

**“LO DISCORRER DI DIO SOVRA QUEST’ACQUE”:  
DANTE, ULYSSES, AND THE CREATION OF THE WORLD  
(PAR. 29.17-21)**

GIACOMO BERCHI, Yale University

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The confrontation between Dante and Ulysses in the *Commedia* has been one of the most frequently discussed topics in Dante Studies. Dante structured his own navigation towards God in parallel with that of Ulysses, which tragically ends with a shipwreck. Critics agree that the last moment of this confrontation occurs when Dante looks down to Earth one last time and sees “il varco / folle d’Ulisse” (*Paradiso* 27.82-3). In this article I argue that Ulysses’ shipwreck is evoked one last time during Beatrice’s narrative of the Creation of the world in *Paradiso* 29. I present my argument in three parts: in the first part, by analyzing the place of the biblical waters above the firmament in the cosmology of the *Commedia*; in the second part, by noting how critics have evoked the figure of Ulysses in their commentaries of the narrative of the Creation without arguing for his presence in the text; in the third and last part, making that claim via a close reading of *Paradiso* 29.17-21. I highlight how a rhyme words pattern connects Beatrice’s narrative of the Creation to Dante’s arrival at the mount of Purgatory and, most importantly, to Ulysses’ shipwreck. Lastly, I argue that this passage in *Paradiso* 29 prompts a vista in retrospect of the kind theorized by Charles Singleton. In the Crystalline sphere, Dante juxtaposes one last time his own navigation with that of Ulysses, evoking the tragic shipwreck of the Greek hero while simultaneously attaining knowledge about the Creation of the world.

Keywords: Ulysses, Crystalline Sphere, Paradise, Creation

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To Piero Boitani, who first brought me on these waters

“...o mar / atrás do mar. O ínvio-obsuro / caos pelaginoso...”  
Haroldo de Campos, *Finismundo – A última viagem*

“... and especially the revisionist Ulysses of *Inferno*, about whom every ‘Dantista’ has had something to say”  
John Freccero, *In Dante’s Wake*

At a certain moment in his cosmic journey, Dante looks down to Earth for the last time. This is what he sees (*Par.* 27.79-87):

Da l’ora ch’io avea guardato prima

i' vidi mosso me per tutto l'arco  
che fa dal mezzo al fine il primo clima;

sì ch'io vedea di là da Gade il varco  
folle d'Ulisse, e di qua presso il lito  
nel qual si fece Europa dolce carco.

E più mi fora scoperto il sito  
di questa aiuola; ma 'l sol procedea  
sotto i mie' piedi un segno e più partito.

Dante then turns his gaze to Beatrice with his "mente innamorata" (88) and finds himself transported to the Primum Mobile or Crystalline sphere, the ninth heaven or "ciel velocissimo" (99). The abovementioned *terzine* depicts Dante's final gaze down to Earth in the poem, mirroring the rewriting of the scene from the *Dream of Scipio* at the end of *Paradiso* 22. In this passage, Dante not only characterizes his synthetic gaze with his usual astronomic precision but also maps geographic space with mythic coordinates. On one hand, we have the Ovidian myth of Zeus' abduction of Europe, on the other hand, the Dantean myth of Ulysses' last journey into the ocean. Dante and Beatrice are on the verge of reaching the Crystalline sphere and then the Empyrean, leaving behind from now on not only time and space but also every earthly concern.

Virtually all critics have recognized the significance of the reference to the "varco / folle" (82-3) as the final moment of confrontation between Dante and Ulysses.<sup>1</sup> It marks the third and last explicit mention of the Greek hero's name in the poem.<sup>2</sup> As is well known, in fact, Dante frames his personal and intellectual journey

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<sup>1</sup> Of the immense bibliography about Ulysses in Dante's work I only recall: Mario Fubini, "Ulisse," in *Enciclopedia Dantesca*, vol. 5 (Rome: Treccani, 1970); Teodolinda Barolini, "Ulysses," in *The Dante Encyclopedia* (New York: Routledge, 2000); Jurij M. Lotman, "Il viaggio di Ulisse nella *Divina Commedia* di Dante," in *Testo e contesto. Semiotica dell'arte e della cultura* (Bari: Laterza, 1980), 81-102; John Freccero, *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1986); Piero Boitani, *The Shadow of Ulysses: Figures of a Myth* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); Maria Corti, "La «favola» di Ulisse: invenzione dantesca?" in *Scritti su Dante e Cavalcanti* (Turin: Einaudi, 2003) 255-83; Gennaro Sasso, *Ulisse e il desiderio* (Rome: Viella, 2011); Bruno Basile, "Canto XXVI. Tragedia di Dante, tragedia di Ulisse," in *Lectura Dantis Romana. Cento canti per cento anni* (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 2013) 823-50.

<sup>2</sup> As Teodolinda Barolini notes in her commentary: "Dante thus names the Greek hero one last time, immediately following the Canto where Adam's sin was defined — in "Ulyssean" code — as the "trapassar del segno" (*Par.* 26.117)," (<https://digitaldante.columbia.edu/dante/divine-comedy/paradiso/paradiso-27/>). The explicit mentions are in fact three, one for each cantica: *Inf.* 26.56, *Purg.* 19.22, and *Par.* 27.83.

in juxtaposition to that of Ulysses, who embodies the tragic possibility that always haunted him. As Jurij Lotman famously stated: “Ulisse è l’originale doppio di Dante.”<sup>3</sup> In this article, I suggest that the concluding stage of the Dante-Ulysses confrontation needs to be repositioned within the text and that confrontation consequently needs to be reevaluated from that final point. This reevaluation is not centered on the level of the authorial endeavor, as analyzed by Teodolinda Barolini,<sup>4</sup> but rather on the level of the pilgrim’s journey in the poem.

The vision of God in *Paradiso* 33 undoubtedly serves as the final *locus* for all the thematic tensions in the poem, including the Dante-Ulysses dynamic. However, I suggest that Dante intended Beatrice’s narrative of the Creation of the world in *Paradiso* 29, set within the Crystalline sphere – the spatiotemporal boundary of the universe – to signify the successful and specular culmination of his journey in contrast to that of Ulysses. The access to the profound mysteries of the created cosmos bestowed upon the Christian pilgrim directly counters the tragedy of the Greek hero. The contemplative gaze at the beginning of the world counters the epistemic shipwreck in the boundless ocean. The connection goes beyond the mere theme, as Dante highlights it through a precise textual strategy. I suggest that this passage in *Paradiso* 29 permits the kind of vista in retrospect theorized many years ago by Charles Singleton as an understanding of overarching patterns of meaning that run through the entire poem.<sup>5</sup> In this specific case, such a vista elucidates the epistemic fulfillment of Dante’s journey in contrast to that of Ulysses.

