

The difficulty surrounding the interpretation of the eighth *Bolgia* of Dante's *Inferno*

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ABSTRACT

The final voyage of Ulysses, which is recounted by the Greek hero in the eighth *bolgia*¹ of Dante's *Inferno*, has given rise to much critical debate. An authoritative reading of the episode has been difficult to establish because Ulysses' monologue appears detached from its context. This occurs as a result of the grandeur of the hero, but also because the voyage seems to have very little in common with what else we hear about the sinners of the eighth *bolgia*. Depending on whether one looks at the episode of Ulysses, or the episode of Guido – also a sinner in the eighth *bolgia* – one is likely to come away with entirely different readings of the moral condition of the sinners in this region of Hell.

While I do not propose to offer a precise definition of the sin of Ulysses and Guido (for example, fraudulent counsel or misuse of intellect), I would like to suggest that the only manner in which one can approach the sin of the eighth *bolgia* is through understanding that there is a relationship between the final voyage of Ulysses and the details that we learn elsewhere of the sinners' lives. It is only through a unified reading of the entire episode that it might be properly understood.

Introduction

In the eighth *bolgia* of the eighth circle of his journey through Hell, Dante the Pilgrim meets the mythological figure of Ulysses. The punishment to which Ulysses is subjected is to be enveloped in a flame with his ancient partner, Diomedes. Diomedes says nothing at all in this canto and Ulysses ignores him completely; the episode belongs unmistakably to Ulysses. However, analysis is complicated by two considerations: the content of what Ulysses says to the Pilgrim, and the nature of the sin for which Ulysses is being punished.

In the same *bolgia* as Ulysses, Dante also encounters Guido da Montefeltro, a contemporary military strategist and, latterly, a Franciscan monk. That Ulysses and Guido are in the same division of Hell indicates that they each provide examples of the same sin. However, analysis of the characters of the two figures, and the events that surrounded their lives, seems to suggest that there is little that the two have in

common. In some cases this has led to critics isolating a particular element of the *bolgia* from its context and subsequently drawing conclusions that seem incongruous with what else we know of this division of Hell. It is the purpose of this paper to demonstrate that such a method of analysis hinders a proper understanding of what might be the true meaning of this division of Hell.

Ulysses' Monologue

In *Inferno* XXVI, Ulysses speaks of how, after returning to Ithaca, he made one final voyage beyond the Pillars of Hercules, the ancient markers of the end of the then known world, and which were widely held to be of divine origin and of moral significance in Classical times. For five months, Ulysses and his crew travelled southwards until they caught sight of a mountain, higher than any that Ulysses had ever seen. The geographical pointers given in Ulysses' speech indicate that this is Dante's mountain of Purgatory that had at its peak the Earthly Paradise. Dante is told that, after rejoicing at having seen the mountain, but without having managed to land on its shores, Ulysses and his crew are drowned.

There is no known tradition of Ulysses' final voyage in either classical or medieval sources, and the voyage that he recounts in the *Inferno* appears to be entirely the invention of Dante-Poeta.² Broadly speaking, critics have read the voyage in one of two ways: either as a straightforward example of sin, or as an example of the heroic endeavour of a magnanimous pagan soul.³

Perhaps the two critics who best represent the extent of this division are Nardi and Fubini, respectively. For example, Nardi writes:

Ulisse...personifica in sé la ragione umana insofferente di limiti e ribelle al decreto divino...Nel folle volo d'Ulisse, Dante scorge una continuazione del peccato originale, anzi del peccato degli angeli ribelli ([Nardi 1937](#): 13-14).

This contrasts greatly with Fubini's assessment of the drowning of Ulysses and his crew. He notes that "la catastrofe [...] è insieme il suggello della grandezza dell'eroe e dell'onnipotenza di Dio" ([Fubini 1955](#): 507). The diametrically opposed views of these two critics characterise the division that exists in relation to how the episode of Ulysses should be interpreted. On the one hand, there is the suggestion in Fubini that the voyage is an essentially positive example of human endeavour that ends with what resembles a divine blessing; on the other hand, it is compared, in Nardi's view, with the sin of Lucifer. The two judgments could hardly be further apart.

