



“Sinners and Saints in Dante’s *Commedia*”

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Recapitulation of Week One

- Dante is the father of Italian, though not the inventor of Italian, nor is he the first Italian poet. He is part of a “fourth wave” of Italian poets ([1] the first Italian poets write in Old Occitan, [2] Sicilian poets at the court of Federico II, [3] *siculo-toscani* and Bolognesi in the Communes of northern Italy, [4] Dante & Company])
- Dante writes the *Comedy* while in exile and amidst a fractured and divisive political background
- both Liberal Italy and the Church claim Dante
- Italy’s literary unification precedes and perhaps supercedes its political unification (1861)
- The Church calls Dante “ours” (Pope Paul VI, Pope Benedict XV) despite Dante’s willingness to condemn popes and others to hell in the *Comedy*, and despite Dante’s argument, in the *De monarchia*, that the pope ought to concentrate on being Christ’s vicar on earth (“the two suns [Emperor and Pope]”)
- the *Comedy* presents a unified cosmos, consisting of “death, love, and God” that ends with God himself, who has “bound the universe in a single volume” (see also *Letter to Cangrande*)
- the *Inferno* is not enough - we must read on through *Purgatory* and *Paradise*
- “From the abyss of crimes punished, through the serene realms where human spirits purify themselves, toward the arduous summits of perfection, to which a multiplicity of ways lead to holiness and splendor, there are those who model the many different forms that holiness takes -- panegyrics woven for St. Francis, St. Dominic, St. Peter Damian, St. Benedict of Norcia, St. Romuald, St. Bernard -- all rising toward a summit.” (*motu proprio* of Pope Paul VI, 1965, VII centenary of Dante’s birth)

Recapitulation of Week Two

- the formal structure of the *Commedia* (canti, canticles, *terza rima*, hendacasyllables)
- The division and circles of *Inferno*
- Dante's careful attention to each word, each phoneme in the poem
- “Vertical readings”
- Description of sinners and Hell in *Inferno*
- *Inferno* 1 and 2: prologue, invocation, meeting with Virgil
- *Inferno* 3: the first sinners (neutrals)
- *Inferno* 5: Francesca and Paolo
- The first saints of Hell (St. Paul, St. Lucy)
 - “Io non Enea, io non Paolo sono”, he says (*Inferno* 2.32) (‘I am not Aeneas, nor am I Paul.’)
 - [Beatrice speaks, reported by Virgil to Dante] “She [Mary] summoned Lucy and made this request: / “Your faithful one is now in need of you and I commend him to your care.” / Lucy, the enemy of every cruelty arose and came to where I [Beatrice] sat at venerable Rachel’s side” (*Inferno* 2.97-102)

Ed ecco verso noi venir per nave
un vecchio, bianco per antico pelo,
gridando: “Guai a voi, anime *prave*!
Non isperate mai veder lo cielo:
i’ vegno per menarvi a l’altra riva
ne le tene**bre** etterne, in caldo e ’n gelo.

E tu che se’ costì, anima viva,
pàrtiti da cotesti che son morti”.
Ma poi che vide ch’io non mi partiva,
disse: “Per *altra* via, per *altri* porti
verrai a spiaggia, non qui, per passare:
più lieve legno convien che ti porti”.
(*Inferno* 3.82-93)

And now, coming toward us in a boat,
an old man, his hair white with age, cried out:
‘Woe unto you, you wicked souls,
give up all hope of ever seeing Heaven.
I come to take you to the other shore,
into eternal darkness, into heat and chill.
And you there, you living soul,
move aside from these now dead.’
But when he saw I did not move,
he said: ‘By another way, another port,
not here, you’ll come to shore and cross.’
A lighter ship must carry you.’

Per correr mighor acque alza *le* vele
omai *la* navicella del mio ingegno,
Che lascia dietro a sé mar sì crudele.
(*Purgatorio* 1.1-2)

To run its course through smoother water
The small bark of my wit now hoists its sail
Leaving that cruel sea behind.

Io ritornai da *la* santissima onda rifatto sì
come piante novelle rinovellate di novella
fronda, puro e disposto a salire a *le* stelle.
(*Purg.* 33.142-145)

From those most holy waters
I came away remade, as are new plants
Renewed with new-sprung leaves
Pure and prepared to rise up to the stars.