The article is divided in three parts. In the first part I substantiate my argument by examining the cosmology of the *Commedia*.<sup>6</sup> I show how both Dante and Ulysses are portrayed as characters embarked on sea journeys, respectively over and under the firmament. In the second part, I explore prominent critical interpretations of *Paradiso* 29 to uncover instances where scholars have

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<sup>3</sup> Lotman, *Il viaggio di Ulisse*, 96.

<sup>4</sup> “If the pilgrim learns to be not like Ulysses, the poet is conscious of having to be ever more like him. The *Paradiso*, if it is to exist at all, cannot fail to be transgressive; its poet cannot fail to be a Ulysses, since only a *trapassar del segno* will be able to render the experience of *trasumanar*,” Teodolinda Barolini, *The Undivine Comedy: Detheologizing Dante* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 54.

<sup>5</sup> Charles S. Singleton, “The Vistas in Retrospect,” *Modern Languages Notes* 81 (1966): 55-80.

<sup>6</sup> For an updated bibliography on the topic see the Forum “Dante and Cosmology,” coordinated by T. J. Cachey Jr., A. Pegoretti, and C. Sbordoni in *Dante Studies* 140 (2022): 135-265.

evoked the shadow of Ulysses, following Piero Boitani's critical formula. These critical readings refer to Ulysses without claiming his actual presence in the narrative of the Creation of the world. If Ulysses is there, it is through the lenses of the critic and not the strategy of the poet. In the third and last part I assert the claim of Ulysses' actual presence in the narrative of the Creation of the world via a close reading of three specific passages from the poem which I propose to read sequentially.

### "Queste acque": *The Crystalline Sphere and Genesis*

Dante and Beatrice arrive at the ninth sphere around the latter half of Canto 27 of *Paradiso*. The next two Cantos, both set in this same sphere, present Beatrice's final theological discourses. This spatio-temporal boundary of the created universe serves as the ideal stage for addressing major cosmological and theological topics: the nature of time (27.106-20), the angelical hierarchies surrounding the point of God (28.13-139), the unfolding of the Creation of the world and angels (29.10-48), the angelic rebellion (29.49-66), and an additional reflection on angelic nature (29.67-84, with a coda lamenting the "ciance" the believers are fed with by pastors and theologians).<sup>7</sup>

This is the beginning of the narrative of the Creation of the world (29.13-21):

Non per aver a sé di bene acquisto,  
ch'esser non può, ma perché suo splendore  
potesse, risplendendo, dir 'Subsisto',

in sua eternità di tempo fore,  
fuor d'ogne altro comprender, come i piacque,  
s'aperse in nuovi amor l'eterno amore.

Né prima quasi torpente si giacque;  
ché né prima né poscia procedette  
lo discorrer di Dio sovra quest'acque.

Dante's reinterpretation of the Creation scene rejects any anthropomorphic narrative of the beginning, in contrast to accounts

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<sup>7</sup> As Piero Boitani notes about *Paradiso* 29: "A canto which is absolute, which speaks with one voice alone, that of Beatrice, sweeping down from before the beginning to the earthly world of the fourteenth century and back again to the fullness of heavens," "The Poetry and Poetics of the Creation," in *Dante's Commedia: Theology as Poetry* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 110.

found in *Genesis*, Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, and, later, Milton's *Paradise Lost*. These narratives are characterized by a series of active past tense verbs attributed to a divine figure actively engaged in the act of creation: "and God said... and God saw... and He divided..." (*Gen.* 1:3-4); "A god – and nature, now become benign – / ended this strife... separated... defined... unraveling... assigning... linked" (*Met.* 1.22-25)<sup>8</sup>; "... then founded, then conglobed" (*PL* 7.241). Dante instead, as Boitani suggests, is "rewriting the Hebrew-Christian Genesis and the prologue of John's Gospel in the Greek-Latin-Scholastic language of the Platonists and the Aristotelians, and roundly dismissing any anthropomorphism from the Beginning in favor of metaphysics and the categories of thought."<sup>9</sup> On a similar note, D'Agostino observes that the traditional division of the creation into six days is notably absent in Dante's narrative.<sup>10</sup> For such a division, European epic poetry will have to await the works of later poets like Tasso, Du Bartas, Acevedo and eventually Milton. Nevertheless, in Dante's highly conceptual account where theological truths are elucidated via Neoplatonic images and metaphors, there is one explicit reference to concrete spatiality and narrative. I am referring to line 21: "lo discorrer di Dio sovra quest'acque." The line clearly and unmistakably refers to *Gen.* 1:2: "et spiritus Dei ferebatur super aquas." My focus here is on the significant addition of the demonstrative adjective "queste" to "acque."<sup>11</sup> This adjective ties the cosmology and the narrative of the poem to the tradition of theological commentaries that sought to solve the problem of the waters above the firmament of *Gen.* 1:7. In his comprehensive essay, Bruno Nardi showed how an entire exegetical tradition variously tried to justify the apparent paradox of a mass of water said to be above the furthest reaches of the physical sky, against common sense and Aristotelian physics.<sup>12</sup> More recently, a survey of the tradition has been provided by Dino Boccaletti.<sup>13</sup> What is of

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<sup>8</sup> Allen Mandelbaum (trans.), *The Metamorphoses of Ovid* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1993). The Latin text reads: "Hanc deus et melior litem natura diremit... abscidit... secrevit... evolvit... exemit... ligavit."

<sup>9</sup> Boitani, "The Poetry and Poetics of the Creation," 110.

<sup>10</sup> "Quello che si sembra mancare, come si nota soprattutto nella continuazione del discorso, è ogni riferimento al racconto dell'*Esamerone*, della creazione in sei giorni, o comunque frazionata, scaglionata, a qualunque cosa si possa riferire, nella mente dell'autore biblico, il termine 'giorno'," D'Agostino 869.

<sup>11</sup> Piero Boitani writes in detail about this rewriting. See note 37.

<sup>12</sup> Bruno Nardi, "Lo discorrer di Dio sovra quest'acque," in *Nel mondo di Dante* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2012) 305-13.