The critical point of dissension that appears to separate critics on the morality of the voyage is the interpretation of the significance of the Pillars of Hercules. Those who claim that the voyage was sinful, generally hold the view that the Pillars represented a divine prohibition, and to pass beyond them without divine consent indicated an act of rebellion against divine will. Those who suggest that the voyage was an admirable display of courageous endeavour generally believe that the Pillars carried no such importance, and that they were simply a geographical warning, rather than a spiritual guide. It is therefore important for interpreting the morality of the voyage to understand the significance of the Pillars of Hercules.

In Greek mythology, Hercules was a demi-God who was most celebrated for the twelve labours that he undertook at the behest of Eurystheus, King of Mycenae. Each labour was designed to be too onerous to complete, but Hercules continuously demonstrated himself capable of overcoming the challenges presented to him. The

first six labours took place in the Peloponnese, but the final six took him to the ends of the Greek world and beyond, finding an adversary always in Juno. The Pillars of Hercules (though not resulting from the twelve labours) signified the end of the known world. The Pillars were formed by the division of a single mountain into two, forming Mount Abyla and Mount Calpe on either side of the Strait of Gibraltar. Within the context of Ulysses' tale in the *Inferno*, the Pillars of Hercules were understood as a boundary. Ulysses acknowledges this restriction when he states:

quando venimmo a quella foce stretta
 dov' Ercule segnò li suoi riguardi
 acciò che l'uom più oltre non si metta
 (*Inf.* XXVI, 107-109)

However, the critical question is whether the barrier existed to warn against physical danger or moral error within the context of Dante's poem.

Because of his status as a demi-God, Hercules' actions carried more ethical significance than those of an ordinary man, or even those of a hero. Burkert notes that one of the reasons Hercules became an influential spiritual force was that he was "the prototype of the ruler who by virtue of his divine legitimation acts in an irresistible way for the good of mankind" ([Burkert 1985](#): 211). It would follow that the advice that Hercules gives through the placement of the Pillars, must be regarded as morally informed and ethically just. However, the question is whether or not violation of a divine pagan edict was still punishable in the context of a medieval Christian poem and according to Dante.

The regard that the ancients had for Hercules was, to some extent, filtered into the Christian tradition. Padoan notes that it was common among medieval Christians to view Hercules as a prefiguration of Christ and that he was "sempre interpretato come il sapiente (anzi, il filosofo) obbediente al Cielo" ([Padoan 1960](#): 52). However, the fact that Hercules was esteemed by medieval Christians, even to the extent of viewing him as a prefiguration of Christ, is not in itself enough to demonstrate that the significance of the Pillars of Hercules was accepted by Dante as a divine prohibition. Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that the medieval Christian understood the Pillars of Hercules to represent a warning of physical danger, free from any moral consequences. Brunetto [Latini](#), for example, writes of the Pillars of Hercules in his *Livre dou Tresor* [I 122, 15], noting that "plus avant n'avoit point de gent." Brunetto presents the Pillars as marking a point beyond which there were no people; however, he is silent as to any moral consequences that might flow from a journey beyond such a point. The reference is apparently made only to explain the geography of that part of the world and is so clinical that one can reasonably conclude that Latini attached no moral significance to the markers.

A stronger comment on the ethical implications of violating this particular boundary can be found in the *Dittamondo*, written by Fazio degli Uberti, probably in the 1340s. Although it remained unfinished, it has been said that the *Dittamondo* was intended to be "a vast compendium of didactic verse and geographical information modeled upon the *terza rima* of Dante" ([Bondanella and Bondanella 1979](#): 201-2). In Book I, [Fazio](#) writes:

Galizia truovo al fine de la terra;
 truovo la stretta, dove Ercules segna
 che qual passa piú lá il cammin erra
 (*Inf.*, X, 58-60)

With the use of the verb *errare*, *Il Dittamondo* throws the ethical significance of the Pillars into rather ambiguous territory. “*Erra*” could simply mean “wanders” or “roams”, or it could carry the stronger implication of action involving sin and moral error. The context appears to permit either meaning, and perhaps admits both. However, it is still not a clear, explicit recognition of the Pillars as the expression of divine prohibition.

