

CANTO I

HAVING LEFT THE Inferno behind, Dante announces his intention to sing of the second kingdom, Purgatory, and calls upon the Muses, in particular Calliope, to accompany his song. As the dawn approaches, he feels a sense of renewal, and, looking up into the heavens, he sees four stars. Turning his gaze earthward again, he discovers standing near him a dignified old man: Cato of Utica. Cato thinks Dante and Virgil are refugees from Hell, and he questions them as to how they managed to escape. Virgil explains that Dante is still a living man, and that, at the command of a lady from Heaven, he, Virgil, has been sent to guide this man on a journey for the purpose of his salvation. Already this journey has taken them through Hell, and now it is their intention to see the souls of Purgatory. Cato assents to their passage. He then instructs Virgil to bind a reed around the Pilgrim's waist and to be sure to cleanse him of every trace of stain from the infernal regions. The two poets descend to the shore, where they proceed to carry out Cato's instructions. The purgation is marked by a miracle: when Virgil pulls a reed from the ground, another springs up immediately to take its place.

For better waters, now, the little bark
of my poetic powers hoists its sails,
and leaves behind that cruelest of the seas. 3

And I shall sing about that second realm
where man's soul goes to purify itself
and become worthy to ascend to Heaven. 6

Here let death's poetry arise to life,
O Muses sacrosanct whose liege I am!
And let Calliope rise up and play 9

her sweet accompaniment in the same strain
that pierced the wretched magpies with the truth
of unforgivable presumptuousness. 12

The tender tint of orient sapphire,
suffusing the still reaches of the sky,
as far as the horizon deeply clear, 15

- renewed my eyes' delight, now that I found
myself free of the deathly atmosphere
that had weighed heavy on my eyes and heart. 18
- The lovely planet kindling love in man
made all the eastern sky smile with her light,
veiling the Fish that shimmered in her train. 21
- Then to my right I turned to contemplate
the other pole, and there saw those four stars
the first man saw, and no man after him. 24
- The heavens seemed to revel in their flames.
O widowed Northern Hemisphere, deprived
forever of the vision of their light! 27
- And when I looked away from those four stars,
turning a little toward the other pole,
where no sign of the Wain was visible, 30
- I saw near me an ancient man, alone,
whose face commanded all the reverence
that any son could offer to his sire. 33
- Long-flowing was his beard and streaked with white,
as was his hair, which in two tresses fell
to rest upon his chest on either side. 36
- The rays of light from those four sacred stars
struck with such radiance upon his face,
it was as if the sun were shining there. 39
- "Who are you two who challenged the blind stream
and have escaped from the eternal prison?"
he said, moving his venerable locks. 42
- "Who guided you? What served you as a lamp
to light your way out of the heavy night
that keeps the pit of Hell forever black? 45
- Are all the laws of God's Abyss destroyed?
Have new decisions now been made in Heaven
so that, though damned, you come up to my cliff?" 48
- My leader quickly seized me by the arm;
his words, his touch, the way he looked at me,
compelled my knees and brow to reverence. 51

- Then he addressed him: "Not on my behalf
have I come here; a lady sent from Heaven
asked me to guide this man along his way. 54
- But since it is your will that we reveal
the circumstances of our presence here,
how can my will deny yours what it asks? 57
- This man has not yet seen his final hour,
although so close to it his folly brought him
that little time was left to change his ways. 60
- So I was sent to help him, as I said;
there was no other way to save his soul
than by my guiding him along this road. 63
- Already I have shown him all the Damned;
I want to show him now the souls of those
who purge themselves of guilt in your domain. 66
- How we came here would take too long to tell;
from Heaven comes the power that has served
to lead him here to see and hear you now. 69
- May it please you to welcome him—he goes
in search of freedom, and how dear that is,
the man who gives up life for it well knows. 72
- You know, you found death sweet in Utica
for freedom's sake; there you put off that robe
which will be radiant on the Great Day. 75
- We have not broken Heaven's timeless laws.
This man still lives; Minòs does not bind *me*;
I come from that same Round where the chaste eyes 78
- of your dear Marcia still plead with your soul,
O blessed heart, to hold her as your own;
for love of her, then, bend your will to ours, 81
- allow us to go through your seven realms,
and I shall tell her how you have been kind—
if you will let me speak your name below." 84
- "Marcia was so enchanting to my eyes,"
he answered then, "that while I was alive,
there was no wish of hers I would not grant. 87