Inci pma canticca l'poe comedie dante d
his q' s'it m'fens. Que i'catis diu d'legem
Inci pma p'm' nq' p'm' p'm' ad totu opus

Inco el chamu d'nostri m'it
miratua p'una selua ostant
schella diritta ma em finarrita.
E quando adir - quale colà d'una
ella selua selua agia - aspra - forte
chenel pensier rinoua la paura.
Anto camu d'chepochie piu morte
mapetratar tellen chio uiridua
d'oro tellalre cose chio uo scoue.
Io non lo benedire ch'nono m'itua
tanto era p'ua d'isforno aquel punto
chella uenue ma alantona.
Apoi chio f'eu ap' d'un colle giunto
laoue emm'ua quella ualle
chem'ua d'ap'ua ilco: com' punto
Guarda m'itua em' d'leue spalle
u'fuegia del taggi del pianeto
chem'ua uenue al'ua p'ogne calle
Illa fu lap'ua un poco cheta
chenel lago d'elco: m'itua uenue
la notte chio p'ua conuata p'eta
E come quei che cholera affinnata
u'fue fuori del pelago alla rina
finoige all'acqua perigiosa: guata
E osi l'anno mio am'ore fuggua
fuolle an'co: am'itua l'op'allo
cheno l'afro g'ama: p'fona mia
Poi che polio un poco ilcorpo l'allo
m'itua ma p'p'ag'ia d'isferta
f'itua p'ie f'erno f'erno e'itua p'itua b'allo
t'cho quasi al'com'itua tell'eta
una l'ona l'ona: p'festa molto
chen'itua m'itua e'itua m'itua
nom'itua p'itua m'itua al'itua
angi in p'itua m'itua m'itua
ch'io f'itua p'itua p'itua uol'itua

Tempo era tel'p'itua tel'itua
il sol montua su con quelle stelle
che'itua collu: quanto l'amo: diuino.
Eosse d'ap'ua quelle cose belle
f'itua ben'itua spar m'itua ragione
d'itua f'itua la g'itua pelle
Ora tel'itua d'itua tel'itua stagione
m'itua d'itua m'itua m'itua
l'itua che m'itua p'itua d'itua leone
Questi p'itua che con'itua m'itua uenisse
colla tell'itua: con'itua f'itua
f'itua che p'itua che l'itua m'itua
d'itua l'itua che d'itua l'itua
f'itua d'itua d'itua nella sua mag'itua
em'itua genti f'itua m'itua g'itua
Questi m'itua m'itua d'itua g'itua
colla p'itua d'itua d'itua m'itua
ch'io p'itua l'itua m'itua tell'itua
E quale quei che uol'itua m'itua
em'itua nel tempo che p'itua l'itua
d'itua f'itua p'itua p'itua
al'itua la b'itua f'itua p'itua
d'itua m'itua m'itua ap'itua ap'itua
m'itua l'itua l'itua sol t'itua
E m'itua chi m'itua m'itua loco
m'itua ag'itua m'itua m'itua
che p'itua m'itua p'itua f'itua
quanto m'itua collu: m'itua d'itua
m'itua m'itua g'itua all'itua
qu'itua che t'itua ombra: m'itua certo
m'itua m'itua non m'itua m'itua f'itua
m'itua m'itua m'itua f'itua
m'itua m'itua p'itua m'itua
m'itua f'itua m'itua m'itua
m'itua m'itua m'itua m'itua
nel tempo tell'itua m'itua m'itua

The oldest known manuscript of the *Commedia*, [Ashburnham 828](#) (c. 1r). Now held at the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana in Florence. Datable to 1335 to northern Tuscany, probably Pisa or Florence.

