

**Dante's *Inferno*:
A Discussion Guide**

David Bruce



Dedicated to Rex Kennedy and His Siblings

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I recommend that you read the translation by Mark Musa. The translation by John Ciardi is also very good.

I also recommend the course on Dante's *Divine Comedy* by William R. Cook and Ronald B. Herzman, which is available from the Teaching Company.

• G.K. Chesterton was lecturing on Dante at California's Milbrook Junior College, when a woman who had lost her place in her volume of Dante called out, "Where the hell are we?" The class laughed, but Mr. Chesterton took the interruption with good humor, saying, "I rather like that phrase. Good Catholic expression. A Catholic doesn't live in Milbrook or in England, but *sub specie aeternitatis*, and the question always is, where in hell are we? Or where in heaven are we? Or where in purgatory are we? We live in that spaceless, timeless commonwealth and the question is very important." (Source: John Deedy, *A Book of Catholic Anecdotes*, p. 48.)

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Books Then, Books Now, Books Forever

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Preface

The purpose of this book is educational. I have read, studied, and taught Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and I wish to pass on what I have learned to other people who are interested in studying Dante's *Divine Comedy*. In particular, I think that the readers of this short introduction to Dante's *Divine Comedy* will be bright high school seniors and college first-year students, as well as intelligent adults who simply wish to study *The Divine Comedy* despite not being literature majors.

This book uses a question-and-answer format. It poses and then answers relevant questions about Dante, background information, and *The Divine Comedy*. This book goes through the *Inferno* canto by canto. I recommend that you read the relevant section of the *Inferno*, then read my comments, then go back and re-read the relevant section of the *Inferno*. However, do what works for you. I also do the same thing for the *Purgatory* and the *Paradise* in other discussion guides.

Teachers may find this discussion guide useful. Teachers can have students read cantos from the epic poem, then teachers can ask students selected questions from this discussion guide.

It helps to know something about Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Virgil's *Aeneid*, Greek and Roman mythology, the Bible, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and other works such as Saint Augustine's *Confessions*, but this background reading is not strictly necessary. You have to begin reading great literature somewhere, and Dante's *Divine Comedy* is a good place to start. (Come on in! The water's great! And later you can go and read the *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, *Aeneid*, etc.)

This book uses many short quotations from Mark Musa's translation of *The Divine Comedy* and from John Ciardi's translation of *The Divine Comedy*. If I don't identify the

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Introduction to The Divine Comedy

• Who was Dante Alighieri?

Dante, of course, is the author of *The Divine Comedy*. He was born a Roman Catholic in Florence in 1265 C.E. He died of malaria in Ravenna, Italy, in 1321 (the night of Sept. 13-14). He remains buried in Ravenna, although an empty tomb in Florence is dedicated to him. Dante is known for his ability as a world-class poet, for his interest in politics, and for being exiled from Florence. In a way, he remains exiled from Florence, as his body is not in a tomb in Florence.

• What is *The Divine Comedy* in essence?

The Divine Comedy tells about Dante's imaginative journey through the afterlife. Dante finds himself in a dark wood of error, and his guide, Virgil, the author of the Roman epic *The Aeneid*, takes Dante through the Inferno (Hell), and up the Mountain of Purgatory to the Forest of Eden. There Beatrice, Dante's beloved who died early in life, takes over as Dante's guide, and the two ascend the spheres of Paradise, until finally Dante, with the aid of another guide and of the Virgin Mary, is able to see God face to face. These three parts of Dante's imaginative journey make up the three parts of *The Divine Comedy*: the *Inferno*, the *Purgatorio*, and the *Paradiso*.

In *The Divine Comedy*, Dante tells the reader how to achieve Paradise. In addition, the epic is a love story. A woman takes it upon herself to save Dante.

• How long does the journey in *The Divine Comedy* take?

Considering all the distance that is traveled, it doesn't take long at all. It begins on the night before Good Friday and ends on Easter Wednesday of the year 1300, when Dante was 35 years old (midway through his three score and ten years). The journey takes roughly five and a half days. The

year 1300 is significant other than being the midpoint of Dante's life. In 1300, spiritual repentance and spiritual renewal were major themes of the Catholic Church's first Holy Year.

• **What is the scope of *The Divine Comedy*?**

Herman Melville, author of *Moby Dick*, once said that in order to write a mighty book, an author needs to choose a mighty theme. By choosing the afterlife as his theme, Dante chose a mighty theme. He writes about the Inferno and how sins are punished, about Purgatory and how sins are purged, and about Paradise and how good souls are rewarded. In doing this, he writes about many themes that are important to the people of his time and to the people of our time and to people of any time: religion, God, poetry, politics, etc.

• **Is *The Divine Comedy* universal?**

“Universal” means applicable to anyone, at any time, and anywhere. Yes, *The Divine Comedy* is universal. One need not be a Christian to enjoy and learn from *The Divine Comedy*. All of us sin, and probably most of us regret sinning. Many people can identify with the characters of *The Divine Comedy*. For example, Francesca da Rimini refuses to take responsibility for her actions, instead casting blame on other people. Many of us have done exactly the same thing.

Reading *The Divine Comedy* seriously will take some work. Readers will need to know something about Dante's biography, about the history of his time and previous eras, and about literature. However, *The Divine Comedy* is relevant to our lives today, and this book and its companion volumes can be your guide to Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

• **What are some of the really big issues that are of concern to *The Divine Comedy*?**

One big issue is sin. For example, what are the results of sin?

One big issue is spiritual transformation. For example, how can one purge him- or herself of sin?

One big issue is politics. For example, Dante warns the reader about the dangers of extreme factionalism.

One big issue is poetry. How can poetry help us?

Of course, one really big issue is this: How do I enter Paradise?

• This book is your guide to *The Divine Comedy*. What is the purpose of a guide?

A guide will help you to cover territory safely the first time you go through the territory. However, many guides, including teachers, want to make themselves irrelevant. By reading this book as you read Dante's *Inferno*, you will get a good grasp of the material, but I hope that you continue to read *The Divine Comedy* and the *Inferno* on your own, making it a part of your life and going beyond what is written here. *The Divine Comedy* is one of the Great Books of Western Literature — a book that you can reread with interest and profit each year of your life.

• Briefly, what are the major facts of the biography of Dante the Poet?

Dante was born in 1265 in Florence, Italy. He was successful in both poetry and politics. Early, he fell in love with Beatrice, a woman who died young in 1290. Both Dante and Beatrice married other people. About Beatrice Dante wrote a group of poems that he published in a volume (with commentary) titled *Vita Nuova* (*The New Life*).

Dante was a member of the political group known as the Guelfs, but when the Guelfs split into rival factions, he became a White Guelf. The White Guelfs opposed the Pope and wanted Florence to be free from papal power, while the

Black Guelfs supported the Pope and were willing to do his bidding if he put them in power. Not surprisingly, Pope Boniface VIII supported the Black Guelfs, and he sent troops to Florence who took over the city in November of 1301. We can date Dante's exile from Florence at this time, but he was officially exiled in January of 1302. Dante never returned to Florence.

While in exile, Dante composed his masterpiece: *The Divine Comedy*. He died on Ravenna in 1321 at age 56.

By the way, "Guelf" is sometimes spelled "Guelph." The Italian word can be transliterated into English in these two ways.

• **What does the title *The Divine Comedy* mean?**

Dante called his poem the *Commedia* or *Comedy*. In the 16th century, the word *Divina* or *Divine* was added to the title to show that it was a work rooted in religion.

The Divine Comedy is a "comedy" for two reasons:

1) *The Divine Comedy* was not written in Latin, but was instead written in the "vulgar" language of Italian. Being written in a "vulgar" language, the vernacular, it is written in a language that was regarded as not suited for tragedy.

2) The epic poem has a happy ending.

• **What is the difference between Dante the Pilgrim and Dante the Poet?**

Dante the Pilgrim is different from Dante the Poet. Dante the Pilgrim is a character in *The Divine Comedy*. At the beginning, he is naive and sometimes believes the spin that the sinners in the *Inferno* put on their own stories. However, Dante the Poet is an older, wiser Dante. Dante the Poet has journeyed throughout the *Inferno*, *Purgatory*, and *Paradise*,

and he sees through the stories that the sinners tell in the *Inferno*.

Dante the Poet is the author of *The Divine Comedy*, whose major character is Dante the Pilgrim. Dante the Poet has more knowledge and experience than Dante the Pilgrim.

For example, Dante the Poet knows that he has been exiled from Florence because he is in exile when he writes *The Divine Comedy*. Because the poem is set in 1300, and Dante is not officially exiled until 1302, Dante the Pilgrim does not know at the beginning of the poem that he will be exiled. He will hear the prophecies of his upcoming exile that are made in the *Inferno*, but he will not fully understand that he will be exiled until his ancestor Cacciaguida clearly tells him that in the *Paradise*.

Dante the Poet is also more intelligent than Dante the Pilgrim. Dante the Pilgrim will sometimes be taken in by the spin that sinners in the *Inferno* put on their stories, but Dante the Poet knows that God does not make mistakes. If a sinner is in the Inferno, Dante the Poet knows that the sinner belongs there.

• ***The Divine Comedy* is an allegory. Define “allegory.”**

An allegory has a double meaning. It can be understood on a literal level, but also present is a symbolic level. On the literal level, Dante the Pilgrim travels through the Inferno, Purgatory, and Paradise. On the symbolic level, a human soul who will be saved faces trials, overcomes them, and achieves Paradise.

Allegories have many symbols.

• **What do you need to be in the Afterlife in Dante’s Inferno?**

You must meet three criteria:

- 1) You must be dead.
- 2) You must be dead in 1300 (with a few exceptions where a soul is in the Inferno while a demon occupies the soul's body in the living world).
- 3) You must be an unrepentant sinner. (After all, if you are a dead repentant sinner, you would be found in either Purgatory or Paradise.)

• What does it mean to repent?

To repent your sins means to regret them. Of course, this does not mean regretting being caught for doing them, but regretting the sins themselves.

The sinners Dante will meet in the Inferno are unrepentant sinners. The repentant sinners he will meet in Purgatory treat Dante very much differently from the way the unrepentant sinners he meets in the Inferno treat him.

• What is the geography of Hell? In *The Divine Comedy*, where is Hell located?

Dante did not think that the world was flat. (Educated people of his time did not think the world was flat.) To get to the Inferno, you go down. The story is that Lucifer rebelled against God, was thrown from Paradise to the Earth, and landed on the point of the earth that is opposite to Jerusalem. His landing made the Southern Hemisphere composed of water as the land rushed under the water to hide from him. In addition, when he fell to the center of the Earth the land he displaced formed the Mountain of Purgatory.

Dante and Virgil will climb down to the center of the Earth, where Lucifer is punished, then they will keep climbing up to the other side of the world, where they will climb Mount Purgatory.

- **Explain the three separate kinds of moral failure: incontinence, violence, and fraud.**

Incontinence

Incontinence is not being able to control yourself. For example, you may not be able to control your sexual desire (lust) or your desire for food and drink (gluttony).

Violence

Violence can be directed against yourself (suicide), against God (blasphemy), or against other people (physical violence).

Fraud

Fraud involves the willful use of misrepresentation to deprive another person of his or her rights. For example, one can claim to be able to foretell the future and charge people money to tell them their “future.”

Complex fraud is fraud committed against those to whom one has a special obligation of trust. Sinners who commit complex fraud are traitors of various kinds: e.g., traitors to kin/family, traitors to government, traitors to guests, or traitors to God.

Simple fraud is fraud, but it is not committed against those to whom one has a special obligation of trust.

Of course, sin is the opposite of virtue, and we can look at these kinds of sins as being the opposite of kinds of virtues.

Incontinence is the opposite of moderation.

Violence is the opposite of courage.

Fraud is the opposite of wisdom.

Another classical virtue is Justice, and we will see an unjust city in the *Inferno*.

• **What kinds of characters will we see in *The Divine Comedy*?**

We will see both real characters and fictional characters. Mythological creatures will often be the guards in the *Inferno*.

Some of the characters will be important historically and globally, while others will be important only locally and would in fact be forgotten if they had not been mentioned in the *Inferno*.

• **What do the sinners in the *Inferno* all have in common? Why can't we take what the sinners say at face value?**

They have in common the fact that they are unrepentant. They do not take responsibility for the sins they have committed. Because of that, they will spin their stories and try to put the blame on someone or something else.

When we read the *Inferno*, we must be careful to try to see the whole story. The sinners will **not** tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. (Reading this discussion guide to Dante's *Inferno* or the notes in the translation of the *Inferno* that you are reading can help you to understand when a character is trying to spin you.)

Be aware that many people in the *Inferno* are going to be able to tell a good story, and you may end up thinking — like Dante the Pilgrim sometimes — that a certain sinner does not belong in Hell. However, Dante the Poet realizes that God doesn't make mistakes. Anyone who is in Hell deserves to be in Hell. It's important to closely examine the stories of some persuasive sinners to see what they are leaving out.

• **Why do people sin?**

Two main reasons, perhaps:

1) A lack of will. Often, we know what we ought to do, but we can't bring ourselves to do it. (Everyone who needs to lose 10 pounds knows exactly what to do to lose it: Exercise more and eat less. A student who exercises less than needed and eats more than needed without a good reason such as illness is guilty of the sin of gluttony.)

2) An attractive veneer. Sometimes, sinning can appear to be attractive and to be fun, and thus people are tempted to sin. (Staying up late, getting drunk, and partying can be fun, but if these things prevent a student from attending class, that student is guilty of the sin of sloth.)

• Does God make mistakes? Do these sinners belong in the Inferno?

We must be careful when reading the *Inferno*. Dante the Pilgrim will sympathize with some sinners early in the *Inferno*, and we may be tempted to do exactly the same thing, but God is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent. God does not make mistakes. If a sinner is in the Inferno, the sinner belongs there.

By the way, the difference between *Inferno* and Inferno is that *Inferno* is the title of a book and Inferno is the name of a place. (Similarly, *Hamlet* is the title of a play, and Hamlet is the name of a character in that play.)

Inferno

Chapter 1: “Canto 1: The Dark Wood of Error”

- **What is the time in which Canto 1 is set?**

The time is just before Good Friday, 8 April 1300.

- **Explain the first 12 lines of the *Inferno*. What does Dante say in these lines?**

We learn these things:

1) Dante the Pilgrim is 35 years old. He is “Midway along the journey of our life” (Musa *Inferno* 1.1). The Biblical three score and ten years of an average human lifespan is 70 years, so the halfway point is 35 years.

By the way, (*Inferno* 1.1) means that the line being quoted is line 1 of Canto 1 of the *Inferno*. I will be using Mark Musa’s translation of the *Inferno* and John Ciardi’s translation of the *Inferno* in this book. Remember: If I don’t identify the translator of a passage as John Ciardi, the translator is Mark Musa. The long quotations will mainly be from the translation by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, unless otherwise noted.

2) We learn that Dante the Pilgrim is “in a dark wood” (Musa *Inferno* 1.2), that he has “wandered off from the straight path” (Musa *Inferno* 1.3), and that he has strayed from “the path of truth” (Musa *Inferno* 1.12).

- **Write a character analysis of Dante the Pilgrim as he appears at the beginning of the *Inferno*.**

Dante the Pilgrim in Canto 1 of the *Inferno* is a sinner in trouble. He is disoriented, and he needs help to get himself out of the “dark wood” (Musa *Inferno* 1.1) of error. Fortunately, he will get the help he needs.

We aren't told how Dante gets into the dark wood, but many people get there little by little. It isn't that they commit some great evil, but that one day they wake up and think, *How did I get here? Why am I this kind of person? I didn't mean to be here.*

Sex workers sometimes wonder how they ended up in that profession. Probably very few people make being a sex worker their career of choice.

• Dante attempts to climb up the hill to the light, but three beasts keep him from reaching the light. Allegorically, what does this mean?

Dante the Pilgrim wants to get out of the dark wood, of course, and he attempts to climb to the sun. Because *The Divine Comedy* is an allegory, Dante makes the sun a symbol. Here it can be a symbol of God and of truth and of salvation.

Much critical ink has been used interpreting the symbols of the three beasts: the leopard, the lion, and the wolf. In general, we can say that the three beasts represent sins. They may represent the sins of youth, of middle age, and of old age. On the other hand, they may represent the sins that make up the three major classifications of the Inferno: incontinence, violence, and fraud. Or they can represent lust, pride, and cupidity. What seems certain is that these three animals symbolize sin.

The three animals are taken from Jeremiah 5:6. This is the King James version:

6: Wherefore a lion out of the forest shall slay them, and a wolf of the evenings shall spoil them, a leopard shall watch over their cities: every one that goeth out thence shall be torn in pieces: because their transgressions are many, and their backslidings are increased.

• **Dante tries to reach the light by himself, but he fails. He needs a guide. Dante the Pilgrim's first guide is Virgil. Who is Virgil?**

Virgil, of course, is the author of the *Aeneid*. He is a writing hero for Dante, who praises him highly and says that he learned about poetic style from him:

*“Thou art my master, and my author thou,
Thou art alone the one from whom I took
The beautiful style that has done honor to
me.”*

(Longfellow 1.85-87)

Virgil is also on a mission from God, by way of a mission from Beatrice. Virgil has been sent to guide Dante out of the dark wood and to another guide who can take him further than Virgil can.

Virgil is a symbol of human reason, which is powerful, but which Dante regarded as less powerful than faith. Dante's next guide, Beatrice, who represents faith, will take Dante further along on his journey than Virgil (human reason) can. Dante is aware that Virgil, as a pagan, does not know God:

*And I to him: “Poet, I thee entreat,
By that same God whom thou didst never
know,
So that I may escape this woe and worse,”*

(Longfellow 1.130-132)

Dante, as you would expect, thinks that it is wonderful that his hero, Virgil, is his guide. Although hesitant out of fear, he eventually agrees to go wherever Virgil will lead him.

• **Virgil outlines the three-part journey facing Dante. What are those three parts?**

The three parts of the journey are these:

- 1) The Inferno, where many souls shriek.
- 2) Purgatory, where souls willingly undergo a purifying fire.
- 3) Paradise, where the everlastingly blessed dwell.

• **Canto 1 actually introduces the entire *Divine Comedy*.**

The Divine Comedy is comprised of 100 cantos or songs. The first canto is an introduction to the entire *Divine Comedy*, so we may want to say that the *Inferno* has 33 cantos, as do the *Purgatory* and the *Paradise*.

Numbers are important to Dante. We know of course that three is an important number because it is the number of the Trinity: God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. We see the number three throughout *The Divine Comedy*; for example, Dante writes tercets: stanzas of three lines.

The number ten is another important number. Ten consists of three Trinities plus one Unity. Why does Dante have 100 cantos in his *Divine Comedy*? The number 100 consists of ten times ten.

Chapter 2: “Canto 2: Dante Hesitates”

- **Dante must endure a journey that he likens to a battle. Why does he make that comparison?**

Dante writes that “I, one man alone, / was making ready to endure the battle / of the journey, and of the pity it involved” (*Musa Inferno* 2.3-5).

Of course, the journey through the *Inferno* is difficult, so it can be likened to a battle. In addition, Dante must be on his guard against pitying the sinners, many of whom will attempt to gain his pity by telling him only part of their stories and leaving out whatever makes the sinner look bad. Dante the Pilgrim is still naïve at this point; he needs to learn that God does not make mistakes and that the sinners in the *Inferno* deserve their punishment.

- **Dante the Poet makes an invocation to the Muses. What is an invocation, and who are the Muses?**

The Muses are ancient goddesses of the arts.

In an invocation, a poet asks the Muses for help in singing a song (such as an epic poem). Both Virgil and Homer invoked the Muses in telling their epic poems.

This is how Dante invokes the Muses:

O Muses, O high genius, now assist me!

O memory, that didst write down what I saw,

Here thy nobility shall be manifest!

(*Longfellow* 2.7-9)

• In Canto 2, why does Dante have second thoughts about allowing Virgil to be his guide?

One thing to notice is that Dante has second thoughts here, although eventually, of course, he decides to allow Virgil to be his guide.

We can be sympathetic here. The Inferno is a place where many souls shriek with despair. This is not going to be a pleasant visit to a tourist destination. In fact, at one point later in the Inferno (Canto 11), Dante and Virgil have to rest to allow themselves to become accustomed to the stench that is rising from the lower Circles of the Inferno.

Another thing to notice is that Dante gets help from the outside. God is concerned about Dante, and God allows Virgil and others to guide Dante to salvation.

• Dante the Pilgrim wonders whether his trip to the Inferno will be successful, although both Aeneas and Saint Paul have successfully made trips to the Inferno (Underworld or Hell). Who are Aeneas and Saint Paul, and what were the trips to the Inferno that Dante the Pilgrim is speaking of?

In Canto 2, Dante the Pilgrim mentions a couple of people who have visited the afterlife — people who are (he says) much more worthy than he of the visit.

Aeneas

One is Aeneas, the hero of Virgil's *Aeneid*. Virgil, of course, is Dante's guide throughout the Inferno and most of Purgatory. In Book 6 of the *Aeneid*, Aeneas visits the underworld in order to learn more about his destiny — his deceased father, Anchises, shows him his future descendants, who are Roman heroes. Virgil is a good guide through the Inferno; after all, he has been there before, imaginatively, while writing his *Aeneid*.

St. Paul

The other major visitor to the afterlife is Saint Paul, who supposedly visited the realms of the dead, a journey described in a medieval work titled *Visio Sancti Pauli* (*The Vision of Saint Paul*).

Other Heroes

Many ancient heroes visited the underworld, as described in Greek and Roman mythology. They include Orpheus, Theseus, Hercules, and Odysseus (whose Roman name is Ulysses). See below (Canto 3).

• **Explain who are the three heavenly women who are concerned about Dante.**

The three heavenly women are these:

- 1) Mary, the mother of Christ. People of the Middle Ages regarded Mary as their spiritual mother.
- 2) Saint Lucia, a 3rd-century martyr. Saint Lucia was the patroness of good eyesight. After Beatrice died, Dante strained his eyes with too much crying (according to his book the *Vita Nuova*). Lucia was an early Christian who was persecuted for being a Christian. She was tortured, including being blinded, and eventually killed by being stabbed with a dagger. Note: Her name is pronounced with three syllables, with the stress on the second syllable.
- 3) Beatrice. Dante was in love with Beatrice, although they married other people. She died young, and Dante mourned her greatly.

• **Why is Virgil Dante's guide?**

Dante has three heavenly women looking after him. Beatrice came to Virgil in Limbo to ask him to be Dante's guide.

Beatrice has heard about Dante's troubles from Saint Lucia, who in turn had heard about them from Mary. Virgil is very willing to do Beatrice a favor.

Virgil makes the persuasive point that with three such heavenly women looking after him, Dante should not be afraid to go down into the Inferno. Doing that is a necessary part of his journey.

We can also give a few other reasons why Virgil ought to be Dante's guide through the Inferno:

- In Book 6 of Virgil's *Aeneid*, Aeneas makes a trip to the Underworld. Therefore, Virgil is familiar with the Inferno.
- We will find out in Canto 9 that earlier Virgil journeyed as a soul through the Inferno. The sorceress Erichtho sent him to the bottom of the Inferno to find and bring a soul to her. Once again, Virgil is familiar with the territory.
- In the Middle Ages, Christians believed that Virgil forecast the birth of Christ in his Fourth Eclogue. Historians believe that Virgil was actually writing about the birth of a Roman.

Chapter 3: “Canto 3: The Gate of Hell”

- **At the beginning of Canto 3, we enter Hell.**

In Canto 3, Dante and Virgil go through the gate that leads into the Inferno.

- **Many ancient heroes have visited the Underworld. Name a few, and briefly describe some of their visits to the Underworld.**

Theseus was held captive in a chair of forgetfulness in Hades. Hercules rescued him.

Hercules entered the Underworld as part of his labors. He stole Cerberus, the three-headed dog, and took him up into the living world.

Odysseus entered the Underworld to get information about his journey home from Troy from the prophet Tiresias.

Aeneas visited his father in the Underworld in Book 6 of the *Aeneid*. He was able to see many of his future descendants and many important Romans.

- **What is the meaning of the sign over the entrance to Hell, and who created the sign?**

The sign over the gate of Hell reads:

“Through me the way into the suffering city,
 Through me the way to the eternal pain,
 Through me the way that runs among the lost.
 Justice urged on my high artificer;
 My maker was divine authority,
 The highest wisdom, and the primal love.
 Before me nothing but eternal things were made,

And I endure eternally.

Abandon every hope, ye who enter here.”

(Longfellow 3.1-9)

God, of course, created the sign. God is known for being omnipotent (the Father), for having the highest wisdom (the Son) and for having primal love (the Holy Spirit). We learn that although the Inferno is a place of eternal damnation, it is also a place of justice. The people who enter the Inferno (with the exception of the still-living Dante and a few other heroes from long ago) are doomed to remain there always. (Other exceptions are the people rescued by Christ during the Harrowing of Hell.) The basic meaning of the sign is that unrepentant sinners will forever be punished.

Of course, the sign contains the most famous line in *The Divine Comedy*, a line that is often translated in this way: “ABANDON ALL HOPE, ALL YOU WHO ENTER.”

• What is Dante’s reaction to the words on the sign? Is his reaction appropriate?

Dante is understandably afraid to enter the Inferno; however, his reaction to the sign is inappropriate. He says, “these words I see are cruel” (Musa *Inferno* 3.12).

We know that God is just, and we know that the Inferno is a place of just punishment. However, at this point Dante the Pilgrim does not know that, although Dante the Poet knows that very well. At this time, Dante the Pilgrim is naïve.

For Dante, punishment in Hell is eternal. The sinners we see in the Inferno will never get out of the Inferno, thus the sign above the gate to Hell refers to “ETERNAL GRIEF” (Musa *Inferno* 3.2).

John Ciardi writes, “The souls of the damned are not permitted to repent, for repentance is a divine grace” (Ciardi, *The Divine Comedy*, 36).

• The souls punished in the Inferno have “lost the good of intellect” (Musa *Inferno* 3.18). What does that mean?

According to mythology, human beings have eaten the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, and we can tell the difference between good and evil. This is something that animals cannot do. A dog does not feel guilty if it eats the food of another dog. Human beings ought to use their intellect to determine the right thing to do and then to do it. The unrepentant sinners being punished in the Inferno did not use their intellect to do these things.

• Which souls can be found in the Vestibule of Hell? What is a Vestibule, and why is the punishment of the souls found there appropriate?

A Vestibule is a passage between the door and the interior of a building. Even before we reach the first Circle of Hell, we see souls being punished.

The punishments of the Inferno begin even before Hell Proper is reached. Outside Hell Proper are the souls of those who never took a stand in life. While living, they were neither for good nor for evil, and now that they are dead, neither Heaven nor Hell wants them. In life, they did not follow a banner; in death, they follow a banner endlessly, running after it as it travels here and here, never remaining in one place. Similarly, in life, these noncommitted souls never staked out a firm position. In life, these souls never felt deeply, either for good or for evil. Now, these souls do feel deeply, as wasps and hornets bite them. They bleed from the bites, and maggots eat the pus that flows to the ground. This punishment is fitting. What these souls avoided doing in life, they now do in death. In addition, these souls did no lasting good

or harm on Earth, and they will be not be remembered on Earth. In the *Inferno*, Dante mentions none of them by name.

The uncommitted who are punished here include angels who fought neither for God nor for Lucifer when Lucifer rebelled against God.

Sometimes people say that Dante put the morally neutral in the deepest pit of Hell. That is not true. Not even Hell wanted them, so they are not even in a Circle of Hell.

One thing to learn here is that Dante is letting us know that choosing not to make a choice is in itself a choice. These people chose not to choose to be committed to good.

John Ciardi sees the human beings here as Opportunists. They did not act either for good or for evil; they acted only for themselves (Ciardi, *The Divine Comedy*, 30).

In addition, some commentators believe that these souls are the Slothful. Because the sin of Sloth is purged on the Mountain of Purgatory, the sin of Sloth ought to be punished in (or near) Hell. The Slothful may be punished here in the Vestibule of Hell, or the Slothful may be punished in Circle 5. Many commentators believe that the Sullen are punished in Circle 5, but Mark Musa believes that the sinners punished there are the Slothful. The Angry or Wrathful are also punished in Circle 5, and since Sullenness is a form of bottled-up anger, perhaps the Sullen are punished in Circle 5. Sloth means not loving the right things enough, and the souls in the Vestibule of Hell did not love what is good and right enough to pursue those things, so perhaps these are the Slothful.

Hell does not want these uncommitted souls because “the damned might glory over them” (Musa *Inferno* 3.42). The verb “to glory” means “to exult.” Apparently, the sinners in Hell would feel superior to the uncommitted. The

uncommitted never took a stand, either for good or for evil, but the damned at least took a stand, even though it was for evil.

Who keeps the uncommitted souls out of Hell Proper? Although Hell does not want these uncommitted souls, the proper answer is not Lucifer because we will see that Lucifer has no power in the Inferno. The proper answer is that God keeps these souls out of Hell Proper. After all, we know that God created the Inferno, and therefore God created the Vestibule of the Inferno.

• The banner that the Uncommitted in Hell chase is a symbol. What is a symbol, and what does the banner symbolize?

According to the 6th edition of *A Handbook to Literature*, by C. Hugh Holman and William Harmon, “A symbol is something that is itself and also stands for something else; as the letters a p p l e form a word that stands for a particular objective reality; or as a flag is a piece of colored cloth that stands for a country. All language is symbolic in this sense, and many of the objects that we use in daily life are also” (466).

The banner symbolizes a cause. The souls in the Vestibule of Hell had no causes that they were passionate about.

• Who of the people in the Vestibule of Hell is “the coward who made the great refusal” (Musa *Inferno* 3.60). Who is he?

The “coward” (Musa 3.60) is perhaps Pope Celestine V, who was pope for only five months before he renounced the papacy in 1294. John Ciardi points out that this man was manipulated by a priest named Benedetto, who convinced him that any man living in part of the world (as opposed to renouncing the world and living as a monk) would lose his soul. As soon as Pope Celestine V renounced the papacy,

Benedetto became Pope Benedict VIII, an enemy to Dante and a worldly man who ends up being punished in Dante's Inferno. (See Ciardi, *The Divine Comedy*, 35-36.)

However, Mark Musa makes a good case that the coward is Pontius Pilate, who did not want to condemn Jesus to death, but who allowed Jesus to be executed, blaming the Jews for the execution of Jesus (Musa 95).

• **Who would you say belongs in the Vestibule of Hell?**

We can say that people who refused to speak out against the evils of racism, sexism, sexual harassment, homophobia, religious persecution, and torture belong there. Those who refused to speak out against the Nazis during the Holocaust belong there. (Of course, if they are in the Vestibule of Hell, they would not have repented.)

• **If you want to stay out of the Inferno, what should you do?**

If you want to stay out of the Inferno, you need to make a stand for good.

Sometimes men make a stand for good. This anecdote appears in my book *The Kindest People Who Do Good Deeds, Volume 4*:

When Ohio University student Haley Butler visited London, she saw and enjoyed the musical *Wicked*, although she attended the musical alone despite having promised her parents that she would not go out alone at night. On her way back to her hotel, she noticed that a strange man was following her. She tried to get away from him, but he kept on following her. In the subway, she needed to take an elevator to get to ground level, but she thought, "There is no way in hell I'm getting in the elevator with that man. He's going to rape me. He's going to rape me, and then

kill me.” She was making a major effort not to cry when the elevator door opened, and a man in the elevator looked at her, saw how frightened she was, and even though he had never seen her before, said, “Oh my gosh! How are you? I can’t believe I ran into you!” Haley knew that she had never seen this new man before, but she replied, “I’m great! It’s so good to see you.” The strange man who had been following Haley left, and Haley said, “You saved me. That guy was following me, and I didn’t know what to do!” The new man responded, “I know. I could tell by the look on your face! You seemed so frightened.” The new man even walked her to her hotel just to ensure that she would be safe. (Some men can be very helpful in situations like this. Comedian Jay Leno once noticed a woman being harassed by a man, so he went over and pretended to be the woman’s boyfriend and chased the harasser away.) (Source: Haley Butler, “*Wicked*,” pp. 20-25. Also: Bill Adler and Bruce Cassiday, *The World of Jay Leno: His Humor and His Life*, p. 59.)

• **Explain what *contrapasso* means.** Note: Italicize foreign words such as the Italian word *contrapasso*.

Contrapasso is divine punishment or divine retribution. It is a punishment that is appropriate for the sin. (Note the word “sin” here instead of “crime.” Not all sins are crimes. It is not against the law to be a Glutton.)

We will see *contrapasso* over and over in the Inferno.

One main point to learn in the Inferno is that these sinners abandoned God, and therefore God has abandoned them. We can, in fact, say that these sinners chose to reside in the Inferno in their afterlife.

• **Describe the second crowd of souls, who are freshly deceased.**

This crowd of souls is waiting to be ferried across the river by the mythological figure Charon, who in Greek mythology ferried the souls of the dead across the River Acheron.

As you would expect, these souls are those of unrepentant sinners.

• **What words does Charon tell the recently deceased? How do they react?**

Charon lets the recently deceased know that they are doomed eternally:

[...] “Woe unto you, ye souls depraved!

Hope nevermore to look upon the heavens;

I come to lead you to the other shore,

To the eternal shades in heat and frost.”

(Longfellow 3.84-87)

The recently deceased grow silent, despair, and change color, and their teeth chatter in fear. By the way, we learn that these souls are naked:

But all those souls who weary were and naked

(Longfellow 3.100)

We will find out later that the Hypocrites are clothed; apparently, all the other souls are naked.