- She dwells beyond the evil river now,
and can no longer move me by that law
decreed upon the day I issued forth. 90
- But if a heavenly lady, as you say,
moves and directs you, why your flattery?
Ask in her name, there is no need for more. 93
- Go with this man, see that you gird his waist
with a smooth reed; take care to bathe his face
till every trace of filth has disappeared, 96
- for it would not be fitting that he go
with vision clouded by the mists of Hell,
to face the first of Heaven's ministers. 99
- Around this little island at its base,
down there, just where the waves break on the shore,
you will find rushes growing in soft sand. 102
- No other plant producing leaves or stalk
that hardens could survive in such a place—
only the reeds that yield to buffeting. 105
- When you are ready to begin to scale
the mountainside, do not come back this way;
the rising sun will show you where to climb." 108
- With that he vanished. From my knees I rose,
and silent, drawing closer to my guide,
I looked into his eyes. He said to me: 111
- "Follow my footsteps; now we must turn back,
for over there the plain begins to slope,
descending gently to the shore below." 114
- The dawn was gaining ground, putting to flight
the last hour of the night; I recognized,
far off, the rippling waters of the sea. 117
- We made our way along that lonely plain
like men who seek the right path they have lost,
counting each step a loss till it is found. 120
- When we had reached a place where the cool shade
allowed the dew to linger on the slope,
resisting a while longer the sun's rays, 123

my master placed both of his widespread hands
 gently upon the tender grass, and I,
 who understood what his intention was, 126
 offered my tear-stained face to him, and he
 made my face clean, restoring its true color,
 once buried underneath the dirt of Hell. 129
 At last we touched upon the lonely shore
 that never yet has seen its waters sailed
 by one who then returned to tell the tale. 132
 There, as another willed, he girded me.
 Oh, miracle! When he pulled out the reed,
 immediately a second humble plant 135
 sprang up from where the first one had been picked.

NOTES

1-6. *For better waters*: The first tercet introduces the theme of the sea voyage, a metaphor both for the journey undertaken by Dante the Pilgrim and for the process of composition in which the genius of Dante the Poet is involved. The same image with the same twofold implication is found in the *Paradise* at the beginning of Canto II, and here the "little bark" has become a mighty ship, the metaphor being considerably developed to include Dante's readers in their boats. The presence of this image already in the *Inferno* would seem to be guaranteed in lines 1 and 3 of this canto: the words *For better waters, now . . . , and leave behind that cruelest of the seas* are surely reminders of the Pilgrim's earlier travels through Hell. Yet no reference to "Dante's ship" is to be found in the first canticle. For an explanation of this inconsistency, see notes to *Purg.* I, 7-12 and 115-36.

7-12

The Invocation to the Muses points both backward to the beginning of the *Inferno* and forward to the beginning of the *Paradise*. The Invocation in the *Inferno* is contained in one tercet; actually, it consists of one line: "O Muses, O lofty intellect, help me now"; in the other two lines of the tercet Dante calls upon his own memory to record faithfully what he has seen (*Inf.* II, 7-9).

In our passage the Invocation, expanded to two tercets, singles out Calliope, leader of the Muses. The appeal is made more elaborate by the allusion to the arrogant daughters of King Pierus: the Poet asks of Calliope that she do him the favor of accompanying his poetry with the same strain, the same exalted music that had served to bring low the presumptuous princesses. By contrasting himself with the "magpies," the Poet stresses his modesty: unlike them, he has not challenged; he simply seeks for help. (The need for humility is constantly stressed in the *Purgatory*: there will be other allusions to it in this canto.) At the same time, however, it seems clear that Dante the Poet has been cautiously gaining confidence in his own poetic powers.

And the difference between the Invocation here and that of the *Inferno* may explain the absence, there, of the image of the Poet's ship. At the beginning of his poem, when he must humbly beg the Muses, simply: "Help me now," how could he posit the "ship of his talent"?

