

Beatrice ammiraglio: Master and Commander of Poetic Authority in Dante's *Commedia*.

*...e donna mi chiamò beata e bella,
tal che di comandare io la richiesi.*

.....
«O donna di virtù, ...

.....
*tanto m'aggrada il tuo comandamento,
che l'ubidir, se già fosse, m'è tardi;
più non t'è uo' ch'aprirmi il tuo talento.»
(Inf. 2.53-81)¹*

Enter Beatrice

Few encounters in the *Commedia* rival the shocking and seemingly perplexing effect of Beatrice's initial appearance to Dante in the thirtieth canto of *Purgatorio*.² To the newly confident Florentine poet who has gone through hell, scaled impossible heights, and even plunged into flames so searing that he imagines molten glass a welcome relief—all just to reach her—Beatrice's words and mien both come as a withering rebuke of his intellectual and poetic shortcomings. With the very first and only utterance of his name in the poem, Beatrice makes it clear that her pronouncements and demeanor are unequivocally intended for the Florentine pilgrim:

«Dante, perché Virgilio³ se ne vada,
non pianger anco, non pianger ancora;
ché pianger ti conven per altra spada».
Quasi ammiraglio che in poppa e in prora
viene a veder la gente che ministra
per li altri legni, e a ben far l'incora;
in su la sponda del carro sinistra,
quando mi volsi al suon del nome mio,
che di necessità qui si registra,
vidi la donna che pria m'appario
velata sotto l'angelica festa,
drizzar li occhi ver' me di qua dal rio.

[“Dante, though Virgilio be gone,
do not weep, do not weep yet—
there is another sword to make you weep.”

ADOYO

Just like an admiral who moves from stern to prow
to see the men that serve the other ships
and urge them on to better work,
so on the left side of the chariot—
as I turned when I heard her call my name,
which of necessity is here recorded—
I saw the lady, who had just appeared
veiled beneath the angels' celebration,
fix her eyes on me from across the stream.]
(*Purg.* 30.55-66)

The analogy of Beatrice's bearing to a vigilant admiral has occasioned some discomfort among critics and inspired innumerable meditations on what many consider a "peculiarly masculine image" (Scott 29-39).⁴ Building on interpretive themes articulated by André Pézard (19) and Robert Hollander (ch. 3 and 4), J.A. Scott, expressing deep and abiding discomfort, suggests an allegorical reading of the simile in which its "striking masculinity" may be accounted for by Beatrice's function as a *figura Christi* who "proves herself the true guide or *ammiraglio* across the sea of *cupiditas*" (37). Elaborating further, Scott surmises that

it is this analogy that provided an essential motive for Dante's use of this image, which comes near to ruining the description of Beatrice's preternatural beauty and the love he still felt for the woman he had known and cherished in Florence. (37)

Alongside Beatrice's Christological symbolism,⁵ Scott insists on seeing Beatrice in such decidedly mundane terms as "the woman" beloved of the poet. It appears that despite the Christological justification that Scott leans on to account for both the "masculine" language in the announcement of Beatrice's arrival and the *ammiraglio* analogy, the perceived gender incongruity proves too opaque a lens for the critic who remains "unhappy about the aesthetic impact of Dante's simile." Providing pithy expression of additional incongruities that have troubled commentators, Scott further summarizes the objections that have been raised by critics over the years as follows:

every other detail in Dante's description depicts Beatrice's hieratic immobility rather than an admiral pacing his quarterdeck, let alone rushing from bow to stern. And, in any

BEATRICE AMMIRAGLIO

case, where are “la gente che ministra / per li altri legni” and how may Beatrice be said to encourage them? There are too many niggling doubts left in our minds for us to accept this as the successful evocation of *the woman* whose appearance the poet had so triumphantly caught in vv.21-39. (39)

The foundation for Scott’s objection to the *ammiraglio* simile is, ironically, in fact the very fallacy for which Beatrice rebukes the pilgrim upon his arrival in the Terrestrial Paradise: namely, that of seeing her primarily as an object of erotic ideal and failing to understand and act upon her semiotic function as a mortal signifier of the Divine. The critic thus strays into a reader-subjective cul-de-sac with no objectively edifying consequent.

The fog of indignation conjured by the masculist polemics of Pézard, Hollander, and Scott—among others—throws an obfuscating shroud over the depth and lucidity of Dante’s distinct representation of authority in his *magnum opus*. For, as Barolini articulates,⁶ Beatrice—the most important character in the *Commedia* drawn from among Dante’s contemporaries—does not conform to the reductive parameters of the *descriptio mulieris* extant in the literature of the poet’s time. This essay offers a three-part forensic analysis of Dante’s representation of Beatrice as the authority of the *Commedia*’s poetics of revelation.

The first part of this analysis uses the lens of Judith Butler’s critique of the performative ontology of gendering to examine how Dante’s composition of the figure of Beatrice consistently subverts the standard tropes of the *descriptio mulieris*. Juxtaposing Dante’s meeting with Beatrice in the Terrestrial Paradise’s *divina foresta* (*Purg.* 28.2) with his first encounter with Virgilio on the outskirts of the *selva oscura* (*Inf.* 1.2) illuminates how the text contrapuntally prefigures and establishes the poem’s investment in Beatrice’s authority.

The second part of this analysis comprises a survey of the currency of nautical metaphors as signifiers of the poetic enterprise within the rhetorical legacy from which Dante draws both the material and skill of his craft. The survey, in turn, provides the poetic context for deciphering the figurative meaning of the term *ammiraglio* in order to respond to Scott’s query to Dante’s simile: “where are ‘la gente che ministra / per li altri legni’ and how may Beatrice be said to encourage them?”

The third part of this study brings focus back to the primary text of the *Commedia*, enumerating how Dante uses nautical metaphors that signify poetic composition to chart a clear course leading to the announcement of Beatrice's authoritative function as admiral, the master and commander of Dante's unprecedented poetics of revelation.

“The Woman” as Gendered Object

Between the *Vita Nova* and the *Commedia*, Dante not only goes to great lengths to develop Beatrice as a poetic figure, he is also breathtakingly bold in laying and declaring the poetic foundation of her authority in the *Commedia*. The most significant part of this process is the fact that the poet of the *Commedia* does all of this while also exploding established tropes of gender performativity, very much to the confusion and discomfort of “historically mostly male commentators” (Barolini), critics, and even casual readers.

Reading Dante's Beatrice through the lens of Judith Butler's discourse on gendering exposes the critical fissures in the commentary tradition which has, for nigh near seven centuries, willfully striven to nullify the way Dante neutralizes conventionally gendered portrayals of his muse and guide. Butler's intuition to scrutinize gender as an identity attribute that is conjured by the expectation of its affirmation through performative gestures is the key to contextualizing the discomfort and disappointment critics express about the way Dante confounds these expectations. Among the female-gender-affirming performative gestures codified in the *descriptio mulieris* trope are activities and occupations that include dancing, singing, chanting, sighing, marrying, bearing children, raising them. Butler summarizes how these conventional gendering indicators frame the female in terms of her function not only as an object of the male subject's erotic desire, but also pragmatically, in her role as bride and mother, as “the object of exchange that both consolidates and differentiates kinship relations” (38). Furthermore, the woman is a commodity, “the gift” that “opens a channel of exchange that not only serves the functional purpose of facilitating trade, but also performs the symbolic or ritualistic purpose of consolidating the internal bonds, the collective identity, of each clan differentiated through the [institution of marriage]” (Butler 39).

The souls of several historical women notably wronged and dishonored in service to this reductive concept of the woman as commodity are prominently featured in epistemically pivotal roles at

the threshold of each *cantica* along the pilgrim's itinerary in the *Commedia*. The first soul to recount the story of her unhappy fate in *Inferno* proper is Francesca, a sympathetically eloquent speaker whose surrender to carnal appetite over reason by way of Paolo's tremulous kiss transgresses the kinship bonds secured by her marriage to his brother (*Inf.* 5.107; *Inf.* 6.2). In *Purgatorio*, Pia declares that the manner of her death is known to him who claimed her hand in matrimony (*Purg.* 5.133-136). Meeting the pilgrim at the beginning of his journey through *Paradiso*, Piccarda is first introduced as the sister of the penitent Forese Donati (*Purg.* 24.10-15) and the doomed Corso Donati (*Purg.* 24.79-87) who forced his sister out of the convent against her will and into a politically expedient marriage (*Par.* 3.97-108). The burdens of consolidating kinship bonds and sustaining the Hohenstaufen clan's hereditary dominion accumulate on the shoulders of Piccarda's companion in the Sphere of the Moon, the Empress Costanza (*Par.* 3.109-120); born the daughter of Ruggero II, King of Sicily and Africa, Costanza, too, was taken from the convent against her will (*Par.* 3.113-117) and compelled to marry the Emperor Henry VI for whom she bore a son, the Emperor Frederick II (see *Inf.* 10.119; *Inf.* 13.58-69), who in turn made her the grandmother of yet another King of Sicily, Manfredi (*Purg.* 3.113).⁷

Scott's reproachful discomfort with Dante's choice to present "the woman" Beatrice as "quasi ammiraglio" finds fault with the poet's failure to frame her in the beguiling gendering conventions of the *descriptio mulieris* intended to service the pilgrim's erotic fantasy; indeed, the fact that Dante avoids presenting Beatrice in ways that reiterate and legitimize the dominion of the heterosexual matrix described by Butler (47 ff.) apparently compounds both the passage's poetic and rational deficiencies in Scott's estimation. Clearly absent in Beatrice's severe comportment in this simile is the traditional repertoire of performative gestures attributable to the feminine. In fact, unlike some of the other female figures in the *Commedia*, never in Dante's work does Beatrice engage in any such alluring gestures, nor occupy prescribed roles as object or commodity. With apparent disregard for the efforts and gender truisms of posterity's patriarchal glossators, Dante is meticulous not to saddle Beatrice with the symbolic identities that frame her purpose and function in service to the heterosexual matrix; never do the poet's works introduce Beatrice in terms that identify her as either the mother or the wife of any man in particular. Not even in relating the death of her father in the *Vita nova* does the poet circumscribe

Beatrice's identity as the decedent's daughter, preferring rather to discuss the significance of the paternal-filial bond in general ethical terms. Equally conspicuous, when describing Beatrice's aspect and comportment, is the poet's silence where the traditional repertoire of physical attributes ascribed to the feminine object of desire are concerned; In pronounced contrast to these conventions, never is the color of Beatrice's hair mentioned, nor the shape of her lips or brow, nor her height, nor heft in Dante's *œuvre* (Picone 15-16). Any illustrator attempting to render an image of Beatrice based on textual clues provided by Dante would be hard-pressed to even draw a silhouette of the lady.⁸

The effort the poet exerts to neutralize conventional gendered imagery when presenting Beatrice extends to the way he represents the power of her subjective agency and authority without the mediating intervention of the putatively masculine characterization Scott imagines. Dante's descriptions of the lady center primarily on her actions: her eagerly sought salutation in the *Vita nova* and her ineffable smile in *Paradiso* have a powerful influence on his composure at any given moment.⁹ In other words, whether in the *Vita nova* or the *Commedia*, eroticized physiological signifiers of sex or gender codified to service the demands of the heterosexual matrix and enforce the restrictions it imposes on women are irrelevant to the role that Beatrice occupies as the voice of authority in the *Commedia*'s poetics of revelation.

In what is perhaps the most incisive palinode of Dante's self-censure, Beatrice herself rejects the objectifying gaze of the enamored pilgrim in powerfully declared first-person subjectivity as she proceeds to disabuse him of his puerile infatuation and teach him to recognize and acknowledge her edifying semiological function:

«guardaci ben! ben son, ben son Beatrice.»
 [“Behold! Indeed I am, indeed I am Beatrice.”]
 (*Purg.* 30.73)

The onomastic identifier that Dante first mentions in *Vita nova*—“la gloriosa donna de la mia mente, la quale fu chiamata da molti Beatrice” (*VN.* 1.1)—bespeaks her ontology as an autonomous subject, the willful agent whose sets the pilgrim's journey in motion by recruiting Virgilio at the behest of Dante's other celestial benefactors, Santa Lucia and Maria, the Mother of God, herself:

BEATRICE AMMIRAGLIO

«i' son Beatrice che ti faccio andare.»

[“I, who bids you go, am Beatrice.”]

(*Inf.* 2.70-2)

Gorni provides the most persuasive key to understanding Beatrice in the *Commedia* when he argues that she is primarily a textual figure whose very ontology is inherent in, and conveyed by, her name (19-44). In underscoring the lady's ontology as text, Picone, in turn, notes that Beatrice's corporeal aspect plays a negligible part in the vicissitudes of the *Vita nova*; even in the *Commedia*, the beauty of this “*donna beata e bella*” registers primarily as a function of the effect her bearing and radiance have on the awestruck pilgrim.