Although these souls are going across into Hell Proper to be judged and then punished, they are eager for that to happen, as we learn from what Virgil tells Dante:

“And ready are they to pass o’er the river,

Because celestial Justice spurs them on,
So that their fear is turned into desire.”

(Longfellow 3.124-126)

• **How does Charon react when he notices that Dante is still living?**

Charon notices that Dante is living and orders him away. (Living visitors to the Underworld, such as Hercules, have caused problems such as stealing Cerberus.) Virgil lets Charon know that Dante’s presence in the Underworld has the approval of God, and Charon ferries Dante and Virgil across the river.

• **One point to notice as we begin the journey through the Inferno is that the Circles of Hell get smaller the further down we go.**

We will be hearing about the sizes of some Circles as we begin the journey through the Inferno. The Circles will grow smaller the further down we go. Apparently, more sinners are punished in the bigger Circles than are punished in the smaller Circles. So more people are punished for the sin of lust than are punished for the sin of complex fraud (fraud committed against those with whom the sinner ought to have a special tie of trust).

• **Another point to notice is that the name “Jesus Christ” is never uttered in the Inferno.**

To mention the name “Jesus Christ” in the Inferno would be inappropriate; however, the sinners do blaspheme against God. Jesus is referred to only elliptically. However, Virgil does mention the word “Christ” in *Inferno* 4.37 (Musa’s translation), which is set in Limbo, not in Hell Proper.

Chapter 4: “Canto 4: Limbo”

• Dante the Pilgrim wakes up in Limbo. How does Dante the Poet depict Limbo?

Dante falls asleep, and then he wakes up in Limbo. Limbo is the first Circle of Hell. It is not a place of shrieks; rather, it is a place of sighs. The souls here are separated from God, but they are not being tortured. However, many of the souls here are great thinkers, and part of their punishment for not worshipping God correctly is to be denied knowledge: knowledge of God.

Limbo is where Virgil resides in the afterlife. This is where Beatrice came to ask him to be Dante’s guide. Other virtuous pagans live here, too.

Limbo is interesting because some people who used to be here are here no longer. During the Harrowing of Hell, Jesus released these people and took them to Paradise.

• Which three classes of people are (or were) in Limbo?

These are the three classes of people who are (or were) in Limbo:

- 1) The virtuous pagans. These pagans were good morally, but they were not Christian (or Jewish in the days before Christ). They did not believe in the one true God. Virgil says that “they did not worship God the way one should” (Musa *Inferno* 4.38). Later, we will see that some pagans are in Paradise.
- 2) The unbaptized, including infants. Because they are unbaptized, they are here. These are not morally bad people. Later, we will see that some unbaptized children are in Paradise.

3) The people who used to be here, including the Jewish patriarchs. Jesus released these people from Limbo during the Harrowing of Hell.

Apparently, the souls who are still here will be here “forever” (Musa *Inferno* 4.45), according to Dante the Pilgrim, but perhaps we should remember that Dante the Pilgrim is naive and does not know the full story. In any case, it is God’s decision whether these souls stay here forever. God’s mercy may be greater than Dante the Pilgrim thinks. However, salvation is a mystery, and we humans are not fully capable of understanding the will of God.

• **What is the Harrowing of Hell?**

According to mythology, after Jesus died and before He was resurrected, He entered Hell to save the souls of great religious figures such as King David and Adam and Eve. He took them out of Limbo and put them in Paradise. Jesus saved the souls of the faithful Jews.

By the way, Virgil died in 19 B.C.E., so he was present at the Harrowing of Hell. Virgil says that he was “a novice in this place” (Musa *Inferno* 4.52) when “a mighty lord” (Musa *Inferno* 4.53) came and rescued Adam, Abel, Noah, Moses, Abraham, King David, Israel, Rachel, “and many more” (Musa *Inferno* 4.61).

We may think of Dante as using his *Divine Comedy* to do some of what Jesus did. Dante lets us know what we need to avoid doing and what we need to do to avoid going to Hell.

• **If you have read Plato’s *Apology*, explain how Socrates envisioned the afterlife in this work of literature.**

Socrates said after being condemned to death that death must be one of two things: 1) a sleep that goes on forever, or 2) a place where he can talk with the other deceased souls. Limbo sounds very much like this second alternative. By the way,

Limbo apparently has a library, as Virgil shows later that he is familiar with the work of poets who followed him.

• Why are the virtuous souls in Limbo not found in Heaven?

They did not worship God correctly. Of course, the righteous Jews showed that it was possible to worship God correctly even before the coming of Jesus. (Also, they expected the Messiah to appear.)

By the way, later in *Paradise* we will read of two pagans who are in fact in Paradise. There we see that salvation is a mystery and we humans are not fully capable of understanding the will of God.

• How do the renowned ancient poets in Limbo treat Dante?

They treat him as an equal. He is one of the great poets. This is remarkable, on Dante's part. He is comparing himself to ancient poets such as Homer and saying that he is in their league. Few if any modern poets would do that today — I hope.

Dante writes:

When they together had discoursed somewhat,
 They turned to me with signs of salutation,
 And on beholding this, my Master smiled;
 And more of honour still, much more, they did me,
 In that they made me one of their own band;
 So that the sixth was I, 'mid so much wit.

(Longfellow 4.97-102)

Four great pagan poets — Homer, Horace, Ovid, and Lucan — talk with Virgil and Dante.

Virgil, of course, wrote the *Aeneid*, which tells the story of the fall of Troy and recounts the adventures of Aeneas after the fall of Troy and his successful attempt to become an important ancestor of the Romans.

Homer is the author of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. The *Iliad* tells the story of the argument between Agamemnon and Achilles in the final year of the Trojan War, and the *Odyssey* recounts the adventures of Odysseus after the Trojan War.

Horace is the author of the collection of poems known as the *Epistles*.

Ovid is the author of the *Metamorphoses*, a collection of myths involving metamorphoses or transformations.

Lucan is the author of the *Pharsalia*, an epic poem about the civil war between Julius Caesar and Pompey the Great.

One interesting point to note is that both Dante and Virgil walk on water here, as presumably the souls of all the virtuous pagans can do: “we walked right over it as on hard ground” (Musa *Inferno* 4.109). The “it” refers to “a sweetly flowing stream” (Musa *Inferno* 4.108). The *Inferno* is an allegory, and the stream is a symbol of something, although what that something is, is open to interpretation. Mark Musa believes that one possible interpretation is that the stream symbolizes eloquence, something that Dante and Virgil and the other ancient poets most definitely have (Musa *Inferno*, 104).

• **Identify some of the people who are found in Limbo.**

Some other people found in Limbo are fictional/mythological:

Aeneas

Aeneas, of course, is the hero of Virgil's *Aeneid*. In the *Aeneid*, Aeneas survives the fall of Troy, takes his father and son out of the city (but his wife perishes in the chaos), and leads the Trojan survivors to Carthage and then to Italy, where he becomes the founder of the Roman people.

Lavinia

Lavinia is the Italian princess whom Aeneas marries in Italy. She and Aeneas become important ancestors of the Romans.

Hector

Hector is the great leader of the Trojans during the Trojan War. His death at the hands of the great Greek warrior Achilles means that Troy will fall.

Electra

Electra is the daughter of Atlas, the god who holds up the sky, and the ancestor of all the Trojans, including Aeneas and Hector.

Camilla

Camilla fights for the Italians against Aeneas in Italy. The *Aeneid* tells of her death.

Penthesilea

Penthesilea is an Amazonian queen. She fought for Troy against the Greeks during the Trojan War.

Others are real:

Julius Caesar

Julius Caesar became the ruler of Rome and the Roman Empire as the Roman Republic ended.

Democritus

This Greek philosopher believed in the theory of atoms: the idea that matter is composed of imperishable and indivisible units.

Diogenes

Diogenes of Sinope, aka “the Cynic,” was a Greek philosopher who advocated self-control and abstinence.

Zeno

Zeno may be Zeno of Citium, the founder of the Stoic School of Philosophy, or Zeno of Eleo, a disciple of Parmenides. Both Zenos were ancient Greek philosophers.

Euclid

Euclid is famous for his writing about geometry.

Ptolemy

Ptolemy gave his name to a system of astronomy that placed the Earth at the center of the universe.

John Ciardi divides the people found in the Citadel into three groups: 1) The Heroes and Heroines, 2) The Philosophers, and 3) The Naturalists (Ciardi, *The Divine Comedy*, 44-45).

• Which three Muslims are placed in Limbo — something that should be regarded as a mark of honor?

A major point to notice is that three Muslims are found in Limbo. Many Christians in the Middle Ages were hostile to Islam, but Dante does put three eminent Muslims in a place of honor:

- 1) the philosopher Avicenna (980-1037). He was a Persian physician, philosopher, and scientist. He memorized the Koran.

2) the philosopher Averroës (1126-98). He was an Arab who wanted to reconcile Aristotelianism with Islam.

3) the sultan Saladin (1138-93), who captured Jerusalem from the Crusaders. He was a great Muslim general and leader.

Chapter 5: “Canto 5: The Lustful”

• Who is Minos in mythology, and what role does he play in the *Inferno*?

We may want to say that Hell Proper begins with Minos and the second Circle. Previously, we saw the Vestibule of Hell, where souls desired by neither Heaven nor Hell were punished. We also saw the first Circle of Hell — Limbo — where there is no torture. Limbo in some ways seems like a pleasant place.

Minos is the first judge we see in the *Inferno*. In mythology, there was a King Minos of Crete and a bad King Minos of Crete. (Some authorizes say that there was only one King Minos of Crete, and he had both good and bad qualities.) Supposedly, the good King Minos of Crete became a judge in the Underworld.

In the *Inferno*, Minos is the judge of the dead souls, but he is a monster with a long tail. When a sinner is before him, Minos wraps his tail around his body. The number of times the tail is wrapped around his body shows to which Circle the sinner will be sent. If the tail is wrapped three times around his body, then the sinner will be punished in the third Circle of Hell. Sometimes, Minos uses his tail to fling the sinner to that Circle.

Dante makes Minos, who was a human being in life, a monster in the *Inferno*. Sin is bestial and monstrous, and so the guards and judges in the *Inferno* are also bestial and monstrous.

• How good of a guide is Virgil here?

Virgil is a very good guide for Dante here, as he will be throughout the *Inferno* and while climbing the Mountain of Purgatory. Occasionally, Virgil will need divine help, but almost always he is able to be an excellent guide for Dante.

Virgil is always on the lookout for Dante. Minos speaks to Dante:

“O thou, that to this dolorous hostelry
 Comest,” said Minos to me, when he saw
 me,
 Leaving the practice of so great an office,
 “Look how thou enterest, and in whom thou trustest;
 Let not the portal’s amplitude deceive thee.”

(Longfellow 5.16-20)

Dante does need to be careful about whom he trusts. He also needs to take care not to be fooled. After all, we will see sinners such as Francesca da Rimini who will try to scam him into pitying her. Indeed, Francesca succeeds in doing this.

However, Virgil apparently thinks that Minos is telling Dante not to trust him. Of course, Virgil is trustworthy. In addition, Virgil’s job is to take Dante into the Inferno — and out again. Virgil will succeed in doing that. After all, he is on a mission from God, and God will help him.

Earlier, Virgil spoke to Charon and made him ferry Dante, a living man, across the Acheron. Here, Virgil may be worried that Minos will keep Dante from entering the Inferno because of his warnings, which are just. Virgil tells Minos:

“Do not impede his journey fate-ordained;^[1]
 It is so willed there where is power to do
 That which is willed; and ask no further ques-
 tion.”

(Longfellow 5.22-24)

• **Which souls are in the second Circle of Hell?**

Four Circles will be used to punish the incontinent.

In the second Circle, the lustful are punished. These are people who were incontinent with sexual desire. They could not control their lust.

• **How are the lustful being punished in the second Circle of Hell? Why is that punishment appropriate for this sin?**

The second Circle of Hell is the first of the four Circles that are dedicated to punishing the incontinent — those who were unable to control themselves. In this second Circle are punished those who are guilty of the sin of lust. These sinners could not control their lustful desires, which drove them to do things they should not have done, and in the second Circle they are unable to control themselves, for a storm blows them here and there, but always around in a circle. In this Circle we find Francesca and Paolo, who wanted to be together — adulterously — in life. Now they will be together — eternally — in death.

This is a good example of *contrapasso*. These sinners get what they wanted, but they turn out not to want it.

• **Which technique does Dante use in describing the Circle of Hell that appears in Canto 5 — a technique that he will use elsewhere?**

Dante gives us the big picture first, then he focuses on a group picture, and then he focuses on one or two people.

First we see all the sinners in a group being blown around by the storm, then Dante mentions a few sinners by name, then he talks to Francesca, who is punished together with her illicit lover, Paolo.

• **Identify some of the souls — including Dido — who are in the second Circle of Hell.**

Semiramis

Semiramis married her own son. She was an Assyrian queen of Babylon, and she was known for her lechery.

Dido

Dido, of course, commits suicide in Book 4 of the *Aeneid*, when *Aeneid* breaks off their love affair and leaves Carthage to go to Italy and become an important ancestor of the Roman people. Dido could have appeared in a lower Circle devoted to punishing the sin of suicide, but Minos the judge felt that it was more important for her to be punished here.

Helen of Troy and Paris

These are a good pair to put here. Paris ran off with Helen, the wife of Menelaus. Menelaus, his brother (Agamemnon), and a Greek army followed the pair to Troy, where the Trojan War was fought to get Helen back for Menelaus. Much of the story of Helen of Troy, Paris, Menelaus, and the Trojan War is told in Homer's *Iliad*. The Fall of Troy is recounted in Book 2 of Virgil's *Aeneid*.

Achilles

Achilles, the Greek hero of the Trojan War, is also punished here. According to mythology, he fell in love with Polyxena, a daughter of the Trojan King and Queen, Priam and Hecuba, and he agreed to switch sides from the Greeks to the Trojans in order to marry her. However, at the wedding Paris treacherously killed him.

Cleopatra

Queen of Egypt, Cleopatra had love affairs with both Julius Caesar and Mark Antony. Like Dido, she committed suicide — she allowed a poisonous snake to bite her — and so Minos could have sentenced her to a lower Circle in Hell, but

apparently lust was the greatest of her sins, so she is sentenced to eternal punishment in Circle 2.

Tristan

A Knight of King Arthur's Round Table, he fell in love with Isolt. They had an adulterous love affair. Isolt was married to someone else.

• **A key to understanding the *Inferno* is that many of the guilty souls found there avoid taking responsibility for the actions. We will examine how Francesca avoids taking responsibility for her actions. (Spin is nothing new. Francesca is excellent at spinning her story to make herself appear in a good light.)**

Here, we have a long encounter between Dante and one of the damned. Many more encounters will take place. Like many of the other sinners in the *Inferno*, Francesca tries to avoid taking responsibility for her actions by blaming other people and even things.

• **“Oh living creature” (Musa, *Inferno* 5.88) — why would Francesca refer to Dante as a “creature” rather than recognize his humanity?**

The sin of incontinence is about rejecting one's humanity. We are humans, not pigs, yet gluttons treat themselves as pigs. Instead of making use of their intellect and will, the incontinent sinners ignore those things. A human being can use intellect to figure out how much he or she should eat and drink, and a continent person uses his or her will to eat and drink that much, but an incontinent person ignores his or her humanity and acts like an animal that is incapable of understanding the difference between right and wrong.

This, of course, applies to the other incontinent sins. Francesca's sin is lust. A human being can use intellect to know that adultery should be avoided and a human being can use

will to resist the temptation of adultery, but Francesca has ignored her own humanity and succumbed to the temptation of committing adultery.

By committing adultery, Francesca has not recognized her own humanity, and by calling Dante a “living creature” (Musa, *Inferno* V.88) rather than a human being, she is not recognizing his humanity.

Reason is not in control of Francesca — desire is.

• A key to understanding the *Inferno* is that the guilty souls found there fully and completely believe that they are the most important thing in the universe. How does Francesca show that she believes that?

Francesca speaks to Dante before Dante speaks to her:

“O living creature gracious and benignant,
 Who visiting goest through the purple air
 Us, who have stained the world incarnadine,”
 (Longfellow 5.88-90)

What she says is interesting. She seems to think that Dante has come to pay her a visit, a social call. Of course, Dante is not in the *Inferno* specifically to pay a visit to Francesca. He is in the *Inferno* to discover what he must do to stay out of the *Inferno* after he is dead. Dante is in the dark wood of error, and this journey he is taking is intended to save his soul.

Francesca continues speaking:

“If were the King of the Universe our friend,
 We would pray unto him to give thee peace,
 Since thou hast pity on our woe perverse.”

Some prisoners can identify with Francesca. Before being sent to prison, a prisoner may blame everyone and everything for his or her actions. Sometimes, while in prison a prisoner may realize that he or she was doing exactly what Francesca is doing in Canto 5 of the *Inferno*.

• **A key to understanding the *Inferno* (and *The Divine Comedy*) is that when Dante has long conversations with sinners (and other people), it is almost always because these sinners (and other people) have something important to say to him. Dante can learn from the sinners with whom he speaks, if he listens in the right way and does not allow himself to be scammed.**

Here Dante can learn that he needs to take responsibility for his actions instead of blaming everyone and everything but himself.

Dante can also learn that he needs to carefully evaluate what sinners in the *Inferno* tell him. Here Francesca is spinning Dante by telling him only part of her story — she leaves out some details that incriminate her.

Of course, Dante the Pilgrim is still naive at this point. He feels sympathy and pity toward Francesca. However, as his journey continues, he will learn that the sinners in the *Inferno* deserve their punishment.

Dante the Pilgrim also needs to control his sexuality. Sex need not be bad (for example, sex between married people who love each other), but sex can be bad (for example, adulterous sex).

• **In the story that Francesca tells, she leaves out some things. What are the things that she leaves out?**

Francesca leaves out three important facts:

- 1) She and Paolo are married, but not to each other.

- 2) She is Paolo's sister-in-law.
- 3) Her husband found her and his brother in bed together, and he killed them both.

When reading the story of Francesca da Rimini, the reader must be very careful. Francesca is very charming, but she is also in Hell. Since God put her in Hell, and since God does not make mistakes, Francesca must belong in Hell.

Francesca tells a very charming story, but she is an expert at spin. Like other sinners in Hell, she does not accept the blame for being condemned to Hell. Instead, she blames other people and even things for her presence in Hell.

• What is the fallacy of suppressed evidence?

When Francesca tells her story, she leaves out important facts. For example, Francesca and Paolo are married — but not to each other. Francesca's husband found them in bed together, so he killed them both. In addition, Paolo is Francesca's brother-in-law. These certainly seem to be important facts, but Francesca chooses to not mention them when talking to Dante the Pilgrim.

When Francesca tells her story, she commits the fallacy of suppressed evidence. In this fallacy, the arguer leaves out important information that is needed to reach an accurate conclusion. Francesca argues that she is innocent, but the reader who knows all the relevant evidence realizes that she is guilty.

Note also that Dante the Pilgrim is taken in by Francesca. He pities her so much that he faints. Dante the Poet — an older, wiser Dante — is not taken in by Francesca.

• Francesca does not take responsibility for her own actions. What does she blame instead?

Francesca has blamed Love. Now she blames a book:

“One day we reading were for our delight^[SEP]

Of Launcelot, how Love did him enthrall.

Alone we were and without any fear.”

(Longfellow 5.127-129)

Lancelot (this is the more common spelling) is the Knight of the Round Table who had an adulterous love affair with King Arthur’s wife, Queen Guinevere. That adulterous love affair ended the civilization that King Arthur had brought to Camelot and medieval England.

Francesca and Paolo read a book about an adulterous love affair, and she and Paolo began their own love affair. Francesca says, “Our Galehot was that book and he who wrote it” (*Inferno* 5.137). Basically, Francisca and Paolo read about Lancelot and Guinevere kissing illicitly, and they did the same thing. Why? Because of the book. The book was their Galehot. Galehot was the go-between between Lancelot and Guinevere — we can look at Galehot as being a go-between or pimp who made the affair possible.

If Francesca and Paola were reading the book correctly, they would realize that committing adultery is a bad thing. The adultery of Queen Guinever and Sir Lancelot led to the destruction of King Arthur’s Camelot. For a brief time in the Dark Ages, Camelot arose, but because of an adulterous love affair, it soon fell back into the Dark Ages.

• **One of the ultimate consequences of saying Love did it, or the book did it, is that I have no freedom of the will.**

Of course, if we have no free will, then we are not responsible for the sins we commit, including the sins of incontinence.

Francesca places the blame not on herself, but on Love or on a book.

She implies that she did not make a choice — this just happened to her. Of course, she made a choice — a choice not to use her intellect and will. Now that she is in the second Circle of the Inferno, she can make no choice about where to go — the winds simply blow her around the Circle.

• **Francesca says, “That day we read no further” (Musa, *Inferno* 5.138). What did Francesca and Paolo do instead?**

We can guess what they did. They hopped into bed and started having sex. Then her husband found them and killed them.

• **Francesca’s line is almost a quotation from Book 8 of Saint Augustine’s *Confessions*. However, Saint Augustine’s story has quite a different ending.**

Saint Augustine’s *Confessions* had a big influence on Dante’s *Divine Comedy*. We see an example of that here.

Paolo’s name means Paul, and Saint Augustine was converted to Christianity by reading Saint Paul. Like Francesca and Paolo, Augustine read a book. Augustine’s book was by Saint Paul, who told him to turn to Christ. Augustine did that.

Augustine wrote, “No further would I read; nor needed I.” Instead of reading further, Augustine converted to Christianity.

Augustine’s reading leads him to turn to God, but Francesca and Paolo’s reading turn them away from God.

This is the relevant passage, as translated by Edward Bouverie Pusey:

So was I speaking and weeping in the most bitter contrition of my heart, when, lo! I heard from a neighbouring house a voice, as of boy or girl, I know not, chanting, and oft repeating, “Take up and read;

Take up and read.” Instantly, my countenance altered, I began to think most intently whether children were wont in any kind of play to sing such words: nor could I remember ever to have heard the like. So checking the torrent of my tears, I arose; interpreting it to be no other than a command from God to open the book, and read the first chapter I should find. For I had heard of Antony, that coming in during the reading of the Gospel, he received the admonition, as if what was being read was spoken to him: Go, sell all that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven, and come and follow me: and by such oracle he was forthwith converted unto Thee. Eagerly then I returned to the place where Alypius was sitting; for there had I laid the volume of the Apostle when I arose thence. I seized, opened, and in silence read that section on which my eyes first fell: Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying; but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, in concupiscence. No further would I read; nor needed I: for instantly at the end of this sentence, by a light as it were of serenity infused into my heart, all the darkness of doubt vanished away.

• **How did Francesca and Paolo die?**

Francesca’s husband came home and found Francesca and Paolo in bed. He killed them both.

• **How does Francesca regard her own husband?**

Francesca says about her husband:

“Love has conducted us unto one death;

Caina waiteth him who quenched our life!”

(Longfellow 5.106-107)

Caina is the place in the Inferno where are punished those who betray loved ones. Francesca tells us that her husband, who killed her, will end up there.

Of course, Francesca has been talking about Love. Apparently, her husband killed her because he loved her. If he had not loved her, he would not have cared with whom she slept. Francesca thinks that it is OK if Francesca is led to do something wrong by Love, but not OK if her husband is led to do something wrong by Love.

• Does Dante the Pilgrim believe Francesca's version of her story? Does Dante the Poet?

Dante the Pilgrim is so overcome with pity for Francesca that he faints. Dante the Poet knows that Francesca is scamming Dante the Pilgrim.

Dante the Pilgrim is allowing himself to be scammed here. He is naïve, and during his journey through the Inferno, he needs to learn not to be naïve. God placed Francesca and Paolo in the Inferno. God does not make mistakes; Francesca and Paolo deserve eternal punishment.

• What is a good phrase to use when speaking of Francesca da Rimini?

Alexander Woollcott was a famous theater critic who was excited about meeting famous opera singer Mary Garden. Unfortunately, he was tongue-tied when meeting her and so she was unimpressed by him. However, she did tell a magnificent story about finding overnight success in Paris. She had loved the opera *Louise* and had studied it thoroughly, including marking out the places the person singing the title role would have to stand on stage. She was in the audience when the person singing the part of Louise took ill. Mary Garden took the singer's place, sang magnificently, and the

next morning she was famous throughout Paris. Unfortunately, Mary Garden told Alexander Woollcott, “You do not have my permission to print that story!” Too bad. It was a magnificent story, and Alexander Woollcott wanted to print it, but he did not dare to go against Mary Garden’s wishes. Later, he said about Mary Garden, “She was the most charming bitch I ever met.”

Francesca da Rimini can out-“charming bitch” Mary Garden any day.

• If you do research, you can find out other facts that can help excuse Francesca’s behavior. How should readers of Dante’s *Inferno* use those facts?

If you do research, you will read the story that Francesca meant to marry Paolo, not Paolo’s physically handicapped brother. A switch was pulled so that Francesca would marry (without her knowledge) the physically handicapped brother. This can seem to excuse Francesca, but I think that we should ignore those facts. Dante the Poet has put Francesca in the *Inferno*, and in this imaginative work of art we are meant to believe that God put Francesca in the *Inferno*. God does not make mistakes, and so Francesca is exactly where she belongs. Apparently, adultery is always wrong, even for someone who was tricked into marrying a man whom she did not intend to marry.

In addition, the story about Francesca being tricked into marrying Paolo’s brother may have been made up after their deaths to excuse their actions. In reading Dante’s *Inferno*, it is best to completely ignore this story; it plays no part in Dante’s *Inferno*.

• Some critics believe that Francesca and Paolo have triumphed because they are in love and are together for all eternity. Is this interpretation correct?

No. God knows what He is doing. The two are being punished. Francesca never refers to her lover by name but instead refers to him impersonally as “this one” (Musa, *Inferno* 5.101 and 5.135). In addition, Paolo, who never speaks, is weeping (Musa, *Inferno* 5.140).

Francesca is so charming that she is able to convince even good critics that she is not responsible for her sins.

• Why do you suppose the word “Heaven” is never mentioned in Hell?

Hell is not an appropriate place for Heaven to be mentioned, so it is never mentioned there.

• Do you know of anyone who is guilty of the sin of Lust?

Former President Bill Clinton comes to mind. Many other politicians, both Democrat and Republican, also come to mind. So do the names of some preachers.

• If you want to stay out of the Inferno, what can you do?

You need to avoid inappropriate sexual behavior. Don't commit adultery, and make sure that the sex you engage in is consensual sex. Of course, in Dante's society you should have sex within marriage only.

Chapter 6: “Canto 6: The Gluttonous”

• What does “Incontinence” mean when it is applied to sin?

Being incontinent in a sinful way means not being able to control yourself.

Being incontinent in a sinful way means putting your desires ahead of your reason.

Being incontinent in a sinful way means submitting reason to desire.

• What are the sins of incontinence?

These are the sins of incontinence:

- 1) Lust: not being able to control your sexual desire.
- 2) Gluttony: not being able to control your desire for food and drink.
- 3) Hoarding Money (Misers) or Spending Money Too Freely (Spendthrifts) — The Hoarders and the Wasters: not being able to control your desire for money — or for the things that money can buy.
- 4) Being Angry or Being Sullen (or Possibly Being Slothful): not being able to control your attitude.

• What is the sin of gluttony?

Gluttony is eating and drinking too much.

Gluttony is allowing desire for food and drink to overrule reason.

Gluttony is being obese or alcoholic.

• The Gluttons are in the third Circle. Why is Cerberus a fitting choice to be a guard to be over the Gluttons?

The next — the third — Circle of Hell punishes the Gluttons, whose guard is Cerberus, the three-headed dog of mythology. Cerberus is a fitting guard of the Gluttons because he is a Glutton himself — having three heads also means having three mouths to feed. When Aeneas visits the Underworld, his guide the Cumaean Sibyl quiets Cerberus by giving him something to eat. In Dante’s *Inferno*, Dante the Pilgrim’s guide, Virgil, also quiets Cerberus by giving him something to eat — in this case, Virgil throws gobs of mud down Cerberus’ three throats. (In Virgil’s *Aeneid*, when Aeneas journeys to the Underworld, his guide, the Sibyl, gives Cerberus honey-cakes that are drugged to make the three-headed dog sleep.) Also, of course, having three heads means having six eyes — all the better to keep an eye on the sinners.

• Describe the punishment of the Gluttons.

Mud is plentiful in the third Circle of the *Inferno* because rain is always falling. The Gluttons wanted to enjoy the good things, but now they are forced to live in uncomfortable surroundings — surroundings much like a muddy pigsty. The Gluttons made pigs of themselves while living, and now, although they are dead, they live like pigs. Dante the Pilgrim speaks briefly with a Florentine Glutton nicknamed Ciaccio. After their brief conversation, Ciaccio lies down and goes to sleep in the mud, just like a Glutton would go to sleep after enjoying a huge meal. Ciaccio is unable to focus his eyes; he is in a stupor, just as a Glutton would be in a stupor after eating a huge meal. In addition, Cerberus bites the Gluttons the way that the Gluttons bit into their food.

Poet and *Divine Comedy* translator John Ciardi refers to the third Circle of Hell as being a “gigantic garbage dump” (Ciardi, *Divine Comedy*, 54).

• **What does the nickname “Ciaccio” mean?**

The nickname means “pig” or “hog.” It is a fitting name for a sinner in this particular Circle of Hell.

• **The Damned in the Inferno can foresee the future. What prophecy does Ciaccio make to Dante regarding the future of Florence?**

Ciaccio predicts a few future events. He knows that the Guelfs defeated the Ghibellines in 1289, thus Ciaccio reveals that he has knowledge of the past. He now predicts that the Guelfs will be divided into two factions: the White and the Black. In 1301, the White Guelfs will expel the Black Guelfs from Florence. Eventually, the Black Guelfs will defeat the White Guelfs, and in 1302 send them (including Dante) into exile.

We should note that although *The Divine Comedy* is set in 1300, Dante wrote it after that date, so most of the predictions that are made in *The Divine Comedy* had already occurred when Dante wrote the epic poem.

Also, Dante the Pilgrim often does not understand the prophecies that are made to him. It is only in the *Paradise* that he fully understands that he will be exiled.

In addition, the three sins responsible for the troubles of Florence, according to Ciaccio, are “pride, envy, avarice” (Musa, *Inferno* 5.74). These can remind us of the three beasts symbolizing sin in Canto 1 of the *Inferno*.

• **Sinners in the upper Circles of the Inferno want to be remembered on Earth.**

Ciaccio tells Dante the Pilgrim:

“But when thou art again in the sweet world,

I pray thee to the mind of others bring me;”

(Longfellow 6.88-89)

The word “sweet,” of course, is a good word for a Glutton to use.

We will see later in the Inferno that sinners in the lower Circles do not want to be remembered on Earth. Apparently, their sins are so bad that they do not want to be remembered.

• Will the punishment of the sinners be more intense following Judgment Day?

Yes, the punishment will be more intense. Right now, the sinners in the Inferno have souls only, not bodies. On Judgment Day, they will be reunited with their bodies (except for the Suicides, as we will see later). Because the sinners will be complete, having both souls and bodies, they will feel their punishment more intensely.

• Why is the punishment of the Gluttons fitting?

The Gluttons lived a life devoted to pleasure on Earth. They ate and drank too much. Now they are like pigs in a filthy pigsty. They lie in mud the way that pigs do.

• Do you know of any famous Gluttons?

Diamond Jim Brady lived to eat. He used to go to a restaurant, sit down at the table with his belly a certain number of inches from the table, and then eat until his belly touched the table. He once liked a certain kind of candy, so he ordered several hundred boxes of it. Unfortunately, the candy company could not handle an order of that size, so he gave the candy company an interest-free loan so it could expand the size of its operations. He loved a sauce that was made by a chef in Paris, but the chef would not reveal how the sauce was made. Therefore, Diamond Jim Brady paid a man to go to Paris, work for the chef, learn how to make the sauce, and come back to America and work at a restaurant that Diamond

Jim frequented. (Diamond Jim said that he could eat a dish-towel if it were covered with that sauce.) When Diamond Jim died, an autopsy revealed that his stomach had been stretched to four times the size of a normal stomach.

Anyone who has seen Monty Python's 1983 film *The Meaning of Life* will remember the Glutton whose stomach explodes because he eats too much. This film still offends, something that makes Monty Python member Eric Idle proud.

George Handel, composer of *Messiah* and the "Hallelujah Chorus," was a bit of a glutton. He once ordered a dinner for three at an inn. The food was slow in coming, so he asked the innkeeper when he would be served. The innkeeper said that he would serve the food when the company arrived. Handel replied, "I am the company."

Chapter 7: “Canto 7: The Wasters, Hoarders, Wrathful, and Sullen (or Slothful)”

• Why is Plutus a fitting choice to be the guard over the Wasters (the Spendthrifts) and the Hoarders (the Misers)?

In Canto 7 of the *Inferno*, Dante writes about the Wasters and the Hoarders. These are people who either save as much money as possible and never spend it or people who spend every penny they can and never save anything. Both types of people are sinners. To be good with money, we need to spend some money to acquire necessities and good things; however, we also need to have an emergency fund. When it comes to money, we need to seek a mean between extremes.

The Wasters and the Hoarders are both incontinent with money. The Wasters value too much what money can buy, and the Hoarders value too much the money itself.

Plutus is also known as Pluto, and he is the pagan god of wealth, as well as the god who ruled the Underworld. (Some other authorities regard Plutus and Pluto as two separate gods.) It is fitting that he rules the Underworld because much wealth (gold, silver, diamonds) comes from under the ground. His association with wealth makes him a fitting guard for the Wasters and the Hoarders.

• How are the Wasters and the Hoarders punished?