7. *Here let death's poetry arise to life: The morta poesia*, "dead poetry," of the original must refer to the poetry of the *Inferno*, "dead" in that it treated of souls dead to God and to His grace. But note also the suggestion of resurrection contained in this line.

9. *Calliope*: The greatest of the Muses, who, in Greek mythology, presides over heroic or epic poetry.

11-12. *that pierced the wretched magpies*: Pierus, king of Emathia in Macedonia, had nine daughters, to whom he unwisely gave the names of the nine Muses. In their presumption they challenged the Muses to a contest in song, in which they sang the praises of the Titans who waged war against Jupiter (cf. *Inf.* XXXI). Defeated by Calliope, who was chosen to represent all the Muses, they were punished by being transformed into magpies (cf. Ovid, *Metam.* V, 294-678).

13-30

These six tercets are devoted to a description of the sky: the passage is important if only because it invites us to imagine the experience of the Pilgrim, who, having emerged from the darkness of Hell, is allowed for the first time to see the heavens above him. And this description of the heavens with which the

Purgatory begins is, in fact, the beginning of the end of the *Divine Comedy*, for the *Paradise* concludes with the Beatific Vision of God in the Empyrean. From this moment on we will never be able to forget the heavens above the Pilgrim, the heavens toward which he will be climbing throughout his journey in *Purgatory* and into which he will enter, still continuing to ascend, at the beginning of the *Paradise*.

As for the graphic details of the description, it is indeed a clear and delicate glow of color that strikes our eyes after the grim reds and dead blacks of the skyless Hell. The atmosphere of *Purgatory* contrasts strongly with that of the *Inferno*, sensuously as well as spiritually. A new vocabulary is in evidence: the gentle glow (13), the spreading color (15), the smiling eastern sky (20), the heavens lit with joy (25) (there is a similar delicate treatment of the details of the landscape at the end of the canto). And opposed to the heavy, sullen despair and excruciating torment of Hell, *Purgatory* holds out the prospect of new hope. Though there will be much stress in this canticle on the arduous, painful purgation of the soul, we are constantly made aware of the increasing capacity of the soul for love, knowledge and self-perfection: the note of hope was already sounded within the first two tercets treating of the "sea voyage": *For better waters, now . . .*

Already the Invocation to the Muses had contained the suggestion of the resurrection motif in line 7; now, in the description of the heavens, we learn that the time is just before dawn, the hour of rebirth and new beginnings. Moreover, because of the position of the stars that are described here, it has been determined by scholars that the date is supposed to be April 10, 1300, Easter Sunday. The Pilgrim descended into Hell on Good Friday, and now he rises from the "dead atmosphere." The main events in Dante's poem—the descent of the Pilgrim into Hell, his emergence into *Purgatory*, and his final ascent into *Paradise*—are an imitation of the central events of divine history: the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ.

The eastern origin of the sapphire directs our gaze to that point on the horizon where the sun, symbol for Christ, is just about to rise. At this same point the planet of love, Venus, has risen with the constellation of Pisces, which it outshines, lighting up the whole eastern sky. Pisces is the last of the twelve signs of the Zodiac. The sun, when it rises, will be in the first sign, Aries, or the Ram.

23. *those four stars*: No living man since the time of Adam and Eve has seen the four stars that the Pilgrim now sees. These stars would have been visible to Adam and Eve because the Garden of Eden, in which they were placed after their creation, was located at the top of the mountain of Purgatory (the Pilgrim is now at the bottom of this same mountain). After the Fall, Adam and Eve were driven from the garden, and they and their offspring—the whole human race—were consigned to inhabit the lands opposite the Earthly Paradise, that is, according to Dante's geography, the Northern Hemisphere. Hence, the stars of the southern sky would be invisible in the inhabited northern part of the globe.

Allegorically, the four stars represent the four cardinal virtues: Prudence, Temperance, Justice, and Fortitude. A problem arises when, in lines 26 and 27, Dante laments the fact that the inhabited world is widowed, deprived forever of the sight of these stars (or virtues). But it is not likely that the poet is saying that after the Fall the world was deprived and will continue to be deprived of the virtues of Prudence, Temperance, Justice, and Fortitude! Surely Virgil and the other noble shades of antiquity now in Limbo possess these four virtues; in fact, it was the pagan philosophers who were the first to describe them. And every Christian, if he is prepared to receive sanctifying grace, will be endowed with these virtues (as well as with the three theological virtues). In the case of the Christian, the four virtues in question are referred to as the "infused" cardinal virtues; the pagans may possess only the "acquired" cardinal virtues.