This notwithstanding, it would be unwise to assume that medieval Christians understood the Pillars of Hercules as a warning, devoid of moral overtones. Mariano writes at some length on the Christian interpretation of the Pillars. He notes that the prohibition on returning to the Earthly Paradise had been revealed and made clear through the exile of Adam and Eve in the Book of Genesis. However, amongst ancient peoples, only the Jews had been made aware of the prohibition in this way. God therefore used Hercules and *li suoi riguardi* to warn the rest of humanity that those marked with original sin were not permitted to attempt the passage to the Earthly Paradise (Mariano 1967: 951). Furthermore, Scott observes that “[a] pagan is judged by his attitude towards the god he knew and should have respected” (Scott 1971: 169). That is to say, the violation of a boundary that was understood by the ancient pagans as being a divinely-instituted limitation must be seen as deriving from the same authority as Christian prohibitions and decrees.

The reference that Ulysses makes to the Pillars of Hercules as a limit (“acciò che l’uom più oltre non si metta”) also anticipates a passage from the *Purgatorio* that speaks more explicitly of a divine restriction on human activity. Chiavacci Leonardi writes that the placement of *l’uom* at the centre of the verse, where the stress would fall, denotes that:

Esso vale per il genere umano, o l’ ‘umana gente’, come Dante dirà in un passo ben noto che a questo è strettamente connesso: ‘State contenti, umana gente, al *quia*...’ (Purg. III, 37). Quell’uomo che campeggia nel verso è appunto Ulisse, che tutti li rappresenta, ed egli ne ha piena consapevolezza (Chiavacci Leonardi 1979: 146).

In *Purgatorio* III, we hear Virgil impose a restriction on the knowledge that the living human soul might legitimately seek:

State contenti, umana gente, al *quia*;
ché, se potuto aveste veder tutto,
mestier non era parturir Maria;
e disiar vedeste senza frutto
tai che sarebbe lor disio quietato,
ch’eternalmente è dato lor per lutto.
(Purg. III, 37-42)

The *quia* was understood as the manifestation of something or the observable actuality. This was in contrast with the *propter quid*, which was the essence of something, or the reason for it being so.⁴ The passage from the *Purgatorio* expresses a clear limitation on human knowledge and is clearly of divine origin. If we accept that the episode of Ulysses foreshadows Virgil’s discussion on the divine restriction on human knowledge, then it is not unreasonable to infer that the Pillars of Hercules should be understood as representing divine limitations on the boundaries of human knowledge, remembering that Ulysses’ justification for passing the Pillars of Hercules is to pursue “virtute e canoscenza.”

Ulysses calls his voyage a “folle volo,” or mad flight (*Inf.* XXVI, 125), and Dante echoes this assessment in the *Paradiso* when, looking out on the world, he

states that he could see the “varco / folle d’Ulisse” (*Para.* XXVII, 82-83). The use of *folle* echoes two important occasions for the Pilgrim in the opening stages of his journey. The first of these is in *Inferno* II, when Dante, expressing concern about the legitimacy of his journey, states “temo che la venuta non sia folle” (*Inf.* II, 35). The second important use of the adjective “folle” occurs in *Inferno* VIII when one of the demons outside the Gates of Dis taunts Virgil and Dante and calls out to Virgil to let Dante return alone “per la folle strada” (*Inf.* VIII, 91).⁵ Dante makes it clear that under normal circumstances and without divine approval (which the Pilgrim obviously has), such a venture into a divine realm would be highly inappropriate. This strengthens the case for interpreting the Pillars of Hercules (beyond which lies the Earthly Paradise) as the manifestation of a divine decree, because the transgression of these markers is described as “folle.” The linguistic unity of the term “folle” directs the reader to interpret the episode of Ulysses as an action that was contrary to divine will and authority.