<sup>13</sup> Dino Boccaletti, *The Waters Above the Firmament: An Exemplary Case of Faith-Reason Conflict* (New York: Springer, 2020). See also: Adam Rasmussen, *Genesis and Cosmos: Basil and Origen on Genesis 1 and Cosmology* (Leiden: Brill, 2019).

importance here, is that Dante sides with the tradition that saw in the biblical waters above the firmament a reference to the Prime Mover or Crystalline Sphere. This sphere, namely the very heaven he now finds himself in together with Beatrice, as noted by Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi, was interpreted by commentators such as Albert the Great, Bonaventure, and Thomas Aquinas to be substantiated by these waters.<sup>14</sup> In Dante's cosmology, the Prime Mover serves as the nexus between the One and the Many, connecting the Empyrean as God's mind with the created world, as demonstrated by Christian Moevs.<sup>15</sup> Consequently, it provides an apt stage for profound theological discussions about the beginning. Similarly, one could argue that *Gen.* 1:2 serves as a nexus for its readers, bridging the gap between the very beginning and what existed before it, marking the conceptual and imaginative limits of human understanding regarding the origin of the universe: "terram autem erat inanis et vacua et tenebrae super faciem abyssi et spiritus Dei ferebatur super aquas." Dante's insertion of the demonstrative adjective then, represents a rewriting of the line from *Genesis* that merges a Neoplatonic Christian understanding of cosmic Creation and the linearity of biblical narrative: the pilgrim's upwards trajectory beyond the Crystalline sphere (Neoplatonic ascension) reverses the forward (linear) trajectory of the *Genesis* narrative.<sup>16</sup> In the former, the pilgrim (and the reader) moves from the Many to the One, transitioning from the multiplicity of the created world to the fullness of Being of the Empyrean. In the latter, the reader moves from the One to the Many, from "In principio, In the beginning" to the unfolding of Creation and the history of Israel. These two trajectories explicitly meet in Dante's line: "Lo discorrer di Dio sovra quest'acque."

Dante and Beatrice find themselves on the waters, at the spatiotemporal boundary of the created world. The only other figure who has traversed the same waters is God before the Creation of the world. It is crucial to remember that "queste acque" constituting the Crystalline sphere above the firmament were once united

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<sup>14</sup> "[these waters] furono interpretate da molti dottori, tra cui Alberto Magno, Bonaventura e Tommaso, come la sostanza che costituiva il Primo Mobile o cielo Cristallino (detto anche «acqueo», in quanto formato da una materia trasparente e chiara come l'acqua), cielo che appunto avvolge lo Stellato, cioè il firmamento," Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi in Dante, *Paradiso*, (Milan: Mondadori, 2005) 799.

<sup>15</sup> Christian Moevs, *The Metaphysics of Dante's Comedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>16</sup> As well as the primeval emanation from the One to the Many in which Neoplatonic creation consists.

with other waters which are not there, as noted by Nardi.<sup>17</sup> These other waters are none other than the Earth's Ocean and seas, located *below* the firmament. They were originally separated from the others now *above* the firmament during the creation act of the second day. Dante was acutely aware of the theological and cosmological complexities inherent in the biblical account. His late work, the *Questio de aqua et terra*, clearly demonstrates this awareness. In that text, Dante engages in a heated debate concerning the reciprocal relationship between the sphere of the earth and that of the water, particularly addressing the problem of why certain parts of the former emerge above the latter.<sup>18</sup> Dante employs a wide range of concepts of natural philosophy and endeavors to address the issue by considering the influence of the heaven of the fixed stars on the sublunary elements. Dante's thirst for knowledge and his struggle with its limits are most evident here, as they are throughout his works. His reasoning reaches its climax with a deeply felt acknowledgement of the limits of human understanding. Dante argues that the ultimate causes behind certain phenomena of the natural world remain beyond human comprehension. It is at this juncture that Dante references *Gen.* 1:9, the work of the third day, that is when the waters *below* the firmament (or "*quelle acque*," one could say) were gathered in one place, allowing the emergence of the earth. Then follows chapter 22:

Desist then, let men desist from seeking into things that are above them, and let them seek only so far as their faculties allow, that they

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<sup>17</sup> "Ad intendere il pensiero di Dante, ritengo non si debba perder di vista il dimostrativo «queste», che vuol dire che le acque cui s'accenna son vicine a chi parla e a chi ascolta, e lascia intravedere che vi sono altre acque dalle quali sono state distinte," Nardi, «*Lo discorrer di Dio sopra quest'acque*» 307 (italics mine).

<sup>18</sup> In the present article and after the work of Padoan and Freccero among others, I don't question the Dantean paternity of the treatise. I quote from the most recent edition of the text edited by Michele Rinaldi for the *Nuova edizione commentata delle opere di Dante*: D. Alighieri, *Le Opere: Epistole, Egloge, Questio de aqua et terra*, M. Baglio, L. Azzetta, M. Petoletti, M. Rinaldi (eds.) (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 2021), 5.653-93. On the treatise see: Sabrina Ferrara, "Il progetto della *Questio de aqua et terra*: Dante magister," in *La parola dell'esilio. Autore e lettori nelle opere di Dante in esilio*, (Florence: Franco Cesati Editore, 2016), 303-10; Zygmunt Barański, "I segni della creazione: il mistero della *Questio de aqua et terra*," in *Dante e i segni. Saggi per una storia intellettuale di Dante Alighieri*, (Naples: Liguori Editore, 2000), 199-219; Francesco Mazzoni, "Introduzione alla *Questio de aqua et terra*," in Dante Alighieri, *Opere minori*, (Milan: Ricciardi, 1979), 693-737; John Freccero, "Satan's Fall and the "*Questio de aqua et terra*," in *Italica*, 38.2 (1961): 99-115; Bruno Nardi, *La caduta di Lucifero e l'autenticità della «Questio de aqua et terra»*, (Turin: Società Editrice Internazionale, 1959); Giorgio Padoan, "La *Questio de aqua et terra*," in Umberto Bosco (ed.), *Dante nella critica d'oggi. Risultati e prospettive*, (Florence: Le Monnier, 1965), 758-67.