But, though these virtues can be possessed in individual cases by pagans and Christians alike, they no longer form an inevitable part of human nature as they did before the Fall. When God endowed Adam with a combination of these virtues and an immortal body, He created a perfect man. This perfection was to pass to Adam's progeny, but when Adam sinned and lost Eden, mankind lost Eden and human nature was defiled. This Edenic state of existence was never to be recovered. Even with the Redemption, when Christ opened up the way for man to Salvation, we were not restored to the perfect Edenic existence of our first parents, with the natural infusion of virtue and the immortality of the body.

Thus, the first reference to the four stars leads to a lament, actually, over the loss of Eden; and this lament anticipates the

great joy the Pilgrim will experience when, at the end of Canto XXVII, he is led by Virgil to the entrance of the preternaturally beautiful Earthly Paradise and encouraged to "let pleasure be your guide."

See Singleton (1958), pp. 159-83, for the allegorical significance of the four stars as it is revealed in the course of the journey up the mountain of Purgatory.

30. *no sign of the Wain*: The constellation of the Wain (or Big Bear, *Ursa Major*), since it is near the North Pole, is not visible in the Southern Hemisphere.

31-75

Here we are introduced to Cato of Utica, the guardian of the Antepurgatory. Cato (Marcus Porsius 'Cato Uticensis, 95-46 B.C.) was a devout Stoic who became famous for his stern moral principles. Although he opposed the ambitions of both Caesar and Pompey, when the civil war broke out in 49 B.C., he sided with the latter against Caesar. After Caesar's victory at Pharsalia, Cato continued his resistance in Northern Africa, where he joined forces with Metellus Scipio, but they were defeated at the battle of Thapsus, and all of Africa, with the exception of Utica, fell into Caesar's hands. Rather than submit to Caesar, Cato resolved to take his own life. He reportedly spent the night before his suicide reading Plato's *Phaedo*, which deals with the immortality of the soul.

Dante's profound admiration for the character of Cato is expressed in earlier writings. In *Monarchy* (II, v, 15) he calls Cato "that most severe author of true liberty," and in the *Convivio* (IV, xxviii, 121-213) he makes the startling analogy: "And what earthly man is more worthy to represent God himself than Cato? Certainly none." Dante's appreciation of Cato belongs to a tradition that our poet inherited from antiquity: in particular, he must have known Lucan (*Phars.* II, 380-90), who praises Cato's integrity, and Cicero, who in the *De Officiis* justifies and idealizes Cato's suicide.

How can one justify the appropriateness of Cato's presence on the shores of Purgatory and of his role as guardian of the repentant souls newly arrived to begin, in time, the process of purgation? As for the fact of Cato's suicide, it will become clear from Virgil's words to him later (73-75) that Dante, like Cicero, viewed this idealistically, not as an act meriting punish-

ment but as a supreme reaffirmation of the great Stoic's love of freedom. Not only was Dante ready to judge the pagans in terms of their own moral code; perhaps he even looked upon Cato's death as reflecting the sacrificial death of the Savior. (In early illustrations of the *Comedy* Cato is sometimes shown with a radiating nimbus.) At any rate, it could be argued that since the labors of the souls in Purgatory are devoted to the pursuit of ultimate spiritual freedom, and Cato had died for the sake of political freedom, he could most fittingly be conceived as their guardian—if we remember that throughout the *Purgatory* we are offered as ideal, a blend of civil and moral liberty. The role of "guardian" was perhaps suggested to Dante by the allusion to Cato in *Aen.* VIII, 670, where he is represented as lawgiver of the virtuous souls in the Elysium.