The Structure of the *Comedy*: Form as a Reflection of Content

- set in the Jubilee year of 1300 (March 25 or April 8) [likely composed between 1302-1321]
- The language is Dante's (Florentine) Italian, with many neologisms, provençalisms, frenchisms etc
- three canticles, each composed of 33 canti [*Inferno* has 34]
- contains 14,233 verses, almost all of which are in *terzine* (tercets)
- Dante uses *terza-rima* (a method of rhyming by which the second verse of every *terzina* provides the rhyme for the first and third verses of the successive tercet)
- the meter is *endecasillabo* (hendecasyllable), wherein there is a stress on the tenth syllable, which is (usually) the second-to-last syllable. There is another stress on the fourth (*a minore*) or on the sixth (*a maggiore*):
 - Al cor gentil rempaira sempre amore (Guido Guinizzelli)
 - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11
 - Nel mez-zo del cam-min di nos-tra vi-ta (Dante, *Inferno* 1.1)
 - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11
 - Mi ri-tro-vai per u-na sel-va os-cu-ra (Dante, *Inferno* 1.2)
 - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11

- Inferno:

- the *selva oscura* (canti 1, 2)
- Gate of Hell (canto 3)
- Circle One (canto 4, Limbo)
- Circle Two (canto 5, lust)
- Circle Three (canto 6, gluttony)
- Circle Four (canto 7, avarice, prodigality)
- Circle Five (canti 7-8, wrath; canti 8-9, Dis)
- Circle Six (canto 10, heresy)
- Circle Seven (canti 11-17; murder, suicide, blasphemy, sodomy, usury)
- Circle Eight (canti 18-30, fraud, simony, political corruption, theft, fraudulent rhetoric, schism, falsity)
- Circle Nine (canti 32-34, treachery)

**TO CRITICIZE
THE CRITIC
AND OTHER
WRITINGS
BY T.S. ELIOT**

“No verse seems to demand greater literalness in translation than Dante’s, because no poet convinces one more completely that the word he had used is the word he wanted, and that no other will do.”

(T.S. Eliot, “What Dante Means to Me,” 1950)

“May those ladies who aided Amphion
to build the walls of Thebes now aid my verse,
that **the telling be no different from the
fact.**” (*Inferno* 32.10-12)

Ma quelle donne aiutino il mio verso
ch'aiutaro Anfione a chiuder Tebe,
sì che dal fatto il dir non sia diverso.
(*Inferno* 32.10-12)

Dante's metapoetic declaration: *Inferno* 32

S'io avessi le rime aspre e chiocce,
come si converrebbe al tristo buco
sovra 'l qual pontan tutte l'altre rocce,
io premerei di mio concetto il suco
più pienamente; ma perch' io non
l'abbo,

non senza tema a dicer mi conduco;
ché non è impresa da pigliare a gabbo
discriver fondo a tutto l'universo,
né da lingua che chiami mamma o
babbo.

Ma quelle donne aiutino il mio verso
ch'aiutaro Anfione a chiuder Tebe,

Had I the crude and scrannel rhymes to suit
the melancholy hole upon which all
the other circling crags converge and rest,
the juice of my conception would be pressed
more fully; but because I feel their lack,
I bring myself to speak, yet speak in fear;
for it is not a task to take in jest,
to show the base of all the universe —
nor for a tongue that cries out, “mama,” “papa”.
But may those ladies now sustain my verse
who helped Amphion when he walled up Thebes,
so that my tale not differ from the fact.

(*Inf.* 32.1-12)

The appearance of common themes in vertical cantos

Rispuosemi: "Così com'io t'amai
nel *mortal corpo*, così t'amo sciolta:
però m'arresto; ma tu perché vai?".
(*Purgatorio* 2.88-90).

"Even as I loved you in my mortal flesh (**mortal corpo**), he said,
so do I love you freed from it - yes, I will stay.
And you, what takes you on this journey?"
(*Purgatorio* 2.88-90).

Io rispuosi: "Madonna, sì devoto
com'esser posso più, ringrazio lui
lo qual dal *mortal mondo* m' ha remoto.
Ma ditemi: che son li segni bui
di *questo corpo*, che là giuso in terra
fan di Cain favoleggiare altrui?"
(*Paradiso* 2.46-50).

