follow the pilgrim's long textual journey of return, and at each step, recognize the immense poetic effort to harmonize one's creative work with the divinely inspired birth of one's conscious self.

The transformative Dantean moment is when one becomes a *fante*, a speaker; however, that moment is marked by an inability to speak and the impossibility of remembering. Thus, the thrust of the *Commedia* is to recall through art and to articulate through art one's most significant and yet unattainable moment. The way in which Dante signals the death of the pilgrim, coinciding with a return to the womb, is by poetically superimposing the one upon the other. Thus, the end of the *Divine Comedy* refers the reader to the embryo canto, *Purgatorio* XXV.

**The Relationship between *Purgatory* XXV and *Paradiso* XXXIII: The Beginning Superimposed Upon the End**

When the pilgrim encounters God at the poem's end, Dante employs certain techniques in order to recall the Purgatorial passage where Statius tells of how the embryo receives its soul from God's infusion of breath. As we have seen, Dante configures both the womb and the heavens as watery places. We will now investigate how Dante creates rhymes
which draw the two ends of the temporal spectrum together. Moreover, in each of these cantos—Purgatorio XXV which recounts the embryonic beginning and Paradiso XXXIII which conveys the symbolic end of the pilgrim as well as the poem—Dante raises a rainbow. The rainbow stretches the imagination leading the viewer to stop and wonder. It occurs in rare, seemingly impossible circumstances, when the heavens both rain and shine. Hence, the rainbow, which Dante often associates with its classical past as a message from the gods, functions as an apt symbol of the fleeting, paradoxical moment when one dies in a divine moment which corresponds with a return to the womb to encounter one's Creator.

At the end of the poem, in Paradiso XXXIII, the pilgrim looks directly at divinity. And in struggling to convey what he experienced, the poet draws on a stunning comparison for an initiatory reading: Dante explains that his speech "will come more short even of what I remember than an infant's who yet bathes his tongue at the breast"(105-107).

Ormai sarà più corta mia favella, pur a quel ch’io ricordo, che d’un fante che bagni ancor la lingua alla mammella.

As already noted, the unusual term Dante uses for infant "fante"—meaning speaker—also occurs in the embryo canto. Statius tells the pilgrim that the difficult moment to understand in the generation of the embryo and creation of the soul revolves around our transformation from an animal to a fante (one who speaks). The metamorphosis results from the divine infusion of breath which gives the embryo a soul. At the conclusion of the poem this key term from the embryo canto recurs: the pilgrim's ultimate encounter with God is a recall of his primal encounter with God. At both moments, he becomes a fante. The infusion of God's breath transforms him from an animal embryo into a speaker in the womb; the dissolving into God's presence, which coincides with the completion of the poem, marks the transformation from Dantean pilgrim to poet, a highly sophisticated speaker. The trouble of articulating each moment stems from a failure of the memory. Dante's death experience as he encounters God parallels the time when he could not remember nor express himself.

The poet must speak from a place prior to the time of his infancy: the place that
compares to what he experiences at the height of Paradiso is the womb where he first encountered God. His speech will fall short of the capacity of a nursing infant. In temporal terms, Dante's comparison represents womb-time. The poet struggles at the conclusion of his poem to convey his vision of God; the comparison of his speech to that of an infant's in the womb establishes a correspondence between the soul in the womb and the soul at the summit of heaven. One encounter with God is superimposed upon the other.

Not only does Dante connect the two cantos with the term "fante," but he also conveys his vision of God with the spiral gira rhyme which also occurs in the embryo canto, Purgatorio XXV.

(In the profound and clear ground of the lofty light appeared to me three circles of three colours and of the same extent, and the one seemed reflected by the other as rainbow by rainbow, and the third seemed fire breathed forth equally from the one and the other, 115-120)

Once again we find the rhyme spira/gira of Purgatorio XXV and Paradiso X. As mentioned earlier, this rhyme, with the breath being divine, appears only four times in the poem. At the end of the poem, the rhyme occurs in plural form as giri/spiri. The one occurrence of the rhyme---of divine breath (spira) setting either the wheels of the universe or the self spinning (gira)---that we have not yet examined reappears in plural form. Moreover, this other plural occurrence of the spira/gira rhyme alludes to the embryo canto; we may therefore assume that Dante makes this rhyme a poetic device which serves to signal the embryo canto.

In canto II of the Paradiso, Beatrice explains to the pilgrim how the heavens influence individuals: "The motion and the virtue of the holy wheels (giri) must derive (spiri) from the blessed movers, as the craft of the hammer from the smith"(127-129).

Lo moto e la virtù de' santi giri, come dal fabbro l'arte
del martello, da' beati motor convien che spiri;

Sinclair has translated *spiri da* as "derive from" which fails to capture the original sense of God's breathing, *spiri*, which sets in motion the *beati motor*, or blessed movers, who in turn spin the holy wheels, the *santi giri*. The smith uses his hammer to put in the nail. God's breath moves the angelic orders so that they set spinning the holy wheels and thus influence life on earth. Continuing her explanation, Beatrice draws on another analogy which recalls *Purgatorio* XXV.

E come l'alma dentro a vostra polve per differenti membra e conformate e diverse potenze si risolve, così l'intelligenza sua bontate multiplicata per le stelle spiega, girando sè sovra sua unitate.

(and as the soul within your dust is diffused through different members that are adapted to various faculties, so the Intelligence unfolds its bounty, multiplied through the stars, itself wheeling on its own unity, 133-138).

Notably, we hear the verbal echo between "sè in sè rigira" and "girando sè sovra sua unitate" which provides another mode of seeing the microcosm/ macrocosm that links the individual soul to the universe. Dante has Beatrice refer to the primal moment when God breathed forth the individual soul of Adam; when dust became humanity: "E come l'alma dentro a vostra polve." If this allusion to Adam seems far removed from Statius' discourse on the development of the embryo and creation of the soul in *Purgatorio* XXV, then we may refer to the passage in *Paradiso* VII which connects the two definitively.

Beatrice unravels for the pilgrim a typically baffling divine conundrum which has little bearing for the present discussion, but if we focus on the imagery she uses to explain her meaning then the passage becomes highly significant:

L'anima d'ogne bruto e delle piante di complession potenzìata tira lo raggio e 'l moto delle luci sante; ma vostra vita sanza mezzo spira la somma beninanza, e la innamora di sè sì che poi sempre la disira. E quinci puoi argomentare ancora vostra resurrezion, se tu
Beatrice clearly sets her explanation in the context of what the pilgrim has already learned from Statius: the generation of the embryo in the watery womb, travels through a plant and an animal stage until it reaches its human form, at which moment, God breathes into the human embryo a soul. In this passage, Beatrice makes explicit the connection between each individual who receives from God's breath a soul and the first soul to ever enter the dust of matter and become Adam.

Beatrice's allusion to Adam sends the reader to Genesis, and thus an intriguing discovery is made. The creation of the world corresponds with the creation of the foetus in the womb. First there were plants; then God created sea creatures; and finally He made the beasts of the field. The final step of course occurs when God: "formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul."19

I have elided one complex moment in the creation of the flora and fauna of the earth. God makes sea creatures and flying creatures in the same gesture: "And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven."20 As I mentioned earlier, briefly in reference to Dante configuring not only the womb, but also the heavens as a watery place, there is a constant correlation in Dante's poem between the sky (heaven) and the sea. We will return to the connection between sky and sea, flight and diving.

Other critics do not highlight the corresponding watery spaces of the womb and the heavens since they direct their attention to the theological debate that we noted previously raged around the generation of the embryo. The end of the poem never connects with the
embryo canto in critical studies because scholars treat *Purgatory* XXV as a discrete canto of doctrinal concern. Before I continue my discussion of the way in which Dante strives to poetically link the primal beginning, the embryo canto, and the ultimate end, the dissolving vision of God at the poem's conclusion, I will return to the other interpretations of the embryo canto. I want to highlight the struggle critics have to make sense of Dante's embryo canto for it refuses to work logically within the poem.

In *Purgatory* XXV, the reason the Dantean pilgrim receives a lecture on the generation of the embryo is due to a question he asks of his guides. The pilgrim, who has seen emaciated shades doing penance for the sin of gluttony, wonders "Come si può far magro/ là dove l'uopo di nodrir non tocca?" (How is it possible to become lean where there is no need of nourishment? 20-21). In other words, what is the relationship between the shades who appear emaciated and the bodies that these souls once possessed. Virgil offers a mythological response which we will investigate later and Statius launches into the development of the embryo. Neither seems to address the pilgrim's question.

Giorgio Padoan recognizes that Statius' tale of the embryo does not respond to the pilgrim's question about the relationship between living bodies and shades in the afterworld. However, he goes on to suggest that Dante provides the lengthy discourse on the embryo, which he drew from established theological doctrine, in order to ground the speculative, imaginative section that follows. Padoan is aware of the contradictions that surface in the Dantean shades. Nonetheless, he maintains that as Dante wrote the *Commedia* his poetic design took shape in the writing. Hence, the *Inferno* had already been published and Dante, who became more sensitive to the issue of bodies in the afterworld, could no longer change the inconsistencies in the shades of his first *cantica*. Padoan must therefore struggle with the fact that Dante has Sordello and Virgil embrace as solid bodies in the *Purgatorio* itself. Padoan seeks to dismiss the embrace as insignificant.

Bruno Nardi believes that Dante set Statius' discourse on the generation of the embryo in the context of medieval theological and philosophical debate because he truly needed to understand and believe the connection between the soul and the body which he has appear to the pilgrim in the afterworld. Nardi contrasts Dante's shades with those of the pagan Virgil in
the Aeneid and concludes: "Per Dante invece quello che gli appare è realtà e non finzione."

According to Nardi, unlike Virgil who regards shades as fictional devices, Dante believes in the theological reality of shades.23 However, throughout the Commedia Dante undermines the theological notion of shades. As many have noted, the shades are actual shadows when the poet sees fit, but when he has other poetic concerns, they become solid bodies which can be kicked or embraced or held.24 If Bruno Nardi is right in thinking that Dante has Statius provide a long explanation of the generation of the embryo in order to demonstrate his theological correctness, it does not make sense for Dante to then contradict his spokesman Statius throughout his epic. Etienne Gilson comes closer to the truth when he writes: "The Most High Poet has adapted to the needs of his own universe the data provided by the theology of his time".25 I will stress once again, we must entertain the thought that there is more to Purgatorio XXV than theological doctrinal debate.

I am not convinced by either Bruno Nardi nor Giorgio Padoan's interpretation. Thus I want to examine how in Purgatorio XXV itself, Dante undermines Statius' discourse about the shades that the pilgrim meets in the afterworld. It is not a simple question of "undermining" the theology of his time, I believe that Dante undertakes the complexity of the generation of the embryo and creation of the soul in order to express his poetic purpose and design. The purpose is initiatory, and hence the design requires superimposing the ultimate end upon the primal beginning. We will continue therefore to track down the ways in which Dante makes the embryo canto harmonize with the final canto of the poem.

In attempting to establish a connection between Purgatorio XXV and the final canto of Paradiso, we have already uncovered a resonant network of associations. To return to the fundamental rhyme scheme which unites Purgatorio XXV and Paradiso XXXIII, we must note that the rhyme giri/spiri of the Commedia's concluding canto also rhymes with iri (rainbow). The Dantean pilgrim sees three giri (circles) two of which seem reflected by one another as rainbow by rainbow, iri da iri, and the third seems as fire, spiri (breathed) by the one and the other (Par. XXXIII, 115-120). Sinclair accurately translates iri as rainbow, but the term has echoes of the mythological figure Iris, who, as a rainbow acts as a messenger for the gods, Juno in particular. By referring to the rainbow in its pagan form at this juncture,
Dante enriches our reading of this natural occurrence for he uses the mythological rainbow, the messenger of the gods, to represent poetically the singular moment when his Creator breathes into him a soul while it occurs once again to convey the moment when he dissolves in sight of his Creator at the end of his poetic pilgrimage. In the Divine Comedy, the rainbow maintains its mythic role since it carries a divine message to humanity when it appears in Dante's poem.

The image of a rainbow is used six times in the Commedia. Twice Dante alludes to the rainbow basically as a weather phenomenon. The other four occurrences of rainbow imagery in the poem relate to the embryo canto. The two most significant allusions further connect the embryo canto and the final canto of the poem. And the other two rainbow allusions refer obliquely to the issues raised by the embryo canto.

The first instance of rainbow imagery used in the Paradiso takes place in the sphere of the sun which harbours the sequence of cantos dealing with theologians. Dante uses the rainbow to convey the sound of the song emanating from the wreath-like circles of the theologians: "As two bows parallel and of like colours bend through thin cloud when Juno commands her handmaid" (Par. XII, 10-12).

Come si volgon per tenera nube due archi paralleli e concolori, quando Iunone a sua ancella iube

Earlier we documented the importance of the sphere of the sun which contains the debating theologians: these paradisal cantos function as a microcosm of the poem whereby Dante downplays the debate about the embryo in order to expose its fundamental role in his poem. The sphere of the sun draws on the embryonic codes to lead the reader forward and backwards through the narrative to the pivotal moment of God's breath which is a spira that causes the self and the universe to turn, to gira. The reference to the rainbow works effectively to remind the reader once again that the debate which raged over the embryo on earth is not all that important. In contrast, the importance is to recapture that remarkable moment when the Creator infused the embryo with his breath and transformed it from an
animal to a speaker.

The other reference to a rainbow reinforces the above interpretation. The pilgrim gazes on the angelic circles in heaven: "Beyond followed the seventh, spread now so wide that Juno's messenger, completed, would be too small to contain it." (Par. XXVIII, 31-33)

Sopra seguiva il settimo si sparto già di larghezza,
che 'l messo di Iuno intero a contenerlo sarebbe arto.

Gathering up the references to the rainbow as a natural phenomena, Dante demonstrates in this comparison the limited capacity of nature when attempting to translate the divine. Likewise, theologians may struggle to argue and defend their stance on divine issues, however, their perspective is always limited. In this paradisal canto where the Dantesan pilgrim learns of the angelic orders and how inadequate a rainbow would be to contain their immensity, he also learns from Beatrice that, during his life, St. Gregory disagreed with this order of angels and thus when he arrived in this heaven and they were revealed to him: "di sè medesmo rise" (he smiled at himself, 133-135). In other words, Dante stresses yet again that the importance of the embryo canto does not lie in its participation in the medieval debate. Wise men debate about significant spiritual issues whether it be the generation of the embryo or the order of the angels. The key to the embryo canto does not only open the door on medieval theology, it also unlocks the initiatory dynamic of Dante's epic poem.

After discussing the relatively rare rainbow allusions in the Commedia, we will now concentrate on the most important ones for this study: the rainbow of the embryo canto, Purgatory XXV and the rainbow of the poem's end, Paradiso XXXIII.

The Dantesan pilgrim asks about the relationship between shades and real bodies, and receives two replies which only obliquely respond to his question: a mythological allusion from Virgil and the discourse of the embryo from Statius. However, after his discourse on the embryo, Statius does respond directly to the query of the pilgrim. Although Dante charges Statius' discussion of the embryo with contemporary learning, when he has Statius explain the relationship between a living body and a ghostly shade, Dante draws on his own imagination. According to Statius, as the flesh falls away, the soul---consisting of memory,
intelligence and will—intensifies and generates a shade of the former physical shape. Statius clarifies his explanation by comparison to a rainbow:

Tosto che loco li la circunscrive, la virtù informativa raggia intorno così e quanto nelle membra vive: e come l'aere, quand'è ben piombo, per l'altrui raggio che 'n sè si reflette, di diversi color diventa adorno; così l'aere vicin quivi si mette in quella forma che in lui suggella virtualmente l'alma che ristette;

(As soon as space envelops it there the formative virtue radiates round about, in form and measure as in the living members; and as the air, when it is full of rain, becomes adorned with various colours through another's beams that are reflected in it, so the neighbouring air sets itself into that form which the soul stopped there stamps upon it by its power, 88-96)

in Purgatorio XXV, Dante uses the image of the rainbow to express the relationship between the soul and the body; alternatively, in Paradiso XXXIII, he employs the rainbow to convey his vision of the Trinity. Although at first glance these two comparisons to a rainbow seem very different, they in fact operate as microcosmic and macrocosmic parallels. Bruno Nardi has brought to the attention of scholars the echo of the Trinity in Dante's description (drawn from Augustinian psychology) of the triune soul: memory, intelligence and will. Thus, we have the individual trinity in Purgatory XXV and the universal Trinity in Paradiso XXXIII; Dante conveys each by comparison to a rainbow.

John Freccero's study of Dante's rhyme form, the terza rima, which he sees as one Dantean mode of expressing the trinity, dovetails evocatively with the microcosmic and macrocosmic trinity of Purgatorio XXV and Paradiso XXXIII, especially since Freccero sees in the terza rima form an overlap of beginning and end:

I should like to stress [...] the reconciliation of motion that terza rima implies: a forward motion, closed off with a recapitulation that gives to the motion its beginning and end. Any complete appearance of a rhyme ...BA BCB...incorporates at the same time a recall to the past and a promise of the future that seem to meet in the now of the central rhyme.
Thus, Freccero's insight into the *terza rima* offers further support for examining the structure of the *Commedia* as a significant overlap of beginning: the embryo in the womb who encounters God, and the end: the pilgrim who creatively journeys to heaven and encounters God. Comparable to Dante's rhyme scheme, the poem moves towards the future while at the same time it incorporates a recall to the past: hence, the divine breath of God is analogous to the "now of the central rhyme."

We can no longer regard *Purgatorio* XXV as an isolated doctrinal treatise on the generation of the embryo and creation of the soul. Canto XXV clearly has a significant relationship with the end of the poem: Dante connects the two cantos by designating the womb and the heavens as a watery space, by means of God's breath which activates the *spira/gira* rhyme, and finally, by using the image of the rainbow: to express the triune force of the immortal body arising from the individual's dead form and to express his vision of the wheeling triune Divinity. Thus Dante superimposes the primal beginning onto the ultimate end: his primary encounter with God in the womb occurs as a simultaneous parallel to his creative encounter with God at the summit of Paradise. The former leads to birth, the latter to death; both together herald his initiation into poetic time which for Dante is the vehicle to access the spirit.30

1 Vittorio Russo asserts that this scientific/philosophical canto rarely inspires interpretation. And Giuseppe Citanna notes that a doctrinal canto like *Purgatorio* XXV seems better suited to the *Paradiso.*

2 In *Purgatorio* XXV, the pilgrim asks a question to which Virgil attempts an answer and then directs the pilgrim's query to Statius. Virgil asks Statius to be the "sanator delle tue piage" (the healer of your wounds, 30). Bruno Nardi believes the term "piage" deserves critical attention:

   Vere piaghe [...] sono i dubbi tormentosi e assillanti, i dubbi che non ci danno tregua,  
   ci ossessionano e impediscono che dormiamo i nostri sonni tranquilli... (1964: 506)

Nardi interprets Dante's use of the forceful term "piage" to signal a crucial shift in his philosophical outlook prior to writing the *Commedia.* I believe that Dante's emphasis on the significance of his question and therefore Statius' response, which tells of the generation of the embryo in the womb and the infusion of the soul, marks the importance of *Purgatory* XXV for the whole of his epic poem.

3 Nardi wrote extensively on issues directly relevant to *Purgatorio* XXV in *Studi di filosofia medievale* and several years later he wrote a more condensed and focused analysis of the canto. For critics who provide summaries of Nardi's interpretation without adding anything new, see: Gabriele Rossetti, or the latest treatment of the canto, Vittorio Sermonti. Francis Fergusson wrote on *Purgatorio* XXV prior to Nardi and does not investigate the philosophical debates raised by the canto; nor does Fergusson offer any insights that contradict, or support, an initiatory reading of the canto. He anticipates in a general way poetic readings of the canto which...
are treated in greater depth by critics such as Padoan and Russo.

Edward Moore sees in almost every line of Statius' discourse on the embryo: "a reproduction of some statement or theory of Aristotle in the De Gen. Anim." (136). If interested in Dante's use of Aristotle, see Moore. I will focus ultimately on how Dante alters his discourse on the embryo from the Convivio to the Commedia. The general ideas are the same; however, I find subtle differences which I believe significant.

Barolini takes the embryonic codes to poetry, see Teodolinda Barolini. Barolini takes the embryonic codes from a literary discussion in the De vulgari eloquentia and explores how they relate to and comment on Dante's portrayal of poetry and poets in the Commedia (1984: 186-187).

The term "fante" is an unusual term for child; taken from the Latin verb fari, it means parlante (speaker); see Sapegno. Dante's decision to use fante for child is significant and thus I will return to examine the implications later on.

I have taken the term code from the work of Michael Riffaterre who uses the term to indicate that the vocabulary has been organized in such a way that it contributes to a category. A string of swear words would thus be in the "profanity code." Although in the imagery that I discuss there is usually only one reference---as opposed to an accumulation of terms---I nonetheless find the idea expressed by "code" best suits my purposes since the vocabulary chosen by Dante produces a series of codes which are related to one another, indicating development.

In Christ's exchange with Nicodemus, we discover exactly this overlay of ascension into heaven and descent into the watery womb: Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' (John 3: 3-7) I believe Dante creatively explores the Christian paradox of "being born from above"; hence, he superimposes an ascent into heaven, upon, a descent by a man "having grown old" into his mother's womb in order to be reborn in the spirit. Jesus responds to Nicodemus with a baptismal allusion, "being born of water and Spirit", and Dante overlays the return to the womb with baptismal typology which we will examine further along.

In reference to the Convivio and the Commedia, V. Russo and B. Nardi find the generation of the embryo and creation of the soul treated in slightly different, but essentially complementary ways. Theologically, I fully agree; yet in terms of Dante's poetics, there is the telling addition of water imagery in the Commedia which I find has far-reaching implications. See Convivio III, ii, 10-17, as well as, III, iii, 9-10.

In Umberto Bosco and Giovanni Reggio's edition of the Purgatorio, the editors replace fungo with spungo and explain their choice as follows:

spungo marino: il Petrocchi (1 208-210) spiega la ragione della scelta della lezione spungo (spunga) invece della più generica fungo, che si trova nelle altre edizioni.
La lezione a testo conferma ciò che già aveva asserito il Nardi che, pur leggendo fungo marino, intendeva la spunga. Comunque il senso non muta molto; si tratta sempre di organismi inferiori, tra il vegetale e l'animale (n. 56).

Patrick Boyd also alters "fungo" to the masculine form (if one exists) of "spunga" in his quotation of the embryo passage. And Giuseppe Citanna explains that natural science would use the term "medusa" in place of Dante's odd choice of "fungo marino" (940).

14 The most interesting appearance of the spira gir rhyme occurs at the end of the Inferno. Dante provides a fitting infernal inversion of the divine breath which sets the human soul and the universe revolving. Satan's wings do not generate the spira; they are moved by it, as the wind moves the slats of a windmill (Inf. XXXIV, 4-7).

15 Aquinas tells the Dantean pilgrim the identity of the shining souls that surround him. The first is St Albert and the last is Siger; since the souls have formed a circle, St Thomas, St Albert and Siger shine together in a row (Par. X,97-138).

16 John Freccero (1986: 133).

17 According to Eliade, a ritual version of new birth involves an initiatory return to "the embryonic state." The return to the fetal state abolishes biological existence. This theme of going back, Eliade interprets as a desire to erase: "historical duration that has already elapsed and to begin a new life, with all its possibilities intact"(55).


25 Etienne Gilson (134).

26 The rainbow appears as part of a list of natural events which do not occur on Mount Purgatory (Purg. XXI, 50). When the Dantean pilgrim watches the pageant in the terrestrial paradise, he compares the flaming candles to a solar and lunar rainbow (Purg. XXIX, 78). In both instances the emphasis is on rainbows as striking weather phenomena.

27 As Citanna rather amusingly puts it: Dante's notions of shades in the afterworld "non si trova certo in S. Tommaso." And according to Etienne Gilson:

"There are no shades of Hades in the world of Aristotle or in that of Thomas Aquinas. The new cycle of operations imagined by Dante has for its object to account for the existence of such shades in his own poetic universe. On this precise point, Dante is entirely on his own; he will make Aristotle answer a question which the Philosopher had never asked (130)."


29 John Freccero (1986: 262).

30 According to Mircea Eliade, in the wide range of religious documents from different ages and cultures which he compares: "one common characteristic emerges---access to the sacred and to the spirit is always figured as an embryonic gestation and a new birth"(58). Dante's ritual occurs within his textual production; nonetheless, he accesses the sacred and the spirit through his textual death and rebirth.
II Poetics of Initiation

In the last chapter, we designated *Purgatory XXV* as the pivotal canto for initiatory dynamics in the *Divine Comedy*. A recognition of the significance of the generation of the embryo changes the way in which we read Dante's epic poem: for the *Commedia* is structured so that the final death-like scene of encountering his Creator serves simultaneously to refer the reader back to the primal scene in the womb when the Creator breathed in the self-reflecting soul. In this next chapter, it will become apparent that the initiatory thematics are dynamic in the sense of transforming the pilgrim into the poet, the reader into the writer. Reading Dante's poem means potentially undergoing a transformation. The reader is Dante as well as every reader who joins him on his pilgrimage through the afterworld. Thus, *Purgatory XXV* is not only an important canto for demonstrating that the death at the end of the poem is also a return to the womb, the embryo canto also plays a key role in Dante's poetics. The initiatory dynamic of *Purgatory XXV* establishes the *Divine Comedy* as a write of passage for the simultaneous death and return to the womb fuels the poetic project of its author. In the following chapter, we will look at the way in which the discourse on the embryo works as a fundamental component of Dantean poetics.

* * *

The overlap of death and birth forms the core of initiation ceremonies: often the novice is enclosed in a dark, cave-like space, both womb and tomb, from this space, the initiate emerges into the light like a new-born child.¹ This ritual enactment of initiation echoes closely a rebirth moment in the *Commedia* discussed by Robert Hollander who writes: "The topic of the first canto of *Purgatorio* is rebirth. Dante has issued forth from the womb of Hell to be reborn in salvation."² We encounter another key rebirth moment in the poem near the end of *Purgatory* when the pilgrim arrives in the earthly paradise. The Dantine pilgrim emerges from his baptismal plunge in the river Eunoe and the poet describes the event according to the thematics of rebirth:
Io ritornai dalla santissima onda rifatto si come piante
novelle rinovellate di novella fronda, puro e disposto
a salire alle stelle.

(From the most holy waters I came forth again remade, even as new plants
renewed with new leaves, pure and ready to mount to the stars, *Purg. XXXIII*,
142-145)

These rebirth moments in the poem act as rehearsals for the ultimate transformative
experience. Matilda's dunking of the pilgrim in the river Eunoe seems particularly apt since it
involves a plunge into a watery realm which foreshadows the aquatic realm of *Paradiso*. For
readers attuned to the embryo canto, these rebirth moments function as ideal anticipations
since they involve the first stage of the embryo's gestation: the plant phase. In the Purgatorial
scene that Robert Hollander identifies, the image of rebirth appears most notably in the
regeneration of the rush which Virgil plucks to gird the pilgrim: "O marvel! for as was the
lowly plant he chose such did it spring up again immediately in the place where he had

Significant for my purposes, the rush with which Virgil girds the Dantean pilgrim and which
when returned to the water *si rinacque* is specified as an aquatic plant (100-105). Amilcare
Iannucci argues that this scene is not only charged with spiritual rebirth, it also enacts a
poetic rebirth. He calls it a "poetic resurrection" and quotes the resonant line: "qui la morta
poesi resurga" (here let dead poetry rise again, 7). Iannucci discusses the way in which
poetry is reborn as music and as rhetoric; I will add to his interpretation by suggesting that
the rebirth of poetry also requires a return to the womb and thus the recollection of the primal
moment when one experiences the birth of the soul.

In his final symbolic baptism in *Paradiso* where he bathes his eyes in the river of
light which then allows him to see the river transform into the celestial rose (*Par. XXX*, 88-
Dante recalls both of the previous purgatorial rebirth moments. These rebirth scenes open and conclude the Purgatorial cantica. *Purgatory* commences with the renewal of a watery plant and it ends with the pilgrim himself, as he emerges from the water, compared to the renewal of a plant in spring. In *Paradiso*, Dante describes the transforming of the river into a rose in a striking way for an initiatory reading of the poem: "and no sooner did the eaves of my eyelids drink of it than it seemed to me out of its length to have become round" (88-90).

The dual image of rebirth---water and plant---that we have seen surface at nodal moments in the *Commedia*, becomes in its final form a fitting image of initiatory narrative: the linear reading of the poem, the length, suddenly becomes circular when we conclude with the *spira* of God and recognize that it circles the pilgrim back to his first experience of divine *spira* in the womb. The *lunghezza* of the poem *divenuta tonda*.

As further support, for comparing the above description, of the river changing into the rose, to the way in which the reader experiences the poem---where the linear narrative transforms into a circular narrative---Dante chooses, in this scene fraught with rebirth imagery, to liken himself to an infant. In these nodal moments, Dante draws the reader's attention to the time before one becomes an infant. In other words, Dante has the reader symbolically return to the womb.

In the rebirth scene in the *Paradiso*, Beatrice tells the pilgrim that the plant life, the flowers, he sees around the river "son di lor vero umbriferi prefazii" (are shadowy images of their truth). Not until the pilgrim drinks from the celestial river will he see their true forms; and Dante describes his desire for the truth in a telling manner:

Non è fantin che si subito rua col volto verso il latte,  
se si svegli molto tardato dall'usanza sua, come fec'io,  
per far migliori spigli ancor delli occhi, chinandomi  
all'onda che si deriva perché vi s'immegli;
(No infant, waking long after its hour, throws itself so instantly with its face to the milk, as I, to make still better mirrors of my eyes, bent down to the water that flows forth for our perfecting, Par. XXX, 82-87)

We noted earlier how Dante uses the image of a baby at the breast, (the fante from the embryo canto of which we here have an echo in fantin) in the final canto of Paradiso, to express how his speech will come short of what he experienced in his vision of Divinity. In the passage quoted above, we have another foreshadowing of the pilgrim passing beyond the earliest moment of his life—a nursing infant—to a prior moment which he configures as a symbolic return to the womb. In the final anticipatory image of rebirth, we discover once again the same components Robert Hollander noted at the outset of Purgatory and those that we identified at the close of Purgatory: water and plants which translate into immersion in water (return to the watery womb) and the earliest phase of the development of the embryo, the plant stage. Another vital instance of this rebirth motif of water and plant takes place in the Inferno and thus functions as another anticipation of the rebirth dynamics of Purgatory XXV.

In the first canto of the Inferno, the pilgrim has just barely escaped from a dangerous body of water:

Allor fu la paura un poco queta che nel lago del cor m'era durata la notte ch' i' passai con tanta pieta.
E come quei che con lena affannata uscito fuor del pelago alla riva si volge all'acqua perigliosa e guata

(Then the fear was quieted a little which had continued in the lake of my heart during the night I had spent so piteously; and as he who with labouring breath has escaped from the deep to the shore turns to the perilous waters and gazes, 19-24)

In the next canto, following this description of an anti-baptism, an escape from a watery death, Dante describes his new found courage to journey into hell according to plant code. Virgil tells the cowardly pilgrim that Beatrice has set in motion his salvation and requires the journey into the afterworld. Dante describes the pilgrim's response: "As little flowers, bent
down and closed with the chill of night, when the sun brightens them stand all open on their stems, such I became" *(Inf. II, 127-130)*

Quali i fiorretti, dal notturno gelo chinati e chiusi, poi che 'l sol li 'mbianca si drizzan tutti aperti in loro stelo, tal mi fec' io

In the *Inferno*, due to the images being placed in two cantos, the rebirth imagery involving water code and plant code is more difficult to connect. However, a close reading of the above passage, which details the pilgrim's escape from a dangerous body of water, will immediately reveal its connection to our final measure of rebirth dynamics, *Purgatory* XXV.

Three key phrases must be noted in this passage. The first telling phrase is "a riva" which, as we noted in the first chapter, Dante uses in the embryo canto. At that time I maintained that, on one level, Dante uses the phrase "a riva" in order to suggest the womb as a watery place. In *Purgatory* XXV, Dante explicitly makes a contrast between the human embryo which is "in via" and a plant's embryo which would have already reached the shore of its development: the plant embryo would thus already be "a riva." Dante's use of "a riva" serves to define how the other rebirth moments operate within the poem.

Throughout the *Commedia*, the pilgrim is "in via." At certain stages in the poem, he attains a partial goal; he reaches the shore, the *riva* of a particular phase. Nevertheless, the pilgrim is still *in via*. The poet expresses these climactic moments with images of rebirth: the pilgrim escapes the deep waters of a dark night of the soul which threaten to destroy him (*Inf.* I); the pilgrim travels successfully through hell and emerges into the light of Mount Purgatory (*Purg.* I); the pilgrim concludes his penitential journey and prepares to ascend to heaven (*Purg.* XXXIII); and finally, the pilgrim purifies his eyes in order to see the celestial rose (*Par.* XXX). All of these moments combine the contradictory terms *in via* and *a riva*: the pilgrim reaches the various shores of his development while he is still *en route* towards the truly climactic moment at the end of the poem when he will encounter God, thus dying and being born in one remarkable instant. For the attainment of each stage, the poet uses water and plant imagery. The floral and aquatic codes describe two of the early
developmental phases of the embryo, and yet they also at key moments describe the narrative development of the pilgrim through the text: the pilgrim is on one level a riva (expressed by rebirth imagery); yet he must continue his journey and his development, thus he is still a via.

Another striking phrase in the passage cited from the Inferno, where the pilgrim feels as if he had just escaped drowning, is "lago del cor." Although critics are aware that this expression comes from Aristotle's biological explanation of the embryo's gestation, the source for Statius' discourse on the embryo, I have yet to come across anyone who connects the term with its appearance in the opening passage of the Inferno. During his discourse on the embryo, Statius tells the pilgrim that there are two types of blood: one is like food in the veins, the other "prende nel core a tutte membra umane/ virtute informativa" (takes in the heart informing power for all the bodily members, 40-41). The readers in Dante's time, who were familiar with Aristotle or his commentators, would have immediately recognized the reference to the "lago del cuore," where the special blood, filled with informative power, is stored before it descends into the male genitals and in the sexual act impregnates the female and generates the human embryo. Dante's use of "lago del cor" in the opening of the Inferno, to describe the realm in which his soul flounders, has startling implications when the poem is read as initiatory.

Dante draws on the actual physical site of new life---the lake of the heart where the body stores one's creative blood---to illustrate how his potential for a renewed textual life, a rebirth, is desperately threatened. The disturbed "lago del cor" of Inferno reappears as the Aristotelian lago del cuore in Statius' discourse which contains the hope that new life may occur. By the end of the poem, the fulfillment of the generation of the embryo takes place for Dante encounters God at the height of Paradiso which corresponds to the human embryo's meeting with God in the womb: both result in new life.

The third phrase from the opening of Inferno I which is relevant to Purgatorio XXV and thus Dantean poetics is "con lena affannata" (with labouring breath). The verb affannare means literally "to leave breathless." Not only does breath signify the spira of God infusing the soul, but it also acts as the vital force behind Dante's poetry. In the crisis at the beginning of the Comedy, we find the pilgrim breathless: not only is his soul in jeopardy, but also his
In chapter one, we focused on the significance of God's breath which infuses a soul into the embryo in *Purgatory* XXV and revolves as a rainbow-like Trinity in *Paradiso* XXXIII. We remarked on how the *spira* of God sets in motion the triune soul of man which *sè in sè rigira* while it also sets revolving the whole universe which *girando sè sovrà sua unitate*. We will now investigate the way in which Dante renders this relationship between microcosmic soul and macrocosmic universe more complex so that his poem also serves as a microcosm of the life of the individual. At the opening of the poem, the pilgrim finds himself frantically out of breath; yet it is not until the canto before *Purgatorio* XXV where we learn that *spira* is the cornerstone of Dante's poetics. Thus, in the context of Dante's definition of his poetics as revolving around divine breath, the phrase "con lena affannata" must be re-read.

In *Purgatorio* XXIV, just before hearing Statius' discourse on the development of the embryo and creation of the soul, the pilgrim exchanges some ideas about poetry with Bonagiunta, a lyric poet who serves to represent the *old school* as compared to *le nove rime* (the new rhymes) of Dante. Dante tells Bonagiunta: "I am one who, when love breathes in me, take note, and in that manner which he dictates within go on to set it forth"(52-54).

>t' mi son un che, quando Amor mi spira, noto, e a quel modo ch'è' ditta dentro vo significando.

According to the pilgrim, Love breathes into him and he produces poetry; this of course anticipates the next canto where God breathes into the embryo a soul. Most *dantisti* ignore the embryo canto in their commentaries on *Purgatorio* XXIV. Yet a few critics have recognized the echo of *spira* from one canto to the next which they interpret as Dante presenting his poetic process as comparable to God's creative act in infusing the embryo with a soul.

Most critics working on Dante's poetics skip the doctrinal embryo canto, since it does not appear to belong to the sequence of purgatorial cantos dealing with poetry. Critics who do not deal with the parallel between the *spira* of Dante's poetics and the *spira* with which God
infuses a soul tend to translate Love's breath as Love's inspiration. Thus, Teodolinda Barolini translates the pivotal terzina as "I am one who takes note when Love inspires me" which clearly muffles any echo between the spira of Purgatory XXIV and Purgatory XXV. When examining Dante's exchange with Bonagiunta, Barolini aptly identifies subtle verbal parallels between the twenty-fourth and twenty-sixth Purgatorial cantos; yet she does not even mention the divergent, but I would argue crucial, embryo canto that bridges them.⁹

In their respective readings of Purgatorio XXV, Giorgio Padoan and Vittorio Russo, distinguish themselves from other critics by addressing the embryo canto in terms of the poetic discussion which surrounds it. However, neither critic examines the parallel between the divine spira which becomes poetry in Purgatory XXIV and the divine spira which infuses the soul in Purgatory XXV. Recognizing his approach as an anomaly, Giuseppe Mazzotta treats the embryo canto as a significant contributing force to the sequence of purgatorical cantos which deal with poetry. Mazzotta integrates Purgatory XXV into the poetic discussion and maintains:

It is within this context that we have to see the poetic act as fundamentally analogous to the Incarnation. Like the Incarnate Word, which is its model, this human word is the vehicle to God. Dante, in effect, characteristically expands the metaphor of his journey as Exodus into a verbal cosmos.¹⁰

Building on the work of Mazzotta, R. L. Martinez believes that Bonagiunta's reaction to Dante's definition of poetry results from his recognition of "the pilgrim's resemblance to the Creator" due to the fundamental connection between the breath that becomes Dante's poetry and the breath that becomes the soul.¹¹ For me, the resonant phrase in Mazzotta's reading is the idea of Dante's "journey as Exodus into a verbal cosmos." Let me put Mazzotta's idea into different terms: the initiation that occurs in the Divine Comedy involves the death of the literary pilgrim, the reader, and the birth of the poet, the writer of the Commedia. As Martinez boldly states, for Dante to be the poet means he will create in analogous ways to his Creator. Dante evokes God's cosmos in order to create a verbal cosmos; the realm to which Dante strives is a textual one.

The significance of Dante defining his poetic process as the result of a divine infusion
of breath renders the initiatory pattern we have examined: death/ return to the womb/ rebirth, as fundamental to his literary project. The pilgrim tells Bonagiunta that he is aware of God's breath which he records as poetry. Thus Dante anticipates in Purgatory XXIV the description of the primal moment when one encounters God in the womb and first experiences His breath. Incredibly, Dante tells Bonagiunta that as a mature man he experiences that divine breath known to all in the womb and he translates that spira into poetry. However, the pilgrim does not actually say "God" when speaking to Bonagiunta; instead he uses the evocative term Amor.

To read God in the figure Love does not pose any theological difficulties. In Dante's Poets, Teodolinda Barolini establishes the telling connection between Amor and God. Although not interested in connecting the spira from the respective cantos, Barolini notes the important reference to Paradiso X which serves to further unite this canto with Purgatorio XXIV and thus Purgatorio XXV:

as Dante specifies in Paradiso X, speaking of "quella materia ond' io son fatto scriba" (that matter of which I am made the scribe"[27]), he is God's secretary, taking down reality as dictation. The "dittator" of Purgatorio XXIV, 59 ---Amor--- is therefore an analogue, within the lyric and amatory sphere, of the other dittator---God, also Amor---within the poem's overall structure.13

According to Barolini's insight, Amor and God are not only interchangeable in poetic terms, but Dante specifically encourages the reader to hear in Paradiso X an echo of his poetic process in Purgatorio XXIV. Barolini's placement of the poetic process of Purgatorio XXIV in the context of Paradiso X furthers unwittingly, but nonetheless significantly, the connection I have sought to align between the divine spira the poet translates into poetry and the divine spira that transforms the embryo into a human soul. Martinez would concur.

Just before the terzina in Paradiso X to which Barolini refers, there appears a key word for the embryo canto: "lieto" (delight):

s'esser vuoi lieto assai prima che stanco. Messo t'ho
In Purgatorio XXV, the term "lieto" (delight) resonates because it is the uniquely emotive term in Statius' philosophical, theological discourse on the generation of the embryo and the creation of the soul. When the embryo has reached the zenith of its natural development, God turns to the newly generated embryo with "lieto," with delight, and at that moment breathes into it a soul. (Purg. XXV, 70) Once again Paradiso X contains the necessary interpretive apparatus for understanding the significant role of the embryo canto in the plan of the Commedia.

As Martinez and Barolini have demonstrated, Dante does not explicitly conflate God and the allegorical figure of Amor until Paradiso X. In chapter one, we examined the crucial role played by Paradiso X for an interpretation of the embryo canto, since in this canto Dante brings together the debators of the generation of the embryo and creation of the soul. We remarked that Paradiso X opens with the divine breath of God which acts as the pivot around which circle the embryonic codes. Moreover, we saw that Paradiso X serves to link the embryo canto and the final canto of the Commedia by means of the image of the Trinity and the vital spira/gira rhyme. Now we discover that in order to make the connection between the Amor mi spira of Purgatorio XXIV and lo motor primo spira spirito novo of Purgatorio XXV, we depend once again on the clinching verses that open Paradiso X: "Guardando nel suo Figlio con l'Amore/ che l'uno e l'altro eternalmente spira" (Looking on His Son with the Love which the One and the Other eternally breathe forth). The spira of Love and the spira of the Prime Mover appear essentially related. The relationship between the two is brought to our attention in Paradiso X which, as we have already seen, works as a miniature version of the poem: the embryonic codes progress toward the divine breath and the embryonic codes travel back to the divine breath. We therefore have a condensed structure of the epic poem where the pilgrim travels towards symbolic death, occurring when he encounters God, which
is superimposed upon his journey back, to his first meeting with God in the womb. Drawing on the terms of ritual initiation, the overlay of death and return to the womb signal rebirth. In *Purgatorio* XXIV the pilgrim tells Bonagiunta that his poetry results from the *spira* of Amor. In *Purgatorio* XXV the pilgrim learns that God's *spira* created his soul in the womb. In *Paradiso* X these two instances of divine breath are brought together: in initiatory terms, what does this tell us about Dante's poetic process?

Bonagiunta identifies the pilgrim by quoting a line of his poetry from the *Vita Nuova*. And the structural relationship between *Purgatory* XXIV and *Purgatory* XXV discovers a precedent in the *Convivio*. Hence, for those seeking a response to the above query, a return to former Dantean texts will provide insight into how the poet seeks to relate the generation of the embryo and creation of the soul to the poetic process of his epic the *Commedia*.

When Bonagiunta meets Dante he asks: "But tell me if I see here him that brought forth the new rhymes, beginning with 'Ladies that have intelligence of love.'" *(Purg. XXIV. 49-51)*

Ma di s' i' veggio qui colui che fore trasse le nove rime, cominciando "Donne ch' avete intelletto d'amore."

The verse that Bonagiunta quotes is taken from a *canzone* in Dante's *Vita Nuova*. As critics have noted, this verse has particular resonance in the *Vita Nuova* since it comes to the poet without his intellectual intervention: while walking outside, he feels a strong urge to write poetry:

Allora dico che la mia lingua parlò quasi come per se stessa mossa, e disse: *Donne ch'avete intelletto d'amore.*
Queste parole io ripuosi ne la mente con grande letizia, pensando di prenderle per mio cominciamento;

(Then my tongue spoke, almost as though moved of its own accord, and said: 'Ladies who know by insight what love is.' With great joy I stored these words away in my mind, intending to use them as an opening for my rhyme.)

The almost miraculous occurrence of this poetic experience contrasts sharply with the poetic
process Dante later chronicles in the Convivio. Teodolinda Barolini provides a typically astute treatment of Dante's poetic experience in the writing of "Donne ch'avete."

Significantly for my purposes, she describes Dante's poetic process in terms of birth:

The privileged status of the first poem written in the new style is immediately apparent. Only on this occasion does Dante chronicle the birth of a poem, a birth that is described as a quasi-miraculous event, a creation *ex nihilo.*

Dante's description of his creative process in the *Vita Nuova* anticipates the process of his poetic project which is expressed obliquely in the generation of the embryo and creation of the soul. According to Barolini, the verse "Donne ch'avete," is a creation *ex nihilo*; in other words, it parallels the divine breath of God infusing a soul. In the creation of the soul, God operates directly, *sanza mezzo.* In the generation of the embryo, nature produces the embryo indirectly, *con mezzo,* in anticipation of God's breath. The poet generates a poem *con mezzo,* yet he receives a divine verse *sanza mezzo* which he stores in his memory and around which he generates the poem "Donne ch'avete intelletto d'amore." The writing of the *Commedia* is comparable: the embryonic self experiences God's infusion of breath which births within him a soul. Around this fundamental encounter with the Creator, Dante generates an epic poem.

As documented in his epic, the divine verse is the breath of God which he stores in his memory. And around this divine verse he generates the *Commedia.* However, there is an important distinction between the poetic process documented in the *Vita Nuova,* and the one that compares to it in the *Divina Commedia.* The line of poetry, "Donne ch'avete" occurs to a young articulate man; however, the breath of god---likened to the breath of Amor which becomes poetry---infuses the embryo at a time before language. Dante's referral to the embryo at this stage as a "fante," a speaker paradoxically serves to remind us that the time in the womb is pre-language. The divine verse that is the centre around which Dante writes his epic poem resides in his memory, but he cannot access it for the event occurs before language. When we investigate the relationship between Dante and his textual guide Virgil in the following chapters, we will further discuss this contradiction at the heart of his epic enterprise. Dante paradoxically generates poetry in order to return to a time of pre-literate
experience.

Only three times in the Commedia does Dante quote lines from his former poetry. We have briefly looked at one instance from Purgatorio XXIV: "Donne ch'avete." The other two auto-citations also take place in the Purgatorio and both are taken from the Convivio, the philosophical treatise that Dante began after the Vita Nuova and abandoned incomplete. Critics generally contrast these divergent poetic experiences: one taken from the Vita Nuova and dedicated to Beatrice and the others taken from the Convivio and devoted to Lady Philosophy. Robert Hollander argues that Dante's references to the two Convivial odes are negative and that Bonagiunta's quoting of "Donne ch'avete" serves as a positive contrast:

Here is a canzone [Donne ch'avete] that is not only true to Beatrice (and that is precisely what the two Convivial odes are not), but, one might argue, true to God (while the Convivial odes are not, at least when they are considered as caring more for Philosophy than Revelation).18

Hollander then turns to Beatrice's condemnation of the pilgrim in the earthly paradise where she accuses him of being seduced by sirens which Hollander and others have exposed as not only women of the flesh, but also women of the mind like Lady Philosophy from Dante's Convivio.19 When Bonagiunta identifies the pilgrim in Purgatorio XXIV by a line from a canzone in the Vita Nuova, he recalls the earlier auto-citations and thus announces a contrast in Dante's poetic process from the divine Beatrice to the philosophical Lady of the Convivio. The former a guide and the latter a siren.