Now, in itself, there is nothing incongruous about the idea of a virtuous pagan occupying a position of authority over Christian souls, whom he encourages upward toward Heaven in their struggle to achieve salvation (*Purg.* II), once we accept the contributory role of Virgil himself in the Pilgrim's search for salvation. In fact, a parallel between the two pagans is suggested by a comparison between Cato's sudden appearance from nowhere in *Purg.* I, 31, and that of Virgil in *Inf.* I, 62 (and Cato, like Virgil, belongs, as we shall learn, to Limbo). Yet most critics believe that Cato has been saved. The only possible evidence to this effect is to be found in verses 73–75, in which Virgil, praising Cato for his suicide, mentions the fate of his body on the Judgment Day: ". . . Utica . . . there you put off that robe which will be radiant on the Great Day." And this prophecy of Cato's radiant body has been for most scholars a prophecy of his entrance into Heaven—delayed until the Judgment Day.

Of the few who find verse 75 inconclusive, some seek for new evidence of Cato's salvation outside our canto (cf. Chimenz, p. 326, who refers us to *Par.* XX, with its discussion of *fides implicita*). Others abandoning the possibility of Cato's ascent to Heaven, imagine a different explanation for this ambiguous line: Ciardi (p. 38) is content to speak vaguely of a "special triumph" for Cato on the Judgment Day; Carroll (p. 7) suggests that on that day Cato will return to Limbo as lawgiver, in line with the role assigned him in the *Aeneid* (see note to I, 89). Carroll's would seem to be the more likely interpretation: the evidence of verse 75 in favor of Cato's salvation is surely weak (and to seek the explanation of *Purg.* I in *Par.* XX is un-

warranted). Still, I must confess that I do not completely understand the implications of verse 75.

31. *I saw near me an ancient man, alone:* The description of the heavens gives way to a description of Cato's face, but in his face the stars will be seen again.

34. *streaked with white:* Cato's beard with its mixture of colors is a fitting emblem of Purgatory—which place is not completely shrouded in darkness, as is the Inferno, nor totally imbued with light, as is Paradise: in Purgatory we will see the regular alternation of day and night. In addition, the souls in Purgatory, although they have been saved, are still not entirely cleansed from the stain of sin until they are released.

37–39. *The rays of light:* If we think in terms of Cato as lawgiver, it is tempting to see in this description a parallel with Moses the lawgiver: Cato, standing at the foot of a mountain with his face brightly lit, could remind us of the moment (Gen. 35:29) when Moses came down from the mountain with the Tables of the Law in his hands, “and the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God.” Furthermore, Cato's present position in Purgatory might recall the fate of Moses, who came in sight of the Promised Land but could not enter it.

40. *the blind stream:* This is the “little stream” that comes from Lethe and flows into Cocytus. The Pilgrim and his guide had followed the course of this stream out of Hell, through the earth, to the lower slope of the mountain of Purgatory (cf. *Inf.* XXXIV, 127–34).

73–75. *You know:* The inevitable separation of the body from the soul at death, as well as the place and the circumstances of this event, is a recurrent theme in the opening cantos of the *Purgatory*.

73. *Utica:* Second most important city in ancient North Africa (after Carthage), located on the coast approximately thirty miles northwest of Carthage. Utica was the scene of the last stand of Pompey against Caesar, as well as the place where Cato subsequently took his life.

79. *your dear Marcia:* In 56 B.C. Cato gave his second wife, Marcia, to his friend Hortentius. When Hortentius died, Marcia asked Cato to take her back. The episode, recorded in Lu-

can's *Pharsalia* (II, 326 ff.), was seen by Dante in the *Convivio* as an allegory of the soul's tardy return to God at the onset of old age. Marcia is mentioned among the souls of the virtuous pagans in Limbo (*Inf.* IV, 128).

89. *by that law*: This reference to a law that was proclaimed the day Cato left Limbo behind is not too clear. To most scholars it represents the absolute distinction between the Damned and the Blessed, made forever on that day of the Harrowing of Hell, when the elect souls were rescued from Limbo; Cato's allusion to it here would explain his estrangement from Marcia. But to the few who believe that Cato is not saved, that his rescue from Limbo along with the Patriarchs differed from theirs in far more than the mere postponement of his ascent to Heaven, the law in question would apply only to Cato's unique situation: it would represent the divine decision to rescue Cato from Limbo that he might serve in Purgatory for a finite period of time, only to return to Limbo. In favor of this "private" interpretation is Cato's reference in verse 90 to "the day I issued forth." But would such a special dispensation be called a "law"? In any case, this interpretation would not explain Cato's estrangement from Marcia, as would the generally accepted one.