The Wasters are Spendthrifts, who spent every penny they could, saving nothing for emergencies. The Hoarders are Misers, who saved every penny they could, spending little even to make themselves comfortable. These two opposed groups are condemned to roll great weights at each other. Each group sets off in an opposing direction around the Circle, then meet and crash the weights together, one group crying “Why hoard?” (Musa, *Inferno* 7.30) and the other group

crying “Why waste?” (Musa, *Inferno* 7.30). Then they roll the weights back and meet again on the other side of the Circle.

Interestingly, in his illustrations for *The Divine Comedy*, Gustave Doré represents the huge weights as huge bags of coins.

• Why is the punishment of the Wasters (the Spend-thrifts) and the Hoarders (the Misers) fitting?

These two groups were opposed to each other in life; now they are eternally opposed to each other in death.

In addition, Dante does not recognize any of the souls here. These souls were undiscerning in life — they did not know what true wealth is. Now, in death the souls are unable to be discerned by the living Dante.

Dante does recognize that some of the souls were monks by their haircuts, but he does not know their names. Popes are mentioned as being guilty of being greedy for money — the first time we have Popes mentioned in Hell. During the Middle Ages, priests, monks, cardinals, and popes were often criticized for their greed.

Dante says that he should recognize some of the souls here, but Virgil tells him this:

And he to me: “Vain thought thou entertainest;
 The undiscerning life which made them sor-
 did
 Now makes them unto all discernment dim.”

(Longfellow 7.52-54)

By the way, the late comedian Bill Hicks and his comedian friends loved to watch such religious programs as *The PTL [Praise the Lord] Club*. They used to make bets about how

long it would take the preacher to stop talking about Jesus and start talking about dollars. (Source: Cynthia True, *American Scream: The Bill Hicks Story*, p. 103.)

• **What is Aristotle’s Mean Between Extremes?**

This theory of the mean between extremes is a famous part of Aristotle’s ethical thought. He believed in moderation — as most Greeks did. If you had too much or too little of something, you would suffer from an excess or a deficiency of that thing. Think about food. If you eat too much food, you will be overweight. If you eat too little food, you will be underweight. You need to eat the right amount of food so that you will have a healthy weight. What you need is exactly the right amount. A different example: Courage is the mean between the extremes of Rashness (excess) and Cowardice (deficiency). Here are some means and their extremes:

Courage

Rashness (Excess); Courage (Virtue); Cowardice (Deficiency)

Liberality

Prodigality (Excess); Liberality (Virtue); Miserliness (Deficiency)

Nobility

Vanity (Excess); Nobility (Virtue); Ignobility (Deficiency)

Good Temper

Hot Temper (Excess); Good Temper (Virtue); Indifference (Deficiency)

Truthfulness

Boastfulness (Excess); Truthfulness (Virtue); False Modesty (Deficiency)

Each set of three represents the excess, mean, and deficiency of a certain activity. The first set is about the activity of confidence; the second set, giving and getting money; the third set, honor and dishonor; the fourth set, anger; the final set, truthfulness.

One point to notice is that not all activities have a mean between extremes. Some activities are already excessive in themselves. Thus, adultery is always wrong. You will never be able to commit adultery with the right woman (or man) at the right time and in the right manner. (You should never say, “I don’t want to commit too little adultery or too much adultery; I just want to commit exactly the right amount of adultery”!) Also, the mean can vary among people. In determining how much food to eat, the mean for a weightlifter will be much greater than the mean for an inactive person.

The Greeks, of course, believed in moderation. The temple of Apollo at Delphi bore this inscription: “Nothing in excess.” Comedian Ernie Kovacs’ tombstone, however, says, “Nothing in moderation.”

• How does Aristotle’s Mean Between Extremes apply to the Wasters (the Spendthrifts) and the Hoarders (the Misers).

The Wasters (Spendthrifts) and the Hoarders (Misers) did not pursue the mean between extremes when it came to money. The Hoarders saved every penny they could, not even spending money on things to make themselves comfortable, and the Wasters spent every penny they could, not saving any for emergencies. A person who pursues the mean between extremes will save some money and spend some money to make his or her life comfortable.

It is a mistake to spend every penny you can borrow and get deep in debt. It is also a mistake to save every penny you can and go hungry (without a good reason) when you have lots of money.

• Do you know of any famous Wasters or Hoarders, either in fact or fiction?

The Wasters throw their money around, spending it all and not saving any. On the other hand, the Hoarders become misers, seldom spending money — even for their own comfort.

For a good example of a Hoarder (Miser), think of Ebenezer Scrooge. However, we need to be aware that Ebenezer Scrooge repented his sins, and therefore he would not end up in the Inferno. Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* tells the story of how Ebenezer Scrooge stopped being a miser.

For a good example of a Waster, think of someone who wins a \$10 million lottery and is broke within a year.

Misers

Hetty Green was a famous miser, although she may not have deserved her reputation. Supposedly, she took her son to a charity hospital to have his bad leg treated, although she had millions of dollars to take him to a very good hospital. Her son's leg had to be amputated. Supposedly, if she had taken him to a better hospital, her son's leg would not have been amputated. (This story may not be true.)

Hetty Green's father was a miser. He smoked cheap cigars, and he once declined the gift of an expensive cigar because he was afraid that he would like it and start smoking expensive cigars.

Wasters

In James Barter's *Artists of the Renaissance*, we read of the wealthy businessman Agostino Chigi, who gave a dinner

party for Pope Julius II at which the food was served on solid gold plates. After the guests had eaten, the servants did not wash the solid gold plates — they threw them away.

Some people win multi-million-dollar lotteries, get a huge cash payment, and then a few years later, they are broke.

Evelyn Adams won the New Jersey lottery twice (1985, 1986). Evelyn Adams said these things:

- “Winning the lottery isn’t always what it’s cracked up to be. I won the American dream but I lost it, too. It was a very hard fall. It’s called rock bottom.”
- “Everybody wanted my money. Everybody had their hand out. I never learned one simple word in the English language: ‘No.’ I wish I had the chance to do it all over again. I’d be much smarter about it now.”
- “I was a big-time gambler. I didn’t drop a million dollars, but it was a lot of money. I made mistakes, some I regret, some I don’t. I’m human. I can’t go back now, so I just go forward, one step at a time.”

Source: <http://articles.moneycentral.msn.com/SavingandDebt/SaveMoney/8lotteryWinnersWhoLostTheirMillions.aspx>

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• **Who is Fortune, and what does she do?**

Fortune is a minister of God. She sees that money goes from person to person, family to family, country to country. She controls the Wheel of Fortune. At times, a person may be at the top of the Wheel of Fortune and be very prosperous, but as the Wheel turns, that person’s prosperity decreases. The thing to do is to be prepared for the turning of the Wheel of Fortune. Often she is called Lady Fortune.

• **How can people be incontinent with their own emotions?**

They can be excessive in their emotion, often becoming overly angry.

They can be deficient in their emotion, being sullen rather than becoming angry.

A person who follows the mean between extremes will be angry when there is a good reason to be angry, but will not be angry when there is not a good reason to be angry. This person will show emotion when there is a good reason to show emotion.

• **Why is the punishment of the Wrathful and the Sullen (or perhaps they are the Slothful) fitting?**

The Wrathful can be found in a marsh, and they attack each other, biting and scratching and head-butting each other. They are not able to control their anger.

Buried in the swamp, their presence noted only by bubbles rising to the top of the water, are the Sullen (or Slothful). Translator Mark Musa believes that the Slothful are found here. In Purgatory, one of the sins purged is Sloth, so it would be unlikely that no Slothful are found in the Inferno. Others believe that these sinners are the Sullen. However, some commentators believe that the Slothful are punished in the Vestibule of the Inferno.

Whether they are Sullen or Slothful, these sinners cannot control themselves. The Sullen should have been happy, and the Slothful should have been vigorous.

Once again, these sinners have failed to achieve a mean between extremes.

• **What is frugality?**

Frugality is the opposite of wastefulness.

These anecdotes illustrate frugality; the second anecdote is a humorous exaggeration:

The Zen master Gizan was taking a bath. The water was too hot, so he asked a student to add some cold water to the bath. The student brought a bucket of cold water, added some cold water to the bath, and then threw the rest of the water on a rocky path. Gizan scolded the student: “Everything can be used. Why did you waste the rest of the water by pouring it on the path? There are some plants nearby which could have used the water. What right do you have to waste even a drop of water?” The student became enlightened and changed his name to Tekisui, which means “Drop of Water.” (Source: Tsai Chih Chung (editor and illustrator) and Kok Kok Kiang (translator), *The Book of Zen*, p. 50.)

While walking along a river, two monks noticed a lettuce leaf floating downstream. “How sad,” said one of the monks, who knew that Zen master Gizan lived one mile upstream. “Gizan has started to waste food.” Just then, Gizan burst out of the bushes, panting and sweating, jumped into the river, and began to swim downstream after the lettuce leaf. The two monks bowed low in the direction of Zen master Gizan, then they continued their walk. (Source: Lucien Stryk and Takashi Ikemoto, selectors and translators, *Zen: Poems, Prayers, Sermons, Anecdotes, Interviews*, p. xlii.)

Chapter 8: “Canto 8: The Boatman Phlegyas and Filippo Argenti”

• Who is Phlegyas, and why is it appropriate that he appears here?

The guard of the Wrathful and Sullen (or Slothful) is Phlegyas, who also ferries Dante the Pilgrim and Virgil across the River Styx, in which souls of the Wrathful — such as Filippo Argenti — swim. Phlegyas is an appropriate guard of the Wrathful because of the great wrath he felt while he was alive. After the god Apollo raped his daughter, Phlegyas set fire to a temple of Apollo. The Greek gods are not always benevolent, and Apollo killed Phlegyas because of his action. In the *Inferno*, Phlegyas is still “seething in his anger” (Fagles 8.24).

• How does Dante the Pilgrim treat Filippo Argenti?

While crossing the River Styx, Dante is accosted by Filippo Argenti, a name that can be translated as Phil Silvers. (Phil Silvers is the name of a famous comedian and star of the TV series *The Phil Silvers Show*, on which he played the character Sergeant Bilko. By the way, *The Phil Silvers Show* had black actors at a time when that was rare because of racial prejudice. A black man once started to rob Mr. Silvers, but recognized him, said, “You’re OK,” and left him alone. (Source: John Javna, *The Best of TV Sitcoms*, p. 24.)

Interestingly, it is possible that Filippo Argenti recognizes that a living person is in the boat because Dante’s weight makes the boat sit lower in the water. The souls have no weight, so when Virgil gets on the boat, it does not sit lower in the water. Filippo Argenti is a soul being punished for wrath, so apparently he wishes to do violence to Dante.

Dante treats Filippo Argenti harshly — he wishes that Filippo would receive a harsher punishment than he already has.

Dante tells Virgil:

And I: “My Master, much should I be pleased,
 If I could see him soused into this broth,
 Before we issue forth out of the lake.”

(Longfellow 8.52-54)

• Is Dante’s anger at Filippo Argenti a good thing? Does Virgil approve of Dante the Pilgrim’s lack of pity?

Virgil approves of what Dante says. As a symbol of Human Reason, Virgil cannot understand why anyone, such as Filippo Argenti, would knowingly and deliberately do evil. Virgil tells Dante:

And he to me: “Ere unto thee the shore
 Reveal itself, thou shalt be satisfied;
 Such a desire ’tis meet thou shouldst enjoy.”

(Longfellow 8.55-57)

Dante is different from the way he was when he talked to Francesca da Rimini. He is beginning to realize that these souls deserve to be punished.

Apparently, Dante is acting correctly when he wishes that Filippo Argenti be punished. After all, God put Filippo Argenti in the Inferno, and God does not make mistakes. Since Filippo Argenti is here in the Inferno, he deserves to be here, and he deserves to be punished severely.

Dante is becoming capable of righteous indignation; righteous indignation (anger exercised the right way against the right object) is a good thing. John Ciardi regards righteous indignation as being the golden mean between extremes: wrath is excessive anger, sullenness is bottled-up anger, and

righteous indignation is anger exercised the right way against the right object. John Ciardi uses Jesus Christ chasing the moneychangers out of the temple as an example of righteous indignation.

• **How are the Wrathful punished?**

The wrathful are punished by being allowed to exercise their wrath. Filippo Argenti becomes so angry that he bites himself. We also read that the other wrathful souls shout, “Get Filippo Argenti!” (Musa, *Inferno* 8.61); in addition, Dante writes that “I saw the wretch so mangled / by a gang of muddy souls that, to this day, / I thank my Lord and praise Him for that sight” (Musa, *Inferno* 8.58-60).

• **The first section of Hell is devoted to the sins of incontinence. What does “incontinence” mean when it is applied to the Wrathful and the Sullen (or Slothful)?**

Some people are unable to control their emotions. They become angry or sullen. Instead of using reason to control their emotions, they allow their emotions to overcome their reason.

Again, the Slothful allow their laziness to overcome their reason. Reason would say that we ought to accomplish something, but laziness can make us accomplish nothing.

We should note that anger is used as a transition to the next part of the *Inferno*. We will see Heresy next, but beyond that are the sins of Violence. Anger is related to Violence. Of course, Heresy is a Christian sin and does not fit into the classical classification of sins that Virgil knows.

• **Do you know of any famous Wrathful and the Sullen (or Slothful), either in fact or fiction?**

For these sins, we may be able to look at ourselves. All of us have probably done these things. If you go out for a beer

when you know that you ought to be reading Dante, you are Slothful. If you are not taking notes in class, you are Slothful.

Let me point out that C.S. Lewis said that we have to do some things (such as making a living), we ought to do some things (such as taking care of our health and acting morally), and we want to do some things (C.S. Lewis liked reading fairy tales). As long as what we want to do does not conflict with what we have to do and with what we ought to do, then it's OK to do what we want to do. So after you have read your Dante (I assume that that is a goal of yours, since you are reading this book), and drinking a beer is what you want to do, and drinking a beer does not conflict with what you have to do and with what you ought to do (such as obeying just laws), then by all means drink a beer.

Achilles was famously angry at Agamemnon after Agamemnon took away Briseis, Achilles' spear-bride. In fact, the first word of Homer's *Iliad* is Wrath or Rage (in ancient Greek, the word for Wrath or Rage is *Menis*).

In Purgatory, we will meet a Florentine who was famous for his laziness.

• When Dante and Virgil arrive at a city, how do the fallen angels treat them?

The fallen angels talk to Virgil alone, and then they run back to the Gates of the City and slam them shut. Obviously, these angels are angry.

However, the fallen angels were unable to keep Christ out of Hell during the Harrowing of Hell, and they will be unable to keep Dante and Virgil from continuing their journey. Help from Heaven is already on the way.

One theme of the *Inferno* is that good is more powerful than evil. Evil can attempt to thwart good, but good wins in the end. Over and over in the *Inferno*, evil is forced to bend to

the will of good. Charon and Phlegyas do not want to ferry Dante, but they have to. Filippo Argenti wishes, apparently, to harm Dante, but Virgil, who is doing the will of good souls (the three Heavenly ladies), stops him. The evil angels wish to prevent Dante and Virgil from entering and passing through the City of Dis, but a good and powerful angel will arrive soon to force open the city gates.

Virgil represents Human Reason, and Human Reason needs divine help at this point. Human Reason can take us only so far. To go beyond that, we need divine help.

Chapter 9: “Canto 9: The City of Dis”

• Who is the sorceress Erichtho?

In Canto 9, Dante and Virgil have a conversation in which Virgil reveals that the sorceress Erichtho earlier had sent him to the bottom of the Inferno. The poet Lucan’s *Pharsalia* (VI, 507-830) relates a story about Erichtho sending a soul to the bottom of the Inferno to retrieve another soul who would foretell the victor of the Battle of Pharsalia, which took place on 9 August 48 B.C.E. In this battle, the forces of Julius Caesar defeated the forces of Pompey..

Which soul did Erichtho send to find out about the Battle of Pharsalia? We aren’t told, but it can’t be Virgil because Virgil was alive during the Battle of Pharsalia — his dates are 15 October 70 B.C.E.-21 September 19 B.C.E. Apparently, we are meant to understand that Erichtho sent more than one soul to the bottom of Hell. She sent souls there on more than one occasion.

The main point is that Virgil is familiar with the territory of the Inferno, since he has traveled it before. By the way, in the Middle Ages, Virgil had a reputation as a sorcerer, so that may be one reason Dante writes about Virgil’s visit to the bottom of Hell.

Apparently, Dante the Poet made up this story, since scholars have found no literary or mythological source for it.

Here is Charles S. Singleton’s translation:

“It seldom happens that any of us makes the journey on which I go. It is true that once before I was down here, conjured by that cruel Erichtho who was wont to call back shades into their bodies. My flesh had been but short while divested of me, when she made me enter within that wall to draw forth a spirit from the circle of Judas. That is the lowest place, and the

darkest, and farthest from heaven that encircles all.
Well do I know the way..." (Inf. 9.19-30)

Source: <<https://tinyurl.com/ycc3lu9a>>

Here is Singleton's commentary:

"Erichtho [was] a Thessalian sorceress, who, according to Lucan (*Phars.* VI, 507-830), was employed by Pompey's son Sextus to conjure up the spirit of one of his dead soldiers on the eve of the battle of Pharsalia, so that he could learn what was to be the outcome of the campaign. The story Dante tells about Erichtho's sending Virgil into the nethermost Hell is of unknown authority. It probably was suggested to Dante by one of the numerous legends associated with Virgil in the Middle Ages, when the Roman poet was universally regarded as a magician. Boccaccio, for instance, in his comment on *Inf.* I, 71, calls Virgil 'solennissimo astrolago' ('a very great astrologer') and gives a list of his wonderful performance. (On this aspect of Virgil's reputation in the Middle Ages, see D. Comparetti, 1955, pp. 266-67; also see E. Moore, 1896, pp. 234-37.) Referring specifically to Dante's story about Erichtho and Virgil, Boccaccio admits in his *Comento* that he cannot 'recall ever having read or heard just what this story was.' Benvenuto was of the opinion that Dante invented the tale: 'Ista est simpliciter fictio nova.' ('This is simply a new fiction.') But the 'fiction' is, in a sense, not so new: the Sibyl who guided Aeneas through the nether regions declared that she had been there once before and had seen all (*Aen.* VI, 562-65)."

Source: <<https://tinyurl.com/ycc3lu9a>>

• Why does Virgil need help from Heaven to enter the City of Dis?

“Dis” is a name for Pluto, Lucifer, and this city.

In Dante’s allegory, Virgil represents Human Reason, which is powerful, but which is less powerful than faith and religion. Reason can do only so much, and then faith and religion have to take over.

As a symbol of Human Reason, Virgil cannot understand why anyone, such as the rebellious angels, would knowingly and deliberately do evil.

• **Who are the Furies and Medusa?**

The Furies and Medusa help protect the City of Dis. They are mythological creatures. Medusa had snakes for hair and anyone who looked at her was instantly turned to stone. She was originally a mortal woman who committed the offense of giving birth in a temple of Minerva/Athena, who punished her by transforming her into a monster.

The Furies were avenging demons. When Orestes killed his mother (Clytemnestra), who had killed his father (Agamemnon), the Furies pursued him and would not let him rest. You can read about this in Aeschylus’ *Oresteia*, a trilogy of Greek tragedies.

• **How does Virgil protect Dante?**

Virgil does take very good care of Dante. He has Dante cover his eyes to protect him from Medusa, and then Virgil also uses his hands to cover Dante’s eyes.

Because he is a pagan, Virgil, however, underestimates the power of God. Virgil tells Dante:

“Turn thyself round, and keep thine eyes close shut,
 For if the Gorgon appear, and thou shouldst
 see it,
 No more returning upward would there be.”

(Longfellow 9.55-57)

One of the lessons that Dante needs to learn in the Inferno is that good is more powerful than evil. The appearance of the angel who unlocks the gate of the city of Dis helps him to learn that. Of course, Dante also learns that Human Reason, as symbolized by Virgil, can do only so much. Occasionally, human beings also need Divine Aid.

• **Why are Medusa and the Furies and the rebelling angels appropriate Guards of the Circle devoted to punishing heresy?**

Medusa and the Furies are appropriate Guards of this Circle because they are pagan figures, and to a Catholic Christian such as Dante, pagans do not think correctly about God. Of course, the rebelling angels are also appropriate Guards of this Circle because they did not think correctly about God, as they chose to fight against Him rather than fight against Lucifer. Heresy is thinking incorrectly about God.

• **Who is Theseus?**

The Furies refer to Theseus, who is one of the ancient heroes who has visited the Underworld — others include Hercules, Odysseus, and Aeneas. The Furies refer to their letting Theseus off too easily. According to mythology, Theseus was held captive in the Chair of Forgetfulness. (Readers of the Chronicles of Narnia may remember that C.S. Lewis used a similar chair in *The Silver Chair*.) Hercules rescued Theseus from Hades.

We also see a reference to Cerberus here. The angel says this to the rebellious angels who have been keeping Virgil and Dante from entering the city:

“What helpeth it to butt against the fates?

Your Cerberus, if you remember well,

For that still bears his chin and gullet peeled.”

(Longfellow 9.97-99)

When Hercules came to rescue Theseus, Cerberus tried to keep him from entering Hell. Hercules put a chain around Cerberus’ neck and dragged the monster out of Hell and to the upper world. This chafed his neck.

• **In what way is Dante the Pilgrim still naïve?**

Dante the Pilgrim should trust in God and the three heavenly ladies who are looking out for him; however, he is very nervous when the rebellious angels refuse to allow him and Virgil to pass through the gate and enter the city of Dis. Some of this nervousness comes from Virgil, who is upset about not being allowed through the gate.

• **An angel appears to open the gate of the City of Dis. What other opening of the gate of Hell does this remind you of?**

Jesus opened the gate of Hell during the Harrowing of Hell.

By the way, *The American Heritage College Dictionary* defines “to harrow” as “To inflict great distress or torment on.” Jesus inflicted great distress or torment on the sinners who saw people being released from Hell while they themselves have to stay in Hell forever. Jesus also inflicted great distress or torment on the rebellious angels who wanted to stop him from releasing the virtuous Jews (and apparently at least one pagan — see Dante’s *Paradise*, Canto 20) from Hell.

Notice that the good angel is able to walk on water. In addition, as the good angel approaches, sinners move away from the good angel the way that frogs move away from snakes, their natural enemies. These things, plus the ease with which the good angel opens the gate of the city of Dis, reveal that good is more powerful than evil. Truly, the good angel seems

more annoyed than anything else. The good angel has nothing but scorn for the rebellious angels.

God — Ultimate Goodness — is more powerful than Lucifer — Ultimate Evil.

Chapter 10: “Canto 10: Heretics in Flaming Tombs”

• As Dante goes through the Circles of the Inferno, he passes through Circles devoted to punishing incontinence, violence, and fraud. In Canto 10, he passes through a Circle devoted to punishing heresy.

Circle 6 of the Inferno is devoted to punishing the Heretics.

After passing through the gates, Dante sees open tombs out of which flames are rising. The Heretics are in these flaming tombs.

Note that heresy does not fit into the scheme of incontinence, violence, and fraud. These three categories make up a pagan list of sins, and since heresy is a specifically Christian sin, it does not fit into the pagan list of sins.

The Circle devoted to punishing heresy lies between the Circles devoted to punishing incontinence and the Circles devoted to punishing violence and fraud. The sin of heresy is a sin of intellect. The sin of heresy is more serious than the sins of incontinence (sins of the body), but it is less serious than the sins of violence and fraud.

• What is heresy?

Heresy is an interesting sin that does not fit in the pagan classification of sins in the Inferno. Heresy is not a sin of incontinence, of violence, or of fraud. Heresy is incorrect thinking about God. In other words, heresy is having the wrong beliefs concerning religion.

• What is factionalism?

Factionalism will be seen in this canto. Factionalism is two political or other parties struggling against each other. In this canto, Dante will meet Farinata, a Ghibelline. Dante, of course, was a Guelf.

• **How does factionalism apply to heresy?**

Factionalism does apply to heresy. The Epicureans represent a faction that did not believe in life after death. To Dante, this belief is heretical and against true belief in God.

Factionalism, or parties battling each other, can be seen in politics, in religion, and even in art, including poetry.

• **Epicurus is one of the Heretics punished in Canto 10. Who was Epicurus?**

The major fact we need to know is that Epicurus did not believe in life after death. Neither does Farinata.

• **Dante talks with Heretics in Canto 10, but he does not talk to them about heresy as it applies to religious belief. What are the two topics he discusses with the Heretics?**

He discusses politics and poetry. He discusses politics with Farinata, and poetry with the father of a poet friend of his.

Although factionalism can be seen in politics, as in the struggle between the Ghibellines and the Guelfs, or between the White Guelfs and the Black Guelfs, we also see factionalism in other areas. For example, we can see factionalism in religion, as when we see the Heretics being combated by those who have the true beliefs concerning religion and God. Factionalism can also exist in poetry. A new kind of poetry can replace the old style of poetry.

• **Why would Dante talk with the Heretics about these two topics? Does factionalism exist in these two topics? Which examples of factionalism are you aware of?**

Obviously, factionalism does exist in politics, as we see with the Ghibellines and the Guelfs, and with the White Guelfs and the Black Guelfs. Factionalism can be very bad, indeed. In Dante's time, when a faction came into power, it would ban the opposing faction, exiling them from Florence.

An example of factionalism in politics: Winston Churchill was present when a politician of an opposing party was giving a speech with which Mr. Churchill disagreed. Mr. Churchill was in full sight of the audience, and he began to search through his pockets, obviously looking for something he could not find. The audience's attention was diverted to Mr. Churchill, and the audience ignored the opposing politician's speech. Later, Mr. Churchill claimed that he had merely been looking for a piece of candy (a jujube) and not deliberately drawing attention away from the speech.

Factionalism exists also in poetry. One kind of love poetry may be popular, but then can be pushed aside by another kind of poetry.

An example of factionalism in poetry: A great American poet was in the audience when a rival poet was giving a reading. During the recitation of poetry, the great American poet fiddled around with an ashtray. Somehow, some paper in the ashtray caught on fire, thus diverting attention away from the poetry of the rival poet. Later, the great American poet claimed the fire was an accident.

Factionalism exists also in music. In Dante's time, poetry and song were related. A poem could be set to music and then sung. This was the case with some of Dante's love poetry. As with poetry, one type of music may be popular, then a new kind of music may come along and be more popular or may be the hot new thing.

An example of factionalism in music: Louis Armstrong was a master of Dixieland jazz, but when a new form of jazz came along — bebop — he claimed not to like it or to understand it. Today, of course, some people are resistant to hip-hop or to rap. (Older people tend not to like newer music.)

Factionalism also exists in religion. A faction that believes in a heresy can be opposed to a faction that believes correctly about God. Of course, Christians can hate Jews, or Protestants can hate Catholics, and vice versa.

An example of factionalism in religion: The Epicureans did not believe in life after death.

The kind of factionalism that Dante talks about here is extreme factionalism.

Occasionally, Dante will be talking to sinners who have committed sins that he is not tempted to commit. These sins include heresy and homosexuality. In these cases, Dante will still talk to sinners, but the conversation will be about something that Dante can learn from. Therefore, since Dante is not tempted to become a heretic, he does not talk about heresy in Canto 10. Instead, he talks about something related to heresy that he can learn from: extreme factionalism.

Note that factionalism need not be bad. We have two major political parties — the Democratic party and the Republican party — in the United States. Both can work together for the good of the American people, and both can keep an eye on each other. However, in extreme factionalism, each party could try to illegally steal elections from each other.

Or one political party could try to keep voters who support the other political party from voting — or do other bad things. Research North Carolina in July 2013. We need not assume that both political parties are always equally at fault. See

<http://andrewtobias.com/column/what-the-s-o-p-stands-for/>

and

<http://andrewtobias.com/column/banning-nipples/>

In *The Divine Comedy*, Dante criticizes extreme factionalism.

• **Dante is addressed by a sinner, a Heretic. How does the sinner know that Dante is a Florentine?**

A sinner named Farinata recognizes that Dante is a Florentine because of his accent; therefore, the sinner speaks to Dante:

“O Tuscan, thou who through the city of fire
 Goest alive, thus speaking modestly,
 Be pleased to stay thy footsteps in this place.
 Thy mode of speaking makes thee manifest
 A native of that noble fatherland,
 To which perhaps I too molestful was.”

(Longfellow 10.22-27)

Note that Farinata interrupts the conversation of Dante and Virgil. In extreme factionalism, interruptions occur and people on opposing sides often do not truly listen to each other.

Also note that Virgil speaks little in this circle. As a pagan, Virgil does not have a lot to say about heresy, which is a specifically Christian sin.

• **What is the punishment of the Heretics?**

The Heretics whom Dante meets are those who did not believe in life after death. Their punishment is to get exactly what they thought they would get after death: a tomb. The souls of the Heretics are placed in open tombs filled with fire. After the Last Judgment, the souls of the Heretics will be reunited with their bodies and the tops of the tombs will be closed forever.

Other kinds of Heretics are punished in this Circle. We read earlier, at the end of Canto 9, that Virgil tells Dante, “Like heretics lie buried with their like / and the graves burn more, or less, accordingly” (Musa, *Inferno* 9.130-131).

In addition, the vision of the Heretics was faulty on Earth, since they believed in incorrect things. In the *Inferno*, the vision of all the sinners is faulty. They can see the future, but they cannot see the present; thus, Cavalcante does not know whether his son is still alive. After the Last Judgment, the Heretics will have no future and so they will know nothing. Farinata tells Dante the Pilgrim that “all our knowledge / will be completely dead at that time when / the door to future things is closed forever” (Musa, *Inferno* 10.106-108).

No guards are here because tombs don’t need guards.

• How do we know that Farinata degli Uberti is proud from the way that he talks to Dante?

Farinata is definitely proud. Dante writes about him that he is “proclaiming his disdain for all this Hell” (Musa, *Inferno* 10.36).

It is interesting to think of what Farinata is doing. He is in a tomb, and he stands up in it, so that his chest, shoulders, and head are visible to Dante. That position diminishes him (Farinata’s head is much lower than Dante’s head because Farinata is standing in a tomb that is dug into the ground), but he is still proud. Although Farinata would like to tower over Dante, Dante stands higher than he does. Although Farinata would like to look like a dignified statue on a pedestal, he looks somewhat silly.

He asks Dante, “And *who* would *your* ancestors be?” (Musa, *Inferno* 10.42). This is an interesting question, and we find out that Farinata is from a high-born family, part of the aristocracy of Florence. In fact, Farinata’s family is higher born than Dante’s family.

Basically, Farinata will soon be implying this: My family is better than your family.

Note that most of us would not be talking the way that Farinata talks to Dante. If we were far from home, and we met a person from our hometown, we would be talking about things we have in common — for example, the best pizza place in your hometown — rather than saying that our family is better than your family.

In fact, it turns out that Farinata is a Ghibelline and so he opposed the Guelfs.

In addition, when Farinata mentions two of the people in the tomb with him, he mentions only two people of high social position — apparently, he approves of these people because of their high social position:

He said: “With more than a thousand here I lie;
 Within here is the second Frederick,
 And the Cardinal, and of the rest I speak not.”

(Longfellow 10.118-120)

The people referred to are the Emperor Frederick II and Cardinal Ottaviano degli Ubaldini. The other people in the tomb are presumably of lower class than these two and so are not worthy enough for Farinata to mention their names.

• What did Farinata do in the past at the Battle of Montaperti between the rival cities of Florence and Siena on 4 September 1260?

Farinata was a Ghibelline general and leader at the Battle of Montaperti. At this battle the Ghibellines defeated the Guelfs and took control of Florence, kicking out many Guelfs.

The Florentine Ghibellines had allied themselves with the rival city of Siena. In this battle, thousands of people died.

The other major Ghibelline leader at the Battle of Montaperti was Provenzan Salvani (the leader of the Sienese Ghibellines), whom we will see in *Purgatory*.

• How does Dante respond to Farinata’s boasting about the past?

Farinata boasts about the past. He says about Dante’s Guelfs:

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.”

(Longfellow 10.46-48)

His statement is true, by the way. The Ghibellines exiled the Guelfs twice: in 1248 and in 1260. This, of course, is an excellent example of factionalism.

Dante responds in kind. He says:

“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.”

(Longfellow 10.49-51)

What we are seeing here is factionalism in action. Both Farinata and Dante are acting out the roles of a Ghibelline and a Guelf struggling against each other. Dante points out that his party, the Guelfs, came back from exile twice and are in fact still in control of Florence.

Of course, Dante is doing what Farinata is doing. Both are trying to score points against someone of an opposing political party. However, what happened to Farinata because of that kind of thinking? He ends up in the Inferno. Dante needs to learn to avoid extreme factionalism during his journey through the afterlife. At this point, Dante the Pilgrim is still naïve and is still making mistakes.

• Farinata’s tombmate, Cavalcante, speaks to Dante. Who is Cavalcante?

We see more factionalism in action when Cavalcante speaks to Dante. Cavalcante is a Guelf while Farinata is a Ghibeline, so they are of opposing political parties. However, they are related by marriage. Cavalcante’s son married Farinata’s daughter in a politically motivated marriage.

Farinata and Cavalcante will be sharing the same tomb forever.

Note that Cavalcante interrupts the conversation of Farinata and Dante just like Farinata interrupted the conversation of Dante and Virgil earlier.

• What do Dante and Cavalcante talk about?

Cavalcante believes that Dante’s ability as a poet won him this trip through Hell. Cavalcante wonders why his son (Guido), who is also a poet, is not with Dante. Cavalcante thinks that his son is the equal of (or better than) Dante as a poet.

• What misunderstanding occurs in the conversation between Dante and Cavalcante?

