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*Irony in the underworlds of Dante and Virgil:
Readings of Francesca and Palinurus*

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to draw readers' attention to a similarity of poetic procedure in the underworlds of Dante and Virgil: namely, the ironic presentation of the souls of the damned in the *Inferno* and also, as I propose here, of the shades who speak (or, in the case of Dido, fail to speak) with Aeneas in the underworld in *Aeneid* 6.¹ In both texts, degrees of self-misrepresentation and/or self-delusion shape the utterances of the underworld speakers, with the effect that readers are invited to see these speakers differently from the way that they see and present themselves. I would ask my own readers please to note that I am *not* proposing that Dante derived this application of irony from Virgil: intentional borrowing of this trope would be impossible to prove. In addition, I myself do not hold such firm conviction on the matter as to put forward this argument. Nevertheless, the similarity of the two poets' use of this ironic procedure in their underworlds, as I do propose to argue, has potential interpretive resonance for both texts. Consequently, I wish to set forth for other readers of Dante and Virgil my understanding of how irony, the constitutive trope of the *Inferno*, figures as poetic procedure in *Aeneid* 6 as well. Similarity of practice, of course, does not necessarily entail similarity of significance or effect. Indeed, on my reading, the irony that I observe in these two texts subserves virtually antithetical purposes. In my conclusion, therefore, I will speculate briefly on differences

1. I follow the definition of irony in Quintilian; that it is a function of difference, discrepancy, contradiction. Quint. *Inst.* 8.6.54: "in eo uero genere quo contraria ostenduntur ironia est...quae aut pronuntiatione intellegitur aut persona aut rei natura; nam si qua earum uerbis dissentit, apparet diuersam esse orationi uoluntatem." See also W. Booth, *Rhetoric of Irony*, Chicago 1974, p. 183: the fundamental test of irony is disparity. John Freccero's *Infernal Irony: The Gates of Hell*, *MLN* 98, 1983, pp. 769-786 is a crucial study for irony in the *Inferno*. See also his *Introduction to Inferno*, in *Cambridge Companion to Dante*, ed. R. Jacoff, Cambridge 1993, pp. 172-191; specifically, p. 175: "Each encounter in Hell amounts to the ironic undercutting of the values enunciated by the separate characters...[since these] values are undermined by the fact of being championed by the damned."

between what I perceive to be Dante's Christian irony vs. Virgil's pagan irony.

IRONY IN THE *INFERNO*

In the *Inferno* there is consistent, if subtle, disparity between the claims of the souls of the damned and the justice of God that condemned them to Inferno, as the inscription above the entrance to Inferno makes unambiguous:

giustizia mosse il mio alto fattore;
fecemi la divina podestate,
la somma sapienza e'l primo amore. (*Inf.* 3.4-6)

Although intending in some way to justify their actions and/or to elicit pity from Dante-pilgrim, these speakers nevertheless reveal – despite themselves – that they fail to acknowledge or indeed still love their sin, and thus fail to see themselves as God sees them. While recognition of this ironic representation of the damned is currently an accepted reading among Anglo-American scholars of Dante,² it is not so for scholars of any nationality with respect to the souls encountered in Virgil's underworld. Therefore, in proposing this perspective on the reading of Virgil's underworld interviews, I may perhaps add further resonance to our readings of *Aeneid* 6 and perhaps, as well, contribute indirectly to the plausibility of the ironic reading of the *Inferno*.

Many Dante scholars argue that irony is a constitutive trope of the *Inferno*. As a conversion narrative, the *Commedia* entails necessarily a discrepancy in perspective between Dante-pilgrim and Dante-poet. This discrepancy, whence results the irony of which

2. For reviews of the history of American readings of Dante, see A. Iannucci, *Dante: Contemporary Perspectives*, Toronto 1997, pp. ix-xxii. R. Hollander, *Theologus-Poeta*, «Dante Studies» 94, 1976, pp. 91-136, and *Dante and his Commentators*, in *Cambridge Companion*, pp. 226-36; R. Jacoff, *Introduction*, pp. ix-xvi in J. Freccero, *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion*, Cambridge, MA 1986. American readings of Dante have become characteristically theological, while, on the other hand, romantic and post-romantic (generally European) readings of Dante tend to interpret speakers in *Inf.* as heroic and tragic in their individual strivings. Freccero, *Infernal Irony*, p. 779: "...the history of Dante criticism is filled with debates between partisans of 'Divine Justice' on one hand and of 'humanity' on the other. The debates are confined to the *Inferno* because of the ironic mode of the representation, a consistent contradiction of the perspective of the pilgrim by the perspective of the poet." Similarly in Jacoff, ed., *Cambridge Companion*, p. 188: "...the diachronism of conversion... is the source of the irony that is pervasive in the *Inferno*" [i.e., since it privileges the perspective of the conclusion].