92. *why your flattery?*: Cato accedes to Virgil's request for the Pilgrim's admission because of the intervention of the "heavenly lady" in his behalf—not because of Virgil's flattery. The choice of the word (*lusinghe*) is interesting: it does invite a more critical re-reading of Virgil's deferential words to Cato.

After summarizing their journey up to this point, Virgil pleads movingly with Cato to look with pleasure upon the Pilgrim's arrival, because of the purity of his goal—which Virgil likens to that of Cato: "He goes in search of freedom," Virgil tells Cato. "How dear that is . . . *you* know." And he bolsters his request by a reference to Cato's glorious fate "on that Great Day." The factual statement that follows (that the Pilgrim is still alive, that Virgil is from Limbo) leads immediately to praise of Cato's wife and to an attempt to exploit the tenderness Virgil assumes to exist in their relationship. Cato's rebuff is unmistakable. Is it, perhaps, deserved?

95. *a smooth reed*: The reed will now replace the cord that the Pilgrim wore fastened round his waist while going through the Inferno. The Pilgrim tells us (*Inf.* XVI, 100–108) that with this

cord he had once foolishly hoped to ensnare the leopard (which he encountered in the opening canto of the *Inferno*), a confession of his excessive self-confidence. At Virgil's request, however, he discarded the cord, which was then made to serve Virgil's mysterious purpose (*Inf.* XVI, 112-14). Now, in order to ascend the Mount of Purgatory, he must be girded with a reed, clearly symbolizing humility, the opposite of his former self-confidence.

107. *the mountainside*: the mountain referred to by Cato is, of course, Mount Purgatory, which dominates the small island on which the two travellers have recently found themselves. It is mentioned belatedly and is never presented to view as a part of the topography; it is the mountain of Salvation, and its presence is to be taken for granted.

Virgil and the Pilgrim, following the dark passage leading up out of Hell, had evidently emerged from an opening in the slope of the mountain, so close to the bottom that the descent to its foot and to the shore around it, which Cato now enjoins upon them, will amount simply to a token act suggestive of humility. When the Pilgrim came out upon the slope his first act, as we know, was to look up at the sky. Then he let his eyes rest on Cato's face: up to this point he has seen nothing of the landscape.

115-36

Now at last, after a final glance at the sky, the Pilgrim is able to gaze on the terrain itself and the waters surrounding the shore. Our discussion of the elaborate description of the sky (13-30, beginning "The tender tint of orient sapphire") mentioned the "new vocabulary" of the *Purgatory* to be found in the sensuous descriptions. Here, too, the Poet chooses from a new lexicon that could have no place in the *Inferno*: rippling waters (117), cool shade (121), dew (122); note, too, the word "gently" (125), used of a human gesture, which perfectly captures the mood of the lines describing natural phenomena.

And as the Pilgrim makes his way down the slope, the reader is reminded of his entrance into the Dark Wood; there, too, a deserted shore (*piaggia diserta*: *Inf.* I, 29); there, too, a mountain of Hope, but one that appears suddenly, mysteriously, only to prove inaccessible. Whereas he felt he had lost forever the right path he had wandered from, now he and Virgil go

confidently in search of it (119–20). Thus, the Pilgrim who reaches the shore (130) to participate in the ritual that will prepare him for the ascent is very different from the figure who appears in the first canto of the *Divine Comedy*.

But as he reaches this shore where the reeds of humility grow, a contrasting figure comes to mind: the mention of the lonely shore that never saw a man sail on its waters and return (130–32) is a clear evocation of the great ill-fated voyage of Ulysses, who, according to the story invented by Dante (*Inf.* XXVI), dared to pass through the forbidden Pillars of Hercules into the unknown waters of the South Atlantic, where, finally, a storm sank his ship, not far from a dark mountain-island. This must have been, according to Dante's geography, the same mountain of Purgatory, at whose foot the Pilgrim now finds himself, cleansed of the fumes of Hell and ready to ascend once he has been girded with the reed of humility. It was precisely Ulysses' lack of humility that cut short his voyage just off the shores of Purgatory.