One of the auto-citations from the Convivio has particular relevance for the present study: at the foot of Mount Purgatory, the pilgrim asks his friend Casella to sing him something. Casella selects one of Dante's poems from the Convivio which commences "Amor che ne la mente mi ragiona" (Purg. II, 112).20 The pilgrim makes this request of Casella because he feels so tired:

E io: ‘Se nuova legge non ti toglie memoria o uso
all'amoroso canto che mi solea quetar tutte mie voglie,
di ciò ti piaccia consolare alquanto l'anima mia, che,
con la mia persona venendo qui, è affannata tanto!'
(And I: 'If a new law does not take from you memory or practice of the songs of love which used to quiet all my longings, may it please you to refresh my soul with them for a while, which is so spent coming here with my body.' Purg. II, 106-111)

A key term becomes lost in Sinclair's rendition of these two terzine: the pilgrim requests the calming song from Casella because he is so "affannata" which, as we noted earlier, translates literally as being "breathless." In the first canto of the Inferno, the pilgrim barely escapes drowning and finds himself "affannata" (out of breath). When we consider that during the gestation of the embryo, the fundamental spiritual moment to which the pilgrim seeks to return results from the divine breath of God, and, when we consider that in the preceding canto, the pilgrim tells Bonagiunta that his poetry stems from the divine breath of God, the two occurrences of the pilgrim being "affannata" (being out of breath) surely express a spiritual and poetic crisis. In the dark wood of the soul's near-death and at the foot of Mount Purgatory lounging to the tune of his former philosophical poetry, Dante presents himself as out of breath.

Dante reinforces the potentially obscure relationship between the auto-citations and Statius' discourse on the generation of the embryo and creation of the soul by Casella's choice of verse from the Convivio. John Freccero remarks on the lack of critical consensus about Casella's choice: "The principle difficulty is that Casella is made to choose a relatively abstruse, doctrinal, and therefore inappropriate canzone." As Freccero discovers, moral canzoni such as this were not normally sung. The terms "abstruse" and "doctrinal" should point in the direction I plan to pursue: Dante has Casella sing this particular canzone from the Convivio because in that former philosophical work, it occasions a discussion of highly doctrinal and abstruse discourse on the generation of the embryo and creation of the soul.

The section on the generation of the embryo and creation of the soul differs from Purgatory XXV in two significant ways. First, there is no water code. Second, and particularly important for a discussion of poetics, in the Convivio Dante does not speak of the spira of God which infuses the soul; instead, he uses the image of light: "la divina luce, come in angelo, raggira in quella." In the Convivio, Dante imagines divine light illuminating the
mind of the poet and this divine light finds its image in the poet's relationship to Lady Philosophy. Dante thus outlines an intellectual exercise where, by means of philosophy, he believes that his mind is divinely illuminated rendering him near angelic. Conversely in the Commedia, divine breath infuses the embryo with a soul and therefore represents the primal encounter with God to which the Dantean pilgrim/poet seeks to creatively return. Dante thus describes his poetic process to Bonagiunta as taking note when God breathes into him. Moreover, the personified Amor in the Convivio offers a telling contrast with the Amor who appears in Purgatorio XXIV. In his unfinished philosophical treatise, Amor represents Lady Philosophy; whereas in discussion with Bonagiunta, Amor represents nothing less than God. 

Bonagiunta quotes a line of poetry from the Vita Nuova, "Donne ch'avete intelletto d'amore" and this verse acts as a marker for Dante's poetics in Purgatory. In contrast, Casella sings a verse from a canzone in the Convivio, "Amor che ne la mente mi ragiona" and this verse leads to a philosophical presentation on the development of the embryo. The auto-citation from the Vita Nuova describes an involuntary, bordering on the divine, experience of poetic composition; whereas the quote from the Convivio outlines a voluntary, intellectual poetic experience which elaborates the author's relationship to Philosophy. By means of this contrast in poetic experiences, we realize in Purgatorio XXIV that Dante refutes the intellectual poetic process in the Convivio and returns to the divine experience recorded in his earlier work the Vita Nuova.

When we investigate the relationship between Bonagiunta's identification of the pilgrim with a line of his poetry and Casella's lulling of the pilgrim's soul with a quote from Dante's former philosophical work, we can no longer read the embryo canto as out of place in the sequence of Purgatorial cantos on poetry. In fact, Purgatorio XXV is one of the most important cantos in understanding Dantean poetics. The poetic process of the Commedia revolves around the poet's creative return to the primal moment in the womb when God breathed into him a soul; thus he tells Bonagiunta: "'I' mi son un che, quando/ Amor mi spira, noto" (I am one who when Love breathes in me, take note.) The Dantean pilgrim ostensibly tells the poet of the old order that God inspires his poetry. However, by the end of the Commedia, the Dantean poet will enrich the meaning of this poetic statement to read: I am
one who, when in the womb, felt God's *spira* infuse me with a soul; I transformed into a *fante* who will speak with poetry to recall this primary moment of becoming.

Dante's bypassing of the more recent *Convivio* and return to the *Vita Nuova* thus represents on a small scale the more profound journey of return to the womb recounted in the *Commedia*.

Bonagiunta uses the term "nodo" (knot) to express what separates the new poetics of Dante from the poetry that Bonagiunta and others wrote. The older poet tells the pilgrim: "O brother [...] now I see the knot that held back the Notary and Guittone and me short of the sweet new style that I hear" (emphasis mine, 55-57).

'O frate, issa vegg'io' diss'elli 'il nodo che 'l Notaro e Guittone e me ritenne di qua dal dolce stil novo ch' i' odo!

Almost everyone who struggles with *Purgatory* XXIV ends up trying to interpret the meaning of Bonagiunta's *nodo*. In reference to himself, throughout the poem, Dante uses *nodo* to express how he is entangled in his inability to understand. Bonagiunta applies *nodo* to his and others' inability to experience and record the *spira* of Divine Love. The term "nodo" appears in one of the key cantos which is linked directly to the embryo canto, the final canto of the poem.

Recalling Bonagiunta's use of the word, in *Paradiso* XXXIII, the pilgrim has a vision into the *nodo*: when the pilgrim encounters God, he sees "La forma universal di questo nodo" (the universal form of this complex, 91). The *nodo* that blocks Bonagiunta and his contemporaries therefore involves, on the one hand, the *spira* of Divine Love, and on the other, a vision of the Divine *nodo* (complex) of the universe. According to an initiatory reading of the poem, these two ostensibly separate temporal poles of Dante's poetry are in fact one and the same: the poet's vision of God at the poem's conclusion is superimposed upon his primary encounter with God in the womb. Bonagiunta uses the term *nodo* to express the barrier he had as a poet to the infusion of divine breath, which in the following purgatorial canto we learn occurs in the womb transforming the embryo into a speaker. At the
end of the poem, the term *nodo* resurfaces in the pilgrim's encounter with God suggesting on another level that the two moments are simultaneous: the encounter with the joyful Maker in the womb parallels the meeting with the Creator in his poetically created heaven. In order to arrange that meeting, Dante required a verbal cosmos of his own making.

In *Purgatorio* XXIV, we learn that Bonagiunta, used as a symbolic contrast to Dante, failed to creatively recall his divine origin in the womb. Bonagiunta never experiences, thus his poetry never records, an initiatory journey back and forward to his joyful Maker. A journey which involves a simultaneous symbolic death and return to the womb in order to activate a rebirth in textual terms. The whole of the writing process of the *Commedia* involves untangling the knot that blocks one's experience of the encounter with one's Creator. Thus, the *nodo* represents an inability to creatively recollect the first encounter with God in the womb. The pilgrim's insight in *Paradiso* into the *forma universal di questo nodo* expresses an act of symbolic or ritualized recollection. The poet records and thus creatively recalls the divine breath that infused into his being a soul. His ability to poetically recollect the moment when God's *spira* infused in him a soul allows him to see into the *nodo* of God's universe.

Brian Stock pointed out that Dante refers the reader to Augustine's *Confessions* when he employs the term "nodo." In Book I, where Augustine makes the transition from the period of infancy to boyhood, he uses the term *nodo* to refer to the loosening of the *knot* of his tongue:

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nam puer coepi rogare te, auxilium et refugium meum,
et in tuam invocacionem rumpebam nodos linguae meae;
(emphasis mine)
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The realization that Dante refers the reader to the *Confessions* by the way in which he uses the term *nodo* is fundamental to understanding the embryo canto as Dante's mode of dialoguing, essentially responding, to Augustine's spiritual autobiography.

Summarized neatly by Stock:
Augustine has no recollection of his earliest infancy; yet he is convinced that infants attain self-consciousness from the time when they can remember past events.  

He then makes a crucial point about the import of Augustine's opening focus on infancy:

When we have no knowledge of events that have taken place, we have to put our trust in authorities other than ourselves (1.6.49-52).  

The authorities that serve Augustine in his knowledge of infants and his own infancy are his mother and nurses. As we will elaborate on in greater detail in the next chapter, Dante refers to Virgil as an authority, a mother, and a nurse. He describes Virgil's speech as a fonte (fountain) and Augustine refers to the fonte lactis "fountain of milk." Highly important for our discussion in the next chapter, Augustine specifies that the milk supplied to him by his mother and nurses finds its source in God. The deadly error Dante outlines via his relationship to the Virgilian intertext involves not realizing that God infuses Virgil's text with meanings beyond those recognized by its author. Thus to follow the author and not the text may be dangerous. God acts as the true source for the fonte of nourishing milk in Augustine's case and the fonte of mentoring speech in Dante's case which both flow from a physical mother/ nurse for the former and an metaphysical mother/ nurse for the latter. When we turn once again to the work of Brian Stock, we learn that for Augustine the infant at the breast referred in fact to a metaphysical exchange. Stock explains that Augustine is "speaking symbolically of the first stages of interpretive activity and of the ancient education of the soul." He notes that in De Doctrina Christiana, Augustine compares the nourishment of temporal matters to that of mother's milk. Stock's final reference is essential to Dantean poetics:

Similar comparisons are found in the Sermones ad Infantes, where the term "infants" refers to catechumens who have completed a programme of basic instruction and are to be taken before their bishop for baptism, normally at Easter.  

Many threads in the nodo of Dante's epic poem weave together with the Augustine intertext:
the temporal setting of the poem during Easter, the baptismal typology, the reference to the milk of mothers and nurses as a metaphor for the Virgilian intertext named both mother and nurse within the Commedia. And most significant, the allusions to the baby at the breast in moments of poetic impasse when according to Dante only a time before the nourishment of milk could supply the poetry necessary to convey his experience. That time to which Dante refers is the encounter in the womb when---and here is where Dante differs remarkably from Augustine---the infant becomes a fante. In other words, whereas the womb is the place beyond speech and recollection for Augustine34, for Dante it acts as the primal moment of speech and self-reflection (sè in sè rigira) and thus memory. However, it is beyond access and the only way for Dante to reach it is to undergo a literary baptism, a textual initiation. For Dante, to recover the original self, he must return via creative memory to the moment in the womb when God breathed in his soul.

The nodo that unravels in Augustine's speech is the nodo that the Dantean infant already unraveled in the womb when the breath of God transformed him into a fante. And Dante unravels this nodo each time he writes initiatory poetry for in that kind of writing, as he tells Bonagiunta, he returns and re-experiences the spira of Amor. And thus the divine nodo reappears at the end of the poem to signal that the end and the beginning are paradoxically a simultaneous moment.

At the opening of the poem, the first canto of the Inferno, the Dantean pilgrim barely escapes drowning in the lake of the heart, the Aristotelian expression for the blood source that generates the embryo. He flounders; he is breathless. Likewise, at the beginning of the Purgatorio he finds himself short of breath when he listens once again to Casella sing the siren song of Lady Philosophy. At the opening of each canticle, the pilgrim is in danger according to baptismal typology and according to the system of poetics that he shapes in the discussions with Bonagiunta and other poets. If the source of his poetry is divine breath, we must recognize the specific threat to his poetry when he feels breathless. Connected with this threat is the threat of drowning. And drowning means never reaching the various shores (riva) culminating in the ultimate shore, that of God's harbour. At the opening of the Paradiso, we once again encounter danger which involves the thematics of divine breath, but
this time there is a notable difference: the poet invokes the breath of God to infuse his poetry at whatever risk.

Readers could rightly argue that it is the pilgrim who speaks to Bonagiunta and not the poet. Thus, the significance of the divine *spira* to Dante's poetic process is perhaps overemphasized. To quell such doubts, Dante writes the invocation to Apollo at the opening of *Paradiso*. In this instance, it is clearly the poet who invokes divine breath for his poem: "Come into my breast and breath there as when you drew Marsyas from the scabbarb of his limbs" (19-21).

Entra nel petto mio, e spira tue si come quando Marsia traesti della vagina delle membre sue.

The invocation to Apollo refers the reader to the embryo canto, not only with the imagery of divine breath, but also by means of another verbal echo. In *Purgatorio* XXV, Statius says to Dante, and the emphasis is mine: *Apri alla verità che viene il petto* (Open your breast to the truth that follows, 67). At the beginning of *Paradiso*, Dante intensifies this expression when he invokes Apollo with (and again the emphasis is mine): "Entra nel petto mio, e spira tue" (Come into my breast and breathe there, 19). Again---by means of divine breath---we find woven together the canto of the embryo and the act of writing the poem.

The request for divine *spira* at the outset of *Paradiso* alludes to *Purgatory* XXV in yet another way. As Dante looks at Beatrice, who looks at the sun, he undergoes a kind of metamorphosis. His description of how the transformation feels secures my objective to demonstrate the Dantean design whereby he equates his ascent to God into a watery heaven with his descent into the watery womb of the origin of his soul:

Nel suo aspetto tal dentro mi fei, qual si fè Glauco nel gustar dell'erba che'l fè consorte in mar delli altri Dei. Transumanar significar per verba non si poria; però l'esempio basti a cui esperienza grazia serba. S'i era sol di me quel che creasti novellamente, amor che 'l ciel governi, tu 'l sai, che col tuo lume mi levasti.

(At her aspect I was changed within, as was Glaucus when he tasted of the
herb that made him one among the other gods in the sea. The passing beyond humanity cannot be set forth in words; let the example suffice, therefore, for him to whom grace reserves the experience. If I was only that part of me which you created last, you know, Love that rules the heavens, who with your light did raise me, Par. I, 67-75)

In this passage, Dante refers directly to Statius' discourse on the development of the embryo: "S'i era sol di me quel che creasti novellamente" (If I was only that part of me which you created last). In other words, "if I was only the soul which you, at the ultimate moment, breathed into my body when I was an embryo in the womb." The direct reference to Purgatorio XXV, in Dante's description of how he ascended to heaven, is crucial to acknowledge since Dante conveys his ascent to heaven as a descent into the sea. Without recognizing the relationship of Dante's ascent to God in Paradise and his descent to God in the womb, the comparison to Glaucus is baffling. Dante reminds the reader of the embryo canto at a moment in the poem when he renders an ascent to God in heaven comparable to a descent to divinity in the sea. For those who have noted how Dante constructs the womb as a watery realm, the ascent to God parallels a recollection of the meeting with the joyful Maker in the watery womb.

In the direct reference to the embryo canto, Dante calls God Amor which further confirms that the relationship we noted between Amor who breathes into the poet in Purgatorio XXIV is vitally connected to God who breathes into the embryo a soul. Dante's poetic process results from the divine spira which makes the ending of the poem recall the poet's ultimate beginning as a speaker. In initiatory terms, the death at the poem's end parallels the return to the embryonic state: what allows for the conjunction of these two profound moments is the poem.

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1 J. S. La Fontaine (64).
3 Amilcare Iannucci (1990: 34).
4 See Fernando Figurelli (49); Bruno Nardi (1960: 47).
5 Collins Italian/English Concise Dictionary. According to Il Grande Dizionario della lingua Italiana: "Affannato: [...] Pieno d'affanno [breathlessness]; che ha il respiro grosso (come dopo una corsa, una salita, uno sforzo); ansimante [ansimare: to pant, gasp for breath], stanco, stremato." The first exemplary quote is the one under scrutiny in the Inferno.
I believe it is crucial, for an understanding of the Comedy, to constantly keep in mind the inextricable connection in the Dantean epic between poetry and spirituality. To quote Picone:

Il maggiore e più alto onore che dunque Dante attribuisce a se stesso è quello di essere "poeta": da questa condizione gli deriva la forza propulsiva capace di trasportarlo oltre i confini dell'esperienza storica dell'uomo e di proiettarlo in una dimensione soprannaturale (5).

We must therefore not be surprised when with the term "affannata," Dante conveys the risk both to the pilgrim's soul and to his poetry.

For a thorough examination of the figure Bonagiunta in the context of Purgatorio XXIV, see Maria Simonelli. Richard Abrams relates the breath that becomes poetry and the breath that becomes a soul in an interesting study of the sin of gluttony. He imagines the outpouring of praise (the distinctive feature of Dante's poem Donne ch'avete) as an appropriate return of "what God's love has breathed into the soul" (32).

Singleton makes the important connection between the dynamic relationship between Love which is the love of the troubadour poets and Love which, and here he refers the reader to Richard of St. Victor. is caritas (1949: 90-93). J. A. Scott would agree with Singleton (102).

As Mazzotta has discovered, the activity here of the Trinity's spira would represent, according to Aquinas, the second procession of love, called, "spiration." Mazzotta seeks to expose the Trinitarian resonances, not only in the term "spira", but also in the term, "ditta." He refers to Aquinas in order to demonstrate the essential connection between inspiration and the Word, see esp. p. 204.

for Dante the pilgrim Casella's song carries a double burden of responsibility: a philosophical theory (the Convivio) and an aesthetic one (the DVE). Seen in this light, the canto may be palinodic in a double sense. Dante is rejecting not only the text and all that it implies, but also an aesthetic principle [...] Dante in the Commedia abandons Aquinas' notion (previously embraced) that what makes a work of art perfect is not the content but the form (1990: 42).

Iannucci's reading provides a contrast to those critics who focus on Purgatorio XXIV as Dante's attempt to define his school of poetry based on aesthetics. As will become apparent, I believe (and find support in Iannucci's article) that Dante is more interested in content than form in his discussion of poetry with Bonagiunta.

Robert Hollander also notes the echo between the "lena affannata" of Inferno I and the appearance of "affannata" in Purgatorio II. Hollander concludes: "In both cases the effect is to make him long to discontinue the journey; in the total context of the Commedia such a desire can never be praiseworthy." (1980: 94)

"Questo amore, cioè l'unimento de la mia anima con questa gentil donna, ne la quale de la divina luce assai mi si mostrava, è quello ragionatore del quale io dico; poi che da lui continui pensieri nascean, miranti e esaminanti lo valore di questa donna che spiritualmente fatta era con la mia anima una cosa" (III, ii, 9).

John Freccero identifies the "new law" to which the pilgrim refers in his request to Casella to sing him some poetry: "The 'nuova legge' (v. 106) to which Casella's song is subject is the new law, the supernatural order to which nature must ultimately give way" (1986: 192). I find Freccero's emphasis on the new law applicable to Purgatorio XXIV where we find Dante stressing the newness (le nove rime, dolce stil novo) that separates his poetry from that of Bonagiunta's and others. This newness, via the poetic experience of the divine in "Donne ch'avete," clearly signals a supernatural order. Just as the natural process of the generation of the embryo gives way to the divine infusion of breath, the poet's intellectual and aesthetic learning gives way to the poetic expression produced by the divine breath of God. What is new about Dante's poetry is that nature gives way to the supernatural order.

Marcello Cicotto believes the nodo represents "una mancata chiarezza di ispirazione" on the part of Bonagiunta and the poets named along with him (389-395). Martinez sees the nodo as the principle of the new style "a transparency of the Creator in the creature." Martinez also notes the relationship of the nodo in Purgatory XXIV to the nodo of the poem's final canto and refers the reader to Fallani who sees the final nodo as the Trinity (1983: 52-54). Mazzotta notes that Dante was aware of the connotations of Solomon's knot in his use of the term nodo; thus, the nodo carries the meaning of natural perfection sundered from the perfection of God (201-202). Barolini remarks on the anticipation of Bonagiunta's nodo in the preceding canto where the gluttons: "forse di lor dover solvendo il nodo" ([loose] the knot of their debt) XXIII, 15. Mark Musa also interprets the nodo as the sin of gluttony which holds back Bonagiunta (128). Michelangelo Picone sees Bonagiunta's nodo as "un 'nodo' ideologico irrisolto, da una carenza gnoseologica" (56).

See Inf. X, 95; Par. VII, 53; Par. XXVIII, 58.

Augustine, I, ix, 14.

Brian Stock, 23.

ibid, 24.

Brian Stock, 24.

III  Drowning in the Intertextual Baptismal Font

In the last chapter, we looked at two related moments, both at the beginning of a canticle, where the write of passage threatens the literary pilgrim with violence and pain. The Divine Comedy opens with the near-drowning of Inferno I where the poet who depends on divine breath finds himself "affannata" (breathless). The final canticle, the Paradiso opens with the invocation to Apollo where the poet requests inspirational breath that could strip him violently of himself. These key junctures, each of them linked to Purgatorio XXV, convey the initiatory experience as dangerous and perhaps painful. Dante's Ulysses, who drowns due to trespassing beyond divinely set limits, acts as another reminder of the risk involved in literary initiation. Since Dante configures his ascent to God as a plunge into the sea or as a return to the watery womb, the potential for drowning must be explored.

Dante anticipates rebirth with his use of baptismal typology (the watery rush which si rinacque; the pilgrim's dunking in the river Eunoe; and the bathing of his eye-lids in the river of light). These baptismal images are all positive. However, we noted in the prologue canto a reversal where baptism is marked negatively: the pilgrim's near-drowning at the opening of Inferno. Nonetheless, by means of the plant code which follows in Inferno II, we saw that Dante relates the pilgrim's failed baptism with the successful baptismal experiences which follow by the use of a plant code to express regeneration. When the pilgrim reaches the depths of hell, organized as malebolge (large round pockets in which sinners suffer their various torments), we discover another allusion to baptism and drowning. Dante ostensibly describes the size and shape of the malebolge as resembling that of a baptismal font:

Non mi parean men ampi né maggiori che que' che son nel mio bel San Giovanni, fatti per luogo di battezzatori; l'un delli quali, ancor non è molt'anni, rupp'io per un che dentro v'annegava: e questo sia suggel ch'ogn' uomo sganni.

(They seemed to me of a width not more or less than those that were made in my beautiful Saint John as fonts for baptism, one of which, not many years ago, I broke for one that was drowning in it---and to this I set my seal, to clear
This passage is striking in that it makes the reader think of the *malebolge* as baptismal fonts. Seven cantos later the pilgrim hears of *Ulisse* drowning and the image of the baptismal font hovers again in the reader’s mind for Dante has associated the baptismal font as a space in which one may drown. We are left to wonder when we hear of Ulysses’ tale whether or not his drowning was an inversion of baptism.

The ritual of baptism differs from the other sacraments in that it carries the opportunity for rebirth: the old man dies and the new man is born. However, what happens in textual terms when the old man dies and yet rebirth does not occur? Anthony Cassell has shown the way in which Dante uses the dual nature of baptism, "sacrament of initiation," to expose this very risk. Cassell asserts:

> It is clear [...] that no matter how they are punished, all the sinners of Dante’s *Inferno* are forever fixed in immersion in Hell, that is, in baptism’s aspect as the wrath and judgement of God.²

Dante’s Ulysses is clearly one of these infernal figures who strives towards renewal but finds himself locked into the watery descent of baptism without any hope of re-emerging from the sea as a new man. In this regard, the Ulysses canto will prove crucial to my reading of Virgil. For, like Ulysses, the tragic figure of Virgil falls into the category of failed baptisms: in the moment that Dante places Virgil in a Christian afterworld, his old pagan self dies with the knowledge of his separation from God; and yet his awareness of God does not offer him the promise of rebirth, the emerging of a new Christian self. Dante places Virgil in Limbo with the great souls of the pagan past, but also the souls of infants who died before baptism. In the following chapter, I will analyze the textual implications of the association between Ulysses and Virgil for the initiatory writer Dante.

Dante’s emotionally charged decision to place his beloved guide Virgil in Limbo has occasioned a great deal of critical response. We will begin by examining Limbo, the place where Dante sends his mentor before he ascends to encounter his Maker. Amilcare Iannucci outlines Dante’s innovative treatment of Limbo:
no one before Dante placed the virtuous pagans in Limbo and left them there [...] He imprisons the exceptional men of antiquity, or more precisely, all virtuous negative infidels, whether B.C. or A.D., in a Limbo that resembles more that of the infants than that of the adults. Their existence is not one of hopeful expectation like that of the Hebrew fathers of the *limbus patrum*, but one of expectation without hope, like that of the children of the *limbus puerorum.*

Emphasized by Iannucci, what I too want to stress in Dante's innovative treatment of Limbo is the parallel between Virgil's plight and that of unbaptized children. In Virgil's description of the shades the pilgrim sees in Limbo:

ch'ei non peccaro; e s'elli hanno mercedi, non basta, perché non ebber battesmo, ch'è porta della fede che tu credi. E se furon dinanzi al cristianesmo, non adorar debitamente a Dio: e di questi cotai son io medesmo. Per tai difetti, non per altro rio, semo perduti, e sol di tanto offesi, che sanza speme vivemo in disio.

(that they did not sin; but though they have merits it is not enough, for they had not baptism, which is the gateway of the faith you hold; and if they were before Christianity they did not worship God aright, and of these I am one. For such defects, and not for any guilt, we are lost, and only so far afflicted that without hope we live in desire, *Inf. IV*, 34-42)

What has particular resonance for an initiatory reading of the poem is the comparison between the liminal state of the pagan Virgil and the equally liminal state of unbaptized children: neither the virtuous pagans, who were born before Christ, nor the innocent infants, who died before the ritual of baptism, can attain heaven. As we have seen, baptismal motifs occur throughout the poem in relation to the embryo canto so that the ascent the poet charts towards God is simultaneously represented as a plunge into baptismal waters, a plunge which anticipates the ultimate return to the watery realm of the womb. The ritual of baptism appears to parallel a poetic ritual that Dante enacts in the writing of the *Commedia* and that involves the exclusion of the pilgrim's guide Virgil.

The poetic baptism that Dante undergoes works effectively as an act of penance. In his study of the *Libri Paenitentiales*, Cyrille Vogel reveals the different ways in which
sinners sought to return to the state of grace conferred during baptism. As an act of repentance, a person could construct a church or a monastery or perhaps donate land. According to Vogel, the important element in penitential acts was to maintain a link between the work of redemption and the sin.\(^5\) What could be more fitting penance for an erring poet than to write a penitential poem. The rite of baptism, enacted poetically, returns the poet appropriately through his poetic process to the state of first grace acquired at baptism and subsequently lost through sin.

Although innocent of any fault, Virgil cannot walk through the gateway of baptism to Dante’s faith. The pilgrim must leave him behind. Like an unbaptized child, Virgil must remain in the liminal phase, what Iannucci identifies as "that graceless period between the fall and the incarnation: in the emptiness of time."\(^6\) Iannucci convincingly shows that Dante uses the complex abandonment of Virgil in Limbo in order to dramatize this liminal phase of the world’s history---put by Iannucci into theological terms---the unredeemed section of time between Adam and Christ. In the context of the embryo canto, Iannucci’s insight obtains further support, albeit from a different perspective.

As we noted in the first chapter, Dante specifically connects the divine *spira* of the embryo canto with the *spira* of God in Genesis which breathes into the dust of Adam a soul (*Paradiso* II and *Paradiso* VII). In the second chapter, we looked at the way in which Dante draws on baptismal imagery to anticipate the final plunge into the watery womb which corresponds with the concluding image he has of God. And yet, as we have recently seen, the poet fills Limbo with unbaptized children and virtuous pagans, including his guide Virgil; all of these figures experienced the infusion of a soul in God's breath but they still cannot aspire to heaven. We may therefore conclude that to have the divine breath of God infusing one's soul in the womb is not enough for a return to God: the fall of Adam must be redeemed by Christ; original sin must be removed by the cleansing waters of the baptismal font; the individual must ritually seek to return to God. For Dante, this ritual return, comparable to the rite of baptism, the sacrament of initiation, takes the form of a write of passage. However, not only does Dante directly link the baptismal ritual with his writing of the *Commedia*, but he also draws on the Virgilian emblem of poetic achievement, the laurel crown:

\begin{quote}
Se mai continga che 'l poema sacro al quale ha posto
\end{quote}
mano e cielo e terra, si che m'ha fatto per più anni
macro, vinca la crudeltà che fuor mi serra del bello
ovile ov'io dormi' agnello, nimico ai lupi che li danno
guerra; con altra voce omai, con altro vello ritorné
poeta, ed in sul fonte del mio battesmo prenderò
'l cappello;

(If it ever come to pass that the sacred poem to which both heaven and earth
have set their hand so that it has made me lean for many years should
overcome the cruelty that bars me from the fair sheepfold where I slept as a
lamb, an enemy to the wolves that make war on it, with another voice now and
other fleece I shall return a poet and at the font of my baptism take the laurel
crown, Par. XXV, 1-9)

The line that sings in this passage, "the sacred poem to which both heaven and earth have set
their hand," suggests the way Virgil accompanies the Dantean song. Just as the embryo is
created up to a certain stage by nature, Virgil will lead the literary pilgrim to a certain
culminating phase and then the hand of heaven will intervene and infuse its spirá, its breath,
transforming the embryo Dante into the instrument of the Commedia.

If the embryo canto in Purgatory XXV sets the stage for a series of associations which
unite baptism and poetry (as the literary enactment of the return to the womb), we should not
be surprised to find in Paradiso XXV a direct statement of the fundamental tie between the
writing of the Commedia, the return to the watery womb to allow for rebirth, and the
sacrament of baptism. Dante sets up these correspondences, which work well in terms of his
literary development, but he leaves the reader with a puzzle: Virgil acts as the poetic guide to
the pilgrim, and yet, although he is the literary authority, he is left in Limbo with unbaptized
children. Is there some way in which Dante's Virgil failed to poetically return to God when
Dante brings together the rite of baptism, writing an epic poem, and attaining the laurel
crown? Virgil makes it clear that he could not discover God via the gateway of baptism;
however, Virgil's epic poem—which should crown him with laurel—undergoes ambiguous
treatment in Dante's hands. We may therefore wonder whether Dante saw some flaw in the
Aeneid which serves to explain Virgil's inability to leave Limbo and reside in heaven. To
pose the question simply at the outset: how does Virgil fit into the baptismal typology of the
Dantean textual return?

In the work of Robert Hollander, we find a partial response to this complex query.
Awakening the biblical analogues that lie dormant in the *Commedia*, Hollander sees in Virgil the *figura* of John the Baptist:

Virgil is Virgil, and Virgil is figurally related to John the Baptist, whose desert voice leads to Christ, and who performs the first baptism. What are Dante's first words in describing Virgil? "Quella fonte/che spandi di parlar si largo fiume" (lines 79-80). Virgil is a fountain which pours forth a river of speech. Is his "water" figurally related to the baptism in Jordan (Mark 1:5; John 1:28) given by John the Baptist, the first baptism which is then completed in the baptism offered by Jesus in that same river?

Although Hollander does not deal with the embryo canto, his recognition of the figural relationship between Virgil and John the Baptist contributes greatly to an initiatory reading of the poem. I believe that Virgil as a *fountain of speech* anticipates the unusual term "fante" which, as we have seen, appears in the embryo canto as the word to express the human embryo infused with a soul from God's *spira*. The echo is verbal (*fonte/fante*) and thematic (*the fountain of speech and the human embryo in the watery womb designated as a speaker*). Virgil can lead the Dantean pilgrim/poet to the ultimate stage of development, the stage of *fante*, speaker. However, regardless of how important it is to reach this stage, specifically in Dante's case as a speaker for God, it is not enough. Virgil, as the author of the *Aeneid*, can lead the Dantean pilgrim to the baptismal font, but only Beatrice---the Christ figure to Virgil's John the Baptist---can plunge him into the waters of textual rebirth. For as we have already seen, in the final canto of the poem, when Dante superimposes the encounter with God in the womb upon his vision of God at the conclusion of the *Commedia*, his "speech will come more short [...] than an infant's (a *fante*) who yet bathes his tongue at the breast" (*Par.* XXXIII, 106-108). Just as Dante must pass through the gate of baptism leaving Virgil behind, he must also, excel and yet pass beyond the stage of *fante* to which Virgil leads him. The initiatory phrase commonly used to express *passing beyond* is "crossing a threshold" and this crossing requires a rite of passage.

Whether examined theologically, ritually, or poetically, Dante's writing of his return to God---modeled on the rite of baptism---involves the abandonment of Virgil in Limbo. A poignant crux for critics, a vast amount of literature has resulted from this Dantean decision. I will explore the pilgrim's separation from Virgil in terms of literary initiation; thus rather
than dealing with Virgil, I will concentrate on the Virgilian intertext, drawing on the work of other scholars in a selective manner.

I believe that in order to understand the initiatory dynamics of the pilgrim's loss of the Virgilian intertext, we must return to the other essential pagan figure who also is held in a liminal zone, who also is structured according to a baptismal motif, Ulysses.

The pilgrim encounters Ulysses in the eighth bolgia in which false counselors are punished. Critics agree that Dante cannot have been familiar with Homer's Odysseus; nonetheless, he would have known the story of the Greek hero's return to Ithaca from various other classical and medieval sources. It is therefore surprising that Dante has Ulysses tell the story of how he and his aged crew left Ithaca in pursuit of knowledge, passed beyond the divinely set limits of the Pillars of Hercules, and were whirled to their death in sight of Mount Purgatory (Inf. XXVI, 90-142). In the late sixties, several articles appeared almost simultaneously which organized Dante's treatment of Ulysses according to a tradition in which the Greek hero and his fatal journey across the ocean "represents allegorically a kind of presumptuous philosophical pride that leads not to truth and salvation, but to Hell and damnation." Recent scholarship concurs that the presumptuous philosophical wandering of Dante produced the Convivio which ultimately becomes a shipwreck. Thus, the shipwrecked swimmer who appears in the Prologue canto, upon whom we focused due to his dangerous spiritual and poetic state of being affannata (out of breath), relates to the shipwreck of Ulysses and the abandonment of the Convivio. The relationship between the twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth Purgatorial cantos—with Dante's emphasis on divine breath becoming poetry and divine breath setting the soul in motion within the womb—further supports this interpretation since, as we have noted, these two cantos outline a rejection of the philosophical experience of poetry from the Convivio and replace it with a spiritual process of poetry developed in the Commedia and originating in the Vita Nuova. In order to proceed with a sense of how the Ulysses story in Inferno XXVI contributes to a reading of the twenty-fourth and thus twenty-fifth Purgatorial cantos, we must return to a component of the imagery not yet discussed.

Argued persuasively by Mark Musa, in Purgatorio XXIV, Bonaguinta's use of the term penne may be read as pens or wings. As Bonagiunta tells the pilgrim: "I see well how
your pens [wings] follow close behind the dictator, which assuredly did not happen with ours"(58-60).

Io veggio ben come le vostre penne di retro al dittator
sen vanno strette, che delle nostre certo non avvenne;

When we read *penne* as wings, then the contrast Bonagiunta draws between himself and Dante participates in the pattern of flight imagery that appears throughout the *Divine Comedy*. John Freccero examines the flight metaphor of the *Commedia* in order to account for the portrayal of Ulysses in Dante's epic poem. Freccero has shown that Dante's metaphor of flight activates Platonic and Neoplatonic language describing the soul's flight back to its source.\(^\text{15}\) Dante draws on the Neoplatonic notion of "return to God." Earlier I suggested that the *nodo* which holds back Bonagiunta and other poets from new Dantean poetics, involves exactly this distinction: unlike Dante, Bonagiunta did not write poetry that expressed a return flight to the primary moment when God breathed into the embryo a soul.

In Ulysses' account of his fatal ocean journey, one line has received great attention: "dei remi facemmo ali al folle volo" (we made of the oars wings for the mad flight, 124). For an initiatory reading of the poem, this line hums with import. Ulysses, who certain critics have persuasively shown to be a negative figure for Dante himself,\(^\text{16}\) participates in an inversion of the schema established by the embryo canto: the ascension to heaven superimposed upon a return to the watery womb becomes, in Ulysses' tale, an abortive flight and drowning by water. Notably, as explained by John Freccero, Ulysses' portrayal of his crew: *we made of the oars wings for the mad flight*, echoes a "classical metaphor, the *remigium alarum* used by Virgil to describe the flight of Daedalus."\(^\text{17}\) Hence, in the use of this evocative phrase, Dante has Ulysses highlight Virgil's *Aeneid*.

Scholars struggle to fit Ulysses into the "flight" pattern or the "drowning" pattern. Does Ulysses ascend or descend in Dante's poetic design? Teodolinda Barolini summarizes the critical impasse:

if at one extreme we place those who argue that Dante feels only admiration for Ulysses' voyage and that it has nothing whatever to do with his damnation [...] at the other extreme we find those who urge us not to be taken in by the hero's rhetoric, who tell us that the
poet feels nothing but scorn for his creature and to see anything else at work in the canto is to read it through romantic eyes.\textsuperscript{18}

Barolini avers that these extreme statements "rob the episode of its tension and deflate it of its energy."\textsuperscript{19} Especially with the knowledge that Dante superimposes his ascent into heaven upon a descent into the sea of the womb, I would agree with Barolini that to imagine Ulysses according to either flight or drowning takes from the episode its particular force. However, Barolini's reading seems more applicable to the Dantean pilgrim who succeeds in maintaining the tension she attributes to Ulysses: the pilgrim soars into heaven at the same time that he plunges into the waters of the womb. Whereas at least on the plot level, Ulysses does not reach heaven, he simply drowns.\textsuperscript{20} The Dantean pilgrim undergoes a baptismal experience where the old man is shed and the new man emerges. Ulysses, on the other hand, fits into the pattern of negative baptism: he loses the old man to a death by water, but the new man never emerges. In initiatory terms, Ulysses, like Virgil, never leaves the middle stage of initiation: the liminal phase.\textsuperscript{21} We therefore must ask: what do Ulysses and Virgil have in common that may help us better understand Dante's notion of literary initiation? At the beginning of Inferno XXVI, Dante signals the relevance of the Ulysses canto to Virgil by drawing the reader's attention to the relationship between follower and mentor, in other words, the Dantean pilgrim and his guide the Virgilian intertext.

Dante describes the pilgrim's vision of Ulysses in his malebolgia in terms of mentor and disciple, elder and novice:

\begin{quote}
E qual colui che si vengì con li orsi vide 'l carro
d'Elia al dipartire, quando i cavalli al cielo eri
levorsi, che nol potea si con li occhi seguire, ch'el
vedesse altro che la fiamma sola, si come nuvoletta,
in su salire;
\end{quote}

(And as he that was avenged by the bears saw the chariot of Elijah at his departure when the horses reared and rose to heaven, who could not follow it with his eyes so as to see anything but the flame alone like a little cloud mounting up, Inf. XXVI, 34-39)

Dante places the pilgrim in the position of the disciple Elisha who watches the ascent of his master Elijah.\textsuperscript{22} Therefore, the Dantean pilgrim is to Ulysses as Elisha is to Elijah.\textsuperscript{23} We have
noted throughout the paradoxical correspondence between ascent and descent, so for Elisha to watch his master's ascent works effectively as a parallel for the Dantean pilgrim hearing of Ulysses' descent. One soars into heaven; one descends into the sea. In this Infernal canto there is an obvious distinction between the rising motion of Elijah and the falling motion of Ulysses; yet, the contradictory movements occur simultaneously in the Dantean pilgrim's journey. Moreover, Dante's evocation of the Elisha-Elijah relationship, just prior to Ulysses' tale of drowning, signals the baptismal typology with which I have sought to read the failed ritual of Ulysses.

Surprisingly the fiery ascent of Elijah compares to the watery descent of Ulysses. As explored and developed thoroughly in Anthony Cassell's work, Dante has fire and water operate analogously in the ritual of baptism:

Baptism, as Christian initiation, and the basis for the justification of the individual, is present symbolically in the Commedia both in its aspect as the fire of castigation upon iniquity and as the water of the remission of sin.24

But even more significant for a baptismal reading of the Elijah comparison to Ulysses is the knowledge, once again provided by the research of Cassell, that the tale of Elijah is directly related to the sacrament of baptism.25 Cassell draws on the Old Testament gloss of St Gregory of Nyssa as a representative of a vast tradition of reading fire and water as both purifying and destructive agents resulting from Elijah's sacrifice which prefigures the sacramental rite of baptism.26 If we apply the above reading of the Elijah simile to the outset of the Ulysses canto, it buttresses my treatment of the pagan hero's fate as comparable to a failed baptism. However, even more important, Dante's use of the Elijah simile recalls the way in which baptism occurs by water or fire and thus allows us to see the connection between Ulysses and Virgil: the former acts as the figure for the threat of water—Ulysses leading his men to death by drowning—and the latter expresses the threat of fire—the pilgrim's inability to let go of Virgil by whose fire he may therefore be consumed. Both fit into the typology of failed baptisms.

By rendering Ulysses and Virgil comparable guides and by evoking the disciple/mentor relationship of Elisha to Elijah at the outset of Inferno XXVI, Dante refers his reader
to the Old Testament relationship in regards to baptism, rather than the New Testament treatment which sets up John as one who will baptize with water, while Christ will baptize with fire. And when we refer to the biblical source of his analogy, an interesting exchange occurs between the Old Testament figures. Knowing he will lose his mentor, Elisha asks to "inherit a double share" of Elijah's "spirit." The moment comes where Elisha loses his beloved guide: "Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven. Elisha kept watching and cried out, "Father, father!" A transfer of power takes place and the prophets realize: "The Spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha." When the pilgrim loses Virgil in the earthly paradise, he too calls upon Virgil as a "Father" (Purg. XXX, 50). A transfer also takes place between the author of the Aeneid and the author of the Comedy, for when the pilgrim leaves Virgil to descend back to Limbo alone, he still takes with him Virgil's epic poem and moves forward to becoming the poet of his own epic. In the case of this new mentor and disciple, like the prophets, we too could say: the Spirit of Virgil rests on Dante.

Dante uses the image of a gateway to reveal the limitations of both pagan guides: Ulysses must not pass through the gateway of the Pillars of Hercules; and in an earlier inversion of this image, we learn that Virgil cannot reach heaven because he is unable to pass through the porta della fede, the gateway of baptism. The image of the gateway is perfectly suited to such a dual significance: the passing beyond expresses Ulysses transgression of a divine rule; the inability to pass through represents the tragically helpless position of Virgil. Hence the Greek hero ends up in Dante's hell; whereas the virtuous author of the Aeneid finds himself in Limbo. When we recognize the parallels drawn by Dante between Virgil and Ulysses, the gateway beyond which the pagan leader strives appears to the reader as part of the baptismal typology. In other words, Ulysses attempts to force his way, without divine sanction, through a ritual from which he is excluded. Virgil sadly accepts his fate as the equivalent to an unbaptized child and remains in Limbo.

The most basic trait that Ulysses and Virgil share in the Commedia is their role as guides. However, in contrast to the virtuous Virgil, Ulysses is a renowned figure for false counsel. Yet Dante has him recount a tale in which he does not deceive his crew. Of all the well-known tales of Ulysses' deceit, renumerated in fact by Virgil (Inf. XXVI, 55-63), Dante chooses to fabricate a story in which Ulysses does not act as a false counselor. When Ulysses
encourages his crew to join him in a voyage beyond the Pillars of Hercules, he does not know that they will drown. Ulysses does not counsel his crew falsely. Throughout the *Commedia*, Dante places Virgil in an identical role.\(^\text{30}\)

When we entertain the notion of Virgil as an unwittingly false counselor, like Ulysses in this particular story, then the difference between Ulysses' crew who drown and the Dantean pilgrim who descends to ascend, is that the pilgrim ultimately leaves his guide behind. Virgil is put in Limbo. Perhaps then the fatal error of Ulysses' crew is that they blindly follow their leader; they reach old age, "Io e' compagni eravam vecchi e tardi" (I and my companions were old and slow, *Inf.* XXVI, 106), and they still submit their wills to that of Ulysses.

In the *Convivio*, Dante divides the individual life-span into four ages; he discusses the fundamental responsibilities of each age. The stage that applies to the elderly crew of Ulysses is the final stage when, according to Dante, the individual should apply himself to two things:

> it returns to God, as to the port from which it departed when it came to set sail on the sea of this life; and it blesses the journey it has completed, for it was direct and pleasant and untroubled by violent storm.\(^\text{31}\)

Clearly, Ulysses' elderly crew chose another path. Ulysses and his crew set forth from the port (God) rather than return to it. The crew responds to Ulysses' rhetoric which plays on their pride rather than seeking any sort of blessing for their voyage. And thus Ulysses and his crew drown in a bitter storm and tempest.

By organizing the pilgrim's perspective in this canto as the position of Elisha to Elijah, thus, disciple to master, Dante focuses the reader's attention on the relationship between Ulysses and his elderly crew which serves as a model for the pilgrim's relationship to Virgil. As we have begun to see, Dante furthers the comparability of these relationships by setting up a close association between the leaders, Virgil and Ulysses. Continuing the association between the two guides, Dante has Virgil suggest that the pilgrim remain quiet and let him do the talking with Ulysses: "for perhaps, since they were Greeks, they would disdain your speech" (73-75).

> Lascia parlare a me, ch' i' ho concetto ciò che tu vuoi; ch'ei sarebbero schivi, perché fuor greci, forse del tuo detto.
Virgil's request to do the talking serves to emphasize the connection between Virgil as a guide to the pilgrim and Ulysses as a guide to his men. The connection between the two becomes even more telling when Virgil presents himself as an epic poet and Ulysses defines himself in contrast to Virgil's epic hero, Aeneas (79-102). Amilcare Iannucci shows that the connection Dante draws between the two pagan figures depends on an epic code of style to which Dante no longer adheres: "For the Greek, what distinguishes man from animal is speech, and superiority among men is gauged by articulate speech and rationality." We have seen in the embryo canto that Dante has Statius highlight exactly this transformative moment: "But how from an animal it becomes a child (speaker) you see not yet; this is the point which once made [one] wiser than you to err" (Purg. XXV, 61-63).

Ma come d'animal divenga fante, non vedi tu ancor: quest'è tal punto, che più savio di te fè già errante

In the embryo canto, Dante modifies the Greek sense of superiority by rendering the moment in which one transforms from animal to speaker as the moment when God breathes into the embryo a soul. An understanding of why Dante draws attention to the high epic style of Ulysses and Virgil in Inferno XXVI, and then stresses this transformative moment from animal to speaker in the embryo canto, may help us to interpret the limits of Virgil in the poem.

We have allowed throughout for a dual journey: one which progresses forward through the realms of the other-world to a meeting with God; and the other voyage which leads Dante backwards through creative recollection to the primal moment when he encountered God in the womb. The journey that leads the pilgrim forward requires the development of his poetic skills to their utmost. At various points in the journey, Dante asks the reader to consider his struggle to communicate what he has experienced. As a scriba for God the importance of perfecting his literary skill cannot be overemphasized. The author of the Aeneid, Virgil, acts as the finest mentor for the poet in this capacity. When Dante first encounters Virgil in the Prologue canto, he exclaims:

O delli altri poeti onore e lume, vagliami 'l lungo studio e 'l grande amore che m'ha fatto cercar lo tuo volume. Tu se' lo mio maestro e 'l mio autore; tu se' solo colui da
cu' io tolsi lo bello stilo che m'ha fatto onore.