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I speak, is manifest in the gap between the knowledge and perspective of Dante-pilgrim, a lost soul accompanied through Inferno by "Virgil," and Dante-poet, who writes from the perspective of revealed truth. The perspectives of Dante-pilgrim and Dante-poet are not fully joined until the revelations of *Paradiso*. In making Dante-pilgrim converse with the damned in *Inferno*, Dante-poet has the opportunity to portray the faults of the damned as well as those of his prior self.³ The souls of the damned are, then, "unreliable narrators" in their responses to Dante-pilgrim's questioning. Dante-pilgrim, along with many readers, may initially fail to appreciate the irony in these infernal portraits, since readers are most likely to fail to perceive irony when the ironized values coincide with their own.⁴ Thus readers of certain sensibilities are moved, for example, by the passion and romance of Francesca and Paolo in canto 5; the humanistic values of Brunetto Latini in canto 15; the fearless questing of Ulysses in canto 26. Yet sympathy for these characters must ultimately be a snare and a delusion, as their place in God's scheme necessarily shows. That the reader should wish otherwise (cf., e.g., Dante-pilgrim in *Inf.* 15.79-81) should serve as a warning of the reader's own unilluminated state. Dante-pilgrim's journey is salvific for himself and is divinely sanctioned (*Paradiso* 17, 23, 25) to be so for readers.

It is not impossible that Dante might have seen a model of this ironic (as in Quintilian's understanding of irony as defined by difference or discrepancy⁵) representational mode in *Aeneid* 6. Scholars at least since Servius noted the discrepancy or contradiction between the account of Palinurus' death by the *Aeneid* narrator at the end of *Aeneid* 5 and Palinurus' own account to Aeneas in the underworld in *Aeneid* 6. The discrepancies are stark and thus create an interpretive "gap" that scholars have filled in various ways. The traditional explanation of the discrepancies is that Virgil's death prevented his intended revision of the poem, which, it is assumed, would have included the harmonizing of variant accounts of Palinurus' death. Yet, the differences between the passages are not trivial, and they can lead to questions

3. Freccero, *Infernal Irony*, p. 785: "The journey that Dante depicts is both a critique of human society and of his own 'illusory' self."

4. L. Hutcheon discusses irony's potential to "misfire." See *Risky Business in Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony*, London 1994, pp. 9-36.

5. As set forth in note 1, above.

of great moral and theological consequence. Further, Palinurus' own account of the event is more creditable to himself than is the narrator's account; indeed, Palinurus' account has the character of a protestation of innocence.⁶ (Analogous disparities may be argued for both Dido and Deiphobus.⁷)

Aeneas (pilgrim) addresses three shades in the underworld (four including the exceptional episode with Anchises⁸), Dante-pilgrim a lengthy series. Treatment of irony in all these exchanges would become repetitive, and for Dante, in any case, has already been done for many speakers by accomplished scholars.⁹ Therefore, to argue for my reading of parallel or analogous irony in the *Inferno* and *Aeneid* underworlds, I propose to study the first of the interlocutors in each text, thus Francesca da Rimini in *Inferno* 5 and Palinurus in *Aeneid* 6, assuming that, by virtue of primacy, they are to a great degree paradigmatic and thus offer a legitimate basis for comparison.

IRONY IN THE INFERNO: FRANCESCA DA RIMINI

In reading this "structurally determining" "key episode" that resonates throughout the poem¹⁰ I rely on the work done by a number of critics whose insights I gratefully summarize.¹¹

6. C. Connolly, *The Unquiet Grave by Palinurus*, 1944, repr. New York 1999, p. 134. In the "Epilogue" to this memoir/novel from the second World War period, Connolly offers his novelist's imaginative "case study" of the character of Palinurus in the *Aeneid*, in which he points to resonant implications of this discontinuous portrait. Full discussion below.

7. I will study irony in all three speakers more fully in a forthcoming essay.

8. The Anchises passage is commonly interpreted as parallel to Cacciaguida's investiture of Dante-pilgrim in *Par.* 17 with the mission of writing this poem, termed "sacratu poema" (*Par.* 23.62) and "poema sacro" (*Par.* 25.1).

9. E.g., R. Hollander, *Inferno xxxiii, 37-74: Ugolino's Importunity*, «*Speculum*» 59.3, 1984, pp. 549-555; T. Barolini, *Dante's Ulysses: Narrative and Transgression*, pp. 113-32 in Iannucci, ed., *Contemporary Perspectives*. J. Kleiner of Brunetto in *On Failing One's Teachers: Dante, Virgil, and the Ironies of Instruction in Sparks and Seeds: Medieval Literature and its Afterlife, Essays in Honor of John Freccero*, ed. D. Stewart and A. Cornish, Turnhout, Belgium 2000, pp. 61-74.