Furthermore, from a strictly linguistic perspective, the “masculine” references to Beatrice are perfectly coherent in purely grammatical terms with her role in the pilgrim's journey. Beatrice's appearance to the pilgrim in the Terrestrial Paradise is first in a role as *judex* and, as this study will demonstrate, the description of her bearing as *ammiraglio* is simply a practical and poetically efficient way of representing the breadth of her authority in Dante's new poetics. Subsequently, Beatrice's stewardship of the pilgrim through the Celestial Paradise is explicitly and consistently as his *doctor*. In all three cases, the term designating the role is linguistically masculine; the same candor with which Dante assigns a maternal role to Virgilio as the occasion merits (see *Inf.* 23.37-45 and *Purg.* 30.43-45)¹⁰ without feminizing him applies to characterizing the lady who comes to first judge him and then lead him into the realm of ultimate revelation without masculinizing her.

Anima fia a ciò più di me degna...

The contrapuntal elements in Virgilio's and Beatrice's respective roles as Dante's primary guides through his three-part itinerary are notable from the very first *canto* of *Inferno* when Virgilio informs the pilgrim that he will only lead his ward through two of the realms before entrusting him to another more worthy guide (*Inf.* 1.121-126). In an exploration of poetic authority in the *Commedia* like the one this study undertakes, a comparative juxtaposition of parallel features in the two guides proves illuminating. Unlike the figure of Virgilio, an anthropomorphic expression of the metonymic synthesis of the Florentine poet's Vergilian heritage, Beatrice exists in Dante's world as his own poetic invention. Beyond the particulars of her being

female, young, beautiful, wise, and authoritative, Dante goes even further than other poets and philosophers have done¹¹ with comparably fair muses in presenting her as a truly potent symbol of poetic authority. So comprehensive is Beatrice's command in the *Commedia* that she is not only the one who assigns Virgilio the task of leading Dante safely out of his predicament in the *selva oscura* and the *fiumana ove 'l mar non ha vanto*, she also wields the power to correct and clarify the pilgrim's inherited misapprehensions and internal conflicts about theological mysteries and philosophical questions as she guides him through *Paradiso*.

The body of scholarship that interrogates the various problematic aspects of Dante-pilgrim's and Dante-narrator's relationship with Virgilio generally focuses on the *Commedia*'s reservations about Virgilio's authority. This study proposes to supplement that work by juxtaposing the dynamics of the pilgrim's and the Roman poet's meeting at the beginning of *Inferno* with Dante's and Beatrice's initial encounter in Terrestrial Paradise. The complementary and contrapuntal nature of four specific elements in both encounters pithily contextualizes the deeper consequence of Beatrice's stewardship within the poem's program of authorization: (a) the affective atmosphere in the moment of encounter; (b) the ambiance of the setting; (c) the linguistic subject identity of the two guides; and lastly, (d) the nature of the query posed by both guides upon meeting Dante.

Chi per lungo silenzio pareo fioco...

(a) The meeting with Virgilio occurs in an atmosphere of deep, dispiriting silence and occupies a discreet 30 lines in *Inf.* 1.61-90. Virgilio, appearing before Dante at Beatrice's behest, is a barely discernible shade that is further obscured to near imperceptibility by the deep silence from which he emerges. The pilgrim he encounters has all but completely lost hope of ascending the luminous hill before him.

Mentre ch'i' rovinava in basso loco,
dinanzi a li occhi mi si fu offerto
chi per lungo silenzio pareo fioco.

[While I was fleeing to a lower place,
before my eyes a figure appeared,
faint, in the wide silence.]

(*Inf.* 1.61-63)

(b) The setting of this meeting is a bleak “gran diserto.” The atmosphere of desperation and deep desolation reverberates in the pilgrim’s first words to the apparition echoing David’s supplication for mercy uttered repeatedly throughout the *Psalms*: “Misere mei.”¹²

Quando vidi costui nel gran diserto,
«Miserere di me», gridai a lui,
«qual che tu sii, od ombra od omo certo!».

[When I saw him in that vast desert,
“Have mercy on me, whatever you may be,”
I cried, “whether shade or living man!”]
(*Inf.* 1.64-66)

(c) The apparition’s initial response, “Non omo” [“Not human”], to the pilgrim’s query about his identity is grammatically distinctive for the conspicuous absence in it of the principal verb of being, “essere” [“to be”], that ordinarily indicates the linguistic subject in its moment of utterance. Instead of answering with a simple nominal predicate in the present tense, “Non *sono* uomo” [“I am not human”], the apparition relegates the subject-identifying verb of *being* to the preterite, “omo già *fui*” [“I once *was* human”], a perfect tense that makes the absence of the present tense “sono” [“I am”] all the more glaring in the initial locution that bears the linguistic weight of the speaker’s agency.

The significance of this verbo-temporal detail in Virgilio’s first utterance is especially transparent when read through the lens of Émile Benveniste’s analysis of Language and Subjectivity (“De la subjectivité” 262). According to Benveniste, the semiotic versatility of personal subject pronouns resides in their capacity, as otherwise empty signifiers, to extemporaneously designate the concrete referent in a linguistic instance of enunciation when the subject speaks the first-person pronoun, “I”, in the present tense.¹³ Subject identity and agency in language is therefore contingent upon and marked by the pronoun in time. So, although the figure of Virgilio *is* in fact present before the pilgrim, and he is speaking, he very deliberately does not immediately assert his subjective agency in that present moment of self-identification.

Virgilio’s apparition then proceeds to linguistically reiterate, always in the preterite, his defunct subjectivity as he enumerates his history as the son of a Lombard family from Mantova; specifies the

ADOYO

historical era of his birth; identifies where he spent that life geographically; defines both the political and religious contexts in which he lived; and concludes with a note on his professional life as poet, providing identifying clues about his most iconic work, the *Aeneid*:

Rispuosemi: «Non omo, omo già fui,
e li parenti miei furon lombardi,
mantoani per patria ambedui.
Nacqui sub Iulio, ancor che fosse tardi,
e vissi a Roma sotto 'l buono Augusto
nel tempo de li déi falsi e bugiardi.
Poeta fui, e cantai di quel giusto
figliuol d'Anchise che venne di Troia,
poi che 'l superbo Ilión fu combusto.»

[He answered: “Not human, though once I was.
My parents were from Lombardy—
Mantua was their homeland.
I was born *sub Julio*, though late in his time,
and lived in Rome, under good Augustus
in an age of false and lying gods.
I was a poet and I sang
of that just son of Anchises who came from Troy
after proud Ilium was put to flame.”]
(*Inf.* 1.67-75)

(d) Having thus identified himself in the preterite, Virgilio now addresses Dante in the present tense, asking him to explain his reluctance to ascend the luminous source of all joy:

«Ma tu perché ritorni a tanta noia?
perché non sali il diletto monte
ch'è principio e cagion di tutta gioia?».

[“But you, why are you turning back to misery?
Why do you not climb the peak of delight,
origin and cause of every joy?”]
(*Inf.* 1.76-78)

BEATRICE AMMIRAGLIO

This is the pair's initial encounter, and the Roman poet does not address the pilgrim by name, nor does he inquire about his identity. Rather, the topic of Virgilio's query is the pilgrim's circumstance and motivation, his questions posed to elicit information that verifies whether the lost soul before him is the one whom Beatrice sent him to aid—a friend “so hindered on his way upon the desert slope / that, in his terror, he has turned back” («ne la diserta piaggia è impedito / sì nel cammin, che volt'è per paura»; *Inf.* 2.62-63).

It is left to the pilgrim to name Virgilio in recognition, finally speaking the Mantuan poet into the present tense and establishing his agency in subjective correlation¹⁴ with his woebegone interlocutor. Furthermore, Dante affirms Virgilio's stature among poets, zealously avowing his own discipular devotion:

«Or, *sei* tu quel Virgilio, quella fonte
che spandi di parlar sì largo fiume?

.....

Tu se' lo mio maestro e 'l mio autore»

[“*Are* you indeed Virgil, the fountainhead
that pours forth so full a stream of speech?”

.....

You are my teacher and my author”]

(*Inf.* 1.79-85)

Sovra candido vel cinta d'uliva donna m'apparve...

Juxtaposing the four elements summarized above (affective atmosphere, ambiance, linguistic subject identity, and the guide's query to the pilgrim) in Dante's encounter with Beatrice reveals some illuminating counterpoints in the poem's program of authorization:

(a) Compared to the ominous apparition of Virgilio which materializes in the deep shade of silence, Beatrice's brilliantly attired figure emerges in jubilation and resplendent glory:

Io vidi già nel cominciar del giorno
la parte oriental tutta rosata,
e l'altro ciel di bel sereno addorno;
e la faccia del sol nascere ombrata,
sì che per temperanza di vapori
l'occhio la sostenea lunga fiata:

ADOYO

così dentro una nuvola di fiori
che da le mani angeliche saliva
e ricadeva in giù dentro e di fori,
sovra candido vel cinta d'uliva
donna m'apparve, sotto verde manto
vestita di color di fiamma viva.

[At break of day, I have seen the sky,
its eastern parts all rosy
and the rest serene and clear
even as the sun's face rose obscured
so that through tempering mist
the eye could bear it longer,
thus, within that cloud of blossoms
rising from angelic hands and fluttering
back down into the chariot and around it,
olive-crowned above a veil of white
appeared to me a lady, beneath a green mantle,
dressed in the color of living flame.]

(Purg. 30.22-33)

The olive wreath crowning Beatrice is a telling adornment that foreshadows her severity toward the pilgrim. For unlike the laurel wreath which figuratively represents the art of poetry guided by Apollo, the olive wreath represents the aegis of Minerva,¹⁵ who, in Ovid's words, "mille dea est operum: certe dea carminis illa est" ["is goddess of a thousand works: certainly the goddess of song"] (*Fasti* 3.833). Known for her wisdom and skill in craft and strategy, Minerva is also fiercely exacting and does not tolerate either willful mediocrity or hubris in those endowed with the intellectual and artistic gifts she administers. Thus radiantly self-assured, Beatrice's arrival is directly preceded by mellifluous singing that fills the air of the Terrestrial Paradise followed by a solemnly reverend procession that metonymically personifies the Books of both the Old and the New Testament, complete with hermeneutic apparatus that include, among other personified allegories, Graces and Virtues rejoicing in dance. A thunderous trumpet call rings out as they stop, and a host of angels saturate the air with torrential cascades of flowers and jubilant songs of praise and welcome.

(b) In contrast to the desolation of the "gran diserto" in which the pilgrim cries out in despair just before meeting Virgilio's apparition,

BEATRICE AMMIRAGLIO

the Terrestrial Paradise where the pilgrim finally lays eyes on Beatrice is the quintessence of all earthly abundance, teeming with trees and flowers galore, crystalline streams, and beauty of such idyllic perfection that it seems the Platonic ideal that poets of Antiquity could only imagine:

«Quelli ch'anticamente poetaro
l'età de l'oro e suo stato felice,
forse in Parnaso esto loco sognaro.
Qui fu innocente l'umana radice;
qui primavera sempre e ogne frutto;
nettare è questo di che ciascun dice.»

[“Those who in ancient times called up in verse
the age of gold and sang its happy state
dreamed on Parnassus of perhaps this very place.
Here the root of humankind was innocent,
here it is always spring, with every fruit in season.
This is the nectar of which the ancients tell.”]
(*Purg.* 28.139-144)

(c) Further emphasizing the contrapuntal difference between Dante's encounter with his two guides, Beatrice's opening utterance is the first and only declaration of the pilgrim-narrator-poet's proper name in the entire *Commedia*: “Dante!” Unlike Virgilio who embarked on a mission to lend aid to a soul he had never met and whose identity he first had to verify with circumstantial inquiry, Beatrice's greeting leaves no doubt that she knows the pilgrim on whose behalf Maria invoked grace and for whose sake Lucia sought help. Then, on the heels of a peremptory interdiction that Dante suspend his tears over Virgilio's departure because he has much to answer for, Beatrice does not follow with the periphrastic kind of introduction that Virgilio offered the distressed pilgrim, but rather with an assertive self-identification in the present tense in which she also pronounces her own proper name:

«Guardaci ben! Ben son, ben son Beatrice!»
[“Behold! Indeed I am, indeed I am Beatrice!”]
(*Purg.* 30.74)

The English translation of this utterance loses a significant linguistic detail, namely that Beatrice simply foregoes the index of subjectivity, “io,” obviating that empty pronominal signifier, and emphasizing the nominal predicate declaring her subject agency as a uniquely distinct individual. Beatrice provides no other information about familial, geographic, or political affiliations to further establish her identity; unlike the mysterious apparition at the edge of the *selva oscura*, Dante already knows who she is, their meeting taking place following his prolonged, and then recently intensified, anticipation of finally seeing her again.

(d) Before she expounds on the reason for her rebuke, Beatrice makes yet another pronouncement that presents in direct counterpoint to Virgilio’s solicitous query where he had asked the pilgrim:

«perché non sali il diletto monte
ch’è principio e cagion di tutta gioia?»

[“Why do you not climb the peak of delight,
origin and cause of every joy?”]
(*Inf.* 1.77-78)

Beatrice, instead, demands of the now mortified Dante:

«Come degnasti d’accedere al monte?
non sapei tu che qui è l’uom felice?»