Cavalcante asks Dante:

Weeping, he said to me: “If through this blind
Prison thou goest by loftiness of genius,

Where is my son? and why is he not with thee?"

(Longfellow 10.58-60)

Note that Cavalcante, like Farinata, is proud. He considers his son to be a poet of at least equal worth as Dante. If Dante is present as a living man in the *Inferno* because of his great worth, then Cavalcante's son also ought to be present as a living man in the *Inferno*.

Dante replies to Cavalcante: "that one waiting over there guides me through here, / the one, perhaps, your Guido held in scorn" (Musa, *Inferno* 10.62-63).

Of course, "that one waiting over there" (Musa, *Inferno* 10.62) is Virgil.

Note that Dante seems to be accepting Cavalcante's assumption that Dante is here in the *Inferno* because of his great merit as a poet. However, we know that actually he has three heavenly ladies who are worried about his soul. Dante is actually undertaking this pilgrimage in an attempt to save his soul.

Note also the reference to factionalism in poetry. It seems that Cavalcante's son the poet scorned Virgil.

This exchange of dialogue leads to a major misunderstanding. Cavalcante hears the past tense ("held") and assumes that his son has died.

We read what Cavalcante says:

Up starting suddenly, he cried out: "How

Saidst thou, — he had? — Is he not still alive?

Does not the sweet light strike upon his eyes?"

(Longfellow 10.67-69)

Dante does not speak for a moment because he is surprised — after all, the souls here know the past and the future, so why wouldn't the souls know the present? During the pause, Cavalcante disappears back into the tomb, thinking that his son is dead.

Of course, heresy also involves misunderstanding. Heretics misunderstand God.

• Does Farinata ever acknowledge the existence of his tombmate?

Once again, we see factionalism in action. Farinata and Cavalcante completely ignore each other. Farinata picks up the conversation as though Cavalcante had never spoken.

Dante says about Farinata:

he merely picked up where we left off:

“If that art they did not master,” he went on,
 “that gives me greater pain than does this
 bed.”

(Musa 10.76-78)

Even though Cavalcante and Farinata will be in the same tomb forever, they completely and totally ignore each other.

Note that Cavalcante and Farinata are in-laws. Cavalcante's son (Guido) married Farinata's daughter (Beatrice) in a marriage arranged to form a political alliance. Unfortunately, despite the things they have in common — being Florentines and being in-laws — extreme factionalism makes Cavalcante and Farinata completely and totally ignore each other. If not for extreme factionalism, Cavalcante and Farinata could talk together in the tomb, somewhat lessening the severity of their punishment.

• **What does Farinata reveal to Dante about the future?**

Farinata reveals that Dante will soon be sent into exile — within 50 months.

Farinata says:

“But fifty times shall not rekindled be
 The countenance of the Lady who reigns
 here,
 Ere thou shalt know how heavy is that art;”

(Longfellow 10.79-81)

“The queen who reigns down here” (Musa, *Inferno* 10.79) is the moon; the sun does not shine in the Inferno.

This is a very clear prophecy of Dante’s coming exile.

• **Farinata asks why the Florentines are so hard on his family. (His family was not allowed to return from exile to Florence.) What explanation does Dante give?**

Dante replies:

Whence I to him: “The slaughter and great carnage
 Which have with crimson stained the Arbia,
 cause
 Such orisons in our temple to be made.”

(Longfellow 10.85-87)

Montaperti was a hill on the side of the Arbia River, so Dante is referring to the bloodshed of the Battle of Montaperti in 1260.

In 1280, many Ghibellines were allowed to return to Florence; however, Farinata’s family — the Uberti family — was not allowed to return to Florence.

Farinata was basically a traitor to Guelf-led Florence. He went to the city of Siena and got the Siennese to fight on his side. Many Florentines died in the battle, but Farinata and his Ghibellines gained power.

• How does Farinata avoid taking responsibility for his actions?

Dante says about Farinata:

After his head he with a sigh had shaken,
 “There I was not alone,” he said, “nor surely
 Without a cause had with the others moved.
 But there I was alone, where every one
 Consented to the laying waste of Florence,
 He who defended her with open face.”

(Longfellow 10.88-93)

After the Guelf Florentines had been conquered, the Siennese thought about razing the city, but Farinata says that he by himself stopped them.

Of course, we can ask why he stopped them. Chances are, he wanted power over the city. If no city exists, then he cannot exert power over the city. Rather than Farinata being a hero, chances are good that Farinata was simply concerned about getting power for himself.

Farinata is apparently willing and able to sacrifice much life for power. At the Battle of Montaperti, thousands of people died. Also, Farinata can be regarded as a traitor to Florence, having conspired with a rival city to get soldiers to defeat it.

By the way, the leader of the Sieneese at the Battle of Montaperti was Provenzan Salvani, whom we will see among the saved in Purgatory.

As usual, a sinner in the Inferno is avoiding taking responsibility for his actions.

• In which way is the vision of sinners in the Inferno faulty?

Farinata reveals that souls in the Inferno are unable to know the present, although they remember the past and know the future. Farinata says that the sinners in the Inferno can learn about present events and living people when a new sinner arrives. Of course, after Judgment Day no new sinners will arrive.

Mark Musa writes,

In answer to the Pilgrim's wish (the "knot" of line 96) to know the shade's capacity for knowledge of the present, Farinata states that, while they have complete knowledge of things past and future, they are ignorant of the present (except, of course, for the news of current events brought them by the new arrivals in Hell, the "others," 104). Even this knowledge will be denied them after the Day of Judgment, when all will become absolute and eternal. The door of the future will be closed (108) and their remembrance of the past will fade away, since there will no longer be any past, present, or future. (*Inferno* 166)

Farinata says:

“Hence thou canst understand, that wholly dead^[L]_[SEP]

Will be our knowledge from the moment
when^[L]_[SEP]

The portal of the future shall be closed.”

(Longfellow 10.106-108)

• **Dante wants Farinata to give a message to Cavalcante. Is Farinata likely to give that message?**

Dante requests that Farinata tell his tombmate that his son is still alive, but it seems very unlikely that Farinata will do that. Partisan politics (factionalism) will prevent that from happening.

• **Why, in the Circle of the Heretics, do the characters talk about politics and poetry at all? Why is that an appropriate topic?**

Sinners have something important to say to Dante. Here we see factionalism in action, and factionalism can occur in many areas: religion, politics, poetry, and music.

Dante is being warned against being factionalistic.

• **Why is Farinata in Hell?**

Farinata is proud — something that is the foundation of all sin.

Farinata got a lot of people killed because of his political factionalism.

Farinata is a Heretic who denied the immortality of human beings.

• **Why is the punishment of the Heretics (who denied that human beings are immortal) appropriate?**

The Heretics whom Dante meets are those who did not believe in life after death. Their punishment is to get exactly what they thought they would get after death: a tomb. The souls of the Heretics are placed in open tombs filled with fire. After the Last Judgment, the souls of the Heretics will

be reunited with their bodies and the tops of the tombs will be closed forever. In addition, the vision of the Heretics was faulty on Earth, since they believed in incorrect things. In the *Inferno*, the vision of all the sinners is faulty. They can see the future, but they cannot see the present; thus, Cavalcante does not know whether his son is still alive. After the Last Judgment, the Heretics will have no future and so they will know nothing. Farinata tells Dante the Pilgrim that “all our knowledge / will be completely dead at that time when / the door to future things is closed forever” (Musa, *Inferno* 10.106-108).

Chapter 11: “Canto 11: Virgil Teaches Dante”

• Canto 11 is a kind of break for Dante the Pilgrim. Why does Virgil want Dante to take a break here?

Virgil and Dante need to take a break here in order to become accustomed to the stench that is rising from the lower Circles of Hell. Virgil uses this opportunity to educate Dante about the lower levels of the Inferno.

By the way, we see in this canto the tomb of a pope: Pope Anastasius (496-498 C.E.). He was believed to have denied that Christ is divine.

• How do we know that Dante is an eager student?

When Dante and Virgil take a break in order to become accustomed to the stench that rises from the lower Circles, Dante tells Virgil, “You will have to find / some way to keep our time from being wasted” (Musa, *Inferno* 11.13-14).

This says something about Dante the Pilgrim. He is taking this journey through the Inferno and the rest of the afterlife in order to learn things that will save his soul, and he is eager to learn.

• How is Hell organized, according to Virgil? (Briefly, what do the three final Circles contain?)

Virgil is a teacher. He and Dante are taking a break, but Virgil uses this break to educate Dante about what lies ahead.

Hell is divided into three main parts:

First, the incontinent are punished in Circles 2-5. These sinners committed the sins of incontinence.

Circle 2 punishes those who are guilty of not controlling their lust.

Circle 3 punishes those who are guilty of not controlling their desire for food and drink; they are guilty of gluttony.

Circle 4 punished those who are guilty of not controlling their desire either for money or for the things that money can buy.

Circle 5 punished those who are guilty of not controlling their anger.

Second, the violent are punished in Circle 7. These sinners committed the sins of bestiality (acting like a beast).

Third, those who committed fraud are punished in Circles 8-9. The sins of fraud are also sins of malice.

In addition, as we have seen, heresy is punished in Circle 6, which is located between the Circles devoted to punishing the incontinent (Circles 2-5) and the Circle devoted to punishing the violent (Circle 7). Also, the virtuous pagans reside in Circle 1: Limbo. Heresy and paganism are both Christian concepts and so are not parts of a pagan classification of sins.

• The 7th Circle contains the violent. Into which three sub-categories can the violent be subdivided?

The three sub-categories of violence are these:

1) A sinner can be violent against neighbors. You can do this by harming the person or by harming the person's property.

2) A sinner can be violent against self (by committing suicide). The violent wasters of wealth punished in the Wood of the Suicides committed a kind of suicide by deliberately courting death after they wasted their wealth. We will see a sinner who did not retreat in battle, but instead stayed and fought so that he

would be killed. He had violently wasted his wealth and did not want to live anymore.

3) A sinner can be violent against God by blaspheming or by being an atheist. A sinner can also be violent against God by opposing Nature, which God created; for example, the Sodomites oppose Nature by engaging in sex that is incapable of resulting in children.

• Fraud is punished in the final two Circles. What are the two major kinds of fraud? How many subdivisions do these kinds of fraud have?

Fraud is depriving another person of a right through the use of willful misrepresentation.

The two major kinds of fraud are simple and complex.

Simple Fraud

Simple fraud is punished in Circle 8.

Simple fraud does not involve the betrayal of a special trust.

Ten kinds of sinners engage in simple fraud:

- 1) Seducers and Panderers
- 2) Flatterers
- 3) Simonists
- 4) Fortune-Tellers and Sorcerers
- 5) Grafters
- 6) Hypocrites
- 7) Thieves
- 8) Evil Deceivers/Those Who Misuse Great Gifts

9) Schismatics: Those who caused divisions (in families or in politics or in religion, etc.)

10) Falsifiers, including Counterfeiters

Complex Fraud

Complex fraud is punished in Circle 9.

Complex fraud does involve the betrayal of a special trust. Complex fraud is fraud to which is added treachery toward those to whom we have a special obligation to be honest and forthright.

Four kinds of sinners engage in complex fraud:

- 1) Traitors against kin/family.
- 2) Traitors against government.
- 3) Traitors against guests or hosts.
- 4) Traitors against God — the worst sin possible.

• Which is worst? The sins of incontinence? The sins of violence? The sins of fraud?

The deeper you go into Hell, the worst the sins become.

The sins of fraud are the most evil. The sins of complex fraud are more evil than the sins of simple fraud. Being a traitor against God is the worst sin possible. As you would expect, Lucifer, the angel who led the rebellion against God, is the worst sinner of all time.

The sins of incontinence are the least evil. Lust is the least evil sin of all. The sins of incontinence are punished outside the walls of the city of Dis, which is the city of Lucifer. The sins of heresy, violence, and fraud are punished within the walls of the city of Dis.

Chapter 12: “Canto 12: The Minotaur and the River of Blood”

- **The 7th Circle, the Circle of the Violent, will be described for the next 6 cantos: 12-17.**

During the next 6 cantos, we will see a number of kinds of violent sinners.

- **Why do we see so many half-human, half-animal mythological creatures in this section of the Inferno?**

As Mark Musa points out in his notes to Canto 12, “The Sins of Violence are also the Sins of Bestiality, and the perfect overseer of this Circle is the half-man, half-bull known as the Minotaur” (181). Why is violence a sin of bestiality? Perhaps because Nature is red in tooth and claw. Many animals kill other animals in order to eat them. (All food is something that was recently alive. In Nature, few if any animals die of old age.) Centaurs are also guards in this section of the Inferno, and they are half-human and half-animal.

- **Which kinds of people do the violent include?**

Canto 12: Sinners who harmed others physically through violence are boiled in a river of blood. These sinners include murderers and bloody tyrants.

Canto 13: The Suicides are punished in a gloomy wood.

Cantos 14 through 17: The Blasphemers, Sodomites, and Greedy Moneylenders are punished in a burning desert.

- **Virgil and Dante descend over the rocks of a landslide. When was that landslide caused?**

Christ caused the landslide during the Harrowing of Hell — when Christ rescued virtuous Jews (the Elect) from Hell. In particular, an earthquake that occurred during the Harrowing

of Hell caused the landslide. Note that in the Inferno damage occurs. Nothing is ever damaged in Paradise.

The damage caused by the landslide during the Harrowing of Hell is a change since the last time Virgil was here. Virgil died, the sorceress Erichtho sent him to the bottom of the Inferno to find and bring a soul to her, and after Virgil had completed this task, Christ's Harrowing of Hell occurred.

Virgil tells Dante:

“Now will I have thee know, the other time
I here descended to the nether Hell,
This precipice had not yet fallen down.”

(Longfellow 12.34-36)

• **What is the Minotaur, and why is it an appropriate guard here?**

Circle 7 punishes three categories of the violent: those who are violent against other people, those who are violent against themselves, and those who are violent against God. The main guard here is the Minotaur, who was violent. The Minotaur is the half-human, half-bull offspring of Pasiphaë, the wife of King Minos of Crete, who is the judge of the damned. Pasiphaë fell in love with a bull, and in order to have sex with the bull, she crept inside a lifelike but artificially created (by Daedalus) wooden cow. The result of their sexual union was the half-bull, half-man Minotaur, which was so violent that Daedalus created a labyrinth for the Minotaur to live in. The Minotaur feasted on the flesh of young Athenians who were given to the Cretans as tribute and put into the labyrinth with him. Eventually, Theseus, the King of Athens, was able to kill the Minotaur. He was afraid that he would get lost in the labyrinth, but Ariadne, Pasiphaë's daughter, helped him by telling him to tie one end of a ball

of string to the entrance, then enter the Labyrinth. He was able to find his way out of the Labyrinth by using the string. Here, as elsewhere, we see a bestial guard. Dante is making the point that sin is bestial in nature. Certainly, beasts can be violent.

Violence is an irrational sin, and the Minotaur is irrational. It even bites itself in rage.

• What are Centaurs, and what role do they play in this canto? Why are they appropriate guards for this Circle?

The guards of the violent who physically harmed other people are the Centaurs. Centaurs have the torso and head of a human being and the body of a horse, thus they are half-human and half-beast. The mythological Centaurs were often violent.

• Identify these Centaurs: Pholus, Nessus, and Chiron. What are their stories?

Pholus

In Thessaly, the Centaurs were invited to a wedding, but grew drunk and tried to rape the women guests. Pholus, one of the Centaur guards here in the Inferno, tried to rape the bride.

Nessus

Another Centaur, Nessus, who is also a guard, seized Hercules' second wife, Dejanira, and tried to rape her. Hercules killed Nessus, but before Nessus died, he told Dejanira to soak a shirt with his blood, and if she ever doubted Hercules' fidelity to her, to have him wear that shirt. When Dejanira later gave Hercules the shirt to wear, the blood of the Centaur burned his skin so painfully that he committed suicide. Nessus becomes the guide for Virgil and Dante. He leads them

to the ford, where the river is shallowest, and he carries Dante across the ford so that Dante does not burn his feet.

Chiron

Not all of the Centaurs are violent — Chiron (the leader of the Centaurs) was the noted tutor of Hercules, Aesculapius (an ancient physician), and Achilles — but enough Centaurs are violent that they are appropriate guards of the violent who physically harmed others. We do note that Chiron is intelligent. We first see him in a contemplative pose (Musa, *Inferno* 12.70-71), and he notices that Dante is alive because Dante “moves everything he touches” (Musa, *Inferno* 12.81), which is not something a dead soul does. In addition, Chiron is a good judge of character; he is very helpful to Virgil and Dante.

• How are those who harmed others through violence punished, and why is that punishment appropriate?

These violent sinners are punished by being immersed in a boiling river of blood. These violent people caused the blood of other people to flow; now they are immersed in blood. Each sinner is appointed a certain level to be immersed in the river; the more blood the sinner caused to flow on earth, the more deeply they are immersed in the river. Centaurs shoot arrows at sinners who try to rise above their appointed level in the river.

By the way, the name of the river is Phlegethon, which means “Fiery.” Only one river runs through the Inferno. The river’s name changes from place to place, and the water turns to boiling blood here and then back to water later. This should not surprise us; after all, Jesus was able to turn water into wine. (By the way, the writer of this discussion guide can also perform a miracle; he can turn water into coffee.)

• Who are a few of the people who are being punished in this part of the 7th Circle of the Inferno?

Alexander is here. This may refer to Alexander the Great, who conquered much of the known world (known to his country, that is). According to the Christian historian Orosius, Alexander the Great was cruel and violent. However, this Alexander could very well be Alexander, tyrant of Pherae. According to ancient authors Cicero and Valerius Maximus, Alexander of Pherae was extremely cruel.

Attila the Hun, another noted warrior, is here.

Ezzelino, who burned 11,000 people at the stake on one occasion, is here.

Each of these violent people is up to his neck in boiling blood.

Other violent sinners are up to their chests, waists, knees, or feet in boiling blood.

Dante recognizes many people here, but he does not speak with any of them. This is rare. Since he speaks with people from whom he can learn, apparently violence was not a sin that Dante was much guilty of.

• How do the Centaurs treat Virgil and Dante?

The Centaurs challenge Virgil and Dante, but after hearing their story, they treat Virgil and Dante well. Chiron even gives them an escort to the next Circle: Nessus, the Centaur responsible for killing Hercules. Dante rides on Nessus' back.

• Do you know of any people who are especially violent toward other people?

Any rapist or murderer will do.

Any serial killer such as Ted Bundy or John Wayne Gacy is a good example of a person who is violent toward other people.

Ted Bundy confessed to killing over 30 young women. He was a serial rapist as well as a serial killer.

John Wayne Gacy raped and murdered young men and boys.

• **Why is Dante the Pilgrim completely silent in Canto 12?**

We note that Dante the Pilgrim is completely silent in Canto 12. Apparently, he is learning to concentrate on his education. We remember that earlier Dante the Pilgrim said to Virgil that “I’m trying not to talk too much, / as you have told me more than once to do” (Musa, *Inferno* 10.20-21).

In addition, violence was not one of Dante’s sins. He speaks to no sinner here because he would learn nothing from the sinner.

Chapter 13: “Canto 13: The Suicides”

• **Describe the place where the Suicides reside. Why is this place appropriate for the Suicides to reside?**

This is a gloomy wood with trees or shrubs with black leaves. Trees do not have self-determination the way that human beings do. Human beings can decide to move around; trees can't. Human beings can decide where to live; trees take root where a seed falls. Human beings can make decisions; trees can't. Human beings can solve problems; trees can't. Human beings have free will; trees don't have free will.

By committing suicide, these human beings gave up the power of self-determination; therefore, this is an appropriate place for the Suicides to be punished.

• **Why does Dante use the words “no” and “not” so often at the beginning of Canto 13?**

Canto 13 begins this way:

Not yet had Nessus reached the other side,
 When we had put ourselves within a wood,
 That was not marked by any path whatever.
 Not foliage green, but of a dusky color,
 Not branches smooth, but gnarled and inter-
 tangled,
 Not apple-trees were there, but thorns with
 poison.
 Such tangled thickets have not, nor so dense,
 Those savage wild beasts, that in hatred hold
 'Twixt Cecina and Corneto the tilled places.

(Longfellow 13.1-9)

Obviously, we have a lot of negative words at the beginning of these stanzas. This is appropriate because the Suicides have said “no” to life. They have rejected the life that God gave them.

Cecina and Corneto are towns in Italy. Corneto is now called Tarquinia.

• The Suicides are the grubby shrubs. Why is being turned into a shrub an appropriate punishment for the Suicides?

After leaving the boiling river of blood where the violent are punished, Dante and Virgil arrive at a gloomy wood where the Suicides are punished. The Suicides are the grubby shrubs of the wood. The Suicides cannot even determine when they will talk; they can communicate only when one of their twigs or branches is broken, because they use the resulting hole as a mouth until the blood congeals. (The blood oozes from the wound the way that sap would ooze from a broken twig or branch.) The punishment of the Suicides is appropriate because by killing themselves, the Suicides gave up the privilege of self-determination. As shrubs, the Suicides have no free will because plants have no free will. This is appropriate because in life the Suicides rejected free will by committing suicide. As grubby shrubs, the Suicides cannot move around, and they cannot even speak unless someone breaks off a twig or branch.

• What are the Harpies?

Guarding the Suicides are the Harpies, who are half-bird and half-woman. Violence is a bestial sin, and this is reflected in the Harpies, who feast on the leaves of the shrubs and so allow the Suicides to complain about their pain.

• **What happens when Dante breaks off a twig from a shrub?**

The shrub speaks and complains to him.

The same thing happens in the *Aeneid*. Aeneas breaks a branch and then the shrub begins to bleed and to speak to him. It turns out that a Prince of Troy is buried there. The Prince was murdered with spears so the murderers could take his wealth. The body fell to the ground, and the spears took root and grew.

Virgil asks Dante to break off a twig so that he could witness for himself what happens. If Virgil were to simply tell him what would happen, Dante is unlikely to believe him.

• **Write a short character analysis of Pier delle Vigne.**

We find out that the shrub is Pier delle Vigne (Peter of the Vines), who says:

“I am the one who both keys had in keeping
 Of Frederick’s heart, and turned them to and fro
 So softly in unlocking and in locking,
 That from his secrets most men I withheld;”

(Longfellow 13.58-61)

Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II fought the Pope for control of Italy. He died in 1250, and we know from Canto 10 that Frederick II ended up in the Inferno in a tomb with Farinata, so we know that he is an unrepentant sinner.

Pier delle Vigne was basically the Chief of Staff to Frederick II. He controlled who got access to the Holy Roman Emperor. He also wrote propaganda in support of Frederick II. He advised Frederick II — the two keys that Pier delle Vigne

refers are “yes” and “no.” Pier advised Frederick II on whether something was good or bad.

However, eventually he was removed from office and treated badly (he was blinded, and he was put in prison), and as a result he committed suicide by hitting his head against a wall.

Pier does say that he was loyal to Frederick II: “I was so faithful to my glorious office, / I lost not only sleep but life itself” (Musa, *Inferno* 13.62-63).

Note that Pier delle Vigne was a workaholic.

In addition, we learn that Pier delle Vigne likes fame. In the top Circles of the *Inferno*, many sinners want to be remembered on Earth; however, the deeper we go into the *Inferno*, the less the sinners want to be remembered on Earth.

Virgil wants Pier delle Vigne to talk to Dante, and so he tells Pier:

“But tell him who thou wast, so that by way

Of some amends thy fame he may refresh

Up in the world, to which he can return.”

(Longfellow 13.52-54)

Pier delle Vigne wants to be remembered on Earth, so he tells Virgil, “So appealing are your lovely words, / I must reply” (Musa, *Inferno* 13.55-56).

• Like the other souls in Hell, Pier delle Vigne tells his story in a very self-serving way, in a way that puts the blame on somebody or something else. How does he do this?

Pier delle Vigne blames envy for his problems:

“The courtesan who never from the dwelling
 Of Caesar turned aside her strumpet eyes,
 Death universal and the vice of courts,
 Inflamed against me all the other minds,
 And they, inflamed, did so inflame Augustus,
 That my glad honors turned to dismal mourn-
 ings.
 My spirit, in disdainful exultation,
 Thinking by dying to escape disdain,
 Made me unjust against myself, the just.”

(Longfellow 13.64-72)

We see that Pier delle Vigne overvalued Frederick II, whom he calls “Caesar” and “Augustus.” In addition, because Pier is in the *Inferno*, we know that he undervalued God.

Of course, although Pier delle Vigne was loyal to Frederick II during Pier’s life, he was disloyal to God when he committed suicide.

At the end of his speech, Pier delle Vigne makes clear that he blames Envy for his problems:

“And to the world if one of you return,
 Let him my memory comfort, which is lying
 Still prostrate from the blow that envy dealt
 it.”

(Longfellow 13.76-78)

Of course, we know that Pier (not Envy) was the person who committed suicide.

To some extent, Pier delle Vigne's story is effective, for Dante pities him. When Virgil tells Dante to ask Pier delle Vigne any questions he has, Dante replies:

Whence I to him: "Do thou again inquire

Concerning what thou thinks't will satisfy
me;

For I cannot, such pity is in my heart."

(Longfellow 13.82-84)

Mark Musa thinks that the pity Dante feels here is different from the pity that Dante felt for Francesca da Rimini (193). I am not so sure. It is possible that Dante pities Pier because of the false rumors that led to his imprisonment, as Musa thinks; however, it seems plausible to me that once again Dante the Pilgrim is being scammed by a sinner.

• What is the nature of suicide? When does the person who commits suicide want to live? When does the person who commits suicide want to die?

Suicides want to live life on their own terms. When things are going well, they want to live. When things are going badly, they do not want to live.

• How will Dante the Pilgrim's situation in life be someday similar to Pier Delle Vigne's situation in life?

Dante will be under attack one day. Dante will lose his political position, and he will be exiled. Like Pier delle Vigne, Dante will be discouraged and wonder whether life is worth living.

• What can Dante learn from Pier Delle Vigne?

The main thing Dante can learn is to not act like Pier delle Vigne. Pier delle Vigne committed suicide, and he ended up in the Inferno. If Dante commits suicide when he is

discouraged, he can end up in the same place as Pier delle Vigne. Dante will be sent into exile, and he will be discouraged, but if he wishes to stay away from eternal punishment in the Inferno, he must respond to his discouragement differently from the way that Pier delle Vigne responded to his discouragement.

As human beings, we have free will, and we can choose how we respond to disaster. We can give in to discouragement and commit suicide, or we can respond in a more courageous way.

Some women who have been raped become counselors for other women who have been raped or they become self-defense experts and teach other women how to defend themselves.

• At the Last Judgment, what will happen to the Suicides?

At the Last Judgment, the Suicides will be given back their bodies, but because they rejected their bodies when they were alive, their bodies will hang from the branches of the shrubs.

• Why is the punishment given to the Suicides fitting?

The Suicides have no free will because they rejected the chance to use free will to solve their problems.

The Suicides rejected their bodies, so they will not be reunited with their bodies.

Because the Suicides gave up their right of Self-Determination, they no longer have Self-Determination in the Inferno. Minos throws their souls into Circle 7, and the souls sprout wherever they fall. The souls cannot move around freely, and they cannot speak unless one of their twigs or limbs is broken.

In life, the Suicides mutilated themselves. Now, as shrubs, they can no longer mutilate themselves.

• Two naked souls are found fleeing from black dogs. These two people are Profligate Spenders — they violently wasted their wealth. Why are they here among the Suicides?

Perhaps surprisingly, we see Profligate Spenders among the Suicides. These Profligate Spenders are not among the Spendthrifts who are incontinent because after these Profligate Spenders violently wasted their wealth, they courted death by going into battle and hoping to be killed. Black dogs attack these “Suicides” as violently as the Profligates wasted their wealth.

• Who are the Profligates? How are they different from the Spendthrifts?

The Profligates are different from the Spendthrifts in that they actively courted death in battle as a kind of suicide after violently wasting their wealth. The Spendthrifts wasted their money, but the Profligate Spenders violently wasted their money.

• Why is the punishment given to the Profligates fitting?

The Spendthrifts simply wasted their wealth; the Profligates are violent in their wasting. After wasting their wealth, the Profligates courted death by acting foolishly in battle — a kind of suicide.

We learn that the dogs tear the shades of the Profligates to pieces and then carry off the limbs. Giacomo da Sant’ Andrea hides among the Suicides, but the dogs find him:

On him who had crouched down they set their teeth,

And him they lacerated piece by piece,

Thereafter bore away those aching members.

(Longfellow 13.127-129)

It is fitting that the Profligate Spenders are torn by dogs — an act that mimics doing violence to wealth and courting violent death.

Of course, the punishment of Giacomo da Sant' Andrea also causes pain to the Suicides among whom he was hiding. When the dogs tear Giacomo da Sant' Andrea to pieces, they are also tearing the branches of the Suicides. In particular, they are tearing the branches of a Florentine who committed suicide by hanging himself in his home.

The souls must be reconstituted at a later time after they are torn to pieces by dogs. Souls do not die; they are immortal.

The black dogs are yet more guards of the Inferno.

• **Who are some of the Profligates?**

One Profligate is Giacomo da Sant' Andrea, who supposedly once deliberately set on fire several houses that he owned just because he wanted to.

Lano of Siena wasted his wealth and then deliberately sought death in a 1287 battle; he could have escaped by retreating, but stayed to fight so that he would die.

• **Why are so many half-human, half-beast characters from ancient mythology found in Hell?**

The sins are bestial in nature. Sins go against reason — reason is one characteristic of human beings at their best.

• **Which examples can you give of Suicides and of Profli-gates?**

Cato the Younger, whom we will see later, is a famous Suicide. He fought against Julius Caesar, and rather than surrender to him, he committed suicide.

I once read a science-fiction story in which people are born with a credit card. They charge as much as they want up until they are 18, and then they start working to pay off the credit-card debt. One person charged vast amounts, then on his 18th birthday tried to commit suicide. However, the credit-card company knew that he might do that, so they stopped his suicide. He ended up with a very bad job — flying a spaceship for years and years at a speed less than the speed of light.

Today, some people commit Suicide by Cop. They don't want to live, so they charge at a police officer and force the police officer to shoot them in self-defense.

Here is an anecdote about suicide:

Can a hit man do a good deed? Yes. When Angelina Jolie was a young actress enrolled in film school in New York, she became depressed and decided to hire a hit man to murder her, believing that if she committed suicide directly it would be harder on her family and friends. However, when she contacted the hit man, he advised her to wait a month and then call him if she still wanted his services. One month later, Ms. Jolie was no longer depressed and she did not call the hit man. (Source: Rachel Lynette, *Angelina Jolie* (Lucent Books), p. 37.)

Chapter 14: “Canto 14: The Desert with Falling Flames”

• **Describe the place where the Blasphemers, Usurers, and Sodomites are punished.**

The Blasphemers, Usurers, and Sodomites are punished in a desert where nothing is growing. Flakes of fire drop from the sky onto a barren plain, and of course the sinners’ hands are busy brushing the fire away from bodies:

Without repose forever was the dance
Of miserable hands, now there, now here,
Shaking away from off them the fresh gledes.

(Longfellow 14.40-42)

A glede is an ember (a live coal).

The sinners appear in different positions:

- 1) The Blasphemers, who are least numerous, cursed God, so they lie on their backs, looking upward in the direction of what they cursed.
- 2) The Usurers (Greedy Moneylenders) are bent over, like a moneylender who is counting money.
- 3) The Sodomites, who are most numerous, are forever running.

• **Who is Capaneus?**

Capaneus is one of the seven kings who attacked Thebes. He died as he cursed Jove, aka Jupiter. In particular, he boasted that Jove could not stop him from attacking Thebes, and Jove killed him because of his boast.

Capaneus, even now, is unrepentant. His hands do not brush away the fire. Instead, he is scornful of the flames.

The story of how Capaneus blasphemed is told in Statius' *Thebaid* 10:

[...] in mid-heaven Capaneus was heard: "Are there no gods among you," he cries, "who stand for panic-stricken Thebes? Where are the sluggard sons of this accursed land, Bacchus and Alcides? Any of lesser name I am ashamed to challenge. Rather come thou — what worthier antagonist? For lo! Semele's ashes and her tomb are in my power! — come thou, and strive with all thy flames against me, thou, Jupiter! Or art thou braver at frightening timid maidens with thy thunder, and razing the towers of thy father-in-law Cadmus?"

Source: <http://www.theoi.com/Text/StatiusThebaid10.html>

THEBAID BOOK 10, TRANSLATED BY J. H. MOZLEY

• How are Virgil and Dante able to travel safely through the burning plain?

A stream (a branch of the river of boiling blood) flows through the burning desert. Above this stream the flames are put out. By staying close to the stream, Dante and Virgil are protected from the flakes of fire.

• What is the parable of the statue on Crete, and what is the source of the rivers of Hell?

The statue on Crete is made of many kinds of materials, which grow less in quality descending from the head, which is made of gold, to the feet, one of which — the right one — is made of terra cotta (baked clay). The eyes of the statue drip tears. The tears flow to the ground and become the streams and rivers of the Inferno. These are those streams:

Acheron: Charon ferries the souls of the dead across Acheron.

Styx: This stream is a marsh in which the angry and the sullen (or slothful) are punished.

Phlegethon: This is the river of boiling blood in which the physically violent are punished.

Cocytus: Cocytus is not explained here, but it is the frozen ice in the ninth and final circle. Virgil merely tells Dante that he will see it for himself.

Also, the tears form the stream of Lethe, which is located on top of the Mountain of Purgatory.

This reminds us of the ages of Humankind, where a golden age is followed by a silver age, which is followed by other ages in which the quality of Humankind declines.