10. Iannucci, *Contemporary Perspectives*, p. xviii.

11. For discussion of Francesca the following are extremely helpful: A. Iannucci, *Forbidden Love: Metaphor and History (Inferno 5)*, pp. 94-112 in Iannucci, ed., *Contemporary Perspectives*; T. Barolini, *Dante and Francesca da Rimini: Realpolitik, Romance, Gender*, «*Speculum*» 75, 2000, pp. 1-28; R. Poggioli, *Paolo e Francesca, in Dante: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. J. Freccero, Englewood Cliffs, N.J. 1965, pp. 61-77; K. Brownlee, *Dante and the Classical Poets*, pp. 100-19 in Jacoff, ed., *Cambridge Companion*. As an overall consensus prevails among these, I will not foot-

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This episode offers a brilliantly condensed, resonant characterization of both Francesca and Dante-pilgrim, who catches sight of Francesca in the second circle of *Inferno*, amongst those condemned for lust. As in the world above these souls were carried away by their desires, so in *Inferno* they are blown about eternally by infernal winds.

enno danniti i peccator carnali,
che la ragion sommettono al talento...

nulla speranza li conforta mai,
non che di posa, ma di minor pena (5.38-39, 44-45)

Unlike others, such as Dido,¹² who appear in *Inferno*'s second circle, Francesca is a contemporary of Dante. As Francesca tells her story in response to Dante-pilgrim's questioning, quite a full portrait emerges: Francesca was married to the brother of Paolo; together the two spent time reading a book of courtly love, specifically the story of the forbidden love of Lancelot and Guinevere. Impassioned (repeatedly: "per piu fiate," 5.130) by the story, they are drawn to enact their own illicit romance. Francesca's husband, on discovering the affair, kills the two of them. Presently, then, they find themselves, buffeted by winds, coupled for eternity, in the second circle of hell. This story is so seductive to unsaved readers of a certain sensibility that they, along with Dante-pilgrim (who falls in a dead faint to end the canto), extract from it only thrilling tragic romance. Dante-pilgrim is moved by pity, he claims; but also, as Dante-poet allows, from unrenounced love of the very values of courtly poetry that led Francesca and Paolo to their fatal sin. Dante-poet now sees, however, the couple's condemnable failure to act on love's correct nature and purposes, the models of which are embodied in the salvific love of Beatrice for Dante. *Paradiso* 33 "enables us to judge Paolo and Francesca correctly."¹³

note every observation, but refer readers to these studies generally. See also A. Quaglio, *Enciclopedia Dantesca*, Vol. III, pp. 1-13, s.v. "Francesca da Rimini" for discussion of readings by many (generally Italian) scholars.

12. *Inf.* 5.61: "L'altra è colei che s'ancise amorosa, / e ruppe fede al cener di Sicheo." Cf. *Aen.* 6.444: *curae non ipsa in morte relinquunt.*

13. B. Comens, *Stages of Love, Steps to Hell: Dante's Rime Petrose*, «MLN» 101, 1986, p. 187. Cf., e.g.,

I son Beatrice che ti faccio andare;
vegno del loco ove tornar disio;

The irony in this episode results from the discrepancy between Francesca's manner of telling her story – which has the character of a defense and whose unexpressed purpose is to elicit pity from Dante-pilgrim – and the truth as we must infer it from her condemnation to Inferno. Briefly: Francesca, still imbued with the values of courtly love, speaks in the vocabulary of courtly romance (Singleton ad loc.). Claiming that a “cor gentil” (which, by implication, she and Paolo have) is necessarily responsive to love, she blames the unhappy outcome of her life not on her own self and sin, but on love:

Amor, ch'al cor gentil ratto s'apprende... (100)

Amor, ch'a nullo amato amar perdona,
mi prese del costui piacer sì forte,
che, come vedi, ancor non m'abbandona.
Amor condusse noi ad una morte. (103-106)¹⁴

She blames also the book, as if it had agency, as a panderer, a “Galeotto [who arranged for Lancelot and Guinevere to meet] fu'l libro e chi lo scrisse” (5.137). In implicitly attributing to herself (and Paolo) a gentle heart, she praises herself, as also in the self-aware sensuality of her fair body. Desire lives in the powerful physical memory of Paolo's kiss on her mouth. Therefore, “quel giorno più non vi leggemmo avante” (5.138).¹⁵ Despite eternal punishment, Francesca still wants the beautiful (5.104) Paolo, who will be with her always (“questi, che mai da me non fia di-

amor mi mosse, che mi fa parlare. *Inf.* 2.70-72

14. Commentators reference the *Canzone* of Guido Guinizelli, beginning “Al cor gentil reimpaira sempre amore/ come l'ausello in selva a la verdura.”

15. Barolini, *Dante and Francesca*, p. 28, n. 63 and others read Francesca as a poor reader because of her incomplete or imperfectly remembered reading of the Lancelot story. I suggest that there may be another instance of her misreading, seemingly not proposed by Dante scholars. Francesca says:

“Nessun maggior dolore
che ricordarsi del tempo felice
ne la miseria; ciò sa 'l tuo dottore.” *Inf.* 5.121-23.