The importance of the Pillars in *Inferno* XXVI is further emphasised by the drama that surrounds this point of the voyage. It is when Ulysses and his crew are at the Pillars that they stop and, with the exception of Ulysses, appear “vecchi e tardi”. The hero exhorts his companions to recall their origins and their humanity (“fatti non foste a viver come bruti”) and their calling. In *Purgatorio* III, Virgil also exhorts humankind to remember their humanity and what they are entitled to know, when he urges “State contenti, umana gente, al *quia*” (37). However, Virgil’s exhortation is used restrictively, whereas Ulysses’ increasingly widening scope is mirrored in the expansive ocean of the unknown world and his quest appears to be entirely unregulated.

Dante believed there to be very definite, divinely imposed restrictions on the human mind’s capacity for divine knowledge. In an episode that is fundamentally concerned with the pursuit of knowledge, the indications given to us imply that the Pillars of Hercules must be seen as a divine prohibition. The emphasis that Dante places on them indicates that they have a significantly high level of importance, worthy of being considered as more than a simple warning without moral significance.

“Perché diede ’l consiglio frodolente”

Unified analysis of the eighth *bolgia* has been difficult to achieve. The cause of this rests largely with the fact that there is no explicit mention of the sin in of the eighth *bolgia* by Dante or Virgil, suggesting the possibility of ambiguity with regard to the definition of the sin. When Virgil explains the physical and moral structure of Hell in *Inferno* XI, he outlines some of the types of fraud that are punished in the *Malebolge*:

onde nel cerchio secondo s’annida
ipocresia, lusinghe e chi affattura,
falsità, ladroneccio e simonia,
ruffian, baratti e simile lordura.

(*Inf.* XI, 57-60)

The sins of the eighth and ninth *bolge* are not specifically listed by Virgil, and are apparently described collectively as “simile lordura”. Later in the poem, the nature of the sin of the ninth *bolgia* is made abundantly clear as Mohamed states explicitly that

the sinners here were “seminator di scandalo e di scisma” (*Inf.* XXVIII, 35). Indeed, the subject matter of the ninth *bolgia* could not allow for any other reasonable interpretation of the nature of these damned souls. The nature of the sin of the eighth *bolgia* is not so clear.

One of the foundation pieces for sound analysis of the sinners in the *Inferno* is identifying correctly the circumstances surrounding their lives, particularly with regard to their sin. The need to identify the precise nature of the sin is obvious. The entire *Commedia* is concerned with the consequences of moral choice, that is, moral judgment. If we fail to understand the moral choice of the individuals concerned, then we find ourselves reading into the poem a moral judgment that has been alienated from its context. In most cases, the task of understanding the moral choice of the sinner is relatively straightforward. No one has ever seriously challenged the conclusion that Paolo and Francesca are in the circle of the lustful, for example, nor that they arrived at such a point on account of their adulterous affair.

Before Virgil summons Ulysses and Diomedes in *Inferno* XXVI, he gives a brief outline of who is enveloped in the flame, noting three particular exploits of these sinners:

e dentro da la lor fiamma si geme
l'agguato del caval che fé la porta
onde uscí de' Romani il gentil seme.
Piangevisi entro l'arte per che, morta,
Deïdamìa ancor si duol d'Achille,
e del Palladio pena vi si porta.

(*Inf.* XXVI, 58-63)

This is all we learn of Ulysses from *Inferno* XXVI, other than what the Greek tells us himself as he speaks of his final voyage. In the subsequent canto, Dante meets Guido da Montefeltro, another sinner in the same section of Hell as Ulysses and Diomedes. Pope Boniface VIII, Dante's arch-enemy, had been in conflict with the Colonna family, who had taken refuge at their stronghold, Palestrina. Attempting to devise a plan to defeat them, Boniface sought advice from Guido, himself a great military strategist. Guido advised Boniface to promise much, but deliver little (“lunga promessa con l'attender corto,” *Inf.* XXVII, 110). Boniface therefore promised the Colonna family an amnesty if they surrendered, but then reneged on the agreement and successfully defeated his enemies.