That the voyage of Ulysses is meant to be seen as a foil to the progress of the Pilgrim is also shown by a verbal link between the passage that closes *Purg.* I and the final lines of *Inf.* XXVI: *com' altrui piacque*. The Pilgrim girds himself "as pleased Another" (133); when Ulysses' ship goes down, the waters close over it "as pleased Another" (*Inf.* XXVI, 147). "Altrui," of course, is God, the God who condemned Ulysses' "mad flight" (*folle volo*, *Inf.* XXVI, 125) but now approves of the Pilgrim's preparations (in spite of his past *follia*, mentioned by Virgil to Cato here in line 59).

Though it is only at the end of this canto that we find a clear allusion to the voyage of Ulysses (one recognized by most scholars), there is, perhaps, a suggestion of it at the very beginning: in the opening lines when the poet applies to himself the metaphor of a sea voyage in the "little bark of my poetic powers." Here, Dante is looking forward both to the success of his Pilgrim's journey and to the successful accomplishment of his own poetic endeavor: to the proper use of his talent. But Ulysses, too, had been blessed by a God-given talent—which, misdirected by his *follia*, led him to his destruction.

That the Pilgrim's encounter with Ulysses in Hell had made him keenly aware of the dangers inherent in the possession of extraordinary gifts is powerfully suggested in the well-known passage of the *Inferno* when the poet speaks of the necessity he

feels, whenever he remembers the events of that canto, to curb his talent lest it speed where virtue does not guide (XXVI, 19–24). And in these words, perhaps ("lest talent speed where virtue does not guide"), we have in embryonic form that image of the "bark of my poetic powers," missing from the beginning of the *Inferno* and appearing full-fledged only in the opening lines of *Purg.* I—an image suggested by the experience of Ulysses.

Now the absence of the image at the beginning of the *Divine Comedy* has already been attributed to the poet's modesty at this point. But to explain its absence there is not to explain its presence here; perhaps this image of a successful sea voyage would never have taken shape without the challenge of Ulysses' failure.

127. *my tear-stained face*: Surely the tears this line refers to are not the Pilgrim's recent tears of humility but those he shed upon witnessing certain scenes of punishment in Hell. As such, they would form part of the "trace of filth" (96) that Cato urged be wiped away. For, according to Carroll (p. 12), the Pilgrim's past tears had made him less fit to climb the mountain.

134–36. *When he pulled out the reed*: The springing back of the reed is modeled on an episode in the sixth book of the *Aeneid* (135–44): the Sibyl tells Aeneas that, in preparation for his descent into the underworld, he must pluck a golden bough to carry with him as a kind of a passport—and no sooner is the bough pulled out than another springs up to take its place. Similarly, here, the reed (of humility) is the Pilgrim's necessary passport to the mountain of Purgatory.

This reminiscence of Aeneas at the end of the first canto of the *Purgatory* must remind the reader of the moving line in *Inf.* II when the Pilgrim cries out to Virgil: "But I am not Aeneas, I am not Paul." By the end of *Inf.* I Virgil had explained that he had been chosen by heavenly powers to guide the Pilgrim through Hell and Purgatory toward Paradise. The Pilgrim at first accepts the challenge of such a journey; later, his humility—or, as Virgil will call it, his cowardice—makes him recoil from the venture. At the very beginning, Virgil has presented himself to the Pilgrim as the creator of the *pious Aeneas*; now, in *Inf.* II, the Pilgrim, become fearful, reminds him of the preeminence, the sublimity, of that figure predestined to be the founder of the Roman Empire; Aeneas, he said, could well be

permitted to visit the Kingdom of the Dead—but, he adds, "I am not Aeneas."

And surely, with the echo here of *Aen.* VI, the repetition of the miracle of the "plucked plant reborn," Dante intends to assure the reader of the success of his Pilgrim, to elevate him to the rank of that Aeneas he had earlier praised so highly. Thus it is with a reminder of the successful voyage of Aeneas, preceded by a reminder of the tragic doom of Ulysses, that the first canto of Dante's *Purgatory* ends.