may draw near to things immortal and divine so far as they have power to do so, and things beyond their power let them leave. Let them hear Job's friend saying: "Canst thou understand the ways of God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?." Let them hear the Psalmist saying: "Marvellous is thy knowledge; it has comforted me, and I cannot attain unto it." Let them hear Isaiah saying: "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways"; and he was speaking even in the person of God to man. Let them hear the voice of the Apostle to the Romans: "O the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and His ways past finding out!." And finally let them hear the very voice of the Creator saying: "Whither I go, ye cannot come." And let these words suffice for the inquiry after the truth we have sought.<sup>19</sup>

This passage appears toward the conclusion of a rigorous treatise on natural philosophy, revealing Dante's profound involvement with the boundaries of human understanding. His unquenchable thirst for knowledge meets here with the trust in God's ultimately unknowable plans, as conveyed through biblical passages. The inclusion of numerous biblical quotations introduces a different epistemic dimension when the natural philosopher faces the limits of his own rational endeavors. Dante perceives that the ultimate fate of the individual and the knowledge of the cosmos both adhere to the same mysterious and yet benevolent pattern – God's plan. Notably, the subject under discussion here pertains to the position of the *other* waters, the waters *below* the firmament.

Before the *Questio*, another significant moment in Dante's work combines thirst for knowledge, human nature, the physical world, and the inner limits of human understanding. This moment occurs at the intersection between philosophy and theology, and it is one of his most memorable literary episodes: Ulysses' last voyage narrated in *Inferno* 26. Another episode that unfolds upon the waters. I have just suggested, in the wake of Nardi, Chiavacci

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<sup>19</sup> *A Translation of the Questio de aqua et terra with a Discussion of its Authenticity*, A. C. White (ed.), (Boston: Ginn & Company, 1903), 51-53. The Latin text reads: "Desinant ergo, desinant homines querere que supra eos sunt, et querant usque quo possunt, ut trahant se ad immortalia et divina pro posse, ac maiora se relinquunt! Audiant amicum Iob dicentem: "nunquid vestigia Dei comprehendes et Omnipotentem usque ad perfectionem reperies?"; audient Psalmistam dicentem: "mirabilis facta est scientia tua ex me: confortata est, et non potero ad eam"; audient Ysaïam dicentem: "quam distant celi et terram tantum distant vie mee a viis vestris" – loquebatur equidem in persona Dei ad hominem; audiant vocem Apostoli ad Romanos: "O altitudo divitiarum scientie et sapientie Dei, quam incomprehensibilia iudicia eius et investigabiles vie eius!"; et denique audiant propriam Creatoris vocem dicentis: "quo ego vado vos non potestis venire": et hec sufficient ad inquisitionem intente veritatis."



Leonardi, and Moevs, that the waters of the Crystalline sphere in the poem have to be identified with the waters above the firmament of *Gen.* 1:7. In Beatrice's vast theological discourse on the Creation of the world, these very waters are said to be the ones God was hovering on at the beginning in *Gen.* 1:2. Aporias – the very core of exegesis – abound in the biblical text and also in its rewriting within the Christian Neoplatonic cosmology of the *Commedia*. Regardless of how Dante visually pictured the (simultaneous) beginning of the created world, there has been a primordial moment (even if just conceptual and not temporal) in which the waters *above* and those *below* the firmament were together in a unique mass, partitioned now in the Crystalline sphere and the ocean on Earth.<sup>20</sup> For this reason, it is possible to correct what I have said above: in the *Commedia*, not two, but three characters are shown to have been on what were *originally* the same waters: God before the beginning of the universe, Dante himself (together with Beatrice in the Crystalline sphere), and Ulysses.<sup>21</sup> Not by chance, as John Took has synthesized, the very intellectual presumption Dante is reproaching in the abovementioned passage of the *Questio* can be defined as “impious Ulysseanism.”<sup>22</sup>

In the first part of this article, I have demonstrated how, according to the cosmology presented in the poem, Dante's and Ulysses' paths intersect once more on different parts of the originally same waters. In the following parts, I aim to examine, through a close reading of the text, whether and how Dante utilizes this cosmological observation to construct the narrative tension of the poem itself. In other words, I intend to explore whether Ulysses is in some way present to Dante the pilgrim at the spatiotemporal boundary of the created universe in *Paradiso* 29, and, if so, why.

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<sup>20</sup> The first commentators read these ‘waters’ allegorically. Benvenuto da Imola writes: “*queste acque*, id est, creaturis”; Francesco Buti: “*queste acque*, cioè sopra questa creatura dell’universo”; Anonimo Fiorentino: “*queste acque*, cioè sopra queste creature”; Cristoforo Landino: “*queste acque*, i. sopra queste creature”; etc. The allegorical interpretation that sees the waters of *Gen.* 1:2 as creatures, or rather, as prime matter as seen under the aspect of its potentiality to acquire form as creature, goes back to Augustine of Hippo's interpretation in *On the Literal Meaning of Genesis* 4.13. For all these commentaries I have used The Dante Dartmouth Project: <https://dante.dartmouth.edu>.

<sup>21</sup> Of course, beyond Ulysses, Dante, and God, there are other figures who in the world of the *Commedia* traverse the waters: the souls arriving to Purgatory (cp. the beginning of *Purg.* 2). But their journey is divinely sanctioned, takes place already in the afterlife and, as such, truly “sdegnà li argomenti umani” (*Purg.* 2.31).

<sup>22</sup> John Took, *Dante* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020), 525.

### *The Shadow of Ulysses on the Waters*

When Dante contemplates Earth from above for the last time, as described in the passage at the beginning of this article, he provides very precise spatial coordinates for his celestial journey. He states that during this moment of his second downward gaze, he was "mosso per tutto l'arco / che fa dal mezzo al fine il primo clima" meaning that he moved across the entire arc from the center to the end of the first climate. That is to say, he moved westward from the meridian of Jerusalem to the climate's western extremity. Therefore, his actual position within the Crystalline sphere aligns with the terrestrial coordinates of the meridian of Cadiz – precisely where Ulysses was standing while trespassing the Pillars of Hercules. Dante too, in fact, is about to trespass a boundary. He makes a very careful use of adverbs of place: "sì ch'io veda *di là* da Gade il varco / folle d'Ulisse, e *di qua* presso il lito / nel qual si fece Europa dolce carico" (*Par.* 27.82-4). As Giuseppe Mazzotta writes: "Al pari di Ulisse alle Colonne d'Ercole, che dirompe il perimetro chiuso della geografia tolemaica, Dante si ritrova alla frontiera dello spazio fisico e la supera: entra nella metafisica e viaggia nella mente di Dio."<sup>23</sup> In his analysis of the Greek hero in the poem, Jurij Lotman similarly remarked: "Ulisse viene ricordato per la seconda volta [the first one being the episode of the syren in *Purg.* 19.22-3] quando Dante entra nella costellazione dei Gemelli. Trovandosi nel punto che è esattamente agli antipodi rispetto al luogo del naufragio di Ulisse, Dante conclude il volo verso il meridiano alle colonne d'Ercole e ad altezza infinita ripete il viaggio di Ulisse finché non viene a trovarsi sopra il luogo della sua morte, sul meridiano Sion-Purgatorio. Qui, seguendo l'asse della caduta di Lucifero, che passa attraverso il luogo in cui è naufragata la nave di Ulisse egli compie il volo verso l'Empireo. In questo modo è come se il suo viaggio fosse la continuazione di Ulisse dal momento della morte di questi. Da allora è come se l'uno fosse il doppio dell'altro."<sup>24</sup> Indeed, both the Florentine pilgrim and the Greek hero are on the verge of entering uncharted waters.