The tears, of course, apparently become blood when they reach Circle 7 — the circle of the violent. Jesus can turn water into wine, and God can turn water into blood.

The Old Man of Crete shows his back to the Egyptian seaport Damietta, symbol of the pagan world. The Old Man of Crete faces Rome, home of the Pope and symbol of the Christian world.

Dante got the idea of the Old Man of Crete from Daniel 2:31-35:

31: Thou, O king, sawest, and behold a great image. This great image, whose brightness was excellent, stood before thee; and the form thereof was terrible.

32: This image's head was of fine gold, his breast and his arms of silver, his belly and his thighs of brass,

33: His legs of iron, his feet part of iron and part of clay.

34: Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces

35: Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshingfloors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth.

• What is usury? What are some Bible passages about usury?

Lending at interest may be permissible in certain instances; certainly we capitalist Americans believe that. I personally see lots of good reasons for lending at interest. Bonds raise money for investments. However, at times lending at interest is not ethical. For example, the lending could be done at excessively high rates of interest. Here I think of the check-cashing places that prey on the poor. Those business owners can end up in Hell.

However, although we Americans may believe in lending at interest, the Bible may prohibit it — at least in certain cases. For example, thou shalt not lend money at interest to your brother, especially if your brother is poor, although you may lend money at interest to strangers. Here are a few Bible passages about lending at interest:

Deuteronomy 23:19: Thou shalt not lend upon usury to thy brother; usury of money, usury of victuals, usury of any thing that is lent upon usury:

Exodus 22:25: If thou lend money to any of my people that is poor by thee, thou shalt not be to him as an usurer, neither shalt thou lay upon him usury.

Leviticus 25:35-37: And if thy brother be waxen poor, and fallen in decay with thee; then thou shalt relieve him: yea, though he be a stranger, or a sojourner; that he may live with thee. Take thou no usury of him, or increase: but fear thy God; that thy brother may live with thee. Thou shalt not give him thy money upon usury, nor lend him thy victuals for increase.

Deuteronomy 23:20: Unto a stranger thou mayest lend upon usury; but unto thy brother thou shalt not lend upon usury: that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all that thou settest thine hand to in the land whither thou goest to possess it.

• Why is the punishment given to the Blasphemers and the Usurers fitting?

The Blasphemers, Sodomites, and Greedy Moneylenders (Usurers) are punished in a scorching desert. All of these sinners have committed sins in which they are violent against God or God's gifts. All of these sinners have committed sins in which they either take something that should be fertile and make it infertile or take something that should be infertile and make it fertile. These sinners are on a sandy desert on which fire rains down and on which nothing can grow.

The Blasphemers ought to love God, but they curse God instead. The love of God ought to be fertile and result in good things, but the Blasphemers curse something that ought to be regarded as valuable. They lie in the sandy desert and face upward, looking toward that which they cursed. Of course, when they open their mouths to curse God, flakes of fire fall into their mouths.

In contrast, the Greedy Moneylenders (Usurers) take something that ought to be infertile and make it fertile. The definition of usury has changed over time, but originally, as in the Bible, it meant lending money at interest. The Bible is against lending money at interest to relatives or to poor people, although Jews are allowed to lend money at interest to non-Jews; thus, Jews became moneylenders in the Middle Ages.

In modern times, usury is charging an unethically high rate of interest. In my opinion, the owners of modern check-cashing places and the CEOs of many credit-card companies in America may end up in the Inferno, and in my opinion, they belong there. Because the Greedy Moneylenders have been taking something that ought to be infertile and making it fertile, they are in this burning plain with fire raining down on them. Here they are bent over, like the Greedy Moneylenders of Dante's time bent over their tables and counting their money. Hanging from their necks are moneybags, which they probably gazed at reverently in life — and now with revulsion. Dante cannot recognize any of the Greedy Moneylenders by looking at their faces; they were so preoccupied with making money that they have lost their individuality. Because the Greedy Moneylenders are bent over, gazing greedily at the moneybags hanging from their necks, they are less able to avoid the flakes of flame falling on their bodies.

By the way, Dante does not identify any Jews as Greedy Moneylenders in *The Divine Comedy*.

• Do you know of any famous Blasphemers or Greedy Moneylenders?

Many credit-card companies and modern check-cashing places are Greedy Moneylenders. They charge very high prices for the loans. The same thing is true of some tax-preparation places that advance people their coming tax refund.

Unfortunately, blasphemy is very common nowadays. Many people very easily take the Lord's name in vain. Some people are capable of saying things such as Cincin-Goddamn-nati.

One of the Ten Commandments says, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord, thy God, in vain." Many people think that the commandment means that we should not say things such as "God damn." *Tucson Weekly* columnist Tom Danehy writes, "In my entire life, I've said the word 'God,' and I've said the word 'damn,' but I have NEVER said them together. Not one time, not even while singing along to the Steppenwolf song 'The Pusher.'" That fiercely anti-drug song includes the line "God damn the pusher man." However, Mr. Danehy says that he asked his parish priest about this commandment and the phrase that he avoids saying:

What's funny is that I asked my parish priest about that when I was growing up, and he said that the commandment wasn't about that particular phrase, but rather people having the nerve to speak for God: 'Oh, God will punish you for that,' or, 'It's a sin to build a nuclear weapon' — that sort of thing, which makes a lot more sense to me, although I'm still never putting those two words together, just in case the aforementioned parish priest had it wrong. (Source: Tom Danehy, "PETA's claims that good Christians should be vegetarians lack biblical backing." *Tucson Weekly*. 5 March 2009 <<http://tinyurl.com/mroh2qz>>.)

Chapter 15: “Canto 15: Brunetto Latini”

• What is the definition of sodomy?

The New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy, Third Edition, defines Sodomy in this way:

Sexual intercourse that is not the union of the genital organs of a man and a woman. The term is most frequently applied to anal intercourse between two men or to sexual relations between people and animals.

After I show my students at Ohio University this definition on a transparency, I ask them this: “How many of you are going to telephone your mother tonight and say, ‘Hey, Mom, guess what I learned in school today?’”

• This canto is about violence against God, or against nature, or against art. This canto is about taking something that should be fertile and making it infertile.

Dante the Pilgrim, of course, is in the Inferno to learn things that will keep him out of the Inferno. He apparently did not have homosexual feelings, yet he writes a canto especially devoted to the part of the Inferno that is devoted to punishing Sodomites.

What Dante the Pilgrim needs to learn here is to not take something that should be fertile and make it infertile. This, of course, is what the Sodomites do. No amount of homosexual intercourse will result in the birth of a baby from that union.

Dante the Pilgrim will later be engaged in what should be a fertile act: the writing of *The Divine Comedy*. He, of course, succeeded in creating a work of art that has been fertile in engaging the minds of Humankind. Reading this book has rewarded many, many people. It has lasted for over 700 years and is likely to last as long as people read Great Books.

What could make the act of writing *The Divine Comedy* infertile? If Dante were to write in order to become famous instead of writing in order to say the truth, *The Divine Comedy* would not be the fertile work of art we know today.

• **What does it mean to be violent against God?**

God is not a physical person (except in the case of the Incarnation), so how can one be violent against God?

Blasphemers are violent against God directly. They curse God directly.

The Greedy Moneylenders and the Sodomites are violent against God indirectly. The Greedy Moneylenders take advantage of the poor, although God has several commandments saying to take care of the poor, not harm them. The Sodomites are against God in that they are going against the commandment to “Be fruitful and multiply.”

I think that polluters do violence against God. In the Garden of Eden myth, we are commanded to take care of the earth. Polluters don’t do that. (By the way, myths can be true.)

• **What is the importance of the walls built around the burning desert?**

We read that the walls built around the burning desert are like the walls that people in countries below sea level build to keep back the sea so that they can live and grow things there:

Even as the Flemings, ’twixt Cadsand and Bruges,
 Fearing the flood that tow’rds them hurls itself,
 Their bulwarks build to put the sea to flight;
 And as the Paduans along the Brenta,

To guard their villas and their villages,
Or ever Chiarentana feel the heat;

In such similitude had those been made,
(Longfellow 15.4-10)

Of course, in the burning desert nothing can grow, so the walls here are ironic. An image that on Earth is fruitful is here in the Inferno barren. Of course, these sinners were violent against nature. Nature is now violent against these sinners, who have flakes of fire falling on them.

• Why is the punishment given to the Sodomites fitting, and why is the environment of the Sodomites fitting?

In contrast to the Greedy Moneylenders, the Sodomites take something that ought to be fertile and make it infertile. Instead of having sex with women and raising families with children, the Sodomites had sex with other men, a form of sex from which no children can be result. Thus, they are punished in this infertile field. They continuously run, perhaps because they continually ran after men when they were alive. If the Sodomites stop running, they are punished by having to lie on the desert ground for 100 years while being unable to brush off the falling flakes of fire from their body (Musa, *Inferno* 15.37-39).

• Dante recognizes Ser Brunetto Latini. Does Dante the Poet put only his enemies in Hell?

No, Ser Brunetto Latini is a friend of Dante. Dante treats him very well indeed and with a lot of respect.

Dante is being eyed by the homosexuals when suddenly he is recognized by one of them:

Thus scrutinized by such a family,

By some one I was recognized, who seized

My garment's hem, and cried out, "What a marvel!"

And I, when he stretched forth his arm to me,
 On his baked aspect fastened so mine eyes,
 That the scorched countenance prevented not
 His recognition by my intellect;
 And bowing down my face unto his own,
 I made reply, "Are you here, Ser Brunetto?"

(Longfellow 15.22-30)

Italian is a language that has respectful and familiar forms of addressing someone else. Here Dante uses the respectful form of *you* when he asks, "Is this really you, here, Ser Brunetto?" (Musa, *Inferno* 15.30).

• **Who was Brunetto Latini?**

Brunetto Latini is not known much today except as a character who appears in Dante's *Inferno* and as someone who was a mentor to Dante in real life. He was, however, a Guelf and a scholar. He was famous for having written the *Trésor*, which recounts much encyclopedic knowledge of the day. After the Battle of Montaperti in 1260, he was exiled from Florence.

• **Why is Brunetto calling Dante "O my son" (Musa, *Inferno* 15.31) ironic?**

As a homosexual, Brunetto, of course, is unlikely to have biological sons. And, of course, Dante was not his biological son.

Many teachers, by the way, regard their students as their children.

• **How does Dante respond when Brunetto asks why he is here?**

Brunetto asks, “What fortune or what destiny / leads you down before your final hour?” (Musa, *Inferno* 15.46-47).

Dante’s reply is important because this is the first time he answers the question correctly. Apparently, he really has been learning something in the Inferno:

“Up there above us in the life serene,”

I answered him, “I lost me in a valley,

Or ever yet my age had been completed.

But yestermorn I turned my back upon it;

This one appeared to me, returning thither,

And homeward leadeth me along this road.”

(Longfellow 15.49-54)

• **What kind of respect does Brunetto have for Dante?**

Brunetto really does have a lot of respect for Dante: “He said to me: ‘Follow your constellation / and you cannot fail to reach your port of glory’” (Musa, *Inferno* 15.55-56).

Basically, Brunetto is telling Dante that he is going to be famous. He heaps praise on Dante and tells him that his name is going to be in lights.

• **What could be a reason why Brunetto is so interested in Dante’s potential for becoming a great poet?**

Brunetto himself had some fame, although it was not long lasting — the way that Dante’s fame is.

Brunetto may very well be interested in his own fame. If Brunetto is remembered as Dante's teacher, Brunetto's fame will at least last longer.

Some college professors are interviewed on TV about famous pupils they have taught.

• What could happen to Dante if he concentrated on becoming famous?

Dante tells Brunetto that "you taught me how man makes himself eternal" (Musa, *Inferno* 15.85). This is a reference to becoming famous on Earth through literature.

Yet Brunetto is in Hell for all eternity. Brunetto did not teach Dante about the right kind of "eternal." Brunetto was all about gaining eternal fame on Earth, not eternal life in Heaven.

If Dante were to concentrate on becoming famous rather than telling the truth in *The Divine Comedy*, he might end up like Brunetto, with fame that is not long lasting on Earth and with punishment that is eternal in the Inferno.

If Dante were to concentrate on becoming famous rather than telling the truth in *The Divine Comedy*, he might not put Popes in Hell, but instead flatter them so that he could be their guests and drop their names to other people.

If Dante were to concentrate on becoming famous rather than telling the truth in *The Divine Comedy*, he might not put any of his friends in his *Inferno*, but instead he might put only his enemies in his *Inferno*.

As we know, Dante achieved eternity in Paradise, and all indications are that he will continue to enjoy fame as a poet on Earth. I personally rank Dante with Homer, Virgil, and Shakespeare.

• **What does Brunetto show a keen interest in (besides homosexuality)? Is showing a keen interest in that a sin?**

Brunetto truly has a keen interest in fame. At the end of the canto, he tells Dante, “Remember my *Trésor*, where I live on, / this is the only thing I ask of you” (Musa, *Inferno* 15.119-120).

Compromising your artistic vision for fame is a sin. If you don’t tell the truth in your art, your art will not live on.

Ironically, if you do tell the truth in your art, it can live on, and your fame will be greater than if you had compromised your vision. Dante is remembered today as one of the greatest poets who ever lived. Brunetto is a footnote in scholarly volumes. If you read the *Trésor* today, you will read it only in the hope that you will learn more about Dante.

Books should be fertile; books written only to make the writer famous are infertile.

• **What works did Brunetto Latini write?**

Brunetto Latini mentions his *Trésor* (Musa, *Inferno* 15.119). The full title is *Livre dou Trésor*, and the title of this work of prose can be translated as *The Book of the Treasure*. Brunetto Latini also wrote an allegorical, poetic work titled *Tesoretta*, or *The Little Treasure*.

• **Which prophecy does Brunetto Latini make concerning Dante?**

Brunetto Latini prophesies hard times for Dante. He says,

“But that ungrateful and malignant people,
Which of old time from Fesole descended,
And smacks still of the mountain and the
granite,

Will make itself, for thy good deeds, thy foe;”

(Longfellow 15.61-64)

This prophecy states that both political parties will regard Dante as an enemy. Fiesole is the town where Catiline was besieged. (Cicero exposed Catiline’s plot to overthrow the Roman Republic in 63 B.C.E.) The survivors of the siege founded Florence.

• **What is Dante’s reaction to Brunetto Latini’s prophecy?**

Dante, of course, has heard other prophecies, both from Ciaccio (Canto 6) and from Farinata (Canto 10). He tells Brunetto Latini that he will “write down what you tell me of my future” (Musa, *Inferno* 15.88) and will have it interpreted by Beatrice, although actually it is his ancestor Cacciaguida who will interpret the prophecies for Dante.

Dante also says that he is ready for what lies ahead for him. He will not waver from his course. We can interpret this, of course, as also applying to his writing *The Divine Comedy*. Dante will tell the truth; he will not write simply in order to become famous.

Dante tells Brunetto Latini:

“Provided that my conscience do not chide
me,

For whatsoever Fortune I am ready.

Such handsel is not new unto mine ears;

Therefore let Fortune turn her wheel around

As it may please her, and the churl his mat-
tock.”

(Longfellow 15.92-96)

Virgil is very happy with what Dante says about remembering the prophecies he has heard and tells him, “He listens well who notes well what he hears” (*Inferno* 15.99).

• **Who are some Sodomites with Brunetto Latini?**

Brunetto Latini mentions a few other Sodomites with him:

Francesco d’Accorso: A lawyer from Florence who also taught law at the University of Bologna.

Andrea de’ Mozzi: From 1287 to 1295, he was Bishop of Florence.

Brunetto Latini also says that there are many clerics and many men of letters in his group.

• **Do you know of any famous Sodomites?**

Sodomites are common in the arts. Many famous dancers have been Sodomites. Rudolf Nureyev is one such dancer. At an awards ceremony he attended, a naked man streaked across the stage. Mr. Nureyev was delighted.

Here are a few other anecdotes about gay men:

• Tim Gill is a gay business executive of the company that manufactures Quark XPress. He found coming out very difficult. While attending college in Boulder, Colorado, he walked into the Boulder Gay Liberation office, said “Hi,” then “Hello,” then he “just shook for ten minutes.” Fortunately, the man in the office managed to calm him down. Like many other gay men of the time, Mr. Gill saw a psychiatrist. At this time, 1972, homosexuality was no longer considered aberrant, so the psychiatrist told him, “Well, if you want to change, I will help you. Otherwise, we just have to work on your parents.” (Source: Michael Thomas Ford, *Outspoken*, pp. 193ff.)

- Celebrated effeminate homosexual wit Quentin Crisp was more or less accepted by his family, although they sometimes sent him letters with this salutation: “Dear Sir or Madam — cross out which does not apply.” Something similar happened in a law court when the clerk sneered at him and said, “You are a male person, I presume.” (Source: Paul Bailey, editor, *The Stately Homo: A Celebration of the Life of Quentin Crisp*, pp. 60, 226.)

- Gay author Joel Perry recommends being out of the closet so gays and lesbians can fight for their rights. Of course, he realizes that being out means possibly being targeted for abuse, but even that can be an opportunity for activism. For example, if a bigot calls him a queer, he corrects the bigot by saying that he is a “fantastic queer.” (Source: Joel Perry, *Funny That Way: Adventures in Fabulousness*, p. 86.)

- Bill Serpe of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, came out when he was 24 years old, although he had realized that he was gay at age 19. For five years, he led a double life, talking at his day job as a shoe salesman about dating women although at night he was really dating men. One day, his boss asked him what he had done the evening before, and Mr. Serpe replied that he had been on a date. That’s when he realized that he couldn’t keep lying, that he had to be open about his sexuality. When his boss asked what her name was, Mr. Serpe replied, “His name was John.” His father was in denial about Mr. Serpe’s sexuality, and although they discussed it once, they didn’t discuss it further for a very long time. When Mr. Serpe was 29 years old, at Thanksgiving he visited his family, then left to see his partner. His father asked, “Why don’t you pick her up and bring her back here?” Mr. Serpe replied, “It’s not a her.” Hearing this, his stepmother asked, “Then why don’t you bring him back here?” That’s when Mr. Serpe came out to the rest of his family. He says, “It was difficult at first, but we worked through it. I’ve been a very lucky gay man.” (Source: Lisa Kaiser, “It’s the Most Liberating

Thing': Six Milwaukeeans tell their coming-out stories." *The Shepherd Express*. 7 June 2007 <<http://tinyurl.com/q9t4dpu>>.

- As a gay teenager, Paul Guilbert showed little fear. Whenever someone called him “faggot,” he would reply, “That’s right, honey.” (And whenever someone hit him, he hit back.) Mr. Guilbert was Aaron Frick’s date at his high school prom, which Mr. Fricke writes about in *Reflections of a Rock Lobster: A Story About Growing Up Gay*. (Source: Aaron Fricke, *Reflections of a Rock Lobster: A Story About Growing Up Gay*, p. 44.)

Chapter 16: “Canto 16: The Violent Against Nature (Continued)”

• What are the three major subdivisions of the Inferno?

Of course, before we enter Hell Proper, we see the Vestibule of Hell, where those who never took a stand, either for good or for evil, are punished.

In Circle 1, aka Limbo, which is a place of sighs rather than screams, are such people as the Virtuous Pagans and the Unbaptized.

The three major subdivisions of the Inferno are these:

1) The Circles devoted to punishing unrepented sins of Incontinence.

Circle 2: Lust

Circle 3: Gluttony

Circle 4: The Hoarders and the Spendthrifts

Circle 5: The Wrathful

Note: Circle 6 is devoted to punishing unrepented heresy — a Christian sin.

2) The Circle devoted to punishing unrepented sins of Violence: Circle 7.

3) The Circles devoted to punishing unrepented sins of Fraud: Circles 8 and 9. Circle 8 punishes Simple Fraud, while Circle 9 punishes Complex Fraud.

Incontinence, Violence, and Fraud are pagan classifications of sin. Heresy is a Christian classification of sin.

• **Who are the Florentines whom Dante meets?**

Dante meets three Florentines who are all warriors and who are all punished for Sodomy:

1) Guido Guerra.

In 1260, the Florentine Guelfs attacked Siena and lost. Guido Guerra had advised the Florentine Guelfs not to attack Siena at Montaperti.

2) Tegghiaio Aldobrandi.

He also advised the Florentine Guelfs not to attack Siena at Montaperti. He knew that many mercenaries had joined the Sieneese forces.

Note: Of course, the Florentines should have listened to Guido Guerra and Tegghiaio Aldobrandi. The Sieneese won the Battle of Montaperti. Farinata, who is punished among the Heretics, was one of the generals of the Sieneese and allied forces.

3) Jacopo Rusticucci.

His wife was unpleasant, and he sent her home to her father. He blames his sodomy on her. He was wealthy.

• **In your opinion, why do Dante and Virgil treat the Sodomites with so much respect?**

Virgil treats the Florentine Sodomites with respect. He tells Dante that these men are well worth talking to:

Unto their cries my Teacher paused attentive;

He turned his face towards me, and “Now wait,”

He said; “to these we should be courteous.

And if it were not for the fire that darts

The nature of this region, I should say
 That haste were more becoming thee than
 them.”

(Longfellow 16.13-18)

One thing we find out about these Sodomites is that they are concerned about Florence and wish her well. They may be Sodomites, but they are patriots who have done much good for Florence. Sodomites are able to do good in the world. They have heard from a newly arrived sinner, Guglielmo Borsiere, that Florence is in bad shape, and they are worried about the city.

We should also note that these three Sodomites wish to be remembered in the living world. Speaking together, they tell Dante, “do not fail to speak of us to living men” (Musa, *Inferno* 16.85).

• **Was Dante a Sodomite?**

Dante does not seem to have been tempted to become a Sodomite.

• **Is homosexuality a sin?**

Sodomy is a sin — if it is a sin — that does not hurt other people, I think. It is a victimless sin. I suppose that homosexuality can break up a marriage, if a man discovers that he is gay after being married or if he is discovered to be gay after being married. This may be an argument for accepting homosexuality, as some men may deny that they are gay because society looks down on it, and they may feel compelled to be married to a woman.

Here’s an anecdote: A man married, then discovered that he was sexually attracted to other men. He started going to gay bars late at night, making his wife wonder where he was.

Eventually, he told her that he was gay, and she said, “Is that all? I thought you were an international spy or something.”

Today, we may want to put such Biblical quotations as “Homosexuality is an abomination” into historical context. At the time of that quotation, the Jews were struggling against other people who accepted homosexuality. Also, the word “homosexuality” is a relatively recent term that has appeared in translations of the Bible only recently.

Dante clearly considers Sodomy a sin.

See my free essay “Why I Support Same-Sex Civil Marriage: here:

<https://www.smashwords.com/books/view/34568>

Be aware that Catholic priest Daniel A. Helminiak wrote a book titled *What the Bible Really Says About Homosexuality*. He does not believe that homosexuality is a sin.

• **How does Virgil signal Geryon?**

Virgil takes Dante’s cord that he uses as a belt, which Dante used to try to catch the leopard that kept him from climbing to the sun, and throws it into a pit.

Virgil and Dante need to summon Geryon so that they can ride on his back down to the Circle. Here is a cliff, as evidenced by a waterfall, and so they need help to advance to the next Circle.

Note that this canto is bookended by the waterfall. At the beginning of the canto the waterfall is heard faintly; at the end of the canto the waterfall is much louder.

• **Could Dante’s cord that he uses as a belt be a symbol?**

Some people think that Dante at one time may have been a Franciscan, members of which order similarly wear cords as belts. The cord can be seen as a symbol of the Franciscans.

Mark Musa, translator of *The Divine Comedy*, believes that the cord is also a symbol of foolish self-confidence. Mr. Musa notes that here in Canto 16 Dante tells us that he once thought he could use his cord to catch the leopard of Canto 1.

• **Which special powers does Virgil have?**

We have had references to two special powers that Virgil has:

Virgil always knows what time it is by the positions of the heavenly bodies. It is always dark in the Inferno, but Virgil is able to know the positions of the heavenly bodies and so know the time.

Virgil is able to tell which questions Dante is thinking. We see a clear reference to that in Canto 16, when Dante writes, and the Pilgrim thinks:

Ah me! how very cautious men should be
 With those who not alone behold the act,
 But with their wisdom look into the thoughts!

(Longfellow 16.118-120)

Virgil, of course, has other qualities:

- He is a symbol of Human Reason, and he is a Virtuous Pagan.
- He is a famous poet and the author of the *Aeneid*, and he has all the qualities of a shade, including weightlessness.
- He also is very helpful to Beatrice, and he has special knowledge of the Inferno as a result of having previously journeyed to the bottom of the Inferno after being required to retrieve a shade for the sorceress Erichtho to question.

We will also see that Virgil is strong and sure-footed. He is able to carry Dante when Dante needs to be carried.

Chapter 17: “Canto 17: Geryon”

• Who was Geryon? Why is he an appropriate guard for these sinners who have committed fraud?

The guard of the Circles dedicated to punishing fraud is Geryon, a creature with the face of an honest man, the body of a beast or combination of parts of beasts, and a stinging tail like that of a scorpion. Note that Geryon is described as having three parts. Like other triune Guards, Geryon is a perversion of the Holy Trinity. Later, we will see that Lucifer has three mouths — yet another perversion of the Holy Trinity.

Geryon is an appropriate guard because he embodies fraud. His honest-looking face encourages people to trust him, while he hides his tail that will sting his victim. We can certainly guess that Geryon stings the sinners who ride on his back. In doing that, he commits fraud. When Geryon arrives, his stinging tail is out of sight; it hangs down toward the next Circle. Geryon’s honest-looking face convinces the sinners to get on his back, and then Geryon stings him with his tail.

We have learned that the judge Minos flings sinners to the Circle or at least closer to the Circle where they will be punished. Some sinners must travel to the Circle where they will be punished. Phlegyas the ferryman takes them across the swamp named the Styx. Here we see that Geryon flies some sinners from Circle 7 to Circle 8.

In mythology, Geryon was a warrior with three bodies, three heads, and six arms. Hercules killed him during one of his famous Labors.

The character Geryon is also based on Revelation 11:7-11 (King James Version):

7: And the shapes of the locusts were like unto horses prepared unto battle; and on their heads were as it

were crowns like gold, and their faces were as the faces of men.

8: And they had hair as the hair of women, and their teeth were as the teeth of lions.

9: And they had breastplates, as it were breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots of many horses running to battle.

10: And they had tails like unto scorpions, and there were stings in their tails: and their power was to hurt men five months.

11: And they had a king over them, which is the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in the Hebrew tongue is Abaddon, but in the Greek tongue hath his name Apollyon.

Another source is Pliny, *Natural History*, Book 8, Chapter 30:

Ctesias informs us, that among these same Æthiopi-ans, there is an animal found, which he calls the man-tichora; it has a triple row of teeth, which fit into each other like those of a comb, the face and ears of a man, and azure eyes, is of the color of blood, has the body of the lion, and a tail ending in a sting, like that of the scorpion. Its voice resembles the union of the sound of the flute and the trumpet; it is of excessive swiftness, and is particularly fond of human flesh.

Source: <http://tinyurl.com/lmr4wo6>

Translation: Pliny the Elder, *The Natural History* (eds. John Bostock, M.D., F.R.S., H.T. Riley, Esq., B.A.)

• Explain the reference to Arachne when Dante describes Geryon's belly and flanks (*Inferno* 17.13-18).

Dante, of course, was a very learned man, and he was very familiar with literature and mythology, as well as with the science of his day. About Geryon, Dante writes:

Two paws it had, hairy unto the armpits;
 The back, and breast, and both the sides it had
 Depicted o'er with nooses and with shields.
 With colors more, groundwork or broidery
 Never in cloth did Tartars make nor Turks,
 Nor were such tissues by Arachne laid.

(Longfellow 17.13-18)

Arachne was a mortal woman who was an expert weaver. She was proud of her skill, and she challenged the goddess Minerva/Athena to a weaving contest. This is never a good idea because the ancient Greek and Roman gods and goddesses are not always benevolent, and they can do horrible things to human beings with whom they are angry. Arachne's weaving was perfect, and Minerva/Athena was so angry that she tore it to shreds. Frightened, Arachne tried to commit suicide by hanging herself, but Minerva/Athena did not allow her to die, but instead turned her into a spider. Today, an arachnid is an eight-legged creature, which includes spiders, mites, ticks, and scorpions.

• What is fraud, and what modern examples of fraud do you know about (perhaps on the Internet)?

When fraud occurs, someone deprives another person of his or her rights by using willful misrepresentation.

We see much fraud occurring in the 20th and 21st centuries:

1) Nigerian (and other) emails:

Often, people get an email that supposedly comes from someone trying to take millions of dollars out of a country. If you give that person access to your bank account, supposedly so that they can deposit the money into your account, you think you will get a big portion of the money. What happens, of course, is that the person committing fraud transfers money from your bank account to their bank account.

2) Canadian emails:

In these emails you are told that you will get a refund of taxes from the federal government; however, the person committing fraud asks for your bank account information, supposedly so that your refund can be directly deposited into your bank account. What happens, of course, is that the person committing fraud transfers money from your bank account to their bank account.

3) Phishing:

You get an email asking you to update your information at Amazon or PayPal or a bank. The email asks for your bank account information. What happens, of course, is that the person committing fraud transfers money from your bank account to their bank account.

4) Identity theft:

Someone steals your identity, gets a lot of credit cards in your name while pretending to be you, and runs up a huge amount of debt in your name.

5) Genuine placebo:

You can buy pills that will enhance your sexual performance. These pills are legally advertised as a genuine placebo. Some people who don't know what a placebo is will buy these pills. (A placebo contains no medicine; if it works,

it works because the person taking the placebo thinks it works.)

• **What is usury?**

An archaic definition of usury is the charging of interest on a loan.

A modern definition of usury is the charging of excessive interest on a loan.

Personally, I favor charging interest on most loans. It helps business.

Lending money at interest is not always wrong, according to the Bible. You may not ethically charge a relative interest, and you may not ethically charge a poor person interest. However, in some circumstances you may lend money at interest.

• **What modern examples of usury do you know about (e.g., check-cashing places)?**

Modern check-cashing places really do charge high amounts of interest. The interest on a payday loan can be 500 percent in a year. Huge profits are why so many check-cashing places sprang up so quickly.

A tax preparer may give you your expected tax refund in advance — for a high rate of interest.

A loan shark may charge you a high rate of interest — and break your arms and legs if you don't pay the loan back.

• **How are the Usurers punished? Why is that punishment appropriate?**

The Greedy Moneylenders (Usurers) take something that ought to be infertile and make it fertile. The definition of usury has changed over time, but originally, as in the Bible, it meant lending money at interest. The Bible is against

lending money at interest to relatives or to poor people, although Jews are allowed to lend money at interest to non-Jews; thus, Jews became moneylenders in the Middle Ages. In modern times, usury is charging an unethically high rate of interest. In my opinion, the owners of modern check-cashing places and the CEOs of many credit-card companies in America are sinful.

Because the Greedy Moneylenders have been taking something that ought to be infertile and make it fertile, they are in this burning plain with fire raining down on them. Here they are bent over, like the Greedy Moneylenders of Dante's time who bent over their tables and counted their money. Hanging from their necks are moneybags, which they gaze at greedily just as they did while they were living. Dante writes that the Greedy Moneylenders seem to "feast their eyes" on these moneybags (Musa, *Inferno* 17.57). Despite the presence of the moneybags, the Greedy Moneylenders are suffering. Dante writes about them:

Out of their eyes was gushing forth their woe;

This way, that way, they helped them with
their hands

Now from the flames and now from the hot
soil.

(Longfellow 17.46-48)

In addition, Dante cannot recognize any of the Greedy Moneylenders by looking at their faces; they were so preoccupied with making money that they have lost their individuality. However, although Dante cannot recognize any individual Greedy Moneylenders, he can recognize the families that the Greedy Moneylenders come from by looking the designs — the coats of arms — on their moneybags. For example, the Gianfigliuzzi family of Florence is identified by the yellow purse with a blue lion. In addition, the Ubriachi family of

Florence is identified by the red purse with a goose, and the Scrovegni family of Padua is identified by the purse with the blue sow.

The sins of Violence are also Sins of Bestiality, and we see that these Greedy Moneylenders are much like beasts. Their hands move constantly, like the hands of other sinners here, as the flakes of fire rain down like them:

Not otherwise in summer do the dogs,

Now with the foot, now with the muzzle,
when

By fleas, or flies, or gadflies, they are bitten.

(Longfellow 17.49-51)

• How does Virgil show that he is a caring guide during the flight on Geryon?

Virgil, as always, is a caring guide. Geryon, the symbol of fraud, is dangerous because of his scorpion's stinger. Therefore, when Virgil and Dante seat themselves on Geryon to be flown into the next Circle, Virgil seats himself in back, near the scorpion's stinger. Virgil tells Dante,

“Now we descend by stairways such as these;

Mount thou in front, for I will be midway,

So that the tail may have no power to harm
thee.”

(Longfellow 17.82-84)

As we have already seen, Virgil knows the thoughts of Dante the Pilgrim. Here, Dante is afraid and he wants Virgil to hold on to him. Although Dante does not say that out loud, Virgil does exactly that (Musa, *Inferno* 17.94-96).

In addition, while Dante was talking to the Greedy Money-lenders, Virgil was talking to Geryon, arranging their flight into the next Circle. Geryon is not happy to be their transportation, as we shall see. However, Virgil and Dante are on a mission from God, and Geryon knows that he is unable to resist God.

God uses evil creatures for His purpose. Geryon, like many of the guards in the Inferno, is evil, but he serves God's purpose by serving as a guard of the sinners in the Inferno — and by serving as transportation for Virgil and Dante. Once again, we see that good is more powerful than evil.