"My Lady, with absolute devotion
I offer thanks to Him
who has removed me from the world of death (**mortal mondo**).
But tell me, what are the dark spots on this body (**questo corpo**)
that make those down on earth repeat their preposterous tales of
Cain?"
(*Paradiso* 2.46-50)

Io ch'era d'ubidir disideroso,
non gliel celai, ma tutto gliel' apersi;
ond' ei levò le ciglia un poco in suso;
poi disse: "Fieramente furo avversi
a me e a miei primi e a mia parte,
sì che per due fiata li dispersi."
"S'ei fur cacciati, ei tornar d'ogne parte,"
rispuos' io lui, "l'una e l'altra fiata;
ma i vostri non appreser ben quell' arte." (*Inferno* 10.43-51)

Noi salavam per una pietra fessa,
che si moveva e d'una e d'altra parte,
sì come l'onda che fugge e s'appressa.
"Quì si conviene usare un poco d'arte,"
cominciò 'l duca mio, "in accostarsi
or quinci, or quindi al lato che si parte." (*Purgatorio* 2.7-12)

Vero è che, come forma non s'accorda
molte fiata a l'intenzion de l'arte,
perch' a risponder la materia è sorda,
così da questo corso si diparte
talor la creatura, c'ha podere
di piegar, così pinta, in altra parte;
e sì come veder si può cadere
foco di nube, sì l'impeto primo
l'atterra torto da falso piacere. (*Paradiso* 1.130-138)

Leva dunque, lettore, a l'alte rote
meco la vista, dritto a quella parte
dove l'un moto e l'altro si percuote;
e lì comincia a vagheggiar ne l'arte
di quel maestro che dentro a sé l'ama,
tanto che mai da lei l'occhio non parte. (*Paradiso* 10.7-12)

I, who desirous of obeying was,
Concealed it not, but all revealed to him;
Whereat he raised his brows a little upward.
Then said he: "Fiercely adverse have they been
To me, and to my fathers, and my party;
So that two several times I scattered them."
"If they were banished, they returned on all sides,"
I answered him, "the first time and the second;
But yours have not acquired that art aright."

We mounted upward through a rifted rock,
which undulated to this side and that,
Even as a wave receding and advancing.
"Here it behoves us use a little art,"
Began my Leader, "to adapt ourselves
Now here, now there, to the receding side."

True is it, that as oftentimes the form
Accords not with the intention of the art,
Because in answering is matter deaf,
So likewise from this course doth deviate
Sometimes the creature, who the power possesses,
Though thus impelled, to swerve some other way,
(In the same wise as one may see the fire
Fall from a cloud,) if the first impetus
Earthward is wrested by some false delight.

Lift up then, Reader, to the lofty wheels
With me thy vision straight unto that part
Where the one motion on the other strikes,
And there begin to contemplate with joy
That Master's art, who in himself so loves it
That never doth his eye depart therefrom.

“The Abyss of Crimes Punished”: Sinners in the Inferno

Inferno 1: Dante has lost his way; he encounters the three beasts; meets Virgil

Inferno 2: Dante is uncertain and fearful; Dante “meets” Beatrice through Virgil; Dante’s hope is renewed

Inferno 3: the (in)famous Gate of Hell; first shades (the ‘neutrals’); the infernal boatman Charon

Inferno 5: Second Circle of Hell (lust); encounter with Minos; ancient shades (Semiramis, Dido, Cleopatra); ‘modern’ shades (Francesca and Paolo)

How does Dante describe sinners and Hell?

1. ...*Loco eterno* / ove udirai le disparate strida, / vedrai *li antichi spiriti dolenti*, / ch'a la seconda morte ciascuna grida" (*Inferno* 1.114-117)

(‘...Through an eternal place / where you shall hear despairing cries / and see those ancient souls in pain / as they bewail their second death’)

1. E io a lui: “Poeta, io ti richieggo..../che tu mi meni là dov’or dicesti, / sì ch’io veggia la porta di San Pietro / e coloro cui tu fai cotanti *mesti*.” (*Inf.* 1.130, 133-135)

(‘And I answered: “Poet, I entreat you..../lead me to the realms you’ve just described / that I may see St. Peter’s gate / and those you tell me are so sorrowful.”’)

1. “Ma dimmi la cagion che non ti guardi / de lo scender qua *giuso in questo centro* / de *l’ampio loco* ove tornar tu ardi.” (*Inferno* 2.82-84)

(‘But tell me why you do not hesitate to descend into the center of the earth from the unbounded space you long for?’)

1. Intra per *lo cammino alto* e *silvestro*. (*Inf.* 2.142)
(I entered on the deep and savage way.)

How does Dante describe sinners and Hell?