(O glory and light of other poets, let the long study and the great love that has made me search your volume avail me. You are my master and my author. You are he from whom alone I took the style whose beauty has brought me honour, (Inf. I, 82-87)

Yet we find the other journey, the voyage back to the womb, conveyed in different terms, according to a distinctive set of values: for the journey backwards in time, Dante appropriately resorts to "baby-talk." Virgil cannot comprehend, let alone lead the pilgrim-poet in this direction.

When I assert that the Dantean figure of Virgil could not comprehend, let alone lead the pilgrim backwards from his literary learning to baby-talk, I am thinking of the Virgil of the Middle-Ages whom Domenico Comparetti thoroughly reveals:

And where there was grammar there was also Virgil as its inseparable companion and its supreme authority. Virgil and grammar became synonyms, one may almost say, in the middle ages.

Comparetti explains the close connection between grammar and rhetoric and thus the way in which Virgil had "prominence in this branch." The Virgil of Dante's time was associated with the advancement of learning through literary skill. This medieval Virgil would not see the value of journeying in the opposite direction towards an unformed and early language of the self.

Walter Ong illuminates what the distinction between Latin and baby-talk signifies:

Learned Latin, which moved only in artificially controlled channels through the male world of the schools, was no longer anyone's mother tongue, in a quite literal sense. Although from the sixth or eighth century to the nineteenth Latin was spoken by millions of persons, it was never used by mothers cooing to their children. There was no Latin baby-talk or nursery language.

The transfer of the Dantean pilgrim from Virgil to Beatrice acts on one level as a shift from the Latin of Virgil to the Italian of a woman Dante knew as a child. This emotionally charged transfer can thus be read as a movement backwards from the mature man to the child. Moreover, Virgil is a guiding intertext; he is a literary siren seducing and influencing the
course of Dante's epic poem. In contrast, the figure Beatrice is essentially Dante's poetic creation. Significantly, when altering his course from being dependent on a guiding intertext to speaking in his own poetic voice, Dante presents his pilgrim self in liminal terms. The poet depicts his transforming state as in between child and man in the earthly paradise:

Quali i fanciulli, vergognando, muti con li occhi a terra stannosi, ascoltando e sè riconoscendo e ripentuti, tal mi stav’io; ed ella disse: 'Quando per udir se’ dolente, alza la barba, e prederai più doglia riguardando.'

(As children ashamed stand dumb with eyes on the ground, listening and acknowledging their fault and repentant, so I stood there, and she said: 'Since by hearing you are grieved, lift up your beard and you shall have grief by looking, Purg. XXXI, 64-69)

Dante depicts himself so thoroughly as a child in the traumatic early scenes in the earthly paradise that it almost comes as a shock to hear Beatrice's description of his beard, the attribute of a mature man. Almost without exception, artists draw the Dantean pilgrim as a smooth-cheeked youth, and yet the only physical attributes the poem offers us refer to his mature years and his beard.

Walter Ong continues to provide further insights into the relationship between Latin and baby-talk, emphasizing the distinct gender roles that attend each mode of expression. Ong comments on the contrast between the patrius sermo and the lingua materna:

In sum, patrius sermo means the national speech bequeathed by ancestors who held it as a kind of property, whereas lingua materna means quite simply "mother tongue," the tongue you interiorized as it came to you from your mother (or a mother figure). The contrast is between legally inherited speech and "natural" speech.37

Since Dante has already taken the innovative step of writing in Florentine dialect, his "mother tongue," he needs to use literal baby-talk to convey the backwards movement of his epic journey.

Robert Hollander has written on the apparent contradiction of "baby-talk" in the Commedia. I will apply Hollander's research and insights to the association Dante makes between Virgil and Ulysses as speakers, since it is relevant to an initiatory reading of the poem.
Although not referring to the dual journey, Hollander's following comments reveal the way in which the simultaneous voyages move in contrary directions:

What arises from Dante's subsequent discussion of grammar in *De Vulgari Eloquentia* is that *grammatica* constitutes a sort of redemption of the linguistic "Fall." At any rate, we should not have needed to create an ordered "artificial" speech had we not destroyed the natural and universal tongue breathed into us directly by God in Adam. Thus the vernacular poet has two tasks: to make his language as grammatically excellent as Latin and as "noble" as the first speech of humankind.\(^{38}\)

In the two tasks of the vernacular poet, we can trace the outline of Dante's dual journey: he needs to render his language as "grammatically excellent as Latin," hence the necessity for the Virgilian intertext as the guide to lead him forward. Whereas the other journey involves a return to the "noble" language, lost through the Fall, but, according to Dante, known in the womb before birth.\(^{39}\)

Dante must proceed forward on his journey, led by the ultimate Latinist Virgil, in order to write the poem which will have an impact on the souls of its readers; just as Virgil's *Aeneid*, according to Dante, affected the spiritual condition of its readers. Yet Dante must also travel back to the primary language of divine presence that he learned in the womb and lost with Adam's fall upon entering the historical world.

Amilcare Iannucci describes the speech of Beatrice which establishes a contrast with Virgil's eloquence and thus outlines the way Beatrice's speech moves Dante in the direction of "baby talk" or the natural language of Adam:

The love ("amor") that prompted ("mosse") Beatrice to leave her place in heaven and descend into hell is not just her own love for Dante, but God's love for mankind. Moreover, this love informs her speech: "amor... mi fa parlare." Its resemblance to the language of courtly poetry is purely external, for Beatrice, inspired directly by God, speaks the language of salvation. Only her true words ("vere parole") can eliminate Dante's doubts.\(^{40}\)

Beatrice's language of salvation was recognized, but then abandoned by Dante, during the writing of the *Vita Nuova*. Thus, his re-writing of her language, generated by *amor*, just as he
tells Bonagiunta he records the *spira of Amor*, leads the pilgrim in reverse. He returns to the poetics of the *Vita Nuova*, bypassing the *Convivio*; likewise, he bypasses the poetry of Virgil, to return to his mother tongue. Amilcare Iannucci ultimately contrasts the language of salvation, spoken by Beatrice, with a differing language, one voiced by Virgil and he concludes: "Virgil's ornate and honest words would be ineffectual were they not reinforced by Beatrice's 'vere parole'."\(^{41}\)

We have already noted how Dante relates the transformative moment, when God breathes into the embryo a soul, to the primal moment when God breathed into Adam not only his life, but also his "natural and universal tongue." And we have also seen that Dante structures his poetic return as a baptism, the sacrament which ritually repairs the damages of the Fall. Thus, on several levels---church ritual, plot, and poetics---Dante tells the story of the dual journey of the *Commedia*: an initiatory voyage towards death in a vision of God, superimposed upon a return to the womb as his first encounter with God. We may recognize the overlay of death and return to the womb at the poem's conclusion in terms of language, for, as Hollander puts it: "The ultimate moment in the poem is, stunningly and justly, babble."\(^{42}\) How suitable for Dante to use at this final moment the keyword "fante" to echo and recall the "fante" of the embryo canto.

What role does the Virgilian intertext play in this drama of the initiatory dual journey? Once again I will lean on the work of Hollander who addresses specifically the way in which Virgil participates in the Dantean poem in terms of the contradictory directions: grammatical excellence leading the pilgrim-poet one way and baby-talk taking him back along another route. Hollander finds in the *De Vulgari Eloquentia* and in the *Commedia* that Dante uses *mamma* and *babbo* as "code words" to represent inferior and childish speech. However, in the *Purgatorio* and elsewhere Dante uses the term *mamma* in a positive sense: "And when the word *mamma* re-enters the poem it does so in Statius' description of his debt to Virgil's *Aeneid.*" And yet, as Hollander notes, and we have remarked on previously: "Virgil's poem was to Dante and his time the very peak of Latinity, the very summit of *grammatica.*"\(^{43}\) Hollander interprets this contradiction in terms germane to my initiatory reading of the poem. Hollander discusses the implications of the moment when Statius refers to the *Aeneid* as his *mamma*:
what this suggests is that grammar, the regular poetic language, far from being a superior and rival to the vernacular, or at least to Dante's vernacular, is instead its beloved progenitor. Not content with making this claim a single time, Dante returns to it in his culminating praise of Virgil. The moment, perhaps the climax and certainly the turning point of the *Commedia*, has Dante, finally face to face with Beatrice, turn back to his beloved Virgil, only to find him gone (and, we surmise, returned to Limbo). Dante is, in simile, like the fearful, affected child who runs to his *mamma*.

When read in terms of the embryo canto, Virgil resembles both the father and mother who come together to produce a child; however, the embryo would remain in an animal state if God did not breath into the embryo a soul, thus transforming it from an animal to a speaker. We may therefore recognize in Virgil the role of nature which causes the First Mover to feel joy in its creative production. Nonetheless, nature must give way to divine intervention. And we see this enacted in the earthly paradise where Virgil disappears when Beatrice arrives. Significantly, the loss of Virgil in the earthly paradise contains an echoing line from the Ulysses episode. However, before I zero in on this further link between Virgil and Ulysses, I want to examine in general terms the way in which these two pagan figures fit into the initiatory pattern of the *Commedia*.

The work of Amilcare Iannucci contributes vitally to an initiatory understanding of the relationship between Ulysses and Virgil. Although Iannucci concentrates his interpretation on Ulysses, I find that his reading provides a convincing response to the question of why Dante sought to make Ulysses and Virgil comparable, albeit through a series of contrasts, as speakers and guides. According to Iannucci: "Dante rips Ulysses out of the mold of myth and plunges him into the uncertainties and irreversibility of history." Thus, in Iannucci's interpretation, the tragic fate of Dante's Ulysses depends on being pulled from the cyclic pattern of mythic time and drowning in the linear historical time of Christianity. John Freccero relates this Ulyssean temporal tragedy to Dante's depiction of Virgil:

Both history and the individual follow a circular course in the *Odyssey*, while the pathos of the Virgilian epic seems to lie in the discrepancy between the linear destiny of Rome and the cyclical turn of the seasons, to which individual men remain forever subject. Christian time shattered both circles, however, and insisted on the perfect congruence, in the
geometric sense, between history and the soul. If we substituted the more encompassing term *nature* for Iannucci and Freccero's use of *mythical time*, then we could recognize Dante's comparative treatment of Ulysses and Virgil as part of an initiatory dynamic within the *Commedia*. E. R. Curtius says of *Natura*: "She is the age-old Mother of All; father, mother, nurse, sustainer; all-wise, all-bestowing"; this description of *Natura* sounds remarkably close to the Virgil of Dante's *Commedia*.

We noted how the Virgilian intertext corresponds to *nature* when Statius describes the *Aeneid* as his *mamma*, the term that Dante will also apply to Virgil in the earthly paradise. Virgil compares to the natural mother who generates the embryo until the moment when God breathes into it a soul. Similarly, as Hollander explains, the *Aeneid* acts as the natural mother to Dante's poem; however, at a certain point, Virgil's "grammatical excellence" must fade away and allow for the "baby-talk" of the poet's return to the womb and hence his return to the language breathed into Adam prior to the Fall. One way to return to this early language is through the cleansing waters of baptism, another is by a write of passage, a literary initiation.

In his study on the bible, Northrop Frye writes about *nature* and the human need to break with her endless cycle:

> The maleness of God seems connected with the Bible's resistance to the notion of a containing cycle of fate or inevitability as the highest categories our minds can conceive. All such cycles are suggested by nature, and are contained within nature—which is why it is so easy to think of nature as Mother Nature. But as long as we remain within her cycle we are unborn embryos.

Ulysses and Virgil, as shown by the work of Iannucci and Freccero, belong to a world governed by "a containing cycle of fate" modeled on cyclical nature. Dante poetically leaves behind this pagan world which circles like the seasons and is structured by the mold of myth. When Dante breaks away from the cycle of nature, he activates initiatory dynamics.

In *Inferno* XXVI, the canto which recounts the drowning of Ulysses, we noted that Dante positions the pilgrim in the role of disciple, like Elisha. Dante draws attention to those who follow guides. In initiatory terms, Ulysses' crew, who remain in the cycle of nature, the circular voyage, parallel those who remain "unborn embryos." In contrast, Dante's *Commedia*
tells the story of his embryonic development and his rebirth into textual time. Ulysses' crew follows their leader to their death; whereas Dante abandons Virgil, ascends to heaven, and is reborn via the poem. According to Dante's plan, the elderly crew should have broken from their mentor rather than following his counsel to set off on this final fatal journey. Just as Dante must sever the bonds that tie him to Virgil if he wants to continue his journey into Paradise.

As E. R. Curtius succinctly puts it: "Man receives his birth from Natura, his rebirth from God." The embryo canto details exactly this initiatory process: the natural cycle of the man's blood impregnating the woman, within whose womb develops an embryo which passes through natural stages until the First Mover turns to the embryo with delight and infuses into it a soul. We learn in the Comedy that this model must occur at least once again during the life of an individual: the infant must undergo the ritual of baptism in order to be reborn; the poet must write a literary initiation which tells of the return journey back to the Creator.

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1 Romans 6: 3-4.
2 Anthony K. Cassell (97).
4 Intriguing for an initiatory reading, Iannucci suggests that Virgil and the other virtuous pagans remain in Dante's Limbo, along with the unbaptized infants, as infants themselves, "spiritually immature" (1984: 81). In societies that practise initiation rites, an individual who does not participate or successfully complete the initiation ritual is considered and treated from that point on as a child.
5 Cyrille Vogel, 50-53.
6 Amilcare Iannucci (1984: 84). For an insightful and comprehensive examination of how baptism figures theologically, ritually, and poetically in Dante's depiction of Limbo, within the context of the whole of the Commedia, see esp. pp. 112-128.
8 It is perhaps going too far, nevertheless intriguing, that Dante verbally corresponds so closely with Dante.
9 As Hollander puts it: "It is Beatrice, the figure of Christ, who brings Dante to salvation; it is Virgil who brings Dante to Beatrice" (1969: 261).
10 In his reading of the Limbo canto, Amilcare Iannucci reaches a similar conclusion:

The subject of the canto is neither poetry nor philosophy, but the limits of humanism when it is not illuminated by revelation. Seen from this perspective, the episode signals an unmistakable shift from the stance Dante had assumed in the Convivio. There he had sung of Lady Philosophy (Conv. II xii) and extolled intelligence and reason without acknowledging explicitly and insistently, as he does in the Commedia, Philosophy's role as handmaiden to Theology and Reason's impotence without Revelation (1984: 101).

I quote at length in order to demonstrate the multiple ways in which Dante seeks to convey his message. Once again we find the limits of the Convivio explored and contrasted with the poetic process of the Commedia. Once again Virgil must be left behind in order for the pilgrim/poet's full development, or in my terms, initiation.

I have taken this summary from Richard H. Lansing (167) who refers to the original articles written by Freccero and Thompson published respectively in Dante Studies in 1966 and 1967. Both essays have now been incorporated into books.

Richard H. Lansing believes that not only the Convivio, but also the Monarchia acts as a shipwrecked philosophical work (168).

Mark Musa (123-128). In his essay on Casella's song, Freccero reads the penne of Bonagiunta as "wings," interpreting from a different point of view than Musa, which nevertheless serves to reinforce Musa's reading of penne as wings (1986: 193-194). R. L. Martinez reads penne as wings due to Musa's influence and he goes on to recognize how Bonagiunta's reference to wings ties Purgatorio XXIV into the whole context of Purgatory where, by means of numerous references, souls strive to grow their spiritual wings for flight heavenward. Martinez includes Ulysses in his brief survey of Purgatorial wing metaphors (1983: 61-63). For a more detailed and developed integration of Ulysses in the poem's "metaphorization of desire as flight," see Teodolinda Barolini (1992: 48-49). For an extensive treatment of flight imagery throughout the poem, particularly interesting due to his constant references to the biblical analogues, see Hugh Shankland (1975: 704-785).


See David Thompson 37; John Freccero (1986: 139); Robert Hollander (1969: 119); Teodolinda Barolini (1992: 49)


Ibid, 50.

I make the distinction about Ulysses' position in hell on the plot level, because, as is well known and puzzled over by dantisti, Ulysses re-surfaces, by name, in the Purgatorio (XIX, 22-24) and in Paradiso (XXVII, 79-83). Moreover, he is "invoked through surrogate figures like Phaeton and Icarus; through semantic tags, like folle, that Dante has taken care to associate with him; and most encompassingly, through Ulyssesan flight imagery," Teodolinda Barolini (1992: 51).

Arnold Van Gennep noted that all rites of passage organize themselves according to a tripartite schema: "rites de séparation, rites de marge, et rites d'agrégation" or "les rites préliminaires, liminaires, postliminaires"(14).

Robert Hollander also focuses on the Elijah-Elisha story; however, he does not see the mentor-disciple relationship as having a bearing on Dante's relationship to Virgil (1969: 117)

For an examination of the figure of Elijah as treated by biblical commentators, in particular Augustine, see C. H. Grandgent. Richard H. Lansing ultimately focuses on the connection between Elijah and Ulysses. He reviews the work of other critics: Goldstein who believes that the story of Elijah as good counselor acts as an ironic opening for the story of an evil counselor, Ulysses; and Philip Damon who follows this ironic reading by means of the apt contrast between the rising sun image of Elijah and the setting sun image used for Ulysses. Lansing takes these readings in a different direction in order to demonstrate the link between Elijah-Ulysses and Dante's disillusion with Philosophy; thus he concludes: "Lady Philosophy deceived Dante just as Ulysses, the greatest deceiver of them all, deceives him, by appearing as Elijah"(176). The difficulty I have with this interpretation is that Dante has Ulysses recount a story that does not involve false counseling. The fact that Dante presents a tale in which Ulysses does not deceive his crew is significant for this essay and I will thus treat this Dantean twist in the Ulysses' tradition at length further on.

Anthony K. Cassell (13).

Ibid (73).

Ibid (73).

I think Dante activates the Elijah analogue in order to direct the reader away from seeing the baptism by fire, as Virgil in the role of Christ. By his configuration of the malebolge as baptismal fonts, coupled with the evocation of Elijah in a traditional role of baptism by fire, Dante effectively diverts attention away from the well-known words of John the Baptist: "I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming [...] He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire" (Luke 3: 15).

2 Kings 2:9, 15.
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 (1984: 214).

I believe the Ulysses canto operates as a study of the paradoxical "truthful-lie" and thus it comments on Dante's ambiguous portrayal of his guide Virgil.

The *Convivio* (IV, xxviii, 2).

What I refer to briefly, solely to offer an example of the way in which Dante encourages the reader to compare Ulysses and Virgil, has been fully explored by John Freccero. He convincingly explains that the reason Virgil speaks to Ulysses is because they share "a common style, the high style of ancient epic" (1986: 142). Teodolinda Barolini also focuses on the exchange between Virgil and Ulysses. She provides an important contrast to the exchange which follows between the Dantean pilgrim and Guido da Montefeltro (1984: 228-229).

To examine some of the many ways in which Dante places Ulysses and Aeneas under the reader's comparative gaze, see John Freccero (1986: 143 ff.); Giorgio Padoan (1977: 170-173); Robert Hollander (1969: 118 ff.) and David Thompson (53-61).


Domenico Comparetti (77 and 133).

Walter Ong (1967: 250-251).

Walter Ong (1981: 37, note 2).


Michelangelo Picone stresses the vital distinction between the two languages which lead the pilgrim in two narrative directions:

La *gramatica*, col latino che è una sua realizzazione, rende dunque possibile il recupero della dimensione umana, in accezione meramente storica, nel tempo e nello spazio. In una parola, essa è la base della stessa affermazione dell'uomo dentro l'ambiente storico in cui vive. L'applicabilità ultima della lingua naturale, invece, ci è indicata dalla sua qualità essenziale: che è quella di manifestare una presenza: la presenza divina (10).

Amilcare Iannucci (1979: 33).

Amilcare Iannucci (1979: 37).


Amilcare Iannucci (1976: 419).

John Freccero (1986: 147).

E. R. Curtius (106-107). Dante calls Virgil the "mar di tutto 'l senno"; as well as "padre" and "matre" and he has Statius call him "mamma" and "nutrice."

Northrop Frye (1982: 110) One may argue that in the earthly paradise we discover the opposite of Frye's notion of the maleness of God overcoming the endless female cycle of reproduction leading to death, in other words, culture taking over from nature. In the earthly paradise, the woman Beatrice takes over from the male Virgil. She is linked to Dante's childhood; whereas Virgil represents the more mature stage of Dante's life, where he learned from this poetic mentor the ability to write poetry. However, the exchange in the earthly paradise does not involve a simple shift from male poet to female muse; the scene is in fact fraught with liminality: Virgil becomes a mother figure; Beatrice appears within masculine terminology; she then compares
to the clearly male figure of an admiral; and finally Beatrice herself takes on the role of mother to Dantean child. The liminal phase of initiation is when transformation takes place: it is almost as if Dante seeks to express what occurs to the individual in the moments when plunged into the sacred transformative waters of the baptismal font.

49 In a study on the "dialectics of Christian typology in the Bible and Dante," Alan Charity describes the shift from the world of pagan myth to the world documented in the bible:

Israel is introduced to a realm of which primitive religion can, by its nature, take only limited cognizance: the future. The 'newness' of God's act meant a call to a new life, a new way of life, which the God of 'new things' brings about. 'Contemporaneity' brought man into encounter with God not to restore the status quo, harmony, the primaeval past which makes normality normative, but to make present to him an altogether new status, which takes him away from natural into historic existence, investing him with a new freedom and a new burden of responsibility. Contemporaneity was not, in other words, in the least an end in itself, as it was in myth, but a means to an end, the assumption of a responsibility before God and to him: to serve (56).

Charity describes the monumental shift from myth to history: from the harmonious relationship with mother nature, where contemporaneity is an end in itself, to a relationship with time where contemporaneity allows one to act now in anticipation of a spiritual future. Charity's stressing of the "newness" will ultimately prove significant, for, as we will see, one of the key terms that unite Ulysses and Virgil is "antica" (ancient). They represent the ancient pagan way that Dante learns from, but, regardless of how emotionally difficult, must leave behind.

50 E. R. Curtius (118).
IV Write of Passage

Two pagan figures serve as representative of the endless cycle of pagan time which becomes "shattered" by Christian time: Ulysses' breach of divine command leads him through the gateway of the pillars of Hercules into a negative baptism where the font is only a tomb. Virgil does not pass through the gateway of baptism and thus remains in Limbo with the unbaptized children. Yet it is Virgil who leads the pilgrim. Due in part to the guidance of Virgil, the pilgrim is reborn out of mythical time and the cycles of nature, into Christian time. Along with all other critics who work on the poem, we cannot undertake a reading of the Divine Comedy without coming to terms with the contradictory figure of Dante's Virgil. How does Virgil participate in the initiatory structure of the Commedia?

The last chapter served to set the scene for the intertextual drama that Dante plays out between himself and Virgil. The drama is an initiatory one since, as we documented in the last chapter, Dante uses baptism---the sacrament of initiation---to render Virgil's fate tragic. Dante structures Ulysses and Virgil as comparable figures. Ulysses drowns; his final resting place is as a tongue of flame in a baptismal malebolge in hell. Virgil simply disappears and one assumes he returns to his final resting place, a liminal zone which he shares with other pagan philosophers, but also with the unbaptized children. We noted in the last chapter how Ulysses and Virgil correspond with Mother Nature and her crucial, yet essentially limited, role in the development of the embryo. In the following chapter, we will render more particular our analysis of Virgil as a mother figure. I wish to examine his role as intertextual mother.

In order to investigate the initiatory role of the Virgilian intertext in the Divine Comedy, we must continue filling in the letters of the cross-word puzzle which will ultimately spell out why Ulysses and Virgil are so ominously connected.

The term antica fiamma echoes. It serves to describe the fiery tongue with which Ulysses speaks and it operates as a paraphrase of a Virgilian line, appearing at the crucial moment when Dante meets Beatrice and loses the Virgilian intertext. Virgil asks to hear the story of Ulysses who communicates with a flaming tongue:
The resonant phrase for my purposes is "fiamma antica" which occurs in reverse in the earthly paradise in the highly charged scene where Virgil disappears and Beatrice arrives. The metonymic reduction of Ulysses to a flaming tongue keeps us focused on his crime as one who guides by words, both falsely and unwittingly. Likewise, Virgil guides by words and since fire acts as the attribute of Virgil, in his role as guide and as threat to the pilgrim, we can imagine his words as shaped by a flaming tongue.

When the pilgrim sees the arrival of Beatrice in the earthly paradise, he turns to Virgil for support:

(I turned to the left with the confidence of a little child that runs to his mother when he is afraid or in distress, to say to Virgil: 'Not a drop of blood is left in me that does not tremble; I know the marks of the ancient flame.' But Virgil had left us bereft of him, Virgil sweetest father, Virgil to whom I gave myself for my salvation, nor did all the ancient mother lost avail my cheeks washed with dew that they should not be stained again with tears, Purg. XXX, 43-54)

The expression: "I know the marks of the ancient flame" is a literal translation of Dido's
anxious words when, as Freccero writes: "she first sees Aeneas and recalls the passion for her dead husband while she anticipates the funeral pyre on which she will die: "Agnosco veteris flammæ vestigia" (Aeneid IV, 23)." Although this line from the Aeneid is well-known, I quote Freccero because he remarks on the multiple connotations of the ancient flame: fiery passion yet anticipatory of a death by fire. Freccero interprets this emotionally disturbing scene, which culminates in Beatrice's first and only naming of "Dante," as a poetic acknowledgement, yet also a surpassing, of his guide Virgil. Freccero refers to the only directly quoted line in the Commedia from the Aeneid: "Manibus o date lilia plenis" (Give me lilies with full hands, Purg. XXX, 21) taken from Aeneid VI, 885. In Virgil's poem, the line conveys Anchises' "futile funereal gesture," as he foresees for his son Aeneas, the premature death of the Emperor's promising son Marcellus. Freccero interprets Dante's handling of the loss of Virgil, expressed by the pilgrim in the above passage, as follows:

The foreignness of the Virgilian sentiment here at the top of the mountain, underscored by the foreignness of the original language, is neutralized by the otherwise seamless context; death is transformed into resurrection, leaving behind the distinctive mark of the disappearing father, his text in Latin like a foreign element [...] the sign of the father is most in evidence at the moment of the son's triumph;

I want to approach the dramatic parting of Virgil from a different angle: Freccero is very convincing in his reading of Virgil as the father, in Dante's words, "dolcissimo patre," but we must contend with Dante's likening of Virgil to a "mamma" and the reference to "antica matre" which not only ties in with the key phrase in the translation from the Aeneid, antica fiamma, but also with the figure of Ulysses, the fiamma antica.

When we hear the echo of Ulysses, appropriately in the inverted form, as the "fiamma antica," we must recognize the threat to the pilgrim from the epic world during his journey through the Inferno and the Purgatorio. The pilgrim is threatened by the endless natural cycle of the pagan world represented by Ulysses, and at the summit of Mount Purgatory, by the recall of the Aeneid and his grief at the loss of the Virgilian intertext when the pilgrim should be turning fully to Beatrice. Ulysses functions as an inversion of the pilgrim: both set sail, the
Greek hero literally, the pilgrim poet textually. Their journey resembles a flight and yet the former plunges into the sea whereas the latter ascends into heaven. The reversed form of *antica fiamma* in reference to the inverted character *Ulisse* seems fitting. Nonetheless, *antica fiamma* also draws attention to the temporal plight of Virgil.

The adjective "antica" is highly applicable to Virgil since his inability to return to God is a result of being born too soon. Neither can Virgil reach heaven since he was born too late. In the words of Amilcare Iannucci: "the tragedy of Virgil is that he is born too soon and has known Christ too late." Iannucci notes how the adverb *tardi* (late) often surfaces in Virgil's discourse and sounds a pathetic note. Iannucci's attention to temporal references enlarges our view of the conversation Dante has with Bonagiunta about poetics: Dante distinguishes his poetry with its newness (*le nove rime, dolce stil novo*). What we are realizing is that one key aspect of the newness of the Dantean enterprise is the initiatory dynamics of his epic. Virgil and Ulysses belong to the *antica* epics; Dante passes beyond to write the new epic tale.

The way in which Dante describes the loss of Virgil recalls another significant Virgilian scene; notably, a scene in which we find another Ulyssian reference. In the earthly paradise, where Beatrice arrives and the pilgrim loses the Virgilian intertext, Dante alludes to the opening of *Purgatorio*. Virgil takes the pilgrim to a place where the dew (*la rugiada*) resists the sun. Virgil reaches towards the pilgrim's tear-stained cheeks (*le guance*) and washes them with dew, restoring their colour. Dante refers directly to this scene in the above passage: "nor did all the ancient mother lost avail my cheeks washed with dew that they should not be stained again with tears."

\[
\text{nè quantunque perdeo l'antica matre valse alle}
\text{guance nette di rugiada, che, lacrimando, non}
\text{tornasser atre.}
\]

[emphasis mine]

I would like to suggest a reading of the above passage, one that depends on verbal echoes: even though, at the foot of the mountain, Virgil washed my cheeks with dew, still, this loss of the ancient mother causes me to weep. Considering the direct allusion to the opening of
Purgatorio, I read the "antica matre" as referring to Virgil. A few lines earlier, Dante has called Virgil "mamma"; already tagged with the phrase antica fiamma, Virgil slides into the verbal combination antica matre. Reading Virgil signed as the antica fiamma and as the antica matre constellates a complex pattern of imagery which connects the disparate realms of epic poetry, maternal influence, and consuming fire.

At the foot of Mount Purgatory, right after Virgil washes away with dew the stains of hell from the pilgrim's cheeks, as noted by many critics, Dante refers obliquely to Ulysses: "We came then on to the desert shore that never saw man sail its waters who after had experience of return." (Purg. I, 130-133)

Venimmo poi in sul lito diserto, che mai non vide navicar sue acque omo che di tornar sia poscia esperto.

Ulysses attempts to sail in the divinely protected waters which lead to Mount Purgatory and thus acts as a fine example of one who never experiences return. In the following canto, Dante describes an angelic boatman who "si che remo non vuol nè altro velo/ che l'ali sue" (seeks no oar nor other sail than his wings, 32-33) which again recalls Ulysses and his crew who made of their oars wings for the mad flight. The arrival and progression that the pilgrim makes ascending Mount Purgatory sets up Ulysses as an inversion of the pilgrim. But more significant for an initiatory reading: not only is Virgil carefully implied in the Ulysses episode, but also, in the related scenes at the foot and summit of Mount Purgatory. Ulysses and Virgil once again come into telling contact. References to Ulysses re-surface in the baptismal scene where Virgil washes the pilgrim's face and girds him with the rush; and then, with the expression antica fiamma, Dante conjures up the Ulyssean shade when Virgil disappears and Beatrice arrives at the summit of Mt. Purgatory. The Purgatorial allusions, which serve to associate Ulysses and Virgil, confirm my earlier attempt to show how Dante presents these pagan guides as comparable figures.

I remarked in the earlier discussion of Ulysses and Virgil that an ostensible contrast between the two revolves around water and fire. Ulysses conveys the threat of drowning in
water; whereas Virgil seems to express the threat of fire. One of the ways to bridge the distance between fire and water, as pointed out by Anthony Cassell, is through baptismal typology. For at the outset of the canto, Dante leads us to imagine the mirroring effect of Elisha who ascends in a fiery chariot and Ulysses who descends drowning in the sea. Ulysses once again appears as an inversion. Moreover, Ulysses himself is marked by fire for he burns as a tongue of flame. The sometimes fiery quality of Ulysses thus works as another way of comparing him to Virgil. We will finally address what has been anticipated throughout this initiatory reading of the poem: the fiery attributes of Virgil which configure him as both a nurturing and destructive intertextual mentor.

John Freccero read the dramatic parting of Virgil at the summit of Mount Purgatory as Dante's acknowledging and yet surpassing of his poetic father, his "dolcissimo patre" Virgil. As stated before, I plan to read the loss of Virgil from another angle: resounding, for an initiatory reading of the poem, is Dante calling Virgil, in this climatic scene, "mamma."\

* * *

Although he does not try to imagine Virgil in a motherly role, Robert Hollander's desire to illustrate the intertextual relationship between the Divine Comedy and the Aeneid provides an important insight into our ensuing discussion of Virgil as a mother. Hollander shows step by step how Dante uses his "great pagan predecessor" to structure the opening canto of his Comedy. One of the parallels Hollander identifies between the two texts occurs when Venus appears to her son Aeneas bringing divine help. Likewise, Dante has Virgil materialize with divine support for the floundering pilgrim. Both Aeneas and the pilgrim have just escaped from drowning. Dante's carefully structured parallel puts the pilgrim in a son/ mother relationship with Virgil, since he models the encounter on the meeting of Aeneas with his mother Venus. Hence, right from the opening scene of the Commedia, we are encouraged to think of Virgil in the role of mother. Moreover, the escape from drowning sets in motion the association that will ultimately develop between Ulysses and Virgil as guides.

In Statius' praise for Virgil's poem, fire imagery and the maternal force of the
Virgilian intertext come together:

Al mio ardor fuor seme le faville, che mi scaldar, 
della divina fiamma onde sono allumati più di mille; 
dell'Eneïda dico, la qual mamma fummi e fummi 
nutrice poetando: sanz'essa non fermai peso di 
dramma. E per esser vivuto di là quando visse 
Virgilio, assentirei un sole più che non deggio al mio 
uscir di bando.

(The sparks that kindled the fire in me were from the divine flame from which 
more than a thousand have been lit—I mean the Aeneid, which was in poetry 
my mother and my nurse; without it I had not weighed a drachma, and to have 
lived yonder when Virgil lived I would have consented to a sun more than I 
was due before coming forth from banishment, Purg. XXI, 93-102)

Edward Moore has shown that Dante has taken from Statius' Thebiad the words of praise and 
devotion which Dante has his fictional Statius apply to Virgil. Moore reads Statius' lines as 
"a sort of valedictory address to his own poem":

Vive, precor: nec tu divinam Aeneida tenta, Sed longe 
sequere, vestigia semper adora.

(xii, 816-817)

Moore then quotes the relevant passage from Dante which I have quoted above, and although 
Dante refers the reader to the Thebiad by means of key words, such as "divina" linked to the 
voicing of the title of Virgil's epic, the words in which he has Statius describe Virgil's effect 
on him is distinctively different. By means of Moore's comparison, we learn that, Statius' 
likening of Virgil to a flame (fiamma) and his sense of Virgil as a mother figure belong fully 
to Dante's imagination and the dictates of his poetic project in the Commedia.

The remarkable rhyme in Statius' discourse is fiamma/ mamma which anticipates the 
parting of Virgil in Purgatorio XXX where we find the rhyme organized into a Virgilian 
formation: the translation of the line from the Aeneid, antica fiamma, the loss of the antica 
matre, and Dante's turning to Virgil as to a mamma. Nonetheless, what is even more striking 
in Statius' confession of the vital role played by Virgil in his life arises in his final statement
that if he could live during Virgil's time, he would submit to another year of purgatorial repentance. Although Statius has been released from his penance and is free to ascend to heaven, which supposes that his will is in perfect accord with God's will, he blasphemously states---if it meant he could know Virgil—he would happily spend more time exiled from God on Mount Purgatory. However, if in fact Statius did live during Virgil's time, he never would have known Christ; he never would have experienced baptism. Statius begins speaking of the Aeneid, the poem's powerful influence. However, he then shifts his gratitude and love for the poem onto the poet; he concludes worshipping Virgil. We will return to Statius' dangerous transfer of emotion from poem to poet after a more full investigation of Virgil conveyed in terms of fire and maternal imagery.

In Purgatorio XXV, just before Statius tells of how the embryo develops in the womb, Virgil attempts to answer the pilgrim's question: "Come si può far magro/là dove l'uopo di nodrir non tocca?" (How is it possible to become lean where there is no need of nourishment? 20-21). The pilgrim cannot comprehend the connection between our living bodies and the shades he sees in the afterlife, which on the terrace of the gluttonous, appear penitentially emaciated. Virgil answers the question by reminding him of the myth of Meleager: "Se t'ammentassi come Meleagro/ si consumò al consumar d'un stizzo" (If you call to mind how Meleager was consumed in the consuming of a brand, 22-23). Virgil's allusion to the myth does not explain exactly why the shades in the afterlife have expressive, sensitive bodies. However, if investigating the way Dante configures Virgil as a mother figure then the myth tells us something crucial about the poet's representation of his intertext.

With the reference to Meleager, Dante has Virgil evoke the following myth: Alathea, Meleager's mother, learns from the fates at her son's birth that his life is inextricably linked to that of a twig in the hearth. When this twig is fully consumed in the fire, her son Meleager will die. Alathea whisks the twig out of the fire, plunges it in water, and then puts it away. One day, murderously angered with her son Meleager for killing her brothers, the mother seeks revenge and has a flaming pyre constructed upon which she puts the twig of Meleager's life and thereby kills her son. Thus, the pilgrim's question about bodies and their afterlife equivalents, shades, receives differing responses: Virgil evokes the myth of a mother who
destroys her son by placing the symbolic twig of his life onto a flaming pyre and Statius recounts the generation of the embryo and the infusion of the soul.

The central drama of the Meleager myth involves a mother who plunges into water or into fire depending on whether she wants to offer her son life or death. Yet again we discover watery and fiery fates intertwined in the Commedia. The myth of Meleager is drawn from Ovid's Metamorphoses. Teodolinda Barolini demonstrates that the verbs Dante often associates with Ovid "are all verbs that adumbrate the Christian mystery of true metamorphosis: rebirth." However, as Barolini argues, Dante qualifies Ovid's rebirth scenarios so that they appear doubtful and limited. Thus, Virgil's choice of the Meleager myth to answer the Dantean pilgrim's question provides another instance where the pagan response is ambiguous and limited, almost threatening.

The discussion in Purgatory XXV of bodies and shades recalls the unusual bodily relationship between the pilgrim and Virgil. Just prior to the embryo canto, we witness a suitable encounter between shades enacted by Statius and Virgil. Since they are shades, they cannot embrace, although Statius forgets in a presumably overwhelmed state: "Already he was bending to embrace my Teacher's feet; but he said to him: 'Brother, do not so. for you are a shade and a shade you see'"(Purg. XXI, 130-132).

Già s'inchinava ad abbracciar li piedi al mio dottor, ma el li disse: 'Frate, non far, ch'è tu se' ombra e ombra vedi.'

Without comprehensively charting Dantean discrepancies on the physicality of shades, I want to hone in on one particularly relevant contradiction. In the Inferno, Virgil saves the pilgrim from swooping devils:

Lo duca mio di subito mi prese, come la madre ch'al romore e desta e vede presso a sè le fiamme accese, che prende il figlio e fugge e non s'arresta avendo più di lui che ci sècura, tanto che solo una camincia vesta

(My leader caught me instantly, like a mother who is wakened by the noise and sees beside her the flames kindled and caught up her child and flies and,
more concerned for him than herself does not even stay to put on a shift, *Inf. XXIII, 37-42*)

Virgil escapes with the pilgrim in his arms, even though the pilgrim is a solid body and Virgil is a transparent shade. Elsewhere in the *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*, Dante stresses the weight and solidity of his body in contrast to the shades that surround him on his journey through the afterworld. Dante makes sure we do not overlook Virgil in the role of mother: he thus repeats that Virgil carries him against his chest "come suo figlio, non come compagno" (not as a companion but as his child, 51). By means of fire imagery, Dante places Virgil in both a protective and a threatening role. In the *Inferno*, Virgil saves the pilgrim, as a mother saves her son from fire. In the *Purgatorio*, after hearing Statius represent Virgil as a mother,¹⁴ Virgil evokes the myth of Meleager where the mother puts the figurative twig of her son's life into the fire.

In the last chapter, we noted the way in which Dante has Virgil, along with Ulysses, correspond to Mother Nature. Based on the dual role in which we have seen Virgil by means of fire imagery---as protective and menacing mother---the following quote from Northrop Frye will further demonstrate the pertinence of this mode of interpretation:

> one very frequent mythological formulation of this attitude to nature is an earth-mother, from whom everything returns at death [...] As the womb of all forms of life, she has a cherishing and nourishing aspect; as the tomb of all forms of life, she has a menacing and sinister aspect.¹⁵

Virgil as the maternal intertext nourishes and cherishes the literary initiate, the Dantean pilgrim, in his primary stage of poetic development; nonetheless, the literary pilgrim, the reader, reaches a certain point along his path of poetic development where he must separate from the maternal intertext and become a speaker, a writer.

We have examined Virgil in a threatening role by means of his association with Ulysses, baptism, and most notably fire imagery. When we turn to Suetonius' biography of Virgil's life, the only work on Virgil with which Domenico Comparetti is certain Dante was familiar,¹⁶ we find the missing link that illuminates the interconnection between Virgil, Ulysses, baptismal and fire imagery. According to the biographer Suetonius:
In the fifty-second year of his age, wishing to give the final touch to the *Aeneid*, he determined to go away to Greece and Asia, and after devoting three entire years to the sole work of improving his poem, to give up the rest of his life wholly to philosophy. But having begun his journey, and at Athens meeting Augustus [...] he resolved not to part from the emperor and even to return with him; but in the course of a visit to the neighbouring town of Megara in a very hot sun, he was taken with fever, and added to his disorder by continuing his journey; hence on his arrival at Brundisium he was considerably worse, and died there.17

Virgil was by Dante's standards an old man like the "vecchi e tardi" (old and slow) crew that agree to follow Ulysses to their death. At the age of fifty-two, based on Dante's scheme in the *Convivio*, Virgil would have been in the penultimate stage rather than the final one. However, Dante believes that "these ages may be longer or shorter according to our complexion or temper and our constitution or composition."18 Considering that Virgil is so near death, it seems appropriate to place him in the final stage, especially since he shows a desire to finish his life's work and retire from social life. Recall that this final stage for Dante should be geared towards a return to God as a metaphorical port and a blessing of the voyage. However, like Ulysses' crew, Virgil turns away from spiritual concerns to follow a human leader.

Virgil had a vitally important project to complete: the *Aeneid*, but instead of pursuing his own goal, he altered his plan and followed the emperor. Suetonius faintly implies that this poor decision cuts short Virgil's life: for not only did he contract a fever while following Augustus, but he also continued to journey and thus the fever worsened and resulted in his death. Like the old loyal crew of Ulysses, Virgil shifts his own life plan to follow a powerful leader and leaves his life work incomplete. In the *Convivio*, Dante argues that this final phase in an individual's life should revolve around two central concerns: returning from the sea of life into the harbour of one's Creator and blessing one's life which has escaped storms and tempests. Virgil does the opposite: he sets forth on the seas rather than metaphorically returning to port and he exposes himself to the sun, just as Ulysses succumbs to a tempest. But Virgil does not die in a storm, he takes a fever from the intense sun. And thus, another piece in the puzzling association Dante constructs between Virgil and Ulysses falls into
place. As we noted previously, Ulysses' signature line "we made of the oars wings for the mad flight," originates in the *Aeneid* and refers to Daedalus's wings. The wings that Daedalus makes for his son Icarus melt in proximity to the sun just as Virgil's health deteriorates in the hot sun of his journey with the Emperor. The abortive journey results in Virgil's premature death, which means his epic poem is left incomplete. But far more serious than leaving the *Aeneid* unfinished, Virgil wanted it burned because it lacked his final touch. Suetonius tells of Virgil's desire to see his poem burned:

[Virgil] had arranged with Varius, before leaving Italy, that if anything befell him his friend should burn the *Aeneid*; but Varius had emphatically declared that he would do no such thing. Therefore in his mortal illness Vergil constantly called for his book-boxes, intending to burn the poem himself; but when no one brought them to him, he made no specific request about the matter, but left his writings jointly to the above mentioned Varius and to Tucca, with the stipulation that they should publish nothing which he himself would not have given to the world.\(^{19}\)

Considering that Dante treats the *Aeneid* as a sacred text, as the complementary work to the Bible,\(^ {20}\) Virgil's request to have such a text destroyed appears selfish and destructive. A desire on Virgil's part that places far more emphasis on the individual reputation of the writer than on the universal import of the work.\(^ {21}\)

In the *Inferno*, Virgil tells the pilgrim an account of the origin of his city Mantua which contradicts the tale told in his *Aeneid* (X, 198-203). Virgil tells the pilgrim in forceful terms that if he ever hears another account of the origin of his city, not to let the false tale pervert the truth (XX, 97-99). And notably, the pilgrim responds: "Master, your account is so sure for me and so holds my confidence that any other would be for me dead embers"(100-102).

E io: Maestro, i tuoi ragionamenti mi son si certi e prendon si mia fede, che li altri mi sarien carboni spenti.

In other words, Virgil's presence is so strong to the pilgrim that he can cancel out the account
in the *Aeneid*. The fire imagery, heavy with meaning after reading Suetonius's biography, of *carboni spenti* (dead embers) suggests that when confronted with Virgil, the pilgrim agrees to burning the account of Mantua in the *Aeneid*, exactly what Virgil himself sought to do to his own epic poem, the epic poem which has saved its readers. The seductive figure of Virgil overwhelms his role as the author of the *Aeneid*. Thus, one of the pilgrim's most important learning experiences involves recognizing the value of Virgil in his work, his role in the scheme of universal history, not merely his role in the life of the individual Dante.

Directly after the loss of Virgil, Beatrice confronts the pilgrim with precisely this issue in regard to herself: when she is no longer a presence to the pilgrim, he mourns and then tries to compensate for her loss with unworthy pursuits (*Purg. XXX*, 115-145). What Dante needs to learn is that Beatrice the woman has a finite value; however, the textual Beatrice, contained within his own poetry, has an infinite worth. Ironically, Virgil himself attempts to teach the pilgrim this fundamental lesson. In *Purgatorio* XV, Virgil responds to one of the pilgrim's questions on the nature of love:

> Perché s'appuntano i vostri disiri dove per compagnia parte si scema, invidia move il mantaco a' sospiri. Ma se l'amor della spera suprema torcesse in suso il disiderio vostro, non vi sarebbe al petto quella tema; chè, per quanti si dice più li "nostro," tanto possiede più di ben ciascuno, e più di caritate arde in quel chiostro.

(It is because your desires are fixed where the part is lessened by sharing that envy blows the bellows to your sighs; but if the love of the highest sphere bent upwards your longing, that fear would not be in your breast. For there, the more they are who say ours, the more of good does each possess and the more of charity burns in that cloister, 49-57).

Notably, Virgil uses fire imagery positively in this context. Although he does not refer specifically to literary "sharing," his lesson on the envious follows directly after the pilgrim hears a lengthy discourse about the transitory nature of one's literary fame (*Purg. XI*, 79-109). If the proud artists' desire for fame, which results in competition and envy, transferred
to a love of sharing their art with others, then "the more of good does each possess and the more of charity burns in that cloister." The Aeneid was the "spark" which inspired not only the poetry of Statius but also his conversion; thus, its burning with a "divine flame" rather than being destroyed by the "antica fiamma" of pagan pride, allows the Aeneid to be shared with many. And thus the more of charity arde in that cloister.

Teodolinda Barolini maintains that "Vergil's susceptibility to earthly fame is a leitmotif of his character" and then she adds: "It is essentially an infernal characteristic, a trait that he shares with many other damned souls." Barolini does not miss the typically ambiguous treatment of earthly fame and thus she quotes Virgil's encouraging statement to the pilgrim which seemingly puts fame in a necessary and positive role: "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).