• Dante compares his fear while flying on Geryon to the fear of two people who undertake other flights: 1) the flight of Apollo's son Phaëthon, and 2) the flight of Icarus. Explain the flight of Apollo's son Phaëthon.

Phaëthon was Apollo's son, but he was born to a mortal woman, and so he was a mortal. One day, he journeyed to see his father, who wanted to give him a gift — a gift of anything he wanted. Phaëthon decided that he wanted to drive his father's chariot. Apollo was the Sun-god, and he drove the chariot that warmed and lit the Earth. However, Apollo knew that only a god could handle the horses that drove the chariot, and he begged his son to choose another gift. However, Phaëthon was determined to drive the chariot. Since Apollo had sworn an inviolable oath by the River Styx, he had to let Phaëthon drive the chariot.

As Apollo had foreknown, Phaëthon could not control the horses, and the chariot drove wildly over the sky, coming too close to Earth sometimes and being too far away sometimes. In fact, at one point the chariot came so close to the Earth that it turned the people in Africa black. Eventually, the chariot came so close to the Earth that the Earth was about to catch fire. Fortunately for the people living on the Earth, Zeus killed Phaëthon with a thunderbolt and Apollo was able

to drive the chariot again, and so everything went back to normal.

• **Define “allusion.”**

The website <http://guweb2.gonzaga.edu/faculty/wheeler/lit_terms_A.html> defines “allusion” in this way:

A casual reference in literature to a person, place, event, or another passage of literature, often without explicit identification. Allusions can originate in mythology, biblical references, historical events, or legends. Authors often use allusion to establish a tone, create an implied association, contrast two objects or people, make an unusual juxtaposition of references, or bring the reader into a world of experience outside the limitations of the story itself. Authors assume that the readers will recognize the original sources and relate their meaning to the new context. For instance, if a teacher were to refer to his class as a horde of Mongols, the students will have no idea if they are being praised or vilified unless they know what the Mongol horde was and what activities it participated in historically. This historical allusion assumes a certain level of education or awareness in the audience, so it should be taken as a compliment rather than an attempt at obscurity.

• **Why is it important to know mythological stories?**

It is important to know mythological stories because literature is rich in allusions to them. Here in Dante at this point we see references to two mythological stories about Phaëthon and Icarus. If the reader knows the stories, the allusions are meaningful. If the reader does not know who Phaëthon and Icarus are, the allusions fall flat.

Sometimes readers find Shakespeare difficult because of all the allusions to mythology. For example, if you do not know who Phaëthon is, this allusion that Juliet makes in *Romeo and Juliet* will fall flat:

“Gallop apace, you fiery-footed steeds,
Towards Phoebus’ lodging: such a wagoner
As Phaëthon would whip you to the west,
And bring in cloudy night immediately.”

(Shakespeare 3.2.1-4; Signet Classic Edition)

However, if you know who Phaëthon is, the allusion will be meaningful. You will understand two things:

1) Juliet is so eager for Romeo to come to her on their wedding night that she does not care if the world is destroyed. She wants Romeo as soon as possible. In addition, of course, we know that Romeo and Juliet’s world will be destroyed.

2) Phaëthon is a doomed, impetuous youth, and he reminds us of Juliet, who, like Phaëthon, is doomed, impetuous, and young. Of course, Romeo is also doomed, impetuous, and young.

• Dante compares his fear while flying on Geryon to the fear of two people who undertake other flights: 1) the flight of Apollo’s son Phaëthon, and 2) the flight of Icarus. Explain the flight of Icarus.

Icarus is the son of Daedalus. Daedalus built the wooden cow that Pasiphaë crept into when she fell in love with a bull and wanted the bull to make love to her. After Pasiphaë gave birth to the Minotaur, Daedalus built the Labyrinth that housed the Minotaur. Obviously, Daedalus was ingenious, but he doesn’t seem to have always used his ingenuity to accomplish good things.

To make sure that no one could ever learn the secret of how to get out of the labyrinth, the King of Crete imprisoned Daedalus and Icarus, his son. Daedalus fashioned wings made out of wax and feathers so that he and his son could fly away from the island where they were imprisoned. Daedalus warned his son not to fly too high, for if he did the sun would melt the wax, the feathers would fall out of the wings, and he would fall into the sea and drown.

This is exactly what happened. Icarus became excited because he was flying, he flew too high, the wax of his wings melted, he fell into the sea, and he drowned.

• According to Mark Musa, Geryon is angry at Virgil and Dante because he has been defrauded. What evidence exists for this interpretation?

The defrauding would occur when Virgil drops Dante's belt down to Geryon, who takes it as a sign that sinners are awaiting transportation down to a lower Circle. As an agent of evil, Geryon would be angry that instead of two sinners who will be punished in the two lowest Circles, Virgil and Dante await transportation.

As Mark Musa points out, Geryon shows his displeasure in a few ways:

- 1) Geryon's descent is compared to that of a falcon that is "perched in anger and disdain" (Musa, *Inferno* 17.132) toward his master.
- 2) Geryon lands in such a way that Virgil and Dante are almost up against the jagged cliff.
- 3) As soon as Virgil and Dante get off his back, Geryon shoots "off like a shaft shot from a bowstring" (Musa, *Inferno* 17.136).

This seems plausible to me. We remember the boatman Phlegyas, who was deceived by a signal into thinking that two sinners needed to be ferried to their place of punishment (Canto 8). Similarly, the dropping of Dante's belt into the abyss deceived Geryon.

In Canto 5, we learned that when Minos judges sinners, the sinners "are hurled below" (Musa, *Inferno* 5.15). Apparently, some sinners are not thrown all the way to their place of punishment but must journey to reach it.

Chapter 18: “Canto 18: Panderers and Seducers; Flatterers”

• What is the difference between simple fraud and complex fraud?

Fraud involves the willful use of misrepresentation to deprive another person of his or her rights. For example, someone can claim to be able to foretell the future and charge people money to be told their future.

Simple fraud is betrayal of strangers, and complex fraud is betrayal of those with whom we ought to have a bond.

Simple fraud is fraud, but it is not committed against those to whom one has a special obligation of trust.

Complex fraud is fraud committed against those to whom one has a special obligation of trust. Sinners who commit complex fraud are traitors of various kinds: e.g., traitors to kin/family, traitors to government, traitors to guests, or traitors to God.

• Give some examples of simple fraud.

The acts of simple fraud are

- 1) pandering and seducing,
- 2) flattering,
- 3) committing Simony,
- 4) doing sorcery,
- 5) committing graft,
- 6) being a hypocrisy,
- 7) stealing,
- 8) evil counseling,

9) discord-sowing, and

10) counterfeiting.

The numbers refer to the ditch in which those who committed these sins are punished.

• **What does the term “Malebolge” mean?**

Malebolge means “evil pockets” or “evil pouches.” They may be called that because the sinners here regard everything as being for sale. They wish to pocket money.

Circle 8 has 10 ditches (pockets, pouches) in it. In each ditch a different kind of sinner is punished. The sinners cannot get out of the ditches, but a number of stone bridges cross the ditches. These bridges resemble the spokes of a wheel.

As Dante and Virgil travel down to Circle 8 on the back of Geryon, Dante is able to see a bird’s-eye view of the malebolge (or evil pockets) that make up the Circle. In all, the Circle contains 10 pockets or ditches in which many kinds of sins are punished.

• **What does the term “pander” mean?**

A Pander or Panderer is a pimp or a procurer. If you are a man who wishes to have an affair with someone else’s wife, a Pander will help you do that. A Pander is a go-between for two people who wish to have an affair. “To pander” is a verb that means to act like a pimp or a procurer.

• **How are the Panderers and Seducers punished, and why is that punishment fitting?**

In the first bolgia are punished Panderers and Seducers. These sinners walk in lines past each other, showing that their sins are related. (Both sins involve unethical sex.) Here we see the first horned devils of the Inferno. These devils whip any sinner who is slow; they also insult the sinners.

These sinners caused others to feel pain in the living world; now they feel pain themselves.

• **Who is Venedico Caccianemico, and what is his sin?**

Venedico Caccianemico used his own sister to advance himself. He let the Marquis of Este sleep with his sister, who was named Ghisolabella. Thus he is a Panderer.

We should note that Venedico Caccianemico does not want to be recognized. Dante writes that “that whipped soul thought that he would hide from me / by lowering his face” (*Inferno* 18.46-47). In the two lowest Circles, the sinners have committed such heinous crimes that they do not want to be remembered on earth. (By “whipped,” Dante is referring to the whipping of the sinners by devils, part of the sinners’ punishment here.)

• **Who is Jason, and what is his sin?**

Jason is the Jason of Jason and the Argonauts, who sailed in search of and found the Golden Fleece. Unfortunately, he was a Seducer who would sleep with women, then abandon them when he found it convenient to do so.

He slept with, and then abandoned Hypsipyle when she was pregnant. She had twins.

He married and had children with Medea, but he abandoned her when someone he thought was better came along: Creusa. Creusa was the daughter of the King of Corinth, Creon. Medea killed their children in response.

Jason is one of the proud sinners. Some sinners in the *Inferno* are still proud — and rebellious. We read about Jason:

And the good Master, without my inquiring,
Said to me: “See that tall one who is coming,
And for his pain seems not to shed a tear;”

(Longfellow 18.82-84)

• How are the Flatterers punished, and why is that punishment appropriate?

In the second bolgia are punished Flatterers. This bolgia is filled with excrement from human privies, and the excrement coats the Flatterers. In the living world, insincere flattery — or crap — came from the mouths of the Flatterers, so in the *Inferno* they are covered with crap. Thaïs the whore is punished here, and so we see a connection with the previous bolgia, which punished some sinners whose sins had a connection with sex.

• Who is Alessio Interminei from Lucca, and what is his sin?

Alessio Interminei from Lucca is a Flatterer, and he is in a ditch filled with excrement, along with the other Flatterers. We read about him:

He beat his slimy forehead as he answered:

“I am stuck down here by all those flatteries
that rolled unceasingly off my tongue up
there.”

(Musa 18.124-126)

We know, of course, that the slime on his forehead is excrement.

One thing to note about Alessio Interminei from Lucca is that we know little about him. His fame comes from being in Dante’s *Inferno*, although he is mentioned in some historical documents from the time he was alive. Many people in *The Divine Comedy* are famous, but some of them are not famous.

• Who is Thaïs, and what is her sin?

Thaïs was a prostitute who flattered her clients. She prostituted her body, and she prostituted her words. She is punished by being immersed in excrement.

Thaïs is a fictional character in the play *Eunuchus* by Terence. In his *De Amicitia*, Cicero wrote about her.

• Do you know of any famous Flatterers, either in real life or in fiction?

Expensive prostitutes probably flatter their clients.

Wormtongue from Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* flattered the king to control him.

Pick-up lines may be a form of flattery.

Good Pick-Up Lines (Assuming that Pick-Up Lines Can be Good)

You must be in the wrong place — the Miss Universe contest is over there.

Was that an earthquake or did you just rock my world?

A Bad Pick-Up Line

Did you fart? Because you blew me away.

Source: <http://www.pickuphelp.com/>

• What are the advantages of being a flatterer? What are the disadvantages of being a flatterer?

Mulla Nasrudin lived on a poor person's diet of chickpeas and bread, while his rich neighbor, who served the emperor, feasted on sumptuous food. The rich neighbor said to Nasrudin, "If only you would learn to flatter the emperor like I do, then you would not have to live on chickpeas and bread." Nasrudin replied, "If only you would learn to live on

chickpeas and bread like I do, then you would not have to flatter the emperor.” (Source: Jack Kornfield and Christina Feldman, *Soul Food*, pp. 273-274.)

• Why do you think the sinners in this Circle don’t want Dante to talk about them on Earth?

The sinners deep in the Inferno have committed worse sins than those who are high in the Inferno. For this reason, they don’t want to be remembered on Earth.

Also, misrepresentation is a part of fraud. These sinners may be trying to keep whatever good reputation they have on Earth.

• Why do you think the language used in the *Inferno* is coarse: “shit” (Musa, *Inferno* 18.116) and “shitty” (Musa, *Inferno* 18.131)?

Dante uses various kinds of language throughout *The Divine Comedy*. In the *Inferno*, it is appropriate to use coarse language, and so Dante uses it. The language in the *Paradise* will be much different.

John Ciardi writes that Dante’s use of such low language earned him the title of “Master of the Disgusting.” Similarly, controversial director John Waters’ movies have earned him the title of the Prince of Puke. (Mr. Waters knows how to keep censors happy: Get a can of creamed corn and film a puke scene so the censors can cut it from your movie.)

• What is the difference between these words: *bolgia* and *bolge*?

Bolgia: singular

Bolge: plural.

By the way, this is good advice: Proofread three times. (Proofreading is hard work.)

Chapter 19: “Canto 19: The Simonists”

• **The Inferno is divided into three major subdivisions — incontinence, violence, and fraud.**

Of course, we know that heresy is also punished in the Inferno, although it does not fit into the pagan classification of sins that include incontinence, violence, and fraud.

At this point, we are entering the final two Circles: the two Circles that are devoted to punishing fraud. Simple fraud is punished in Circle 8, and complex fraud is punished in Circle 9.

• **In Canto 19, Dante for the first time engages in apostrophes. What are apostrophes? (No, they are not marks of punctuation in this context; instead, apostrophe is a rhetorical device.)**

Apostrophes occur when the writer addresses an absent person or thing as if that person or thing were present. In Canto 19, Dante addresses these persons as if they were present:

- 1) Simon Magus
- 2) All Simonists
- 3) Divine Wisdom
- 4) Constantine the Great

Dante’s first apostrophe is directed at Simon Magus, who is not present (he is not where he can be seen by Dante the Pilgrim). Dante also refers to all Simonists, some of whom are present.

Here is Dante’s first apostrophe:

O Simon Magus, O forlorn disciples,

Ye who the things of God, which ought to be

The brides of holiness, rapaciously
 For silver and for gold do prostitute,

(Longfellow 19.1-4)

Note the word “prostitute” here. The last sinner we saw in the bolgia was Thaïs the whore. She forms a fitting transition to the sin of Simony.

• **What is Simony?**

Simony is the selling or buying of church offices or spiritual benefits.

For example, if I want to be the Bishop of a city, I could go to a corrupt Pope in the Middle Ages and pay money to become Bishop. This was a major problem and led to reform in the church, although periodic reform was occasionally needed in Dante’s day, as well as in other times.

Sinners could also buy indulgences. The belief was that by paying money, the sinner would not be punished for certain sins. It is buying forgiveness of sin with money.

• **In Canto 19, Dante the Pilgrim grows. In *The Divine Comedy*, he starts out naive and ignorant, and he ends up smart.**

We saw in Canto 5 that Dante the Pilgrim was naive. Francesca da Rimini scammed him into pitying her. Later, Dante the Pilgrim began to become less naive. When he met Filippo Argenti in Canto 8, he wanted Filippo to be punished more than he already was. Virgil praised Dante for this, apparently because he saw righteous anger in Dante at Filippo’s sin.

Now, in Canto 19 Dante is really going to be angry at the sinners who commit the sin of Simony, which is a very serious sin indeed. Dante the Pilgrim truly is becoming smart.

• **Dante the Poet is audacious and courageous. He does not hesitate to put Popes in the Inferno.**

Dante the Poet puts Popes in Hell. This, of course, is a very courageous thing to do. Think what would happen if someone were to write that the current Pope deserves to be in Hell.

On 2 October 1992, an Irish singer named Sinéad O'Connor appeared on *Saturday Night Live*, where she made a few critical comments about the Pope, then tore up his photograph. She was much criticized for that, and when she tried to sing on a stage a few days later, the audience booed her off the stage and would not let her perform. What Dante does is much more audacious than what Sinéad O'Connor did.

Of course, what Dante is doing is speaking truth to power, much as the Old Testament prophets did. He is very much against Simony, and he is not afraid to speak out forcibly against it. He also believes that this kind of criticism is needed. To make the church stronger, we need to root out corruption in the church. Therefore, Dante sees this kind of criticism as constructive rather than destructive.

• **Who was Simon Magus?**

We read about Simon Magus in Acts 8. Peter and John are using one of the gifts of God: the laying on of hands to convey the Holy Spirit. Simon Magus is impressed by this and wants to pay Peter and John money to teach him how to do that. Of course, Peter and John are insulted because the laying on of hands to convey the Holy Spirit is a free gift of God and is not for sale (Acts 8.20-23; King James version):

20: But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money.

21: Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God.

22: Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee.

23: For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.

The apocryphal Acts of Peter tells us about Simon Magus' death. Simon became a magician, and he learned to fly. Saint Peter prays for Simon to fall, and he does fall. (By the way, *magus* means magician, and *apocryphal* means of questionable or doubtful authenticity or authorship.)

This is what we read in the apocryphal Acts of Peter:

XXXII. And already on the morrow a great multitude assembled at the Sacred Way to see him flying. And Peter came unto the place, having seen a vision (or, to see the sight), that he might convict him in this also; for when Simon entered into Rome, he amazed the multitudes by flying: but Peter that convicted him was then not yet living at Rome: which city he thus deceived by illusion, so that some were carried away by him (amazed at him).

So then this man standing on an high place beheld Peter and began to say: Peter, at this time when I am going up before all this people that behold me, I say unto thee: If thy God is able, whom the Jews put to death, and stoned you that were chosen of him, let him show that faith in him is faith in God, and let it appear at this time, if it be worthy of God. For I, ascending up, will show myself unto all this multitude, who I am. And behold when he was lifted up on high, and all beheld him raised up above all Rome and the temples thereof and the mountains, the faithful looked toward Peter. And Peter seeing the strangeness of the sight cried unto the Lord Jesus Christ: If

thou suffer this man to accomplish that which he hath set about, now will all they that have believed on thee be offended, and the signs and wonders which thou hast given them through me will not be believed: hasten thy grace, O Lord, and let him fall from the height and be disabled; and let him not die but be brought to nought, and break his leg in three places. And he fell from the height and brake his leg in three places. Then every man cast stones at him and went away home, and thenceforth believed Peter.

But one of the friends of Simon came quickly out of the way (or arrived from a journey), Gemellus by name, of whom Simon had received much money, having a Greek woman to wife, and saw him that he had broken his leg, and said: O Simon, if the Power of God is broken to pieces, shall not that God whose Power thou art, himself be blinded? Gemellus therefore also ran and followed Peter, saying unto him: I also would be of them that believe on Christ. And Peter said: Is there any that grudgeth it, my brother? come thou and sit with us.

But Simon in his affliction found some to carry him by night on a bed from Rome unto Aricia; and he abode there a space, and was brought thence unto Terracina to one Castor that was banished from Rome upon an accusation of sorcery. And there he was sorely cut (Lat. by two physicians), and so Simon the angel of Satan came to his end.

Source: <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/actspeter.html>

From *The Apocryphal New Testament*

M.R. James-Translation and Notes

Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924

Date Downloaded: 26 January 2009

Simon Magus' fall gives us an interesting image. We can think of him hitting the ground headfirst and creating a hole with just his feet sticking out.

• The followers of Simon Magus are Simonists. What do they do?

They do the same kind of things that Simon wanted to do. They pay money for spiritual gifts or religious offices, or they take money for spiritual gifts and religious offices.

By the way, the Catholic Church has reformed itself a number of times. Today, if Simony plays a role in the election of a Pope, that election is invalid.

• What do Dante and Virgil see in this part of the Circle?

They see stone holes in the ground — holes that look like the baptismal fonts of Dante's day. The baptismal fonts of Dante's day were hexagonal pools of water, and at each corner was a stone hole where somebody could stand.

Sticking out of the holes in this circle of Hell are feet — sinners are stuck in the holes. Flames are burning the feet of the sinners. We will find out that each time a new sinner arrives at one of the holes the new sinner pushes deeper down into the holes the sinners who arrived earlier.

This, of course, is just like Simon Magus crashing headfirst into the ground after flying around in the air.

• Once, a child got stuck in a baptismal font, and Dante freed the child by breaking the baptismal font. Why do you suppose that Dante tells us this?

This is very important. Dante had to break a baptismal font to save the life of a child. This is an interesting image because Dante is actually doing a very good thing although he

may appear to be doing a very bad thing. Certainly, breaking a baptismal font may appear to be a very bad thing to do; however, Dante is doing that for a very good reason: to save the life of a child.

Similarly, in Canto 19 Dante is going to very vigorously criticize some Popes and the church. That may appear to be a very bad thing, but Dante, of course, is trying to reform the church. By pointing out that what the church is doing is wrong — the church is engaging in Simony — Dante hopes to make the church stronger.

In the entire *Divine Comedy*, Dante is trying to reform the Church and make it stronger.

• How are the Simonists being punished, and how is that punishment appropriate?

In the third bolgia are punished Simonists (who sell church offices for money), including several popes. The Simonists are upside down in holes resembling baptismal fonts, and flames dance on their feet. When other Simonists arrive, they will push deeper into the hole the Simonists who are already here. (Simon Magus is very deep within one of the holes.) The Simonists pocketed money sinfully gained; now they themselves are being pocketed.

Several things are going on here:

- 1) First, the sinners are upside down because they placed things upside down in the living world — they placed material things before spiritual things, thus upsetting their proper order.
- 2) Second, when Dante speaks with Pope Nicholas III, he is like a confessor by the side of an assassin who is soon to be buried alive upside down — Pope Nicholas III will be pushed deeper into the hole when

Pope Boniface VIII arrives in a few years. Simonist Popes are assassins of the Church.

3) Third, we see a parody of Pentecost, when flames danced on the heads of the followers of Jesus. Here, of course, the flames are dancing on the feet of the Simonists.

4) Finally, we see a parody of baptism, when water should be splashed on the head of the person being baptized. The holes that the Simonists are buried in resemble the holes of a baptismal font.

One thing to note in Canto 19 is that Dante the Pilgrim is in full agreement with Dante the Poet that these sinners richly deserve their punishment.

• **What is Pentecost?**

We read about Pentecost in Acts 2:1-12:

1: And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.

2: And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.

3: And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.

4: And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

5: And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven.

6: Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language.

7: And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans?

8: And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?

9: Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia,

10: Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes,

11: Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.

12: And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this?

• **Why does Dante decide to talk to one of the sinners?**

All of the legs are twitching violently, but one set of legs is twitching more violently than the others because it is “burned by a redder flame” (Musa, *Inferno* 19.33). Apparently, some sinners here have sinned more deeply than others, and the flame is hotter for them.

Dante is curious about who the sinner with the violently twitching legs is, and Virgil, being a good teacher, invites Dante to go down into the bolgia and talk to the sinner to find out about the sin that is being punished here. In fact, Virgil carries Dante down to the bolgia. Later, he carries Dante up out of the bolgia. Virgil’s special powers include great strength and sure-footedness.

• **How is the punishment of the Simonists like the punishment given to assassins in Dante’s time?**

Assassins in Dante's time would be buried alive upside down in a hole. They would be given an opportunity to confess their sins before the hole was filled in with dirt.

I stood even as the friar who is confessing
 The false assassin, who, when he is fixed,
 Recalls him, so that death may be delayed.

(Longfellow 19.49-51)

People who sell church offices are assassins of the Church.

• What do we learn about Pope Boniface VIII, who was still alive in 1300?

We learn that the spirit who is in the hole where Dante stops is expecting Pope Boniface VIII to be in Hell soon. In fact, he is wondering whether Dante is that Pope, who would be prematurely in the Inferno in 1300.

This pope says to Dante:

And he cried out: "Dost thou stand there already,
 Dost thou stand there already, Boniface?
 By many years the record lied to me.
 Art thou so early satiate with that wealth,
 For which thou didst not fear to take by fraud
 The beautiful Lady, and then work her woe?"

(Longfellow 19.52-57)

Note: The "beautiful Lady" is the Church, and the "book" is the Book of Fate. (Musa uses the word "book," while Longfellow uses the word "record.")

By the way, Pope Boniface VIII died in 1303, so Dante can't put him in the Inferno in 1300.

Of course, we see here another example of the sinners in the Inferno having knowledge of the future. Pope Nicholas III knows that Pope Boniface VIII will be sentenced to eternal punishment in this Circle of the Inferno after he dies. Pope Boniface VIII deserves this punishment. When he was Pope, he gave many church offices to his relatives and to his friends.

• To whom is Dante speaking? What is the story of that person?

Dante is surprised that the spirit thinks that he is Pope Boniface VIII, so he is silent until Virgil tells him to tell the spirit that he is not Pope Boniface VIII. Dante does as Virgil suggests.

We then read:

Whereat the spirit writhed with both his feet,
 Then, sighing, with a voice of lamentation
 Said to me: "Then what wantest thou of me?
 If who I am thou carest so much to know,
 That thou on that account hast crossed the
 bank,
 Know that I vested was with the great mantle;
 And truly was I son of the She-bear,
 So eager to advance the cubs, that wealth
 Above, and here myself, I pocketed."

(Longfellow 19.64-72)

This passage gives us enough facts to let us know who he is. The phrase “dressed in the great mantle” (Musa, *Inferno* 19.69) simply means that he was once Pope, and the phrase “the she-bear’s son” (Musa, *Inferno* 19.70) means that he was a member of the Orsini family, a name that means “bear.” The spirit is Pope Nicholas III, who died in 1280.

What he says is important here. Popes traditionally take a new name when they become Pope. Thus, Karol Wojtyła becomes Pope John Paul II. This is similar to Abram becoming Abraham and Saul becoming Paul. The Pope puts aside family in order to rule the universal Church. The Church comes first.

However, this Pope did not do this. Instead, he remained “the she-bear’s son.” That means that he used his power and influence as Pope to advance his family’s interests. Pope Nicholas III put his family ahead of the Church. He gave his relatives church offices, and he advanced the political power of his relatives. This shows that he put his family ahead of God.

• What is the meaning of this: “wealth / I pocketed in life, and here, myself” (Musa, *Inferno* 19.71-72)?

Once again, we see *contrapasso*. In life, Pope Nicholas III pocketed money sinfully gained, and by doing so he pocketed himself in this pocket of the Inferno. He is like money that has been carelessly stuffed into a pocket so that a little of the money is sticking out. Of course, the money (and the Pope) will be stuffed deeper into the pocket as more money is (and more Popes are) deposited on top of what is already there.

The word “pocketed” is a famous pun (a pun is a word that two meanings, one of them humorous). This Pope pocketed money in life, and now he himself is pocketed in one of the holes in this Circle of the Inferno.

• What is Dante the Pilgrim’s reaction when he learns which sin is being punished here?

Previously, Dante has tended to be sympathetic to the sinner (with the exceptions of Filippo Argenti and Farinata), but here he really criticizes Pope Nicholas III and the other Simonists. He is aware that Simony is a really horrible sin.

Dante speaks, sarcastically, to this Pope:

I do not know if I were here too bold,
 That him I answered only in this metre:
 “I pray thee tell me now how great a treasure
 Our Lord demanded of Saint Peter first,
 Before he put the keys into his keeping?
 Truly he nothing asked but ‘Follow me.’
 Nor Peter nor the rest asked of Matthias
 Silver or gold, when he by lot was chosen
 Unto the place the guilty soul had lost.”

(Longfellow 19.88-96)

Jesus did not use Simony in choosing his apostles, and popes ought not to use Simony in awarding church offices.

We also have a reference to the Acts of the Apostles. After Judas, who was bribed with 30 pieces of silver, killed himself, he had to be replaced. Peter and the remaining apostles did not use Simony in choosing his successor.

Dante wants Pope Nicholas III to “stay stuck here” (Musa, *Inferno* 19.97).

• What are the consequences of Simony?

Why would someone want to buy a church office? Presumably, they would look at it as an investment. They would be paying money to gain power and perhaps to get more money. However, are these the people who should be in church offices? Do we want a Pope who bought his way into that position? The answer is no. We would prefer someone who deserves the position through his own merit. We would prefer a meritocracy to a plutocracy.

The trouble with Simony is that the people who deserve church offices because of their merit don't get them for these reasons: Either they don't have the money to buy the church office, or they do have the money but won't buy the church office because they know that Simony is wrong.

Of course, Simony affects society as a whole. Pope Boniface VIII will end up here in Hell because of his Simony. Of course, his use of Simony gave him access to power and money and soldiers that he would not otherwise have had. Because of Simony, he was able to use his resources to get Dante and the other White Guelfs exiled from Florence.

• Is Dante doing the right thing when he so severely criticizes the Simonists?

Dante does exactly the right thing here when he so severely criticizes the Simonists. He finally seems to know that God does not make mistakes when He places unrepentant sinners in the Inferno. These people deserve exactly what they get.

Dante says,

“Ye have made yourselves a god of gold and silver;
And from the idolater how differ ye,
Save that he one, and ye a hundred worship?”

(Longfellow 19.112-114)

Pope Nicholas III and Pope Boniface VIII worshipped gold and silver instead of God and so they end up in the Inferno for eternity.

• **Who was Constantine? What is the Donation of Constantine?**

We see another apostrophe when Dante the Pilgrim addresses Constantine, who is not here in the Inferno:

“O Constantine, what did you sire,
 not by your conversion, but by the dower
 that the first wealthy father got from you!”

(Musa 19.115-117)

Constantine was the first Christian Roman emperor. When he moved from Rome to the city of Constantinople, he supposedly gave an awful lot of power and material possessions to the Pope. The medieval belief was that Constantine deliberately moved East in order to reward Pope Sylvester with power and possessions because Pope Sylvester had cured him of leprosy. Dante believes that this Donation of Constantinople corrupted many Popes and the Church.

Actually, the so-called Donation of Constantine turned out to be a forgery, but this was proven long after Dante's day; in the 15th century, the so-called Donation of Constantine was proven to be a forgery.

• **In Dante's *Divine Comedy*, what determines whether a person ought to be punished or rewarded?**

Constantine does appear in *The Divine Comedy*, but he appears in *Paradise*, not in *Inferno*. He made a donation that caused a lot of corruption in the Church, so Dante believed, yet he is in Heaven. Why?

What gets you in Heaven — in Constantine’s case, at least — is your motivation, not the consequences of your actions. Constantine meant to do good, not evil, with his Donation, so this act helps get him into Heaven. Sometimes it is difficult to accurately predict the consequences of our actions.

Is it always true that motives get you into Heaven? Because I don’t know the mind of God, I don’t know the answer to that question. One proverb is that the path to Hell is paved with good intentions, but I don’t know whether that proverb is true. I do know that both motives and consequences are important. Constantine wanted to do the right thing by donating money to the papacy, but he ended up doing a great deal of harm, in Dante’s opinion. However, Constantine ends up in Heaven.

But what if someone sincerely opposes abortion and sincerely believes that killing doctors who perform abortions is the right thing to do? Or what if someone sincerely opposes the pro-life protesters and sincerely believes that killing pro-life protesters is the right thing to do?

In real life, sometimes consequences are very important and sometimes motives are very important. As far as who gets into Heaven or Hell, I will leave that to God.

• Is Dante the Pilgrim learning anything in the Inferno?

Yes, he is learning the things that Dante the Poet knows. Both the Poet and the Pilgrim are bothered by Simony and the corruption of the Church.

In addition, Dante the Poet — the older, wiser Dante the Pilgrim — approves of the design of the Inferno. In an apostrophe to Highest Wisdom, he says:

Wisdom supreme, O how great art thou showest

In heaven, in earth, and in the evil world,

And with what justice doth thy power distribute!

(Longfellow 19.10-12)

• **How does Virgil show that he is pleased with Dante's progress?**

Virgil is pleased with Dante. Dante is angry at the Simonists, and Virgil is very happy that Dante is angry at the Simonists. We read:

I think in sooth that it my Leader pleased,
 With such contented lip he listened ever
 Unto the sound of the true words expressed.

(Longfellow 19.121-123)

In addition, Virgil picks up Dante and carries him up out of the bolgia. When he does this, he holds Dante against his breast (Musa, *Inferno* 19.125). Previously, when he carried Dante down into the bolgia, he had held Dante against his side (Musa, *Inferno* 19.43). Holding Dante against his breast, as in a hug, may show that Virgil is very pleased with Dante.

By the way, great strength and sure-footedness are other of Virgil's supernatural abilities, in addition to his ability to know the position of the stars and the planets and his ability to read Dante's mind.

Chapter 20: “Canto 20: The Soothsayers”

- **Although Dante the Pilgrim makes progress in Canto 19, it does not mean that he will automatically continue to make progress.**

Dante the Pilgrim really does make progress in Canto 19. He is completely and fully aware that the Popes being punished for Simony richly deserve their punishment. In Canto 19, Dante the Pilgrim seems aware that God does not make mistakes when he puts unrepentant sinners in the Inferno.

However, Dante the Pilgrim will be a backslider. In the very next canto, Canto 20, he pities the Fortune Tellers.

- **What is the punishment of the Fortune Tellers and Diviners, and why is it fitting?**

In the fourth bolgia are punished the Fortune Tellers and Sorcerers, who tried to look too far into the future (Musa, *Inferno* 20.38). Because of this, their heads have been twisted around so that they always look backwards for their eternal, very appropriate punishment. They weep, and as they weep, their tears flow between their butt cheeks: “the tears their eyes were shedding / streamed down to wet their buttocks at the cleft” (Musa, *Inferno* 20.23-24).

- **Who are some of the Fortune Tellers and Diviners found in this Circle?**

Amphiaraus

Amphiaraus was one of the seven kings who fought against Thebes. He foresaw that he would die if he fought against Thebes, so he attempted to hide himself so that he would not have to fight. Unfortunately, his wife revealed his hiding place, so he had to go on the military expedition. The Earth opened up and he fell into the chasm, dying as he had foreseen.

