



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

Anthony Nussmeier (University of Dallas)  
Online Course: Archdiocese of San Francisco  
Week Three: *Inferno* 10, 26, 32-34  
9 August 2022

## 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.

Incipit prima cantica l'opere comedie dantes di  
his q' s'it in seculis. Que incipit diuinitate  
Incepit p'm' n'q' p'tem. i' ad totu opus

**C**omeo tel chamun d'nostri uen  
miratua p'una selua oscura  
chella diruta ma em firarrita.  
**E** quando adur quale cosa d'una  
essa selua seluaggia. aspia forte  
che nel pensier rinoua la paura.  
**T**anto camun che poche piu morte  
mappetatar tel ten chio introua  
d'oro tellalre cose chio uo scoue.  
**C**o non lo benedire ch'nono uirtua  
tanto era piu d'isorno a quel punto  
chella uenue ma alantona.  
**A** poi chio sen apie dun colle guinto  
laoue eminaua quella ualle  
chemanica d'ipaua ilcoz com punto  
**G**uarda inuilito emdi lesue spalle  
uelfuegia del taggy del pianeto  
chemena uenue altrui p'ogne calle  
**I**llei fu lapaua un poco cheta  
chenellago delcoz mem durata  
la nocte chio passai con tanta pietà  
**C**ome quei che cholera affannata  
uifito fuoz del pelago alla ruina  
finoige allacqua perigiosa guata  
**C**osi lammo mio tanto faggua  
fuolle anetro arimmar lo passo  
chene l'alto giamai p'fona uita  
**P**oi che polio un poco ilcorpo l'alto  
m'p'chi ma p'piaggia d'iserta  
si bel pie fermo sempre eral puo basso  
tacho quasi alcominciar tellerta  
una lenca leggier. 2 presta molto  
ched'era maculato era ceuto in  
nomi di parti d'ingangi aluoto  
angi in perua tante amio sanuato  
chio fin p'ritenar piu uolte uoto

**T**empo era telpanapio telmatino  
il sol montaua su con quelle stelle  
che in collu quanto lamoz diuino.  
**C**esse dapaua quelle cose belle  
sichabene spar meia ragione  
d'iquella fiera la gicra pelle.  
**O**ra tel tempo ella tolte stagione  
manosi chepaua nommi tesse  
lausta che ma parue dun leone  
**Q**uesti p'p'eta che cona me uenisse  
colla testata con rabbiosa fame  
si che parca che lair me temesse  
**D**una lupa che tu dice uenue  
sembrana chiara nella sua magrea  
emote genti se gia uiuer giame  
**Q**uesta impozie tanto uigamea  
colla paua ch'foca d'isua uita  
chio p'ri lasp'ingia tellaltea  
**C**uale quei che uoluneri aquila  
eguenel tempo che p'ce lofice  
ch'entati suoi pensier piange elatista  
almisce la bestia lunga pace  
che uenemto inuicento apoco apoco  
**C**enar chi rumaua in basso loco  
rimana aglodi mischi offerro  
che plungo silene parca ficeo  
**Q**uanto uidi colui nelgian d'iserto  
miserere d'ime grida allui  
qu'el che tulle ombra homo certo  
risuosemi non homo homo gia fu  
eti parenti mie siron lombardi  
manouani p' patria ambidui  
**A** qui foguio anco che fosse tardi  
emisi arroma socto buono aquillo  
nel tempo teli dei falsi bugardi

italiana

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.  
"Qui 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 si 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  
meo la vista, dritto a quella parte  
dove l'un moto e l'altro si percuote;  
e li 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 i 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*

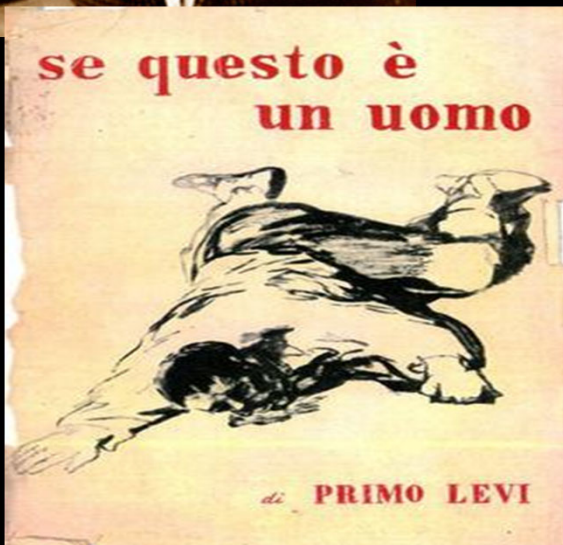
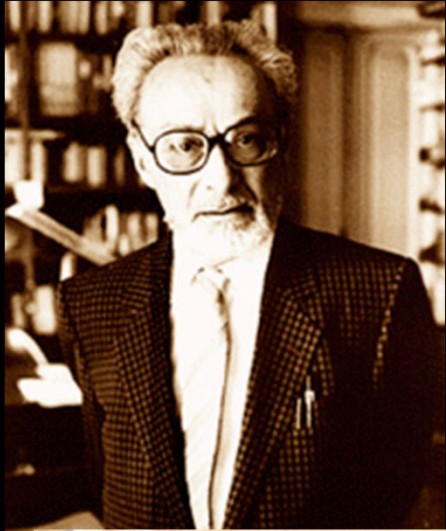
1. Quando rispuosi, cominciai: “Oh lasso,  
quanti dolci pensier, quanto disio  
menò costoro al doloroso passo!”  
Poi mi rivolsi a loro e parla' io,  
e cominciai: “Francesca, i tuoi martiri  
a lagrimar mi fanno tristo e pio. (*Inf.* 5.112-117)

(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

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

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

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

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

105 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.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

117 "'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 fé 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