C. Singleton, ed. and trans., *Dante Alighieri: The Divine Comedy*, 3 vols., Princeton 1970, ad loc. references comparable sentiments in Augustine, Aquinas, and Boethius. However, I propose that by saying “as your teacher knows,” Francesca takes the citation from Virgil specifically. I propose further, therefore, that, as a bad reader, she may be mis-remembering, indeed completely inverting, the meaning of Aeneas' melancholy encouragement to his men in *Aen.* 1.203: *forsan et haec olim meminisse iuvabit*. His sense there, the very contrary of her point here, is that in the future there will be some pleasure in reflecting on past griefs survived.

viso," 5.135).¹⁶ Paolo, as often noted, speaks not a word, but only weeps, thus revealing that it is Francesca who is the dominant of the two. Francesca's anticipation of vengeance for their murders ("Caïna attende chi a vita ci spense," 5.107) further hints at her willful strength of character.

Francesca is not the only target of Dante-poet's irony. As Dante scholars note, Dante himself had earlier written this style of poetry. Here in *Inferno* Dante-pilgrim reveals his continuing enchantment with fabled ladies and lordly gentlemen ("le donne antiche e' cavalieri," 5.71). He is, indeed, lost ("fui quasi smarrito," 5.72; cf. "la diritta via era smarrita," 1.3). Further to his discredit is not only his voyeuristic curiosity about the details of the affair ("Ma dimmi: al tempo di dolci sospiri, / a che e come concedette amore / che conosceste i dubbiosi disiri?" 5.118-20), but also his agreement that it was love that made them act on their desires. Misplaced pity (117, 140) at the tragic tale overwhelms him, as he falls heavily in a faint ("e caddi come corpo morto cade," 5.142). Dante-poet thus underlines the physicality of the error of both Francesca and himself/Dante-pilgrim. While explicit authorial judgment is lacking here, as elsewhere throughout, the ironic disparity between the characters' utterances and their context allows willing readers to infer the moral meaning of the episode.¹⁷

To summarize: As Francesca tells her story, she inadvertently – ironically – reveals the justice of God's judgment in placing her in *Inferno*. She fails to confess; she fails to take responsibility as a moral Christian agent; she fails to see herself or her sin as God sees her and it. Dante-pilgrim's response implicitly reveals his own debased spiritual state, as he is too taken with chivalric lords and ladies, too curious for details, too moved by what is in fact not a tragic story, but a story of sin and just punishment.¹⁸

16. For Poggioli (*Paolo e Francesca*), p. 63, a cry of possession, where pride mingles with despair.

17. Poggioli, *Paolo e Francesca*, p. 76: "Though verbally unstated, Dante's judgment...his moral message is implicit in the situation and structure of the story, so that no further intervention on the poet's part is required to make it meaningful to us." Barolini, *Dante and Francesca*, p. 8: Dante-pilgrim's curiosity is an "act of voyeurism that the text both solicits and rebukes." Similarly, p. 9: "...narrator's moral clarity (carnal sinners who subject reason to desire) has given way to the pilgrim's moral confusion."

18. Poggioli, *Paolo e Francesca*, p. 66 suggests that the effect is to evoke, but the purpose is to exorcise, romantic love.

IRONY IN THE AENEID: PALINURUS

As noted above, discrepancy in the accounts of Palinurus' death creates a "gap," an interpretive space that has been filled by readers in different ways. However interpreted, the verses comprising the Palinurus episode engage issues crucial to Dante's faith, e.g., guilt, punishment, gods' justice, redemption, eternity (of one's name or of one's soul).

To resume the discrepancies: In *Aeneid* 5 – as told by the *Aeneid* narrator – the weather is calm; Palinurus, the helmsman, alone is awake. The god Sleep (Somnus) comes to him (*te, Palinure, petens*, 5.840), bringing bad/fatal dreams (*somnia tristia*, 5.840). (The narrator's apostrophe to Palinurus heightens the pathos of the scene.) Assuming the form of Phorbas (presumably dead at Troy, *Il.*14.490), Somnus urges that Palinurus put down his head in sleep while he, Somnus, takes over the helm. Palinurus resists this urging, for, he says, he knows the sea's treachery. The passage is freighted with terms of moral import: the narrator describes Palinurus as *insoniti* (5.841). Phorbas implies that giving in to sleep is a kind of theft (*furare*, 5.845). In Palinurus' world the sea has moral valence: it is a deceptive monster (*monstro*, 5.849; *fraude*, 5.851). For him, he says, dedicated as he is, sleep would constitute a violation of trust (*Aenean credam... fallacibus auris?* 5.850). Not to be put off, however, Somnus overcomes Palinurus with Lethan sleep and casts him into the sea:

et super incumbens cum puppis parte reuulsa
cumque gubernaculo liquidas proiecit in undas
praecipitem ac socios nequiquam saepe uocantem. (5.858-560)

Curiously, Palinurus drags with him as he falls both the tiller and part of the stern. Aeneas, in time sensing that the ship is about to founder, awakens to take over the helm himself – a mysterious feature of this passage, for, as the narrator has just said, Palinurus took the tiller with him in his fall. Inferring that Palinurus went or fell to sleep, Aeneas, in a virtual epitaph,¹⁹ speaks of Palinurus' misplaced faith and lost burial:

19. A. Barchiesi, *Palinuro e Caieta: Due "Epigrammi" Virgiliani*, «Maia» 31, 1979, pp. 3-11 discusses both the formal features of the funeral epigram ("la riconoscibilità estrema della forma epigrammatica") as well as its particular thematic power in closing book 5, where we expect "enunciazione riassuntiva sul piano tematico, che raccolga e organizzi più limpidamente, in forma paradigmatica, opposizioni e tensioni ricorrenti nel testo" (8).