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

For those who trace the fire imagery as a marker of the Virgilian contradiction, Virgil's metaphor, which compares the neglect of one's fame to smoke vanishing in the air, resonates tellingly. It becomes even more haunting when one recognizes that all that would remain of Ulysses and his men who drowned: would be foam on water. Virgil's observance of his own literary fame overwhelmed his sense of the Aeneid's importance and he thus requested the burning of his poem. The smoke that might have arisen from the pages of his burning Aeneid transform within the Commedia into a signal for Dante. The life of Virgil results in a comedic rather than tragic ending because his fame was secured---against his will---by not allowing him to turn the Aeneid into a monument to fame, "fummo in aere." The words of encouragement that Virgil offers to the pilgrim are ambiguous and demonstrate a continued lack of understanding on Virgil's part of the transcendent importance of his poem.

The crux of Ripheus further contributes to the distinction Dante seeks to draw between the author and the literary work. Critics strive to understand why Dante excludes
Virgil from heaven, but takes a minor character (Barolini calls him "a bit player") from the *Aeneid* and places him in the heavenly sphere of Jupiter with the just rulers (*Par. XX*, 67-69). Dante has Ripheus saved in order to make clear that Virgil's epic poem transcends its human author: the *Aeneid* belongs to part of a divine plan, just as the *Comedy* depends on the hand of heaven and the divine breath of *Amor*. Notably, Ripheus undergoes a miraculous baptism which signals the potential for Virgil to have also passed through this gateway of faith. The *Aeneid* carries the "divina fiamma" of Christian rebirth, but Virgil only knew the "antica fiamma" of pagan ideals (i.e. of fame) and thus he remains in Limbo with the unbaptized children.

Statius also appears to be unaware of the fine distinction between literary fame and the significance of one's work. There appears to be a dangerous tendency with Virgil to worship the author rather than the poem: Statius begins by praise of the *Aeneid* and the fire imagery falls under a positive marker, but then Statius exclaims that he would willingly spend another year separated from God if only he could have lived during Virgil's time. And living during Virgil's time means living before Christ, before the opening of the gate of baptism. The fire imagery that Dante uses to convey the nourishing yet menacing potential of Virgil seems suitable in the light of the biography: Virgil does not recognize that his *Aeneid* burns with a "divina fiamma" and he therefore attempts to submit his epic poem to the flames of an human pyre. Hence, the flames that threaten the pilgrim are the "antica fiamma" of the pagan world and its passionate attachment to great figures such as Ulysses or Aeneas. The elderly crew follows Ulysses, the "fiamma antica" to their death. And Queen Dido unknowingly anticipates the pyre on which she will throw herself when she recognizes in Aeneas the "antica fiamma" of passion.

At the beginning of *Paradiso* VIII, in the sphere of Venus, Dante brings together the signal word "antica" in reference to the *Aeneid*, and in particular, in reference to Dido:

Solea creder lo mondo in suo periclo che la bella
Ciprigna il *folle* amore raggiasse, volta nel terzo
epiciclo; per che non pur a lei faceano onore di
sacrificio e di votivo grido le genti *antiche*
nell'antico errore; ma Dione onoravano e Cupido, questa per madre sua, questo per figlio; e dicean ch'el sedette in grembo a Dido;

(The world once believed, to its peril, that the fair Cyprian, wheeling in the third epicycle, rayed forth mad love, so that the ancient peoples in their ancient error not only did honour to her with sacrifice and votive cry but honoured also Dione and Cupid, her as her mother, him as her son, and told that he lay in Dido's bosom, emphasis mine, 1-9)

The net that draws Ulysses (folle) and Virgil (antiche / antico and madre) extends to gather a direct reference to Dido (conosco i segni dell'antica fiamma). This network of associations further confirms the comparable relationship between Ulysses and Virgil as a guided stage---the former concluding negatively, the latter concluding positively---a stage through which the pilgrim must pass, but from which he must also break free.

Just before he realizes that he has lost Virgil, the Dantean pilgrim quotes from the Aeneid: "conosco i segni dell'antica fiamma" (I know the marks of the ancient flame). Dante draws on Dido's words, Dido, who will ultimately throw herself on a pyre, abandoning her kingdom and duty to her people at the loss of Aeneas. The Dantean pilgrim also undergoes a crisis at the loss of Virgil, but if he had chosen to follow his guide back to Limbo, the time before baptism, he would never have reached heaven, nor, finished the Commedia. The pilgrim's baptism would have resembled the failed one of Ulysses' crew: they follow their inspiring leader to the tomb of the sea where they remain in a liminal zone, for without God, the tomb never transforms into a womb. They sought to pass beyond the gateway, but they went against divine command, choosing instead to follow a human guide. According to the biography, Virgil sets aside the divinely inspired task of completing the Aeneid, and also chooses to follow a human leader to his demise.

Virgil abandons his plan to devote time to the Aeneid; he sets off on a journey with the emperor which leads to his death and the incomplete status of his epic poem. Even worse, Virgil attempts to destroy the Aeneid which, according to Dante, participates in a divine scheme. In defining his role to Sordello, Virgil offers a contradictory explanation: "Not for doing, but for not doing, I have lost the sight of the Sun above for which you long and which
was known by me too late." (Purg. VII, 25-27)

Non per far, ma per non fare ho perduto a veder l'alto
sol che tu disieri e che fu tardi per me conosciuto.

In his description, we recognize that Virgil came to know Christ too late for it to benefit him, but how do we interpret the confusing lines: Non per far, ma per non fare? Suetonius' life of Virgil holds the key: "not for doing", i.e. I did not succeed in burning the Aeneid, thus I am in Limbo; "but for not doing", i.e. I am in Limbo because I followed the emperor on a journey when I should have finished work on the Aeneid. Moreover, in the light of Suetonius' biography, Virgil's puzzling statement in the Commedia about "being a rebel to God's law" makes sense. Virgil does not consciously refute Christian law in a time before Christ; however, he does not recognize the significance of his own poem since he is more concerned with his literary fame.24

In the Prologue canto, Virgil tells the pilgrim that he will guide him to Purgatorio but then another guide will take his place: "For the Emperor who holds sway there above wills not, because I was a rebel to His law, that I come into His city." (Inf. I, 124-126)

chè quello imperador che là su regna, perch'io
fu' ribellante alla sua legge, non vuol che 'n sua
città per me si vegna

Virgil's self-description of being "ribellante" is confusing because, as the pilgrim states a few lines after: "Poeta, io ti richiego/ per quello Dio che tu non conosci" (Poet, I entreat you by that God whom you did not know, 130-131). How can Virgil rebel against a God unknown to him? According to Dante, in the same way that Ulysses and his crew pass beyond divine limits set by a pagan God and end up in a Christian hell. Virgil rebels against the divine Emperor by first abandoning the completion of his poem in order to follow the human Emperor; and then, more serious, attempting to have his Aeneid destroyed because it would not present to the world his most polished literary skills. The pilgrim must learn, in particular, literary humility by journeying with Virgil through the afterworld.

The Dantean pilgrim must learn to value the Virgilian intertext rather than the figure
Virgil. And one of the ways of charting his journey to the status of poet is to examine his independence from the poet Virgil, coupled with his honouring of the Virgilian intertext. Dante's application to the lesson of literary humility ironically involves recognizing the significance of his own poetry. Dante must realize in the painful transition from Virgil to Beatrice that the love and beauty and value of his pagan guide can always be found in his life's work, in the *Aeneid*. When the pilgrim parts from Beatrice, and the imagery shifts from fire to water, he has clearly learned this lesson. The pilgrim turns to Beatrice to find her gone, just as he turned to discover the loss of Virgil. He turns to find a "tenero padre" in place of his beloved Beatrice. Thus we have come full circle: Virgil as his "dolcissimo patre" yields to Beatrice who in turn yields to St. Bernard a *tender father*. The pilgrim asks Bernard hastily (subito) where Beatrice has gone; and the new guide motions his gaze above:

_Sanza risponder, li occhi su levai, e vidi lei che si facea corona reflettendo da sè li eterni rai. Da quella region che più su tona occhio mortale alcun tanto non dista, qualunque in mare più giù s'abbandona, quanto li da Beatrice la mia vista; ma nulla mi facea, chè sua effige non discendea a me per mezzo mista._

(Without answering, I lifted up my eyes and saw her where she made for herself a crown, reflecting from her the eternal beams. From the highest region where it thunders no mortal eye is so far, were it lost in the depth of the sea, as was my sight there from Beatrice; but to me it made no difference for her image came down to me undimmed by aught between, *Par.* XXXI, 70-78)

The pilgrim experiences the loss of Beatrice in a radically different way from his earlier separation from Virgil. By encouraging the reader to contrast the two scenes, Dante demonstrates the great distance the pilgrim has covered in terms of self-perception and poetic responsibility: Beatrice is as far away from the pilgrim as the depth of the sea, but her image comes down to him *undimmed* since Beatrice remains intimate through his poem. The depth of the sea has acted as a metaphor for God throughout the *Paradiso*, and we have investigated the way in which Dante uses baptismal typology to render a correspondence between the baptismal font, the sea, and the watery womb. When Dante therefore recognizes
the vast distance between himself and Beatrice, as deep as the sea, which is paradoxically no distance at all, since she lives in the Commedia, we may infer that the experience an individual has of a joyful Creator infusing one's soul is not such a remote event. Dante returns the lost moment by means of a creative re-enactment. The seemingly lost encounter with the Creator is rendered once again intimate: at the end of the Commedia, the deathlike dissolving at the sight of God is superimposed upon the primary meeting with God in the womb. The two events coincide, like in the tomb/ womb of the baptismal font, or during a write of passage where the writer activates textual rebirth.

* * *

Virgil paradoxically enacts both the role of Mother, the natural progenitor who must retreat in the face of the divine and the role of literary Father who transfers his poetic power to Dante, just as, on Elisha rests the Spirit of Elijah. Virgil leads the pilgrim to develop as a "fante" which is crucial for Dante's duty to record his experience in poetry; nonetheless, Dante must go beyond the poetic power he has learned from his pagan predecessor and return to the "natural speech" before the Fall. In initiatory terms, Dante must return to the womb where God breathed into him the language of the unfallen "fante."

The bringing together of Ulysses and Virgil as comparative figures serves to warn the pilgrim and reader that the Virgilian intertext not only represents the nourishing mother, but also the menacing mother. Virgil may save the pilgrim from a burning structure or, like Meleager's mother, he may place the twig of the pilgrim's life into the fire.

The antica fiamma which Virgil shares with Ulysses and Dido symbolizes the seduction of pagan rhetoric, pagan passion for another, and most deadly, pagan literary pride. Hence, the pilgrim is threatened by the fiamma antica of Ulysses' infernal tongue; the antica fiamma of passion which lands Dido on a suicidal pyre; and most dangerous, the antica fiamma, with which Virgil plans to destroy his incomplete epic poem. The fiamma of literary pride jeopardizes the Aeneid which indicates that Virgil---consumed with his own reputation---fails to recognize that his Aeneid burns with a divina fiamma.
The pilgrim must strive for the baptismal font in Florence—the place where his readers will crown him with the Virgilian laurel crown—but he must also emerge from this font which requires leaving Virgil behind. Dante refers to one who almost drowned in his Florentine baptismal font and he evokes it, shape and story, prior to meeting Ulysses in an equally baptismal bolgia. Operating in accordance with the reversals of Inferno, acting as an inverted foil for the Dantean pilgrim, Ulisse drowns. The baptismal font ritually represents Natura: the tomb and womb of life, which one must pass through, but out of which, one hopes to emerge, reborn on a spiritual level. Virgil contains both of these potentials for the pilgrim: he leads him through the tomb of hell; he bathes his face in regenerating dew; he walks him through the purifying fire; and brings him to potential rebirth in the form of a spiritual guide, Beatrice. Nonetheless, Virgil cannot emerge from the baptismal font; he remains in Limbo with the unbaptized children.

Dante must leave behind the sophisticated pagan rhetoric and poetry—represented by Ulysses and Virgil—and return to "baby-talk" in order to recover his primal moment with God who breathes into him a soul, and natural language. At the same time, he must be aware of the significance of his poem: Dante has a duty to the Commedia like Virgil had a duty to the Aeneid. The writer must prioritize his poetry rather than follow others who may seek unwittingly to lead him astray. And the poet must never allow his literary pride to interfere with the sharing of his transformative poetry with others. Virgil was a threat to the Aeneid just as he represents a threat to Dante: he could put them both into the fire. Unlike Virgil, Dante emerges from the baptismal font onto a new spiritual plane, because, in direct contrast to his guide, Dante recognizes the initiatory force of his own sacred poem which has been touched by the hand of Virgil, or the world, but has also felt the hand of God: "Il poema sacro/ al quale ha posto mano e cielo e terra" (Par. XXV, 1-2).

The poem of Paradiso XXV which has felt the hand of nature and of God recalls the embryo of Purgatorio XXV which parallels the poetic process: within the womb it develops, journeying to the various shores of its completion, and then it is cradled in the hands of a joyful Creator who breathes into it a self-reflective soul; in that moment, it transforms into a speaker. When the pilgrim metamorphoses into a poet at the end of the Divina Commedia, in
a textual ritual—a write of passage—Dante reenacts the moment in the womb when the
divine breath of love set his soul wheeling like the universe.

1 John Freccero (1986: 208).
2 ibid (1986: 207).
3 "Si ch'io fui sesto tra cotanto senno." Il fatto che Dante sia ultima lo rende primo.
   Non c'e' ansietà bioniana nell'incontro di Dante coi poeti classici, non
   sentimento di "ritard". Al contrario, egli è communque migliore, in parte, proprio
   perché viene dopo. Anche quest'idea è giocata nella narrativa. La tragedia di
   Virgilio è che egli è nato troppo presto ed ha conosciuto Cristo troppo tardi.
   "Tardi" è un avverbio che sfugge dalle labbra di Virgilio in più di una occasione.
   Sulla sua bocca l'avverbio ha un suono patetico. L'insieme dell'episodio di Stazio,
   naturalmente, è strutturato sull'ansieta di chi segue, ma sull'ansieta del precursore,

Translation of Iannucci's work is mine. See also A. C. Charity (note 89).
4 The editors of the Sapegno edition interpret "antica matre" as follows: "Intendi: tutte le delizie dell'Eden,
   perdute da Eva (cfr. Purg. XI, 63) a cagione del suo peccato, non poterono, impedire che le guance, già lavate e
   monde d'ogni caligine infernale alle soglie del monte con la rugiada, non tornassero a macchiarsi di lacrime"
   (338, note 52). Although they refer the reader to the scene in which Virgil cleanses the pilgrim's cheeks with
   dew, they ignore the agency of the pilgrim's guide which I believe Dante subtly conveys through the ambiguous
   terms "antica matre."
5 Teodolinda Barolini demonstrates with many instances the way in which Dante heightens the affective impact
   of Virgil at exactly the moments when he is exposed as being intellectually inadequate (1989: 239-240). The
   separation from the mother forms the basis of initiatory rituals and is a highly affective transition. See Arnold
   Van Gennep (107).
7 Edward Moore, 243.
8 Purg. XXI, 58-72.
9 Purg. XXII, 89.
10 Certain critics find Virgil's answer verging on the ridiculous, for instance, Giuseppe Toffanin: "[Virgil] ha
   parlato a vanvera. Meleagro e il suo tizzo, la figura umana e l'immagine riflessare dallo specchio [...] il povero
   poeta pagano" (34). Without any attempt at questioning his motive, Bruno Nardi simply dismisses Virgil's myth
   of Meleager, for, as he asserts, it does not answer the pilgrim's question (1964: 503). Giuseppe Citanna admits
   that Virgil's comparison of the emaciated shades of the gluttonous to the death of Meleager by the burning of
   the stick is problematic since the former are shades whereas Meleager was alive. Nonetheless, he tries to
   rationalize Virgil's comparison and thus concludes:

   per una causa misteriosa ed esterna i golosi appaiano magri e la loro ombra rifletta
   le conseguenze di quella causa, come Meleagro, ignaro e lontanto, subive le
   conseguenze del decreto delle Parche e rifletteva il bruciarsi e consumarsi del
   tizzone (935).

Elvio Guagnini, without attempting to explain, as Citanna does, states simply: "La riposta di Virgilio è solo un
approccio analogico al problema"(489). One word in Guagnini's interpretation conveys the usual critical stance:
"solo." Virgil appears constantly in his mythological explanation as a progressively more and more inadequate
guide for the pilgrim; in Aldo Bernardo's words: "the answer [to the pilgrim's question] is so involved that
Virgil yields to Statius [who has been] graced with true faith" (343). Virgil must turn to Statius for the "true" or
"satisfying" explanation. According to Guagnini, Statius' liminal quality is what allows him to respond to Dante's query (500). Teodolinda Barolini writes: in canto XXV [...] Vergil is able to answer him only with analogies, and must refer him to Statius for a more rigorous logical presentation" (1984: 249). In general I concur with these various critical readings of Virgil's inadequacy as a guide; nevertheless, I also believe that the Meleager myth has great significance for those who are struggling to comprehend the relationship between Virgil and Dante.

11 Ovid, Metamorphoses (8. 268-546).
13 The Dantean pilgrim cannot embrace Casella: "Oi ombre vane, fuor che nell'aspetto!" (O empty shades, except in semblance!) Purg. II, 76-81. Conversely, the two shades of Virgil and Sordello appear to embrace without a problem: "e l'un l'altro abbracciava" (and the one embraced the other) Purg. VII, 75. The Inferno is so full of such contradictions it is not worth enumerating them.
14 Statius' representation of Virgil as a mother may seem a little far removed from Purgatorio XXV to allow us to imagine Virgil in the role of the threatening mother from the myth of Meleager. Although not interested in pursuing the theme of Virgil as mother, Giorgio Padoan has shown that at the beginning of the embryo canto, Dante places Virgil in the role of mother by means of the stork simile. Padoan compares Dante's analogy of the baby stork to the original one found in Statius' epic, the Thebiad. After analyzing the literary relationship between the two, he concludes:

Il rinvio allusivo è a Virgilio: il cicognino desideroso ed insieme timoroso di volare sarà tosto aiutato dalla madre; per Dante c'è lì pronto Virgilio, dolce padre, il quale appunto lo conforta ad esprimere il dubbio che esige di essere sciolto. (1981: 579)

Nardi also sees Virgil in a maternal role by means of the cicognino analogy (1964: 502).
15 Northrop Frye (68).
16 Domenico Comparetti (212). Moreover, according to Comparetti: "of anecdotes derived from the biography, none was so famous as that of Vergil's dying command that the Aeneid should be burnt" (150-151). Hence, Dante could count on his readers knowing about Virgil's demand that his epic poem be burned.
17 Suetonius (474-477). All further quotations will also be taken from J. C. Rolfe's translation and edition of Suetonius' works, vol. 2. Although I have not found any instance where access to the Latin alters or clarifies these basically descriptive passages, for those interested, Rolfe's edition has both Latin original and English translation side by side.
18 Convivio (IV, xxiv, 7).
19 Suetonius (476-479).
20 At the turn of the century, Moore remarked that we must understand:

Virgil is quoted by Dante (especially in the De Monarchia) as though his language was invested with almost the authority of Scripture [...] The explanation is that Dante regarded the Empire to be as much a divine institution as the Church, and the history of the Roman people to have been no less divinely ordered in preparation for the one, than the history of the Jewish people was for that of the other (167).

Robert Hollander has written extensively on the contradictory role of Virgil whereby his Aeneid hovers on the brink of being comparable to scripture while it is simultaneously undercut and distorted by Dante; the following quote provides a brief summary of his critical stance on Dante's Virgil:

Il grande paradosso della presenza di Virgilio nel testo di Dante nasce dal fatto che il poeta cristiano chiaramente "sorpassa" il suo beneamato auctor soprattutto nei riguardi della fede, e che la propria rinnovata fede in Cristo, come la conversione di Stazio, deriva nondimeno dalla lettura del libro di Virgilio. È un paradosso
sconcertante, che sgorga senza dubbio dalla essenza stessa dell'esperienza dantesca (1983: 71).

According to Teodolinda Barolini:

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. (1984: 252)

In a later statement, Barolini notes: "volume and autore are used in only two contexts: in Inferno for Vergil, and in Paradiso for God" (1984: 268).

21 For an alternate view and much more in-depth treatment of the complex issue of Virgil's Mantua, see Robert Hollander (1983: esp. 90-100). For a sense of Virgil's significance, beyond the needs of the pilgrim, we will find an example in Teodolinda Barolini's work. Barolini contrasts Bertran de Born, a political poet, damned for sowing discord between royal father and son, who carries his severed head like a lantern, with Virgil, who Statius describes as: "him that goes by night and carries the light behind him and does not help himself but makes wise those that follow" (Purg. XXII, 67-69)

quei che va di notte, che porta il lume dietro e sè non giova, ma dopo sè fa le persone dotte

According to Barolini: "Bertran is a grotesque inversion of Vergil: in one there is total severance, a self-sufficiency that is not strength but meaningless, whereas in the other there is a sharing, a passing on, and an illumination of others at the expense of oneself" (1984: 172). Although I agree fully with Barolini, I would still add, what I consider, a crucial distinction: the "sharing," the "passing on," the "illumination," comes from Virgil's literary work, not from the individual Virgil. Statius never knew Virgil. Directly after the above tribute, Dante has Statius quote from the fourth Eclogue. Thus, the emphasis is clearly shifted from Virgil the man, present to Statius, and Virgil the author of the poetry that transforms Statius' life. One of the compelling tensions of the Statius episode involves the inadequacy of Virgil as an historical figure and the transcendent impact of his pagan poetry.


23 As with many other incidents in the poem, the striking quality of Statius' statement was brought to my attention when I first studied Dante with Marguerite Chiarenza.

24 Robert Hollander offers another mode of interpreting Dante's representation of Virgil as "ribellante":

Se per ribellarsi alla legge di Dio occorre almeno aver avuto delle premonizioni di tale legge, credo che la presenza finale dell'Eneide nella Commedia ci dia un'idea della misura in cui, secondo Dante, Virgilio aveva avvertito il vero Dio e del modo in cui era arrivato ad avere tale esperienza, per parziale che fosse (1983: 145).

For the development of this interpretation, see (126 ff). Although Hollander and I treat Virgil's self-description as "ribellante" in different ways, we nonetheless reach the same conclusion. In Hollander's words: "Noi abbiamo avuto la tendenza a rimanere discepoli di Virgilio e, così facendo, abbiamo ottenuto la nostra facoltà di guida e quella di Dante" (1983: 151). I believe the key to understanding Dante's contradictory representation of Virgil results from exactly this desire to "rimanere discepoli." The pilgrim must be nourished and saved by Virgil, but just as important, he must separate from Virgil.
II Joyce
I Charting the Course of the Embryo

Opposite religion or alongside it, "art" takes on murder and moves through it. It assumes murder insofar as the artistic practice considers death the inner boundary of the signifying process. Crossing that boundary is precisely what constitutes "art." In other words, it is as if death becomes interiorized by the subject of such a practice; in order to function, he must make himself the bearer of death. [...] In returning, through the event of death, toward that which produces its break; in exporting semiotic motility across the border on which the symbolic is established, the artist sketches out a kind of second birth.¹

To use Julia Kristeva's forceful terminology, Joyce murders Stephen in A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man while he simultaneously sketches out a second birth. A birth which has various stages: he attains a particular shore of development in A Portrait and reaches another in Ulysses and yet, unlike the Dantine pilgrim, Stephen never seems to transform into the poet. Nonetheless, the intertext that shapes Stephen into a bearer of death and forms him as one who carries semiotic motility across the border is Dante's Divine Comedy.

In A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, Joyce draws on two related, yet contradictory, Dantine cantos in order to structure an initiatory moment for Stephen. One canto from the Divine Comedy treats the theme of birth; whereas the other tells the story of death. The Dantine birth imagery occurs in Purgatory XXV---the discourse on the embryo---and the Dantine death imagery is drawn from Inferno XXVI---the story of Ulysses' death by drowning. Joyce grafts these two cantos onto the initiatory experience of Stephen Dedalus: thus, his ecstatic movement into new life falls under the shadow of death. Joyce has effectively translated Stephen's experience of rebirth according to a Dantine model of birth and death, and superimposing birth on death generates the fuel that stokes the initiatory fire. However, allusions to Dante's embryo canto resurface in the "Oxen of the Sun" episode of Ulysses and thus require a further look at Joyce's use of the initiatory embryo canto of the Commedia. Stephen voices the direct referrals to the embryo canto in "Oxen of the Sun";
however, Joyce makes Stephen's discourse participate in a different, intertextual conversation which in a muttering, disjointed fashion comments on the implications of *Purgatory* XXV.

In the following chapter, we will first look at the way in which Dante's embryo canto, coupled with his infernal canto dealing with *Ulisse*, create a death-rebirth tension in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. The pressure exerted by the force of each canto leaves the reader taut with expectations; however, a revision rather than a fulfillment is attained in the "Oxen of the Sun" chapter of *Ulysses*. The second part of this opening chapter will undertake a discussion of the way in which Joyce draws on the gestation of the embryo, originating in Dante, in order to infuse an intertextual womb in "Oxen of the Sun."

* * *

In the introductory quote, it is vital to recognize that Julia Kristeva delineates an artistic death and rebirth. A literary initiation operates within the text and through it---hence why I designate the write of passage as dynamic---it sets out to transform the writer and reader. Joyce turns to Dante's *Commedia* in order to grapple with the dynamics of literary initiation. Spurred by the title of the novel: *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, the reader anticipates an initiation.² Surely the novel will address the provocative question of how one transforms from a young man into an artist. *A Portrait* fulfills the expectations set up by the title.

What renders the Dantinean and Joycean treatments of initiation comparable is that they are not simply thematic: the ritual death and rebirth for both authors represent an artistic transformation. They deal a death blow to the non-writing self, in order to bring into the world, a poem or a novel, and thus to enact rebirth, as writers. Moreover, Dante and Joyce seek a rebirth in the reader. Thus, the *Aeneid* is the intertextual guide for Dante; the *Divine Comedy* becomes the intertextual catalyst for the rebirth of Joyce; *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* leads to the spiritual-textual rebirth of Thomas Merton, and so on.³ One could argue that many diverse texts provoke the reader into writing. What makes initiatory literature distinctive is that it is self-reflexive about transformation, slowing the
metamorphosis, cocooning narrative time so that the reader may watch the event unfold.

Frank Kermode portrays narrative duration according to a desire for temporal conjunction. Kermode believes that both men and poets "need fictive concords with origins and ends, such as give meaning to lives and to poems." Kermode recognizes beginnings and endings as crises and argues that the response is either continuity or schism. I believe a third response exists: the write of passage. Rather than fear the origin or end, initiatory writers grapple with these fundamental temporal markers and ultimately superimpose them. The initiatory author renders the beginning and end a temporal event yet one that only exists while reading. Hence, the end of the Commedia marks the transformation from pilgrim to poet, specifically the poet who will write the Commedia. Thus, the poem is characterized by liminal time which we can translate as textual time. The story of the Divine Comedy is the writing of the story. Umberto Eco characterizes the Joycean oeuvre according to a parallel distinction: "A Portrait is the story of a young artist who wants to write A Portrait; Ulysses, a little less explicit, is a book which is a model of itself; Finnegans Wake is, above all, a complete treatise on its own nature." Along with Dante, Joyce holds still the moment of transformation when the literary pilgrim becomes the poet.

Richard Ellmann treats the theme of artistic gestation or embryonic development in Joyce's work. I will propose a different reading of comparable themes. Ellmann charts Stephen's progress through A Portrait as though he exists in a watery realm, until nearing the end of the novel, when he takes flight and gulps air for the first time. Alternatively, I plan to investigate how, in A Portrait, Joyce uses the Dantean intertext to superimpose flight upon drowning. Rather than a transformation from water creature to air creature, swimming to flight, I will argue that Joyce overlays the two, so that any reference to the soaring of Daedalus contains the watery fate of Icarus. Or in Dantean terms, the flight of the pilgrim into heaven, parallels the plunge of Dante's Ulysses into the sea.

Stephen draws on birth imagery to introduce his literary project. Discussing his personal artistic aims with Lynch, Stephen tells him that applied Aquinas works up to a point, but then:
When we come to the phenomena of artistic conception, artistic gestation and artistic reproduction I require a new terminology and a new personal experience. (P 209)

Dante's embryo canto, *Purgatorio* XXV, supplies the new terminology and new personal experience that inform Stephen's artistic rebirth (conception, gestation, reproduction). The transformation from old self to new self draws on the embryonic codes in *Purgatory* XXV. For Stephen, the rebirth experience is intoxicating; however, the artistic aims he describes to Lynch do not account for the negative textual allusions, drawn from the same Dantean intertext, that would trouble his notion of art as a simple birthing into the new. Joyce writes Stephen's initiation as a rejection of the old and celebration of the new, while at the same time he uses an infernal canto from Dante's *Comedy* to mark this journey into the unknown, into the new, with death. Stephen, the *young man* of the novel's title, does not realize the contradictory textual references; whereas Joyce, the *artist* of the title, consciously juxtaposes the Dantean imagery.

Notably, the gap in the initiation scene between Stephen and Joyce enacts in concise terms the epic undertaking of Dante's medieval poem: the initiation of *A Portrait* resembles Dante's artistic project—which in relation to Aquinas is new—an artistic project whereby the pilgrim travels through the afterworld, not only to encounter God, but to become the poet. Stephen is analogous with Dante's pilgrim; while Joyce parallels Dante the poet. The *Divine Comedy*, like *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, is a write of passage: both texts tell the initiatory story of the transformation from man to artist.

In order to uncover the Dantean intertext in the scene of Stephen's initiation, I will briefly review the embryonic codes from the *Commedia*. In *Purgatory* XXV, Statius tells the pilgrim how the embryo develops in the womb:

> The active force having become a soul, like a plant's but so far different that it is on the way and the other already at the shore, then operates to the point that now it moves and feels, like a sea-fungus (52-56)

A phrase such as "already at the shore," designates the womb as a watery realm. The plant
phase then leads into an animal one, but the description of the plant soul becoming a "sea-fungus" (fungo marino) heightens the sense of the embryo developing in an aquatic environment. Statius continues to tell of the embryo's gestation, but draws the Dantean pilgrim's attention to the moment when the "First Mover [...] breathes into it a new spirit" (70-72). At this key juncture, the animal soul of the embryo becomes human. Statius continues: "But how from an animal it becomes a child (fante) you do not yet see" (61-62). John Sinclair translates Dante's "fante" as "child"; however, the unusual term "fante" translates more accurately as "speaker." Fante stems from the Latin fari which is the verb to speak. Notably, Dante uses "fante" to represent the human stage of the embryo's development and since Joyce not only read, but also memorized the poem in the original, he would have remarked Dante's surprising decision to use the term speaker to mark the human phase.

Joyce bought a 1904 edition of the *Divina Commedia*—edited, and more importantly, annotated by Eugenio Camerini—at about the same time he marks the beginning of *A Portrait*, 1904. According to Mary Reynolds, Joyce bought this edition in order to have access to the notes, for he knew the poem by heart.9 Camerini glosses "fante" by referring the reader to an earlier appearance of the word in *Purgatory* XI: "fante---Ogni fante, ogni parlante, ogni uomo. Modo omerico." (each child, each speaker, each man. Homeric mode, 364).10 Camerini simply seeks to remind his readers of the classical virtue of the rational mind, represented by one's capacity to speak. However, his phrase "modo omerico" has particular resonance for Joyceans. In Statius's tale of the development of the embryo, he portrays the womb as a watery realm. The embryo begins in a plant phase, moves to an animal phase, and with a divine infusion of breath, becomes a speaker, specifically a speaker in the Homeric mode. When Joyce grafts the embryo canto onto his gestational work *A Portrait*, one could argue he is anticipating the birth of speaking, speaking in the Homeric mode of *Ulysses*. In anticipation of the second part of this chapter, recall that the birth of speaking undergoes a nine month gestation of subject and style in "Oxen of the Sun."

The sequential embryonic imagery from *Purgatory* XXV structures Stephen's initiation in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. In the fourth section of the novel, Stephen rejects the director of Belvedere's offer to join the Jesuit order. Deciding that "his
destiny was to be elusive of social or religious orders" and moreover that "[he] was destined
to learn his own wisdom" (P 162). Stephen's initiation begins. Drawn from Purgatorio XXV.
Dante's embryonic codes surface to chart Stephen's initiation into a literary life.

At the outset, Stephen records his initiatory sensations according to the Dantinean
vegetable code. Smelling the "faint sour stink of rotted cabbages," Stephen thinks of life in
his family home as "the stagnation of vegetable life," which he will nevertheless choose over
an ecclesiastical life (P 162). Dante's marine code appears when Stephen's feelings enter him
"like long slow waves." (P 165) Next, Stephen imagines a new life at the University and the
imagery now shifts from vegetable to animal code:

he seemed to hear from under the boughs and grasses wild
creatures racing, their feet pattering like rain upon the leaves.
Their feet passed in puttering tumult over his mind, the feet of
hares and rabbits, the feet of harts and hinds and antelopes
(P 165).

Prior to the final embryonic development in Dante's system, Stephen refers again to the water
code by means of his proximity to the sea which makes him afraid, but which also lures him
(P 167-168). And then pondering the mystery of his name, Stephen experiences the infusion
of divine breath which, in Dante's Commedia, transforms the animal embryo into a human
speaker, or in Stephen's dramatic terms, a man, "his throat throbbing with song":

His heart trembled in an ecstasy of fear and his soul was in flight.
His soul was soaring in an air beyond the world and the body he
knew was purified in a breath and delivered of incertitude and
made radiant and commingled with the element of the spirit.
(P 169)

Dante's embryonic codes structure the initiation of Stephen who imagines his experience as a
death of the former self which allows for rebirth into a new being: "[his] soul had arisen from
the grave of boyhood, spurning her graveclothes." (P 170) We learn in Joyce's next novel that
Stephen fails in fact to shake free of these graveclothes, for they still shroud him in Ulysses.

Joyce has hovering over Stephen's ecstatic rebirth the shadow of Dante's Ulisse who
believes he takes off in flight, only to plunge into the sea where he drowns. The flight of Dante's Ulysses, which becomes a plunge into the sea, parallels the fate of Icarus who is widely recognized as the model for Stephen's soaring and diving in *A Portrait*. The Dantine *Ulisse* has not been discussed in this context and yet his story allows for a more profound reading of the Icarian motif.

Whereas the soaring of Stephen is recorded in the initiation scene, the drowning will occur in the silence between *A Portrait* and *Ulysses*, just as the near spiritual death of the Dantine pilgrim takes place between *La Vita Nuova* and the *Commedia*. By means of Dantine referrals, during his literary initiation, Joyce foreshadows the fall of Stephen into the sea.

Not only does Stephen express an anticipatory fear of the sea, but a specific Dantine allusion brings the figure of Dante's Ulysses onto Stephen's imaginative stage. Provoked by his mythological name, Stephen wonders at its meaning:

> What did it mean? Was it a quaint device opening a page of some medieval book of prophecies and symbols, a hawklike man flying sunward above the sea, a prophecy of the end he had been born to serve (P.169).

When contemplating the "fabulous artificer" Daedalus from classical mythology, it is odd that Stephen refers to *some medieval book*. I believe the medieval book is the *Divine Comedy*. Joyce refers on two different, inter-related levels, to Dante and his poetry. I call these Dantine literary levels inter-related because the *Commedia* acts as a spiritual autobiography where the pilgrim Dante who barely escapes drowning to take flight into heaven finds his counter-part in Ulysses whose flight becomes a drowning. According to John Freccero, *Ulisse* functions as a contrast for the pilgrim:

> The ancient voyager [Ulysses] is recalled at the beginning of the *Purgatorio* and again toward the end of the *Paradiso* precisely to mark the contrast between his abortive journey and that of the pilgrim.¹¹
Thus, Ulysses' flight into the unknown, which results in his drowning, acts as an inverted model for the Dantean flight into heaven. As we have noted, Dante's flight, his pilgrimage, is as much to experience God as it is to transform from the pilgrim into the poet: as Thomas Bergin expresses it, Dante's project is literary allegory, a symbolic telling about the act of literary creation. Dante blurs the lines between author and character, Dante and Ulisse, reality and fiction. Differing from classical epics, the Commedia is a self-reflexive work that recounts the story of its own creation. Hence, the levels that separate author from character clearly relate to one another in a meta-literary manner. Both Dante and Joyce share the intertextual mentor St. Augustine with whom they debate about the narrative creation of self.

Dante's surprising choice of the term "fante" operates as a mode of distinguishing his spiritual autobiography from one of his intertextual guides: Augustine. In the Confessions, Augustine argues that he must learn about his time in the womb from others. Since he is without speech, the early Augustine does not have any accessible memory traces of that time. Brian Stock demonstrates that this seemingly simple statement of early life in fact refers to the dependence on authorities when one cannot have knowledge. Neither Dante nor Joyce miss the allusion to literary authorities that informs Augustine's subtext, since the Confessions' further discussion of the thematic of the nursing and the nutrition the infant takes from milk reappears in comparable ways in their respective texts. As we will discuss in the next chapter, breast imagery and nursing, for both Dante and Joyce, function as a commentary on intertextuality and authority.

In his treatment of the gestation of the embryo, Dante differs in a crucial way from Augustine: the ultimate stage, when God breathes in a soul, configures the Dantean embryo as a "fante." This word never appears in Augustine's work: Dante thus establishes his origin in the womb as the antithesis of what informs Augustine's opening to the Confessions which elaborates on the stage of the "in-fante, the time of infancy, the time of non-speaking. Dante offers an alternative reading of this stage. As recorded in the Divine Comedy, although beyond conscious memory, the moment when one experiences God's breath and becomes a fante, marks the moment to which one can return, via creative memory. Dante differs from Augustine since he maintains that one does not need authorities to return to this time. In fact,
according to Dante, the literary pilgrim must abandon his authorities in order to set in motion his textual initiation.

Joyce also charts a different course from the one outlined in the *Confessions*. In Augustine's early section on the infant---which sets forth the conjunction of the development of memory and speech---he asks a significant question for Joyce: "Shall any be his own artificer (artifex)?" Stephen's contemplation of the "fabulous artificer" must be put in dialogue with the Augustinian and Dantean modes of imagining the self. For when one examines initiatory dynamics, the pressing question is exactly this: shall anyone be his own artificer? Dante and Joyce's texts respond to Augustine's query with a compelling affirmative.

Stephen's investigation into his prophetic name very reasonably leads critics to the mythic Daedalus. And yet we must factor in Joyce's reference to a medieval book. The allusion to the hawklike man, may be to Dante himself since the characteristic feature of the Dantean face, well known at the turn-of-the-century, for instance in Gustav Doré's portrait of Dante, are his hawk-like features. The "quaint device" could allude to one of these portraits that inevitably appear at the beginning of his epic poem, which neatly fits the description: "some medieval book of prophecies and symbols." Besides his beak-like nose, Dante's last name Alighieri, which Stephen records in his journal, carries resonances of flight. The first three letters of Dante's family name "Ali" mean "wings" in Italian. Taking our analysis to another level, Dante's character *Ulisse*, tells the pilgrim and Virgil that his crew "made of the oars wings [ali] for the mad flight." Significantly, this famous line, which has become emblematic of Dante's Ulysses, is drawn from a passage in the *Aeneid* where it refers to Daedalus. We have thus come full circle in examining Stephen's references to a medieval book while pondering the personal import of the mythical name Dedalus. Joyce's referral to the hawklike man in a medieval book brings to the fore Dante's *Ulisse*.

We have already remarked on the importance of Eugenio Camerini's notes that accompanied Joyce's copy of the *Divine Comedy*. Camerini makes an interesting referral when glossing the line Dante has *Ulisse* employ to describe the enthusiasm of his aged crew: "dei remi facemmo ali al folle volo" (we made of the oars wings for the mad flight, *Inf.* XXVI, 125). Camerini points out that Dante's verse finds its origin in Virgil.
Virgil uses the expression "remigium alarum" (winged oarage) to describe the wings Daedalus creates and then offers to the temple of Apollo. Camerini's note establishes the relationship between Dante's *Ulisse* and the myth of Daedalus. For Stephen, as a reader of the *Commedia*, Daedalus is a "hawklike man in a medieval book"; however, Stephen does not seem aware that, for Dante, the fate of Daedalus is entangled with the drowning of Icarus or Ulysses.

The Dantinean *Ulisse* haunts the comic story of the Homeric Odysseus who returns home. As a flagrant rewrite of the Homeric legend, Dante has Ulysses drown along with his elderly crew.\(^{16}\) Joyce irrigates his novels from both sources. Besides the name which becomes the title of his epic, what makes the Dantinean Ulysses relevant to a student of Joyce is that Dante describes the Homeric hero Ulysses in terms of Stephen's symbolic namesake: the mythic Daedalus.

*Ulisse* surfaces during Stephen's write of passage in *A Portrait*.\(^{17}\) And the Virgilian intertext, which presents Dante's Ulysses as soaring with the wings of Daedalus and yet following tragically the failed flight pattern of his son Icarus, allows us to identify the shadow of the Dantinean Ulysses looming over Stephen's ecstatic initiation, and thus preparing the way for Joyce's *Ulysses*. On the surface of the text, Stephen pursues his connection to his namesake, the inventor Daedalus; whereas in an undercurrent swirling below, Joyce recalls Dante's allusion to Daedalus through the figure *Ulisse*. We must look at the way in which Joyce has Dante's Ulysses textually surface in *A Portrait*.

In *Inferno* XXVI, Virgil leads the Dantinean pilgrim past Ulysses who appears as one prong of "la fiamma cornuta" (horned flame), his punishment for being a false counselor. This Ulysses image is recalled when Stephen's break from the church translates into music "like triplebranching flames leaping fitfully, flame after flame, out of a midnight wood."\(^{18}\) (P 165) Ulysses tells the story of his last adventure which involved sailing beyond divinely set limits, marked by the pillars of Hercules (lines 106-109). Stephen echoes the Ulysses error: "There was a lust of wandering in his feet that burned to set out for the ends of the earth." (P 170)\(^{19}\) *Ulisse* convinces his crew to follow him to the ends of the known world with the cry:
to this so brief vigil of the senses that remains to us choose not
to deny experience, in the sun’s track, of the unpeopled world.
Take thought of the seed from which you spring. You were not
born to live as brutes (Inf. XXVI, 114-119).30

Stephen’s initiation shows him contemplating the spiritual seed from which he springs. He
sets forth, according to his journal, to encounter, not deny experience. And he privileges the
realm of the senses—"the snares of the world"—over the "passionless life" of the
ecclesiastics. Ulysses encourages his men to journey "in the sun's track" and Stephen feels in
the throes of initiation "as though he were soaring sunward." Flying sunward is deadly for
both Icarus and Dante's Ulysses; in the final journal entries, Stephen represents himself
according to both of these doomed figures. Ulisse tells Virgil and Dante that as he and his
crew journeyed their joy turned to lamentation, for a storm rose and hit the forefront of the
ship whirling it around until it finally plunged the prow below and the sea closed over him
and his men (lines 136-142). In the initiation scene where Stephen is drawn to the sea, a faint
recollection of the storm that drowns Ulysses clouds Stephen's excitement:

the air was chilled and looking askance towards the water he saw
a flying squall darkening and crisping suddenly the tide. A faint
click at his heart, a faint throb in his throat told him once more of
how his flesh dreaded the cold intrahuman odour of the sea (P 167).

The myth of Icarus cannot account for the threat of a storm. The unfortunate son of Daedalus
flies too close to the sun; however, Dante's Ulisse succumbs with his ship and crew to a
storm which hovers menacingly on the horizon of Stephen's initiation, much like it did for the
pilgrim Dante, at the outset of the Divine Comedy.

The innovative treatment of the Odysseus myth in the Commedia becomes truly
remarkable when the reader begins the third volume, the Paradiso, and realizes that Dante
configures heaven as a vast sea. In other words, the flight of Ulysses which becomes in fact a
plunge into the sea finds a telling correspondence in the flight of the pilgrim into heaven
which the poet renders as a plunge into a metaphorical sea. According to my reading, which
depends on the disregarded embryo canto, the sea into which Dante plunges is the sea of the
womb. In the watery womb of the embryo canto the pilgrim first encounters God whose breath instills in him a soul. Therefore, Dante's poetic treatment of a meeting with God retells the experience he had as an embryo in the womb: the encounter with God transforms him into a fante, a speaker. The dissolution or death at the end of the Commedia thus parallels the birth moment when Dante fulfills his developmental levels in the womb and prepares to emerge into the world. Joyce alludes to Dante's heavenly sea. With one phrase, Joyce captures the implications of the Dantean flight into heaven which is simultaneously a plunge into the sea.

The apex of Stephen's initiation leads the reader to Dante's heavenly sea described in the Paradiso. Critics have noted Joyce's allusion to Dante in Stephen's description of the celestial rose. In one final nod to Dante's Ulysses, at the height of his initiation, Stephen describes the Dantean rose as "uncertain as under sea." (P 172) Since Dante configures his heaven as a sea, the ascent of the pilgrim into heaven---superimposed upon the drowning of Ulisse---is captured concisely by Joyce in the strange image of the celestial rose uncertain as under sea. Moreover, the rose appears to Stephen as a "new world," the new life activated by initiation rites. Stephen's transformation anticipates the plunge into the sea which will occur between A Portrait and Ulysses. The shedding of the old Stephen, to allow the emergence of the new Stephen, requires a baptism in the sea.

Joyce arranges Stephen's initiation according to the Dantean embryonic codes, including the ocean code which serves to signify the watery womb. Thus, superimposed on the death of the old self is the sequence of embryonic stages which convey the birth of the new self in Dantean terms. Stephen's write of passage culminates in a vision of the great rose in heaven. What is notable in Joyce's allusion to Dante's celestial rose is his description of it as under the sea. The placement of the rose in the sea suggests an awareness on Joyce's part that Dante describes the space of heaven as a vast sea: a sea that parallels the sea of the womb where he first encountered God. However, as we have already seen, the sea which acts as the metaphoric space of Dante's Paradiso is also the sea in which Dante plunges Ulysses. And Joyce clearly foreshadows in the initiation scene of A Portrait, a drowning by sea for his hero Stephen.
Readily discussed by critics, Stephen's connection to the Daedalus family shifts ominously from father to son as he calls out to Daedalus in his final journal entry: "Old father, old artificer, stand me now and ever in good stead." (P 253) Somehow Stephen has taken on the role of Icarus, no longer identifying with Daedalus; instead, he puts Daedalus in the role of old father. The authority he establishes for himself according to an Augustinian system puts the creative force elsewhere: the artifex is not recognized as residing within one's own creative process.

Before charting the course of the embryo in Ulysses, we will make a brief digression on the issue of authority. Jean-Michel Rabaté analyses a Dantean inspired handling of authority in Ulysses which has a bearing on a study of Joyce's novels as participants in a textual initiation. Rabaté quotes a Stephen-generated passage from "Scylla and Charybdis" which concludes: "A. E. I. O. U." The focus is the debt Stephen owes to A. E. and his desire to shirk the debt by arguing he is different from the former self that borrowed the money. Stephen appears to treat the notion of initiation---death of the old self, birth of the new---as an amusing form of avoiding responsibility whether it is financial or intellectual. In contrast, as shown by Rabaté's insightful reading, for Joyce, the passage comments on the troubled relationship between authority and the creation of the self. He connects Stephen's focus on his debt with the earlier exchange in "Telemachus" where the figure of Iago is alluded to in Deasy's misinterpretation of Shakespeare. Rabaté contends:

here Stephen underwrites his own birth---his performative maieutics---by a formula which is the equivalent of an "I owe therefore I am." Between the activity contained in "I+ago" and its parody in "Iagogogo", Stephen discovers the dialectics of subjectivity in a move through language which requires its play with absence and difference.23

If we transplant I+ago into the Augustinian field of spiritual autobiography, we discover a Joycean hybrid: for the I+ago, which Rabaté reads as the I coupled with the Latin ago may also be read in a temporal sense as: I+past authors, those who wrote long ago. I+the authority of the past is fundamental to the literary initiation of Stephen Dedalus, while at the same
time, this dependence, this debt to the authority of long ago, hampers, stifles, and starves the would-be-artist. The contradictory force of authority generates one of the most significant themes in the *Divine Comedy*. Joyce addresses the question of authority to Dante.