- “Città dolente” (‘city of woe’) (*Inferno* 3.1)
- “Eterno dolore” (‘eternal pain’) (*Inferno* 3.2)
- “Perduta gente” (‘lost people’) (*Inferno* 3.3)
- “Le genti dolorose” (‘miserable sinners’) (*Inferno* 3.17)
- “L’anime triste” (‘wretched souls’) (*Inferno* 3.35)
- “Misericordia e giustizia li sdegna” (‘mercy and justice hold [sinners] in contempt’) (*Inferno* 3.50)
- “Sciagurati” (‘wretches’) (*Inferno* 3.64)
- “Anime prave” (‘wicked souls’) (*Inferno* 3.84)
- “Tenebre etterne” (‘eternal darkness’) (*Inferno* 3.87)

Inferno 1 and 2

1. “the realms [Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise] [he] has just described.” (*Inferno* 1)
2. “I am made such”, says she to Virgil, “by God’s grace / that *your affliction* does not touch, nor can these fires assail me” (*Inferno* 2. 91-93).
3. “not rebellious and not faithful to God, who held themselves apart” (*Inf.* 3.38-39).
4. “Io non Enea, io non Paolo sono”, he says (*Inferno* 2.32). ‘I am not Aeneas, nor am I Paul.
5. “holy Rome and her dominion” (v. 21); the journey of Virgil’s protagonist “prepared the Papal mantle” (v. 27). (*Inf.* 2)
6. “‘If,’ says Virgil to Dante, ‘I have rightly understood your words, your spirit is assailed by cowardice’” (vv. 43-45). The Latin poet attempts to allay Dante’s fears; he recounts how he was called by Beatrice; she in turn relays that it was St. Lucy, through the intercession of the Virgin Mary, who requested that Beatrice “help the one, Dante, who loved you so that for your sake he left the vulgar herd” (*Inferno* II, v. 105).
7. What are you waiting for?,” asks Virgil. “Why, why do you delay? Why do you let such cowardice rule your heart? Why are you not more spirited and sure, when three such blessed ladies care for you in Heaven’s court?” (vv. 121-125)

Inferno 2

“And as one who unwills what he has willed, / changing his intent on second thought / so that he quite gives over what he has begun, / such a man was I on that dark slope.” (*Inferno* 2.37-42)

From his initial doubts and cowardice, Dante is reinvigorated, buoyed, by Virgil’s account of Beatrice’s comforting words. His second thoughts are countered by the radiant sun that is Beatrice’s speech: “As little flowers, bent and closed / with chill of night, when the sun / lights them, stand all open on their stems, / such, in my failing strength, did I become” (vv. 127-131). Dante, newly resolute, concludes the second canto with an allusion to the very first verses of the *Comedy*: “Intra per **lo cammino** alto e **silvestro**”: “I entered,” he writes in the final verse of *Inferno* II, “on the deep and savage way”. He uses the Italian adjective, *silvestro*, from the noun *selva*, “wood”, with which he had begun his epic: “Nel mezzo del **cammin** di nostra vita / mi ritrovai per una **selva** oscura.”

Dante's distinction from the sinners of *Inferno* 3

1. “Woe unto you, you wicked souls, / give up all hope of ever seeing heaven. / I come to take you to the other shore, / into eternal darkness, into heat and chill” (*Inferno* 3.84-87).
1. “And you there, living soul, / move aside from these now dead. / / By another way, another port, not here, you’ll come to shore and cross. / A lighter ship must carry you.” (*Inf.* 3.88-93)
1. “removere viventes in hac vita de statu miserie et perducere ad statum felicitatis”),

Inferno 5

1. “[a]s doves, summoned by desire” and “borne by their will to the sweet nest” [vv. 82-84].

1. Poscia ch'io ebbi 'l mio dottore udito
nomar le donne antiche e ' cavalieri,
pietà mi giunse, e fui quasi smarrito. (*Inf.* 5.70-72)

(When I heard my teacher name the ladies / and the knights of old, pity overcame me / and I almost lost my senses.)