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"O nimum caelo et pelago confise sereno,
nudus in ignota, Palinure, iacebis harena." (5.870-871)

By whose or by what agency does Aeneas save and steer the ship?²⁰ And what explains the damage that Palinurus does to the ship as he goes overboard? Since these questions cannot be answered, we see that this account of Palinurus' disappearance at sea, even without its discrepancy with *Aeneid* 6, resists easy interpretation.

In the underworld of *Aeneid* 6, Aeneas sights Palinurus' shade by the river Styx where he wanders in shadows amongst other unburied souls. Aeneas asks:

... "quis te, Palinure, deorum
eripuit nobis, medioque sub aequore mersit?
dic age. Namque mihi, fallax haud ante repertus,
hoc uno responso animum delusit Apollo,
qui fore te ponto incolumem finisque caneat
uenturum Ausonios. En haec promissa fides est?" (6.341-346)

Here Aeneas attributes Palinurus' loss to a god, not to carelessness on his own part.²¹ This change might be attributed to tact. (Aeneas' question implies the possibility of an untrustworthy god rather than a too-trusting human being.) Or has Aeneas indeed settled on a different interpretation of the event? Palinurus responds (direct discourse) that it was no god who took him, but that in stormy seas he fell overboard with tiller still in hand, fearing – he swears “by the rough seas” – for Aeneas and his ship, without a helmsman, lest they perish. Then, he says, he swam for three days and nights, finally sighting Italy on the fourth day. Yet as he grasped for a rocky landfall, he was killed by “cruel” and “ignorant” people who took him for a prize and left his body at the mercy of winds and waves (6.347-362). Thus he represents himself as victim two times over, of both storm and savages. He beseeches Aeneas to return to bury him or, instead, to carry him

20. Dryden fills this “gap” by supplying a god that takes over:

The Victor Dae-mon mounts obscure in Air;
While the Ship sails without the Pilot's care.
On Neptune's faith the floating Fleet relies;

But what the Man forsook, the God supplies. *Aen.* 5.1038-1041

21. Connolly, *Unquiet Grave*, p. 134, n. 1 “In the original [*sic: that it is the original is his interpretation*], Palinurus makes no mention of being asleep, nor is there any mention of Apollo's prophecy, which may be a trap set by Aeneas. Notice how Palinurus' reply is calculated to allay suspicion.”

across the Styx. Aeneas makes no response. The Sibyl, however, rebukes Palinurus for his transgressive request, but adds that divine prodigies will compel the local people to appease Palinurus' bones by erecting a tomb and naming the place after him (presently Capo Palinuro).²² For (susceptible) readers the most significant discrepancy between this account and that of *Aeneid* 5 concerns the weather, since the presence or absence of storm conditions has potential bearing on the question of Palinurus' complicity or guilt in slipping into the water.²³

As noted above, the conventional explanation of the inconsistencies between these two passages is that Virgil did not live to make the revisions that would have harmonized them.²⁴ Certainly this is a plausible explanation. However, it would be unwise to imagine that all seemingly anomalous (in the view of some scholars) passages would have been altered or eliminated by Virgil, had he lived longer; for one man's anomaly is another's brilliant innovation.²⁵ So, although the often accepted strategy for dealing with inconsistencies is to assume that Virgil would have normalized them in revision, another, potentially richer, strategy is to interpret the text as it stands. Some scholars have done so, suggesting, for example, that the narrator's ver-

22. Servius ad loc. says the legend probably came to Virgil through Varro. Also R.G. Austin, ed., *P. Vergili Maronis Aeneidos Liber Sextus*, Oxford 1977; repr. 1978, ad 6.337-83; Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 1.53.2: the Cape is named after a helmsman of Aeneas who died there. Servius ad 6.378, "de historia hoc traxit." R. D. Williams, *P. Vergili Maronis Aeneidos Liber Quintus*, Oxford 1960, ad 5.827-71: "likely" the legend may be traced to Timaeus, thence to Varro, and to Virgil.

23. See R.D. Williams (op. cit., n. 22), pp. xxiii-xxviii for a listing of discrepancies and representative bibliography. J. W. Hunt, *Forms of Glory: Structure and Sense in Virgil's Aeneid*, Carbondale 1973, p. 46 on the significance of the weather. On Palinurus, see F. Brenk, S. J., *Unum pro multis caput: Myth, History, and Symbolic Imagery in Virgil's Palinurus Incident*, «Latomus» 43, 1984, pp. 776-801 for a comprehensive overview and bibliography; M. Lossau, *Enciclopedia Virgiliana*, Rome 1987, s.v. "Palinurus," vol. iii, 936A-936B.