As identified and examined by Jean-Michel Rabaté, the question of authority posed by Stephen—which concludes with the statement of vowels—finds its source in Dante's discussion of authority in book IV of the *Convivio*:

> It must therefore be known that authority is nothing less than the activity proper to an author. This word (namely, *auctor*, without its third letter c) may be derived from two sources. The one is a verb, which has generally dropped out of use in Latin, and signifies much the same as the tying of words together, viz, A E I O U.  

Rabaté makes a connection between Dante's idea here expressed as "tying words together" and the *nodo* (knot) that describes the universal complex imagined by the pilgrim in his climatic vision in *Paradiso*. In the final canto of the *Divine Comedy*, Dante describes how in his final vision he saw "that which is scattered in leaves through the universe" gathered together in one "volume":

> I think I saw the universal form of this complex, (nodo) because in the telling of it I feel my joy expand. (*Par.* XXXIII, 85-93)

Based on this final canto of the poem, Rabaté shows that Dante adheres to the same model of authority he describes in the *Convivio*.

> a proof of the validity of what is written or uttered lies in the performative action realised by the very telling or writing: the poet unlike Stephen, believes his own theory not merely because it is founded on sound authority but also because his enunciation of the vision brings such a bliss, such 'joyance' or joycity to Dante—and to his reader, entranced by the same magnificent ascent towards light and beauty. The knot bridges the gap between the vision and the words that make up the vision.  

> The act of telling or writing is what renders the ritual of initiation a write of passage. For both
Dante and Joyce there has to be a dialogic relationship between authority and the self when it comes to an artistic death and rebirth. Philosopher Charles Taylor, in his chronological examination of the sources of the self, attributes feelings of bliss and joy to the discovery of meaning. He argues that not to have a framework "is to fall into a life that is spiritually senseless." Notably, Taylor sees this quest for sense---in the modern era---as inseparable from the creative act of telling or writing:

We find the sense of life through articulating it. And moderns have become acutely aware of how much sense being there for us depends on our own powers of expression. Discovering here depends on, is interwoven with, inventing.27

According to Taylor, lack of meaning constitutes a threatening state and articulation is a way to survive crossing the threshold from lack of meaning to significance. The author, threatened by a worn-out framework, responds to the impasse with narrative. The author writes an initiation to assist him through the perilous passage from a state of senselessness to one of meaning.28 Charles Taylor and Jean-Michel Rabaté concur that the performative act of inventing one's meaning produces the self. However, what interests me is the relationship between the articulating self who emerges out of the background of authority.

Rabaté's reading of authority---via Joyce's use of the Dantean intertext---supports an initiatory reading not only of the Commedia, but also of Joyce's texts. Augustine's question: "who shall be his own artificer?" becomes in Stephen's response at the end of A Portrait: the old father, the fabulous artificer of myth. Conversely, the poet and the author, Dante and Joyce, reply I+ago will be the artificer of my own write of passage. The equation differs depending on whether one charts the travels of the pilgrim or the journey of the poet in transition.

In the following chapters we will examine in detail the intense relationship between the authority of past texts (ago) and the creativity of the writing self (I). This equation put into textual terms reads: the authority of past writers shapes the literary pilgrim, but the pilgrim must abandon this authority in order to become the poet.

In "Oxen of the Sun," Stephen uses Dante's terminology to express the intertextual
debate between the self-reflective writer and his authorities as follows: "Both babe and parent now glorify their Maker, the one in limbo gloom, the other in purgefire." *(U 319, 224-225)*

On the literal level, Stephen argues that the infant who does not survive and thus does not undergo baptism is assigned to limbo whereas the mother will have to put in her time in Purgatory. On the semiotic level, Stephen's line refers to the Dantean source and comments on the intertextual relationship. Discussed at great length in the Dante section of this work, Virgil is relegated by Dante to the Limbo of unbaptized children. And at the summit of Mt. Purgatory, Dante has the shades of poets performing a fiery penance. Hence, one may read Stephen's lines according to the Dantean intertext as a gloss on the necessity of abandoning the literary guide, Virgil, to limbo gloom like an unbaptized baby in order to pass through the purgefire with other poets thus activating one's own textual rebirth. In the same paragraph of "Oxen of the Sun," Virgil is referred to directly ("as Virgilius saith"), the embryo canto surfaces ("a human soul was infused"), and the ultimate initiatory opposites—birth and death—are brought together. Bloom hems and haws not wanting to provoke the bawdy medical students and thus he sums up: "it was good for that mother Church belike at one blow had birth and death pence and in such sort deliverly he scaped their questions." *(U 319, 257-9)* Bloom escapes their questions but he provokes ours. The pence at birth covers payment for an infant's baptism; the pence at death refers to the funeral costs when the mother cannot be saved. The juxtaposition, not only of birth and death, but of the death of the mother, and of a baptism are crucial to the initiatory intertextual dynamic between Dante and Joyce. The reference to owing money further connects this passage with the contemplation of authority via the debt to A. E.

Keeping in mind the contradictory role of authority in literary initiations, we will now concentrate on Joyce's continued use of *Purgatorio* XXV in *Ulysses*.

* * *

*Send us bright one, light one, Horhorn, quickening and wombfruit.* *(U 314, 2)*
The chanting at the outset of "Oxen of the Sun" brings together the symbolic birth and death of the *Commedia*: "bright one, light one" and "quickening and wombfruit." The death at the end of Dante's epic poem occurs in an overwhelming brightness of divine light. The gestation of the embryo describes the quickening of wombfruit. The two moments are superimposed in both Dante and Joyce.

For those familiar with Dante's embryo canto, "Oxen of the Sun" immediately translates into a comically elaborate treatment of the gestation in the womb resulting, with God's infusion of breath, in a *speaker*. The stages of literary development which Joyce conveys through exaggerations of styles and content and vocabulary, operate according to a comic model of expansion. But the Ulysscean episode narrates as always according to a *jocoserious* method. We will pass beyond the humour to examine how Joyce draws on Dante's embryo canto to see whether or not it contributes to an important way on an initiatory reading of his first two novels.

We noted earlier the way in which Dante asserts his version of the gestation of the embryo in artistic terms in conscious contrast to the ideas put forth by Augustine at the opening of the *Confessions*. Dante's surprising choice of the term "fante," as the final stage in the womb would not have gone unnoticed by Joyce. Moreover, by means of the referral to Augustine's question about who could be his own artificer, it appears that Joyce as well finds himself, along with Dante, in dialogue with Augustine's influential spiritual autobiography. Thus, Joyce's elaboration of Dante's idea---that when God breathes into the embryo the transformation is from animal to speaker---into the nine literary stages of the "Oxen" episode should be approached with intertextual expectations. Notably, Joyce alludes to Dante's canto on the embryonic development while at the same time he superimposes its imagery onto the climatic scene at the end of Dante's epic poem. In other words, like in *A Portrait*, Joyce structures the rebirth imagery around a poetic death. The end of the *Commedia* describes the pilgrim's vision of God as a symbolic death and in the first section of this work, I argued that Dante superimposes this ritual death upon the return to the womb configured in the embryo canto in *Purgatorio*. Joyce brings the two cantos together and thus supports my contention
that the *Divina Commedia* seeks to articulate an initiation while it also strives to generate a write of passage for its readers. Dante becomes an initiatory force when his self-reflective treatment of transformation affects a literary pilgrim like Joyce. Just as Virgil leads Dante out of the dark wood so too does Dante activate the modern writer. Joyce's response to the initiatory dynamic of the *Divine Comedy* reinforces creatively my critical reading.

* * *

In a passage which ostensibly speaks about Bloom's failed love affair with Bridie Kelly, Joyce recalls the womb that forms the initiatory centre of Dante's epic poem while he simultaneously alludes to the symbolic death the pilgrim will undergo as he experiences God. He draws on the embryo canto while recognizing that Dante has superimposed it onto the ending of the poem. The author of *Ulysses* not only recognizes that the pilgrim's encounter with God in the womb parallels his encounter with God at the end of the *Commedia*, but he also integrates this discovery into his own textual ritual.

They are entwined in nethermost darkness, the willer with the willed, and in an instant (fiat!) light shall flood the world. Did heart leap to heart? Nay, fair reader. In a breath 'twas done but---hold! (*U* 338, 1069-1071)

The "they" refers to Bloom and Bridie Kelly who, as the passage continues to elucidate, failed to sexually connect and so Bloom is left without a son. The name Bridie Kelly is a provocative diminutive, containing suggestive terms like bride, die, Book of Kells, St. Brigid.³⁰ Intriguingly, St. Bridgid's feast day is the day before Joyce's birthday. Therefore, temporally, Bridie Kelly represents the time before Joyce. The invocation to the sun at the beginning of the episode---bright one, light one, quickening and wombfruit---has to do with bringing the sun (fiat!) into being out of nethermost darkness. Nethermost darkness creates a womb-like space. Moreover, by taking the wombfruit out of the light and placing it in the darkness of night anticipates the "humid nightblue fruit" of *Ithaca's* dark sky (*U* 573, 1039). Bloom and Bridie fail to produce a son in this passage; however if the wombfruit
foreshadows the nightblue fruit than the uniting of Bloom with Stephen suggest fruition in the womb, the quickening of a son.

The name Bridie Kelly recalls Stephen's passage on the bride bed, bed in which one will die; yet her name is linked with the Book of Kells, spiritual illustrations thus accompany the text of her name. The Dantean intertext encourages the reader to follow the birth/death resonances of the name Bridie Kelly. The odd line: "willer with the willed" recalls the ominous verse in the infernal tale of Dante's *Ulisse* which tells of how their ship was whirled by the storm "as One willed, until the sea closed again over [them]." (*Inf.* XXVI, 141-142)³¹ Dante compares the infernal pockets in which Ulysses appears to his own baptismal font in the cathedral in Florence. In the *Divine Comedy*, the reader recalls this baptismal association in particular with Ulysses, since he drowns and Dante speaks of one drowning in his baptismal font. The reference to Dante's *Ulisse* among the other allusions to the *Commedia* leaves the reader with thoughts on the baptismal font as the site of Catholic death and rebirth.

As we noted in our digression on authority, those like Virgil who are crucial to one's textual rebirth must be abandoned. The way in which Virgil is relegated to Limbo compares to an infant who does not undergo the sacrament of initiation, baptism. In the third chapter we will discuss the extensive allusions to Dante's Ulysses who drowns in the nethermost region of the maternal sea which threatens Stephen in *A Portrait* and also in *Ulysses*. For both Dante and Joyce, the figure of inversion, the drowned *Ulisse*, always surfaces in the matrix of imagery dealing with the return to the womb and thus literary rebirth.

The one who wills life and death dominates Stephen's comparable reflections on the womb that produced him:

> Wombed in sin darkness I was too, made not begotten. By them, the man with my voice and my eyes and a ghostwoman with ashes on her breath. They clasped and sundered, did the coupler's will. From before the ages He willed me (*U* 32, 45-48).

Just as He wills *Ulisse* to drown, He wills Stephen into life. In both passages, the life begins and ends in a breath: "in a breath 'twas done" and a "ghostwoman with ashes on her breath."

The two distinct forces that create in the embryo canto are the natural parents and the Will of God. In the name Bridie we have the natural force: bride who dies a small death in her sexual sin which produces a child. In Stephen's passage this human act "made" him. And then the divine component enters as the Book of Kells or as the one who "before the ages" begot him. The tension between the production of nature (who makes) and the infusion in divine breath (who begets) is exactly what structures the discourse of the embryo in *Purgatory* XXV.

And yet with the line "He willed me" which echoes Ulisse's phrase "as One willed." Joyce sends his reader back to the foil Ulisse who drowns in a malebolge in Dante's hell which resembles his baptismal font in the cathedral in Florence. As we remarked earlier, the death is a maternal death (a ghostwoman) which Joyce links with baptism (*Ulisse*'s malebolge which Dante likens to his baptismal font). Joyce enters *Ulysses* into dialogue with the *Divine Comedy* and its intertwining of baptism with the death of Ulisse who seems to drown for all time in Dante's infernal baptismal font. With the Dantean intertext flowing beneath the surface of *A Portrait* and *Ulysses*, Stephen's unholy fear of water seems quite reasonable. The threat to Stephen corresponds tellingly with the image of drowning in a baptismal font filled with the maternal waters of the sea. In the above quoted passage where Stephen disparages his physical birth and privileges his spiritual entry into the world, we discover a referral to the Dantean dynamic of initiation by superimposing the embryo canto's primary beginning—the pilgrim's birth—onto the *Commedia*'s death-like ending.

At the end of the *Commedia*, where the pilgrim creatively re-enacts his primary encounter with the Creator which occurred in the womb, he is overcome with light. The pilgrim describes himself as "entering more and more through the beam of the lofty light;" he breaks into the invocation "O Light Supreme;" he feels gratitude for looking on "the Eternal Light" and reaches a point where he cannot turn away:

> I think, from the keeness I endured of the living ray, that I should have been dazzled if my eyes had been turned from it (*Par. XXXIII*, 76-78).32

The superimposition of the embryo canto on this final canto of the poem provides a gloss for
the encounter between Bloom and Bridie. We earlier remarked on Joyce's awareness of Dante's representation of the womb and heaven as analogous spaces by describing heaven as a watery realm. Joyce thus describes the Dantesan celestial rose as "uncertain as under sea." In "Oxen of the Sun" where Joyce comically elaborates on the embryo canto, we are not surprised to find an allusion to Ulisse for he participates in the network of Dantesan images which configure the return to the womb as a death by drowning. We discover further confirmation of this pattern of allusions to Ulisse with Joyce's reference to light, "and in an instant (fies!) light shall flood the world," (italics mine). The passage from Genesis works equally well, except that the human parents do not have a part to play as they most certainly do in the discourse on the embryo. Joyce recognizes the death of the pilgrim at the end of the poem---which occurs in the light of God (fies!)---as a watery death (flood). The pilgrim is flooded by light at the end of the poem which recalls his return to the sea of the womb where he first drew in God's breath. The light in the final canto of the Paradiso will flood the realm of the pilgrim, drowning him in the watery womb which will allow for his rebirth as the poet. According to this reading, Joyce's line: "In a breath 'twas done" resounds tellingly. In the next chapter, we will focus on the implications of divine breath for a textual initiation.

This meeting between Bloom and Bridie saddens the protagonist since their failure to copulate will not produce a son. Bloom does not realize that the narrative recounts in fact an intertextual story which originates in Genesis (fies!) and actually tells the story of a spiritual/artistic birth. Remember that St. Bridgid's feast day is February 1st: the sun/son who is evoked at the outset of the episode suggests that the human figures Bloom and Bridie Kelly, will not produce James Joyce whose birthday transforms from the physical to the creative since he births his textual children on February 2nd. The sun/son will be born through the text.

Dante also invokes the sun at the opening of Paradiso. In designating his birth as a textual event, Joyce uses what Stephen seeks in conversation with Lynch, the new terminology of Dante and the new personal experience of reading the Divine Comedy in order to express artistic conception, gestation, and reproduction. A son is not born through the physical nor the biblical clasping, a sun is born via the intertextual initiation.
In "Oxen of the Sun," Joyce returns to the Purgatorial canto of the gestation of the embryo. He clarifies the unusual image of the celestial rose "uncertain as under sea" with his fantastic expansion of the one Dantean verse which has the embryo transform in the womb into a speaker. When we recognize, through an analysis of the "Oxen" episode that Joyce posits Stephen a textual site of origin, the passage on Dante's celestial rose takes on a more profound meaning:

Glimmering and trembling, trembling and unfolding, a breaking light, an opening flower, it spread in endless succession to itself, breaking in full crimson and unfolding, and fading to palest rose, leaf by leaf and wave of light by wave of light, flooding all the heavens with its soft flushes, every flush deeper than other. (P 172)

Like in "Oxen of the Sun" the light is flooding. Dante's celestial rose---an intertextual womb---gives birth to the artist of A Portrait. As we noted previously, at the end of the Commedia in his final vision, the pilgrim sees "that which is scattered in leaves through the universe" gathered together in one "volume." Joyce's leaf by leaf suggest the unfolding of the textual rose whose pages turn leaf by leaf in the Dantean volume.

Joyce has taken Dante's unusual term "fante" (speaker) to the limit so that the embryonic development recorded in "Oxen of the Sun" translates into a literary gestation which one expects to give birth to a Dantean fante. In Ulysses, the development into a speaker refers only fleetingly to a divine infusion of breath, and much more comprehensively treated are the embryo's travels through the various stages of literature to become a speaker. What is condensed in the Commedia to one unique use of the term---fante---expands in Ulysses to a long chapter demonstrating the force of Dante's surprising word for the ultimate moment when the joyful Creator cradles the embryo, infuses it with a self-reflecting soul, and thus transforms it into a speaker.

Statius's discourse on the gestation of the embryo in Purgatory XXV of the Commedia does not merely structure the "Oxen" episode, Stephen also refers to it in the midst of one of his drunken speeches. Garry Leonard suggested in conversation that being under the "influence" of alcohol compares quite notably with the modernist idea of literary
influence. Leonard contends provocatively that modernism is affected by sources in the same way that an individual may be influenced by drink: there is inevitably a return to one's own text, a sobering, so to speak. Thus, the influence sways the text in a more intense and yet transitory fashion. It does not always lead the reader to meaning; however, it may insert into conscious articulation a textual impulse previously held in check. We will return to a more thorough discussion of the thematics of drinking to excess, being under the influence, and drowning in other intertexts. Being the fate of Dante's Ulisse, one must read the drowning in Joyce as not only intertextual, but also initiatory. The fact that Stephen speaks of the embryo canto while inebriated is perhaps more important than one might initially believe.

In two of Stephen's opinionated speeches, which occur back to back, he differs from the general opinion of his mostly medical audience, based on a Dantean distinction from *Purgatory* XXV:

> He said also how at the end of the second month a human soul was infused and how in all our holy mother foldeth ever souls for God's greater glory whereas that earthly mother which was but a dam to bear beastly should die by canon (U 319, 247-250).

Don Gifford aptly calls the incorrect designation "end of the second month" Stephen's "rhetorical flourish"; I would imagine the error stems from his drunken state. Nonetheless, Gifford names as the source for the embryo's development, with the infusion of a soul, Aristotle. The same source that Dante used. However, it is likely that Joyce reads Dante here rather than Aristotle. Joyce mentions Averroes, also alluded to by Dante in Statius's generation of the embryo (identified by Camerini in his notes). In his next speech, Stephen refers to a line spoken by St. Thomas Aquinas in the *Divine Comedy*. Aquinas is the theological source for Dante's embryo canto and thus forms a proper balance with Aristotle who acts as the biological source for Dante's ideas about the generation of the embryo. Stephen's thoughts about the earthly mother (the domain of Aristotelian science) and the holy mother (the domain of Thomist theology) are further explained in Dantean terms:

> Mark me now. In woman's womb word is made flesh but in the
spirit of the maker all flesh that passes becomes the word that shall not pass away. This is the postcreation. (U 320, 292-294)

Just before Statius makes a similar distinction between the biological creation of the embryo and the spiritual infusion of a soul, he also asks his audience to mark his words. The embryo develops biologically, but it does not transform into a speaker or have a self-reflective soul until the infusion of God's breath. In the woman's womb, the embryo becomes flesh; but within God's breath, the part of the embryo that will not pass away, the "postcreation" takes place. This passage in Ulysses, which echoes the dual phase of the generation of the embryo as outlined in Dante's Purgatory XXV, is followed by a direct quote from the final canto of the Paradiso. Joyce captures the initiatory paradox in a direct quote from the Commedia: "Vergine madre, figlia del tuo figlio" (Par. XXXIII, 1; U 320, 303). The Virgin Mary enacts in Christian mythology the initiatory birth, the infusion of sacred time into history; thus she is expressed in the paradox of being the "daughter of her son." She is paradoxically the creator of her Creator. The figure of Mary represents in literary terms the dynamic intertextual relationship between initiatory writers. At the outset of the Commedia, Dante says that Virgil is his author, his creator. And yet, Dante takes his source, the Virgilian intertext, and produces in the Divina Commedia the character Virgil, thus becoming the creator of Virgil. One may therefore assert: the Virgilian mother, daughter of her Dantean son.

Rather than being the product of "the coupler's will" where the physical parents "clapsed and sundered," the Joycean literary initiate has the opportunity to give birth to himself. As we have noted, the birth imagery from the embryo canto occurs in conjunction with death imagery drawn from the conclusion of the Divine Comedy where the pilgrim is flooded with light. What is remarkable in the allusion to the end of Dante's poem, amidst a series of references to the embryo canto in "Oxen of the Sun"---the most extended Joycean allusion to Dante's discourse on the embryo---is the recognition of the initiatory dynamic: the end is in fact the beginning. Death occurs simultaneously with rebirth. The Dantean pilgrim's encounter with God at the end of the Paradiso is superimposed upon his first encounter with God in the womb when the Creator breathed in his soul.
Stephen translates spiritual initiation into a write of passage during the defense of his aesthetic theory in the library:

He is a ghost, a shadow now, the wind by Elsinore's rocks or what you will, the sea's voice, a voice heard only in the heart of him who is the substance of his shadow, the son consubstantial with the father. (U 162, 478-481)

If we transfer this quote out of the Shakespearean arena and place it within the Dantean intertextual network, we can read Stephen's theory as indicative of an initiatory text. The former self has---to use Kristeva's term which dovetails nicely with the fate of King Hamlet---been murdered, has become a ghost, a shadow. The former self in textual initiations is the reader and the texts he reads. Virgil is the ghost, the shadow who leads Dante up until the moment when he transforms into speaker. While Dante reads Virgil he takes on a shadowy life, but his ghostly self that guides the pilgrim disappears when the Dantean pilgrim finds his own voice.

The question of the substance and the shadow is posed by the Dantean pilgrim and acts as the catalyst for Statius's discourse on the generation of the embryo. The Dantean pilgrim hears about the development of the embryo in response to his question about the relationship between the shades he sees in hell and their previous living forms on earth (Purg. XXV, 20-21). The son and the father are one in initiatory terms, just as the mother and son are simultaneously creators of one another, for the literary pilgrim who dies to his former biological/historical life and gives birth out of an intertextual source to a self-reflective being is both mother and father to himself.\(^37\) He now creates his mother and father as characters in his text, just as Dante has Virgil as a dual parental figure, both mother and father, in his Commedia. The paradox of being creator of your Creator captures succinctly the dynamic relationship between Virgil and Dante for the poet of the Divine Comedy credits the creator of the Aeneid with authoring him.

From the gestational terminology he discovers in the Dante's epic poem, Joyce translates initiation into a theory of art: the old becomes an intertextual shadow whose new substance is the work at hand. They read and write one another simultaneously.
produces Odyssean figure, we have in Joyce: Although Joyce brought to Dante's reading of Virgil's Auctoritas. Camerini. When relevant, I will examine the implications of the Auctoritas for an initiatory reading.

All English citations of the Commedia will be from John D. Sinclair's 1939 translation. I have changed Sinclair's use of "thee" and "thou," as well as his use of archaic verb forms, which I feel better captures the tone of Dante's epic.

Mary Reynolds, 31.

All citations from the Commedia will be from the edition used by Joyce, edited, with notes by Eugenio Camerini. When relevant, I will translate Camerini's notes.


Augustine (I, vi, 10).

See Hugh Shankland's article "Dante 'Aliger'."

Camerini writes: "---De remi, ecc. Virgilio disse: il remeggio dell' ale." (214) Mary Reynolds explains that Joyce:

knew the Aeneid in Latin and must have read it, as well as the Divine Comedy, with the critic's eye. Thus we see him deliberately comparing the two poems in order better to understand Dante's use of Virgil. (215)

Although Reynolds does not refer to Virgil's verse about the "winged oarage," she describes the critical attention Joyce brought to Dante's reading of Virgil's Aeneid which is relevant to my interpretation.

According to David Thompson:

Dante has invented the entire account of Ulysses, not only the final voyage but also the quoted version of his encounter with the siren. And he has invented these episodes not to fill gaps in the story as known to himself and his Greekless contemporaries, but in direct opposition to a perfectly clear tradition.(49)

Beyond the critical circle of Dantean scholarship, from the point of view of W. B. Stanford, whose focus is the Odyssean figure, we have further confirmation of Thompson's assertion for according to Stanford Dante produces "an entirely new mutation in the tradition of Ulysses the wanderer."(180) Stanford concludes: "Both in its mythology and in its moral implications this is a revolutionary version of the final voyage of
Ulysses."(181)
17 Richard Ellmann recognized the allusions to Dante's Ulisse in the initiation scene of A Portrait but does not develop them having other concerns (1982: 361).
18 Dante critics have often commented on the carefully drawn parallels between the pilgrim's near-drowning experience in the prologue canto and the drowning of Ulysses twenty-five cantos later. Keeping this correspondence in mind, Joyce's reference to the "midnight wood" carries an echo of Dante's "dark wood" in the well-known opening line of the poem.
19 W. B. Stanford identifies this unconventional urge for the unknown as the quality of Dante's Ulysses that attracted future writers (202). He later refers to this Ulysses as "Dante's centrifugal hero."(235)

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A questa tanto piccola vigilia De' vostri sensi, ch'è del rimanente,
Non vogliate negar L'esperienza. Diretro al sol, del mondo senza gente. Considerate la vostra semenza: Fatti non foste a viver come bruti

22 The passages in Paradiso that demonstrate Dante designing his heaven as a sea are too numerable to quote. For those interested, two instances are particularly representative (Par. III, 85-7 and Par. XVIII, 58-63).
23 Jean-Michel Rabaté, 69.
24 Dante, quoted by Jean-Michel Rabaté, 70.
25 "La forma universal di questo nodo Credo ch'io vidi, perché più di largo, Dicendo questo, mi sento ch'io godo.

26 Jean-Michel Rabaté, 80.
28 I am consciously referring to the male author. I do not want to use gender neutral language since I am not yet convinced that women authors participate in an identical kind of literary ritual. In fact, with issues like separation from the mother being a crucial part of the initiation, I think it would be careless to assume female authors correspond with their male counterparts. See Susan Stanford Friedman and Margaret Homans.
29 Don Gifford (note 14.258, page 414).
30 Don Gifford states that Bridie Kelly is an unknown; however he refers the reader to a previous note on St. Bridgid for Bridie is a diminuitive of that name (note 14. 1068, page 432).
31 "com'altrui piaque, Infin che il mar fu sopra noi richiuso."
32 Io credo, per l'acume ch'io soffersi Del vivo raggio, ch'io sarei smarrito, Se gli occhi miei da lui fossero aversi.

33 The divine breath of Dante's embryo canto gets a comic nod in the following passage:

And there were vessels that are wrought by magic of Mahound out of seasand and the air by a warlock with his breath that he blases in to them like to bubbles. (U 317, 146-148)

Dante's guide and mentor Virgil receives mention in "Oxen of the Sun" in reference to his tale in the Georgics of mares taking in the breeze and becoming pregnant. (U 319, 244) And perhaps there is a sense of Vergil's Latin as the mother-(tongue) at the outstage of the stages of literary development since the sequence begins with Latinized English.
34 In reference to (Purgatory XXV, 63), Camerini notes, page 455.
35 See Gifford (note 14. 290-92, page 415) in reference to Joyce's line: "Desire's wind blasts the thorntree but after it becomes from a bramblebush to be a rose upon the rood of time."
St. Bernard, who acts as Dante's final guide, says these words in a prayer to Mary; and in Stephen's rambling, he pronounces the name of Bernardus just before quoting this opening line from Bernard's prayer.

Interpreting Stephen as fuelled by a desire to become father and mother to himself is not new; see Richard Ellmann (1982: 297-299). However, I have tried to indicate the initiatory implications of this project as well as demonstrate the way in which Joyce dialogues with the Dantean intertext about the textual significance of such a creative act.
II Poetics of Initiation

In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Joyce uses the embryonic codes from *Purgatory* XXV as a mode of structuring Stephen's initiation. The climactic moment has Stephen "purified in a breath" which parallels the transformative moment when the Creator breathes into the embryo a soul transforming it into a speaker. However, this ecstatic initiatory moment takes place under the shadowy sign of Dante's Ulysses. Likewise, in "Oxen of the Sun," the infusion of divine breath, "in a breath 'twas done," alludes to Dante's generation of the embryo while at the same time the line "the willer with the willed" echoes Ulysses's phrase "as One willed," and thus once again entwines the embryo canto with the fate of Dante's Ulysses. In the last chapter, by foregrounding the Joycean handling of these two cantos as a unit, we laid the foundation for further explorations into Joyce's awareness, not only of the initiatory implications of the embryo canto, but of its relationship to the fate of Ulysses as a death by drowning.

Any discussion of a textual initiation must deal with the influence of other texts. Dante specifies Virgil as his creator and yet he abandons Virgil to Limbo. Likewise, Joyce has Stephen contend with the physical/spiritual/intellectual influences in his life which he struggles to reject, striving to be his own artificer. The most significant intertext, designated by each author as a maternal intertext, must be buried in order for the author to emerge into the textual world as a speaker. In the following chapter, the focus will be on the poetics of initiation expressed through the notion of breathing or inspiring. An examination of the thematics of breath will lead to the complex figure of the textual mother and her role in a literary initiation for Joyce as he reads and writes Dante.¹

In the canto before *Purgatory* XXV, Dante describes how he records an infusion of *breath* to produce poetry. He tells the poet Bonagiunta of the old school:

I am one who, when love breathes in me, take note, and in that manner which he dictates within go on to set it forth. *(Purg. XXIV, 52-54)*²

In the following canto, *Purgatory* XXV, we find the discourse on the embryo which
transforms into a "fante" (speaker) when God breathes in a soul. The infusions of breath—one which becomes poetry and the other which becomes a self-reflective soul within a speaker—clearly mirror one another. Thus, the initiatory dynamic of the Divine Comedy is inextricably linked to the writing of the poem itself. Joyce brings the Dantean ideas of initiation and literary process together, but he transfers the divine infusion of breath into the sphere of the poet.

At the outset of Ulysses, we find a startling reversal: while Dante records divine breath in the form of poetry, Stephen is threatened by "the ghostwoman with ashes on her breath" (U 32, 46-47). Spira in the Divine Comedy occurs as a life-giving source whether as a source of poetry or of the self-reflective soul. In contrast, Stephen's dead mother endangers life with her: "hoarse loud breath rattling in horror." (U 9, 275) According to Buck Mulligan, "with her last breath" Stephen's mother begged him to "kneel down and pray for her." (U 5, 91-94). Stephen refused. Shortly thereafter, we find the divine breath of Dantean poetics operating under another reversal: the poet in process, Stephen, draws in the breath of his students. In Ulysses, it would appear that the novice informs the mentor, the taught inspire the teacher. Stephen notes: "A sweetened boy's breath" and "their breathes, too, sweetened with tea and jam." (U 20, 24 and U 21, 37). Describing the children's sugary breath seems to paint a naturalistic portrait rather than form part of a complex Dantean allusion. However the repetition of "sweet" signals the literary exchange in Purgatory XXIV where Bonaguinta refers—and this is the only time it is mentioned in the poem—to Dante's "dolce stil novo" (sweet new style, 57). Stephen mentions the sweet breath of the children just prior to his concentrated thoughts on Cyril Sargent which activate further references to Dante's Commedia. Recognition of the Dantean allusion in the passage on Stephen's pupil, Sargent, will assist in demonstrating Joyce's fascination with the textual initiation that informs the Divine Comedy. The theme of breath infusing the self-reflective soul, transforming the embryo into a speaker, the theme of the death-dealing breath of the mother, the theme of breath becoming poetry, all are intertwined in Dante's epic poem, and in Ulysses, all are woven and unwoven like the tapestry on Penelope's loom.

Recall how, in Purgatory XXV, Dante has the minor poet Statius tell the pilgrim about the generation of the embryo and the divine infusion of breath that transforms the fetus
from an animal embryo into a fante, a speaker. In the cantos leading up to the tale of the embryo, Statius explains his love of the Aeneid and his devotion to Virgil. Significant for a study of the initiatory thematics of Joyce's Ulysses, Statius portrays Virgil as a mother. In the following passage, Statius conveys his love for the Aeneid:

The sparks that kindled the fire in me were from the divine flame from which more than a thousand have been lit---I mean the Aeneid, which was in poetry my mother and my nurse (Purg. XXI, 94-98).³

Statius brings together rather incongruous imagery to represent Virgil's influence: fire imagery and maternal imagery. The juxtaposition of lighting fires in other poets, and mothering other poets, becomes haunting four cantos later in the embryo canto where Virgil draws the Dantean pilgrim's attention to the myth of Meleager, a myth where the mother puts the twig---which represents her son's life---into the fire, thus causing his death.⁴

In Purgatory XXV, Virgil attempts to address the question posed by the pilgrim about the relationship between bodies and shades, by referring to the myth of Meleager. When tracing the use to which Joyce puts the embryo canto in Ulysses, it is interesting that the sensation of children's sweetened breath---with its echoes of Dante's break with poetic tradition and composition of poetry according to the tenets of the dolce stil novo---occasion Stephen's contemplation of maternal love. At this time Stephen reverses Virgil's myth of Meleager. Stephen employs Latin, the language of Dante's textual mother Virgil, to express the maternal paradox: "Amor matris: subjective and objective genitive." (U 23, 165-166) While Virgil seems to threaten the Dantine pilgrim's life by putting his poetic son into the fire like the mythic mother does to her son Meleager, Stephen reverses the threat. Stephen describes his mother as the "trembling skeleton of a twig burnt in the fire."

Although complex and contradictory, the Joycean depiction of the nurturing/menacing mother conforms to cultural mythology. In a typically encompassing view, Northrop Frye presents the dual maternal figure:

one very frequent mythical formulation of this attitude to nature is an earth-mother, from whom everything returns at death [...] As the womb of all forms of life, she has a cherishing and nourishing aspect; as the tomb of all forms of life, she has a
Molly, at moments, takes on the features of the mythological mother. According to the Dantean intertext, her associations between the sea and the womb portray her ultimately as a creative yet threatening force. Molly makes the connection between the womb and the sea in a highly personal manner. She compares her on-coming menstruation to the ocean: "we too much blood up in us or what O patience above its pouring out of me like the sea" (U 633, 1122-1123). The womb and the sea become more disturbingly linked within Molly's reverie about her childhood in Cadiz: "O that awful deepdown torrent O and the sea the sea." (U 643, 1598) Dante's Ulisse and his crew are whirled in an awful deepdown torrent in the sea just beyond Cadiz. Both Dante and Joyce specify this geographical feature on their textual maps. Not only may we conclude that for Dante and Joyce, the nourishing/ menacing mother plays a significant role in the literary enactment of initiation, but with the reference to Cadiz, with the drowning whirlpool connected to the sea of the womb, it is clear that Joyce has in mind the failed baptism of Dante's Ulisse.

Both writers are threatened by the womb of the sea, the baptismal font that symbolizes the death of the old self and the birth of the new man. Dante's Ulisse plunges into the sea, and thus enacts symbolic death, yet he fails to emerge into new life. The literary pilgrim of the Commedia undergoes the death and rebirth of initiation; however, he attributes his salvation to another epic poet, Virgil, his "author" whom he relegates to limbo gloom with the unbaptized children. Rendering the intertextual relationship even more complex, Dante depicts his poetic mentor Virgil as a mother.

The question of maternal influence, within the sphere of literary initiation, becomes particularly acute when one observes that in Dante's embryo canto Virgil---whose poem the Aeneid is regarded as a divine flame and as a nurturing poetic mother---refers to the myth of Meleager where the mother murders her son by putting the twig that represents his life into the fire. As we noted briefly and need to develop, this myth is reversed in Stephen's musing on mothers, his in particular.

Was that then real? The only true thing in life? His mother's prostrate body the fiery Columbanus in holy zeal bestrode. She was no more: the trembling skeleton of a twig burnt in the fire,
the odour of rosewood and wetted ashes. She had saved him from being trampled underfoot and had gone scarcely having been.

(\textit{U} 23, 143-147)\textsuperscript{7}

Stephen's questions---was that then real? the only true thing in life?---resound tellingly for the matrix of breath imagery when we learn from Bloom that Buck Mulligan saved a drowning man with "artificial respiration."(\textit{U} 507, 293) When Stephen asks questions about what is true and real, a contrast is formed with the falsity, the artificiality of Buck Mulligan's breath whether the respiration refers to the infusion of breath transforming one into a speaker, or the breath that becomes poetry, or the breath of one's mother that---bringing both together---threatens one's soul and one's art. Buck saves a man from drowning. On the plot level, it is a heroic deed; on the Dantean intertextual level, with his artificial breath, Buck blocks the plunge into the sea, the death experience of returning to the womb, which is part of textual initiation.

Stephen admires Buck because he so greatly fears the sea, the possibility of being flooded from within and without. Yet the Dantean intertext, the geography of the \textit{Divine Comedy} which depicts heaven as a vast sea requires the poet who seeks to ascend to plunge into the waters of the womb. The Dantean pilgrim tells Bonagiunta that he records divine \textit{breath} as poetry and then in the next canto has Statius recount the moment when the joyful Maker cradles the embryo and \textit{breathes} in a self-reflecting soul transforming the embryo into a speaker. The issuing of breath establishes Dante's poem as a textual initiation for Dante links the poetic process to the creative return to the watery womb. With his artificial respiration, Buck Mulligan is a threat to the literary pilgrim.

In \textit{Ulysses}, Stephen's poetic impulse on the strand speaks to the Dantean poetics of initiation:

\begin{quote}
His lips lipped and mouthed fleshless lips of air: mouth to her moomb. Oomb, allwombing tomb. His mouth moulded issuing breath, unspeeched: oeeeelah: roar of cataractic planets, globed, blazing, roaring wayawayawayawayawayaway.(\textit{U} 40, 401-404)
\end{quote}

Unlike the Dantean pilgrim whose poetry records divine breath, Stephen records his own breath. His literary act does not take note of divine breath and then transcribe it as poetry;
rather, his breath holds all. Not only does it here convey a heavenly ascent, but it next contains the sea: "Listen: a fourworded wavespeech: seesoo, hrss, rsseeiss, ooos." (U 41, 456-457) The poetry of Stephen Dedalus records the sound of his breath "ooeeehah" and the sound of the sea "seesoo, hrss, rsseeiss, ooos." The repeated e and o of each signal the overlap between the two: Stephen's breath rushes into heaven; whereas the sound of the sea hints at a plunge.

The phrase "roar of cataractic planets," even without the echoing line of wavespeech, makes a telling connection between the heavens and the sea. A cataract singular, means a downrush of water, a waterfall. On the other hand, cataracts plural, sends one to the account in Genesis where the "flood-gates of heaven" purify the planet. Moreover, a return to Genesis will divulge the following lines: "They went in with Noah, two and two of all flesh in which there was the breath of life." The most striking phrase for those examining Joyce's use of the thematics of breath as a poetic process must be: "breath of life." However, the definition of the creatures as "of all flesh" and the description of their movement as "two and two" result in significant Joycean correspondences. Stephen's "fleshless lips of air" set forth a marked contrast to the creatures "of all flesh." He is fleshless. We will ultimately discover that

Stephen also lacks "the breath of life" or, to be more precise, he attempts to draw it in from other sources. In the section "Rhymes and Reasons" of "Aeolus," Stephen reflects on his poetic experience above and surmises: "Rhymes: two men dressed the same, looking the same, two by two." Stephen then quotes some of Dante's terza rima and imagines differently the three-fold system of rhymes (U 114, 714-725). The Dantean intertext surfaces in each passage, obliquely in the first and directly in the second. Equally important, we have three allusions to the account of the flood in Genesis linked up with Stephen's attempts at poetry on the strand. Stephen's image of rhymes "two by two" recalls the creatures two by two entering the ark carrying the "breath of life." These creatures are the ones that survive the flood. At this stage, it is doubtful whether or not we can make the same claim for the would-be poet Stephen.

With his thematics of divine breath, Dante recalls the breath of God inspiring dust to create the first man. Alternatively, Joyce highlights the equally initiatory moment when Noah and an extended earthly family, who each still carry a vestige of the divine "breath of life,"
survive a flood. Dante employs a nautical metaphor throughout the Commedia so that his poem sails forth like a boat. It would appear that Joyce envisions his text as a particular boat, an ark, a literary vehicle to carry the writer and reader through a perilous passage, so that they may survive the flood.\footnote{10}

The phrase "roar of cataractic planets," not only sends Joyce's reader to Genesis, but also to Paradise Lost where Milton's rendition of the flood haunts Stephen with the threat of drowning by "all the Cataracts of Heaven" and "all fountains of the Deep."\footnote{11} According to the Dantesque intertext, the danger of flooding comes from both heaven and the womb. In the Divine Comedy, the simultaneous flight into air and plunge into the sea of the womb map the two seemingly opposed directions of the Dantesque initiatory voyage. The roar of cataractic planets that emerges in Stephen's poetic attempt, when superimposed upon the geography of the Divine Comedy line up, so that in each text one may read both heaven and the womb as watery places. From this mirrored region, Stephen fears flooding.

In the last chapter, we discovered that the term flood pours forth from a Dantesque source. In the Commedia, light floods the heavens which are as uncertain as under sea. The metaphorical sea of the Paradiso washes over two key passages we have examined, one in A Portrait, the celestial rose opening, "flooding all the heavens with its soft flushes," and the other in Ulysses, "(Fiat!) light shall flood the world" in the lack of encounter between Bridie Kelly and Bloom. Joyce uses the term flood in its dual Dantesque sense as watery light, a heavenly sea. One of the ways then of reading Stephen's fear of flooding is from intertextual waters. Harold Bloom calls this form of negotiating influence: "Apophrades":

\begin{quote}
we are back in the later poet's flooded apprenticeship [...] the uncanny effect is that the new poem's achievement makes it seem [...] as though the later poet himself had written the precursor's characteristic work.\footnote{12}
\end{quote}

Significantly, the term Apophrades means the "return of the dead." Harold Bloom's category applies to Virgil as the ghost of the Commedia, as well as to Dante as the shade that returns in Portrait and haunts Ulysses flooding the later poet's work and yet it is as if Dante writes Virgil and Joyce writes Dante.

Stephen strives to build a literary ark which will allow him to survive the flood of
other authors threatening to drown him in their texts. Garry Leonard quotes the relevant passage in *A Portrait* where Stephen tries to "build a breakwater [...] against the sordid tide of life" and struggles to "dam up [...] the powerful recurrence of the tides within him." Leonard adroitly comments:

> the issue for Stephen is always the same one: how not to be reabsorbed into his surroundings, how to fortify his constantly crumbling walls of identity against an ever-present, ever-restless, *already interior* ocean of undifferentiated emotions and thoughts, which he tries desperately to misrecognize as an outside force seeking a way to enter.\(^{13}\)

We can categorize the waters that threaten to flood Stephen as flowing forth from a crisis in identity since he suffers under the Augustinian question: shall any be his own artificer? Yet Stephen modifies this fundamental question with the more tormented query: how does one become his own artificer? How does one separate from the waters that have formed the self, polished the self into a smooth stone at the base of a vast stream?

Garry Leonard demonstrates the recourse to ritual as a mode of never contending with the pressing questions of self-creation. Through ritual, the origin lies elsewhere: the self is not required to act as Creator, the self is simply fashioned by a divine Other, and pays homage to that originary moment through carefully stylized gestures from myth.\(^{14}\) Textual initiation puts the question of origin on the table. As Paul de Man sees it: the novelist addresses a crisis which serves to draw attention to the act of writing and its origin.\(^{15}\) Especially brash in Dante's case, the write of passage generates a textual beginning and end. What Garry Leonard describes as ritual, I prefer to think of as ceremony: this kind of act differs essentially from what I term ritual since the key to the literary initiation is that the participant is transformed through a creative act. Creativity is the antithesis of ceremony that requires the participant to follow rules, set down in the past, to which one must adhere. One way to dramatize this contrast is via Jean-Michel Rabaté's equation drawn from Joyce "I+ago" in comparison to the formula demanded by ceremony "I=ago." The equation "I=ago" translated into phrases would read something like: I am what has gone before. I am created in a past moment which does not need me to investigate into that origin, simply believe it on authority. And as we discover in Augustine's *Confessions* and find re-interpreted in Dante
and Joyce, authority is passed on like the milk that nourishes the infant from the mother's breast.

For Augustine, the milk that flows from his nurses and his mother does not find its origin in them, rather it stems from God. In contrast, both Dante and Joyce treat the flowing of breast milk as an intertextual source which nourishes the author and yet must be abandoned. In the Confessions, the flowing of breast milk does not have a bearing on the relationship between mother and son since the true source is God and the maternal breast is merely God's vehicle. In contrast, with the nursing of a literary son upon a textual breast, the relationship of the Dantean and Joycean son to the maternal intertext is troubled.

Buck has become the self-appointed defender of Stephen's mother. Buck respects a simple traditional mother: one who raises children and goes to church. In contrast, Stephen's reference to his mother as a "trembling skeleton of a twig burnt in the fire" draws on and reverses the complex Dantean relationship to his poetic mother Virgil. What does it mean if behind the semi-autobiographical figure of Stephen's mother we find the Dantean pilgrim's complex relationship to his guide and mentor Virgil?

In the embryo canto, Virgil, poet of the Aeneid—which has recently been likened to a flame and a poetic mother—recounts the myth of Meleager's mother who puts the twig, representing her son's life, into the fire. In the passage quoted from Ulysses, we have the mother, the adjective "fiery" modifying Saint Columbanus who overcomes her body, and then the Meleager myth reversed, reducing the mother to "the trembling skeleton of a twig burnt in the fire." The Dantean pilgrim relegates his beloved Virgil to Limbo; and Stephen Dedalus refuses to kneel and pray according to his mother's request. A crucial step in primitive initiation rituals—and further developed in textual initiations—separating from the mother here becomes separating from the mother-tongue and all that it connotes.

Inspired by Joyce, in Our Exagmination, Samuel Beckett compares the innovations in language found in Finnegans Wake with those in the Divine Comedy. Beckett's comparative reading of the new languages generated by Dantean and by Joycean texts provides an insight into the way in which each of these authors abandoned the mother-tongue. Beckett explains:

[Dante] wrote a vulgar that could have been spoken by an ideal Italian
who had assimilated what was best in all the dialects of his country, but which in fact was certainly not spoken nor ever had been. Which disposes of the capital objection that might be made against this attractive parallel between Dante and Mr. Joyce in the question of language, i.e. that at least Dante wrote what was being spoken in the streets of his own town, whereas no creature in heaven or earth ever spoke the language of 'Work in Progress' [...] We are inclined to forget that Dante's literary public was Latin, that the form of his poem was to be judged by Latin eyes and ears, by a Latin Esthetic intolerant of innovation.

I would like to preserve Beckett's idea, but at the same time reverse the esthetic shaping Dante's rebellion in order to explore the Latin source rather than audience. Virgil's Latin functions, according to Statius, as a mother to other poets. Since the Aeneid generates poetry in others, Dante thus configures Virgil's Latin as a maternal force which he must leave behind in order to produce, originate, generate his own language. A crucial aspect of Dante's new language is his paradoxical return to the mother-tongue, the Italian dialect he heard and spoke as a child which operates as another indicator that while the Dantean pilgrim progresses through the narrative action, the poet travels in a contrary direction, back to a language that precedes his Latin training.