[“How did you dare approach the mountain?
Do you not know that here man lives in joy?”]
(*Purg.* 30.74-75)

Where in the meeting with the Roman poet it is Dante who names Virgilio, speaks him into the quickening present tense while lauding his eloquence and celebrates the edifying love and perusal of Vergil’s poetic volume that exalted his own poetic apprenticeship, Beatrice, upon her arrival, not only speaks the pilgrim’s proper name as well as her own name, she soon lays out the heuristic significance for his spiritual and intellectual edification that Dante ought to have discerned and cultivated from her presence in his life. Comparing these two defining moments of the pilgrim’s journey in this way renders the poem’s deep-rooted structural investment in Beatrice’s ultimate authority in the *Commedia* more transparent. Furthermore, it

invites a closer interrogation of the hermeneutic correlation between the blessed lady to whose “comandamento” the Roman poet eagerly submits spontaneously (*Inf.* 2.53-81) when called upon to rescue the floundering Florentine, and the figurative “ammiraglio” that Virgilio’s protégé discerns in the same lady at the conclusion of the mission she mandated.

Synthesis of Poetic Heritage

The stage is thus set at the bookends of the first two *cantiche* for the *Commedia* to affirm the epic genre aspirations persistently invoked at the beginning of each *cantica* and reiterated in *Paradiso*’s inaugural exhortation. Essential to the poetic legitimacy of this declaration is the figurative identity of flowing water with rhetorical eloquence, and seafaring with the poetic enterprise, both tropes richly documented in the poetic tributaries that flow into the *Commedia*’s currents from the classical Mediterranean poetic tradition. It is in this context that the rhetorically allusive significance and authority of Beatrice “*ammiraglio*” gains purchase, further subverting both the pilgrim and the reader’s expectation of an otherwise conventionally gendered object of erotic desire in the heterosexual matrix.

From the moment Virgilio crowns and miters the pilgrim upon awakening in the Terrestrial Paradise, to the instant Beatrice utters her first words to Dante, strains of ancient Roman idyll and overtones of vernacular amorous lyric intermingle to resound in the narrative. A series of intertextual references and quotations of Vergilian pastoral, bucolic, and epic poetry serve to recapitulate the metonymic ontology of the Latin poet’s name, providing Beatrice with a comprehensive handle, “Virgilio,” for the purely temporal, secular poetics of the ancient Roman tradition. In this initial encounter with the pilgrim during which the Roman guide vanishes, Beatrice’s peremptory warning that Dante must answer to an *altra spada* [“another sword”] invokes two significant metonymic figures who both appear in the poem emblematically wielding swords: Homer and the Apostle Paul. The former appears in Limbo at the head of elite poets of the pagan tradition:

...«Mira colui con quella spada in mano,
che vien dinanzi ai tre sì come sire:
quelli è Omero poeta sovrano.»

ADOYO

[“Take note of him who holds that sword in hand
and walks before the three as lord:
He is Homer, sovereign poet.”]

(*Inf.* 4.86-88)

Homer—“quel Greco /che le Muse lattar più ch’altri mai” (“that Greek that the Muses suckled more than any other”; *Purg.* 22.101-102)—is the iconic figurehead of the poetics of Hellenic and Roman Antiquity, the ocean of eloquence from which all other waters flow (Quintilianus *Institutio oratoria* 10.11.47),¹⁶ the “segno re de l’altissimo canto” (“the Lord of the highest song”; *Inf.* 4.95) leading the Augustan poets of the *bella scola*. The Apostle Paul, the emblematic author to whom half the books of the New Testament are attributed, appears in the biblical procession preceding Beatrice’s arrival in Terrestrial Paradise. Walking beside Luke, the healer, Paul advances bearing “una spada lucida e aguta” [“a sword bright and sharp”] so striking that, even from across the river, it inspires fear in the pilgrim (*Purg.* 29.136-141). Beatrice’s locution “altra spada” evokes both metonymic figures in such a way that casts the secular, pagan poetics associated with the vanished Virgilio in direct contrast to the Christian poetics of revelation symbolized by the incisively Pauline “*gladium Spiritus quod est verbum Dei*” (“the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God; *Ephesians* 6:17). This homonymous juxtaposition also effectively synthesizes, in Beatrice’s first *terzina* of direct address, the *Commedia*’s ongoing debate concerning the temporal and the spiritual. The *Commedia* thus embarks on the final stage of its poetic evolution from the profane to the sacred that is outlined in symbolically dualistic terms throughout the pilgrim’s journey—viz., *Enea* and *Paolo*, crown and miter, Empire and Church, ethics and morals; the debate is here spelled out in the literary contrast between the symbolic apogee of pagan poetic art, Homer—*colui con quella spada in mano*—on the one hand, and the *verbum Dei*—*l’altra spada*—on the other.

Upon the arrival of Virgilio, Dante, and Stazio in Terrestrial Paradise after crossing the wall of fire, the narrator periphrastically identifies Virgilio as the singer of the “buccolici carmi” (“eclogues”; *Purg.* 22.57), thereby priming the atmosphere for saturation with Vergilian echoes as the trio prepares to settle in for the night (*Purg.* 27.70-87). Here the *Commedia* underscores the pilgrim’s unselfconscious reliance on his Latin predecessors by casting Virgilio and Stazio as shepherds, and the pilgrim as their ward, a picture

reminiscent of the seventh of Vergil's *Eclogues*.¹⁷ The attitude of all three poets is compared first to one of sure-footed goats grazing on a steep slope watched over by a shepherd leaning upon his staff for support. This analogy is compounded with that of herders who spend the night outdoors with their flock to ensure that no harm comes to the animals. Finally, the distinction between the pilgrim and the Latin poets is made: Dante is like a peaceful, insouciant kid in the tranquil daylight, they like watchful shepherds in the night ready to ward off danger to their flock as they each retire on steps on either side of him.

The suggestive power of Vergil's seventh *Eclogue*—where Corydon and Thyris vie for poetic glory, the one invoking the aid of the “Nymphs of Helicon,” and the other exhorting Arcadian shepherds to “crown [the] newborn poet”¹⁸—continues to resound in this scene on the steps of the Terrestrial Paradise. Anticipating Virgilio's crowning and mitering of Dante in the final verses of the canto, these echoes reverberate with the quiet confidence of an aspiring poet at the threshold of realizing his dream of finally seeing Beatrice.

Complementing this initial resonance of Vergilian pastoral are a pair of close allusions to the *Aeneid*.¹⁹ In the first of these Vergilian echoes, “*manibus date lilia plenis*” (*Aen.* 6.883), Anchises mourns the premature passing of Augustus Caesar's successor, Marcellus, at the end of the Roman epic's prophetic exposition about the future history of Rome. At the top of Mount Purgatory, however, “*Manibus oh date lilia plenis*” (*Purg.* 30.21) assumes a dual significance of a different tenor. Literally, as pronounced by the attending host of Angels and anthropomorphic Biblical metonymy, the phrase heralds the arrival of Beatrice who shortly thereafter emerges from a cloud of flowers. In meta-textual terms, it further mines the metonymic connotation of the Latin poet, foreshadowing Virgilio's own imminent ‘passing’ and the depth of loss that the pilgrim experiences upon his poetic progenitor's disappearance.

The second major Vergilian allusion, “*conosco i segni de l'antica fiamma*” (“I know the signs of the ancient flame”; *Purg.* 30.48), is a translated quotation of Dido's kindled passions for Aeneas, “*agnosco veteris vestigia flammae*,” (*Aen.* 4.23) and effectively implicates the pilgrim for *cupiditas* by laying bare his persistently erroneous erotic conception of Beatrice. Clearly, Dante ought to know better after Virgilio's extensive disquisitions on Love in the central *canti* of the *Purgatorio*, his own dreamed rebuke of the Siren immediately following that lesson, and Matelda's remarks correcting Dante's

erroneous eroticization of her own joyful demeanor (*Purg.* 28.76-81). The complex reverberations—in Dante’s grief over Virgilio’s departure (*Purg.* 30.49-51)—of Vergil’s Orphean lament in the final book of the *Georgics* (4.525-527) are resonant with the Vergilian tricolon where Aeneas’ futile attempt to embrace the shades of Creusa (*Aen.* 2.792-794) echoes a parallel encounter with the shade of Anchises (*Aen.* 6.700-702). This repeated Vergilian figure is in turn recalled in the pilgrim’s failed attempts to embrace the shade of his friend Casella on the shores of Purgatory (*Purg.* 2.79-81). Together, these intertextual allusions foreshadow not just a declaration of the shortcomings of Classical poetics, but also the repudiation of the limits of the pilgrim’s contemporary lyric tradition in Beatrice’s subsequent indictment.

Accordingly, the pastoral, bucolic, and epic strains preceding Beatrice’s arrival all intermingle with echoes of the amorous lyric tradition, an aesthetic the pilgrim has just been extolling in the company of the vernacular poets in the final Terrace of the mountain. Despite the exemplary humility with which Arnaut Daniel repudiates indulging the ethos of erotic vernacular poetry (*Purg.* 26.140-147), the pilgrim continues to interpret the pristine surroundings and encounters of the Terrestrial Paradise in subjectively erotic terms (*Purg.* 28.43-51), even after Matelda gently points out the approximative limitations of the poetics of the Ancients (*Purg.* 28.139-144).

The obtrusive weeds of the pilgrim’s secular erotic poetics are summarily deracinated when Beatrice finally appears in the Terrestrial Paradise and speaks directly to Dante. For although he started the *altro viaggio* knowing that Virgilio would leave upon delivering him to Beatrice (*Inf.* 1.121-123), the pilgrim’s distress at the Roman poet’s departure is acute. Dante knows that before setting out to do Beatrice’s bidding, Virgilio—enlisted to make his poetic craft and eloquence, his *parola ornata*, instrumental in Dante’s salvation from the dangers of “la fiumana ove ’l mar non ha vanto”—eagerly submitted to Beatrice’s command (*Inf.* 2.76-81). Once in the presence of the commander herself, the pilgrim’s experience saturated with Vergilian allusions, Virgilio simply vanishes, leaving his ward breathless with loss. For while both Dido’s sentiments in the *Aeneid* and Orpheus’ laments in the *Georgics* punctuate the intensity of the pilgrim’s bereavement, these passages also express the limits of Dante’s capacity under the aegis of Virgilio’s poetics to discern what Beatrice truly signifies. The pilgrim’s delivery to Beatrice, the

guide better suited to help him complete the divinely ordained pilgrimage, comes with a manifestly blunt assessment of his inadequacy to proceed equipped with only the Classical and vernacular poetics in which he takes so much pride.

The precedent established by the Hellenistic and Roman rhetorical legacy where poets self-consciously cast themselves as intrepid seafarers sets the *Commedia*'s course for this moment's revelation of Beatrice *ammiraglio*'s poetic authority. By this authority, in conjunction with her divinely inspired essence, she pronounces judgment on the deficiencies of the ancient Mediterranean tradition for the revelations awaiting the pilgrim. Cutting through a narrative deeply suffused with both Classical strains and echoes of the courtly love lyric, Beatrice's opening *terzina* pithily contrasts the greater authority of the poetics of the *verbum Dei* to the merely propedeutic function of the Classical tradition typified by the epic, of which Homer is the symbolic apogee. For neither the poetic heritage that Dante initially claims from his *maestro* and *autore*, nor Virgilio's investiture of his ward's sovereign mastery of his will and desire in temporal and spiritual matters (*Purg.* 27.127-142) avail him when he finally stands before the lady under the aegis of whom he embarked on the *altro viaggio*.

In announcing the jurisdiction of an "altra spada," Beatrice signals a change of guard—as it were—in the pilgrim's poetic *Bildung*. By directly counterposing the cause of the pilgrim's grief, i.e. the loss of Virgilio, with the "altra spada," the *terzina* implicitly challenges the poetic authority that Virgilio represents. And so just as Virgilio led the pilgrim who initially worried, "Io non Enëa, io non Paolo sono" (*Inf.* 2.32) through Aeneas's itinerary into the Underworld before accompanying him up Mount Purgatory, Beatrice now prepares to lead the pilgrim through Paul's rapturous itinerary into Heaven²⁰ with the authority of an admiral who encourages the seafarers under her command.

For a clearer picture of some of "the men that serve the other ships" (*Purg.* 30.59), we need only turn to E. R. Curtius for a catalog of the trope casting the challenges of the poetic craft as a seafaring enterprise and poets as sailors in the classical Mediterranean tradition. Curtius hereby helps expedite a survey of the figure's currency (128-130), particularly in the works of Dante's Augustan poets, equipping interested readers of the *Commedia* with a more finely calibrated compass to navigate the sea of poetic legacy that Beatrice *ammiraglio* oversees.