24. E. Norden, *P. Vergilius Maro Aeneis Buch vi*, Darmstadt 1916; repr. 1970, p. 231: "Überhaupt sind die Palinurus Episoden beider Bücher vom Dichter noch nicht endgültig redigiert und in Beziehung zu einander gesetzt worden." (For his full discussion of the passage, see on 6.337-83.) Similarly R. D. Williams, op. cit., n. 22, pp. xxv-xxvii; R. Heinze, *Virgils epische Technik*, p. 146, n. 1, 451.

25. Consider the exciting continuing controversy over the ending of the *Aeneid*, in which Michael Putnam's work has played the decisive part. While others have felt the poem's closure to be insufficient and have therefore hypothesized that the poem was unfinished, on Putnam's reading, the *Aeneid's* closure is brilliant in its "dissatisfactions." Maffeo Vegio's thirteenth book that ties up all (perceived) loose ends is not held to improve upon Virgil's text.

sion of events in *Aeneid* 5 is the "correct" one, since the narrator has access to a higher level of truth than does Palinurus. Palinurus' own account in *Aeneid* 6 would then express only his limited human perspective.²⁶ Susanne Wofford argues that contradictions in the text result necessarily from contradictions within imperial ideology itself. The text (virtually as an independent agent) tries to hide Aeneas' and Virgil's sacrificial strategies through a delusive idyllicism that obscures the costs of dominance. She indicates that readers may observe this strategy at work in aetiologies of place names, wherein, for example, the cape named for Palinurus and the spring named for Jururna function to naturalize their sufferings by absorbing them into the landscape.²⁷ In G. B. Conte's important reading of the *Aeneid*, the text is shot through with unreconciled contradictions, emanating largely from the isolation and deaths of sentient speakers, whose values remain unintegrated into the epic's endorsed imperial purpose – or indeed, must be sacrificed to it. Among these he counts characters such as Dido, Mezentius, Turnus, Creusa, and Palinurus.²⁸ Julia Dyson, in her study of the *Aeneid* as a cultic text, argues that the contradictions between *Aeneid* 5 and 6 allow Palinurus' death to be associated with deaths of other characters by water, thus a series of imperfect sacrifices for the Roman mission that led not to expiation, but only to further sacrifices.²⁹

For my present project, Cyril Connolly's resonant reconstruction of the character of Palinurus in his pseudo-psychological "case study" is critical. As the "attending psychiatrist," he attributes the events of *Aeneid* 5 and 6 to a "will to failure" (137) in the patient, Palinurus, a loss of faith in the mission – which Palinurus then attempts to deny by essentially "protesting his innocence" in the underworld (134). Connolly's imaginative attention to textual detail allows him to construct a sustained argument for this reading.

First, we note in retrospect that *Aeneid* 5 contains several in-

26. Also, e.g., T. Page, *The Aeneid of Virgil, Books 1-6*, London 1894; repr. 1967, ad 6.349; Austin ad 6.348; W. S. Anderson, *The Art of the Aeneid*, Wauconda, IL 1969; repr. 1989, p. 55.

27. S. Wofford, *The Choice of Achilles: The Ideology of Figure in the Epic*, Stanford 1992, e.g. pp. 176-88.

28. G. B. Conte, *The Rhetoric of Imitation: Genre and Poetic Memory in Virgil and Other Latin Poets*, ed. C. Segal, Ithaca and London 1986, pp. 163, n. 15, 171.

29. J. Dyson, *King of the Wood: The Sacrificial Victor in Virgil's Aeneid*, Norman, OK 2001, pp. 74-94 ("The Unburied Dead").

stances of questioning of the mission or loss of faith in Aeneas. As the book opens, the men, seeing smoke rise from Carthage, are filled with dark presentiments:

Quae tantum accenderit ignem
 causa latet; duri magno sed amore dolores
 polluto, notumque furens quid femina possit,
 triste per augurium Teucrorum pectora ducunt. (*Aen.* 5.4-7)

After the long delayed, anxious departure from Carthage, they are once again diverted from their goal by impenetrable (Palinurus says [*Aen.* 5.12-18]) weather and instead must make for Sicily. As Putnam acutely points out,³⁰ many readers experience *Aeneid* 5 as dull, since nothing important for the plot occurs. Readers, like the characters, are frustrated by the delay. Aeneas' funeral games to honor Anchises become unexpectedly costly in physical and emotional terms, although Aeneas, as master of the games, attempts to impose the justice and equity in victory that did not come of their own accord. Meanwhile, the women, tired of the thus-far fruitless voyage and goaded by the gods, set fire to the ships. At this point Aeneas falls into despair and himself questions whether to abandon the mission (*oblitus fatorum*, 5.700-03). As Hunt observes (34), this is one of only three instances in the poem in which Aeneas is *casu concussus* (5.700). Persuaded ultimately by Nautes, later confirmed by a vision of Anchises, Aeneas determines to continue with only the young and fit and to leave the women and others behind. A disheartening sequence of events. Is it significant that Palinurus, although the chief helmsman, is not mentioned as a participant in the ship race (Connolly, p. 130) Connolly thinks so and fills the "gap" of Palinurus' apparent absence by hypothesizing a Palinurus "brooding over the storm and his leader's conduct" (130). On Connolly's reading, Palinurus, troubled by events, unconsciously or deliberately abandons the mission, even attempting sabotage:

But was Palinurus guiltless? If, as we suggest, he was tired of the fruitless voyage, horrified by the callousness of Aeneas, by the disasters which he seemed to attract by his rowdy games, by the ultimate burning of some of the ships by the angry women. . .then was his disappearance as accidental as Aeneas supposed?...[T]he clue we should notice is

30. M. C. J. Putnam, *The Poetry of the Aeneid: Four Studies in Imaginative Unity and Design*, Cambridge, MA 1965, p. 64.