1. The pilgrim then hears from Francesca how Love (fantastic anaphora “Amor...Amor...Amor”) has caused them to end up here in Hell (*Inf.* 5.100-108):

Amor, ch'al cor gentil ratto s'apprende,
prese costui de la bella persona
che mi fu tolta; e 'l modo ancor m'offende. 102
Amor, ch'a nullo amato amar perdona,
mi prese del costui piacer sì forte,
che, come vedi, ancor non m'abbandona. 105
Amor condusse noi ad una morte.
Caina attende chi a vita ci spense".
Queste parole da lor ci fuor porte. 108

Inferno 5

1. Quando rispuosi, cominciai: “Oh lasso,
quanti dolci pensier, quanto disio
menò costoro al doloroso passo!”
Poi mi rivolsi a loro e parla' io,
e cominciai: “Francesca, i tuoi martiri
a lagrimar mi fanno tristo e pio. (*Inf.* 5.112-117)

(In answer I replied: “Oh, / how many sweet thoughts, what great desire, / have brought
them to this woeful pass!” / Then I turned to them again to speak / and I began:
“Francesca, your torments make me weep for grief and pity)

1. Mentre che l'uno spirto questo disse,
l'altro piangëa; sì che di pietade
io venni men così com'io morisse.
E caddi come corpo morto cade. (*Inf.* 5.139-142)

(While the one spirit said this / the other wept, so that for pity / I swooned as if in death. / And down I
fell as a dead body falls.)



Primo Levi, *Se questo è un uomo*, and Dante



Primo Levi, *Se questo è un uomo*, and Dante

“The journey did not last more than twenty minutes. Then the lorry stopped, and we saw a large door, **and above it a sign, brightly illuminated (its memory still strikes me in my dreams): *Arbeit Macht Frei*, work gives freedom...We have a terrible thirst...This is hell. Today, in our times, hell must be like this**” (p. 22).

“The confusion of languages is a fundamental component of the manner of living here; one is surrounded by a perpetual Babel, in which everyone shouts orders and threats in languages never heard before, and woe betide whoever fails to grasp the meaning. No one has time here, no one has patience, no one listens to you; we latest arrivals instinctively collect in the corners, against the walls, afraid of being beaten” (p. 38).

“One cannot hear the music well from Ka-Be. The beating of the big drums and the cymbals reach us continuously and monotonously, but on this weft the musical phrases weave a pattern only intermittently, according to the caprices of the wind. We all look at each other from our beds, **because we all feel that this music is infernal**” (p. 50).

THROUGH ME THE WAY TO THE CITY OF WOE,
THROUGH ME THE WAY TO EVERLASTING PAIN,
THROUGH ME THE WAY AMONG THE LOST.
JUSTICE MOVED MY MAKER ON HIGH.

[...]

ABANDON ALL HOPE, YOU WHO ENTER HERE.

10 **These words, dark in hue, I saw inscribed
over an archway.** And then I said:

‘Master, for me their meaning is hard.’

and he, as one who understood:

‘Here you must banish all distrust,

15 here must all cowardice be slain.

‘We have come to where I said
you would see the miserable sinners
who have lost the good of the intellect.’
and after he had put his hand on mine

20 with a reassuring look that gave me comfort,
he led me toward things unknown to man.

**Now sighs, loud wailing, lamentation
resounded through the air,**

so that I too began to weep.

25 **Unfamiliar tongues, horrendous accents,
words of suffering, cries of rage, voices
loud and faint, the sound of slapping hands –
all these made a tumult,** always whirling
in that black and timeless air,

30 as sand is swirled in a whirlwind. (*Inferno* 3.1-30)

Primo Levi, *Se questo è un uomo*, and Dante

3. “[T]he Lager was a great machine to reduce us to beasts, we must not become beasts” (p. 41).

“We are only tired beasts” (p. 44).

“If Jean is intelligent he will understand. He *will* understand – today I feel capable of so much” (p. 112)

“Here, listen Pikolo, open your ears and your mind, you have to understand, for my sake:

“Think of your breed; for brutish ignorance
Your mettle was not made; you were made men,
To follow after knowledge and excellence’
(from *Inf.* 26.118-120)

As if I also was hearing it for the first time: **like the blast of a trumpet**, like the voice of God. For a moment I forget who I am and where I am” (p. 113)

Considerate la vostra semenza:
Fatti non foste a viver come bruti
Ma per seguir virtute e canoscenza.