Manto

Manto was a soothsayer at Thebes. Her father was the Theban prophet Tiresias, whom Odysseus consulted in the Underworld. After Tiresias died, she went to Italy and founded Mantua, the city where Virgil was born.

Michael Scot

This mathematician and scholar was born in Scotland and had a reputation as a magician; he was supposedly able to serve his guests food magically brought from France and Spain and other countries. (Faust in Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* does the same thing.) We read about Michael Scot in Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron* VIII.9:

The physician declared that he would never repeat what he should tell him, and Bruno said, 'You must know, then, honey doctor mine, that not long since there was in this city a great master in necromancy, who was called Michael Scott, for that he was of Scotland, [...]'

Source: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/23700/23700-8.txt>

Translator: John Payne

Guido Bonatti

Guido Bonatti appears in the Inferno because he was a famous astrologer.

• **Who was Tiresias? What is his story?**

Tiresias is punished here, along with Manto, his daughter. Tiresias was perhaps the most famous Theban prophet. He was famous enough to be consulted by Odysseus in the Underworld in *The Odyssey*.

Tiresias lived life as both a man and a woman. He once saw two snakes having sex, and he hit them with his staff. As his punishment, Hera turned him into a woman. Tiresias married and gave birth to Manto, his daughter, who was also a prophet. After seven years as a woman, he saw two snakes having sex, and according to one version of the myth (not Ovid's version), he did not hit them with his staff. As his reward, Hera turned him into a man again. Tiresias had lived life as both a man and a woman, so when Zeus and Hera quarreled over who enjoyed sex more: the man or the woman — they turned to Tiresias to settle the argument. Tiresias said that women enjoyed sex more, and Hera struck him blind. Zeus could not undo the blindness, but as compensation, he made Tiresias a seer.

The story of Tiresias appears in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*:

The Transformation of Tiresias

3:412 'Twas now, while these transactions past on
Earth,

3:413 And Bacchus thus procur'd a second birth,

3:414 When Jove, dispos'd to lay aside the weight

3:415 Of publick empire and the cares of state,

3:416 As to his queen in nectar bowls he quaff'd,

3:417 "In troth," says he, and as he spoke he laugh'd,

3:418 "The sense of pleasure in the male is far

3:419 More dull and dead, than what you females
share."

3:420 Juno the truth of what was said deny'd;

3:421 Tiresias therefore must the cause decide,

3:422 For he the pleasure of each sex had try'd.
3:423 It happen'd once, within a shady wood,
3:424 Two twisted snakes he in conjunction view'd,
3:425 When with his staff their slimy folds he broke,
3:426 And lost his manhood at the fatal stroke.
3:427 But, after seven revolving years, he view'd
3:428 The self-same serpents in the self-same wood:
3:429 "And if," says he, "such virtue in you lye,
3:430 That he who dares your slimy folds untie
3:431 Must change his kind, a second stroke I'll try."
3:432 Again he struck the snakes, and stood again
3:433 New-sex'd, and strait recover'd into man.
3:434 Him therefore both the deities create
3:435 The sov'raign umpire, in their grand debate;
3:436 And he declar'd for Jove: when Juno fir'd,
3:437 More than so trivial an affair requir'd,
3:438 Depriv'd him, in her fury, of his sight,
3:439 And left him groping round in sudden night.
3:440 But Jove (for so it is in Heav'n decreed,
3:441 That no one God repeal another's deed)
3:442 Irradiates all his soul with inward light,
3:443 And with the prophet's art relieves the want of
sight.

Source: <http://tinyurl.com/kagjutc>

Translator: Sir Samuel Garth (1661-1719)

• **Why might Dante have classified Diviners, Astrologers, and Magicians as committing fraud?**

Dante knew that these people used trickery rather than having supernatural powers; therefore, they are guilty of fraud.

Here is one trick that they used:

To turn water into wine, follow these steps:

1. Soak a piece of bread in wine.
2. Let the bread dry.
3. Distract the victim, then throw the bread into the water. (Presumably, the magician used a vessel that was covered so the victim did not see the bread.)

The famous magician Harry Houdini (who is not guilty of fraud because he did not claim supernatural powers) used to expose mediums. He used to go to a medium and ask about his dear departed Uncle Max. The medium would contact Uncle Max and Harry Houdini would ask questions that Uncle Max would answer. After the séance, Harry Houdini would reveal that he had never had an Uncle Max, then ask, Who was that guy the medium had contacted?

Magicians such as Penn and Teller are not engaging in fraud. They are illusionists, and they do good work debunking fraud, such as on their TV show *Bullshit!* For example, they debunked feng shui, a kind of mystical interior decorating. They invited several feng shui experts (one at a time, and not knowing that other feng shui experts had also been invited) to rearrange the furniture in an apartment in a way that would be harmonious with the spirits or whatever. Each feng shui expert rearranged the furniture in a different way. Penn and

Teller had expected, if feng shui is real, that each expert would rearrange the furniture in the same way.

Here is a definition of feng shui from *The American Heritage Dictionary*:

The Chinese art or practice of positioning objects, especially graves, buildings, and furniture, based on a belief in patterns of yin and yang and the flow of chi that have positive and negative effects.

Source:

<http://www.bartleby.com/61/81/F0078175.html>

By the way, feng shui is pronounced FUNG sway.

Other magicians such as Randi the Great also spend time debunking people who claim to have psychic powers. Randi the Great once debunked water-witching. In water-witching, a person claims to have the ability to detect underground water by using a forked stick or even a wire clothes hanger. Supposedly, when the person stands over underground water, the forked stick or clothes hanger begins to vibrate. To test whether this has any basis in fact, Randi the Great constructed some underwater pipes in a field. He was able to cause water to flow through one or another of the pipes. He then challenged some water-witchers to demonstrate their skills by showing where the water was underground. All of the water-witchers failed to do this.

• How does Dante the Pilgrim feel about the Fortune Tellers and Diviners? Should he feel that way?

Dante the Pilgrim weeps when he sees how the Fortune Tellers and Diviners are punished, with their heads on backward.

Of course, Dante the Pilgrim is backsliding here, and Virgil criticizes him for it:

To me: “Art thou, too, of the other fools?”

Here pity lives when it is wholly dead;
 Who is a greater reprobate than he
 Who feels compassion at the doom divine?"

(Longfellow 20.27-30)

• What is astrology? Should 21st-century Americans believe in it?

Astrology is the belief that the heavenly bodies — meaning the stars and planets — influence us and even determine the course of events.

No, we should not believe in astrology. Certainly the gravity of the planets has very little effect on us, as the gravitational pull on us from such planets as Mars and Venus is so weak.

By the way, Nancy Reagan believed in astrology. Supposedly, she would consult an astrologer and what the astrologer said had some influence on what President Ronald Reagan did.

• Do you know of any famous Fortune Tellers and Diviners?

We have had a few. Jeane Dixon was one. John Allen Paulos, a mathematician at Temple University, is skeptical of psychics such as Jeane Dixon, and he invented the term “the Jeane Dixon effect.” This refers to a psychic who loudly talks about the psychic’s few lucky guesses and who ignores his or her many false predictions. Ms. Dixon thought that World War III would begin in 1958, and she wrote that the 1960 presidential election would be “dominated by labor and won by a Democrat” who then would “be assassinated or die in office though not necessarily in his first term” (the 13 May 1956 issue of *Parade Magazine*).

By the way, it is possible to have a very high number of your predictions come true. Simply predict such things as what you will eat for breakfast tomorrow. Or predict that the Sun will rise in the East tomorrow. Do not predict that all human heads will be triangular tomorrow.

• Why does Dante the Poet use this canto to have Virgil tell Dante the Pilgrim the true story behind the founding of Mantua, the town where Virgil was born?

Virgil tells Dante the Pilgrim the true story behind the founding of Mantua, the town where Virgil was born. Mantua saw land lying surrounded mostly by a marsh. She moved there and died there. After she died, men arrived and built a town there because it was well protected by the marsh.

The theme of the story is truth. Apparently, the story of the founding of Mantua was controversial, with more than one version. Virgil here tells the true story. Truth, of course, is something that people engaging in fraud wish to hide. The people sending Nigerian e-mails do not tell you that they want to draw money out of your bank account and spend it although that is the truth. The people who engage in fraud do not want you to know the truth.

By telling the true story of the founding of Mantua, Dante is letting his readers know that he cares about truth. He is establishing his credibility. Because he cares about the truth of the founding of Mantua, he will be careful to report the truth about the afterlife.

• What is the difference between an Illusionist/Magician such as David Copperfield and a Psychic who has claimed special powers such as Uri Geller?

The difference lies in the abilities that they claim. As an Illusionist/Magician, David Copperfield is entertaining the audience by tricking them into thinking that they are seeing something that is impossible. He claims no psychic abilities,

although obviously he has extraordinary showmanship skills. Uri Geller, on the other hand, has claimed special psychic powers such as being able to bend spoons with his mind. However, actually Illusionists/Magicians are able to do exactly the same thing by using stage magic. Illusionists/Magicians are not committing fraud; Uri Geller is — or at least used to.

• Is it immoral to believe something without sufficient evidence that it is true?

William Kingdon Clifford (1845-1879) believed that it is immoral to believe something without sufficient evidence that it is true. Clifford came up with a very vivid parable to illustrate his point:

A shipowner was about to send to sea an emigrant ship. He knew that she was old, not overwell built, and often had needed repairs. It had been suggested to him that possibly she was not seaworthy. He thought that perhaps he ought to have her overhauled and refitted, even though this should put him to great expense.

Before the ship sailed, however, he said to himself that she had gone safely through so many voyages and weathered so many storms, that it was idle to suppose that she would not come safely home from this trip also. He would put his trust in Providence, which could hardly fail to protect all these unhappy families that were leaving their fatherland to seek for better times elsewhere. He would dismiss ungenerous suspicions about the honesty of builders and contractors. In such ways he acquired a sincere and comfortable conviction that his vessel was safe and seaworthy: he watched her departure with a light heart, and benevolent wishes for the success of the exiles in

their new home; and he got his insurance money when she went down in mid-ocean and told no tales.

Source: William Kingdon Clifford's "The Ethics of Belief"

Clifford was a very logical person — he was a mathematician as well as a philosopher — who believed that “it is wrong to believe on insufficient evidence, or to nourish belief by suppressing doubts and avoiding investigation.” And according to Clifford, everyone has the duty to be rational in his or her beliefs: “It is not only the leader of men, statesman, philosopher, or poet, that has this duty to mankind. Every rustic who delivers in the village alehouse his slow infrequent sentences, may help to kill or keep alive the fatal superstitions which clog his race. No simplicity of mind, no obscurity of station, can escape the universal *duty* of questioning all that we believe.”

According to Clifford, if you choose to believe without sufficient evidence, then you are like the shipowner who sent all those emigrant families to a watery grave and then collected the insurance.

If you agree with this argument, then you will most likely think that it is immoral to believe in such things as astrology, fortune telling, and bending spoons with your mind.

However, when it comes to things such as choosing to believe in God, we may very well have to make a leap of faith and believe without sufficient evidence either that God does exist or that God does not exist.

• Who is Eurypylyus? How well does Virgil think Dante knows the *Aeneid*?

Eurypylyus is punished here in this part of the Inferno. Dante thought of him as a Greek soothsayer; however, in the story told by Sinon the Lying Greek in Book 2 of Virgil's *Aeneid*,

he was a warrior who was sent to the Oracle of Delphi in order to inquire why the gods were angry at the Greeks.

We find out that Virgil thinks that Dante knows the *Aeneid* very well indeed. In John Ciardi's translation, we read,

“He is Eurypylus. I sing him somewhere
in my High Tragedy; you will know the place
who know the whole of it.” [...]

(Ciardi 20.112-114)

Chapter 21: “Canto 21: The Grafters”

• What is graft?

Graft is a bribe. Usually, it involves the giving of money, although other things can be used for the bribe, such as drugs or sexual favors. A politician who takes money to pass legislation favorable to a certain corporation is guilty of graft. A judge who takes money to rule a person innocent is guilty of graft.

Dante writes that one of the devils says, “You can change a ‘no’ to a ‘yes’ for cash in Lucca” (Musa, *Inferno* 21.42). That is graft.

• What modern examples of graft do you know about? (Hint: For examples, Google “Bob Ney” or “Jack Abramoff” or “Duke Cunningham.”)

We do have a number of modern cases of graft. Bob Ney, a Republican congressman from Ohio, was sentenced to 30 months after being involved in Jack Abramoff’s bribery scandal.

Jack Abramoff bribed politicians to pass legislation that was favorable to his clients. He was sentenced to almost six years in prison and ordered to pay millions of dollars in restitution.

Duke Cunningham was bribed in an interesting way. One of the people this politician did favors for bought his house for a price that was well above fair market value. Duke Cunningham pled guilty to accepting over \$2 million in bribes and was sentenced to over eight years in prison.

• Briefly summarize what happens in Canto 21.

Dante spends more space describing this place of punishment than any other. This is perhaps understandable, since one of the trumped-up charges made against him to justify

his exile was that he was guilty of taking bribes (aka barratry or graft).

In Canto 21, Virgil and Dante come to the place where the Grafters are punished by being submerged in boiling pitch (tar). Devils are the guards here. A devil throws a sinner into the boiling pitch, and Virgil tells Dante to hide — these are dangerous devils. Virgil talks to the devils alone, and then Dante comes out of hiding. Virgil needs to talk to the devils because the bridge crossing the bolgia is broken, and Virgil hopes to find another bridge in working order. Supposedly, Virgil and Dante will be able to reach a bridge to cross later, so the devils and Virgil and Dante start walking to the bridge that the devils say exist.

Of course, as we will see, no bridges are intact across this bolgia; all were destroyed during the Harrowing of Hell. Once again, we see ruins in the Inferno. Ruins are certainly appropriate for a place such as Hell.

• **How does Virgil take care of Dante the Pilgrim?**

Virgil takes good care of Dante the Pilgrim. When they see the devils, Virgil wants to speak to them alone while Dante hides:

Said the good Master to me: “That it be not

Apparent thou art here, crouch thyself down

Behind a jag, that thou mayest have some
screen;

And for no outrage that is done to me

Be thou afraid, because these things I know,

For once before was I in such a scuffle.”

(Longfellow 21.58-63)

Only after Virgil has let the devils know that he is on a mission from God does he allow Dante to reveal himself. The devils seem to respect the power of God as their leader, Malacoda, tells the other devils, “Don’t touch this man!” (Musa, *Inferno* 21.87). After hearing this, Virgil allows Dante to come out of hiding.

This is the place in the *Inferno* where Dante is most in danger of physical harm. This is appropriate because one of the false charges made against him when he was exiled from Florence was that he was a grafter.

• **Who are the Malebranche? (Note: The word “Malebranche” is plural.)**

The Malebranche, or devils, are the guards here. They try to catch sinners and torment them. They sometimes are able to catch sinners because the sinners, to somewhat relieve their torment, will raise their backs out of the boiling pitch. At that time, the devils are occasionally able to spear the sinner and lift the sinner out of the boiling pitch to be tormented up close and personal by the devils.

Malebranche means “evil claws.”

• **How can the names of the black devils be translated?**

Mark Musa chooses not to translate the names of the black devils because he feels that doing so would result in losing much of the names’ “grotesque appearance” (266). He does point out that *Malacoda* means “evil tail” and that *Barbariccia* means “Curly-Beard.”

John Ciardi uses these names for the devils in his translation:

Catclaw

Cramper

Crazyred

Curlybeard

Deaddog

Dragontooth

Grafter

Grizzly

Hellken

Pigtusk

Mr. Ciardi does not translate “Malacoda.”

• **In this section of the *Inferno*, Dante the Poet uses very coarse language.**

Note that the language used in the *Inferno* is pretty bad. The devils are uncouth, as their leader, Malacoda (Evil-Tail) uses his butthole for a bugle.

At the end of the canto, the devils engage in a parody of military salutes:

Before they turned left-face along the bank

each one gave their good captain a salute

with farting tongue pressed tightly to his
teeth,

and he blew back with his bugle of an ass-hole.

(Musa 21.136-139)

Dante will change his use of language in both the *Purgatory* and the *Paradise*.

In the *Inferno* we see some “bathroom” words. Speaking of bathrooms, one of my students was talking on the telephone to her boyfriend. Her younger brother noticed this, went to

another phone that was portable to listen in on the conversation, put the phone on mute, and then carried it to the bathroom. When there was a pause in the conversation, he turned off the mute button and flushed the toilet. My student's boyfriend asked, "*Where are you?*"

• **Do you know anyone who uses his butt for a bugle?**

In the mid-1800s, a French entertainer named Joseph Pujol was able to pass gas at will. He created an act in which he would strip naked (when in front of a male-only audience), use a tube to blow into and fill his rear end up with gas, then play songs and do other feats with his anus. Yes, he made his living by farting. He played a flute with a rubber tube inserted into his anus. You can read about him in wikipedia.com ("Le Pétomane") and Laurence J. Peters' book titled *Peter's People*. It's available in many libraries.

I used to tell this anecdote in my Ohio University course in Great Books and then ask, "How many of you students are going to call your mother tonight and say, 'Hey, Mom, guess what I learned in school today?'"

By the way, one of my students in junior composition began a short reaction memo about his best friend by writing, "I had been best friends with Jared for almost three years, and not a day went by when I *didn't* see his butt cheeks."

• **How does the theme of appearance versus reality play a role in this section of the *Inferno*?**

Grafters are able to make appearance different from reality. For example, a person may actually be guilty of a crime, but bribe a judge to find him innocent. Thus, the appearance is that the person is innocent, but the reality is that he is guilty.

We can wonder about the reality of the devils. Very often, they appear comic, and very often, they appear frightening. The reality is that they are indeed comic, and we will see

later that they chase after Virgil and Dante, although because God is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent, the devils would in reality be unable to do harm to Virgil and Dante.

We can also wonder about who is wiser in this canto: Virgil or Dante? Dante is worried about the devils and thinks that they are dangerous. Virgil thinks that the devils are a danger to the sinners punished here but not a danger to himself and Dante.

Of course, we need to remember that Virgil is on a mission from God, and God is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent. God is not going to allow anything very bad to happen to Virgil and Dante.

Chapter 22: “Canto 22: Ciampolo of Navarre and Deceived Demons”

• What is the punishment for the Grafters, and why is it fitting?

Those who engaged in graft are punished in the fifth bolgia. These sinners allowed themselves to be bribed. Their punishment is to be submerged in boiling pitch and tormented by winged devils. These winged guards attempt to capture any Grafter who is sticking his back out of the boiling pitch to ease his pain. The guards use their pitchforks to fish the Grafter out of the boiling pitch and then torment the Grafter with their pitchforks.

The Grafters were sticky-fingered, and now they are sticky all over because of the boiling pitch (tar).

The Grafters used their political and judicial offices to take bribes and make money. As these people manipulated and tormented other people during their lives, so the demons manipulate and torment the Grafters.

• Which trick does the captured sinner play on the demons, and how does it show the sin of fraud in action?

The devils capture a Grafter who has been raising his back out of the boiling pitch to ease his pain. (By the way, the Grafters work together to foil the devils. They communicate to each other when the devils aren't looking and let each other know when it is safe to raise their backs out of the boiling pitch — an action that makes them look like frogs in water. This usually works, but this time the devils capture Ciampolo.)

Ciampolo ends up bribing the devils to do as he wishes. He tells them that he can get them more sinners to torment if they will back up a little so that he can give the all-clear signal to the other sinners. That way, the other sinners will raise

their backs out of the boiling pitch, and the devils can spear them and pull them out of the pitch so they can torment them.

This bribe is not paid, however. Ciampolo jumps back into the pitch and escapes the devils, who try to capture him but fail.

Of course, this illustrates the sin of simple fraud. Ciampolo has tricked the devils by promising to do one thing only to do another. He is like Geryon here — seeming to be an honest man who can be trusted to make a deal and keep it but instead going against his word to trick the devils (thus stinging them).

Note the comedy that we have here. We have a trickster getting his way with some stupid devils, two of whom fight and fall into the pitch themselves. Of course, the Grafters are being punished, despite the comedy.

• **Why are the devils fooled so easily?**

Answering this question involves interpretation because the answer is not spelled out in the *Inferno*. It appears that the devils allow themselves to be fooled so easily because they wish to pick a quarrel with one particular devil.

Ciampolo uses a rhetorical technique in his attempt to deceive the devils. He first tells what is apparently the true history of his life. By telling the truth, including that he is “tricky” (Musa, *Inferno* 22.110) and then following it with a lie, Ciampolo attempts to make the devils believe that the lie is the truth. Ciampolo does persuade one devil, Alichino; however, the other devils may be pretending to believe Ciampolo in order to pick a fight with Alichino.

The devil named Alichino wishes to accept Ciampolo’s devious offer. A devil named Cagnazzo was suspicious of Ciampolo’s offer from the very beginning, but he is the “first to turn” (Musa, *Inferno* 22.119) to hide himself as Ciampolo

had requested that the devils do. Of course, we are told specifically that Cagnazzo is “hoping that the shade [Ciampolo] would make it [make his escape], / so he [Cagnazzo] could pick a fight with his companion [Alichino]” (Musa, *Inferno* 22.134-135).

One interpretation is that the other devils are like Cagnazzo, knowing that the sinner wishes to escape and hoping that he would so that they can fight with Alichino.

• Are we entirely sure that the captured sinner is named Ciampolo?

Early commentators identify the captured Grafter as Ciampolo or Giampolo of Navarre; however, it is possible that they are wrong. We note that the captured sinner does not identify himself by name, although he does identify the region he is from and he does refer to other sinners by name. This deep in the Inferno sinners do not wish to be remembered on Earth. Many sinners in the Inferno are able to recognize that Dante is still alive, so it is possible that Ciampolo (or whoever he may be) does, also. Of course, in writing about this canto, I am using the usually accepted name Ciampolo.

• In which ways are the Grafters compared to animals, and why are they compared to animals?

The Grafters are compared to dolphins, frogs, an otter, a mouse, and a wild duck. In addition, the devils are compared to falcons and hawks.

One reason Dante does this is to make the association that sin is dehumanizing. Another reason is to prepare for the animal fable that he will allude to at the beginning of the next canto.

• Canto 21 and Canto 22 are known as the Gargoyle cantos. Why?

This is a definition of a gargoyle:

“A figurine that projects from a roof or the parapet of a wall or tower and is carved into a grotesque figure, human or animal.”

Source of definition: <www.lynnrutter.com/glossary.html>.

Certainly Canto 21 and Canto 22 contain grotesqueries in the form of the devils. In addition, some commentators have argued that parts of Dante's *Inferno* correspond to parts of a cathedral. These cantos would correspond to the gargoyles found in a cathedral.

Chapter 23: “Canto 23: The Hypocrites”

• What animal fable does Dante allude to at the beginning of Canto 23?

All animal fables were attributed to Aesop in the Middle Ages, and so Dante the Poet — mistakenly — attributed this animal fable to Aesop: A mouse wishes to cross a pool of water, and he asks a frog to help him across the pool of water. The frog agrees to help the mouse, but halfway across the pool of water the frog attempts to drown the mouse. A hawk sees the frog and mouse, captures both of them, eats the frog, and allows the mouse to go free.

• What is the correct interpretation of the beginning of the animal fable that Dante alludes to at the beginning of Canto 23?

Perhaps the mouse in the fable is meant to be compared to Virgil and Dante, who are deceived by the devils (the frog). The hawk can represent Divine Justice, who punishes the wicked and helps the innocent. This is Mark Musa’s interpretation, although other commentators regard the frog as equating Ciampolo, who fools the mouse (Alichino).

• What is the moral of the animal fable?

The moral of the animal fable is that the wicked are punished and the innocent go free. We certainly see that two black devils, who deceived Virgil and Dante about a bridge being intact over the 6th bolgia, are punished by falling into the boiling pitch. In addition, the innocent Virgil and Dante escape from the Malebranche.

• How do Dante and Virgil escape from the Malebranche?

Dante and Virgil talked to the Grafter Ciampolo, thus giving him an opportunity to talk to the devils and escape being

tormented by them. The devils are angry when Ciampolo escapes, and the devils start running after Dante and Virgil, but Virgil takes good care of Dante and gets Dante and himself to the next bolgia.

• **How do we know that Virgil can read Dante the Pilgrim's thoughts?**

We have seen some evidence that Virgil knows Dante the Pilgrim's thoughts. Here Virgil specifically confirms that he has this power when Dante says that he is afraid that the Malebranche are after them:

And he: "If I were made of leaded glass,
Thine outward image I should not attract
Sooner to me than I imprint the inner."

(Longfellow 23.25-27)

Note: "leaded glass" is a mirror.

• **How does Virgil take good care of Dante?**

Virgil does take good care of Dante here. We read that Virgil is like a mother taking care of her son in an emergency:

My Leader on a sudden seized me up,
Even as a mother who by noise is wakened,
And close beside her sees the enkindled
flames,

Who takes her son, and flies, and does not stop,
Having more care of him than of herself,
So that she clothes her only with a shift;

(Longfellow 23.37-42)

By the way, “chemise” (the word used in another translation) is pronounced sha-MEZ. A chemise is a sleeveless undergarment that is worn by a woman.

Of course, mothers really do protect their children. For example, this is a story told to me by one of my students: When Ohio University student Nathaniel Sturgil was a child, an alarm clock caused a major panic in his family. The alarm was set very loud to allow the family to wake up to music, but one morning a radio drama was playing on the station. The radio drama was about a house fire, and the crackling of the flames could be heard very clearly. His mother ran screaming through the house, waking up her children and making them go outside until she realized her mistake.

• **Why can’t the devils follow Virgil and Dante after they leave the devils’ bolgia?**

We learn that once Virgil and Dante have left this particular bolgia (ditch) the devils cannot follow them. God does not allow the guards to leave the area that they are guarding:

For the high Providence, which had ordained
 To place them ministers of the fifth moat,
 The power of thence departing took from all.

(Longfellow 23.55-57)

• **What is Hypocrisy?**

Hypocrisy is making a show of holding beliefs that you do not actually hold.

A politician could pretend to care about the people he represents, but in reality be taking bribes to help corporations fleece the people while in public saying that he fights for the people. Such a politician would be guilty of both barratry and hypocrisy.

A person could also profess in public to be a Christian while in private doing things no true Christian would ever do.

• What is the punishment given to the Hypocrites, and why is it fitting?

In the sixth bolgia are punished the Hypocrites. The Hypocrites appeared golden on the outside although on the inside they were made of base metal, so for eternity they appropriately wear heavy cloaks that are gold on the outside but lead on the inside. We should note that the clothing the Hypocrites wear resemble the cloaks of friars. Dante writes, “(the style was much the same / as those the Benedictines wear at Cluny)” (Musa, *Inferno* 23.62-63). In his notes to his translation of this passage, John Ciardi writes that these monks had habits that were “especially ample and elegant” (186). Mr. Ciardi also notes, “St. Bernard once wrote ironically to a nephew who had entered this monastery, ‘If length of sleeves and amplitude of hood made for holiness, what could hold me back from following [your lead]’” (186).

The Hypocrites are the only sinners in the *Inferno* who wear clothing. (Homer does carry a sword in Limbo.)

These sinners do not have guards. The heavy clothing they wear makes it impossible for them to climb out of the ditch they are in.

Saint Matthew criticized hypocrisy, using words that influenced Dante:

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness. (Matthew 23:27; King James Version)

The heavy cloaks of the Hypocrites make them walk very slowly. This slowness is mimicked in Dante’s verse. He (or

his translator, Mark Musa) uses many commas and a colon in this passage to slow down the reader:

And now, down there, we found a painted people,
 slow-motioned: step by step, they walked
 their round.

(Musa, *Inferno* 23.58-59)

• **Who are the Jovial Friars?**

Dante meets two Jovial Friars in this part of the *Inferno*: the Guelf Catalano and the Ghibelline Loderingo. They were brought into Florence to help keep the peace, but instead they took sides and increased the violence of Florence. (Florentines would not trust the other faction to keep the peace, so outsiders were sometimes brought in to keep the peace.) These two Jovial Friars pretended to be peacekeepers but actually fomented violence. According to Mark Musa, Pope Clement IV gave these two men orders, which they followed. Pope Clement IV wanted to drive the Ghibellines from power and give the power to the Guelfs.

As a whole, the Jovial Friars became known for the laxness with which they took their vows, and eventually their order, by papal decree, was disbanded.

• **Who was Caiaphas? Was Caiaphas present the last time Virgil visited this part of Hell?**

Caiaphas, the High Priest of the Jews, allowed Jesus to be crucified although he believed him to be innocent.

In the 11st chapter of John (King James version), we read:

46: But some of them went their ways to the Pharisees, and told them what things Jesus had done.

47: Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council, and said, What do we? for this man doeth many miracles.

48: If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation.

49: And one of them, named Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all,

50: Nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not.

51: And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation;

52: And not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad.

53: Then from that day forth they took counsel together for to put him to death.

Caiaphas is crucified on the ground with three stakes, and all the other Hypocrites (except those who are crucified on the ground like him) walk over him on their journey around the Circle. Annas (Caiaphas' father-in-law), who delivered Jesus to Caiaphas, is also crucified on the ground, along with the other Jewish counselors who allowed Jesus to be crucified.

Virgil was surprised to see this because the crucified Caiaphas was not here when Virgil made his previous journey to the journey. That journey occurred shortly after Virgil had died and before Caiaphas had died. Of course, other sinners

are now in the Inferno whom Virgil did not previously see, so what strikes Virgil is this kind of *contrapasso*, which he has not seen before.

Caiaphas is an Evil Counselor as well as a Hypocrite. We will see the Evil Counselors punished in the 8th bolgia. (The hypocrites are punished in the 6th bolgia, and the thieves are punished in the 7th bolgia.) Once again, Dante has a transition figure between parts of the Inferno.

• In which way is the punishment given to Caiaphas and Annas and some council members fitting?

Caiaphas, the High Priest of the Jews, allowed Jesus to be crucified although he believed him to be innocent. Caiaphas' father-in-law, Annas, delivered Jesus to Caiaphas for judgment. Members of the council also thought it best that Jesus be crucified.

These people are Hypocrites and Evil Counselors. They are Hypocrites because they thought that Jesus was innocent yet allowed him to be crucified. Thus, it is fitting both that they be crucified and that they bear the weight of the Hypocrites who walk on them.

• Virgil is not perfect. He can be fooled.

Of course, Virgil represents Human Reason. According to Christian believers such as Dante, Human Reason is useful, but we also need Divine Justice and help from God.

Occasionally, Virgil needs divine help, as when an angel came to open the gate of the City of Dis when the rebellious angels shut it. Also, occasionally, Virgil makes a mistake, as when he believed the winged devils in the previous bolgia who said that they would take him to an unbroken bridge although in that part of the Inferno no unbroken bridge existed.

We find out that being deceived bothers Virgil:

The Leader stood awhile with head bowed down;
 Then said: "The business badly he recounted
 Who grapples with his hook the sinners yonder."

(Longfellow 23.139-141)

Note: "Leader" is a word that Longfellow uses for Virgil; Mark Musa prefers to use the word "guide."

However, we also note that Virgil's mistake does not diminish Dante's respect for him:

Thereat my Leader with great strides went on,
 Somewhat disturbed with anger in his looks;
 Whence from the heavy-laden I departed
 After the prints of his beloved feet.

(Longfellow 23.145-148)

• Based on what you have read so far, was Dante anti-Semitic? (For example, many Christians of Dante's time would have placed Jews among the Heretics, Usurers and Counterfeiters. Did Dante?)

Many medieval Christians would have placed Jews among the Heretics, Usurers, and Counterfeiters, but Dante does not.

Joseph Gallagher, in his *A Modern Reader's Guide to Dante's The Divine Comedy*, cites the *Encyclopedia Judaica*, which says this about *The Divine Comedy* (48):

The *Comedy* contains no insulting or pejorative references to Jews There are no Jews among

Heretics, Usurers and Counterfeiters, whose sinful ranks Jews during the Middle Ages were commonly alleged to swell. (p. 1,296)

Dante, however, did accept what the New Testament said about individual Jews; thus, Caiaphas and other individual Jews appear among the Hypocrites.

• **Do you know of any famous Hypocrites?**

Any person who is gay and practices gay sex in private yet publicly speaks out against gay people is probably a Hypocrite. The Reverend Ted Haggard is perhaps one such person. A pastor of a church, he spoke out publicly against homosexuality while having gay sex on the side with a male prostitute. These people would not be Hypocrites if they truly believe that being homosexual is evil yet cannot control their own urges.

Any person who is gay and practices gay sex in private yet publicly claims to be heterosexual is a Hypocrite.

Jimmy Swaggart, another pastor, spoke out against prostitutes while at the same time paying a prostitute.

These people may be punished as lustful or as hypocrites. Of course, if they repent their sins sincerely before they die, they will go to Purgatory and then to Paradise.

Chapter 24: “Canto 24: The Thieves, Including Vanni Fucci”

- **Explain the beginning of Canto 24 (the peasant who thinks that frost is snow). What does it tell us about Virgil’s state of mind and about Dante’s state of mind?**

Here we have a very good description of Virgil’s state of mind. He discovers that the devils lied to him when they said that there was an unbroken bridge across the 6th bolgia that Virgil and Dante could use. At first this bothers Virgil, but then he recovers his usual good humor.

Virgil is like a peasant farmer who wakes up, sees frost, but thinks it is snow. If snow has fallen, then the farmer’s herding animals will not get good fodder. However, the day warms up a little, the frost disappears, and the farmer is happy because now his herding animals will get good fodder. The farmer can take his sheep out to pasture.