The Nautical Metaphor in Archaic Tradition

Scholars of archaic Greek poetry trace the trope identifying nautical metaphors with poetic enterprise at least as far back as the eighth and seventh century BCE, with two particularly pertinent examples in Hesiod's *Works and Days* and Alcman's *Partheneion*. Looking back at the poetic tradition inherited by Vergil and his contemporaries, Rosen, following Nagy, persuasively demonstrates the currency of the metaphor of poetic endeavor as seafaring in the "Nautalia," a conspicuous digression (lines 618-94) found in Hesiod's *Work and Days*.²¹

Reading this *excursus* into sailing as "an Archaic poet making programmatic statements about his art in the manner of an Alexandrian poet" (Rosen 100),²² Rosen demonstrates how the passage's nautical metaphor paints Hesiod's own performance at the funeral games in Chalcis as a "minor venture into the realm of heroic poetry compared to the Homeric epos" (101). In Rosen's estimation, the key to the metaphorical significance of the *excursus* may be found in the poet's generally ironical attitude where he offers to give advice on an enterprise about which he confesses little practical knowledge. In effect, Hesiod figuratively translates poetic activity into sailing, equating the "grandiose, heroic poetry" to genuine seafaring, "a dangerous enterprise" not to be undertaken lightly (Rosen 104).²³

In his analysis, Rosen notes how Hesiod adopts the language of farming and commerce to counsel prudence in the face of poetic ambition: the poet who endeavors to sing the long, demanding epic poem risks failure in the same way that the farmer or merchant risks ruin by consigning all his wares to a long seafaring venture. This cautious attitude is discernible in the works of Augustan poets who often apply the metaphor of sailing in invocations and *recusatio* as illustrated in some of the examples in the survey below. Rosen further notes that the archaic poet's pronounced concern with "the nature of poetic inspiration, poetic authority, and poetic truth" revealed in his interpretation of the "Nautalia" also bespeaks "a degree of literary self-consciousness and gamesmanship that we normally reserve for Hellenistic poets" (112).²⁴

While documenting whether this specific passage from Hesiod's *Work and Days* circulated among Roman poets or was conveyed to their Medieval poetic successors extends beyond the scope of this essay, the text at least offers a precedent example of the nautical metaphor's currency in the classical Mediterranean poetic tradition that may well be worthy of further study.

Nautical Metaphors in the *Bella scola*

Of more immediate relevance to the poetic legacy Dante inherits from the Hellenic tradition through Vergil is Callimachus, an Alexandrian poet of the third century BCE who exerts considerable influence on the aesthetic sensibility of the poets of ancient Rome. Vergil's metonymic avatar, Virgilio, a figure whom the pilgrim welcomes with great reverence and intimacy in distinctly fluvial terms, is the most significant among the poets of the *bella scola*²⁵ who use nautical metaphors to signify the craft of poetry. With good reason, commentaries that gloss this fluvial metaphor pithily outline Vergil's merits as a revered patriarch of the Latin poetic tradition and reiterate how his works represent the celebrated river of eloquence.²⁶ The topos is well documented in Latin rhetoric and yields nuanced variations in the Hesiodic tradition as well. However, the sea that is Homer, and indeed the Hellenic tradition itself, is too far removed from Dante's direct experience and he can only pay homage to it as one does to an emblem, an abstracted ideal of poetic virtue. In recognizing and submitting to Beatrice's command (*Inf.* 2.76-81) and deferring to her epistemic authority throughout his journey with the pilgrim across Inferno and Purgatory, Virgilio—esteemed among exemplary poets (*Inf.* 4.80-93; *Purg.* 21.91-102)—lays a solid foundation for the narrator of the *Commedia* to acknowledge that the compass of this authority extends to other poets of great intellect and grand ambition.

Centuries after Homer, the Alexandrian poet Callimachus emerges with reactionary aversion to the epic in the period preceding the Augustan poets. Criticizing prolixity, symbolized by the roiling muddy waters of the Euphrates River, Callimachus warns against the vast scope and breadth of the epic, and instead champions a spare and modest compositional ethos of the humble lyric in the *Hymn to Apollo* (lines 105-112).²⁷ In his study of the passage, Richard Thomas articulates the intertextual resonance of this fluvial imagery with Vergil's programmatic allusions to his own aesthetic and thematic evolution from an unequivocally Alexandrian poetic youth to a matured champion of the epic (Thomas "From Recusatio").²⁸ Leaving behind the simple apian nectars and quiet brooks of slender muses, Vergil sets out into the open sea and thrives. In short, Vergil eschews the merely servile mimicry of Hellenic poetry and remakes the Greek epic in the Latin voice, much to the delight of his timider counterparts.²⁹ In this light, Dante's interest—the "lungo studio e 'l grande amore" (*Inf.* 1.83) that draws him to Vergil's text—appears

animated at its poetic core by a passion for aesthetic growth that mirrors the Roman poet's own evolution. In the context provided by Thomas's analysis, Dante's greeting, "sei tu, quel Virgilio, quella fonte, / che spandi di parlar sì largo fiume" (*Inf.* 1.79-80) responds to a deeper concern than commonplace poetic eloquence.

Vergil's engagement with fluvial metaphors as poetic enterprise extends to the nautical vein prefaced in the Hesiodic example above. With the exhortation in Book 2 of the *Georgics*, the poet assumes a modest demeanor in his direct appeal to Maecenas, assuring him that the work will not dither in needless rhetorical flourishes. Dante's reader will undoubtedly recognize the nautical imagery in the invocational strains launching the poet's endeavor into *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* in Vergil's invitation to his patron to pay close heed to the poem's progress:

Maecenas, you whose favor is my pride, / O you whose merit
plays the greatest part / In all the honor I have had, Maecenas,
/ Come, spread sail, make haste across the sea. / I could not
hope my song could tell it all, / All that there is to tell, not if I
had / A hundred tongues or mouths, a voice of iron. / Come,
coast along the shore, the land is near. / Nor will our journey
together be hindered by / Inordinate prefacing, fanciful songs,
circuitous / Wanderings here and there among the byways.
(*Georgics* 2.40-47).³⁰

Vergil once again alludes to his poetic labor in nautical terms as he prepares to take leave of his listener in *Georgics* 4.116-119.³¹ Nor is he alone in casting poetic endeavor in fluvial and nautical terms. Horace and Ovid, both poets of Dante's *bella scola* (*Inf.* 1.79-96), remark on the challenges of poetic craft in their works using nautical metaphors in varied contexts that range from the vicissitudes of political or military life to misadventures in love. In a decidedly more expansive context in the *Odes*, Horace uses the nautical metaphor to warn against immoderate temerity or diffidence and instead advises circumspection (*Odes* 2.10.1-7, 17-24).³² In a later ode, the significance of the rhetorical figure is much more transparent as the poet laments not launching forth into the ocean of epic ambition (*Odes* 4.15.1-4).³³

Ovid, for his part, appears to make the most varied and dramatic use of the nautical metaphor. In the *Fasti*, its significance as poetic effort is clearly spelled out in the dedicatory opening verses:

Germanicus Caesar, receive this work with tranquil countenance, and guide my timid vessel's course. Don't turn away from a modest honour; see, it is to you that this act of duty is vowed; give it your godlike blessing and support.

(*Fasti* 1.3-6)³⁴

The same figure also appears in the invocational plea to Bacchus (*Fasti* 3.788-789),³⁵ and is equally transparent in the self-referential exhortation to his poetry in *Fasti* 4.18.³⁶

Ovid maintains this clear correspondence between the nautical metaphor and the poetic endeavor in the *Ars amatoria* (1.772; 3.25-26; 3.747-748), always taking pains to cast himself as the agent of the enterprise in question. However, true to the central concerns of the *Tristia*, the nautical metaphors for both the psychic burden of exile and poetic labor overlap in an elaborate *recusatio* declaring a preference for more humble fare than heroic epos.

Undeservedly am I blamed. Poor is *the field I plough*; that was a theme mighty and fruitful. A *skiff* ought not to trust itself to the *sea* just because it ventures to disport itself in a little pool. Perhaps (but even this I doubt) I am well enough suited to lighter verse, capable of humble measures; but if thou shouldst bid me sing of the Giants conquered by Jove's lightning, the burden will weaken me in the attempt. Only a rich mind can tell the tale of Caesar's mighty deeds if the theme is not to surpass the work.

(*Tristia* 2.327-336)³⁷

The figure of modesty seen here resonates with Dante's own *recusatio* when faced with poetizing Beatrice's resplendence in *Paradiso* 23 as will be illustrated further below.

So saturating is Ovid's self-identification as a sailor in his poetic endeavor that, time and again, he revisits the figure when comparing himself to others: "I feared not, I admit, that where so many *barks* plied, one only would be wrecked while all the rest were safe" (*Tristia* 2.469-470).³⁸ The nautical imagery also serves to set Ovid apart:

Yet think not all my work trivial; oft have I set *grand sails upon my bark*. Six books of *Fasti* and as many more have I written, each containing its own month. (*Tristia* 2.548-552)³⁹

Also notable here is Ovid's integration of the bucolic notion of ploughing with the maritime, an image that occurs in Dante's appeal to the reader in *Paradiso* 2.10-15 which we will have occasion to read more closely below. The Roman poet takes great pains to articulate the travails of his sea voyage from home, lamenting the turbulent vicissitudes of his life in the exile into which Caesar has cast him for his myriad transgressions, poetic and otherwise (*Tristia* 1.2.13-20).⁴⁰

Ovid reprises the figure later, blurring the lines between the literal sea voyage and the exercise of his craft, avowing that he does not aspire to wealth or pleasure, but rather simply hopes to reach his designated port of bitter exile safely (*Tristia* 1.2.73-82).⁴¹ The imagery of ploughing the sea continues through the dramatic description of his bitter fate even as he laments his woeful state through poetry (*Tristia* 1.4.1-6).⁴²

Rounding out Ovid's assorted uses of the nautical metaphor in this survey is the heartbreaking epistolary composition to a faithless, fair-weather friend where the poet equates his happier days of poetic celebrity with smooth sailing, bemoaning his friend's changeful and opportunistic loyalties:

Complaint or silence? Shall I make a nameless charge, or should I wish all to know who you are? I will not employ your name lest my complaint bring you favour and through my verse you win renown. As long as *my bark rested firmly upon its keel among all who wished to sail* with me you were first. (*Ex Ponto* 4.3.1-10)⁴³

Turning now to Statius, the *Thebaid* closes with a cursory version of the nautical metaphor that seems to express the poet's genuine fatigue: "Scarce would new inspiration or Apollo's presence sustain the task, and *my little bark has voyaged far and deserves her haven*" (*Thebaid* 12.808-809).⁴⁴ Elsewhere, in the *Silvae*, the poet deploys the trope first in *recusatio* as he contemplates a greater poetic challenge after completing his Theban saga:

Now if perchance you would know what my Muse essays, the *Thebaid* has already *accomplished her Sidonian labours and furlled her sails in longed-for haven*. [...] Now a different band comes to entwine my vacant locks: [...] Impulse has long been drawing me that way, and fear draws me back. Will

BEATRICE AMMIRAGLIO

my shoulders hold fast under such a mass, or will my neck sink beneath the mighty load? Say, Marcellus, shall I bear it? Or is my ship, accustomed to sail lesser seas, not yet to be trusted in the perils of the Ionian? (*Silvae* 4.4.87-100)⁴⁵

The elegy that Statius dedicates to his recently deceased father is a moving expression of filial piety in which the nautical metaphor alluding to his epic endeavors is woven into a figure of modesty as he celebrates and honors his progenitor:

With you as my mentor my *Thebaid* pressed close against the work of ancient bards. You showed me how to spur my song how to set forth the deeds of heroes, the modes of warfare, the layout of places. Without you my course falters, uncertain my track, befogged the sails of the orphan craft. (*Silvae* 5.3.233-238)⁴⁶

In addition to illustrating the figurative currency of the nautical metaphors as poetic endeavor, the strains of this passage are especially resonant with Stazio's reverential homage to Virgilio in Dante's *Purgatorio*:

«Al mio ardor fuor seme le faville,
che mi scaldar, de la divina fiamma
onde sono allumati più di mille;
de l'Eneida 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
came from the holy flame
from which more than a thousand have been lit—
I mean the *Aeneid*. When I wrote poetry
it was my mamma and my nurse.
Without it, I would not have weighed a dram.
To have lived on earth when Virgil lived
I would have stayed a year's sun longer than I owed

before I came forth from my exile.”]

(*Purg.* 21.94-102)

In thus echoing and evoking the filial devotion that Statius voices in the *Silvae*, the *Commedia* links Stazio not only to Virgilio, but by extension also to the other elite of the *bella scola* who all share the mantle of “poeta” with honor in mutually exalting affinity (*Inf.* 4.79-102). Their centuries-old Mediterranean poetic tradition of self-identifying as intrepid sailors offers a ready response to Scott’s query, “where are “la gente che ministra / per li altri legni” and how may Beatrice be said to encourage them?” With the simple simile, “quasi ammiraglio,” the pilgrim’s first clear glimpse of Beatrice figuratively draws these self-declared sailors of Dante’s acquired poetic tradition into a fleet under the command of a single vigilant admiral. The response to the second part of Scott’s query regarding how Beatrice might be said to encourage this conceptual fleet of poets may be found flowing throughout the *Commedia*’s own series of nautical metaphors which invoke bygone traditions while also sailing new, uncharted waters.