For most of the seven hundred years of criticism on the *Commedia*, the sin of the eighth *bolgia* has been identified as fraudulent counsel. Certainly, a cursory reading of *Inferno* XXVII appears to present the sin, plain as day, to the reader. Guido, recounting the arrival of the black cherub who snatched his soul away at the moment of death, states:

Francesco venne poi, com' io fu' morto,
per me; ma un d'i neri cherubini
li disse: “Non portar; non mi far torto.
Venir se ne dee giù tra' miei meschini
perché diede 'l consiglio frodolente...”

(*Inf.* XXVII, 112-16)

This passage seems at once to illuminate the entire *bolgia*, for Guido appears to have acknowledged openly to the Pilgrim the reason for his damnation. By implication, it also appears to clarify, retrospectively, the reasons for the damnation of Ulysses, for

the sin of Guido must surely be common to Ulysses and indeed all inhabitants of the eighth *bolgia*. Such a reading renders the two cantos remarkably uncontroversial and easy to understand in terms of their moral message. Yet the temptation to such an easy conclusion is perhaps one of the strongest indications that the sin of the eighth *bolgia* is not simply fraudulent counsel. Dante has devoted two entire cantos to the *bolgia* and each of them has been devoted to one personage only. Furthermore, the canto of Ulysses engages Dante at one of his most creative and sublime moments, as he revises the mythology of one of the greatest figures in Western literature and perhaps succeeds in creating the most impressive and influential account of Ulysses since Homer. Considering the inherent magnitude of importance of these two cantos, in terms of their content and of the stylistic concentration of a whole canto to each figure, should we expect the moral dilemma of the eighth *bolgia* to find its solution so easily in the words of the black cherub? To assume that the problem is so easily identified and solved is inconsistent both with what the density of the text surrounding the episode would suggest and with Dante's profound and often complex presentation of the human condition.

Perhaps the first modern critic who seriously challenged the label of fraudulent counsel for the eighth *bolgia*, and ignited considerable debate, was Anna Hatcher, in 1970. In looking at the portrayal of Ulysses and Guido, she observes the difficulty in fitting their actions neatly within the confines of fraudulent counsel. She notes that only one of the three *colpe* outlined by Virgil involves counselling, namely the persuasion of Achilles to return to the war. The ploy of the Wooden Horse and the theft of the Palladium involve no such action and, whilst the persuasion of Achilles involves counsel, Hatcher sees nothing in it that is intrinsically fraudulent. Hatcher also observes that even if we are to identify fraudulent counsel in the actions of Ulysses (specifically his persuasion of Achilles and, in *Inferno* XXVI, the urging of his men beyond the Pillars of Hercules), then his fraudulent counsel is of quite a different nature from Guido's. Whereas Ulysses counsels fraudulently and deceives his listeners, Guido does not deceive his listener, Boniface, but rather encourages him to use fraud in his attempt to conquer Palestrina ([Hatcher 1970](#): 112-3).

To disallow more than one *type* of fraudulent counsel seems to be a rather restrictive way of analysing the *bolgia* and interpreting how sin can be committed. There is surely more than one way in which one can counsel fraudulently and it is unreasonable to assume that Dante would present a narrow reading of the sin of the eighth *bolgia*, having devoted two entire cantos to its presentation. The impression that is left with the reader by the two episodes is also too immense to suggest that the sin be understood as one that is easily defined, much less straightforward in nature. However, despite arguing in favour of fraudulent counsel, Truscott acknowledges the difficulty in fitting all three *colpe* of Ulysses and Diomedes comfortably within the label of fraudulent counsel:

Of the three crimes [...] only two directly involve counsel to use false promise as a stratagem to serve military ends [...] [T]he third crime, the theft of the Palladium, bears no exact parallel to the other two: it certainly involves stealth, in addition to violence and sacrilege, but not counsel to use false promise ([Truscott 1973](#): 62).