Latin clearly holds a contradictory position in the Commedia, for, when focused on the complex relationship between the pilgrim and his guide Virgil, the Latin of the Aeneid functions equally well in the role of mothering---generating and nursing/ nourishing---the literary skill of the novice Dante. Beckett asserts this notion in an attempt to define Dante's new language as a break with the Latin audience who would presumably read Dante's poetry. Dante must attain a particular intimacy with Latin to the point where he transgresses it, passes beyond it, returning transformed to his original tongue in order to become a speaker.

The term fante has a dual significance. It represents the classical attribute of speech which distinguishes us, with our rational minds, from what Ulisse calls bruti (brutes); however, Dante infuses the term fante with a new meaning. When God breathes in a self-reflecting soul while cradling the embryo still in the womb, the term fante becomes a potent marker for the initiatory return journey which requires the sophisticated speaker of classical skill to return to his primary moment in the womb, to resume his mother-tongue. One of the ways of indicating this return journey is Dante's use of babyltalk which we discussed at length.
in the first section devoted to the *Divine Comedy*.

In Dante's epic poem, Latin thus acts as Dante's mother-tongue (as the poetic language of Virgil) as well as the opposite of Dante's mother-tongue (as pointed out by Beckett). The paradoxical dynamic of initiation which superimposes death on birth, in order to hold still for a moment the new life "being born," assists us in perceiving the contradictory role of the mother-tongue. Dante must transgress his mother-tongue while he returns to his mother-tongue. In *Ulysses*, Joyce dialogues with the initiatory Dantean intertext on this issue of the mother-tongue; as we will explore, separation from the mother is configured by Joyce as transgression of an intertextual mother.

The notes that Camerini writes for the representation of Virgil as a mother-figure appear striking to a reader concentrating on the initiatory thematics in *Ulysses*. Statius tells the Dantean pilgrim that the *Aeneid* was like a "mamma"; Camerini glosses such terminology as follows:

---Mamma, mother, that is to say breast, from which I have suckled, like an infant sucks the nourishing milk of life, that was therefore the way in which my poetry quenched [its thirst].^{20}

With the Augustinian and the Dantine narratives in the background, the breast imagery of *Ulysses* takes on a richer meaning since it forms part of an intertextual dialogue. Keeping in mind that Joyce alludes to the scene where Statius calls the *Aeneid* a mother, we will now explore the impact the Camerini notes, in reference to the maternal poetic force, may have had on the writing of *Ulysses*.

In the first section of the novel, Stephen receives milk for his tea from "Mother Grogan," who represents an almost stereotypical Ireland.^{21} Stephen's response to her arrival deliberates on the milk she dispenses:

> He watched her pour into the measure and thence into the jug rich white milk, not hers. Old shrunken paps [...] Old and secret she had entered from a morning world, maybe a messenger. She praised the goodness of the milk pouring it out. (*U* 12, 397-400)

"Mother Grogan" as a figure for Ireland works along with Stephen's mother to represent the mother-tongue. Read as part of a literary commentary, the cow's milk, i.e. the language, is not
hers. Her breasts which (according to the Camerini notes on the nourishing influence of Dante's poetic mentor Virgil) become interchangeable with influential texts and these breasts--read texts--have become old and dry. Nonetheless, Mother Grogan, the Irish literary movement, praises the goodness of its milk; only Stephen identifies the lack of nourishment in the milk that quenches the thirst of the island. Yet the old woman is also a messenger who unknowingly announces a transformation from her "mo[u]ming world." The allusion to Stephen's mother in the message of Mother Grogan leads me to insert a "u" in order to stress the homonym mourning in morning. In the final chapter, we will examine the way in which Stephen transforms the mourning of his mother's death into the dawning of a new literary form.

Similar to the Divine Comedy and yet handled differently, Ulysses comes full circle. Mother Grogan enters in the first chapter with dry breasts and a jug of cow's milk for the tea. In the final chapter of the novel, the narrative returns to the theme of milk in tea. And in between, via the Camerini commentary on the Commedia, the breast becomes associated with the nourishing textual milk of a mentoring mother-figure like Virgil. Mother Grogan's shrunken paps of Irish literature have transformed through the text into the abundant breasts of Molly who, after the birth of Milly, turns to Bloom for relief:

I had to get him to suck them they were so hard he said it was sweeter and thicker than cows then he wanted to milk me into the tea well hes beyond everything [...] if I only could remember the 1 half of the things and write a book out of it the works of Master Poldy yes and its so much smoother the skin much an hour he was at them Im sure by the clock like some kind of a big infant I had at me (U 621, 576-582)

The descriptive language has transformed from traditional sentences to almost zero punctuation. The milk comes from a nourishing female mother who forms an obvious contrast with the menacing mother of Stephen and "Mother Grogan" with her dependence on cow's milk (and thanks to Mr. Deasy's letter we know that there is disease among the cows). It thus becomes more meaningful that Stephen's poetic act recorded in the beginning of Ulysses is written on a scrap of Deasy's letter. Reading breast milk as a nourishing literary substance is further confirmed in the journal title, Titbits---tit-bits---which publishes bit
stories such as Beaufoy's. The link between breast-milk and literary production occurs again in "Oxen of the Sun" where Theodore Purefoy (in the mirroring position to Beaufoy) is encouraged, in a chapter which parallels biological and literary production, with the climaxing command: Drink, man, an udderful!" Resonant within the term udderful, considering the network of imagery we have traced, is "utter-full." Jacques Derrida notes the faint trace of milk in the phrase "galaxy of events" from "Eumaeus" and he links it to "the milky tea that runs through Ulysses, turning it into a milky way or "galaxy."24 Augustine and Dante act as stars in the milky way of Ulysses showering their influence upon Joyce's initiatory narrative, infusing the tea of the text with intertextual milk.

In the above passage where Molly reminisces about Bloom at her breast, milk continues to participate in literary terms. Molly's recollections can be read as a self-reflexive comment on the structure of Ulysses. Molly dreams of writing the "book" of Bloom's "things" which we are in the midst of reading, since the "works of Master Poldy" could function effectively as a subtitle for Ulysses. Notably, the Dantean pilgrim also plans to write the story of the Commedia, and thus the subtitle for his narrative could be "the works of the pilgrim." Roland Barthes imagines this self-reflexive dynamic as essentially modern and he credits Marcel Proust with the remarkable innovation of being "the one who is going to write." Reading Proust accurately, Barthes does not realize that it is in fact Dante who has given "modern writing its epic."25 Proust weaves Dante's plan in the Commedia---to write the epic poem the Commedia---into his text A la recherche du temps perdu. Another father of modernism, James Joyce, has his character Stephen, the writer in process, plan to become the writer of Ulysses over the span of ten voyaging years. Whether medieval or modern, these texts operate as writes of passage; to use Barthes' words: "the modern scriptor is born at the same time as his text."26 The reader concludes such narratives with the author marking the end (the death of the text) with its rebirth (the plan to write it). Intertextual milk flows from one initiatory text to another so that the ending always marks the beginning. Or to put it into the terms of ritual: the death does not function as closure, rather, it corresponds to a return.

Nearing the end of Ulysses, protagonist Bloom appears to return to infancy. The image Molly paints of Bloom at her breast "like some kind of a big infant" refers directly to a parallel scene in the Divine Comedy. In the final canto of the poem, the Dantean pilgrim
struggles to describe his encounter with God:

Now my speech will come more short even of what I remember than an infant's who yet bathes his tongue at the breast.  
(Par. XXXIII, 106-108)27

Nursing at the breast and textual production are brought together in an image which expresses the inability to speak---literally conveyed by "in-fante" (non-speaking)---which Camerini glosses remarkably as "fante" (speaker) its direct opposite. We focused earlier on the word "fante" which Statius uses during the discourse of the embryo to mark the transformation from an animal embryo to a human speaker. In the Commedia, the pilgrim recreates the stage of being without speech prior to the divine encounter as an infusion of breath in the womb. Hence, the experience of God in the womb is superimposed upon this literary meeting with the Creator at the end of the poem. Like an initiation ritual, the death at the conclusion of the poem occurs simultaneously with a rebirth, a return to the womb.

The initiatory novice must separate from the mother before he can activate the death/rebirth dynamic. As the Dantian pilgrim expresses at the outset of the poem, he has learned everything regarding speech from Virgil; thus, he addresses him: "You are my master and my author." (Inf. I, 85) The recognition of Virgil as his author is exactly why he must abandon him. Likewise, the initiatory novice owes the creation of his life to his mother; hence he must separate from her, shifting the emphasis from biological to spiritual creation. The shift is from dependence to self-creation. The novice gives birth to himself and dies to his former self. Nonetheless, the separation is painful.

Beatrice puts the abandonment of the mother into brutal terms:


another, lisping, loves and heeds his mother, who after, when his speech is perfect, longs to see her buried. (italics mine, Par. XXVII, 133-135)28

Considering the role of Virgil as Dante's poetic mother, it hardly seems coincidental that Beatrice's representation of the child separating from the mother revolves around speech. In the write of passage, the perfection of one's speech marks the moment when the mother must be buried. The embryo in the womb develops according to nature up until a certain point at which God intervenes and nature is superseded. Likewise, the pilgrim progresses along the
narrative path with his guide Virgil, up until a particular juncture, when Beatrice intervenes. Virgil compares neatly with the natural mother's creation of the embryo, just as Beatrice corresponds aptly with the intervention of God since she operates within the *Commedia* as the analogue to Christ. However, I am more interested in the textual ramifications of the switch from Virgil to Beatrice: the significant distinction between the former and latter guide is that Virgil---the maternal intertext---is buried in Limbo, allowing for the birth of Dante's speech, signalled by his textual creation, Beatrice.

In *Purgatory* XXV, we learn from Statius that when God breathes into the embryo a soul, the embryo becomes a "fante." When we superimpose the discourse on the embryo onto Dante's epic poem, the arrival of Beatrice, who is the analogy for Christ, parallels the primary encounter with God in the womb; thus, at that moment, the pilgrim symbolically re-enacts becoming a *fante* who no longer lisps, but speaks perfectly. At that moment, Dante buries his poetic mother Virgil.39

The mother is also buried in *Ulysses*. As Stephen exclaims in "Circe": Thirsty fox [...] Burying his grandmother. Probably he killed her." *(U 456, 3610-3611)* The adjective "thirsty" activates the matrix of milk imagery. The mother from whom Stephen strives to separate in *A Portrait* and *Ulysses* is represented by his mother who speaks the language of the church and the language of the traditional Irish family. Joyce has Stephen imagine himself in the riddle he tells of the "fox burying his (grand)mother." Directly following the passage noted previously which begins with the questions about a mother's love: "Was that then real?", Joyce has Stephen imagine:

\[
\text{A poor soul gone to heaven: and on a heath beneath winking stars} \\
\text{a fox, red reek of rapine on his fur, with merciless bright eyes} \\
\text{scraped in the earth, listened, scraped up the earth, listened,} \\
\text{scraped and scraped. (U 23, 147-150)}
\]

Later in the novel, Stephen recalls the riddle and then questions himself: "And you who wrest old images from the burial earth?" *(U 199, 815)*. The textual mother is brought up out of the earth. In the *Divine Comedy*, the old image of Virgil is wrested from the burial of Limbo and appears to the pilgrim. Intertextually, Dante has the *Aeneid* work as a catalyst for his poem: the narrative journey of the *Commedia* reaches an impasse until the manifestation of the
Virgilian shade which sets it in motion. The *Aeneid* mothers the *Commedia*; yet the Virgilian intertext is ultimately left behind as its speech, its creative power is overtaken by the next generation of poets, represented by Dante's own production, Beatrice. Bloom enacts this aspect of the Virgilian figure for Stephen.

Some of the time, Joyce has Bloom in the role of Virgil played against Stephen as the Dantean pilgrim. In *Ulysses*, Virgil resurfaces in the guise of King Hamlet; Stephen has the royal ghost present himself in Virgilian terms. When Virgil appears at the beginning of the *Commedia*, the Dantean pilgrim asks him if he is a shade or a man and Virgil replies: "Non uomo, uomo già fui (Not man; once I was a man, *Inf.* I, 67). Stephen introduces Shakespeare to the gathering in the library: "It is the ghost, the king, a king and no king" (*U* 155, 165-166). And when Bloom enters the newsroom in "Aeolus," MacHugh intones: "The ghost walks." (*U* 102, 237) Virgil, a shade and a maternal intertext, associated with King Hamlet by the term "ghost" becomes even more intimately connected via Stephen's maternal shadow: the ghostwoman with ashes on her breath. We must investigate the way in which Virgil's role in the *Divine Comedy* compares to Bloom's position in *Ulysses*.

Structurally, Virgil and Bloom have a great deal in common. Virgil is a pagan which means he can only travel so far in Dante's Christian afterworld. Likewise, Bloom is ambiguously a signifier for Judaism which like the pagan Virgil allows him to lead with the light of the Old Testament to the Christians who follow, but they only allow him to journey so far. Earlier, we noted the way in which Statius—the poet who tells the Dantean pilgrim about the generation of the embryo—honours Virgil's *Aeneid* as a divine flame and as a poetic mother. In the canto which follows, Statius further describes Virgil in terms echoed by Joyce:

> You did like him that goes by night and carries the light behind him and does not help himself but makes wise those that follow. (*Purg.* XXII, 67-9)

In a resonant echo, at the end of Bloom’s day, Bloom feels satisfied:

> To have sustained no positive loss. To have brought positive gain to others. Light to the gentiles. (*U* 553, 352-3)
Albeit obliquely, Joyce describes Bloom's organ of reproduction in the bath in Virgilian terms as well, since "floating hair of the stream around the limp father of thousands" (U 71, 571) echoes Statius's pronouncement that from the divine flame of the *Aeneid* "more than a thousand [poems] have been lit." In "Ithaca" Bloom's lighting of the fire occasions many memories of fires being lit for Stephen which implies that although Bloom may take on the Virgilian role of sparking literary production in Stephen Dedalus, in fact, the textual flames have come from many different fires (U 547, 135-147).

In "Proteus," out on the strand, when Stephen is trying to stem the flood of the intertextual sea as well as turn the breath of the sea into poetry, we encounter the striking lines:

> Vehement breath of waters [...] In cups of rocks it slops: flop, slop, slap: bounded in barrels. And, spent, its speech ceases. It flows purling, widely flowing, floating foampool, flower unfurling.  
> *(U 41, 57-60)*

Dante describes Virgil as a fountain of speech (*fonte che spande di parlar*). Dante's *Ulisse* is punished in an infernal cup, a barrel which resembles a baptismal font. In *Ulysses*, the linking terms for the basin, the baptismal font, and the sea occurs in the next line following this passage: "under the ups swelling *tide*." Joyce places Bloom in the centre stage of this cast of Dantean allusions: "floating foampool, flower unfurling" becomes in "Lotus Eaters": "floating hair of the stream around the limp father of thousands, a languid floating flower."

Just as Dante connects Virgil and *Ulisse* as two pagan figures who in one way or another plunge into the baptismal font and yet fail to emerge into new life, Joyce weaves all of these initiatory strands into one textured narrative with Bloom as the constantly metamorphosing character, appropriately enough a Proteus. Stephen needs to enter into this blooming Bloomian sea where his initiation will occur presided over by a figure in perpetual transition.

Another Dantean referral, which encourages the reader to contemplate Bloom in a position regarding Stephen, as comparable to that of Virgil to the Dantean pilgrim, occurs shortly after the direct referral about lighting the way for followers. What does Stephen hear when listening to Bloom?: "He heard in a profound ancient male unfamiliar melody the accumulation of the past." *(U 565, 777-8)* What Stephen hears more accurately describes the
Latin tones of the ancient epic poet Virgil.

Bloom simultaneously enacts mentor and novice, Virgil and Dante. As a locus of intertextual signifiers, Bloom represents at the same time various levels of the Dantean initiation. On the one hand, as we will see, Bloom undergoes Dantean initiation in a way that parallels the pilgrim. And yet, on the other hand, Bloom evokes the figure of Virgil which has him enact the Virgilian role of literary parent to a textual birth.

The initiatory correspondences between Bloom and the Dantean pilgrim function according to relatively simple comparisons; however, the implications are complex. In the last canto of the Paradiso, Dante struggles to express his final vision in terms of the mathematician working to square the circle. Of course in Ulysses this task also captivates the mind of Bloom (U 590, 1697). In a remarkable passage (U 598, 2013-2023), Bloom appears as "suncompelled." he must "obey the summons of recall." Of course the reference to "suncompelled" corresponds with Dante's summons from Beatrice, analogy of Christ, symbolized by the sun. Bloom is next described as "reborn" and then the terms become more specifically Dantean when Joyce terms Bloom a "sleeper awakened." In the Divine Comedy, the spiritual near-death of the pilgrim translates in the prologue scene as the moment when he loses the right way while sleeping and stumbles into the dark wood. Thus being a sleeper awakened implies, in the Dantean initiatory system, a rebirth.

In another passage in Ulysses, Bloom passes through the Dantean initiation when he falls into a reverie about the seedcake he exchanged with Molly. The imagery used to express this moment is drawn from the embryo canto, Purgatorio XXV. Again the sun functions as an enlightening image:

Glowing wine on his palate lingered swallowed. Crushing in the winepress grapes of Burgundy. Sun's heat it is. Seems to a secret touch telling me memory. (U 144, 897-900)

Statius also draws on the transformation of grapes into wine in order to assist the Dantean pilgrim in understanding the connection between the body and soul which he seeks to explain in Purgatory XXV by the discourse on the embryo:

And, that you may wonder less at my words, consider the sun's heat which becomes wine when it is joined to the juice that pours
from the vine. (*Purg. XXV*, 76-78)

Bloom reinserts the Dantean pilgrim's experience translated into his own textual realm. Thus, his *memory* of love-making with Molly is conveyed in Dantean terms. The taste of wine recalls the key Dantean moment when the discourse on the embryo sets the stage for reading the *Commedia* as an initiation, a return to the womb in order to activate rebirth. In both the pilgrim Dante and the character Bloom's literary experience, the sun transforms grapes into wine with all of the Eucharistic connotations of such an event. The sexual love of Bloom and Molly finds a spiritual counterpart in the Love that Dante describes between the Father and Son in *Paradiso X*:

> Looking on His Son with the Love which the One and the Other eternally breathe forth, the primal and ineffable Power made with such order all that revolves in mind or space that he who contemplates it cannot but taste of Him.(1-6)

Dante has these six lines introduce the reader to the fourth heaven in the poet's construction of heaven: the sphere of the sun. Bloom's *taste* of the wine which leads to his thoughts on the sun corresponds with the "gustar" the *taste* of God that results from seeing the sun in the ordered universe. As examined in detail in the chapter on the *Commedia*, the unusual rhyming of *spira/gira* "breath" and "revolve" points to the embryo canto where this rhyme contributes to the fundamental moment when God breathes in the soul, the embryo transforms into a speaker and begins to revolve in consciousness. Thus, Bloom participates intertextually in the literary initiation that structures the *Divine Comedy*.

Bloom, typically breaking boundaries, shifting shape like Proteus, leads an initiation while at the same time he participates in an initiation. Thus, in "Lotus Eaters" the initiatory strands come together weaving a textual moment where we see Bloom in both roles simultaneously according to the Dantean intertext:

> He foresaw his pale body reclined in it at full, naked, in a womb of warmth, oiled by scented melting soap, softly laved. He saw his trunk and limbs rippled over and sustained, buoyed lightly upward, lemonyellow: his navel, bud of flesh: and saw the dark tangled curls of his bush floating, floating hair of the stream around the limp father of thousands, a languid floating flower.
We already noted how the final lines of this passage set up a correspondence between Virgil and Bloom and according to the echoing passage from "Proteus" place Bloom in the initiatory space of the womb or baptismal font. Bloom's reverie places him in the transitional realm where one sheds the old man and takes on the new. The key to Joyce's Bloom is that he may dream of himself as a flower, or covertly conduct a relationship under the name Flower, but he will always be Bloom: never bud, never flower, never before nor after, never reaching any sort of closure or fruition. As a literary figure he blooms.

In the passage quoted above where one finds liminal Bloom associated with both the mentor and the novice, Virgil and the Dantean pilgrim, the reverie of bathing lies under the shadow of Dante's Ulysses. The threat of Ulisse's fate—who undergoes a failed baptism in the womb of the sea—mars Bloom's dreamy image of himself. Earlier in the day, when a cloud darkens the sun, Bloom has had as powerful a fantasy about the sea, but this time the womb has been marked negatively: "a dead sea [...] Dead: an old woman's: the grey sunken cunt of the world." (U 50, 219-228) These two Bloomian reveries balance one another so that the baptismal waters of rebirth which correspond with the sea and the waters of the womb also carry the potential for drowning, the possibility of being flooded. Moreover, in the reverie about the bath where Bloom contemplates initiatory potential, we have remarked on how he strikes a Virgilian pose. In the Commedia, Virgil, like Ulysses, functions as a sign of failed initiation. Nonetheless, Virgil tragically leads others, gentiles, to their rebirth.

When the Dantean pilgrim encounters the shade of Virgil, he asks: "Are you then that Virgil, that fountain which pours forth so rich a stream of speech?" (Inf.I, 79-80, italics mine) The stream which flows around Bloom's organ is not only the bath water, floating upon the Dantean intertext it also conveys the stream of speech out of which Virgil inspires the poetics of others. Virgil of course is the pilgrim's "dolce padre," as well as fathering the thousands of others who followed his guiding light (Purg. XXII, 67-9). Another small detail which contributes to the Bloom/ Virgil link: our attention is drawn to the floral associations of his name—Bloom which in Hungarian is Virag which contains the first three letters, as well as the "g," which form the name of Dante's guide Virgil. Later, we will examine the significance of flowers, specifically lilies, to further examine the Virgil/ Dante relationship.
and its transformation in Joyce's *Ulysses*.

The fact that Bloom enacts simultaneously both the mentor and novice's role in the initiatory rite in *Ulysses* suggests that only those in transition can lead those who seek transformation. The shock of Dante's decision to relegate Virgil to Limbo has led to myriad scholarly debates anxious to understand why a devoted novice would place his beloved master in a non-space, neither here nor there, neither punishment nor fulfillment. Joyce's reading of Dante suggests that the potency of liminal characters is exactly their ambiguous status. Bloom performs an equally liminal role in *Ulysses* and comparable to Virgil, he leads, supports, gathers up, a confused and limping artist in the drunk, wounded Stephen. Like Virgil, Bloom guides, but he does not attain fulfillment. Joyce returns Bloom to the Limbo of his life with Molly yet our final vision of him is in an initiatory position: the Dantean return to the womb translates into an image of Bloom in bed.

The poetics of initiation at this stage of analysis are in Limbo along with the maternal intertext Virgil. As Joyce draws on the nourishing milk of the mother-text he simultaneously abandons it. The attempt to read Bloom in the position of the mentor to Stephen simply leads the reader to recognize his textual associations with the initiatory novice. God provides the milk that fills the nourishing breasts in the *Confessions*, but Dante and Joyce pass beyond, like the transgressor *Ulisse*; they posit an intertextual source of literary milk. God breathes into the Dantean pilgrim the dynamic of initiation which he records as poetry; whereas Joyce has Stephen record his own breath and the breathing of the sea. Attempting to stabilize a source for Joyce leads the reader into a liminal zone which makes the act of interpretation feel like being washed away by a flood of contrary signifiers. The reader begins to feel the threat of drowning that so incapacitates Stephen. A plunge into water is what the text requires for the reader to be reborn from the haunting death of authority in the text. As Barthes expresses it: "we know that in order to restore writing to its future, we must reverse the myth: the birth of the reader must be requited by the death of the Author." If Kristeva is right in imagining death as the boundary that must be crossed then the next phase of our study must resemble a trial where we try to ascertain exactly who kills who.

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1 As a premise for his study on the *Anxiety of Influence*, Harold Bloom quotes Kierkegaard's maxim: "He who is willing to work gives birth to his own father." (26) My focus on the maternal intertext, rather than the poetic
father, results in a different reading of a comparable issue.

Joyce refers more obviously to this Dantesque passage in his poem "A Memory of the Players in a Mirror at Midnight" where Dante's "when Love breathes" has become "Love's breath in you is stale, worded or sung". See *Poems and Exiles*, 52.

Hugh Kenner describes Molly in static terms: "Molly lies still at the warm dead womb-like centre of the labyrinth of paving stones." (254) Although Kenner hones in on the death/birth connection, his interpretation of it as static differs fundamentally from my argument which reads the tomb/womb as textually dynamic.

Further confirmation that Joyce had the Dantesque embryo in mind is Stephen's musing on Averroes (U 23, 158) who is named in Camerini's notes to *Purgatory* XXV as the one to whom Dante refers in Statius's discourse on the generation of the embryo.

Joycean critics have addressed the thematics of the positive/negative mother complex which appears in *Ulysses* from a psychological point of view, see for instance Jean Kimball, Sheldon Brivic, Chester Anderson. Morris Beja (who, in contrast to the Freudian stance of the others, regards the devouring/nourishing mother from a Jungian vantage). I, however, want to examine the theme in intertextual terms.

*In Acts of Meaning*, Jerome Bruner evokes Propp's idea that "folktakes begin in lack and displacement." In his own words, he advises the reader: "Note that it is only when constituent beliefs in a folk psychology are violated that narratives are constructed." (39) The initiatory narratives under discussion, both signal lack or displacement, and the literary event steps into this breach to lead the writer and reader through the transition to some kind of safety.

As a contrast to my analysis of Virgil as a maternal figure, Mary Reynolds examines the way in which Joyce transposes Dante's Virgil into his *oeuvre* in terms of paternity; see her chapter "Paternal Figures and Paternity Themes" (especially pages 33-51). Although we approach the subject from opposite perspectives, intriguingly, we arrive at similar conclusions. Mary Reynolds and I interpret Joyce's use of Dante's Virgil—whether as father or mother—as a mode of commenting on artistic development (1981: 76).

In a letter to Valery Larbaud, Joyce writes: "What you say about the Exag is right enough. I did stand behind those twelve Marshals more or less directing them what lines of research to follow." (July 1929) *Letters* I, 283

Samuel Beckett, 18-19. For a much fuller discussion of how Joyce "saw himself as Dante's disciple particularly in the area of linguistic innovation," see Mary Reynolds work on Joyce's application of the Dantesque intertext in *Finnegans Wake*, 199 ff.

Eugenio Camerini:


According to Sheldon Brivic:
the idea of the fallen mother has expanded to become a view of politics: Ireland is the old lady who has given herself to usurpers. This pattern is seen in the old milk woman who is patronized by Mulligan (1970: 144).

In the words of Harry Blamires: "Stephen sees [Mother Grogan] as a symbol of poor, sterile, subjected Ireland, around whom cluster the romantic phrases of the Celtic revivalists" (6).

22 For a more eloquent rendering of this notion, see John Paul Riquelme, 218.

23 Marilyn French reads the lack of punctuation as symbolic of Molly's fluidity: "the rhythms flow like water, which frequently in the novel is associated with sex, eternal recurrence, continuation." (245) Bloom, as water-lover flourishes in Molly's fluidity.

24 Jacques Derrida, 259.

25 Roland Barthes, 51.

26 ibid, 52.

27 Omai sarà più corta mia favella, Pure a quel ch'io ricordo, che d'infante Che bagni anch'io la lingua alla mammella.

Camerini glosses d'infante in an intriguing way for those who noted the uncommon use of fante (speaker) in Statius's discourse on the embryo in Purgatory XXV: "D'un fante, d'un fanciullo.---Bagni la lingua, ecc., che bea anch'io la puppa." p. 673.

28 E tal, balbuziando, ama ed ascolta La madre sua, che, con loquela intera, Disia poe di verderla sepolta.

29 Following the quotes of Milton's Lycidas about drowning, Stephen mentally quotes Christ's line: "To Caesar what is Caesar's, to God what is God's." (U 22, 86) Stephen's quoting of Christ's phrase works well to describe the shift from old to new in the Virgil/Dante relationship, for Virgil is Caesar's poet and Dante is God's.

30 Facesti come quei che va di notte, Che porta il lume dietro, e sè non giova, Ma dopo sè fa le persone dotte...

31 Or se' tu quel Virgilio, e quella fonte, Che spande di parlare si largo fiume?

32 The image of Bloom helping Stephen along has a long allegorical tradition with which Joyce is likely to have been familiar. Dante draws on this tradition when he speaks of his journeying with his "firm foot" while being guided by Virgil. See John Freccero's essay "The Firm Foot on a Journey Without a Guide" (1986: 29-54).

33 Roland Barthes, 55.
III The Siren Song of the Intertext

In a clever reversal, Joyce deals a death blow to the Dantean intertext; he buries the *Divine Comedy* and resurrects the liminal Virgilian shade who shadows the Dantean intertext. A return to *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* shows that Joyce deals directly with Virgil's *Aeneid*: by shining his narrative light on the intertextual mentor, the *Aeneid*, Joyce transforms the initiatory text, the *Commedia*, into a shade.

The question that activates Statius's discourse on the embryo in *Purgatory* XXV is the pilgrim's confusion about how the shades in the afterworld can grow thin in a realm where nourishment is not relevant. In theological terms, Dante fails to supply a satisfactory answer; yet the issue of nourishment informed the last chapter where we traced the lactation motif from the *Confessions*, through the *Commedia*, to *Ulysses*. The literary pilgrim's question does not occasion any significant discoveries about medieval theology; however, it underlines a network of references regarding the transfer of intertextual nourishment from text to text creating a milky way, a galaxy of starry influences. The question serves to draw attention to the relationship between the mentoring intertext---the shade Virgil---and the solid body of the text---the *Divine Comedy*---which is in the reader's hands. Intertextual shades haunt writes of passage; initiatory texts foreground these shades in order to overcome them. The references to nursing in the *Commedia* signify a by-passing of the textual mentor and a return to a time prior to intertextual influence, a time when one breathed in self-reflection in the womb. The Dantean embryo receives divine breath in the womb and at the summit of his poem: both moments are marked by Virgil's absence. The Stephen of *Ulysses* tries to take in the sweet breath of children: this breath has traces of something akin to Dante's sweet new style and thus conjures up the maternal ghost. At the outset of *Ulysses*, Joyce has Stephen emit his own poetic breath in order to transform from literary pilgrim to poet; he thus alters the Dantean equation between divine breath and poetry. While we must return to the thematics of breath, our perspective will be from the underside: we will look at the way breath is threatened with suffocation, in particular by drowning. What we will discover by looking at the underside, is that textual initiations require the reversal of sources. Just as Dante must re-write Virgil,
Joyce must re-write Dante. To become a speaker the influence must be inverted. The literary pilgrim must deal a death blow to the reading self who drowns in the silence demanded by the siren song of intertexts. Joyce transgresses Dante, passes beyond the Dantine pillars out into the intertextual sea following in the wake of *Ulisse*.

* * *

The Joyce section began with *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* where we charted Stephen's initiation into art. He sheds the graveclothes of his boyhood and according to Dante's embryonic codes—breathing divine air in flight—he is reborn. Yet we noted how his initiation is qualified, darkened by the shadow of the Dantine *Ulisse*. In the journal entries that conclude Joyce's first novel, we will discover a further gloss on the write of passage in which Stephen feels reborn, his "throat throbbing with song."

The journal entry for 16 April opens with "Away! Away!" which recalls the dramatic cries that punctuate the initiation scene: "Again! Again! Again!" or "Help! Help!" or Yes! Yes! Yes!" And then the next line echoes the opening to Virgil's *Aeneid*: "Arma virumque cano" (Arms I sing and the man). Stephen has "The spell of arms and voices." As in the initiation scene of *A Portrait* which we examined in the first chapter, Virgil, the textual mentor, acts as a catalyst for initiatory journeys. We noted at that time the way in which Joyce signals Virgil through the signature phrase of Dante's *Ulisse*: "we made of the oars wings for the mad flight." In Stephen's thoughts on the name Dedalus, Dante is suggested by Stephen's referral to a "medieval book." Via the Dantine intertext, as pointed out in Eugenio Camerini's notes, Virgil's *Aeneid* is alluded to by means of *Ulisse* 's verse in which the striking phrase "winged oarage" occurs to describe the donation Daedalus makes to the temple of Apollo. In the journal entries that conclude *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, the echo of the opening line from Virgil's epic poem the *Aeneid* brings us back to the final adventure of Dante's Ulysses and its integral role in the initiatory dynamic operating intertextually. However, instead of reading Virgil through Dante, we find ourselves reading Dante through Virgil.
We will begin by proceeding step by step through the complex references that pattern the following passage in Stephen's diary:

The spell of arms and voices: the white arms of roads, their promise of close embraces and the black arms of tall ships that stand against the moon, their tale of distant nations. They are held out to say: We are alone. Come. And the voices say with them: We are your kinsmen. And the air is thick with their company as they call to me, their kinsman, making ready to go, shaking the wings of their exultant and terrible youth. (P 252)

The most apparent difference in this echo of the opening line of the Aeneid is the shift from sing to spell: in Stephen's rendering, the authorial voice relinquishes primacy to become "voices." And instead of the author telling, here the author is lured---caught in the spell of---other ways, other voices, in other words, intertexts. If we press further the change from sing to spell, one fluid authorial voice gives way to an author who puts words together, who spells.

Another major change in the allusion to Virgil's opening line is the lack of reference to "the man." While Virgil will sing of arms and "the man," Stephen's diary anticipates the first part, the arms, but man is replaced by voices. The hero becomes the voices of other texts. And while arms for Virgil represent the combat necessary to found a new race and carve out a homeland, arms for Stephen represent literary battles fought in the name of freedom to express one's soul. With these battles Stephen hopes to shape the soul of his race and put his homeland on the map.

Shortly before the diary entries, Stephen declares to Cranly that, in order to fly by the nets of Catholic Dublin, he will use specific literary arms:

I will try to express myself in some mode of life or art as freely as I can and as wholly as I can, using for my defence the only arms I allow myself to use---silence, exile, and cunning. (P 247)

Thus, the April 16th entry, which begins, "The spell of arms and voices" speaks about literature: the literary methods of Stephen, arms, and the introduction of other texts, voices.
The diary entry divides into two sections: the spell of arms and the spell of voices; the two sections reflect one another, holding up a mirror to intertextuality.

We noted earlier that the opening exclamations "Away! Away!" recall Stephen's literary transformation which draws on the *Divine Comedy* to activate initiatory dynamics with the embryonic codes, and yet the Dantine intertext also serves to qualify Stephen's death/rebirth experience by shadowing the write of passage with the drowned figure of *Ulisse*. The story of Dante's Ulysses surfaces more menacingly in the April 16th diary entry.

Ulysses tells Virgil and the Dantine pilgrim that he made his *compagni* eager for the "cammino" (road). In the opening verse of the *Commedia*, Dante writes: "Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita" (In the middle of the journey [road] of our life, italics mine). Ulysses lures his crew onto a road—a journey or way of life—that results in their drowning. The Dantine pilgrim, traveling on the road of his life hits a midpoint where he just about drowns. The intervention of Virgil—the intertext of the *Aeneid*—leads him out of narrative, spiritual danger and he continues on his way presumably safe from siren voices like that of Ulysses. The Dantine pilgrim does not recognize the siren-like seductiveness of the Greek hero, but Dante writes it into the poem.

In "Scylla and Charybdis," Joyce inserts the opening line from the *Commedia*—"Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita"—into Stephen's speech (*U* 170, 831). Stephen appears to quote Dante in order to clarify Shakespeare's age; however, as we will see, the line connects the drowning of Dante's Ulysses, the influence of Virgil, and the poetic process. Stephen may use the line to indicate Shakespeare's age, but Joyce draws on the opening verse of the *Divine Comedy* in order to comment on seductive literary influences.

The relationship between the siren and Ulysses comments on the narrative journey of the *Commedia*, for as we have already noted, Ulysses acts as a foil for the Dantine pilgrim. In *Purgatorio* XIX, a siren—who appears to the pilgrim in a dream—basks in the look of love with which he transforms her from mute and handicapped to singing and desirable. The siren sings:

'I am,' she sang 'I am the sweet siren who beguiles the sailors in
mid-sea, so great delight it is to hear me. I turned Ulysses, eager on his way (cammin), to my song, and he who dwells with me rarely departs, so wholly I content him. (italics mine, 19-24)²

Both the siren and Ulysses lure sailors out to sea. Both make their hearers eager to follow them on a voyage. And both, in the Commedia, lead sailors to their death. Ulisse seduces like the siren. In the above quote, I put into italics the key words mid (mezzo) and way/road (cammin) since they also appear in the opening line of the Divine Comedy: Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita. Thus, the pilgrim’s journey towards God, his poetic project to write his initiation from pilgrim to poet, is implicated in the siren’s threat of drowning those who hear her song, those who are in mid-sea, who are on their ocean road.

At the outset of the poem, when the pilgrim loses his way, several holy women, including Lucia, intervene on his behalf, instigating Virgil—the intertext of the Aeneid—to save him. The same pattern structures the dream of the siren where Lucia calls upon Virgil, who materializes in the dream, disposes of the siren, and releases the pilgrim from her spell (which of course the pilgrim endowed her with in the first place through his desire).³ Once again Virgil, the intertext of the Aeneid, saves the Dantean pilgrim.

The connection between the Dantean pilgrim, Ulysses, and the siren becomes even more complex nearing the end of the Purgatorio when Beatrice confronts the pilgrim as follows:

Nevertheless, in order that you may now bear the shame of your wandering and another time, hearing the Sirens, be stronger, lay aside the sowing of tears and hearken.

(Purg. XXXI, 43-46)⁴

Notably, the Dantean pilgrim weeps because he has just lost Virgil. His intertextual guide may no longer continue the journey because he is a pagan. Thus, Dante draws together within the figure of the siren, the distress of losing the way which is connected to the anguish of losing the mentoring intertext. It would appear that in the Divine Comedy, a crucial intertext—Virgil’s Aeneid—may save or drown the reader, the literary pilgrim. It intervenes in times of narrative impasse as well as works as a siren in luring the reader into a silencing literary sea.
In the diary entry of April 16, Joyce's unusual image of the "white arms of roads" is elucidated when set against the Dantesan intertext: the white arms are those that entice the reader out onto the ocean road like the Ulysssean siren. White arms suggest an embrace and the notion of being under a spell suggests even more specifically a siren's embrace. In Stephen Hero, his mind wandering appropriately enough during an Italian lesson, Stephen believes that his life under the spell of Catholic Ireland has inherited "a soul the steadfastness of whose hate became as weak as water in siren arms." (SH, 194) The expression siren arms juxtaposes the literary siren of Dante's Commedia with the literary arms of Stephen's diary entry in A Portrait. Siren arms threaten the creative writer with a smothering textual embrace whether as the dogma of the church or as a powerful literary influence.

Dante's Ulisse appears in the guise of the siren when by means of his inspirational rhetoric he lures his company to follow him onto the road (cammino) that results in the mythological siren's mode of dealing death: drowning. In the April 16 journal entry, the echo of the first line of the Aeneid further confirms this reading since "spell of arms" echoes "sing of arms," and of course singing is the mode of seduction employed by the siren. Moreover, the passage in Stephen's diary introduces at the outset an equivalence between "arms" and "voices" so that the "arms of roads" could read the voices of roads and in the Commedia the siren voice of Ulysses is what leads his men onto the ocean road to their death. Stephen's "white arms of roads" become the "black arms of tall ships" which suggests once again the Ulysssean road upon which he and his crew travel by ship. Furthermore, with the colour scheme black and white, the diary entry generates the image of a page rather than that of a seascape. The whole Dantesan journey is implicated for, as mentioned before, Dante likens his narrative to a sea-going voyage with his poem as a ship. One of the nautical metaphors of the Divine Comedy has particular relevance:

O you who in a little bark, eager to listen, have followed behind my ship that singing makes her way, turn back to see your shores again; do not put forth on the deep, for, perhaps, losing me, you would be left bewildered. (italics mine, Par. II, 1-6)

The ship of the Commedia sings like a siren leading the reader out to sea. Since Virgil has
had to return to Limbo, where Dante places the pagan poets, the *Commedia* has now taken on the role of literary guide or siren, an intertext that Dante knows from experience the reader fears losing (perdendo).

In Stephen's April 16th diary entry, the arms of roads and the arms of ships tell a "tale of distant nations" and the voices "[shake] the wings of their exultant and terrible youth." Arms and voices once again correspond since voices are more likely to tell tales and arms more characteristically resemble wings. But of course the key feature of Dante's Ulysses is the "[making] of the oars wings for the mad flight" which brings the ships and the wings of Stephen's passage into sharp intertextual focus. The opening line of the diary entry which signals the Virgilian intertext also reminds us that the "winged oarage" of Dante's *Ulisse* finds its origin in the metaphor used to describe the mythic Daedalus.

By the time they set forth through the pillars of Hercules, *Ulisse* and his companions are "vecchi e tardi" (old and slow) which contrasts clearly with Joyce's "kinsmen" who call to Stephen with "exultant and terrible youth." The crew that Ulysses lures onto the ocean road were once exultant and terrible youth. Prior to their death however, they have become old and slow. Stephen's reference to his kinsmens' youth serves in Dantinean time to signify the beginning of his literary journey.

The noting of elderly and youthful (old and new) not only works effectively in an initiatory context—death of the old, birth of the new—but it also comments on the intertextual relationships in the diary entry. Ulysses' old crew contrasts with Stephen's young crew because the former are the company of the epic past; whereas, the latter represent the company of the epic of the future. Ten days earlier Stephen enters these notions into his diary:

> Michael Robartes remembers forgotten beauty and, when his arms wrap her round, he presses in his arms the loveliness which has long faded from this world. Not this. Not at all. I desire to press in my *arms* the loveliness which has not yet come into the world. (italics mine, P 251)

Yet again, *arms* operate as a literary term. The arms of intertextual roads, the arms of ships
that tell tales, the arms of literary expression—silence, exile, and cunning—into these arms, Stephen Dedalus will gather beauty "which has not yet come into the world." Not the beauty of earlier epics, but the new beauty of a new epic which he will bring into the world. Thus, the initiation of Stephen takes place: the old dies and the new is born.

The textual initiation of Stephen Dedalus occurs within *A Portrait*, but it also takes place in-between *A Portrait* and *Ulysses*—so that the death by drowning—happens in silence. Roland Barthes characterizes the poetic silence of Mallarmé in provocative terms which also serve as an effective commentary on Stephen's silence between *A Portrait* and *Ulysses*. Barthes reads the poetic time of silence as "a light, a void, a murder, a freedom." The murder that Joyce enacts involves drowning Stephen, the literary pilgrim who reads the *Commedia*. He thus allows Stephen to plunge into a watery realm ruled by the siren voices of other authors. In a write of passage, silence corresponds to reading: the literary pilgrim Stephen must follow the intertextual sirens in the silence of reading, before he emerges into the literary world as one who speaks, a *fante*. He must fly into the unknown, plunge into the sea of other texts, before he is born into the literary world, transforming like Dante from a literary pilgrim, a reader, into a poet. Lorraine Weir would concur, yet she imagines the initiatory textual mentor as Loyola's spiritual exercises:

> the novice must finally retreat into isolation in order to wait for the coming of his own song, his voice—precisely a semiophany rather than a theophany, a response which is language itself.  

For the literary novice, the retreat into isolation, marked by silence, parallels reading.

The literary initiation that occurs in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is two-fold: it tells the story of an ecstatic birth but it also activates the tale of Dante's Ulysses who drowns in his attempted flight. The references to *Ulisse* summon the intertext of the *Aeneid* and thus signal Daedalus. Paradoxically, Virgil intervenes when the Dantean pilgrim has reached a narrative block, but he also works within the *Commedia* as a siren. The Ulysssean line: "we made of the oars wings for the mad flight" alludes through the *Aeneid* to Daedalus; hence, Ulysses' evocative line in the *Divine Comedy* generates a warning to sons who fly with
their literary fathers, like Icarus follows Daedalus and Dante follows Virgil. Until the poet can free himself from the siren's song of other texts, he cannot emerge as a speaker, a fante. Dante uses a Latin word from---the mother's tongue that authors him---Virgil's language to express the paradoxical nature of this fundamental intertext. Dante's undertaking in his epic poem is to replace the "f" of fante with a "D."

Dependent on the intertext, the literary novice cannot enact his own write of passage until he drowns the literary pilgrim who remains in silence while reading. The siren song of the Aeneid is silenced when placed with its author in Limbo. Stephen Dedalus wields the literary "arm" of silence: at the end of A Portrait, he plunges into silence, he succumbs to siren songs, he reads. Stephen will drown as "the man" of the old epics and will emerge as the new fante who speaks in the Homeric mode, the "voices" of Ulysses, or the "voices" of Ulisse.

At the outset of Ulysses, we discover the thematics of initiation intertwined in a watery scene:

Under the upswelling tide he saw the writhing weeds lift languidly and sway reluctant arms, hising up their petticoats, in whispering water swaying and upturning coy silver fronds. Day by day: night by night: lifted, flooded and let fall. (U 41, 461-464)

Stephen's vision recalls his previous initiatory moment when he encountered the "bird-girl" in A Portrait. Yet the girl blends with the siren calling of the sea. The womb of the sea---"upswelling"---overlaps with the baptismal font for once again both are signaled by the key word "tide." The intertextual threat of flooding tinges Stephen's vision. Marching through the passage are echoes of the microcosmic rhymes proceeding two by two in their macrocosmic form: day by day: night by night. In the final chapter of this study, we will explore how this duality signals a Dantean terza rima, a rhyming trinity.

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We discover when we shift our attention from *A Portrait to Ulysses*, Dante's character *Ulisse* also speaks in many voices, the recording of which will further our reading of the initiatory dynamics that Joyce activates through the Dantesque intertext.

Dante critics have noted the way in which the author of the *Commedia* has Ulysses function as an inverted image for the Dantesque pilgrim. One of the condensed areas of overlap is in the prologue canto which begins the epic poem. In the opening scene of the *Divine Comedy*, the pilgrim barely escapes drowning:

Then the fear was quieted a little which had continued in the lake of my heart during the night I spent so piteously; and as he who with labouring breath has escaped from the deep to the shore turns to the perilous waters and gazes, so my mind, which was still in flight, turned back to look again at the pass which never yet let any go alive. (*Inf.* 1, 19-27)

In an epic poem which revolves around breath as the climax of the literary initiation, it is significant that at the beginning of the poem the pilgrim is out of breath. The struggle to breath appears related to the threat of drowning. After barely escaping the Ulyssian fate of drowning, the Dantesque pilgrim struggles to ascend a mountain. The mountain that he attempts to climb parallels the mountain toward which *Ulisse* and his crew are drawn and from which arises the "turbo" (storm) that ultimately sinks their ship. In Joyce's edition of the *Commedia*, Eugenio Camerini records in his notes that the mountain in sight of which Ulysses drowns is Mount Purgatory. Even more interesting, in his commentary on the prologue canto, without mention of Ulysses, he glosses the line "Uscito fuor del pelago alla riva" (escaped from the deep to the shore) as "scampato dalla tempesta" (escaped from the storm). In other words, according to Camerini, the storm that rises from Mount Purgatory results in two opposed fates: the drowning of *Ulisse* and the contrary fate of the pilgrim who escapes from drowning. Hence, Ulysses is not merely part of a vast array of Infernal characters: not only does he stand apart from Dante's cast of contemporary Italians as a classical hero, but *Ulisse* also acts as a foil for Dante himself.