Dante’s Admiral

Dante’s own progressively elaborate use of the nautical metaphor for the poetic enterprise—a trope made most explicit at the beginning of both *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*—creates a stable context in which to interpret the simile that casts the pilgrim’s impression of Beatrice as a vigilant and exigent commander spurring a crew of sailors to excellence. With that single word, *ammiraglio*, the poet synthesizes and deploys a trope that identifies poetic composition with seafaring, thus affirming the poetic foundation of Beatrice’s dominion⁴⁷ over this new poetic enterprise that is the *Commedia*.

The first, admittedly oblique allusion to seafaring in the *Commedia* occurs at the beginning of the poem in the shipwreck simile that characterizes the pilgrim’s sense of relief for escaping an unspecified danger:

E come quei che con lena affannata
uscito fuor del pelago a la riva
si volge a l’acqua perigliosa e guata,
così l’animo mio, ch’ancor fuggiva,
si volse a retro a rimirar lo passo
che non lasciò già mai persona viva.

BEATRICE AMMIRAGLIO

[And as one who, with laboring breath,
has escaped from the deep to the shore
turns and looks back at the perilous waters,
so my mind, still in flight,
turned back to look once more upon the pass
no mortal being ever left alive.]

(*Inf.* 1.22-27)

In this inaugural *canto* where each reference to the sun (*Inf.* 1.16-8; 1.38; 1.60) evokes allusions to Apollo, and the guide who appears to rescue the distressed pilgrim is none other than the iconic author of the *Aeneid* who then promptly invokes Parnassus (1.77-78), the text is so deeply saturated with semantics of the art of poetry that this initial shipwreck reads like a metaphor for the pilgrim's catastrophic failure to master the craft and successfully embark on the ambitious venture of composing a work of epic proportions.

The weight of the nautical metaphor as a signifier for poetry is further buoyed in the current of water imagery that springs from the lost pilgrim's affirmation that Virgilio is "quella fonte che spandi di parlar sì largo fiume." The figurative identity of water with oratory eloquence in the *Commedia* extends beyond retrospective allusions to Latin rhetoric, reaching far enough into *Paradiso* to saturate the pilgrim when he is encouraged to speak his mind:

...mi volsi a Beatrice, ed essa pronte
sembianze femmi perch'io spandessi
l'acqua di fuor del mio interno fonte.

[I faced Beatrice, who quickly signaled,
with a glance, that I should now pour forth
the waters welling from the source within me.]

(*Par.* 24.55-57)

At the beginning of the poem, however, the nautical allusion to the figurative shipwreck that Lucia mentions to Beatrice in her appeal still points to the pilgrim's false start:

«non odi tu la pieta del suo pianto?
Non vedi tu la morte che 'l combatte
su la fiumana ove 'l mar non ha vanto?»

[“Do you not hear the anguish in his tears?
Do you not see the death besetting him
on the swollen river where the sea cannot prevail?”]
(*Inf.* 2.106-108)

In conjunction with Lucia’s appeal, this figurative shipwreck resonates with a distinctly meta-poetic subtext. Both the rhetorical identity of Homer with the ocean from whence other rivers of poetic eloquence flow,⁴⁸ and the rhetorical identity of rivers with other poets of antiquity whose works flow like tributaries into the unifying current of Dante’s *Commedia* together draw a clear correlation between the *selva oscura*—a signifier for the unwieldy raw material that Dante initially fails to master—and the *fiumana ove ‘l mar non ha vanto* that Lucia mentions in her appeal. At the beginning of the poem, the pilgrim is shipwrecked like so many of his classical predecessors had feared to do.⁴⁹ Furthermore, just as fluvial and nautical imagery serves to mark the stages of Vergil’s own poetic evolution, from the clear springs of pastoral poetry, to the turbulent Euphrates in the *Georgics*, and finally the open sea of the epic, so the *Commedia* itself represents an evolution from the tradition of great pagan poets to a Christian poetics of revelation. It is therefore fitting that a metaphor for poetic endeavor as widely understood and deeply established in the Ancient Mediterranean poetic legacy as this nautical trope holds significant currency in unveiling the authority figure designated by Dante to signal this evolution. By evoking this trope in the figure of Beatrice *ammiraglio*, the *Commedia* thereby suggests that the poetics of Antiquity symbolized by Homer, the *poeta sovrano* (*‘l mar*), is insufficient to prevail over the pilgrim’s own poetic struggle (*la fiumana*) to make sense of the hylomorphic poetic *materia prima* (*selva*). In urging Beatrice to attend to the pilgrim, Lucia observes this shortcoming in far more subtle terms than Beatrice will use in the Terrestrial Paradise when she distinguishes pagan and secular poetics from the *verbum Dei*.

Subsequent meta-poetically charged nautical imagery coincides with the simile that equates Geryon’s credulity-defying arrival from the abyss of the *Malebolge* in response to Virgilio’s summons to a free-swimming deep-water diver resurfacing after releasing a ship’s anchor at the bottom of the sea:

BEATRICE AMMIRAGLIO

Sempre a quel ver c'ha faccia di menzogna
de' l'uom chiuder le labbra fin ch'el puote,
però che senza colpa fa vergogna;
ma qui tacer nol posso; e *per le note*
di questa *comedia*, lettor, ti giuro,
s'elle non sien di lunga grazia vòte,
ch'i' vidi per quell'aere grosso e scuro
venir notando una figura in suso,
maravigliosa ad ogne cor sicuro,
sì come torna colui che va giuso
talora a solver l'àncora ch'aggrappa
o scoglio o altro che nel mare è chiuso,
che 'n sù si stende, e da pié si rattrappa.

[To a truth that bears the face of falsehood
a man should seal his lips if he is able,
for it might shame him, through no fault of his,
but here I can't be silent. And by the strains
of this Comedy—so may they soon succeed
in finding favor—I swear to you, reader,
that I saw come swimming up
through that dense and murky air a shape
to cause amazement in the stoutest heart,
a shape most like a man's who, having plunged
to loose the anchor caught fast in a reef
or something other hidden in the sea, now rises,
reaching upward and drawing in his feet.]

(*Inf.* 16.124-136)

Lest there be some lingering doubt about the meta-poetically topical significance of this nautical analogy, the narrator swears on the poetic enterprise in which he is currently engaged and which he, for the first time, identifies by the term “*comedia*” (*Inf.* 16.127-128).

When the narrator next refers to his endeavor in the same terms, it is in conjunction with yet another nautical simile describing the pitch in the *bolgia* of the barrators (*Inf.* 21. 7-18). Prefiguring this second instance in the preceding canto, the narrator strikes a poetically self-conscious note by spelling out the formal compositional components of “*versi*”, “*canto*” and “*canzon*” in *Inferno* 20.1-3. Curiously, although *Inferno* 20 is populated by diviners walking on their feet, their bodies

piteously contorted and their heads twisted to face backwards, the *canto* is nevertheless announced as that of the *sommersi*. However, the submerging pitch described by recalling Venetian shipyards does not appear until *canto* 21, which, in its turn, opens with the reticence of the “*comedia*” (*Inf.* 21.1-3) wrought of the aforementioned “*versi*”, “*canto*”, and “*canzon*”.

The famous nautical episode in Ulisse’s recollection of his final voyage (see *Inf.* 26.100-102; 136-138) occurs within the narrative frame of the Greek sailor’s account about his life and death and is thus not available as metaphor for the *Commedia* itself as will occur later in the *Purgatorio* and the *Paradiso*.⁵⁰ However, this coda to the Homeric epos dramatizing Ulisse’s immoderate, headlong rush to become “del mondo esperto” and culminating in his fatal shipwreck resonates with the Callimachean *recusatio* found not only in the Augustan poets, but also in their predecessor. When, later in *Paradiso*, San Tommaso extolls the virtues of cautious patience over imprudent temerity and hasty judgment, he illustrates his point with a nautical image that activates the poem’s internal memory of this anecdote while also pointing to the hazard of shipwreck that, in the literary context, gives poets pause:

e legno vidi già dritto e veloce
 correr lo mar per tutto suo cammino,
 perire al fine a l’intrar de la foce.

[and once I saw a ship, which had sailed straight
 and swift upon the sea through all its voyage,
 sinking at the end as it made its way to port.]

(*Par.* 13.136-138)

The nautical metaphor explicitly signifying the emerging success of the *Commedia*’s own poetic endeavor is finally spelled out at the very beginning of the *Purgatorio* - incidentally also a realm unknown to the great poets of the classical Mediterranean tradition.⁵¹

Per correr miglior acque alza le vele
 omai la navicella del mio ingegno,
 che lascia dietro a sé mar sì crudele;
 e canterò di quel secondo regno
 dove l’umano spirito si purga
 e di salire al ciel diventa degno.

BEATRICE AMMIRAGLIO

[To run its course through smoother water
the small bark of my wit now hoists its sail,
leaving that cruel sea behind.
Now I shall sing the second kingdom,
there where the soul of man is cleansed,
made worthy to ascend to Heaven.]

(Purg. 1.1-6)

In the latter half of their advance through the Terrace of Pride, an area particularly charged with Dante's self-consciousness about being renowned for artistic merit, Virgilio uses another nautical allusion encouraging Dante to press on. Here, as the pilgrim progresses at a purposely delayed pace in lockstep with Oderisi, listening closely to the penitent illuminator's exposition on exemplary figures of humility, the maritime metaphor is suggestively proximate and complementary to a bucolic simile also often associated with the labor of poetic composition:

Di pari, come buoi che vanno a giogo,
m'andava io con quell'anima carica,
fin che 'l sofferse il dolce pedagogo.
Ma quando disse: «Lascia lui e varca;
ché qui è buono con l'ali e coi remi,
quantunque può, ciascun pinger sua barca,»
dritto sì come andar vuolsi rife'mi...

[As oxen go beneath their yoke.
that overladen soul and I went side by side
as long as my dear escort granted.
But when he said: "Leave him and hurry on,
for it is fitting here, with all your strength,
to speed your ship with wings and oars,"
I straightened up, erect...]

(Purg. 12.1-7)

The contraposition of the bucolic image of slow, yoked oxen and nautical imagery of sailing progress that we see here is quite distinct from the juxtaposition of the two images that we will see in the *Paradiso*. Curiously, the subsequent nautical allusion related to the progress of the travelers in *Purgatorio* 24 only indicates their

fleet pace. Here the metaphor emphasizes the fact that on this occasion the travelers do not slow down as Dante and the penitent Forese converse:

Né 'l dir l'andar, né l'andar lui più lento
facea, ma ragionando andavam forte,
sì come nave pinta da buon vento.

[Walking did not slow our talk, nor did the talking
slow our motion, as conversing we moved swiftly,
like ships that are driven by favoring winds.]

(*Purg.* 24.1-3)

The next significant nautical allusion is the passage which catalyzed this study where Beatrice appears before Dante pilgrim with the bearings of a vigilant *ammiraglio* who oversees “la gente che ministra / per li altri legni, e a ben far l’incora.” Keeping in mind the consistency and stability of that meta-poetic equivalence of nautical rhetorical figures with the enterprise of crafting epic poetry in the classical Mediterranean tradition, the radical and essential meaning of Beatrice’s role as Master and Commander of all poetry in the universe of the *Commedia* is here explicitly illuminated. For just as Virgilio’s actions in the interest of his ward’s well-being merit characterization as father *and* mother, *maestro*, *duca*, *guida*, and at the moment of ultimate, unanticipated separation, a meta-poetic Eurydice to Dante’s Orpheus, so Beatrice’s comportment, starting from the beginning of the journey and persisting through *Paradiso*, is those of *judex*, *doctor*, *sole*, *madre*,⁵² and most significantly, the *ammiraglio* who exercises unimpeachable authority over the itinerary and trajectory of the resurgent “morta poesi” (*Purg.* 1.7) that, by the grace of Heaven, Dante ultimately crafts into his “poema sacro” (*Par.* 25.1).

The conventional reading of this image of Beatrice *ammiraglio* by glossators and critics without regard for its transparent allusion to, and artistic authority over the ancient Mediterranean practitioners of the art of poetry calls attention to hermeneutic limitations that hinder a clear view of just how consciously and radically innovative the poet of the *Commedia* is, even, and especially, by the standards of posterity. But readers are not alone in this condition: the contrite Florentine pilgrim is ruthlessly admonished by Beatrice precisely for this short-sighted narrow-

BEATRICE AMMIRAGLIO

mindedness which fails to see past her womanly form as a mere object in the heterosexual matrix to discern the inspiring heuristic power that her beauty and virtue represent.

«Quando di carne a spirto era salita
e bellezza e virtù cresciuta m'era,
fu' io a lui men cara e men gradita.»