(*Inferno* 26.118-120)

(“Consider how your souls were sown:
You were not made to live like brutes or beasts,
but to follow virtue and knowledge.”)

And my leader said: 'He wakes no more
until angelic trumpets sound
The advent of the hostile power. (*Inferno* 6.94-96)

Inferno 26: Dante's Ulysses

- Opens with another mention of Florence (vv. 1-9)
 - Throughout the *Commedia*, Dante weaves together the political, the contemporary, the ancient, the religious, the secular, the Latin and the vernacular, the mythical and the historical
- Move from the seventh *bolgia* to the eighth (fraudulent rhetoric)
- Exemplary sinners in *Inferno* are a mix of historical personages (think Francesca and Paolo, Ugolino, Ciaccio) and mythological/literary personages (Ulysses/Odysseus here)
- This canto demonstrates again the close association between Hell and an earthly geography (vv. 16-18)
- Fraudulent advice/rhetoric, shrewdness, or fraud in the course of conducting a war? (vv. 58-63)
- Fraudulent rhetoric, false humility, going beyond human limits, Ulysses as a serpent-like tempter of his men (vv. 90-142)

Inferno 26: Dante's Ulysses

Allor mi dolsi, e ora mi ridoglio
quando drizzo la mente a ciò ch'io vidi,
e più lo 'ngegno affreno ch'i' non soglio,
perché non corra che virtù nol guidi;
sì che, se stella bona o miglior cosa
m'ha dato'l ben, ch'io stessi nol m'invidi. (*Inf.* 26.19-24)

I grieved then and now I grieve again
As my thoughts turn to what I saw
And more than is my way, I curb my powers
Lest they run on where virtue fails to guide them
So that, if friendly star or something better still
Has granted me its boon, I don't misuse the gift.

- misuse of the intellect
- misuse of *prudentia*
- prizing of the intellect over the body (the opposite of *Inferno* V where “la ragione sottomettono al talento” [they subordinate reason to desire])
 - in de-emphasizing the corporeality of his men, Ulisse can be accused, plausibly, of assimilating men to angels, who had the need only for the intellect and not the body
- distorted use of language (play on words; in Italian *lingua* = tongue AND language. The *contrappasso* of the sinners here is to be encased in a flame, so that the flames flicker like a “lingua di fuoco”, a “tongue of fire”).
- Transgression of limits that are both human and divine (the “Pillars of Hercules” marked the extreme boundaries of the Roman Empire)

The Sins of Ulysses: Fraud?

'In their flame they mourn the stratagem

Of the horse that made a gateway

Through which the noble seed of Rome came forth.

There they **lament the wiles** for which, in death,

Deidamia mourns Achilles still,

And there they **make amends for the Palladium.**" (*Inf.* 26.58-63)

1. Trojan horse
2. trickery re: Achilles to fight against Troy
3. theft of the Palladium

The last voyage of Ulysses

indi la cima qua e là menando,
come fosse la lingua che parlasse,
gittò voce di fuori e disse: "Quando

mi diparti' da Circe, che sottrasse
me più d'un anno là presso a Gaeta,
prima che si Enëa la nomasse,

né dolcezza di figlio, né la pietà
del vecchio padre, né 'l debito amore
lo qual dovea Penelopè far lieta,

vincer potero dentro a me l'ardore
ch' i' ebbi a divenir del mondo esperto
e de li vizi umani e del valore;

ma misi me per l'alto mare aperto
sol con un legno e con quella compagna
picciola da la qual non fui diserto.

L'un lito e l'altro vidi infin la Spagna,
fin nel Morrocco, e l'isola d' i Sardi,
e l'altre che quel mare intorno bagna.

Io e ' compagni eravam vecchi e tardi
quando venimmo a quella foce stretta
dov' Ercule segnò li suoi riguardi

acció che l'uom più oltre non si metta;
da la man destra mi lasciai Sibilia,
da l'altra già m'avea lasciata Setta.

"O frati," dissi, "che per cento milia
perigli siete giunti a l'occidente,
a questa tanto picciola vigilia

d' i nostri sensi ch' è del rimanente
non vogliate negar l'esperienza,
di retro al sol, del mondo sanza gente.