By means of subtle textual echoes, Dante has the near drowning of the pilgrim form a
parallel with his somnambulistic wandering in the dark wood. The *Divine Comedy* is constructed as though the poem comes into being due to the near spiritual/narrative drowning of the pilgrim. The poem is about the way in which he raises himself out of a sea that represents a death of the soul. The threat of spiritual death is inextricably linked to telling the tale of his experience, recording in literature his conversion: the turning from death to new spiritual life. Thus the initiation in the *Commedia* is not only from spiritually dead to alive, it also charts the conversion from the pilgrim to the poet. Just because Dante structures the conversion as a literary one does not negate the spiritual level; it simply connects the two within his work. As noted above, the foil to the Dantean pilgrim's escape from spiritual death is Ulysses. Thus, when Joyce alludes to Dante's *Ulisse* in *A Portrait* and in the second eponymous novel—-with a name that echoes more closely the Dantean figure than the Greek hero—a single Dantean character does not capture his attention. Instead, Joyce recognizes, encouraged by Camerini, that the figure *Ulisse* encompasses the entire literary enterprise of the *Commedia*. Ulysses shadows the initiatory relationship between the Dantean pilgrim/poet.

John Freccero focuses on Dante's quoting in the *Commedia* the line: "*In exitu Israel de Aegypto.*" He discusses the journey of the Dantean pilgrim as related to the figure of exodus in Augustine's *Confessions*. In the sixteenth century, notes Freccero, the influential passage in the *Confessions* was annotated by Deut. 32: 48-52 where God permits Moses to see the promised land from the mountain, but not to reach it. More importantly, Freccero reads Ulysses drowning in sight of the mountain, which is recalled in *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*, "precisely to mark the contrast between his abortive journey and that of the pilgrim." Dante's *Ulisse* drowns in sight of Mount Purgatory where, when reached by the pilgrim, the souls sing the biblical line "*In exitu Israel de Aegypto.*" (Purg. II, 46) In *Ulysses*, this line of scripture appears linked in Bloom's thoughts with sailors who do not return from their voyages (*U* 310, 1158-1160). In other words, Bloom not only reflects on the journey of a sailor like *Ulisse*, but he puts him specifically in the Dantean context of seeking to find and failing to reach a spiritual homeland. *Ulisse* is thus linked to the Pisgah sight which informs Stephen's "Parable of the Plums."
What concerns me in the contrast between the Dantine pilgrim who *almost* drows
and his re-writing of the classical hero Ulysses—who, against tradition, Dante has drown—is
that the former undergoes initiation whereas the latter does not. Joyce integrates the figure of
Ulysses specifically in terms of textual initiation. Therefore we must pose the question: how
does Joyce read the abortive journey of *Ulysses* as the underside of the return to the womb of
the Dantine pilgrim?

Dante’s *Ulysses* seeks further landscapes out in the world. In contrast, the Dantine
pilgrim travels within, exploring an interior landscape. Dante’s *Ulysses* poses as a leader of
men; while the Dantine pilgrim takes on the role of a novice guided by his mentor Virgil.
The narration of *Ulysses* represents him as constantly forging ahead; alternatively, the
narrative of the *Divine Comedy* follows a dual pattern moving forward and traveling back.
*Ulysses’s* plunge into the sea results in death; whereas the Dantine pilgrim’s plunge into the
sea acts as a metaphorical death, or return to the womb, which results in a renewal of life, a
rebirth.

The return to the womb coded as a death by drowning in the sea is not a Dantine
innovation. Examining *Ulysses*, Umberto Eco depicts the watery sphere in dynamic initiatory
terms with reference to a mythological figure of transformations, Proteus:

> It is not so much the content but the form of Stephen's thoughts
which signals the passage from an orderly cosmos to a fluid and
watery chaos. Here death and rebirth, the outlines of objects,
human destiny itself become amorphous and pregnant with
possibility.¹¹

The thematics in *Ulysses* of drowning, and in particular drowning in maternal terms, could
simply show Joyce drawing on basic cultural symbols. However, there are specific referrals
to the contrasting journeys of the Dantine pilgrim and the Dantine Ulysses in Joyce’s first
two novels. The initiation that occurs in a literary process does not result in simple death and
rebirth, end and beginning; instead it holds still the moment in which the transformation
takes place. Dante captures the initiatory dynamic by writing an epic poem that concludes
with a plan to begin writing. Joyce revels in the liminal implications of Dante’s intertextual
initiation.

In Mircea Eliade's terms, during the initiation ritual: "the neophyte is either dead, or scarcely born---more precisely, he is being born." A textual initiation seeks to give space and time to this non-moment of being in the womb or undergoing death. This non-time is always superimposed: the baptismal waters of death are simultaneously the waters of birth.

As we have charted, in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Stephen undergoes an initiation modeled on Statius's discourse of the embryo in the *Purgatorio*: leaving Aquinas behind, Stephen uses the new terminology of the *Divine Comedy* to experience and express artistic conception, gestation, and reproduction. Yet Stephen's write of passage, which leads him through a symbolic death (rejection of the priesthood) to a rebirth (the acceptance of a free creative life), takes place under the shadow of Dante's *Ulisse*. Thus, the initiation occurs within the realm of the character Stephen Dedalus while it simultaneously anticipates the diffusion of this character into a voice among voices, a textual signifier among intertexts. In the silence between *A Portrait* and *Ulysses*, Stephen plunges into the sea, listening to intertextual siren songs, and undergoes a seachange. Lorraine Weir, in her final section on *A Portrait* before turning to *Ulysses*, neatly expresses the seachange that occurs: "Stephen Dedalus becomes SD, the paradigm of the codes of his articulation." His voice becomes voices, intertextual echoes.

What lifts the Joycean motif of drowning, with its connotations of returning to the sea or the watery womb, out of the general cultural context and places it specifically in a Dantean configuration are the thematics of breath. In the last chapter, we saw the way in which breath not only participates in the initiation scene of *A Portrait*, but also in terms in each author's poetics. The breath that Dante records as poetry has a divine origin, like the breath that transforms Stephen in *A Portrait* into one "throbbing with song." In *Ulysses*, divine breath has dissipated into the death-dealing breath of Stephen's mother, or the sweetened breath of children which alludes to the Dantean intertext through the sweet new style. Stephen tries to breathe out poetry by capturing the breath of the sea. What he discovers is that like Dante's *Ulisse*, one cannot breathe while drowning.

In *Ulysses* a seachange occurs. Joyce's expression "seachange" comes from
Shakespeare's *Tempest*, but the very term "tempest" recalls the "tempesta" (storm) that, according to Eugenio Camerini in his notes on the *Divine Comedy*, threatens the Dantean pilgrim. And, as we have seen, it is a storm that comes off-shore from Mount Purgatory which drowns *Ulysses* and his men. Intriguingly, "mountain" is the final word before Stephen generates the following passage:

Dead breaths I living breathe, tread dead dust, devour a urinous offal from all dead. Hauled stark over the gunwale he breathes upward the stench of his green grave, his leprous nosehole snoring to the sun. A seachange this, brown eyes saltblue. Seadeath, mildest of all deaths known to man. Old Father Ocean. (*U* 42, 479-483)

The breath is no longer of a divine nature leading to an exultant rebirth like in *A Portrait*, now the breath functions according to the underside of initiation: death. The "Old father, old artificer" heralded in Stephen's journal has changed into the sea between *A Portrait* and *Ulysses*; it is now "Old Father Ocean." The flight of Daedalus---which functions in the Dantean intertext as an emblem for *Ulysses*'s drowning---has taken its plunge from the sky into the sea. The flight of *winged oarage* has failed, and thus results in an ocean dive. In oblique reply to Augustine's question in the *Confessions*: shall anyone be his own artificer? Joyce suggests the literary pilgrim should be wary of a particular artifier: Old father ocean, for at the outset of *Ulysses*, Stephen appears to have barely escaped from this body of water.

Echoing the gesture of the Dantean pilgrim, where the pilgrim turns back to gaze upon the perilous waters from which he has emerged with labouring breath, Stephen turns and looks---ostensibly to see if anyone saw him pick his nose (which recalls the reference above to "nosehole")---out upon the water:

He turned his face over a shoulder, rere regardant. Moving through the air high spars of a threemaster, her sails brailed up on the crosstrees, homing, up-stream, silently moving, a silent ship. (*U* 42, 503-505)

Stephen sees a particularly Dantean ship in that it appears to move through the air rather than
the sea, as if it were propelled by *winged oarage*. And perhaps on one level he looks back in time to envision Dante's *Commedia* itself in the "threemaster": the *three* canticles of the *Divine Comedy* written by his master Dante. As already mentioned, Dante uses a nautical metaphor throughout so that his poem compares to a ship.

Like the Dantean pilgrim, Stephen appears to have escaped death by drowning on the literal level. However, on the figural level, he has undergone an initiatory death in the silence between *A Portrait* and *Ulysses*: the Dantean ship that carries Ulysses and his crew to their death by winged oarage has become "silently moving, a silent ship" in the novel whose title is the drowned hero's name. As we noted above, "silence" is one of the "arms" with which Stephen plans to express his creativity freely. In silence Stephen undergoes an initiatory seachange; something dies and something is born. The voice of Stephen Dedalus has given way to the voices of *Ulysses*; likewise, the divine breath of *A Portrait* that marks Stephen as a speaker has become many different breaths, of many different speakers in *Ulysses*.

The murderous breath of Stephen's mother, her dying request, recalls the initiation scene in *A Portrait* that climaxes in new life due to a rejection of Catholic ceremonies. The drowning that hovers on the horizon of *A Portrait*, menaces more forcefully in the opening scenes of *Ulysses* for Stephen's mother may yet drown her son. We hear once again the siren song of Dante's *Ulisse*; it seeks to lure Stephen out to sea.

The siren song comes from Buck Mulligan, who acts as the self-appointed defender and supporter of mothers, and who also bears an uncanny likeness to Dante's *Ulisse*. Dante's Ulysses suffers in hell for being a male version of a siren, a false counselor. *Ulisse* becomes a medieval character in the *Commedia*, without forfeiting his status as a classical Greek. Likewise, Buck resembles a "patron of the arts in the middle ages" while his name has "a Hellenic ring." More telling however, is Buck Mulligan's similarity to creatures that fly as well as those that swim; he therefore wears the signature piece of Dante's *Ulisse* who *made of the oars wings for the mad flight*. Buck "[hops] down from his perch"; the night before, Buck was with a fellow in the "Ship"; we see him "running forward to a brow of the cliff, flutter[ing] his hands at his sides like fins or wings of one about to rise in the air [...] fluttering his winglike hands" with his "birdsweet cries* (U 16, 593-602). Buck wants to see
Stephen at "The Ship." And finally, Buck Mulligan "plunged" and Stephen hears a "voice, sweet-toned and sustained, [calling] to him from the sea." (U 19, 741). Buck Mulligan draws on all of the seductive attributes of Dante's Ulisse in order to lure Stephen into the maternal sea.

Notably, and as will become important later on, Bloom is coded as impervious to the siren claims of Dante's Ulysses. Bloom reads a pamphlet that tries to seduce with a voyage comparable to the adventure that Ulysses sings about to his crew. He recognizes: "Makes you feel young. Somewhere in the east: early morning: set off at dawn." (U 47, 83-84) Ulysses and his elderly crew also set off "poop turned to the morning" (Inf. XXVI, 124). Bloom recognizes the false counsel of the pamphlet: "Probably not a bit like it really. Kind of stuff you read: in the track of the sun." (U 47, 99-100). What Bloom describes is the route taken by Dante's Ulisse who voyages with his crew "in the sun's track." (Inf. XXVI, 117) Bloom does not fall for the "fiction" of the pamphlet, just as he does not find Buck Mulligan a particularly seductive character. Significantly, Bloom codes the false counsel of the pamphlet in terms of the negative mother. The sea into which the initiatory novice must plunge has dried up: "Now it could bear no more. Dead: an old woman's: the grey sunken cunt of the world." (U 50, 226-228) In contrast to Dante's Ulisse who, the poet stresses, willfully leaves home, Bloom's horror at the "dead sea" causes him to hurry "homeward."

In Nighttown, Stephen unwittingly---due to his drunken state---exchanges companions: Buck Mulligan disappears and Bloom makes his entrance. Surviving the dark night of the soul and body, the symbolic father and son stroll towards Bloom's home, the two are chatting:

about sirens, enemies of man's reason, mingled with a number of topics of the same category, usurpers, historical cases of the kind (U 543, 1889-1891).

The key word for Mulligan "usurper"---which brings the second episode of the book to a resounding halt---is linked in the conversation of Bloom and Stephen with the deadly song of the Dantean "siren."
It would appear that Joyce is at pains to portray Buck as a siren, a false counselor like Dante's Ulysses who leads his men on an Hellenic adventure that results in their drowning. Although Stephen recognizes the evil of his friend whom he labels "Usurper," and although he confronts him on his betrayal (U 7, 183 ff.), he nonetheless, fails to recognize Buck's resemblance to Dante's *Uliisse*. Stephen does not realize his friend's siren-like capacity to lure out to sea, for as Stephen says to Buck: "You saved men from drowning. I'm not a hero, however." (U 4, 62) The distinction between Buck as a hero, a Greek hero in particular with his Hellenic name and his new paganism, contrasts with Stephen who declares himself *not* a hero. As we saw in the last chapter, with our initial investigation into breath imagery, Buck uses "artificial respiration" in order to save. If Buck has the siren-like qualities of Dante's *Uliisse*, in what way could he drown Stephen?

One of the ways that Buck may drown Stephen is by means of alcohol. *The Ship* where Buck spends his time and Stephen's money is a pub. In the section of *Ulysses* called "Sirens" the sirens are dispensers of alcohol. The death of Paddy Dinghah due to alcoholism is intertwined with the comic near-death by drowning of Reuben J. Dodd's son. Stephen has earlier noted "Seadeath, mildest of all deaths known to man" (U 42, 482-483) and in reference to Paddy Dinghah's death by alcohol Bloom remarks: "The best death [...] A moment and all is over. Like dying in sleep." (U 79, 312-314) Shortly after this comment, Bloom, musing in the carriage *en route* to Paddy's funeral, imagines: "Dunphy's corner. Mourning coaches drawn up, *drowning* their grief. A pause by the wayside. Tiptop position for a pub." (U 81, 428-429, italics mine) Joyce scripts alcohol in general and Buck in particular as sirens that lure their consumers to a death by drowning.

In "Cyclops," the siren song of alcohol becomes unmistakably linked to the intertextual force of the *Divine Comedy*. Paddy Dinghah is mourned appropriately by his friends in Barney Kieman's pub. The name Dante Alighieri appears as part of a catalogue of Irish heroes and heroines of antiquity (U 244, 182). And then Alf Bergan says he just saw Paddy Dinghah and the circle of drinkers tease him saying in fact he saw his ghost since Dingah was buried that morning (U 247, 314 ff.). Not only do we have the name Dante precede the materializing of a ghostly shade---marked by the embryo canto as the figure to
produce speculation on initiatory dynamics in literature—but the key phrase which connects the varied references we quoted above linking sirens and alcohol: "lowest blackguard in Dublin when he's under the influence." (U 248, 384) Bob Doran applies this comment to Christ for taking away in premature death his friend Paddy Dignam. The expression "under the influence" as a way of indicating someone is affected by liquor is relatively new when Joyce uses it. Notably, when Stephen alludes to the embryo canto in "Oxen of the Sun," he comes across as drunk to the reader in two distinct ways: he is under the influence of Dante whom he quotes, and he is under the influence of alcohol, the two become conflated.

Prior to this turn-of-the-century neologism for intoxication, the notion of influence was reserved for emanations from the stars, the inflow of water, or the infusion of divine or literary forces. In the *Divine Comedy*, the Virgilian intertext emits a siren song that threatens the literary pilgrim. Dante constructs the heavens as a vast sea; thus, the starry influences which emanate from heaven are comparable to the influence that flows like the watery sea upon which one may be seduced by siren song. Joyce takes the layered meanings of the term influence and adds the turn-of-the-century neologism: being under the influence. Thus the connections between Buck Mulligan as a siren and the references to some sort of nautical intoxication participate in a carefully constructed comment on intertextual influence. The ghost of the textual past haunts and floods the literary pilgrim.

The siren call of Mulligan—that materializes like the ghost of the drunk Paddy Dignam—haunts Stephen throughout the novel. Buck's siren song plays the tune of Stephen's mother who chants along with Mulligan that Stephen is guilty of her death.

The thematics of drowning in *Ulysses* originate in Buck Mulligan's network of images linking the sea to the mother (return to the womb as death). In this context, the Martello Tower's position in Buck's mind as an "omphalos" represents a complex danger; for in Stephen's mind, the return to the mother becomes connected with the betrayal of one's creative soul by social conformity to religious ceremony. Richard Ellmann observes that the danger of the maternal, "surrender to mother Dedalus, mother church, mother Ireland, mother England" is that they all demand his "filial allegiance." The age old way to overthrow filial allegiance is according to the Oedipal plan. Other critics have done a much more
comprehensive treatment of this Joycean theme. I want to merely draw on its implications in a glancing way in order to see the role it has to play in intertextual initiation.

We examined the passage where Joyce reverses the myth of Meleager so that instead of the maternal intertext---Virgil---threatening the literary pilgrim with being burnt in the fire, Stephen describes his mother as "the trembling skeleton of a twig burnt in the fire." In that same passage, Stephen imagines St. Columbanus in a provocative sexual position with his mother: "in holy zeal his mother's prostrate body he bestrode." Stephen ultimately compares himself to St. Columbanus (U 35, 192-3). Hence, Stephen's relationship to his mother in this key initiatory passage appears incestuous. Peter Nesselroth puts the literary implications of the incest motif into telling terms:

Nesselroth discusses the textual ramifications of incest in a dynamic way. It is not merely a theme in a novel. The symbolic incest with the mother-tongue and overthrow of the patrimony occur within the arena of the literary pilgrim. In the Divine Comedy and in Ulysses, the literary pilgrim reads a certain kind of literature, one that transgresses the maternal intertext and thus overthrows filial allegiance. Nesselroth's reading of incest is significant because it is self-reflective: it charts a transformation in the reader.

In Ulysses, the incestuous bond between mother-(tongue) and poetic son generates the riddle of the fox burying his (grand)-mother. This puzzle is less perplexing when put in the context of the relationship between the Dantesque pilgrim and the poetic mother Virgil, since Dante conveys the abandonment of the mother in comparably brutal terms in the Commedia. As Don Gifford notes, "Columbanus is reputed to have left his mother 'grievously against her will.'"\textsuperscript{21} The Irish missionary with whom Stephen identifies has separated from a mother who sought to keep him. In other words, he passes beyond the mother's boundaries; he metaphorically transgresses the mother-tongue through incest, and thus activates initiatory
dynamics.

In *Ulysses*, the threat to Stephen comes from a single source parcelled into two interrelated symbolic configurations: his mother and the sea. These two forces become intimately connected in the seductive siren song of Buck Mulligan which lures Stephen with words and drinks. Buck upbraids Stephen for not kneeling down in front of God the father and praying at his mother's request. Raising the specters of the patrimony and the mother-tongue, Buck forcefully proclaims the affinity between the figure of the mother and the sea:

Isn't the sea what Algy calls it: a great sweet mother? The snotgreen sea. The scrotumtightening sea. *Epi oinopa ponton*. Ah, Dedalus, the Greeks! I must teach you. You must read them in the original. *Thalatta! Thalatta!* She is our great sweet mother. Come and look. *(U 4-5, 77-81)*

Stephen does come and look at Mulligan's behest, however, he does not see the same alluring vision; instead: "It lay beneath him, a bowl of bitter waters." *(U 8, 249)* What Buck views according to tradition and the epic past---according to the dictates of the patrimony---Stephen reads personally according to memory. Thus Stephen takes the cultural stereotype of the sea as the mother out of whom we all emerge and emphasizes its dark side, the fact that this "great sweet mother" is marked by death:

he saw the sea hailed as a great sweet mother by the wellfed voice beside him. The ring of bay and skyline held a dull green mass of liquid. A bowl of white china had stood beside her deathbed holding the green sluggish bile *(U 5, 106-109).*

Ostensibly about the view from the tower, Buck Mulligan's declarations about the sea being a great sweet mother demonstrate the difference between his thoughts and those of Stephen on art.22 Buck describes the maternal sea as "snotgreen"; he later announces to Stephen a "new colour for our Irish poets: snotgreen." *(U 4, 73)* And the clash between the two former friends results from their different opinions as to how Stephen should have behaved in the final days before his mother's death. For Buck, the mother coded as the sea, honoured by tradition, is the source of art.23 For Stephen, the mother fills basins, which resemble baptismal fonts, with
bile which drowns art. Buck Mulligan ironically saves those from drowning by luring them to his siren song which chants the Greek version of Ulysses' return and drowns out the medieval tale which plunges him into the sea. Buck only tells of Daedalus's flight; he elides the drowning of Icarus. And thus the breath he offers to save one from drowning is artificial.

As pointed out by Richard Ellmann, Stephen's refusal to his mother is linked to his denial of Buck:

Not to pray, and not to swim: Stephen will not accept their spiritual or physical purification. Mulligan's attempt to be clean is like his mother's ghostly demand for his soul's cleanliness.

Stephen will not participate in the Catholic ceremony which he realizes not only will fail to bring about his rebirth, but also may drown his art. Rebirth for Stephen Dedalus leads him into Bloom's zone where---paradoxically enough---the baptismal font is recognized as containing the maternal sea.

Bloom wanders into a Catholic Church and his description of the baptismal font recalls the "bowl" in Mrs. Dedalus's sick room and thus the Great Sea:

He stood a moment unseeing by the cold black marble bowl while before him and behind two worshippers dipped furtive hands in the low tide of holy water. (U 68, 458-460, italics mine)

The suggestion that the baptismal font contains the sea---which the novel has already established as the maternal element---appears next in Stephen's thoughts. Notably, Stephen puts these thoughts on the maternal sea into a medieval context. Thinking of Dante's friend Cavalcanti, and rejecting "medieval abstrusiosities," Stephen considers once again the difference between Buck's saving of the drowning man and his own fear. First, he recalls "the basin at Clongowes" and then he imagines:

Do you see the tide flowing quickly in on all sides, [...] If I had land under my feet. I want his life still to be his, mine to be mine. A drowning man. His eyes scream to me out of horror of his death. I ...With him together drown...I could not save her. Waters: bitter death: lost. (U 38, 326-330, italics mine)
Stephen buries his mother to save his life, but it wounds him. The tide flows in the baptismal font and rushes in from the sea where Stephen fears drowning. The death of Stephen's mother translates through the text into a drowning in the sea of the church. She drowns within her traditional life in Ireland to a husband who drinks and as a mother to many hungry children.

As we have noted, these simple maternal acts translate into intertextual terms: drowning in a baptismal font can result in a Ulyssean death or a Dantean rebirth; being under the influence means intoxication due to liquor yet it also refers to literary influx from the waters of the sea or the stars of a watery heaven; maternal nourishment stems from intertextual sources: it feeds the writer in process. Stephen refuses to die according to the traditional fate organized for him by the mother-tongue and the patrimony. His chance meeting with Dilly---"She is drowning. Agenbite. Save her. [...] She will drown me with her"---reinforces this dual familial interpretation of drowning which paints a brutal historical picture and yet simultaneously outlines an artistic method (U 200, 875-880). The encounter with Dilly is particularly heart-rending since she yearns to study French and buy a French text. However, when you are literally starving, like Dilly you try to sell books rather than buy them. Dilly will never have the opportunity to learn a language other than the mother-tongue which serves to remind her that she is hungry and her father is drunk.

On the plot level, the character Stephen rightly strives to avoid drowning. However, on an intertextual level, the signifier Stephen undergoes a seachange from A Portrait to Ulysses. What he strives to escape on the plot level, he plunges into on the textual level. He therefore reels back from those that are drowning according to the plot, yet melds with them on a symbolic level. While Stephen cannot help Dilly without drowning too, Joyce plunges into the watery realm generating a timeless condemnation of the mother-tongue and the patrimony who clasp and sunder producing Dilly who starves for the milk of the maternal intertext and the influence that her father guzzles.

Stephen will ultimately have to plunge into the sea but he avoids Buck's siren song and tumbles by the benevolence of his creator into the sea in which Bloom floats. Mary Reynolds recognizes that "Stephen's dread of water" is attached to "his sensitivity to the power of water as a metaphor." And thus, when Harry Blamires asserts that Stephen's
"dislike of contact with water is related [...] implicitly (by the words partial, total, immersion) to his rejection of his own baptism," the baptism signifies much more than a simple rejection of the Catholic faith. Stephen's fear of plunging into the metaphoric realm of water contrasts with Bloom's pleasure in the watery realm. The initiation of *Ulysses*, involves the plunge of Stephen, "hydrophobe," into the realm of Bloom: "waterlover, drawer of water, watercarrier." (U 549, 183-184) When a novice has successfully completed an initiation, he receives a new name. Notably, Bloom is the only one to voice Stephen's name in the novel. The only time Stephen is named in *Ulysses* is when Bloom tries to rally him after the blow from Private Carr. Richard Ellmann compares the scene to the one in the *Commedia* where Beatrice names the pilgrim Dante at the moment when Virgil exits the plot to return to Limbo. The two naming scenes differ in that the Dantean pilgrim becomes Dante; whereas Stephen dissolves into the voices of *Ulysses* rather than becomes James Joyce. Nevertheless, the parallel invites comparison.

The naming of Stephen occurs when he joins Bloom; one could say, Stephen immerses himself in Bloom's watery zone. From this moment on in the story, the rest of his Ulyssian journey is in Bloom's realm.

We must keep in mind that the plunge into water participates in an on-going debate about art. At the outset of the novel Mulligan connects the colour of the sea to the new colour he imagines for Irish art, snotgreen. Mulligan attempts to lure Stephen intoxicated with his siren song into this maternal sea of art. In "Ithaca," the catechistic narrative defines Stephen as loathing water not in artistic terms only, but specifically in terms of its translation into language:

hating partial contact by immersion or total by submersion in cold water [...] disliking the aqueous substances of glass and crystal, distrusting aquacities of thought and language. (U 550, 237-240)

The maternal sea is Bloom's realm, and although normally full of advice, Bloom refrains from counseling Stephen on the importance of bathing. One wonders why and the narrative informs us according to Bloom: "The incompatibility of aquacity with the erratic originality
of genius." (U 550, 247) Bloom honours Stephen for on the plot level, Stephen is the artist and Bloom is an ad canvasser; however, on the intertextual level, the supposed artist of A Portrait dies and is reborn as Stoom and Blephen. Somehow within the textual process of Ulysses, Stephen plunges into Bloom's realm and emerges transformed.

Bloom, the symbolic father has earlier mingled with Stephen's biological father, so that we have "Siopold!" as the culmination of a telling flight. The flight recalls Dante's Ulisse in that it occurs through music, the song of the siren, in the chapter known as "Sirens." Thus, the soaring into "endlessnessnessness..." (U 226, 745-752) echoes the Dantean pilgrim's ascension into heaven which parallels Ulysses' plunge into the siren's realm, the sea. Stephen plunges into the sea of Ulysses becoming one with the signifiers he seeks to escape: he draws into an aqueous substance the maternal realm of death and birth which is the realm loved by the father with whom he must meld. The biological father Simon, and the symbolic father Bloom together point to the spiritual father who in Paul's flight is seen through an aqueous glass darkly. At the outset of the Divine Comedy, the Dantean pilgrim compares himself to Aeneas and Paul and feels inadequate to the journey before him. Virgil calls him a coward and spurs him onward with the promise of meeting Beatrice. In the above quote—which notes that Stephen dislikes the aqueous substance of glass—Joyce's literary pilgrim also attempts to avoid his eventual Pauline vision. Stephen resents the expectation that he will read his world according to the tropes of sacred scripture. Stephen rejects vision translated specifically through an aqueous substance, through St. Paul's Bible. However, Ulysses privileges vision which encompasses the inter-relationships between the physical and metaphysical, the biological and the symbolic, the actual and the textual. Notably Bloom—whose middle name Paula is the feminine equivalent of Paul—unwittingly shares an ability with the Saint to recognize the Spirit in the Letter.

When Bloom encounters the redbearded sailor in "Eumaeus," he unconsciously draws comparisons with Dante's Ulisse. Of course Bloom the character does not identify the Dantean Ulisse in the sailor; he is too busy boasting about Molly and taking care of Stephen. However, Bloom the signifier, working as a signifier for Paul, sees beyond the literal to the semiotic. And acting as a signifier for Paul—well known for his epistolary references to the
significance of reading beyond the literal----Bloom reveals Dante's character mirrored in Joyce's character. This allusion to Paul, reverses the way in which Dante uses him in the Commedia. The Dantean pilgrim---whether from humility or fear---compares his journey to Paul's flight and asks Virgil if he should trace the steps of such an exalted figure. Alternatively, Bloom takes on the trappings of Paul, without noticing, and serves to track the prints left by the Dantean pilgrim across Joyce's text. The intertextual play allows us to characterize Bloom's realm. Bloom's zone, into which Stephen must plunge, signifies the impossibility of separating categories of experience; like water, his realm flows from one level to another. Bloom would have been the sort of listener to appreciate the connections Stephen draws between the biographical and the textual experience of Shakespeare.

We can characterize the Bloomian realm as an intertextual realm where the literal flows into the significant, rendering the watery realm a space without boundaries where all operate as signs. One of the instances of Bloom's intertextual realm results in a re-telling of Dante's story of Ulysses which is of course a re-telling of Homer's Odysseus. The Dantean intertext sets up a mise-en-abîme which occasions another telling when recounted by Joyce. As identified by Mary Reynolds, in "Eumaeus," Bloom places in context the redbearded sailor; thus producing some amusing references to Dante's Ulisse and his failed voyage.31

Bloom notices more than once the "old salt" who stares at the sea and dreams of "fresh woods and pastures new as someone somewhere sings." Ulisse sets off in search of the new and fresh. The old salt Ulysses is a false counselor, a siren whose luring song leads men to their death. Dante's cantos are songs and he too sings, luring the reader out to sea, the Commedia being represented often as his boat. Bloom imagines this old sailor "floundering up and down the antipodes and all that sort of thing and over and under, well, not exactly under, tempting the fates." Dante's Ulisse does exactly what Bloom imagines, and yet brushes aside as impossible. Dante's Ulysses tempts the fates; travels through the forbidden boundary marked by the antipodes; and goes under. With telling resonances of the flight of Dante's Ulisse which becomes a drowning, Bloom figures that "somebody or other had to sail on [the sea] and fly in the face of providence (italics mine)." Shortly thereafter Bloom mentions the "hell idea," and thus, Ulisse arrives in his final Dantean resting place (U 16, 629-640). The
key to the Ulyssean character in the *Commedia* is of course the description of his journey as a "flight" and to fly in the face of Providence captures his Dantean role as a breaker of boundaries and a transgressor of divine rules. Teodolinda Barolini reads the Ulysses canto in the *Divine Comedy* according to the theme of transgression:

the poet's voyage runs not counter to Ulysses' but parallel to it: Ulysses persuades his tired old men to pass the markers set by Hercules [...] Dante persuades us to pass the markers set by death. Both are linguistic transgressions, grounded in the "trespass of the sign": "il trapassar del segno" hearkens back to the Ulysses episode [...] the Ulyssean component of the poem is ultimately related to the *impresa* of the *Commedia* itself, to the poet's transgressing of the boundary between life and death, God and man.32

Barolini's chapter on the two infernal figures, Ulysses and Geryon, examines Dante's techniques to "underscore his poem's veracity, its status as historical scribal record of what he saw."33 Joyce's redbearded sailor Murphy---who so provocatively resembles Dante's *Ulisse*---also functions as a mechanism for Joyce to assert the truth of his fiction. As Richard Ellmann maintains:

> The rejection of Murphy attests that *Ulysses* is not a confidence trick. Instead the episode is made to register humbly, among the lying sights and sounds, its sincerity.34 (1972: 155)

And in a letter to Frank Budgen, Joyce writes: "I am heaping all kinds of lies into the mouth of that sailorman in Eumaeus which will make you laugh." (*Letters* I, 160)

Bloom draws attention to the sailor in "Eumaeus"; he imagines a life for him which conjures up the Dantean figure *Ulisse*. As pointed out by Dante scholar and Joyce critic, both versions of Ulysses in these particular contexts work as narrative devices to throw into relief the *trespass of the sign*: the crossing of the boundary---the fine line---between fiction and truth, but more importantly, between intertextual life and death. To state a critical commonplace, Bloom operates in *Ulysses* as a figure of transgression; he does not fit into established categories and thus disturbs his society. Thus, he forms an analogy in this
instance to the figure of Ulisse who Joyce transposes into the sailor Murphy. Murphy's lies when read inter-textually become truths, literary truths. Bloom's fantasies about Murphy bring to life the dead Ulisse.

The drowning of Ulysses enacts only one part of the baptismal ceremony: the old man dies, but the new man is not born. In Joyce's epic novel, the kind of sea that drowns Ulysses is a sea of tradition---of British rule, of Catholic rule, both oppressions drowned in alcohol---whereas the kind of sea that the Dantean pilgrim and the signifier Stephen enter is a transformative sea. Buck Mulligan attempts to seduce Stephen with his siren song into producing art which honours the mother-tongue's Catholic ceremonies and houses Haines, the mascot of British patrimony. Stephen responds with dirt, incest, and murder. Despite Stephen's transgressions---"He kills his mother but he can't wear grey trousers" (U 5, 122)---Mulligan succeeds in getting him aboard The Ship where he is inevitably under the influence.

Joyce activates the reversals in order to free himself of the siren song's imposition of silence. Like Dante buries Virgil---transgresses his textual boundaries---Joyce struggles to bury all that generates him including the textual origin that plunges him into a realm as uncertain as under sea. Nonetheless, he survives the seachange which has him recognize the deadly waters of the Great Sweet Mother and Old Father Ocean. Joyce examines the many ways in which these cultural waters may drown the literary pilgrim or, as we will see in the next chapter, freeze him into the static stance of filial allegiance.

Alternatively, the watery realm that Joyce creates privileges this mode of intertextual reading between the lines: the water, through which one can see, does not reside in fixed slots; it flows, drawing attention to the limited categories themselves. With his connection to Paul who can see the Spirit in the Letter, Leopold Bloom is the genius of these waters. He loves this liminal realm which serves as a way of departing from the limitations of his society which forever struggles to assign fixed meaning. Into this watery realm presided over by Bloom, Joyce dives, dragging Stephen with him. As Richard Ellmann believes of Joyce's artistic project:

Only in writing, which is also departing, is it possible to achieve
purification which comes from a continual rebaptism of the mind.\textsuperscript{35}

Like Dante before him, Joyce departs beyond the intertextual boundaries, he trespasses the sign in a continual rebaptism which compares to writing a liminal text where only the reader may set the beginning and end.

\begin{enumerate}
\item Joyce would have read the \textit{Aeneid} in Latin; thus a literal rendition of the line would be "Arms and the man I sing." In the translations available to Joyce, the opening line appears as "Arms I sing and the man" (H. Rushton Fairclough) "Arms, and the man I sing" (Dryden); "Arms and the man I sing" (Conington); "Arms I sing, and the hero" (Davidson); and finally "Arms I sing, and the man" (Jackson).
\item 'Io son,' cantava 'io son dolce serena, che i marinari in mezzo mar dismago; tanto son di piacere a sentir piena! Io volsi Ulisse del suo cammin vago al canto mio; e qual meco si ausa rado sen parte, si tutto l'appago.'
\item The text does not specify Lucia, it simply states a "donna santa"; however, Camerini glosses her as "Lucia." (412)
\item Tuttavia, perchè mo vergogna porte del tuo errore, e perchè altra volta, udendo le serene, sie più forte,
\item Roland Barthes (1967: 82).
\item Lorraine Weir, 16.
\item See Robert Hollander, John Freccero, Teodolinda Barolini, David Thompson.
\item Allor fu la paura un poco queta, Che nel lago del cor m'era durata La notte, ch'i' passai con tanta pietà. E come quei, che con l'ana affannata Uscito fuor del pelago alla riva, Si volge all'acqua perigliosa e guata; Così l'animo mio, che ancor fuggiva, Si volse indietro a rimirar lo passo, Che non lasciò giamaiali persona viva.
\item Camerini writes after a rather lengthy discussion: "E la montagna altissima, che alla fine avvistano i marinari, secondo la costruttura dell'intero poema, non può essere che il monte del Purgatorio." (214)
\item John Freccero (1986: 1-28). See "The Prologue Scene" (a two-part article whose second part is entitled "The Wings of Ulysses").
\item Umberto Eco, 36. According to the basic reference text of J. E. Cirlot:
  \begin{quote}
  The symbolic significance of the sea corresponds to that of the 'Lower Ocean'---the waters in flux, the transitional and mediating agent between the non-formal and the formal and, thus by analogy, between life and death. The waters of the oceans are thus seen not only as the source of life but also as its goal. 'To return to the sea' is 'to return to the mother', that is to die. (281)
  \end{quote}
\item Mircea Eliade, 15-16.
\item For a brilliant reading of Joyce and Dante, which extends the death and rebirth of baptism to the more encompassing motif of lustration, see Mary Reynolds' chapter, "Poetic Imagination and Lustration Patterns." Although our readings differ, because we respond to different textual patterns, hopefully the two put side by side provide a richer treatment of the complex subject of Joyce's reading of Dante.
\item Lorraine Weir, 27.
\end{enumerate}
The likening of death by drowning and dying while sleeping is particularly Dantean as we noted above. In the prologue canto of the Divine Comedy, the Dantesan pilgrim finds himself in the dark wood of his soul's death:

I' non so ben ridir com'io v'entr'ai; Tant'era pien di sonno in su quel punto, Che la verace via abbandonai. (Inf. I, 10-12)

(I cannot rightly tell how I entered there, I was so full of sleep at that moment when I left the true way)

The threat of spiritual death during sleep parallels, as we have seen, the near drowning of the pilgrim.


In a much-quoted passage from one of the letters to Frank Budgen, Joyce traces the shape of his episode "Penelope"; rather than quote it again, I will merely highlight the association Joyce draws between the archetypal female and the sea. One of the four female key words is bottom "in all senses bottom button, bottom of the class, bottom of the sea, bottom of the heart." (August 1921) Letters I, 170

Richard Ellmann (1972: 146).

Peter Nesselroth, 75.

Compare to Harold Bloom's idea: "[the Poet] must be self-begotten, he must engender himself upon the Muse his mother." (37).

Don Gifford (note 2. 144, page 33).

Susan Stanford Friedman has written: "For Stephen, the sea images the dual aspect of his mother and his feelings for her. She is both "a great sweet mother" and the green bile she vomits." (170) This is inaccurate: Buck reads the sea as the "great sweet mother" and Stephen looks at this same sea and imagines his dying mother's vomit. I believe the distinction is crucial in order to distinguish Buck and Stephen's differing stances on art.

In a letter to Italo Svevo, Joyce describes his literary work in forceful maternal terms: "Having urgent need of these notes in order to complete my literary work entitled Ulysses or your bitch of a mother". (January 1921) Letters I, 154.

Morris Beja notes the identification in Stephen's mind between his mother and Ireland; according to Beja, both participate in the archetype of the devouring Mother encompassed by Stephen in the phrase: "the old sow that eats her farrow." Beja continues: "But if Mrs. Dedalus represents in part Stephen's nation, she is even more emphatically connected with its church"(259). Thus, Stephen's initiatory need to separate from the mother represents severing ties to family, nation and church, which we learned in A Portrait and find further discussed in Ulysses.

Richard Ellmann (1972: 11).

For brutal depictions of Stephen's family see Stephen Hero, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, Ulysses, or an early letter to Nora (August 1904) Letters II, 48.

Mary Reynolds, 145.

Harry Blamires, 208. Joyce's attitude towards baptism is complex. He specifically did not want his children to be baptised and yet he writes to Lucia when she is grown up: "And talking of priests, if you subscribe to the library there ask for The Life of Father Healy. I knew him and I think that he baptised me or one of my family." Letters I, 364.

Richard Ellmann (1972: 147).

"For now we see in a glass darkly, but then face to face." (2.Cor.xii, 4) Joyce quotes this biblical line in "Cyclops" when the narrative focuses on Paddy Dignam in heaven.

Mary Reynolds has noted that the sailor, whom Stephen and Bloom meet in the cabman's shelter in "Eumaeus," compares with Dante's Ulisse (37). She refers her readers to the Appendix where she outlines exactly the correspondences on which I comment.


ibid, 60.
Victor Turner sees the non-time of rites of passage as a necessary phase of life which forms a vital contrast with the equally necessary role of structure. Turner calls the ritual phase *communitas* since it generates "total beings" interacting with other total beings which is "generative of symbols and metaphors and comparisons; art and religion are their products" (127).
IV Write of Passage

The last chapter left us with a sense of the paradoxical realm of the sea in which one may drown. The sea of *Ulysses* functions as both the nourishing mother and the menacing maternal intertext. Garry Leonard transposes the paradoxical maternal sea into Lacanian terms as the site "from which the subject's question of his existence is presented to him." Leonard asserts that: "This question can bathe and support the subject, but it can also invade him and tear him apart." Although the character contends with the maternal sea as if it exists without, Leonard stresses the fact that this contradiction threatens to flood the subject from within. Thus, one of the ways of characterizing the transformation that occurs within *Ulysses* is that Stephen must recognize the Bloomian waters which flow within him. Joyce conveys the mingling of the two characters comically as Blephen and Stoom. While Dante buries the Virgilian intertext, Joyce integrates the liminal figure of Bloom whom he has endowed with Virgilian attributes. One of the key differences in Dante and Joyce's literary initiation is that the former relegates the maternal intertext to Limbo whereas the latter allows limbo in the figure of Bloom to roam throughout the text.

The literary pilgrim contends with the siren song of the intertext in order to ultimately create a contradictory silence: one in which he reads and yet one in which his own voice sings. One must grapple with the fundamental duality that structures *writes of passage* in order to perceive the contradictory zone of the literary sea in *Ulysses*: the sea drowns the pilgrim and yet it corresponds to the rebirth promise of the baptismal font: "Oomb, allwombing tomb." The intertextual sea floods the pilgrim with the question of his existence. The liminal figure Bloom, water-lover Bloom is the guide who leads Stephen to plunge into this liminal sphere; Bloom thus follows in the footsteps of Virgil the guide to Dante. He blooms like the celestial rose responding to the question of existence by advertising a textual origin from which one may emerge uncertain as under sea.

We have noted Bloom's chameleon capacity to enact simultaneously the initiatory novice and the intertextual mentor. Joyce depicts Bloom as a character who simultaneously represents both stages---as mentor and as novice---in the Dantean journey. He is a figure who
rarely stops moving, a womanly-man who manifests the attributes of Jew and Christian and yet does not commit to either. Therefore, Protean Bloom is the ideal transitional container for the water into which Stephen must plunge. We noted earlier the stream which flows around Bloom’s limp father of thousands and which corresponds with Virgil’s fountain of speech. Both the Dantean and Joycean pilgrims must enter into this dynamic flow of water.

The maternal intertext, Virgil, is also the pilgrim’s "dolce padre"; he is not only father of Dante, but comparable to Bloom, Statius credits him with fathering thousands of others (Purg.XXII, 67-9) and thus he also resembles the quiet Theodore Purefoy. In "Oxen of the Sun" the narrator cries out: "Thou art all their daddies, Theodore." Significantly, this Virgilian quality of Theodore’s appears after a poetic rendition of Dante’s gestation of the embryo:

The air without is impregnated with raindew moisture, life essence celestial, glistening on Dublin stone there under starshiny coelum. God’s air, the Allfather’s air, scintillant circumambient cessile air. Breath it deep into thee. (U 345, 1407-1416)

Dante uses the image of a rainbow during the embryo canto and at the end of the poem which serves to further connect these two narrative moments. Joyce signals the Dantean rainbow with the echo in raindew. More telling however is Joyce’s seeming address to Purefoy which at the same time speaks directly to the reader: "Breath it deep into thee."

Divine breath from a joyful Creator not only transforms one into a speaker with a self-reflective soul, it also is the stuff of poetry as Dante explains to Bonagiunta. Joyce directs this breath towards the reader, inspiring him to take note and record it as poetry. In other words, Joyce tells the reader to transform from literary pilgrim into poet.

In a write of passage, the reader does not simply read his own story reflected in the text; rather, he must articulate his story and thereby flounder and float within the intertextual flux. If the reader survives this liminal plunge, than the creative waters recede and the raindew glistens. The ark Ulysses carries the breath of life and the rhyming beasts two by two. The two that concern us are the pilgrim and poet, but also the narrative that stills the moment of the transformation so that we too may participate in the journey.

The intertextual initiation is a process that occurs between readers and writers. The
reader never becomes solely the writer: the Dantesque pilgrim's reading, his experience becomes the poet's writing, the poem that records the experience. Beatrice encourages the pilgrim to narrate his journey through the afterworld; thus when we finish the *Commedia*, the ending refers us to the beginning since the transformation of the pilgrim into the poet signifies the moment when the writing of the poem begins which coincides with the end of the reading. The death of the reader activates the birth of the poet. Hence, the *Divine Comedy* requires the double focus of the pilgrim and poet, novice and initiate.

Joyce has his characters participate fluidly in the initiatory dynamic so that Bloom plays both mentor and novice---both Virgil and the pilgrim---while Stephen also parallels the Dantesque pilgrim in his quest to become a poet. The paradoxes and contradictions remind us in both Dante and Joyce that the write of passage is a dynamic process; it never achieves stasis. Joyce integrates Stephen with Bloom in order to enact another level of initiation which attains a partial completion at the conclusion of *A Portrait*. In *Ulysses* at a parallel juncture, Stephen dissolves into the watery realm of Bloom so that we find---among the many voices that generate the text---Blephen and Stoom.

* * *

the Joycean dialectic, more than a mediation, offers us the development of a continuous polarity between Chaos and Cosmos, between disorder and order, liberty and rules, between the nostalgia of the Middle Ages and the attempts to envisage a new order. Our analysis of the poetics of James Joyce will be the analysis of a moment of transition in contemporary culture.²

Umberto Eco

Bloom enacts simultaneously both the mentor and novice's role in the write of passage which suggests that only those in transition can lead those who seek transformation. The shock of Dante's decision to relegate Virgil to Limbo has led to myriad scholarly debates anxious to understand why a devoted novice would place his beloved master in a non-space, neither here nor there, neither punishment nor fulfillment. Joyce's reading of Dante suggests that the potency of liminal characters is exactly their ambiguous status. Bloom performs an equally liminal role in *Ulysses*. 
At the outset of the novel, Stephen considers the bed as the receptacle of life’s initiatory moments: "Bridebed, childbed, bed of death, ghostcandled." (U 40, 396) And in the penultimate section of Ulysses, Bloom also considers the initiations that occur in the bed as he "reverently" enters it: "the bed of conception and of birth, of consummation of marriage and of breach of marriage, of sleep and of death" (U 601, 2119-2121). Joyce superimposes the ultimate end upon the primary birth, not only with the image of the bed of birth and death but also through the lay out of the novel since Stephen’s dismal bed reference occurs at the outset of the narrative and Bloom’s corresponding, yet more accepting referral, sums up the Stephen-Bloom journey. This chapter involves a more telling instance of this kind of auto-citation in the work whereby a line that occurs earlier in a dark sense becomes infused with light as the novel approaches its close.

Notably, Stephen's bed is "ghostcandled," whereas Bloom does not reference ghosts. We have traced throughout this study the way in which Joyce charges the figure of the ghost with intertextual resonances. Bloom's ghost Rudy haunts his relationship to Molly rather than disrupts his literary progress. Stephen's artistic development fundamentally involves not having to lie in the bed in which he was made. Surprisingly, Bloom arrives into his initiatory bed as the ultimate figure of liminality: "the childman weary, the manchild in the womb." (U 606, 2317-2318) In this conclusive moment, Bloom contains the paradoxical dualities which inform textual initiations. Bloom's shape constantly shifts between the posture of initiatory novice and the position of mentoring guide.