Thompson attempts to fill in the gap that Truscott passes over, by calling the reader to a more precise analysis of the text of the *Inferno*, noting that the verse from *Inferno* XXVI simply says "E del Palladio pena vi si porta" and there is no mention of a theft. As Thompson observes, according to the *Historia destructionis Troiae*, the actual theft was carried out by Antenora. This adds a new dimension to the crime, as "what

Ulysses and Diomedes did, presumably was to counsel Antenor in connection with his fraudulent activities (treason being, after all, one of the ultimate forms of fraud)” (Thompson 1974: 150-1). Furthermore, Truscott does seem to argue a convincing line when he points to the fact that the black cherub is a “superior logician” to Guido da Montefeltro, “because he has no investment in the intrigues of deception and self-deception to which Guido is committed as a moral being” (Truscott 1973: 60). In other words, there is no reason to assume that the black cherub would lie about the reason for Guido’s damnation. It certainly seems difficult to counter the suggestion that the sin is fraudulent counsel when it has been explicitly stated to be so by a reasonably objective figure, for surely the black cherub had no special interest in lying to Guido as he snatched him away to Hell. However, this seemingly neat conclusion falls apart when we consider how we come to hear of the cherub’s pronouncement. As Markulin observes: “We do not actually *hear* the words of the cherub – we hear those words reported by Guido, which is something quite different” (Markulin 1982: 26).

Whatever the subspecies of fraud that is being punished in the eighth *bolgia*, we know that, in general terms, Guido committed some kind of general fraud, that is, intellectual deceit. It would be a gross misunderstanding of the poem to assume that Guido did not still retain that capacity or, better, that inclination to deceive: as Capaneus cries in *Inferno* XIV, “Qual io fui vivo, tal son morto” (XIV, 51). The sinful nature of each sinner remains constant in Hell, as no spiritual improvement is possible. There are numerous instances throughout Guido’s speech that demonstrate a subtlety and complexity which is not consistent with one who simply blurts out the name of the sin for which he is being punished. Guido opens his communication with a solemn vocative, saying “O tu a cu’io drizzo / la voce” (*Inf.* XXVII, 19-20). The solemn vocative was typically used in classical literature to solicit the attention of whomever was addressed. When Guido prepares his listeners for the explanation of how he believed himself to be deceived by Boniface, he says: “e come e *quare*, voglio che m’intenda” (*Inf.* XXVII, 72). Despite being positively identified and contrasted as a modern personage as against the classical Ulysses – Virgil says to Dante: ‘Parla tu; questi è latino’ (*Inf.* XXVII, 33) – nonetheless Guido intersperses his vulgar speech with Latin. The use of the solemn vocative and the use of Latin show a certain degree of linguistic versatility, as well as a high level of education and intellect. Markulin examines Guido’s speech and observes the complex manner in which his speech is made. He observes that:

When Guido comes to making a request, it is couched in terms of extravagant ingratiation. Instead of a simple imperative, “parla meco,” or “resta a parlar meco,” we find, “non t’incresca restare a parlar meco. (Markulin 1982: 28)

Guido’s speech reveals him to be “verbose and circuitous,” displaying a “preference for cautious insinuation and discreetly worked assumption as opposed to the direct statement of fact” (Markulin 1982: 28-9). The complex style of Guido’s language also corresponds with his own highly elusive manner, even to the point that he attempts to avoid blame for his own damnation, saying:

e certo il creder mio venìa intero,
se non fosse il gran prete, a cui mal prenda!,
che mi rimise ne le prime colpe

(*Inf.* XXVII, 69-71)

Yet Guido is certainly not so innocent and victimised as he would claim to be. By the very fact that he is condemned to Hell – and to one of the nethermost points at that –

he cannot be viewed in such a favourable light as to be considered simply as a victim of another man's malevolence. Can we therefore trust such a slippery, wily figure – one whose sins “non furon leonine, ma di volpe” (*Inf.* XXVII, 75) – when he says that the black cherub took him away “perché diede ’l consiglio frodolente”? At the very least, our suspicions should be raised and when we consider the lack of concrete evidence elsewhere in the *bolgia* to support the label of fraudulent counsel, we should begin to have serious doubts.