Then, brandishing its tip this way and that,
as if it were the tongue of fire that spoke,
it brought forth a voice and said: "When I

'took leave of Circe, who for a year and more
beguiled me there, not far from Gaëta,
before Aeneas gave that name to it,

'not tenderness for a son, nor filial duty
toward my aged father, nor the love I owed
Penelope that would have made her glad,

'could overcome the fervor that was mine
to gain experience of the world
and learn about man's vices, and his worth.

'And so I set forth on the open deep
with but a single ship and that handful
of shipmates who had not deserted me.

'One shore and the other I saw as far as Spain,
Morocco—the island of Sardegna,
and other islands set into that sea.

'I and my shipmates had grown old and slow
by the time we reached the narrow strait
where Hercules marked off the limits,

'warning all men to go no farther.
On the right-hand side I left Seville behind,
on the other I had left Ceüta.

"O brothers," I said, "who, in the course
of a hundred thousand perils, at last
have reached the west, to such brief wakefulness

"of our senses as remains to us,
do not deny yourselves the chance to know—
following the sun—the world where no one lives.

Considerate la vostra semenza:
fatti non foste a viver come bruti,
ma per seguir virtute e canoscenza.'

120

Li miei compagni fec' io sì aguti,
con questa orazion picciola, al cammino,
che a pena poscia li avrei ritenuti;

123

e volta nostra poppa nel mattino,
de' remi facemmo ali al folle volo,
sempre acquistando dal lato mancino.

126

Tutte le stelle già de l'altro polo
vedea la notte, e 'l nostro tanto basso,
che non surgëa fuor del marin suolo.

129

Cinque volte raccesso e tante casso
lo lume era di sotto da la luna,
poi che 'ntrati eravam ne l'alto passo,

132

quando n'apparve una montagna, bruna
per la distanza, e parvemi alta tanto
quanto veduta non avëa alcuna.

135

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

138

Tre volte il fê girar con tutte l'acque;
a la quarta levar la poppa in suso
e la prora ire in giù, com' altrui piacque,
infin che 'l mar fu sovra noi richiuso."

142

' "Consider how your souls were sown:
you were not made to live like brutes or beasts,
but to pursue virtue and knowledge."

120

'With this brief speech I had my companions
so ardent for the journey
I could scarce have held them back.

123

'And, having set our stern to sunrise,
in our mad flight we turned our oars to wings,
always gaining on the left.

126

'Now night was gazing on the stars that light
the other pole, the stars of our own so low
they did not rise above the ocean floor.

129

'Five times the light beneath the moon
had been rekindled and as often been put out
since we began our voyage on the deep,

132

'when we could see a mountain, distant,
dark and dim. In my sight it seemed
higher than any I had ever seen.

135

'We rejoiced, but joy soon turned to grief:
for from that unknown land there came
a whirlwind that struck the ship head-on.

138

'Three times it turned her and all the waters
with her. At the fourth our stern reared up,
the prow went down—as pleased Another—
until the sea closed over us.'

142

Inferno 33: Conte Ugolino and the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist

- As universal as is the *Commedia*, geographically and culturally he was nothing if not a man of his time. Dante's peregrinations had begun in 1302 with exile from his beloved Florence, and he never got over it; in one of his Latin letters he would describe himself as "exul inmeritus," an undeserved exile, and on innumerable occasions in the *Comedy* shades identify Dante-character by his Florentine speech and address him as "Tuscan." In *Inf.* 10, Farinata degli Uberti, the leader of the rival Ghibelline faction, memorably flatters Dante the Guelph by singling him out as a compatriot: "Your way of speaking makes it clear / that you are native to that noble city" (*Inf.* 10.25-26). Similarly, Conte Ugolino recognizes Dante as Florentine in *Inferno* 33: Io non so chi tu se' né per che modo / venuto se' qua giù; ma fiorentino / mi sembri veramente quan'io t'odo" (*Inf.* 33.10-12) (I don't know who you are, nor by what means / you have come down here, but when I listen to you speak, / it seems to me you are indeed from Florence)

For Week Four:

- Jacques Le Goff, “The poetic triumph: the *Divina Commedia*,” in *The Birth of Purgatory*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, University of Chicago Press, 1984, pp. 334-355. [\[PDF\]](#)
- Dante, *Purgatory* 1, 9, 30-33