The verse describing Bloom in bed as weary in the womb highlights the juxtaposition required by literary initiation---manchild childman---and forms a chiasmus which demands the reader's double focus. At the center of this cross is Molly and thus we will chart what happens to our pilgrim-poet pair when she enters the equation transforming the study from one of duality to one on the trinity.

A transformation takes place in Ulysses; Joyce structures the shift according to a comparable one recorded in Dante's epic journey through the afterworld. The change is from the stasis of the Inferno to the dynamic renewal found in the Purgatorio and the Paradiso. The division expressed by two becomes the harmony conveyed in a terza rima pattern of three. Molly sets in motion this renewal for she makes duality into a trinity and thus the
chiasmus—which threatens to become a square—tends to simultaneously flow into the shape of a circle.

* * *

Mary Reynolds outlines the way in which *Dubliners* parallels Dante's *Inferno* in terms of stasis:

as Jackson Cope discovered, the first story [of Dubliners] opens with the words Dante set above the gate of hell in *Inferno* 3: "There was no hope", while the final story, "The Dead," concludes with a disembodied vision of a frozen Ireland that imitates Dante's image of a frozen world, "where the shades were wholly covered [...] from the final canto of the *Inferno*."

The world of *Dubliners* begins and concludes according to the structure of Dante's infernal canticle and thus its inner world compares to the hellish afterworld depicted in the *Commedia*. The characters in *Dubliners* suffer paralysis; likewise, the shades in *Inferno* suffer the stasis of endless repetition. One of the ways in which an individual will be relegated to Dante or Joyce's hell is by failing to undergo initiation. One must deal a death-blow to the literary pilgrim in order to be reborn as the poet of the *Commedia* or the "voices" of *Ulysses*. Stasis translates into conforming to the dictates of the mother-tongue and never questioning the patrimony. What Kristeva describes as a textual murder translates in these literary initiations into the abandonment of the intertextual mother, the burying of that generative source in order to become the textual origin of one's own transformation into articulation. The intertextual mother requires one's silence for she places the literary pilgrim in the position of reading. In order to establish the distinction between the infernal realm of stasis and the dynamic realm of literary initiation, we need to further pursue the thematics of death and rebirth.

Another way of describing the separation from the maternal intertext appears as setting forth from the geography of stasis. The initiatory characters of Dante and Joyce travel through their textual landscapes in the guise of pilgrims. In an article on Joyce and pilgrimage, Julia Bolton Holloway reveals one of the ways in which Stephen and Bloom
symbolically die:

In their thoughts [shadowed by mourning] they join that Nekya
that Homer geographically placed where Ireland is, that land of
the dead to the west beyond the Pillars of Hercules.5

Initiatory figures inevitably must transgress the sign and travel to the land of the dead.
Dante's Ulisse flouts divine dictates—he sails west beyond the Pillars of Hercules—and thus
drowns. Ulysses is compelled by a desire for knowledge. Set in motion by a different desire,
an initiatory one, an overlapping character—the Dantean pilgrim, Gabriel of "The Dead;"
Stephen, and Bloom—this combinatory character also transgresses. This overlapping pilgrim
sails west dying figuratively in a maternal sea, as demanded by the dynamics of literary
initiation. The end of Dubliners alludes to the frozen world of Dante's Inferno; however one
character, Gabriel, strives to go west beyond divinely set limits through the Pillars of
Hercules, through the figurative death experience with its promise of renewal. Likewise, A
Portrait concludes with one character, Stephen, setting forth from the land of the Dead---
Ireland, Homer's Nekya---to encounter renewal after a death by drowning in the maternal sea.

At the end of A Portrait, before Stephen plunges into the maternal sea, the foundation
of the new epic is laid. In a complex revision of the Aeneid, Joyce sends Stephen off to the
tune of the intertextual siren so that he might gather forces while reading the books of the
dead and thus emerge upon the next shore of his development as the artist in process, the
voices of Ulysses, the all wombing tome.

Gathering up the initiation scene in A Portrait, Ulysses concludes with an image of
Dante's celestial rose which surfaces in Molly's interior monologue in the final section of the
novel. It is a strikingly Dantean rose for with a turn of phrase, Joyce has Molly imagine her
roses as within the sea:

whatll I wear shall I wear a white rose [...] I love flowers Id love
to have the whole place swimming in roses God of heaven [...] as
for them saying theres no God I wouldnt give a snap of my two
fingers for all their learning why dont they go and create
something [...] yes when I put the rose in my hair [...] shall I wear
red yes (U 642-3, 1553-1603)

Molly scatters roses in her monologue, specifically Dantean roses, while she demands a write
of passage: "why dont they go and create something." Referring to the dreamy memories of Molly, Mary Reynolds comments on Joyce's use of the Dantinean rose from Paradiso XXXII: "Joyce has put Dante's great spiritual image of the love that moves the universe into this woman's mind." Both the Inferno and Dubliners describe a static realm of suffering; out of this realm the literary pilgrim must journey. Dante, Gabriel of Dubliners, Stephen of A Portrait, Bloom of Ulysses, move beyond the established boundaries. The ending of Paradiso contains a celestial rose which reappears in both A Portrait and Ulysses as they reach their conclusion. Mary Reynolds' phrase to describe the Dantinean rose, "great spiritual image of the love that moves," marks an important shift: the static zone has transformed into movement, frozen water has begun to stream. In the Dantinean system, death corresponds with stasis; whereas new life is conveyed as dynamic movement.

In Ulysses, Joyce does not write about a renewal that activates an initiatory dynamic in an individual life; instead, he works with a renewal that leads to an initiatory rebirth for a whole community. The initiation Joyce alludes to in Ulysses announces a new era, a new way of reading time. Keeping in mind Mary Reynolds' contrast between the Infernal ending of Dubliners and the paradisal conclusion of Ulysses, I believe the contrast could be further explored as a thwarted and a successfully conceived Annunciation. The enacting of this primal scene in Ulysses rewrites the failed attempt at Annunciation in "The Dead." Gabriel tries to place his Word in the womb of Gretta and she bursts into tears rather than says yes. Alternatively, Ulysses ends with the climaxing affirmations of Molly who movingly responds: "yes I said yes I will Yes."

Woven throughout Ulysses are comic references to the Annunciation. Buck Mulligan chants in the first chapter from the Ballad of Joking Jesus: "---I'm the queerest young fellow that you ever heard./ My mother's a jew, my father's a bird." (U 16, 584ff.) And recurring in Stephen's mind is Léo Taxil's amusing version of Joseph's recriminations to his pregnant wife Mary:

---Qui vous a mis dans cette fichue position?
---C'est le pigeon, Joseph. (U 34, 161-162)

These mocking versions of the Annunciation transform from comic to comedy---in the Dantinean sense---at the end of Ulysses where for a brief moment the signifiers, Stephen,
Bloom, and Molly, come together recalling an ancient rite of passage which Joyce conveys to us as a modern rite of passage. In Umberto Eco's terms:

> The adaption of the Trinitarian schema is a typical example of an ancient schema, a theology that Joyce does not accept, freely adapted in order to dominate a material that escapes him.\(^8\)

Umberto Eco's insight could refer equally well to Joyce's use of the sacrament of initiation: baptism. As is well known, Joyce would not allow his children to be baptised; nonetheless, he fills his textual creations with the significance of baptismal typology. Richard Ellmann puts this contradiction into compelling terms:

> Christianity had subtly evolved in his mind from a religion into a system of metaphors, which as metaphors could claim his fierce allegiance.\(^9\)

Along with Umberto Eco, Jean-Michel Rabaté recognizes Joyce's Trinity which comes together in the final episodes of *Ulysses*. As a gloss on Joyce's quote of Dante's paradisal verse: "vergine madre figlia di tuo figlio," Rabaté identifies the Dantean contribution to the structuring of the divine family:

> [Stephen] has to cover the same ground as Dante, that is to move up from a philosophical family sketched by the figures of Plato, Socrates and Aristotle, towards a mystical family made up of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, with which the Virgin entertains certain affinities.\(^10\)

The profane realm of *Ulysses* opens just enough to allow a ray of sacrality to enter and then the moment passes, the shades are once again drawn. Nonetheless, humanity is briefly illuminated by the light of the divine. The philosophical family portraits fade as the mystical family for a moment takes their place.

In the penultimate canto of the *Commedia*, St. Bernard prays to the Virgin Mary. Bernard, the pilgrim's final teacher, instructs him to look closely at the celestial rose and then he suggests the pilgrim look at the face of Mary. The pilgrim describes his vision of Mary and then he records:
and that loving spirit which had first descended on her singing
'Ave Maria, gratia plena' spread his wings before her.
(Par.XXXII, 94-96)\(^1\)

Remarkably, afterwards, the pilgrim asks Bernard: "who is that angel that gazes with such
rapture on the eyes of our Queen, so enamoured that he seems on fire?"(Par. XXXII, 103-
105) What is remarkable about the pilgrim's question is that he has already noted the angel is
Gabriel by the above description. Gabriel announces to Mary that she will bear the divine
child. Dante's description and question, one on the textual level, the other operating on the
plot level, mark the distinction between the pilgrim and poet. This is one of the scenes in the
Commedia where the "dramatic double focus" of the poem is emphasized. The roles are thus
fluid: Dante is both the protagonist and simultaneously the poet. Fluid roles dominate the
final scene of Ulysses as well where the angel Gabriel appears fleetingly through the
characters, but more forcefully within the fabric of the text.

Momentarily Bloom acts as a figure for Dante's Gabriel since he revolves lovingly
around Molly who at moments Joyce represents as a figure for Mary.\(^12\) Stephen, however,
seems to most fully resemble the angelic Gabriel. Throughout A Portrait and Ulysses, the
dominant feature of Stephen is his association with flight; it is not difficult to imagine him in
the role of a winged being. If Stephen recreates the mission of the angelic Gabriel, then
Bloom fits nicely into the role of Joseph, the celibate Jew who becomes a father to a spiritual
child not his.

Stephen projects the shadow of Dubliners Gabriel, not only by fulfilling the mission
which aborts in "The Dead," i.e. not transmitting the message to Gretta as Mary who cries
rather than responds more traditionally about being the Lord's handmaid, but Stephen also
walks accompanied by the shadow of Dubliners' Gabriel since he too sets off for death at the
end of Ulysses. A pattern emerges whereby the conclusion of each of Joyce's texts ends in a
swerve towards death and hence activates the potential for initiatory rebirth. Gabriel must go
West. Stephen of A Portrait sets off for a death by drowning according to the fate of Dante's
Ulisse. Likewise at the end of Ulysses, Stephen sets off for a Ulyssian death in the baptismal
font of the sea thus shedding the old man of Ulysses to be reborn as the new figure of
Finnegans Wake. At the end of Ulysses, we must look at the way in which Joyce structures
Stephen's exit from the novel according to the drowning that awaits Dante's Ulysses.
In the first chapter of this section, we noted the way in which Molly functions as a signifier for the womb, specifically expressive of the metaphorical link between the womb and the sea. In reference to the womb-sea correspondence, Molly feels that her menstrual blood pours from her "like the sea," and when she dreams of her childhood in Cadiz: "O that awful deepdown torrent O and the sea the sea." Joyce envisages Molly, according to the Dantean intertext, as a connecting link in the matrix of imagery that generates a correspondence between the waters of the sea and those of the womb. In the Divine Comedy, if the waters off Cadiz mark the spot where Ulisse drowns, then we can contrast the two differing initiatory paths taken by Bloom and Stephen, in relation to their respective encounter or lack of encounter with Molly.

Joyce makes a distinction in Dantinean terms between Stephen and Bloom: Stephen passes beyond Molly like Dante's Ulisse; whereas Bloom settles on the known side of the Pillars of Hercules. In the twenty-seventh canto of Paradiso, the Dantinean pilgrim glances back at earth from his heavenly perspective and sites Ulysses' path:

From the time when I had looked before I saw that I had moved through the whole arc from the middle to the end of the first clime, so that I saw on the one hand, beyond Cadiz, the mad track of Ulysses. (Par. XXVII, 79-83)

The difference between Bloom and Stephen seems contradictory, but in fact this minor geographical detail allows Joyce to convey both sides of initiation. The write of passage involves a return to the womb: Bloom's return to Molly born in Cadiz. And yet, a return to the womb corresponds with death. The drowning of Ulisse in the maternal sea, due to his transgression of the Pillars of Hercules, which compares to Stephen's passing beyond Molly born in Cadiz. Like the westward bound Gabriel of Dubliners, like the Stephen of A Portrait who sets off on a sea voyage (which recalls the one taken by Dante's Ulisse who drowns) the Stephen of Ulysses journeys towards death.

In contrast to Bloom, Stephen re-enacts the role of Dubliners' Gabriel. Moreover, he takes on the trappings of the Bible's Gabriel. In A Portrait, Stephen associates his creative act with the appearance of Gabriel with whom he melds poetically:

O! In the virgin womb of the imagination the word was made
flesh. Gabriel the seraph had come to the virgin's chamber.

(P 217)

Although Stephen's poem revolves around his offering to a more sensuous virgin, he nonetheless aligns himself with the seraphic angel. The mingling of imagery, which follows the mention of Gabriel, attests to the correspondence between the young would-be-poet and the angelic messenger. Significantly, the image of Dante's celestial rose surfaces once again. Stephen compares the heart of his beloved to a rose and elaborates the image in Dantine terms:

That rose and ardent light was her strange wilful heart, strange that no man had known or would know, wilful from before the beginning of the world: and lured by that ardent roselike glow the choirs of the seraphim were falling from heaven. (P 217)

In the Divine Comedy, Dante's celestial rose holds---simply for the comprehension and transmission of the pilgrim---the shining souls forming a seraphim filled choir. The act of writing poetry links this early venture on Stephen's part with his later truncated verses on the strand, scribbling on a torn piece of Deasy's letter. The "womb-tomb" of this second attempt, coupled with his "wavespeech" acts as an intensification of initiatory themes. However, as we will see, Gabriel functions as the crucial figure for setting in motion the write of passage and thus transforming the tomb into a tome.

As we have seen, at the end of Ulysses, within Molly's reverie the celestial rose of the Commedia surfaces once again. The appearance of the Dantine rose at this juncture links this scene, where Stephen composes poetry, not only with the initiatory scene on the strand, examined previously, but also with the surfacing of the Dantine rose in Molly's monologue which brings Ulysses to a close. The correspondence between the endings of Dubliners, A Portrait, and Ulysses clearly generate a self-reflective dialogue. Significantly, for a study of initiatory dynamics, one of the keys to reading the conclusion of Ulysses requires keeping in mind the figure of the angelic Gabriel who hovers above the endings of Dubliners and A Portrait. Gabriel operates as one of the messengers that Robert D. Newman reads as so integral to the Joycean textual world:

By transgressing non-contradiction, Joycean messengers spur us to
read Hermetically. We move simultaneously backwards and forwards in the text, associatively replicating experience yet continuously revising those associations as we progress into new experiences.\textsuperscript{15}

Newman effectively describes Joyce's Gabriel who appears in \textit{Dubliners}, \textit{A Portrait} and \textit{Ulysses} in such a way that the reader must continually return (read backwards) to earlier appearances of him in order to navigate (read forwards) his on-going journey through the Joycean oeuvre. Moreover, with a biblical name, one must read backwards beyond the Joycean pillars, transgressing his textual realm to discover the Gabriel of other texts. As a messenger, Gabriel contributes via his multiple significations to Joyce's pursuit of contradictions.

In \textit{Ulysses}, the ultimate encouragement to read Stephen in the role of the archangel Gabriel is that his final gesture in the novel discovers him offering lilies to the Virgin. Stephen wanders away from the plot of \textit{Ulysses} after he enacts this symbolic gesture of Annunciation. His method of announcing a new era with the iconographic lily recalls an analogous scene in the \textit{Divine Comedy}.

Just before the literary pilgrim loses Virgil---who, in this scene, he specifically compares to a "mamma"---Dante quotes from the \textit{Aeneid} for the first and only time, in his mother's tongue: "\textit{Manibus o date lilia plenis}" (O, give lilies with full hands!) Camerini's only comment is to refer the reader to the \textit{Aeneid}, book VI, line 884. The reader who returns to the epic poem of the pilgrim's guide discovers an interesting turn around in the \textit{Commedia}: Dante has reversed the meaning of Virgil's phrase. What conveys grief in the \textit{Aeneid}, expresses joy in the \textit{Divine Comedy}. It is interesting to note that the one Italian marker, necessary to maintain the \textit{terza rima} of Dante's poem, in the direct quote from Virgil's \textit{Aeneid} is "o." When Stephen composes his poem to the sensuous virgin in \textit{A Portrait}, he begins the section on Gabriel with an "O!" (P 217)

As discussed by John Freccero, in a highly charged, famous scene in the afterworld, Aeneas singles out the remarkable figure of Marcellus from the pageant of future heroes. Aeneas' father, Anchises, praises the potential and then laments the loss of Marcellus with the phrase "\textit{Manibus date lilia plenis}." In the \textit{Aeneid}, Anchises has the foresight accorded to shades; he thus foreshadows the tragic event that has already occurred in Virgil's time: the early death of the emperor's adopted son, and most promising heir, Marcellus. As Freccero
recounts, hearing this passage recited, Octavia, Marcellus's adoptive-mother, supposedly fainted with grief. Dante takes this lament from Virgil's poem and transfers it to angelic voices who joyfully announce the coming of Beatrice.

Since Dante configures Beatrice as analogous to Christ, her arrival is suitably rendered with the lilies that Gabriel carries to symbolize the pending birth of the Christ child in scenes of the Annunciation. The lilies offered as a sign of mourning in the Aeneid have transformed in the Commedia to the lilies of Christ, whether to announce his birth or celebrate his resurrection. The tragedy of the Aeneid thus becomes the celebration of the Commedia. Dante rewrites his mother-tongue superimposing his own meaning: the anticipated death of Marcellus metamorphoses into the anticipated arrival of Beatrice. In pagan time, death leads to mourning; in Christian time, death leads to rebirth. At this moment, Virgil disappears into Limbo.

Dante buries the mother-(tongue) in a misreading of Virgil; likewise, the mother-(tongue) is re-written in Ulysses. Echoing Dante's conscious misreading of Virgil, we hear Stephen in the opening section of Ulysses quote, from the Layman's Missal, a "Prayer for the Dying." In a following scene, remembering the death vigil around his mother's bed, Stephen hears once again the prayer for the dying, perhaps read by a priest:

Liliata rutilantium te confessorum turma circumdet:
iubilantium te virginum chorus excipiatur. (U 9, 276
-277)

The final words we hear from Stephen in Ulysses occur when he leaves Bloom. The parting between the two men activates the Dantean intertext where the pilgrim loses Virgil while the poet quotes from Virgil's Aeneid, employing the same signifiers, but reversing the signified. Thus, comparable to Dante who transforms the meaning of his mother-(tongue)---the phrase from Virgil's Aeneid---Stephen rewrites the Latin phrase from the Layman's Missal, recited while his mother was dying:

Liliata rutilantium. Turma circumdet. Iubilantium te virginum. Chorus excipiatur. (U 578, 1230-1231)

The phrases have been rewritten so that they no longer work as a prayer for the dying;
instead, Stephen has shaped the phrases to recall the Annunciation. The glorious choir of virgins in heaven have transformed into the Jubilant Virgin herself who will receive lilies---the symbol which the angel Gabriel brings to Mary to announce that she has been chosen to carry the divine child. The phrase marking the death of Stephen's mother-(tongue) has transformed into the announcement of new life.

In initiatory terms, Dante misreads or rewrites Virgil and Stephen performs the same textual act in regards to the Mother who represents family, nation, and religion. Although the medieval and the modern epic compare significantly, they also differ fundamentally. Dante has the pilgrim separate from his poetic mother Virgil; whereas Joyce integrates the mother. The medieval epic reaches a transformative moment when the pilgrim encounters God and becomes the poet. In Ulysses, the transformation does not occur according to a divine meeting; instead, the initiatory grafting of a new beginning onto a worn-out ending occurs among the characters who fluidly take on various symbolic roles through the textual interplay between a sacred book and a secular book. The encounter with the divine in Ulysses is the encounter between the Bible and Joyce's epic, brought together through Dante's epic poem.19

While the characters become momentarily symbolic, drawing on traditional structures, the characters in the Bible are renewed by their meeting with modern signifiers. The Dantean pilgrim sees God in Paradiso; whereas the characters of Ulysses encounter the Creator by constellating a divine pattern for a brief duration and then returning to their individual motifs. The divine meeting in either epic is transformative.

* * *

No one mentions lilies in the Biblical versions of the Annunciation (Mt.1, 18-19; Lk.1, 26-39). Both Matthew and Luke designate the Holy Ghost as the one who comes to Mary and infuses the virgin birth; however, Luke has the angel Gabriel appear to Mary to announce her conception, through the Holy Ghost, of the divine child. Instead of a lily, Dante has Gabriel "[bring] the palm down to Mary when the Son of God would take on the burden of our flesh."(Par. XXXII, 112-114, italics mine)20 The question thus arises: from where does Joyce take the lily as the symbol of the Annunciation brought from Gabriel to Mary? A
general source would be a long history of painting which depicts the Annunciation as the angel Gabriel handing Mary a lily. But a more specific source exists, which would have brought the symbol of the lily to Joyce's attention, appropriately, via Dante: the paintings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

Joyce refers directly to Dante Gabriel Rossetti in "Oxen of the Sun." As noted by Gifford, near the end of the chapter Joyce alludes to a poem by Rossetti called "The Blessed Damozel." Joyce may have read of Rossetti in a great number of works produced about the poet/painter in the twenty-five years following his death. One work in particular stands out since it was written by a contemporary novelist known to Joyce personally; Ford Madox Ford's book The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was published in 1906. Certain effects in Joyce's Ulysses suggest his familiarity with Ford's work on the pre-Raphaelite painters.

Ford records for its comic effect the pre-Raphaelite's "list of Immortals" who represent for the young group their "whole Creed." And then the list follows, quoted by Ford out of a pre-Raphaelite autobiography. It begins with Jesus Christ who gets four stars. Dante (two stars) also makes the list, along with Early English Balladists, Mrs Browning, Wilkie, and The Author of "Stories after Nature," to name a few. Joyce, clearly finding the list humorous, expands the list of "Irish heroes and heroines" in "Oxen of the Sun." (12. 176-199) He also includes Dante (without stars). Ford's description of the pre-Raphaelite's artistic approach and the way in which they are received by the public anticipates the work of Joyce in a compelling way. However, most significant for the purposes of this study is the way in which Ford discusses Rossetti's painting "The Girlhood of Mary Virgin." In his analysis of the painting, Ford refers to the transgression of Dante's Ulysses as well as the dual figure of Christ, presented to the Dantean pilgrim through Beatrice. Both of these moments are crucial to an initiatory reading of the intertextual relationship between Dante and Joyce. If Joyce was in fact familiar with Ford's work on Dante Gabriel Rossetti, he would have found further support for his fascination with the Dantean figure of transgression linked to the initiatory dynamics in the realm of art production.

Ford asserts that Rossetti's "The Girlhood of Mary Virgin" is a milestone on the long road of the history of art; along with a painting by another pre-Raphaelite artist, Ford writes: "They form, if not the pillars of Hercules, at least a Griffin." Without recognizing Ford's
metaphors as direct referrals to the *Divine Comedy*, these literary images form a discordant pair. The pillars of Hercules make more sense as Ford imagines passing through them—the divinely set limits from the known to the unknown world—in order to enter "the city that is [...] modern art." And of course, the Dantean character who focused the reading public on the pillars of Hercules is *Ulisse*. The Dantean Ulysses forms an appropriate figure for Ford's desire to represent Rossetti's daring and innovation in his painting. However, it is difficult to work Ford's Griffin into this notion of breaking with the establishment and entering on forbidden ground.

Perhaps Ford simply uses the Griffin as innovative in the sense that it is a composite mythological beast: constructed of two natures, usually an eagle's head and wings set upon a lion's body. But the Griffin puts in a significant appearance in Dante's *Purgatorio*. As Eugenio Camerini documents in his notes, here the Griffin represents the dual nature of Christ. A brief digression on Dante's Griffin will provide an insight into Ford's use of the mythological beast. For, if Ford expects that his readers are familiar with the *Divine Comedy* than the Griffin participates more clearly in the metaphor of entering into a forbidden zone, specifically in terms of visual art.

Dante places the Griffin in the Garden of Eden, alluding constantly to Adam and Eve's transgression (*see Purgatorio* XXXII). And particularly suitable for Ford's metaphor on visual art, the way the Dantine pilgrim sees the dual nature of the Griffin is through the mirroring eyes of Beatrice. Thus, the Dantine Griffin furthers the point Ford wants to make about the artistic impact of Rossetti's painting: the canvas, "Girlhood of Mary Virgin," works like the mirroring eyes of Beatrice to show to viewers a modernity which they cannot yet envision alone. The Rossetti painting leads the public through the pillars set by the aesthetic establishment into a forbidden garden which is a paradisal return to artists like Raphael who painted before the rules were laid down about how to illustrate beauty. Ford's discordant pair—the pillars of Hercules and the Griffin—become harmonious when the Dantine intertext is acknowledged. According to Ford, Rossetti's painting leads viewers into the unknown of modernity, whether through the pillars of Hercules that lure Ulysses or through the gateway to the earthly paradise.

The Rossetti painting, "The Girlhood of Mary Virgin," forms part of a painterly
quartet drawn on by Joyce to enact the death/rebirth dynamic at the end of *Ulysses*. Joyce brings in the figure Gabriel, carrying lilies, the symbol of the Annunciation and of the Resurrection, by means of the Dantean intertext.

Besides the felicitous gathering of names, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, the pre-Raphaelite poet and artist, over a thirty year period produced paintings illustrating Dante's poetry. As Robert Johnston asserts: "the central body of his expression [both painting and poetry] indicates the powerful influence of Dante." Moreover, Rossetti translated the *Vita Nuova*. What concerns me however, in this seeming digression on Rossetti are the paintings, for the edition of Dante's *Vita Nuova*, owned by Joyce included the pre-Raphaelite's illustrations. In four paintings by Rossetti, we discover a death/rebirth dynamic that brings together the complex network of imagery that revolves around the offering of lilies at the end of *Ulysses*.38

Rossetti altered the physiognomy of his female models to suit an ideal39; thus the Virgin Mary in his two Annunciation paintings hauntingly resembles Beatrice in Rossetti's pictorial renderings of Dante's poetry. In the first work on the Annunciation (titled "The Girlhood of Mary Virgin"), Gabriel as a young angel, holds a vase of lilies while a youthful Mary weaves a tapestry of lilies; in the second (called ultimately "The Annunciation"), the mature Gabriel offers the woman Mary a stem of lilies, while the tapestry hangs on its loom to one side. In both paintings, the Holy Ghost in the form of a dove hovers nearby. In Ford's book on the pre-Raphaelites, he reproduced both Annunciation works by Rossetti.30 The two relevant illustrations from the *Vita Nuova* convey the Annunciation's opposite: the death of Beatrice who is a figure for Christ. In "Dante's Dream at the Time of the Death of Beatrice," the poet looks on as a winged figure leans to kiss the supine Beatrice and he holds in his hand the bow and arrow of Love. Two women hold a shroud with flowers upon it, above the dead Beatrice. Thus, the tapestry of lilies from the Annunciation has transformed into a textile with live flowers scattered upon it. The winged Gabriel compares with the winged figure of Love. And the central female figure appears so similar: as a child, a mature woman, and in the repose of death.

In the second pertinent illustration, "Beata Beatrix," the dove with halo---from the Annunciation paintings---offers a Beatrice, paradoxically swooning in stillness, seated with
her eyes closed, a poppy indicating death. In Christian iconography, the poppy appears in portrayals of the Passion of Christ due to its blood-red colour and its meaning of sleep and death. However, Rossetti has eroticized the portrait so that Beatrice appears to swoon into a climatic death heightened by the lush red poppy. The virginal lily has thus transformed from the announcement of divine life to the poppy representative of a divine-like death. In Molly's monologue she wavers between the colours white and red in her final swoon towards creativity. Rossetti’s dove, offering the poppy to Beatrice, conveys recognition of her role in Dante's poetry as an analogy to Christ. A flower signifies the birth of Christ in the Annunciation paintings as well as the death of Christ (as Beatrice) in the Vita Nuova illustrations. In the Rossetti paintings, the Holy Ghost in the figure of a dove, presides at the birth and death of God's son. Of course the lily also anticipates Christ's Resurrection: when depicted in scenes of the Annunciation, the lily foreshadows its appearance as the Easter lily. Thus, the floral symbolism in Rossetti’s quartet of paintings announcing Christ's birth and depicting his death allude also to his rebirth. These four illustrations evoke through the Dantean intertext the initiatory dynamic: the ritual enactment of death, superimposed upon a return to the womb, in anticipation of a symbolic rebirth. Yet the defining characteristic of Dante's initiation is his death as the pilgrim and rebirth as the poet: the initiation is literary.

In Ulysses, Joyce evokes the Annunciation through Dante's poetry and Rossetti's art: Joyce's use of Christian myth renders the end of his epic a beginning. The bed of birth and death mentioned at the outset of the Ulysses by Stephen and at the end of the novel by Bloom contains the two poles of initiation which become appropriately textual when one puts the bed into an alternate system of graphic signifiers for in French "bed" is "lit" and to "lit" in French is to read. The literary pilgrims Stephen and Bloom each contemplate the bed of birth and death; alternatively, at the beginning of the narrative and at the end, the poet ponders the initiatory "bed or lit (read)" of symbolic death superimposed upon rebirth.

The signifier Stephen works effectively as a Joycean Gabriel. Very much in the style of Dante, who throughout the Commedia rewrites his former texts, Joyce takes the Gabriel of Dubliners who fails to transmit his message and rewrites him as Stephen. The serving girl Lily, offended by Dubliners' Gabriel, is transposed in Ulysses from the lilies in the prayer for the dying into the lilies offered to the jubilant Virgin of the Annunciation. Associated with
creative breath and flight imagery, Stephen also enacts the role of the Holy Ghost who breathes life into dust and who manifests as a dove, the bird which Noah releases from the Ark to see if the flooding has resided.

The various strands of the Annunciation references in *Ulysses* weave together: the ballad of joking Jesus, Léo Taxil's comic dialogue between Mary and Joseph about "le pigeon," the transformation of the lilies in the prayer for the dying into the lilies which announce new life, and the allusion to Dante's parallel transformation of Virgil's "Manibus o date lilia plenis." The lilies in the verse from Virgil's *Aeneid*, the verse that mourns the death of Marcellus, has become in the *Commedia* the joyful announcement of Beatrice (Christ). The ending of Dante's poem the *Divine Comedy* and Joyce's novel *Ulysses* contains a beginning; the shift is from death (Joyce's "The Dead") to life. The end is the beginning in the write of passage. Both Dante and Joyce's literary initiations require the reader to simultaneously read both forwards and backwards.

Just as we discovered in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, a transformation occurs in *Ulysses*. In both novels, the metamorphosis depends upon the Dantean intertext to activate initiatory dynamics. The young man becomes the artist in *A Portrait*. And in *Ulysses*, Stephen takes the lilies from the song of mourning and in a Dantean gesture rewrites them as the lilies that announce new life. Drawing from a classical, a biblical, a medieval, and a modern source, Joyce takes textual lilies marked by death and infuses them with poetic breath like the joyful Creator of *Purgatory XXV* so that the mourning transforms into the morning.

A transformation occurs. In *A Portrait* and *Ulysses*, the reader immediately identifies a change from the preceding work *Dubliners* for while the former two texts are marked by movement, the *Dubliners* collection falls under the sign of stasis. The movement in *A Portrait* and more specifically in *Ulysses*---when the throbbing song of the artist drowns and re-emerges as the many voices of *Ulysses*---revolves around a liminal pivot. The liminal figure of Virgil---the nourishing authority, the maternal intertext, the siren song---dominates the textual sea of *Ulysses* and even threatens both Stephen and the reader with a sensation of flooding. Although the text itself contains the waters of flux---as the baptismal womb of death and rebirth---*Ulysses* also sails across the flood as an ark carrying the breath of life and
the conjunction of words, rhymes, texts, leaf by leaf, two by two.

In the paintings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, we uncover a pictorial source for the network of images that dominate the end of *Ulysses*. The illustrations of Dante's poetry, two which depict Beatrice's death, enact figurative opposites to Rossetti's Annunciation paintings. Mary and Beatrice resemble one another. Since Beatrice is Dante's analogy to Christ, the resemblance between the women of the Annunciation paintings and the women in the illustrations to the *Vita Nuova* is the resemblance between Creator and created, expressed in the paradoxical line with which Dante has St. Bernard address the Virgin Mary and which Joyce has Stephen proffer in "Oxen of the Sun": "Vergine madre, figlia del tuo figliuol" (Virgin Mother, daughter of your Son, *Par. XXXIII*, 1). Mary resembles her Creator who she creates.

Bringing the four Rossetti canvases together as a quartet forms a square. As a series they form the symbolic circle---*figlia del tuo figliuol*---a mystical circle that expresses the relationship between Mary and Christ. Dante envisions the Trinity always as a circle: "That circling which, thus begotten, appeared in you as reflected light." The pilgrim cannot quite envision the paradox of the circling Trinity and he thus compares himself to "the geometer who sets all his mind to the squaring of the circle," but cannot succeed until he is suddenly "smitten by a flash," (*la mia mente fu percossa* Da un fulgore) and at that moment he begins circling with the revolving universe (*Par. XXXIII*, 127-145). The square formed by the Rossetti illustrations which contain the circling mystical family become, in the narrative flash that brings them together in the mind of the reader, the leap that allows the literary pilgrim to revolve within the Joycean universe.

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2 Umberto Eco, 3.
3 Mary Reynolds, 157. Cope's recognition of Joyce's use of Dante's *Inferno* is a note for the *James Joyce Quarterly*; he does not take his discovery further than identification. Reynolds refers the reader to several other authors whose focus is the paralysis of *Dubliners* rather than Joyce's use of Dante. Florence L. Walzl refers to the *Divine Comedy*, but only as a structural parallel to "Grace" (228).
4 Virginia Moseley traces an elaborate Joycean referral in "The Dead" to the three canticles of the *Divine Comedy*; however, her work does not focus on initiatory themes and thus does not have great bearing on the present study.
5 Julia Bolton Holloway, 215.
6 Mary Reynolds, 116.
7 A. Walton Litz notes that Gabriel Conroy: "bears the name of the archangel who will one day wake the dead." (55) According to my argument, the awakening occurs with *Ulysses*. My initial recognition that the exchange
between Gabriel and Gretta was a failed Annunciation is due to Garry Leonard's lecture on "The Dead."

8 Umberto Eco, 49.
10 Jean-Michel Rabaté, 78.
11 E quell'amor che primo li discese; Cantando: Ave, Maria, gratia plena, Dinanzi a lei le sue ali distese.

For those who do not recognize immediately, from the words he sings to Mary announcing that she will carry the Christ child, that the angel is Gabriel, Eugenio Camerini makes it clear in his notes (page 669). The question that Dante asks of Bernard:

Qual è quell'Angel, che con tanto giuoco Guarda negli occhi la nostra Regina, Innamorato si, che par di fuoco?

12 As noted by Harry Blamires, the Virgin Mary and Molly have the same birthday, September 8 which suggests a correspondence (65).
13 Camerini describes Cadiz as near those islands where Hercules thrust in his pillars marking the end of the western world ("da quelle isule, dove Ercole ficco le sue colonne nell'occidente.") page 643.
14 Dall'ora ch'io avea guardato prima, Io vidi nostro me per tutto l'arco Che fa dal mezzo al fine del primo clima; Si ch'io vedea di là da Gade il varco Folle d'Ulisse...

I recognized the importance of this passage while reading a paper on Joyce's "Grace" by Corinna del Greco Lobner who refers in passing to the above passage which gives Joyce the "exotic" detail of Molly's birthplace (52).
16 See John Freccero, 206-207.
17 Clearly Harold Bloom has yet another book project possibility, for these poets seek to misread the poetic mother rather than father. See Bloom's Anxiety of Influence.
18 "May the glittering throng of confessors, bright as lilies, gather about you. May the glorious choir of virgins receive you."

"Bright [glowing] as lilies. A throng gathers about. Jubilant you of virgins. Chorus rescues [releases, exempts or receives]

I have taken the source and the translations from Don Gifford's Ulysses Annotated (pp. 19 and 586). Gifford does not mention other occurrences of the phrase. At the end of the first section, Stephen rearranges the phrases into a poetic series of three verses (U 19, 736-738). Here he also alters the meaning. The emphasis is on the transformation of the phrase from something read to something written, i.e. the shift from the mother-tongue to one's own language and literature. Hence, meaning is transformed, the old gives way to the new.
19 In an article which observes Joyce's use of the Commedia, Julia Bolton Holloway draws on Auerbach's term figura to demonstrate the historical palimpsest operating in Dante and Joyce's texts: "Polytropic is Homer's word describing Ulysses, the man of many turns, "polysemous," Dante's word in the Letter to Can Grande describing the many-meaninged Commedia." To further her point, Bolton conjures up the stonework of a cathedral:

the Reims sculpture would show a thirteenth-century priest and crusader, who were nevertheless shadowily representing Melchizedek and pilgrim Abraham, and, as well, pilgrim Israelites in Egypt participating in the Mosaic Passover. The figures are "many-meaninged." (212-213)

Bolton aptly chooses sculpture for she strives to show the way in which Dante and Joyce operate incarnationally, in reverse: in their texts flesh becomes words. The polysemous, fleshly characters of Ulysses ultimately become the words that tell the story of Gabriel's annunciation to Mary.
Perch'egli è quegli che portò la palma Giuso a Maria, quando il Figliuol di Dio Carcar si volse della nostra salma.

The note in Ulysses Annotated is 14.1573. Interesting for my purposes, Rosetti also produced a painting of the same title in which we find once again the stylized woman holding a branch of lilies. Gifford also identifies a more obscure reference to Rossetti where Stephen's infrequent baths are a characteristic he shares with Dante Gabriel Rossetti. (17. 238-239)

Documenting the many works, H. Oelsner writes: Rossetti's story "has been told more frequently, perhaps, in the five-and-twenty years that have elapsed since his death than that of any other man within so short a period." (xxxii-xxxiii)

Ford and Joyce were not friends so much as, through the net-working of Ezra Pound, colleagues; see Ellmann's James Joyce. Besides literary opportunities offered by Ford to Joyce, by means of a 1928 letter to Sylvia Beach—asking whether or not she has a copy of Ford's The Good Soldier—we know Joyce was also interested in Ford's work (Letters I, 262)

Ford's list of pre-Raphaelite heroes is on pages 105-106. In Joyce's list of heroes he records "Henry Joy M'Cracken" and Ford notes the "M'Crackens of Dublin" as purchasers and supporters of the pre-Raphaelite painters (74). Compare with Gifford's note about the historical figure M'Cracken (12. 180, page 321).

In reference to the impetus behind Rossetti's painting "Girlhood of Mary Virgin," Ford writes: "there is a real effort to reconstitute an old story, to see it with modern eyes, and upon canvas to render it as the painter saw it." (89-90) One could argue Joyce works from a similar stance except with words rather than paint. The response to the pre-Raphaelite exhibition in 1850 produced outraged reactions which launched forth the charges of "blasphemy" and "anarchism." The following quote from the man Ford calls, "the critic of the chief organ of aesthetic opinion," echoes in condemnatory language exactly what I image Joyce sought to achieve in Ulysses:

Their tricks to defy the principles of beauty and the recognised axioms of taste

...The disgusting incidents of unwashed bodies were not (in the early masters) presented in loathsome reality, and flesh with its accidents of putridity was not made the affected medium of religious sentiment in tasteless revelations. (127)

Especially the final line, when reversed to an affirmative, the flesh with its accidents of putridity is made the medium of religious sentiment through revelations, sounds like an accurate comment on the process of Joyce's Ulysses.

Ford Madox Ford, 94.


Johnston also notes a correspondence between Rossetti's reading of Dante's poetry (specifically that of paradise) and his two paintings of the Annunciation (22).

See John Dixon Hunt, 177-181. Rossetti's sister Christina sat for the paintings of the Virgin; whereas, his wife, Elizabeth was the model for Beatrice. Nonetheless, the correspondent elements render the women far more similar than different.


See George Ferguson, 37.

In reference to paintings of The Resurrection, nineteenth-century author Mrs. Jameson explains the way in which the lily became symbolically associated with Easter:

The angel thus seated on the stone has generally a staff terminating in a fleur-de-lis in his left hand---he points with the right. This is the attribute proper to the Archangel Gabriel, who, having announced the birth of the Saviour, figures appropriately here as the announcer of His resurrection. (1890: 2.275)

It is interesting to note, in another pair of volumes on sacred art, in the section devoted to Gabriel, Mrs. Jameson draws frequently on the Divine Comedy to illustrate her point (1905: 1.118-126)

Florence L. Walzl calls the end of Dubliners "one of the most remarkable ambiguities in literature," a conclusion that inevitably generates opposed readings: is the journey westward a death symbol or a symbol of rebirth? (1966-7, 29). Clearly, Joyce's concern with the dynamics of initiation shapes the final story of
Dubliners as he anticipates the novel Ulysses.

Quella circulazion, che si concetta Pareva in te, come lume reflesso
Qual è 'l geometra che tutto s'affige Per misurar lo cerchio, e non ritrova.

Harold D. Baker, commenting on the squaring of the circle, in a comparison of text with the notesheets concludes: "again, significantly, Joyce appears to have withheld a link that would have made fullness out of emptiness, a link he wanted his readers to find in themselves."
Conclusion

_Purgatory_ XXV with its tale of the embryo's development and the infusion of the soul, establishes Dante's epic poem as a textual initiation. Dante uses the embryonic codes in _Paradiso_ X to demonstrate in miniature the whole structure of his _Comedy_: the narrative leads forward to a symbolic death when the breath (spira) of God sets the universe wheeling (gira); the story simultaneously travels back, returns, to the moment in the womb when God's breath infuses the individual with a soul that sets the self turning, _sè in sè rigira_. Thus, we find in Dante's _Commedia_ the basic ritual pattern of death superimposed upon a return to the womb: these moments coincide to offer the birth of a textual self into a literary time. Dante superimposes the primary beginning upon the ultimate end: his encounter with his Creator in the womb occurs as a simultaneous parallel to his symbolic death at the height of Paradise which only transpires in narrative time.

The embryo canto occurs in the midst of a series of cantos focused on poetry. By recognizing that the _spira_ of _Amor_ anticipates in the next canto the _spira_ of God, the initiatory dynamic of the _Comedy_ is revealed as integral to Dantean poetics. The pilgrim tells Bonagiunta that he records God's breath as poetry. Not only does the definition of his poetics establish the significance of the embryo canto which follows, but it also elucidates earlier scenes such as the near drowning in the Prologue canto where the pilgrim finds himself "affannata" (breathless).

At the outset of the _Commedia_, the pilgrim's soul and the poet's voice are both in jeopardy. Near the end of the _Inferno_, we encounter Ulysses and begin to see the network of associations that link initiatory poetics and baptism, or in the pagan hero's case, failed baptism. Virgil leads the pilgrim successfully through baptismal forms while at the same time Dante abandons him to Limbo. The most provocative figure in the _Comedy_, Virgil remains, like Ulysses, a highly liminal figure. The difficulty in Dante's journey does not revolve around external dangers; instead it involves the pain of separation from the maternal intertext, his guide and mentor Virgil. Dante reads and simultaneously writes Virgil. The author of the _Aeneid_ did not recognize the authority of his own poem and thus he wanted it burned. Dante
records his poetic process as different from that of his mentor: the author of the *Divine Comedy* regards his poetry as inspired by a force which renders the experience of the pilgrim---his sentiments, his pride, his ideas---as mere fuel for the blaze that shines forth from epic poetry.

In the *Inferno*, Virgil encourages the pilgrim to descend into hell in order to return to his beloved. Virgil describes how Beatrice herself traveled down into Limbo to find him and ask him---the poet of the *Aeneid*---to save the floundering figure of Dante. Beatrice tells him that the Virgin Mary sought out Lucia in heaven and spoke to her: "Thy faithful one is now in need of thee and I commend him to thee." (*Inf.* II, 97-99). Dante is faithful to Lucia who intervenes to bring him to Virgil; however, it is Lucia once again who intervenes to take Virgil away, for according to Eugenio Camerini, it is Lucia who appears in the dream of the siren and illuminates for Dante the dangerous song of the intertext. Lucia thus sets up another set of poles marking the beginning and ending of the poem for without the narrative support of the Virgilian intertext Dante's poem would not have been born; likewise, without the abandonment, the burying of this same maternal intertext, the poem would not have come into being.

The shining force of the *Commedia*---embodied in the light figure Lucia---takes on Virgil's epic torch, but guides those that follow down a new pathway. Paradoxically, this new path follows the ancient passage through the sea of the womb whose waters are charted by the little ship of the *Divine Comedy*. Not surprisingly a light shod Lucia reappears in *Ulysses*.

Quick warm sunlight came running from Berkeley road, swiftly, in slim sandals, along the brightening footpath. Runs, she runs to meet me, a girl with gold hair on the wind. (*U* 50,240-242)

Lucia surfaces within the sequence of Dantine women who set out to save his soul: Mary, Rachel, Lucia, and Beatrice. The light bearing Lucia appears in *Ulysses* bringing the light of the *Commedia* to bear upon the new epic in process. Strangely comparable to Joyce's daughter Lucia, the textual Lucia from Dante's poem fragments in the Joycean text so that the Dantine light never shines forth clearly just as it is never extinguished; rather it flickers as an
intertextual source. Like Dante, Joyce also was faithful to Lucia. The light from the Dantean source illuminates and casts shadows in Joyce's first two novels.

Joyce recognizes the significance of the embryo canto and he applies its implications to his own texts. The divine breath of God which sets initiatory dynamics in motion in the Commedia enacts transformations within Joyce's A Portrait and Ulysses but the effects wear off and like Cinderella, Stephen must resume his former garb and station. The breath emanates from different sources such as the poetic sweet breath of children which echoes the sweet new Dantean style. Stephen's mother's breath with its ghost-ashes threatens the would-be-poet; nonetheless he triumphs against the maternal intertext and re-writes the mourning prayer into an Annunciation.

Joyce recognizes the danger of drowning in the baptismal font which promises regeneration but may take one's creative life instead. He hears the Ulyssean siren song and turns the deadly tune back upon itself in the process of writing a literary origin for himself. The waters into which Stephen must plunge are Bloomian: the waters of a sea which flows beyond set boundaries and irrigates the dry paps of Ireland. The trinity that shimmers momentarily nearing the end of Ulysses leaves a lasting impression of the true trinity in an initiatory work: the pilgrim, the poet, and the reader. All are transformed by journeying through the literary initiation.

In the first and last chapter of this study I examine the way in which Dante and Joyce superimpose the beginning on the end. Therefore, although divided in two, the overall pattern of the study forms a chiasmus. Thus, instead of the Dante section ending and the Joyce section beginning, the comparative centre of the work should be read as a cross-roads, marked by a signpost that reads: writes of passage.

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1 The name "Rachel" occurs as a title of an opera significantly sparking a recollection of the scene referred to by his father about a father recognizing his son's face (U 62, ). "Mairey" is part of a bawdy rhyme which mentions several time "roses" which is the final setting in Paradiso for all of the women who save Dante, culminating in the vision of Mary (U 64). And if the reader recalls that Beatrice is Dante's analogue for Christ, then mention of Christ completes the series of forces who conspire to bring intertextual aid to the Dantean pilgrim lost in the dark wood (U 66).
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