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that, although the sea is calm, Palinurus when he falls takes with him tiller, rudder, and a section of poop. Tillers may come off easily, but not part of the stem! (132)

Hunt builds on Connolly's construction of a withdrawn, brooding Palinurus. In his reading Aeneas is troubled about the cause of Palinurus' disappearance. In his journey through the underworld (read by Hunt as a "dream vision," e.g., p. 45³¹), Aeneas hears what he wants to hear: Palinurus, "protesting his innocence," did not abandon ship but fought the elements with fearless concern for Aeneas. In the underworld, convinced by the clear proofs of Aeneas' divine support, Palinurus reaffirms his faith in Aeneas, addressing him as "inuicte" (a rare epithet):

Nunc me fluctus habet, uersantque in litore uenti.
 Quod te per caeli iucundum lumen et auras,
 per genitor oro, per spes surgentis Iuli,
 eripe me his, inuicte, malis: aut tu mihi terram
 inice, namque potes, portusque require Velinos;
 aut tu, si qua uia est, si quam tibi diua creatrix
 ostendit ~ neque enim, credo, sine numine diuum
 flumina tanta paras Stygiamque innare paludem ~
 da dextram misero, et tecum me tolle per undas. (6.362-370)

This Palinurus reassures Aeneas in his troubled state; yet, as Aeneas experienced the events, there was no storm. Hence he remains silent while the Sibyl, in a famous verse, rebukes Palinurus' impious request (*dira cupido*, 6.373): *desine fata deum flecti sperare precando* (*Aen.* 6.376).³²

Virgil's readers would have recognized the resemblance of this scene to Odysseus' encounter with Elpenor's shade on his journey to Hades: Elpenor and Palinurus, both unburied, both the first familiar shades encountered by their respective leaders, request burial in order to cross the Styx to have peace in death. Dante may not have known this detail of the *Odyssey*, but we can

31. Cf. G. Most's *Memory and Forgetting in the Aeneid*, «Vergilius» 47, 2001, p. 170 [Special Issue: "The Vergilian Century," ed. Joseph Farrell], observes that nothing from *Aeneid* 6 figures later in the poem: "On the level of the action of the rest of the *Aeneid*, it is as though book 6 never existed: no narrative thread links it to any later event... as though, perhaps, it had been for [Aeneas] simply a false dream and nothing more?"

32. Norden, *op. cit.*, n. 24, ad loc., details the formal finish of Palinurus' speech. Yet, is this accomplished rhetorical performance appropriate for an innocent man? Or does it suggest instead well-planned artifice?

perceive a contrast between Odysseus' sympathetic response to Elpenor and Aeneas' (possibly unsympathetic) silence to Palinurus.³³ Odysseus mourns at length with Elpenor (an insignificant crew member who, having drunk too much, fell off Circe's roof to his death), promises the requested burial, and performs it as promised on his return to the upper world.³⁴ In reflecting on these passages, could Virgil's close readers sense dismay or anger in Aeneas' silence? Where really was the fault? Was Palinurus' death the sacrifice of an "innocent"? an accident? desertion? As it stands, Virgil's text implicitly poses these haunting questions, but refrains from answering them. Therein lies the enduring fascination of these passages, which have generated so much comment.³⁵ A happy accident if Virgil did not intentionally create this effect.

DANTE AND PALINURUS

Although Palinurus does not appear by name in the *Commedia*, he did elicit interpretive comment from some medieval scholars and theologians.³⁶ Interestingly for my argument here, the commentators Fulgentius and "Bernardus" read Palinurus as an exemplar of *errabunda visio*, a serious failing that had to be transcended in order to achieve *doctrina* or *initium philosophandi*. This

33. Would Aeneas have responded if the Sibyl had not, as, e.g., Austin ad 372 or Anderson 59 suppose? There are one hundred twenty-seven speeches in the *Aeneid* that meet with no response (according to G. Highet, *The Speeches in Vergil's Aeneid*, Princeton 1972). W. R. Johnson, *Darkness Visible: A Study of Vergil's Aeneid*, Berkeley 1976, p. 107 points to the *Aeneid's* represented "incapacity for shared suffering," the comparative rarity of dialogue. D. Feeney, *The Taciturnity of Aeneas*, «Class. Quart.» 33, 1983, pp. 204-219 reads Aeneas' relatively abbreviated utterances as a reflection of honesty, a lack of rhetorical artifice.