Many critics have invoked the shadow of Ulysses in their analysis of the scene set in the Crystalline sphere. Giuseppe Mazzotta, as mentioned earlier, interprets the "varco / folle d'Ulisse" as

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<sup>23</sup> Giuseppe Mazzotta, "La metafisica della Creazione (*Paradiso* XXVII-XXIX)," in *Confine quasi orizzonte. Saggi su Dante* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2014), 97-114:100.

<sup>24</sup> Lotman, *Il viaggio di Ulisse*, 97.

both a farewell to and an identification with the Greek hero.<sup>25</sup> Teodolinda Barolini has demonstrated that this awareness of boundary trespassing was more keenly felt by the poet than by the pilgrim.<sup>26</sup> In another passage, while commenting the Creation narrative in *Paradiso* 29, Barolini observes that “within the metaphoric universe of this poem, God’s moving over these waters, ‘quest’acque’, cannot fail to recall Ulysses’ watery journey, or, therefore, the poet’s.”<sup>27</sup> Here, Barolini briefly alludes to Ulysses only on a metaphorical level, in connection with the waters of the Crystalline. In his *Lectura Dantis Romana* on *Paradiso* 29, Alfonso d’Agostino introduces Ulysses only after connecting the image of God’s spirit hovering over the waters with the astonished Neptune gazing upwards at the shadow of Argo on the sea surface, as depicted in the simile of *Par.* 33.96. This connection is made in conjunction with the myth of Jason and the medieval interpretation of the word *umbra* ‘shadow’ as distorted image of something.<sup>28</sup> This is a fascinating and plausible pairing in which Ulysses inevitably plays an important role. In various ways, all these critical readings incorporate the presence of Ulysses to help us comprehend how Dante conceived, depicted, and experienced the narrative of the Creation of the world in *Paradiso* 29. This crucial counterpart of Dante’s journey is explicitly invoked during the downward gaze before reaching the Crystalline sphere in *Paradiso* 27. Critics sensed that the shadow of Ulysses must be present in an episode of such importance for the poet, the theologian, and the human being – the scene set on the Crystalline sphere at the spatiotemporal boundary of the world. I contend that these critics are right in introducing Ulysses into their hermeneutics because Ulysses is actually conjured within the text itself, and in a distinctly Dantean manner, as I will try to demonstrate in the next part of this article.

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<sup>25</sup> “Evocando la tragica grandezza dell’eroe greco, Dante si congeda da lui e a lui si approssima [...] [with] la coscienza del rischio [that] incombe sullo stesso pellegrino nel momento in cui si sta avventurando ai confini dello spazio fisico e del pensiero, e ne avverte il rischio,” Mazzotta, *La metafisica*, 100

<sup>26</sup> See note 4.

<sup>27</sup> Barolini, *The Undivine Comedy*, 238.

<sup>28</sup> He then concludes: “Si rammenti anche la fine di Ulisse (*Inferno* 26), che, inabissandosi con la sua nave, vede la superficie delle acque richiudersi come al rallentatore sopra il suo capo. Se l’impresa degli argonauti è comparabile a quella del Dante poeta della *Commedia*, possiamo quasi immaginare che il Dante *auctor* sia il Demiurgo che crea come Dio crea l’universo, mentre Nettuno da un lato e Ulisse dall’altro sono le creature: Dio e Dante trascorrono sopra le acque, Nettuno e Ulisse vedono solo l’immagine dal basso metafisico della loro mitica esistenza,” Alfonso D’Agostino, “*Paradiso* 29,” 870.

### *Shipwreck, Repentance, Creation*

To my knowledge, no commentator or critic has ever highlighted the fact that "quest'acque," at the end of line 21, is embedded within a pattern of rhyming words that has a significant precedent in the *Commedia*:

...  
in sua eternità di tempo fore,  
fuor d'ogne altro comprender, **come i piacque**,  
s'aperse in nuovi amor l'eterno amore.

Né prima quasi torpente **si giacque**;  
ché né prima né poscia procedette  
lo discorrer di Dio sovra **quest'acque**.

This pattern of rhyming words consists of: (1) a parenthetical clause; (2) a past-tense verbal form of the second conjugation; (3) the plural substantive 'acque,' accompanied by a demonstrative adjective. There are only two other instances in the poem in which the same pattern of rhyming words recurs: *Inferno* 26 and *Purgatorio* 1. Specifically, in *Inf.* 26.136-42:

Noi ci allegrammo, e tosto tornò in pianto;  
ché de la nova terra un turbo **nacque**  
e percosse del legno il primo canto.

Tre volte il fé girar con **tutte l'acque**;  
a la quarta levar la poppa in suso  
e la propra ire in giù, **com'altrui piacque**,

infin che 'l mar fu sovra noi richiuso.

And *Purg.* 1.130-36:

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

Quivi mi cinse sì **com'altrui piacque**:  
oh meraviglia! ché qual si scelse  
l'umile pianta, cotal **si rinacque**

subitamente là onde l'avelse.