Conclusion

The relevance of Ulysses' final voyage for an interpretation of the sin in this *bolgia* has been dismissed too often as an artistic diversion on Dante's part, or given exaggerated significance and accorded greater importance as an indicator of moral culpability than its context would seem to permit. At any rate, it is often detached from the rest of the eighth *bolgia* and analysed separately, without due reference to the other details that we learn of Ulysses, Diomedes and Guido.

The presentation of the eighth *bolgia* is certainly complex; the various particulars that we learn of the lives of the sinners do not seem to show that they have a great deal in common. The beauty and grandeur of the final voyage, together with the familiarity of the figure and of the adventures of Ulysses gained from sources other than Dante, tempt the reader to consider the final voyage in isolation from the text that surrounds it. However, regardless of how forceful a particular episode of Dante's poetry might be, it must be read in terms of, indeed subordinated to, the higher aims of Dante's sacred poem. Although Ulysses is an imposing, heroic figure, and Guido seems somewhat more mercenary and certainly less stoic than the Greek, nonetheless they are both in Hell and that is what is important.

The nature of the sin for which these figures are being punished is not so easily resolved; from the evidence produced the traditional label of fraudulent counsel appears to be inadequate. Both Ulysses and Guido are highly articulate, and fraudulent counsel might form a component of the sin, but it cannot be said to be a precise and absolute definition. A comprehensive understanding of the nature of the sin of the eighth *bolgia* must rest on an understanding of the relationship between each of its elements. There are many features that are common to the episodes of Ulysses and Guido: both characters were men of very high intellectual capacity, leaders and able to command great influence over those whom they advised. Furthermore, the stories that they recount in the *Inferno* are strongly related to the use of intellect, especially when it has a material impact on others. Given Dante's view concerning the divine restrictions on the human intellect, we might have a clue to understanding the nature of the sin in this *bolgia*. There certainly would seem to be an emphasis on the separation between human and divine, and this is not undermined by the mention of Boniface in *Inferno* XXVII, and his involvement in worldly politics. However, since there are elements common to both episodes, it stands to reason that a proper reading of the *bolgia* can only be made through an holistic interpretation of all the events that are recounted in this division of Hell.

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NOTES

¹ The eighth circle of Hell is referred to Dante as *Malebolge* (evil pockets) and is divided into ten *bolge* (pockets). The eighth circle is the circle of general fraud, and each *bolgia* houses sinners who are damned because they committed a particular form of fraud.

² The earliest known author of Ulysses, Homer, was not known to Dante; he understood no Greek and translations of Homer were unavailable in Western Europe in the late Middle Ages. The *Odyssey* is not clear about the fate of Ulysses after he returned to Ithaca. Many of the classical Latin writers whom Dante had read, such as Virgil, Cicero and Statius, are also unclear with regard to the hero’s death, and Ulysses appears in texts such as the *Aeneid* and the *Achilleid* sporadically and typically for the purposes of giving a full account of another protagonist’s adventures, or to support a particular moral lesson or argument. The major exception to this is found in Ovid’s *Tristia* (I, i, 105-114) where Ovid informs us that Ulysses was killed by Telegonus, his illegitimate son by the enchantress Circe. Many authors from the medieval tradition follow on from the conclusion reached in the *Tristia*. Among these authors are Dares, Dictys, Benoît Sainte-Maure and Guido delle Colonne.

³ Barolini notes that “the pro-Ulysses group is spearheaded by Fubini” and is supported strongly by Sapegno, Pagliaro and Forti. On the other hand, there is the less unified group “that emphasizes the Greek hero’s sinfulness.” This group includes critics such as Nardi, Padoan and Dolfi. (Barolini 2000: 844).

⁴ Montano notes that when one bears in mind this passage from the *Purgatorio*, one realises that “si riconosce una impossibilità congenita e si ammonisce intorno alla impossibilità di superare certi limiti” (Montano 1956: 143).

⁵ Logan observes that in each case, the term *folle* is used with “reference to Dante’s own incursion into the infernal regions” (Logan 1964: 41).