34. M. Lossau, *Elpenor und Palinurus*, «Wiener Studien» 14, 1980, pp. 102-124.

35. T. Ziolkowski, *Virgil and the Moderns*, Princeton 1993, pp. 97-98 and 134-39 discusses modern readings of Palinurus, sympathetic and haunted (Ungaretti's in the ironically titled *La terra promessa* and Connolly's in *The Unquiet Grave*). Hunt, p. 50 exemplifies this trend: "But glory in the land of Rome can never silence wholly the secret voice of the sorrowful pilot who vanished into the shadows and the sea."

36. However, Dante scholars have identified what they argue are allusions to Palinurus in the *Purgatorio*. They read these allusions as Dante's "correcting" of Palinurus' pagan values. For these and other suggested allusions and corrections ("a dynamic of displacement"), see C. Cioffi, *Fame, Prayer, and Politics: Virgil's Palinurus in Purgatorio V and VI*, «Dante Studies» 110, 1992, pp. 191 and passim; similarly Singleton on *Purg.* 3.130 (it echoes *Aen.* 6.362) and 3.138-40 (it recalls *Aen.* 6.325-30). See also N. R. Havey, *Brunetto and Palinurus*, «Dante Studies» 108, 1990, pp. 29-38, with bibliography.

negative medieval reading of Palinurus suggests that for Dante it might have been altogether conventional to read Palinurus as a deficient figure rather than as a sympathetic one, as now characteristically. A Palinurus such as Connolly constructs, guilty and anxious over the state of his soul, would have been compatible with a medieval Christian perspective familiar to Dante.³⁷

REFLECTIONS ON IRONY IN THE *INFERNO* AND *AENEID* 6

In the *Inferno* irony is created as characters, while intending accounts that are exculpatory, inadvertently reveal the truth of their sins and the justice of their assignment to Inferno. From Dante's perspective ideally, this irony would allow readers to critique the limited or wrong values voiced by the condemned souls and, consequently, to put themselves on the road to salvation. We might, then, call this "Christian irony," as it portrays a state of delusion in order to lead readers to revelation, to God's truth.

What effect might underworld irony have in the *Aeneid*? On my reading, such irony as is manifest in the shades' self-misrepresentation in *Aeneid* 6 (whether through delusion or deceit) does not lead readers to any higher truth. On the contrary, it would seem that irony in the *Aeneid* mirrors the inaccessibility of any ultimate truth. This failure of Virgil's speakers to represent themselves truly can be read, I suggest, as but one instance of the *Aeneid*'s pervasive representation of the limitations of human understanding. For example, as scholars have noted: oracles and prophecies are misinterpreted;³⁸ gods' intentions remain obscure;³⁹ unanswered questions are a constitutive motif of the text.⁴⁰ Aeneas himself is described explicitly as unknowing or ignorant (*Aen.*4.72 in simile; *Aen.*8.730).⁴¹ This unknowing condition mutates into a kind of self-delusion in the poem's final

37. See Havely, *Brunetto and Palinurus*, pp. 28, n. 27 and 35 for the readings by Fulgentius and "Bernardus" of Palinurus as a figure of *errabunda visio*, an impediment to achieving *doctrina* or *initium philosophandi*. See also C. Cioffi, *Fame, Prayer, and Politics*, p. 200, n. 52 for another possibly perceived deficiency in Palinurus, i.e., his failure to reach the promised land as an "emblem of sloth."

38. J. O'Hara, *Death and Optimistic Prophecy in Vergil's Aeneid*, Princeton 1990.

39. D. Feeney, *Reconciliations of Juno*, *Class. Quart.* 34, 1984, pp. 179-194.

40. W.R. Johnson in *Darkness Visible*, Berkeley 1976.

41. Epitomized in R.A. Brooks' fine phrase re Aeneas' "success in action, frustration in knowledge." *Discolor Aura: Reflections on the Golden Bough*, in *Virgil: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. S. Commager, Englewood Cliffs, NJ 1966, p. 160.

verses. Here Aeneas, who is neither Pallas nor an authorized sacrificant, claims (explicitly in the former case, implicitly in the latter) to be both:

... "Tunc hinc spoliis indute meorum
eripiari mihi? Pallas te hoc uulnere, Pallas
immolat et poenam scelerato ex sanguine sumit." (12.947-949)

In this emphatically placed extension of the irony motif, the ironic self-misrepresentation that characterizes Virgil's underworld speakers in *Aeneid* 6 characterizes Aeneas as well. While Christian irony, then, may be a means to saving revelation, the *Aeneid's* pagan irony, both for the underworld speakers as well as for Aeneas, correlates with an absence of insight, saving or otherwise.⁴² If I am on a legitimate interpretive track here, Dante would again be "correcting" Virgil: for Dante, irony would not, as for Virgil, characterize the human condition as a whole; rather it would characterize only those who have no access to God's truth.

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42. Cf. M. C. J. Putnam, *Anger, Blindness, and Insight in Virgil's Aeneid*, «Apeiron» 23-4, 1990, pp. 7-40.