[“When I had risen to spirit from my flesh,
as beauty and virtue heightened in me,
to him I was less dear and less than pleasing.”]
(*Purg.* 30.127-129)

For even as it declares Beatrice *ammiraglio's* authority over “la gente che ministra / per li altri legni”—the very same host of poets who in their works cast themselves as intrepid seafarers—the *Commedia* also remarks the empowering function of this authority which “a ben far l'incora” [“urges them on to better work”]. It is on this note, then, that the narrator of the *Commedia*, upon embarking on the third and most audacious leg of his poetic enterprise, is now able to more transparently claim his place among the figurative fleet of poetic seafarers.

In the *Paradiso*, the nautical trope that shipwrecked to signal the pilgrim's poetic ineptitude in *Inferno* and then hoisted sail and launched into happier waters of revitalized poetry in *Purgatorio*, now catches the winds inspired by Minerva and ventures forth into uncharted waters guided by Apollo. Beatrice, her office as *judex* under the aegis of Minerva successfully executed in the Terrestrial Paradise, now fully—and literally—assumes the mantle of *doctor*, leading the pilgrim into the heavens by example:

... Beatrice in sul sinistro fianco
vidi rivolta e riguardar nel sole:
aquila sì non li s'affisse unquanco.
E sì come secondo raggio suole
uscir del primo e risalire in suso,
pur come pelegrin che tornar vuole,
così de l'atto suo, per li occhi infuso
ne l'immagine mia, il mio si fece,
e fissi li occhi al sole oltre nostr'uso.

[...I saw that Beatrice had turned toward her left
and now was staring at the sun—
never had eagle so fixed his gaze on it.
And, as a second ray will issue from the first
and rise again up to its source,
even as a pilgrim longs to go back home,
so her gaze, pouring through my eyes
into my imagination, made itself my own, and I,
against our practice, set my eyes upon the sun.]
(*Par.* 1.46-54)

For the greater part of the first *canto* of *Paradiso*, Beatrice, true to her role as *doctor*, follows example with the first of her expository dissertations on the order of all things and Creation's relationship to the Creator (*Par.* 1.103 ff.).

The second *canto* of the celestial realm then affirms Beatrice's role as *ammiraglio* with the most extensively developed nautical metaphor for the new poetic enterprise that is the *Paradiso*. Articulated in three parts, the *cantica*'s first apostrophe to the reader in *Paradiso* 2 immediately extends the link of dependency that exists between Beatrice and the pilgrim to the reader as well. First, the casual listeners are cautioned to return to safety lest they soon find themselves adrift. Next, the serious seekers of wisdom are invited to follow closely. Finally, a coda alluding to Ovidian genesis related to ploughing completes the apostrophe before the narrator returns to describing the celestial ascent.

In the first part of this apostrophe, the modesty of the *piccioletta barca* serves to characterize those casual listeners not adequately equipped to venture forth into the open sea:

O voi che siete in piccioletta barca,
desiderosi d'ascoltar, seguiti
dietro al mio legno che cantando varca,
tornate a riveder li vostri liti:
non vi mettete in pelago, ché forse,
perdendo me, rimarreste smarriti.
L'acqua ch'io prendo già mai non si corse;
Minerva spira, e conducemi Appollo,
e nove Muse mi dimostran l'Orse.

BEATRICE AMMIRAGLIO

[O you, eager to hear more,
who have followed in your little bark
my ship that singing makes its way,
turn back if you would see your shores again.
Do not set forth upon the deep,
for, losing sight of me, you would be lost.
The seas I sail were never sailed before.
Minerva fills my sails, Apollo is my guide,
nine Muses point me toward the Bears.]
(*Par.* 2.1-9)

The nautical trope that opens *Paradiso* 2 exploits both the Hesiodic and Vergilian imagery cited above as Dante launches forth into the open waters of the unknown without reservation. In this case, however, the cautious notes that serve Hellenic and Augustan poets in *recusatio* are now directed to the reader. With a tone more cautionary than Vergil's conciliatory invitation to Maecenas (*Georgics* 2.40-47), the narrator of the *Commedia* warns casual readers (lines 1-3) to forgo the voyage and return to the safety of their domestic shore should they wish to avoid losing their bearings at sea in their *piccioletta barca* (lines 4-6). On this leg of the journey, the poet of the *Commedia* is inspired by Minerva, led by Apollo, and guided by the Muses as he boldly goes where none has gone before (lines 7-9). Occurring immediately after *Paradiso*'s opening *canto* in which Beatrice delivers an inaugural lesson on the order of all things, this passage reinforces the correlation between the goddess of wisdom and poetry whose olive wreath adorns Beatrice's crown and the analogy equating Beatrice to an admiral, thereby crystalizing a compound symbol for poetic composition and affirming the compass of Beatrice's authority in the *Commedia*.

The next time a little barque appears in the text, however, it serves to contextualize the narrator's failing capacity to describe the radiant splendor of Beatrice's sanctifying smile:

Se mo sonasser tutte quelle lingue
che Polimnia con le suore fero
del latte lor dolcissimo più pingue,
per aiutarmi, al millesmo del vero
non si verria, cantando il santo riso
e quanto il santo aspetto facea mero;
e così, figurando il paradiso,
convien saltar lo sacro poema,

ADOYO

come chi trova suo cammin riciso.
Ma chi pensasse il ponderoso tema
e l'omero mortal che se ne carica,
nol biasmerebbe se sott'esso trema:
non è pareggio da picciola barca
quel che fendendo va l'ardita prora,
né da nocchier ch'a sé medesmo parca.

[If at this moment all the tongues
that Polyhymnia and her sisters nurtured
with their sweetest, richest milk
should sound to aid me now, their song could not attain
one thousandth of the truth in singing of that holy smile
and how it made her holy visage radiant.
And so, in representing Paradise,
the sacred poem must make its leap across,
as does a man who finds his path cut off.
But considering the heavy theme
and the mortal shoulder it weighs down,
no one would cast blame if it trembled with its load.
This is no easy voyage for a little bark,
this stretch of sea the daring prow now cleaves,
nor for a pilot who would spare himself.]

(*Par.* 23.55-69)

There in the Eighth Sphere of the Constellations, the poet of the *Commedia* plainly submits that the challenge he faces is not for the faint-hearted: not even the aid of all the great poets of Antiquity, he muses, would be sufficient to convey the smallest part of that experience (lines 55-60). With a *recusatio* reminiscent of both Statius's appeal to Marcellus in *Silvae* (4.4.97-98), and Ovid's diffidence in *Tristia* (2.327-336), Dante opts to simply skip ahead (lines 61-63), assuring the reader that upon considering both the gravity of the subject in question and the mortal shoulders that must bear that burden, none would find his trembling under such weight amiss. For the sea depths that this audacious prow cleaves are no place for the meager barque,⁵³ nor yet for the navigator who would commit less than all of himself. The intellectual challenge posed to the reader at the beginning of the final leg of the journey is now directed to the Dante subject *qua* narrator and poet as the *legno che cantando varca* forges ever onward, ploughing through the uncharted waters of *Paradiso*.

BEATRICE AMMIRAGLIO

The fusion of nautical and bucolic imagery that is introduced in the second part of the apostrophe in *Paradiso* 2 to signify poetry is reminiscent of those classical strains we observed in Hesiod and in the Augustan poets cited above, and especially Ovid:⁵⁴

Voialtri pochi che drizzaste il collo
per tempo al pan de li angeli, del quale
vivesi qui ma non sen vien satollo,
metter potete ben per l'alto sale
vostro navigio, servando mio solco
dinanzi a l'acqua che ritorna equale.

[You other few who craned your necks in time
to reach for the bread of the angels, which
gives us life on earth, yet never leaves us satisfied,
you may indeed set out, your ship afloat
upon the salty deep, keeping to the furrow
I have made, before the sea goes smooth again.]
(*Par.* 2.10-15)

The dedicated seekers of true wisdom (*pan degli angeli*) who are still unsatisfied by earthly knowledge (lines 10-12) are invited to set out with the narrator. The readers who would follow the poet into the undiscovered country must keep close to the wake of his ship if they are to avoid getting lost in the vast unknown sea. Here the ship's wake is described as the ploughed furrow (*solco*) that quickly disappears when the water settles behind the poet's enterprising vessel. Extending the ploughing imagery further, the apostrophe ends by comparing the reader's anticipated wonderment with that of the Argonauts witnessing Jason yoke a pair of fire-breathing oxen to a plough (Ovid *Metamorphosis* 7.100-158).

Que' gloriosi che passaro al Colco
non s'ammiraron come voi farete,
quando Iasón vider fatto bifolco.

[Those famous men who made their way to Colchis,
when they saw Jason had become a plowman,
were not as stunned as you shall be.]
(*Par.* 2.16-18)

ADOYO

The poet's choice of imagery is especially potent since it compounds a reference to ploughing with a recollection of that wondrous feat accomplished at the mythical dawn of civilization that is recounted by Ovid in the *Metamorphosis*. At the end of the *cantica* this allusion is complemented by another recollection of wonder inspired by humanity's mythical first sea voyage undertaken by the Argonauts. This time, the reference comes with the effect of historicizing the marvel of human enterprise:

Un punto solo m'è maggior letargo
che venticinque secoli a la 'mpresa,
che fé Nettuno ammirar l'ombra d'Argo.

[My memory of that moment is more lost
than five and twenty centuries make dim that enterprise
when, in wonder, Neptune at the Argo's shadow stared.]
(*Par.* 33.94-96)

With this last nautical reference, the *Commedia* ties the symbolic totality of human history to the art of poetry. Straining to describe that final vision, the poet claims that the breadth and depth of the cumulative details that he has forgotten of its particulars—details which constitute the material of his narrative—is equivalent in magnitude to what humanity has forgotten of their history since man first embarked on the open sea.⁵⁵ So grave a loss notwithstanding, the poet's ship sails smoothly *through* the final verses of the poem. In a notable departure from the conventions of leave taking, the poetic enterprise of the *Commedia* looks to yet another beginning, mirroring the unending nature of its Trinitarian structure, with the poem closing in the imperfect tense as Dante's will and desire enters consonance with the "amor che move 'l sole e l'altre stelle" (*Par.* 33.145).

The same Dante warning those listeners who are ill equipped to face the dangers of the uncharted, open seas upon which he embarks against following him in their "picciolletta barca," also embraces the same grand undertaking assumed by his ancient predecessors, hoisting the sails of his "legno che cantando varca" spurred on and guided by the *Commedia's* own declared poetic authority, Beatrice *ammiraglio*. The analogy thus designating Beatrice, the agent of Dante's journey of salvation and intellectual edification, is truly one of the most audacious personifications of poetic authority that dares readers to extend our imagination and intellect beyond the

constraints of received and anticipated assumptions of signification, especially with respect to normative gendered conceptions.

Seven centuries have passed since Dante's death and still, the concept of gender as prescribed roles defined to appease the strictures of the heterosexual matrix continues to block the reader's access to the intertextually complex depths of Beatrice's authority in the poetics of the *Commedia*. Beatrice is the commanding catalyst and benefactor of Dante's *poema sacro*, and he does not limit her representation and expression to the narrow boundaries of aesthetic and social systems which demand that she only exist as an object of the male gaze, devoid of either voice or agency. It is telling of the unchallenged persistence of the heterosexual matrix that scholars and commentators view and refer to Beatrice's authority as "masculine." Yet the unselfconscious consistency and intellectual vigor that characterize the lady—from the opening passages of the *Vita Nova* to the *Commedia*'s arrival in Empyrean—constitute the main features of the perfect, resplendent beauty that Dante extolls. That the poet offers no descriptions of Beatrice's physical body need not mean that he denies that she is female, nor does it mean that he endows her with "masculine" traits to establish her credibility. Rather, to the frustration of scholars who have "diligently scrutinized archives and medieval artworks in search of the evidence of Beatrice's 'true' features" (Camilletti 4), the poet effectively obviates cliché tropes of beauty that reduce female figures to physical objects of desire that flatter the authority and expectations of the male gaze. Instead, Dante simply focuses both his and the reader's attention on representing and dramatizing the essential nature of the beauty that moves, inspires, and directs him: radiant intellect and manifest dignity free of gendered and gendering constraints.

The historically vast poetic legacy of the nautical metaphor in which the poetically authoritative significance of the term *ammiraglio* is rooted lays the foundation for an unequivocal outcome: when Beatrice speaks, her utterance as *ammiraglio* collapses the multiplicity of Dante's poetic heritage into a syncretic unity not only in the moment of her appearance before the pilgrim in the Terrestrial Paradise, but throughout the poet's entire program of composition. By characterizing her demeanor as *ammiraglio*, the poet of the *Commedia* distills the idea of poetic enterprise into a single word that connotes both administrative and epistemic authority. The secondary significance of *ammiraglio* in metaphoric, allegorical, or anagogical terms consequently extends beyond the specific instance of the

utterance to a global context that encompasses the *Commedia* and integrates the concept of arduous yet intrepid spiritual and poetic endeavor. It is therefore by drawing upon a metaphor signifying the complex and daunting labor of poetic craft that Dante's *Commedia* invests the figure of Beatrice with paramount authority as the master and commander of poetic enterprise and the hermeneutic arbiter of Dante's new poetics of revelation.