These two passages have frequently been highlighted as textual evidence of how Dante skillfully wove his dialectic with the figure of Ulysses into a fundamental narrative element of the *Commedia*. In her comprehensive study of the figure of Ulysses in the poem, Maria Corti emphasized the significance of Dante's system of auto-citation as a key component of his textual strategy.<sup>29</sup> This is how she comments on the final lines of *Purgatorio* 1: "Come già rilevò Thompson [D. Thompson, *Dante's Epic Journey*, 1974], il modo di proiezione di questi versi su alcuni dell'episodio di Ulisse è chiaro indizio di autocitazione: il segnale più vistoso è la ripetizione dell'enunciato *com'altrui piacque*, indicante l'inattingibilità dei due territori se non in un'esperienza rispettivamente eccezionale a livello sia negativo che positivo; il *piacque* dell'enunciato si collega in *Inf.* XXVI alle rime *acque : nacque*; qui *acque : rinacque*. Dio manda a fondo (v. 141: 'e la prora ire in giù, com'altrui piacque') la nave a punizione di una superba *curiositas*, laddove Dante è cinto con *l'umile pianta* (v. 135), simbolo dell'umiltà della ricerca [...]."<sup>30</sup> Corti follows this pattern of allusions up to the second canto of *Paradiso*, where Dante further engages with the shadow of Ulysses using nautical metaphors and language. Corti's analysis illustrates how, for Dante, Ulysses embodies the perspective of the radical Aristotelians, with possible textual echoes from Boetius of Dacia's *Modi significandi* in Ulysses' "orazion picciola".<sup>31</sup> At the beginning of *Paradiso* 2 Dante urges his readers to accompany him on his sea journey only if they partake in the "pan degli angeli," which is, as Corti paraphrases it, "un sapere confortato dalla Verità teologica e dalla contemplazione."<sup>32</sup> This very theological contemplation reaches its zenith in Beatrice's grand and final theological discourse within the Crystalline sphere, just before penetrating into God's mind – the Empyrean itself. It is surprising that neither Corti nor other critics appear to have included *Par.* 29.17-21 within the context of the rhyming words pattern mentioned above.

Having identified a previously overlooked instance besides the two already known sequences of rhyming words, I now delve into a

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<sup>29</sup> "Dante attribuisce un forte potere ermeneutico al ritorno di unità tematico-formali presso il lettore; egli distribuisce con preciso intento le autocitazioni, questi segnali della memoria interna, perché servano a collegare presso il destinatario della *Commedia* ciò che deve essere collegato e quindi cooperino anche alla lettura allegorica comparata," Corti, "La «favola» di Ulisse," 279-80.

<sup>30</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>31</sup> Cp. Corti, "La «favola» di Ulisse," 278-79 but also Corti, "Tre versioni dell'aristotelismo radicale nella *Commedia*," in *Scritti su Dante e Cavalcanti* 327-47.

<sup>32</sup> Corti, 153.

close reading of these three passages to substantiate my argument regarding the pivotal role of the narrative of the Creation of the world in *Paradiso* 29 within the confrontation between Dante and Ulysses in the *Commedia*.

To begin with, all three passages inherently contribute to the greater numerical pattern embedded in the poem – the omnipresence of the number three with all its narrative and theological implications.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, the figures who pronounce those lines are also three in number: Ulysses, Dante the author, Beatrice. These passages depict three different scenes: a shipwreck, a ritual of repentance, the Creation of the world. For the sake of my analysis, I will refer to these passages numerically, as follows: (1) *Inf.* 26.136–42; (2) *Purg.* 1.130–36; (3) *Par.* 29.13–21.

1. **Shipwreck: *Inf.* 26.136–42.** This moment stands as the most tragic in Ulysses' account of the sea voyage and marks the ending of the canto. The mariners have just glimpsed a towering, dark mountain on the distant horizon and they are filled with joy. However, suddenly, a powerful and tempestuous wind arises ("nacque," 137) from that very mountain and generates a kind of watery whirlpool ("con tutte l'acque," 139), that tragically engulfs the ship. The narrative is both climatic and straightforward, conveyed through brief, descriptive sentences with single verbs that build toward the final moment. The only non-descriptive sentence is the parenthetical clause in line 141 ("com'altrui piacque"), which poignantly encapsulates the hermeneutics of the entire story and Ulysses' destiny.<sup>34</sup> The "altrui," in fact, refers to God himself. Ulysses subtly alludes to a divine agent behind the natural events that led to his shipwreck. The same character whose voice resounded few lines earlier in his brief oration about human nature (note the pattern of rhyming

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<sup>33</sup> Cp. among others: John Freccero, "The Significance of Terza Rima," in *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), 258–71.

<sup>34</sup> I side with the critics that see in Ulysses' last voyage and shipwreck a direct correlation with his infernal condition. Too much is at stake in the way Dante crafts this new and powerful literary myth to think that the whole sea journey has nothing to do with the character's ultimate fate. All the figures Dante meets in the otherworld always shine (darkly or brightly) in front of him with the quintessence of their personality as embodiment of their ultimate destiny, as famously shown by Auerbach.

words: “esperienza,” “semenza,” “canoscenza,” 116, 118, 120), now concludes his narrative precisely where his journey reached its terminus, in the silence of the sea: “infin che ’l mar fu sovra noi richiuso’ (142). Ulysses’ shipwreck represents an epistemic tragedy, and this a tragedy is underscored by the indirect yet explicit mention of a great unnamed entity: “com’altrui piacque” (141). This parenthetical clause serves as the hermeneutical key for the entire scene, a function it shares with the other two passages. Ultimately, it is possible to argue that, for Dante, Ulysses’ shipwreck was the most significant and tragic event to occur on the waters *below* the firmament.

2. **Repentance: Purg. 1.130-36.** These lines mark the conclusion of the liturgical rite of repentance performed by Virgil at the beginning of the journey up the mountain of Purgatory. Cato, the guardian of the second reign, imparts instruction to Virgil and Dante about the liturgical rite that takes place on the shore. Dante the author remarks how that shore is the very desert shore with “sue acque” (131) which have never been visited by anyone who has been able to return. The phrase “com’altrui piacque” (133) alludes to the chain of guides that goes from Virgil, who physically girds the pilgrim with the humble plant, to Cato, who instructs Virgil, and, ultimately, leads to God. The third element, “rinacque” (135), signifies the wonder of witnessing the humble plant miraculously regrowing. In his commentary, Robert Hollander acknowledges the reminiscence of the rhyming words of *Inferno* 26 in these lines, but his analysis concludes there. Notably, there is no reference to *Paradiso* 29 in this chain of allusions.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> “The reminiscence of Ulysses here has had a recent surge of appreciation, but notice of it is as ancient as the commentary of Benvenuto da Imola (followed, as he often was, by John of Serravalle). As Paola Rigo (“Tra ‘maligno’ e ‘sanguigno,’” in her *Memoria classica e memoria biblica in Dante* [Florence: Olschki, 1994]), 48, points out, Benvenuto (comm. to these verses), citing St. Augustine’s opinion (in *De civitate Dei*), says that no one had ever lived at the antipodes who ever returned from there, Benvenuto goes on to suggest that this passage reflects the failed voyage of Ulysses. Some recent writers have also pointed out that the rhyme words in the passage (*diserto, esperto; acque, piacque, rinacque*) are also found in the Ulysses passage (*Inf.* XXVI.98f., XXVI.137f.),” Dante, *Purgatorio*. Eds. J. Hollander, R. Hollander (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 24.

3. **Creation: Par. 29.13-21.** Beatrice has seen Dante's question in God's mind and begins her discourse on the Creation of the world. While God was under no obligation to create the world, he did so as an outpouring of love. The brilliantly direct line "s'aperse in nuovi amor l'eterno amore" (18), denoting the Creation of the angels, concludes a series of clauses that began at line 13. Each clause in this climatic passage carries a profound theological significance, including the final one: "come i piacque" (17), signifying God's absolute freedom in the act of creation. Placed parenthetically within the sentence, this clause exudes a sense of casual lightness, as if it were spoken in everyday conversation. Following line 18, a new section of the discourse begins, marked by a full stop. The next rhyme word is 'si giacque' (19), the past form of the verb 'giacere'. Despite the temporal nature, the sentence challenges the notion that God lay inactive before Creation, for there was neither 'before' nor 'after'; there was *no* time. By negating it, the reflexive '[non] si giacque' (19) implies God's atemporal, if not eternal, activity. The final rhyme word in this sequence is 'acque' in 'quest'acque' (21), already analyzed. These two words ground the theological discourse in the only framework that could potentially transform it into a narrative scene. Yet, ultimately, it remains a theological, conceptual, and Neoplatonic myth, unfolding in the subsequent lines.

Let's begin by examining these passages in sequence and exploring the vista in retrospect (Singleton). I would like to address two potential objections regarding passage (3) that may explain why previous critics have not emphasized the rhyme word pattern I am focusing on here: (a) The two *terzine* are divided by a full stop into two distinct phrases; (b) the second rhyme word, "si giacque" (19), diverges from the linear progression of forms like *nascere* and *rinascere*, which were associated with the whirlpool and the reed in the preceding two *cantiche*. In response to objection (a), I argue that it might not be a substantial objection after all. While passages (1) and (2) can be seen as belonging to the same syntactic unity within Ulysses' and the author's discourses, passage (3) exhibits a stronger thematic unity as it is part of Beatrice's discourse on Creation. Addressing objection (b) allows for a deeper analysis. It is of course true that the verb *giacere* departs from the semantic meaning



of *(ri)nascere*. But if we focus our attention on the parenthetical clause in the sequence, a clearer view will start to emerge: ‘com’altrui piacque’, ‘com’altrui piacque’, ‘come i piacque’. God himself is the direct reference: first, as the obscure cause of a natural phenomenon; then, as the ultimate reference in the chain of authority; finally, as the creator of the world. Nowhere else in the poem does Dante utilize this clause in rhyme.<sup>36</sup> Read vertically, the sequence shows a progression from reproach/hostility to humble obedience/wonder to serene and majestic contemplation. Grammar itself signals this vertical progression by transitioning from the two reiterations of the indefinite pronoun ‘altrui’, in *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*, to the definite archaic pronoun ‘i’ in *Paradiso*. The three sentences, in fact, are centered around God. In the first scene, Ulysses experiences God as Great Unnamed behind his epistemic and physical shipwreck. Dante, in the second scene, experiences God as forgiving father in the liturgy of repentance. In the final scene, Beatrice refers to God’s absolute love and freedom as creator of the world within the grand theological fresco of the Crystalline sphere. We can now observe how the concept of birth is intertwined throughout the past verb sequence: *nascere*, *rinascere*, *giacersi*. In fact, the last verb *giacersi* pertains to the birth of the entire physical world, negating any possible temporal coordinates to frame God’s inaction (‘torpente si giacque’) before the existence of time and space. Not only was God’s love never inactive, but his free act marks the *nascita*, the beginning of everything. The concept of birth then is not semantically explicit but strongly conjured in a thematic and radical way. In conclusion, let’s turn to the third element of the sequence, namely the waters. The ‘waters’ provides the stage for the unfolding of all the three episodes: Ulysses’ shipwreck, Dante’s liturgy of repentance right on the shore, God’s Creation over the abyss of waters. Whenever a poet rewrites lines from the Bible and *Genesis* in particular, every minor change carries major implications. As Piero Boitani has demonstrated, Dante’s rewriting of the line from the Bible in *Par.* 29.21 is three-fold.<sup>37</sup> To Boitani’s

<sup>36</sup> He does twice at the beginning of a line in *Inf.* 34.70 and *Par.* 22.22, referring respectively to Virgil and Beatrice: “com’a lui piacque,” “come a lei piacque.” In *Purg.* 8.53-7 we have the rhyme words: “piacque; tacque; acque.” These “acque” are again referring to the oceanic waters below the firmament: “... quand’è che tu venisti / a piè del monte per le lontane acque?” (56-7).

<sup>37</sup> “In translating the Biblical expression from the Vulgate, Dante introduces three basic changes. In the first place, he qualifies the waters as ‘these’. [...]. Secondly, Dante boldly cuts through centuries of controversy over the expression ‘Spiritus Dei’ (which can mean ‘dreadful wind’, ‘terrible storm’, ‘breath’ or ‘Spirit’ of God), quite simply attributing the action to God himself. Finally, Dante eliminates the neutral ‘ferebatur’

analysis of this line I propose to add a fourth element via the virtually major poetical generator of meaning in the poem that is the rhyme words pattern. Not only in fact does Dante rewrite a line from *Genesis*, but he also makes it rhyme with the highly significant parenthetical clause sealed by 'piacque', exclusively used in the *Commedia* to refer to God alone.

At the height of *Paradiso* 29, Dante is responding to Ulysses' sea narrative in *Inferno* 26. One saw the Creation where the other experienced shipwreck. Indeed, it is true that these waters "già mai non si corse[ro]" (*Par.* 2.7). Only Dante himself and God successfully did. Ulysses tragically failed.