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NOTES

¹ "... a lady called me, so blessed and so beauteous / that I implored her to command me. /... / "O lady of virtue ... / so much does your command please me / that my obedience, were it already given, would still be late. / You have but to make your desire known." (*Inf.* 2.53-81; my translation adapted from Hollander). This study uses the Petrocchi critical edition of the *Commedia* along with Hollander's English translation. All other editions and accompanying translations of primary texts used in this essay are listed in Works Cited. Unless otherwise noted, added emphasis on quoted texts highlighting relevant phrases in context is made by the author of this study.

² In her illuminating discussion of the peculiarity and unparalleled breadth of Beatrice's agency as an authoritative speaker, Barolini also remarks on the unfavorable responses that Beatrice in the *Commedia* elicits from readers in general and from "historically mostly male commentators" of the poem.

³ In order to maintain a clear distinction between the historical author Publius Vergilius Maro and the metonymic poetic avatar that appears as Dante's guide in the *Commedia*, I will refer to the historical figure as Vergil, and to the poetic character in the *Commedia* as Virgilio throughout this essay.

⁴ For studies that analyze this simile in terms of sex and gender see also Potter and Schnapp.

⁵ Charles Singleton is among the most persuasive scholars dedicated to reclaiming Beatrice's Christological symbolism. For further details, see especially "The Pattern at the Center"; *Journey to Beatrice*; and *An essay on the Vita nuova*.

⁶ See Barolini.

⁷ See Laura Ingallinella's essay in this volume discussing the testimonial authority these figures exhibit in the *Commedia*'s representation of their lived experiences, the circumstances of their deaths, and their ultimate fate.

⁸ Contextualizing the mid-19th-century paintings and drawings of Beatrice created by the Pre-Raphaelite Dante Gabriel Rossetti that have become iconic images of Beatrice in contemporary popular imagination, Fabio Camilletti proposes that such works of imaginary representation exemplify an expression of the modern visual artist's interiority responding to the textually "externalized simulacrum of the poet's own interiority" (Camilletti 4-8).

⁹ See discussion on Beatrice's function in service to the poet in Barolini 367-368.

¹⁰ Stazio, too, recounts how the *Aeneid* fulfills the maternal role in the poetic biography he shares (*Purg.* 21.97-99).

¹¹ See Barolini's discussion.

¹² Although several glossators only refer to *Psalms* 50 and 118 as the textual source of the pilgrim's exclamation, "Miserere mei" occurs repeatedly in the *Psalms*, occurring some 18 times throughout David's prayers in the following passages: *Psalms* 4:2, 6:3, 9:14, 24:16, 25:11, 26:7, 30:10, 40:5, 40:11, 50:3, 55:2, 56:2, 85:3, 85:16, 118:29, 118:58, 118:132. The frequency of the phrase in the *Psalms*, coupled with its quotation in the gospels of Luke, Mark and Matthew specifically in relation to David, and finally the general popularity and utility of the *Psalms* makes it a ready identifier of the singer of the "cantor che per doglia / del fallo disse 'Miserere mei'" (*Par.* 32.111-12). Also of interest is Nicola Fosca's note on the verse: "Davide è anche l'umile salmista (*Purg.* X.65), il cantor de lo Spirito Santo (*Par.* XX.38): cfr. *Purg.* X, n. 49-54; a lui Dante, ottenuta l'investitura poetica divina, somiglierà. Si noti che S. Tommaso, nel discutere della grandezza dei profeti (ST II-II, q. 174, a. 4), afferma che "Mosé fu superiore nella conoscenza della divinità, mentre Davide conobbe ed espresse in modo più completo i misteri dell'Incarnazione di Cristo." Cited from the commentary to *Inferno* 1.65 in Fosca.

¹³ Since speech occurs in time, the illocutionary appropriation of the subject position is intrinsically temporal. Citing the *Dictionnaire général*'s definition of the present—« le temps où l'on est » ["the time in which one is"]—Benveniste equates it with « le temps où l'on parle » ["the time in which one is speaking"] ("De la subjectivité" 262). "C'est là le moment éternellement « présent », quoique ne se rapportant jamais aux mêmes événements d'une chronologie « objective », parce qu'il est déterminé pour chaque locuteur par chacune des instances de discours qui s'y rapporte. Le temps linguistique est sui-référentiel. En dernière analyse la temporalité humaine avec tout son appareil linguistique dévoile la subjectivité inhérente à l'exercice même du langage." ["This is the eternally 'present' moment, although it never relates to the same events of an 'objective' chronology because it is determined for each speaker by each of the instances of discourse related to it. Linguistic time is *self-referential*. In the final analysis, human temporality with all its linguistic apparatus reveals the subjectivity inherent in the very act of using language."] ("De la subjectivité" 262-263). In other words, the subject exists within the present in which he speaks along with the world he appropriates through language—a present that he constantly renews and perpetuates in speech. "Le locuteur situe comme « présent » tout ce qu'il implique tel en vertu de la forme linguistique qu'il emploie. Ce présent est réinventé chaque fois qu'un homme parle parce que c'est, à la lettre, un moment neuf, non encore vécu." ["The speaker situates as 'present' all that he implies as such by virtue of the linguistic form he employs. This present is reinvented each time a person speaks because it is, literally, a new moment, not yet lived."] ("Le langage et l'expérience humaine" 72-74).

¹⁴ "Au couple *je/tu* appartient en propre une corrélation spéciale, que nous appellerons, faute de mieux, *corrélation de subjectivité*. Ce qui différencie le « je » de « tu », c'est d'abord le fait d'être, dans le cas de « je », *intérieur* à l'énoncé et extérieur à « tu », mais extérieur d'une manière qui ne supprime pas la réalité humaine du dialogue." ["To the *I/you* pair belongs a special correlation, which we will call, for want of a better term, the *correlation of subjectivity*. What differentiates the "I" from "you" is, first of all, the fact of being, in the case of "I", *internal* to the statement and external to "you", but external in a way that does not take away the human reality of the dialogue."] (Benveniste "Structure des relations de personne" 232).

¹⁵ See commentary to *Purgatorio* 30.22-33 in Imola. See also Gorni 19-44.

¹⁶ “ita nos rite coepturi ab Homero videmur. hic enim, quem ad modum ex Oceano dicit ipse amnium fontium que cursus initium capere, omnibus eloquentiae partibus exemplum et ortum dedit. hunc nemo in magnis rebus sublimitate, in parvis proprietate superaverit. idem laetus ac pressus, iucundus et gravis, tum copia tum brevitate mirabilis, nec poetica modo, sed oratoria virtute eminentissimus” (Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* 10.1.47). [“... the proper place for us to begin is with Homer. Like his own Ocean, which he says is the source of every river and spring, Homer provides the model and the origin of every department of eloquence. No one surpassed his sublimity in great themes, or in propriety in small. He is at once luxuriant and concise, charming and grave, marvelous in his fullness and in his brevity, supreme not only in poetic but in oratorical excellence.”] (Russell)

¹⁷ See *Eclogue* 7.1-5; Ferry 53.

¹⁸ *Eclogue* 7.21-28; Ferry 55.

¹⁹ For alternative readings of this scene see commentary to *Purgatorio* 30.22-33 in Imola and in Pertile (“Chapter 3. Aspettando Beatrice”).

²⁰ “scio hominem in Christo ante annos quattuordecim sive in corpore nescio sive extra corpus nescio Deus scit raptum eiusmodi usque ad tertium caelum. et scio huiusmodi hominem sive in corpore sive extra corpus nescio Deus scit. quoniam raptus est in paradysum et audivit arcana verba quae non licet homini loqui. pro eiusmodi gloriabor pro me autem nihil gloriabor nisi in infirmitatibus meis.” *Epistula Pauli ad Corinthios* 2. 12.2-5. [“I know a man in Christ above fourteen years ago (whether in the body, I know not, or out of the body, I know not; God knoweth), such a one caught up to the third heaven. And I know such a man (whether in the body, or out of the body, I know not: God knoweth), That he was caught up into paradise, and heard secret words, which it is not granted to man to utter. For such an one I will glory; but for myself I will glory nothing, but in my infirmities.” (Douay-Rheims, II *Corinthians* 12.2-5).

²¹ “But, Perses, do remember that each kind of work has its season / and, above all, navigation. / Praise a small ship, but load your cargo on a big one. / The bigger the cargo the greater the profit heaped on profit, / if the winds keep nasty gales in check. / Whenever you want to turn your foolish mind to trade / to escape your debts and the hunger that plagues you, / I will teach you the rules that govern the sea, / though I am no expert on navigation and ships, / since I never sailed the open seas on a boat, / except when I went to Euboea from Aulis, where once / the Achaeans weathered a grim storm and then with a great host / from holy Greece sailed over to Troy, land of fair women. / There I crossed over to Chalkis for the prizes / in honor of wise Amphidamas, the many prizes proclaimed in advance / by his magnanimous sons. And I claim that there / I was the victor in a song contest and won an eared tripod, / which I dedicated to the Helikonian Muses, / where they first taught me mastery of flowing song. / This is all I know about well-riveted ships, / but even so I can speak the mind of aegis-bearing Zeus, / for the Muses taught me to sing and never weary.” Hesiod, *Work and Days* (641-662; qtd. in Rosen). See also Tsagalis.

²² See also Tsagalis.

²³ Rosen further notes that “Hesiod’s injunctions toward the close of the Nautilia (687-94), when read metaphorically, make this point eloquently. The poet here advises the person contemplating sailing not to put one’s entire livelihood into the ship (μηδ’ ἐν νηυσὶν ἅπαντα βίον κοίλῃσι τίθεσθαι, 689), but to leave behind the greater amount (ἀλλὰ πλέω λείπειν, τὰ δὲ μείονα φορτίζεσθαι, 690). The sailor who ensures against a total material disaster at sea by staking only a moderate amount of βίος on one sea voyage is analogous to the poet who avoids the artistic dangers of

heroic poetry by composing in a less ambitious genre (where the poet's βίος is his poetic material)" (Rosen 105).

²⁴ Aside from Hesiod, Theognis, too, associates poetry with the metaphorical flight over the seas, also referring to himself metaphorically as a ship (Rosen 110). As quoted by Rosen: "ἔφθην αἰνήσας πρὶν σοῦ κατὰ πάντα δαῖναι / ἦθεα· νῦν δ' ἦδη νηῦς ἄθ' ἐκάς διέχω" (Theognis 969-70). In (Rosen 110 n.39), the critic remarks that in this case "Kyrnos travels like a bird, but the diction is that of seafaring (ἰχθυόεντα περῶν πόντον ἐπ' ἀτρύγετω)." Rosen further notes that "the most extended treatment of the metaphor is Propertius 3.3.13-24, which is all the more striking because the poem opens with an evocation of Hesiod as Propertius's poetic mentor (1-2). In 13-24 Propertius explicitly likens the contrast between his own ("Hesiodic") poetic agenda and the more elevated heroic epic to that between an enterprising sailor on the open sea and the skittish novice who always keeps the shore in view (cf. esp. 19-24, "ut tuus in scamno iactetur saepe libellus, . . / non est ingenii cumba gravanda tui. / alter remus aquas alter tibi radat harenas, / tutus eris: medio maxima turba mari est." This image is strongly reminiscent of Hesiod's contrast between the Achaeans' sea voyage to Troy and his own minor trip to Chalcis, a trip where each shore would always remain in view" (Rosen 112-113).

²⁵ For more examples of the nautical metaphor cited by Curtius (128-130) but not included among the *bella scola* see: Propertius 3.3.22-3; 3.9.3-4; 3.9.36. Manilius 3.26. Pindar: *Nem.* 3.26-7; *Ol.* 6.101; *Pyth.* 10.51-2. Apollonius: *Arg.* 4.1773-5. Valerius Flaccus: *Arg.* 1.1.1-4. Summarizing the *Thebaid*, Foley notes that "the *ratis* of Statius (*Theb.* 12.809), a "ship" of poetry, which recalls others such as those [cited above] is described by the poet as being deserving of a haven (portum, "harbor," *Theb.* 12.809; cf. *Sil.* 4.4.88-9), ostensibly from the apparently endless tale of epic grief, despair, and ruination it describes. While Statius' employment of the nautical metaphor to refer to the end of the *Thebaid's* journey is reminiscent of Pindar's use of the anchor to indicate the end of an ode (*Ol.* 6.101), it also recalls Ennius's self-conscious statement (possibly) at or towards the end of his *Annals'* original epilogue to the fifteenth book (*Ann. sed. inc. fr.* 69), where he likens a distinguished poeta finishing a demanding literary task to a champion racing steed in retirement (Dominik 1993: 44-5)" (Foley 517). I have reserved analysis of poetically self-conscious nautical metaphors in Homer or in Lucan for a separate study.

²⁶ For a summary, see commentary to *Inferno* 1.79-81 in Landino.