### **Conclusion: "They that go down to the sea in ships"**

In this article, I argue for a reevaluation of the relationship between Dante and Ulysses in the *Commedia*. The core of my argument lies in Dante's intention when he presented Beatrice's narrative of the Creation of the world on the Crystalline sphere in *Paradiso* 29. I contend that Dante meant this narration (also) as an answer to Ulysses' shipwreck in the ocean depicted in *Inferno* 26. This serves as another example of the vistas in retrospect that punctuates the entire poem, a concept theorized by Charles Singleton. Just as Dante the pilgrim looks down/back to Earth before accessing the Crystalline sphere, so Dante the author invites the reader to do the same and reconsider with him Ulysses' shipwreck while being granted access to the mysteries of the Creation of the world.<sup>38</sup>

In the first part of this article, I have demonstrated how, according to the cosmology of the poem and in line with a specific exegetical tradition, the Crystalline sphere and the ocean can be seen as originally part of the same mass of water, as indicated in *Gen.* 1:2, before the division between the waters above and below

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of the Vulgate, rejects the 'incubabat' and the 'fovebat' (the brooding and incubating) that underlie Milton's rendering, neglects the 'volitabat' and the 'irrucebat' (the fluttering and rushing) of the other interpretations, and chooses a word both powerful and delicate, 'discorrer'," Piero Boitani, "*L'acqua che ritorna eguale: Dante's Sublime*," in *The Tragic and the Sublime in Medieval Literature*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 250-78:272. This *discorrer*, Boitani continues, goes back to Ovid's *Fasti* and Virgil's *Aeneid* while also partaking in the semantics of effusion proper of Neoplatonism.

<sup>38</sup> This is not unusual in Dante's practice. Always in *Paradiso* 29, for instance, he writes: "si tacque Beatrice, riguardando / fiso nel punto che m'avea vinto" (8-9). The 'punto' here refers to God. Back in *Inferno* 5, Francesca da Rimini said: "ma solo un punto fu quel che ci vinse" (132), referring to the fatal passage in the chivalric romance. In Dante's poem no lexical choice is without major implications.

the firmament. Dante and Ulysses can both be seen as venturing on these originally united waters, a parallel strengthened by the astronomical coordinates and the explicit mention of the Greek hero in *Par.* 27.83. Ulysses trespasses the threshold into uncharted waters just as Dante trespasses from the Starry sphere to the spatiotemporal boundaries of the created universe. In the second part, I have shown how many critics have evoked the shadow of Ulysses in their analysis of *Paradiso* 29, particularly in reference to line 21: “Lo discorrer di Dio sovra quest’acqua.” This evocation has consistently remained metaphorical or general, without ever being accounted for *in the text*. Subsequently, I have demonstrated through close reading that *Par.* 29.17-21 should be read in conjunction with the only two other passages in the poem that share the same rhyme word pattern: Ulysses’ infernal shipwreck in *Inf.* 26.136-42 and Dante’s liturgy of repentance in *Purg.* 1.130-36. This nearly identical rhyme word pattern, to my knowledge, has gone unnoticed by critics thus far. I propose placing these three passages into a cohesive sequence: *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, *Paradiso*. Ulysses, Dante, God. Shipwreck, Repentance, Creation. This sequence can be read backwards as a vista in retrospect: in the Crystalline sphere, Dante juxtaposes his own navigation one last time with Ulysses’ by evoking the tragic shipwreck of the Greek hero, while, conversely, he has reached knowledge about the Creation of the world. In response to two potential objections, I have argued for Dante’s profound authorial awareness in his reworking of the line from *Genesis* and in his crafting of it to rhyme with the parenthetical clause referring to God exclusively within the poem.<sup>39</sup>

Psalm 106 in the *Vulgate* (107 in the *King James*) portrays the image of sailors at sea: “They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; / These see the works of the Lord,

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<sup>39</sup> As recalled above, Maria Corti has shown how Ulysses’ “orazion picciola,” centered on the nobility of human nature, presents echoes of radical Aristotelians such as Boethius of Dacia. Ulysses’ epistemic shipwreck is also theirs. It was not the purpose of this article to pursue at length this comparison, on the wake of Corti’s essays. But, at the conclusion of my analysis, it is worth recalling that one of the major tenets of this radical readings of Aristotle in the 13<sup>th</sup> century was the belief in the eternity of the world. Having this in mind after what I tried to illustrate in this article, another important aspect of this vista in retrospect emerges. The use of the same rhyme words in Ulysses’ shipwreck and in Beatrice’s narrative of the Creation of the world cannot but point to a direct response by Dante to the radical Aristotelians (and his own possible early doubt): the world had a beginning, as Beatrice is now showing him on *these* waters. On this topic see Richard Dales, *Medieval Discussions of the Eternity of the World*, (Leiden: Brill, 1990), and the updated bibliography that can be found in Boezio di Dacia, *Sull’eternità del mondo, Sui sogni, Sul sommo bene*, L. Bianchi (ed.) (Milan: La vita felice, 2017).

and his wonders in the deep. / For he commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof. / They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths: their soul is melted because of trouble. / They reel to and fro, and stagger like drunken man, and are at their wit's end. / Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses. / He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still. / Then are they glad because they be quiet; so he bringeth them unto their desired haven."<sup>40</sup> Like the sailors of the psalm, both Dante and Ulysses ventured far away, pursuing knowledge through a journey on the sea. Both Dante and Ulysses beheld God's work "and his wonders in the deep." Their wisdom, too, has been shattered – "come i piacque." Though in opposite directions.

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<sup>40</sup> *The Bible: Authorized King James Version with Apocrypha*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). The *Vulgate* reads: "qui descendunt mare in navibus / facientes operationem in aquis multis / ipsi viderunt opera Domini / et mirabilia eius in profundo / dixit et stetit spiritus procellae / et exaltati sunt fluctus eius / ascendunt usque ad abyssos / anima eorum in malis tabescebat / turbati sunt et moti sunt sicut ebrius / et omnis sapientia eorum devorata est / et clamaverunt ad Dominum cum tribularentur / et de necessitatibus eorum eduxit eos / et statuit procellam eius : in auram / et siluerunt fluctus eius et laetati sunt quia siluerunt / et deduxit eos in portum voluntatis eorum," *Biblia sacra iuxta vulgate versione*, (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994).