²⁷ "ὁ Φθόνος Ἀπόλλωνος ἐπ' οὐάτα λάθριος εἶπεν / «οὐκ ἄγαμαι τὸν ἀοιδὸν ὃς οὐδ' ὅσα πόντος αἰεῖδει.» / τὸν Φθόνον ἀπόλλων ποδί τ' ἤλασεν ᾧδὲ τ' ἔειπεν / «Ἀσσυρίου ποταμοῦ μέγας ῥόος, ἀλλὰ τὰ πολλὰ / λύματα γῆς καὶ πολλὸν ἐφ' ὕδατι συρφετὸν ἔλκει. / Διοῖ δ' οὐκ ἀπὸ παντὸς ὕδωρ φορέουσι Μέλισσαι, / ἀλλ' ἦτις καθαρὴ τε καὶ ἀχράαντος ἀνέρπει / πίδακος ἐξ ἱερῆς ὀλίγη λιβάς ἄκρον ἄωτον.» [Spake Envy privily in the ear of Apollo: "I admire not the poet who singeth not things for number as the sea." Apollo spurned Envy with his foot and spake thus: "Great is the stream of the Assyrian river, but much filth of earth and much refuse it carries on its waters. And not of every water do the Melissae carry to Deo, but of the trickling stream that springs from a holy fountain, pure and undefiled, the very crown of waters] (Callimachus, Hymn II.105-112).

²⁸ For more on the polemic over genre in the epilogue of the *Hymn to Apollo*, see Kohnken 413-416.

²⁹ Thomas describes how the Callimachean Propertius, wary of the open sea—"alter remus aquas alter tibi radat harenas, / tutus eris: medio maxima turba mari est" (Prop. 3.3.23-24)—nevertheless hails Vergil's success as an epic poet: "Cedite Romani

scriptores, cedite Grai: / Nescio quid maius nascitur Iliade” (Thomas, “A Trope by Any Other Name”).

³⁰ “tuque ades inceptumque una decurre laborem, / o decus, o famae merito pars maxima nostrae, / Maecenas, pelagoque volans da vela patenti. / non ego cuncta meis amplecti versibus opto, / non mihi si linguae centum sint oraque centum, / ferrea vox. ades et primi lege litoris oram; / in manibus terrae: non hic te carmine ficto / atque per ambages et longa exorsa tenebo” (*Georgics* 2.40-47). English translation in Ferry, *The Georgics of Virgil*. For examples of Hesiodic allusion, see *Geor.* 2.173-176. For detailed commentary see corresponding notes in Thomas, *Georgics*.

³¹ “Atque equidem, extremo ni iam sub fine laborum / vela traham et terries festinem advertere proram, / forsitan et, pinguis hortos quae cura colendi / ornaret, canerem, ...” (*Georgics* 4.116-119) [“And, to be sure, if it were not true that I / Have nearly come to the end of this my labor / And now am almost ready to turn my vessel / Eagerly toward home and furl my sails, / It might be that I’d sing to celebrate / The care it takes to cultivate the flowers / That make our gardens beautiful”] (Ferry, *The Georgics*).

³² “Rectius vives, Licini, neque altum / semper urgendo neque, dum procellas / cautus horrescis, nimium premendo / litus iniquum. / auream quisquis mediocritatem / diligit, tutus caret obsoleti / sordibus tecti, caret invidenda / sobrius aula. [...] non, si male nunc, et olim / sic erit: quondam cithara tacentem / suscitatur Musam neque semper arcum / tendit Apollo. / rebus angustis animosus atque / fortis adpare: sapienter idem / contrahes vento nimium secundo / turgida vela” (*Odes* 2.10.1-7, 17-24). [“You’ll do better, Licinius, not to spend your life / Venturing too far out on the dangerous waters, / Or else, for fear of storms, staying too close in / To the dangerous rocky shoreline. That man does best / Who chooses the middle way, so he doesn’t end up / Living under a roof that’s going to ruin / Or in some gorgeous mansion everyone envies. / [...] / Apollo isn’t always drawing his bow; / There are times when he takes up his lyre and plays, / And awakens the music sleeping upon the strings. / Be resolute when things are going against you, / But shorten sail when the fair wind blows too strong.”] (Ferry, *The Odes of Horace*).

³³ “Phoebus volentem proelia me loqui / victas et urbis increpuit lyra, / ne parva Tyrrenum per aequor / vela darem” (*Odes* 4.15.1-4) [“I wanted to sing a heroic song about / Caesar’s great victories in battle and / The conquering of cities, but Apollo / Struck a peremptory chord upon his lyre, / Forbidding me to do so, forbidding me / To launch my little boat on such an ocean”] (Ferry, *The Odes of Horace*).

³⁴ “excipe pacato, Caesar Germanice, voltu / hoc opus et timidae derige navis iter, / officioque, levem non aversatus honorem, / en tibi devoto numine dexter ades” (*Fasti* 1.3-6). English translation in Wiseman and Wiseman.

³⁵ “mite caput, pater, huc placataque cornua vertas, / et des ingenio vela secunda meo” (*Fasti* 3.788-789) [“Father, turn your mild head and peaceful horns this way, and give my talent favourable sails”] (Wiseman and Wiseman).

³⁶ “mota Cytheriaca leviter mea tempora myrto / contigit et ‘coeptum perforce’ dixit ‘opus’. / sensimus, et causae subito patuere dierum: / dum licet et spirant flamina, navis eat” (*Fasti* 4.18). [“Moved, [the goddess] lightly touched my brow with Cytherean myrtle, and said: ‘Complete the work you have begun.’ I felt it, and suddenly the reasons for the days became clear. While it’s allowed and the breezes are blowing, let the ship sail”] (Wheeler).

³⁷ “arguor immerito. tenuis mihi campus aratur: / illud erat magnae fertilitatis opus. / non ideo debet pelago se credere, siqua / audet in exiguo ludere cumba lacu. forsā—et hoc dubito—numeris levioribus aptus / sim satis, in parvos sufficiamque

BEATRICE AMMIRAGLIO

modos: / at si me iubeas domitos Iovis igne Gigantes / dicere, conantem debilitabit onus. / divitis ingenii est immania Caesaris acta / condere, materia ne superetur opus” (Ovid *Tristia* 2.327-336). English translation in Wheeler.

³⁸ “non timui, fateor, ne, *qua tot iere carinae, / naufraga seruat omnibus una foret*” (*Tristia* 2.469-470). English translation in Wheeler.

³⁹ “omne meum credas opus esse remissum, / saepe dedi nostrae grandia uela rati. / sex ego Fastorum scripsi totidemque libellos, / cumque suo finem mense uolumen habet” (*Tristia* 2.548-552). English translation in Wheeler.

⁴⁰ “uerba miser frustra non proficientia perdo. / ipsa graues spargunt ora loquentis aquae, / terribilisque Notus iactat mea dicta, precesque / ad quos mittuntur, non sinit ire deos. / ergo idem uenti, ne causa laedar in una, / uelaeque nescio quo uotaque nostra ferunt. / me miserum, quanti montes uoluuntur aquarum!” (*Tristia* 1.2.13-20). [“But, wretch that I am, to no purpose am I wasting profitless words. / My very lips as I speak are sprayed by the heavy waves, / and dread Notus hurls away my words / nor suffers my prayers to reach the gods to whom they are directed. / So the same winds, that I be not punished in one way only, are driving /—I know not whither— both my sails and my prayers. / Wretched me! what vast mountains of water heave themselves aloft!”] (Wheeler).

⁴¹ “ut mare considat ventisque ferentibus utar, / ut mihi parcatis, non minus exul ero. / non ego diuitias auidus sine fine parandi / latum mutandis mercibus aequor aro, / nec peto, quas quondam petii studiosus, Athenas, / oppida non Asiae, non loca uisa prius; / non ut Alexandri claram delatus in urbem / delicias uideam, Nile iocose, tuas. / quod faciles opto uentos (quis credere possit?) Sarmatis est tellus, quam mea uela petunt” (*Tristia* 1.2.73-82). [“Even should the sea grow calm and favouring breezes bear me on /—even should ye spare me—I shall be not less an exile. / Not in greed of limitless wealth do I plough the sea to trade my wares / nor am I on my way to Athens as once I was while a student, / nor to the cities of Asia, nor the places I have seen / before, nor am I sailing to Alexander’s famous city / to see thy pleasures, merry Nile. / The reason of my prayers for favouring winds (who could believe it?) / Is the Sarmatian land, the object of my voyage”] (Wheeler).

⁴² “Tingitur oceano custos Erymanthidos ursae, / aequoreasque suo sidere turbat aquas. / nos tamen Ionium non nostra findimus aequor / sponte, sed audaces cogimur esse metu. / me miserum! quantis increscunt aequora uentis, / erutaque ex imis feruet harena fretis!” (*Tristia* 1.4.1-6). [“The guardian of the Erymanthian bear [Bootes] dips / in ocean and with his setting stars makes stormy the waters of the sea. / Yet I am cleaving the Ionian waves / not of my own will but forced to boldness through fear. / Wretched me! what mighty winds swell the waters, / casting up the seething sand from the lowest depths!”] (Wheeler).

⁴³ “Conquerar an taceam? Ponam sine nomine crimen / an notum qui sis omnibus esse uelim? / Nomine non utar, ne commendere querela, / quaeraturque tibi carmine fama meo. / Dum mea puppis erat ualida fundata carina, / qui mecum uelles currere primus eras.” *Ex Ponto* 4.3.1-10. English translation in Wheeler.

⁴⁴ “uix nouus ista furor ueniensque implesset Apollo, et mea iam longo meruit ratis aequore portum” (*Thebaid* 12.808-809). [“Scarce would new inspiration or Apollo’s presence sustain the task, and my little bark has voyaged far and deserves her haven”] (Mozley).

⁴⁵ “Nunc si forte meis quae sint exordia musis / scire petis, iam Sidonios emensa labors / Thebais optato collegit carbasa portu / Parnasique iugis silvaeque Heliconide festis / tura dedit flammis et virginis exta iuvencae / votiferaque meas suspendit ab arbore vittas. / nunc vacuos crines alio subit infula nexu: / Troia quidem magnusque

mihi temptatur Achilles, / sed vocat arcitenens alio pater armaque monstrat / Ausonii
maiora ducis. trahit impetus illo / iam pridem retrahitque timor. stabuntne sub illa /
mole umeri an magno vincetur pondere cervix? / dic, Marcelle, feram? fluctus an
sueta minores / nosse ratis nondum Ioniis credenda periclis?" (*Silvae* 4.4.87-100).
English translation in Bailey.

⁴⁶ "te nostra magistro / Thebais urgebat priscorum exordia vatum; / tu cantus
stimulare meos, tu pandere facta / heroum bellique modos positusque locorum /
monstrabas. labat incerto mihi limite cursus / te sine, et orbatae caligant vela carinae"
(*Silvae* 5.3.233-238). English translation in Bailey.

⁴⁷ For a reading of Beatrice's initial appearance to the pilgrim in biblical and
historical terms elaborating on the figure of the *mulier fortis*, see Pertile.

⁴⁸ Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, 10.1.47.

⁴⁹ See the survey of nautical metaphors above: used to represent the challenge of
composing epic poetry, they are often accompanied by *recusatio* expressing the
poet's diffidence about embarking on such a daunting task.

⁵⁰ Piero Boitani juxtaposes the imagery of Ulisse's episode with that of the Argo
found in *Par* 33.94-96.

⁵¹ See Le Goff.

⁵² See Barolini's observations about the peculiarity of Beatrice's characterization in
maternal terms (368).

⁵³ Incidentally, Padoan reads this *recusatio* as Dante's concession to Giovanni del
Virgilio's demands that Dante compose in the more exclusively erudite Latin rather
than in the vernacular: "...quello [...] parziale cedimento di fronte alle riserve di chi
voleva la vera arte dedicata ai pochi si registra anche all'inizio della terza cantica,
dove cogliendo pretesto dell'affermazione della maggior difficoltà della materia per
cui si tentano nuove altezze, Dante, dopo aver manifestato il desiderio
dell'incoronazione laurea (l'accostamento qui, è assai indicativo), dissuade da
seguirlo coloro che sono 'in piccioletta barca.'" Padoan is of a mind with Auerbach
and Gmelin who detect a paternalistic note in Dante's tone in this apostrophe. The
exclusivity of this attitude, according to Padoan, nearly undermines "quel
difficilissimo equilibrio che nel poema dantesco si stabilisce tra messaggio
escatologico ed ambizione letteraria" (25-27).

⁵⁴ Cf. especially "nos tamen Ionium non nostra *findimus* aequor" (*Tristia* 1.4.3); "non
ego [...] aequor aro" (*Tristia* 1.2.75-6); "arguor immerito. tenuis mihi campus aratur"
(*Tristia* 2.327).

⁵⁵ For a detailed critical reading of *Paradiso* 33.94-96 in conjunction with Ulisse's
doomed final enterprise, see Boitani's analytical exegesis. See also Bárberi Squarotti
for further discussion.

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