We read that hoarfrost covers the ground and then this happens:

The husbandman, whose forage faileth him,
 Rises, and looks, and seeth the champaign
 All gleaming white, whereat he beats his
 flank,
 Returns in doors, and up and down laments,
 Like a poor wretch, who knows not what to
 do;
 Then he returns and hope revives again,
 Seeing the world has changed its countenance
 In little time, and takes his shepherd’s crook,

And forth the little lambs to pasture drives.

(Longfellow 24.7-15)

This passage also describes the feelings of Dante the Pilgrim, about whom we read:

Thus did the Master fill me with alarm,

When I beheld his forehead so disturbed,

And to the ailment came as soon the plaster.

For as we came unto the ruined bridge,

The Leader turned to me with that sweet look

Which at the mountain's foot I first beheld.

(Longfellow 24.16-21)

Note: Both "Master" and "Leader" refer to Virgil.

• Climbing up the ruins of the collapsed bridge is very difficult for Virgil and Dante the Pilgrim. Does this have any thematic significance?

Climbing up the ruins of the collapsed bridge is very difficult for Virgil and Dante the Pilgrim. Of course, this is a reminder that this is a very difficult journey that Dante is taking. Learning how to stay out of Hell can be very difficult.

We do know that Dante will undertake this journey successfully and that eventually he will have a seat in Paradise. We see that foreshadowed here when he and Virgil (who as a soul has no weight) make the climb successfully.

The 6th edition of *A Handbook to Literature* by C. Hugh Holman and William Harmon defines "foreshadowing" in this way: "The presentation of material in a work in such a way that later events are prepared for" (201).

Here are a couple of other definitions:

Foreshadowing is the use of hints or clues to suggest what will happen later in literature.

Source: http://www.tnellen.com/cyber-eng/lit_terms/foreshadowing.html

Definition: A literary device used to hint at events that will follow later in the story, sometimes generating feelings of anxiety or suspense. Anton Chekhov once said that “if there is a gun hanging on the wall in the first act, it must fire in the last.” That remark captures the essence of foreshadowing.

Source: <http://contemporarylit.about.com/library/bldef-foreshadowing>

• **Which “steeper stairs” (Musa, *Inferno* 24.55) do Virgil and Dante have yet to climb?**

Of course, Dante the Pilgrim has much more to see and much more to learn. Virgil tells him as he rests after the climb:

“And therefore raise thee up, o’ercome the anguish

With spirit that o’ercometh every battle,

If with its heavy body it sink not.

A longer stairway it behoves thee mount;

’Tis not enough from these to have departed;

Let it avail thee, if thou understand me.”

(Longfellow 24.52-57)

The “steeper stairs” (Musa, *Inferno* 24.55) that Virgil and Dante have yet to climb are actually the legs of Lucifer. After they climb down to the lowest Circle of Hell, they will have to climb up to the other side of the world, where the

Mountain of Purgatory is. They do that by climbing up Lucifer's legs and climbing up a passage that leads to the surface of the Earth, directly opposite Jerusalem.

When Lucifer was cast out of Heaven, he fell to the Earth opposite to where Jerusalem is located. He fell all the way to the center of the Earth, creating the Circles of the Inferno. All the Earth that was moved by Lucifer's fall forms the Mountain of Purgatory.

• What is Thievery, and which modern examples of Thieves do you know about?

Thievery is stealing someone else's property.

A modern example of thievery is identity theft. Someone can steal your identity, get a credit card in your name, and start charging vast amounts of merchandise.

Plagiarism involves the theft of someone else's ideas and sometimes even their words. Plagiarists may be punished here. However, plagiarists also lie because they say that the work — and sometimes the words — of other people are actually their own. Therefore, the plagiarists may be punished among the liars. Plagiarists can also be hypocrites who speak out against plagiarism while engaging in plagiarism. In my composition courses at Ohio University, I sometimes required my students to write a short research report on a famous plagiarist of their choice. Students have written about historian Stephen Ambrose and journalist Jayson Blair.

• How does Dante describe the bolgia where the Thieves are punished?

Dante the Pilgrim looks down into the bolgia where the Thieves are punished, and we read a description of what he sees:

And I beheld therein a terrible throng

Of serpents, and of such a monstrous kind,
 That the remembrance still congeals my
 blood

(Longfellow 24.82-84)

We also read that the Thieves “ran terrified and naked, hopeless / of finding hiding-holes or heliotrope” (Musa, *Inferno* 24.92-93). Heliotrope is a magical stone that has the properties of being able to cure snakebites and of being able to make the person holding it invisible. Both properties would be useful in this bolgia.

• **Which kind of transformation do we see in Canto 24?**

In the bolgia dedicated to punishing the Thieves, Dante will see a number of transformations. Here is the first kind of transformation that can take place in this bolgia.

Dante descends into a new ditch. There he sees Thieves running around, surrounded by serpents. A serpent bites a Thief, who is consumed by flames, but whose ashes immediately reconstitute again into the Thief. This sinner is Vanni Fucci.

• **Who is Vanni Fucci?**

John Ciardi gives the pronunciation of “Vanni Fucci” as “VAH-nee FOO-tchee” (194).

Dante had thought of Vanni Fucci in terms of his being an angry man; however, Vanni confesses that he once stole some religious objects, and an innocent person was blamed for the theft. This is true, as in 1293 he stole, with the help of two other people, the treasure of San Jacopo. This treasure was located in the Duomo (cathedral church) of San Zeno. One of the people falsely accused of the theft spent one year in prison. Vanni Fucci avoided paying the penalty for his theft by leaving the area.

Often, and not unexpectedly, a sinner has committed more than one kind of sin. Minos, who judges the sinners and who does not make mistakes, determines in which circle they ought to be punished.

• Which prediction does Vanni Fucci make, and why does he make it?

As other sinners do elsewhere in the *Inferno*, Vanni Fucci predicts coming trouble for Dante and for Florence. Vanni tells Dante of these coming troubles, including the expulsion of the White Guelfs from Florence by the Black Guelfs, and then he adds, “And I have told you this so you will suffer!” (Musa, *Inferno* 24.151).

Chapter 25: “Canto 25: The Transformations of Thieves”

• What is the punishment given to the Thieves, and why is it fitting?

In the 7th bolgia the Thieves are punished. In the living world, the Thieves stole things that belonged to other people, and in this bolgia the only thing they have — their identity — is stolen by other Thieves. In the seventh bolgia are many, many snakes, which turn out to be other Thieves. The Thieves, like most sinners in the Inferno, are naked and have no possessions.

The Thieves used their limbs to steal from other people (for example, pickpockets) and to run away, and now they often become an armless, legless snake.

• Which kinds of transformations do we see in Cantos 24-25?

In this bolgia, when some thievish companions in human form wonder why another thief in human form is missing, they have cause for alarm because the thief in human form has been transformed into a thief in the form of a snake or other reptile. We see this when the thievish companions miss Cianfa (Musa, *Inferno* 25.43), who quickly reappears as a six-legged reptile who attacks Agnel, with the result that they are transformed into one creature.

When a snake or reptile bites or wraps itself around a Thief, one of three things can happen:

- 1) the Thief can be consumed by fire and reduced to ashes, then be refashioned into his own form again (much like the mythical bird the Phoenix is consumed by fire, then is reconstituted, as a young bird, again),

2) the Thief and the snake or other reptile can unite into one body, or

3) the Thief can become a snake or other reptile, while the snake or other reptile becomes a Thief with a human form.

• Why are three kinds of transformations found in this bolgia?

Thieves create a lot of uncertainty. You may think that you have something, but you come home after work and you discover that someone has stolen that thing. In a neighborhood where Thieves constantly prey, you can never be sure that something you own will stay in your possession. Similarly, the Thieves are never sure what will happen when a snake bites a Thief.

• What does Dante mean by the words “snake” and “serpent”?

By the words “snake” and “serpent,” Dante means various kinds of reptiles, including reptiles with legs. We see that in the transformation in which a Thief becomes a snake and a snake becomes a Thief.

The transformation starts when “a little serpent” (Musa, *Inferno* 25.83) bites a Thief who has human form. The serpent becomes a Thief in human form and says, “Let Buoso run / the valley on all fours, the way I did” (Musa, *Inferno* 25.140-141).

We are prepared for this in Canto 24 by Dante the Poet’s statement that Libya with all its “so great a plague of venom” (Musa, *Inferno* 24.88) cannot compete with that found here. Dante mentions various kinds of reptiles found in Libya, and similarly we have various kinds of reptiles in this bolgia.

• What is a fig (obscene gesture)?

Vanni Fucci makes a fig in each hand. He thrusts his thumb between the two nearest fingers. Supposedly, this represents sexual intercourse. According to Mark Musa, the gesture means “F**k you!” or “Up yours!”

Vanni Fucci aims the figs at God, and even says, “Here, God, I’ve shaped them just for you!” (Musa, *Inferno* 25.3).

Immediately the snakes start coming after him. The guard Cacus, who carries many, many snakes and a fire-breathing dragon on his back, also comes running after Vanni Fucci to punish him. Cacus apparently has special knowledge of what blasphemies sinners perform in this bolgia, even when he cannot see a particular sinner, because Vanni Fucci flees and then Cacus arrives, looking for him so he and the snakes and the fire-breathing dragon on his back can punish him.

Obviously, Vanni Fucci is still rebellious in the *Inferno*. So is the sinner Capaneus, a Blasphemer whom we saw in Canto 14. Both sinners continue to blaspheme and to rebel against God.

• How does Dante the Pilgrim show that he is learning the lessons of the *Inferno*?

Dante approves of the snakes going after Vanni Fucci, and he even says that the snakes “became my friends” (Musa, *Inferno* 25.4).

Therefore, Dante is learning that God does not make mistakes. Dante is capable of righteous indignation; he approves of the way that the Thieves are being punished in this bolgia.

• The guard of the Thieves is Cacus. Who is Cacus?

The guard here is Cacus, a Centaur who once stole cattle from Hercules. We read about him in Book 8 of Virgil’s *Aeneid*. He stole Hercules’ cattle and dragged them by the tails into his cave so that their hoof prints would lead in the other

direction, away from the cave. One of the cattle lowed, Hercules heard the sound, and he came running to the cave. Cacus barred the doorway, but Hercules tore off the top of the mountain and hurled down boulders to kill Cacus.

Cacus arrives to punish Vanni Fucci. He is carrying many snakes and a fire-spitting dragon on his back (Musa, *Inferno* 25.17-24).

• **Where is Dante the Poet perhaps somewhat boastful?**

Dante may be boastful when he describes the double transformation where a snake turns into a Thief and a Thief turns into a snake. He says, “Let Lucan from this moment on be silent” (Musa, *Inferno* 25.94). He also says that Ovid ought to be silent as well (Musa, *Inferno* 25.97).

The reason for Dante’s saying these things is that these two Roman authors described only single transformations (one thing transforming into another), whereas Dante is describing a double transformation (two different things exchanging forms). Lucan tells of two soldiers, Sabellus and Nasidoius, who were bitten by snakes and burned to ashes as a result (much like the transformation we see in Canto 24). Ovid tells of Cadmus being turned into a serpent and of Arethusa being turned into a fountain. Of course, here the superiority is in content, which is due to Dante’s being in the *Inferno*. Dante is not saying explicitly that he is a better poet than Lucan and Ovid.

Chapter 26: “Canto 26: Evil Advisers; Ulysses/Diomed”

• We are still in the 8th Circle — the Circle devoted to simple fraud as opposed to complex fraud. What is simple fraud? What is complex fraud?

Simple fraud is fraud, but it is not committed against those to whom one has a special obligation of trust.

Simple fraud is betrayal of strangers, and complex fraud is betrayal of those with whom we ought to have a bond.

Complex fraud is fraud committed against those to whom one has a special obligation of trust. Complex fraud is fraud directed against those who have a special claim on the sinner, those to whom the sinner owes a special trust. Sinners who commit complex fraud are traitors of various kinds: e.g., traitors to kin/family, traitors to government, traitors to guests, or traitors to God.

• How does Dante begin Canto 26?

Here we have an apostrophe to Florence. Dante the Poet says that he is ashamed that he has seen five eminent Florentines in the part of the Inferno that is devoted to punishing the Thieves.

Dante is pessimistic and believes that his early-morning dreams are prophetic in predicting bad things for Florence in the future. People in the ancient world and the Middle Ages believed that early-morning dreams are prophetic.

• What is the name of the sin in Cantos 26-27? Can it be Fraudulent Counseling? Can it be Evil Deceiving? Can it be Military Fraud?

Dante does not give a name to the sin being punished in this bolgia. In Canto 11, Virgil names most of the sins being punished in the bolge. He mentions “nests

of hypocrites, flatterers, dabblers in sorcery,
 falsifiers, thieves, and simonists,
 panders, seducers, grafters, and like filth.

(Musa 11.58-60)

The Panders and Seducers are punished in the same bolgia, so that leaves two bolge unaccounted for. We will see that the Sowers of Discord are punished in another bolgia, so that leaves the sin that we read about in Cantos 26-27 without a name.

The answer to this question can be controversial. In the next canto, a Black Cherub says that Guido has given False Counsel, and so some commentators think that the sin here is Fraudulent Counseling.

We might say that the sin being punished here is that of Evil Deceiving. I do think that we can regard Ulysses as having given Fraudulent Counsel to his men when he advised them to sail with him on his final journey. He is manipulating them into doing what he wants.

About Diomed (aka “Diomedes” in ancient literature) I am not so sure. Diomed was in the Trojan Horse along with Ulysses, so we may consider that to be an example of Evil Deceiving. Certainly both Virgil and Dante are on the side of the Trojans, not on the side of the Greeks. As far as Fraudulent Counsel is concerned, I am not sure that Diomed is guilty of that. In the *Aeneid*, Diomed is asked by the enemies of Aeneas to join their side and drive Aeneas out of Italy. Diomed declines to do that and advises them to make friends with Aeneas. That seems to be Good, not Fraudulent, Advice.

We might say that the sin being punished here is Evil Deceiving. On the other hand, isn't all fraud Evil Deceiving?

Of course, when we think about the Trojan Horse, we should remember that Dante, as an Italian, would be on the side of Aeneas, his supposed ancestor. What would have been a glorious victory for the Greeks was a complete disaster for the Trojans. The Greeks would think that the Trojan Horse was a masterpiece of strategy, while the Trojans would think that it was a dirty trick.

We will look at another possibility for the name of this sin later, but yet another candidate is military fraud. This is something that Ulysses, Diomed, and Guido da Montefeltro (in Canto 27) have in common.

• What is the name of the sin in Cantos 26-27? Can it be Great But Misdirected Intellect? Can it be Great But Misdirected Abilities?

Dante scholars William R. Cook and Ronald B. Herzman agree with Mark Musa that the sin is a sin of **Great But Misdirected Intellect**. Both Ulysses and the protagonist of the next canto, Guido da Montefeltro, are very intelligent people, but we can say that they misused their intellect. Ulysses wanted to do everything, but we should not do evil things. Perhaps that is the sin here: having great intellect but misusing it for evil.

Each of the three sins that Virgil mentions leads to the fall of Troy, and each of these sins involves great daring and intelligence. Since the sin of Guido da Montefeltro (who is punished for the same sin as Ulysses and Diomed, and whom we will read about in Canto 27) also involves warfare, perhaps the sin being punished here is *Military Fraud*.

However, the sin may be something else. In Dante's mind, Diomed is involved in each of these sins that lead to the Fall of Troy. Because Diomed is not known for his intellect the way that Ulysses and Guido da Montefeltro (who is punished for the same sin as Ulysses and Diomed, and whom we will

read about in Canto 27), perhaps the sin punished here is NOT **Great But Misdirected Intellect**. Diomed does have great abilities, but great intellect is not one of them. Instead, he is known for fighting prowess, for his courage, and for his daring.

In the opinion of the author of the book you are reading now, perhaps a better phrase would be **Great But Misdirected Abilities**. After all, the abilities here are various: great intellect, great rhetorical ability, and great daring. The sin may be having great abilities, but misusing them to defraud other people.

Mark Musa points out in his notes on the next canto (Canto 27) on page 327:

And so, instead of a clear-cut subdivision, determined by the professional goal toward which the fraud is directed, I prefer to think, in a more general way, of fraud unspecified — except in terms of the talents that characterize its practitioners. While all fraud involves in some way that abuse of the intellect, the intellect that Ulysses and Guido [da Montefeltro, who appears in Canto 27] abused was exceptionally brilliant. If all men are endowed with reason, they had received a special gift from God, but they had used it — these brilliant sinners who shine in flames — for deception and the creation of snares.

• **Why is the focus in Cantos 26 and 27 on Ulysses and Guido da Montefeltro rather than on Diomed?**

Of course, the focus in Cantos 26 and 27 is on Ulysses and Guido da Montefeltro rather than on Diomed. Why is that? Dante is in the Inferno to learn. Dante has great intellect, and he must learn from Ulysses and Guido da Montefeltro not to misdirect it; he must not use his great abilities, including intellect, for evil. Diomed does have great abilities, including

great courage and daring, and so he is punished here; however, what Dante needs to learn is to not use his great intellect for evil.

• **Who is Ulysses? (Ulysses' Greek name is Odysseus.)**

Ulysses' reputation changed greatly in the ancient world. In Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Odysseus is a warrior and a hero. He is one of the good guys, and he is well respected as a warrior, a man, and a speaker.

Ulysses does have remarkable intellectual powers. He is the Greek who thought up the idea of the Trojan Horse, and he was inside the horse when it was taken into Troy. He also showed remarkable intellectual ability when he was in the cave of the Cyclops. Trapped inside the cave where the Cyclops has rolled a huge boulder in front of the door, Ulysses cannot kill the Cyclops because then he and his men would be trapped inside the cave and would eventually starve to death. Therefore, he blinds the Cyclops and sneaks out of the cave by hiding underneath the sheep that the Cyclops herds. Ulysses was also able to establish himself again on Ithaca after 20 years away from home, although over 100 suitors were courting his wife and plotting to kill his son — and they wanted to kill him.

• **How did the reputation of Ulysses/Odysseus change over time?**

In Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Odysseus is a hero.

Over time, the reputation of Ulysses/Odysseus changed, and by the time of the great Athenian tragedians Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, people were against his remarkable ability as a liar — a skill that served him well when he returned home to Ithaca after 20 years away from home.

In the *Aeneid*, Ulysses/Odysseus is a bad guy. According to Virgil's masterpiece, Ulysses/Odysseus left a companion on

the Island of the Cyclopes — a man whom the kindhearted Trojans rescued.

We should note that Dante extends Ulysses' story. He makes up a new death for Ulysses/Odysseus — one that is different from the easy death in old age that is foretold in the *Odyssey*.

Many sinners in the lower part of the Inferno do not wish to be remembered on Earth. This probably is not a problem for Ulysses. In Homer's *Odyssey*, we learn that Ulysses/Odysseus is concerned about his *kleos*, about how he will be remembered on Earth. He does not want to be forgotten. Of course, Virgil instantly recognizes Ulysses/Odysseus, so Ulysses/Odysseus is unable to attempt to hide his identity from Dante.

• How are Ulysses and Diomed and the other sinners here punished? Why is that punishment appropriate?

In the 8th bolgia are punished the **Evil Deceivers Who Misused Their Great Talents**. They are enclosed in flame for eternity, and their souls cannot be seen. Just as they kept their true motives and thoughts hidden from other people, so are their souls hidden for eternity. One Evil Deceiver is Ulysses/Odysseus, who fiercely desired fame or *kleos*; part of his *contrapasso* is to have his identity hidden. (Just as the Trojan Horse enclosed the Greek warriors, so the flame enclosed Ulysses and Diomed.)

A part of the punishment of Ulysses and Diomed is that they are angry at each other, apparently for all eternity to come. Virgil tells Dante, “Within [the flame], Ulysses and Diomed / are suffering in anger with each other” (Musa, *Inferno* 26.55-56).

Just as part of the punishment of Francesca da Rimini and Paolo is to be together for eternity, so Ulysses and Diomed are together for eternity.

Not all Evil Deceivers are enclosed in a flame with another sinner; Guido da Montefeltro in the next canto is enclosed alone in a flame.

• **Why is it Virgil, not Dante, who speaks to Ulysses?**

Virgil, not Dante, speaks to Ulysses for these reasons:

- Virgil is a virtuous man, while Ulysses is an evil man, and virtue has power over evil.
- Virgil helped spread Ulysses' fame by writing him in his *Aeneid*. (However, in the *Aeneid* Ulysses is one of the bad guys.)
- Virgil is from the classical world, as is Ulysses.

• **What are the three sins of Ulysses and Diomed that Virgil lists?**

Virgil lists the three sins of Ulysses and Diomed:

“And there within their flame do they lament
 The ambush of the horse, which made the door
 Whence issued forth the Romans' gentle seed;
 Therein is wept the craft, for which being dead
 Deidamia still deplores Achilles,
 And pain for the Palladium there is borne.”

(Longfellow 26.58-63)

• **What is the story of the first thing that Ulysses and Diomed grieve: the Trojan Horse?**

The fullest account of the Trojan Horse appears in Book 2 of Virgil's *Aeneid*. It is referred to in Homer's *Iliad* and

Odyssey, but the *Iliad* tells the story of events that occur before the Trojan Horse, and the *Odyssey* tells the story of events that occur after the Trojan Horse.

In the *Aeneid*, we learn that Ulysses (his Greek name is Odysseus) came up with the idea of the Trojan Horse. The Trojan War had been going for 10 years, and the forces of Agamemnon and the other Greeks had not been able to conquer Troy by might, and so Ulysses had the idea of using trickery to conquer Troy. The Greeks built a huge wooden horse and left it outside Troy, and then they seemed to sail away in their ships and return home. However, the Trojan Horse was hollow and filled with Greek soldiers, including Ulysses and Diomed, and the ships merely sailed behind an island so that the Trojans could not see them. A lying Greek named Sinon stayed behind and pretended that he had escaped from Ulysses, who had wanted to kill him. Sinon told the Trojans that if the Trojans were to take the Trojan Horse inside the walls of Troy, then Troy would never fall. Amid great rejoicing, the Trojans took the Trojan Horse inside the walls of Troy. That night, the Greek warriors came out of the Trojan Horse, went to the gates of Troy, killed the Trojan guards, and opened the gates of Troy. Agamemnon and his troops were outside the gates, as they had returned from hiding behind the island. The Greeks then conquered Troy, killing many, many Trojans.

For Dante and Virgil, of course, the fall of Troy is a great tragedy, although it did lead to the founding of the Roman people. To Dante, to Virgil, to the Romans, and to the Italians, the bad guys won the Trojan War.

In the *Inferno*, both Ulysses and Diomed grieve over the Trojan Horse.

- **Are the consequences of the Trojan War bad?**

We may say that the consequences of the Trojan War are good because the Roman people was founded. However, we have to ask who gets the credit for that. Ulysses and Diomed get a lot of the credit for destroying Troy, but Aeneas gets the credit for founding the Roman people. Ulysses and Diomed do evil, in Dante's view, but Aeneas does good, in Dante's view.

Consider rape and its consequences. Some men may point out that some women who have been raped go on to become rape counselors for other women, and/or become experts in self-defense and teach self-defense to other women, and/or volunteer at a 24-hour crisis hotline, etc. These things are good, and they probably would not have happened if the woman were not raped, so aren't at least some of the effects of rape in this case good? Of course, that is a faulty way of looking at the situation. There are two sets of consequences here, resulting from two different actions. The first action is the rape itself, and the consequences of rape are bad. The rapist commits the rape, the consequences of the rape are bad, and the rapist is responsible for doing the bad action. The second action is the woman's response to rape. Some women do become experts in self-defense and teach self-defense to other women, and/or volunteer at a 24-hour crisis hotline, etc. They do the action, the consequences of the action are good, and they deserve the credit for doing the good action.

The plan of the Trojan Horse came from the mind of Ulysses. We may consider the Trojan Horse to be an example of Evil Deceiving. We may consider Ulysses' advice to the Greeks to build the Trojan Horse an example of Evil Counsel and of Great But Misdirected Intellect. Certainly, Ulysses, Diomed, and the other Greeks inside the Trojan Horse showed great daring and great courage. We may consider this to be an example of Great But Misdirected Abilities.

• What is the story of the second thing that Ulysses and Diomed grieve: the weeping of Deïdamia?

Ulysses and Diomed also lament other things, as Virgil points out. Both Ulysses and Diomed were instrumental in making Deïdamia grieve. One story of the Trojan War, in which Achilles was the major warrior for the Greeks, is that his mother, the immortal goddess Thetis, knew that he would die at Troy; therefore, she disguised him as a girl and took him to the court of King Lycomedes, where he pretended to be one of the King's daughters. There, he seduced Deïdamia, who bore him a son. (Achilles' son, known as Neoptolemus or Pyrrhus, came to Troy after Achilles died; the son was one of the Greek warriors inside the Trojan Horse.) Ulysses and Diomed had come looking for Achilles, and Ulysses was able to uncover his identity through — surprise, surprise — a trick. Ulysses, bringing gifts for the King's daughters, brought a lance and shield with him — Achilles, dressed as a girl, was very interested in those weapons, thus revealing his sex.

Here Ulysses uses his great intellect, but its use has bad consequences: 1) Achilles kills many, many Trojans (Virgil and Dante are against this), 2) Achilles dies, and 3) Deïdamia mourns him. This is an example of Great But Misdirected Intellect, which is of course a subset of Great But Misdirected Abilities.

In addition, Ulysses is the Greek who learned (from the prophet Calchas) that the Greeks would be unable to conquer Troy without the aid of Achilles, so apparently he advised the Greeks to let him and Diomed look for Achilles. This is an example of Evil Counseling. Also, of course, Ulysses and Diomed did not let King Lycomedes know what they were really looking for at his court, so this is an example of Evil Deceiving.

• **What is the story of the third thing that Ulysses and Diomed grieve: the theft of the Palladium?**

The Palladium was a statue of the goddess Pallas Athena. As long as it remained in Troy, Troy would never fall. Ulysses and Diomed snuck into Troy one night and carried off the Palladium.

Here Ulysses and Diomed use great daring and probably great intellect, and here once again bad consequences follow. As long as the Palladium stays in Troy, Troy will not fall. By stealing the Palladium, Ulysses and Diomed help cause Troy to fall. This is an example of Great But Misdirected Abilities.

Of course, Ulysses advised the Greeks to let him and Diomed attempt to steal the Palladium. This is an example of Evil Counsel.

Ulysses and Diomed got into Troy through the use of disguises. This is an example of Evil Deceiving.

• **What did Ulysses do after returning home?**

Ulysses has been away from home for 20 years: 10 years at Troy during the Trojan War, and 10 years wandering the Mediterranean and being held captive by the goddess Calypso.

However, he quickly decides to leave Ithaca and go wandering again. Ulysses is a restless man who wanders in search of adventures.

• **What is Homer's account of Ulysses/Odysseus' homecoming and death, as told in the *Odyssey*?**

In Homer's account of Odysseus' homecoming, Odysseus has to face a mob of suitors who are trying to marry his wife and who would like for Odysseus and his son to be dead. Dante does not mention the suitors.

In Homer's account of Odysseus' homecoming, after Odysseus kills the suitors, he wants to stay at home for a while, but he will end up going on another journey. The sea-god Neptune (in Greek mythology, the sea-god's name is Poseidon) is still angry at him, so to make peace with Neptune, Odysseus will undertake a journey in which he carries an oar over his shoulder. He will journey until someone asks why he is carrying a winnowing fan (used in harvesting grain) over his shoulder. Odysseus will then plant the oar in the ground, make a sacrifice to Neptune, and go home. The purpose of the journey is to spread knowledge of Neptune to people who have never seen the sea. When Odysseus returns home, he will live a long time, and his death will be easy.

• What is Dante's account of Ulysses' homecoming and death, as told in the *Inferno*, Canto 26?

In Dante's account of Ulysses' homecoming and death, Ulysses returns home and then undertakes a journey in which he and all his men die. He sails into the ocean, sails to the southern hemisphere, and sees the Mountain of Purgatory. As pagans, Ulysses and his men cannot reach the Mountain of Purgatory or climb it. A storm arises, and his ship sinks and he and all his men drown.

What Dante does here is remarkable. He is rewriting the story of Ulysses, going against what the great Greek epic poet Homer wrote.

• How are Dante's Ulysses and Virgil's Aeneas different?

We find out from lines 94-96 in Canto 26 of the *Inferno* (Musa's translation) that Ulysses lacks the Roman virtue of *pietas*, something that Aeneas had in abundance. *Pietas* is giving respect where respect is owed: to one's country, to one's father, to one's wife, and to one's son. Ulysses has been away from Ithaca for 20 years, but quickly he grows bored and wants to set out for adventures, leaving behind his

father (Laertes), his wife (Penelope), and his son (Telemachus). These are people who suffered while Ulysses was away from his kingdom of Ithaca, and Ulysses ought to stay on Ithaca to take care of his family and his people. Instead, he places his thirst for adventure and forbidden knowledge ahead of his family and his kingdom. *Pietas* is a virtue that Aeneas, the hero of Virgil's *Aeneid*, had in abundance.

Here is Mark Musa's translation of some important lines stated by Ulysses:

“not sweetness of a son, not reverence
 for an aging father, not the debt of love
 I owed Penelope to make her happy,
 could quench deep in myself the burning wish
 to know the world and have experience
 of all man's vices, of all human worth.”

(Musa 26.94-99)

Dante's Ulysses undervalues family. He is home for a while, and then he is ready to set off on another journey. In Homer, Odysseus' journey is necessary to make peace with Neptune/Poseidon. In Dante, Ulysses' journey is undertaken to acquire forbidden knowledge.

Aeneas, on the other hand, values family. He refuses to leave Troy without his father, and he ends up carrying his father out of Troy on his back while holding his son's hand as his son runs by his side. Aeneas even goes back inside Troy to try to rescue his wife, Creusa, after she becomes separated from him.

Ulysses undervalues his kingdom. He is King of Ithaca, and he ought to stay on Ithaca and rule his kingdom. Instead, he

gives in to his thirst for adventure and sets off on a sea voyage to have adventures.

Aeneas, on the other hand, values his fatherland. He fights valiantly to defend Troy, and he leaves Troy only after it has fallen. Aeneas works hard to get to Italy and become the founder of the Roman people, even though he would much prefer to stay in Carthage with Queen Dido. He puts family and country first, and himself second.

• What is Ulysses' ambition? What does he want to do with his life?

Ulysses says:

“Nor fondness for my son, nor reverence
 For my old father, nor the due affection
 Which joyous should have made Penelope,
 Could overcome within me the desire
 I had to be experienced of the world,
 And of the vice and virtue of mankind;”

(Longfellow 26.94-99)

What Ulysses wants to do is to have knowledge, including forbidden knowledge. He says that he wishes to have knowledge “of all human worth” (Musa, *Inferno* 26.99), which is good, but he also says that he wants to have knowledge “of all men’s vices” (Musa, *Inferno* 26.99), which is not good.

In general, knowledge is a good thing, but it is not always good.

Ulysses, however, thinks that no knowledge is forbidden to him. Ulysses seems to trust experience more than anything else. He wants to experience everything.

• What are some examples of forbidden knowledge and forbidden experience?

Some things are forbidden for us to know. I don't think God wants for us to know what it is like to be a rapist or to have the knowledge of what it is like to commit other great sins.

I think the knowledge of addiction to harmful illegal drugs is forbidden to us. We aren't supposed to know what a heroin high is. In Homer's *Odyssey*, Odysseus (the Greek name of Ulysses) did not want his men to eat the Lotus.

We are not supposed to experience hating someone without reason.

Criminals tend to be stupid, which is a good thing. If criminals were intelligent, they would be harder to catch, and they would misuse their intelligence by trying to figure out new ways of ripping off people and to escape being caught.

• What are the Pillars of Hercules?

We know the Pillars of Hercules as the Strait of Gibraltar. The myth is that Hercules split a mountain in two to form the Pillars of Hercules. This was a warning to pagan sailors not to go any further. Of course, what lies outside the Pillars of Hercules is the Atlantic Ocean, an ocean that was very dangerous for ancient ships to sail on. Any ancient ship that sailed west into the Atlantic Ocean would probably run out of food long before reaching land, and everyone on board would perish.

• Ulysses doesn't travel out past the Pillars of Hercules and into the Atlantic Ocean alone. How does he convince other men to sail with him?

The other men, like Ulysses, are “old and tired” (Musa, *Inferno* 26.106), yet Ulysses makes a speech in which he convinces them to undertake another journey. In both Dante and Homer, Ulysses is a master of rhetoric, of persuasive speech.

Ulysses says when his ship reaches the Pillars of Hercules:

‘O brothers, who amid a hundred thousand
Perils,’ I said, ‘have come unto the West,
To this so inconsiderable vigil
Which is remaining of your senses still
Be ye unwilling to deny the knowledge,
Following the sun, of the unpeopled world.’

(Longfellow 26.112-117)

Clearly Ulysses values experience.

This is an effective speech. Ulysses says that “we made our oars our wings for that mad flight” (Musa, *Inferno* 26.125)

Note that by sailing into the Atlantic Ocean Ulysses is seeking forbidden knowledge and sailing into forbidden territory. Hercules set up his Pillars as a warning to men not to sail any further.

• Is Ulysses guilty of fraud?

Fraud is willful misrepresentation to deprive other people of their rights.

In my opinion, Ulysses is manipulating other people to get them to do what he wants. He is a master of rhetoric, and rhetoricians study how to get other people to do what they want them to do. Of course, persuasion can be ethical in some situations as well as unethical in other situations.

In my opinion, Ulysses is giving these men bad advice. They are old and tired, and they ought to stay home on Ithaca; instead, they undertake a journey that only younger men, if any, should undertake if it were made for ethical purposes.

However, we should note that the men, old as they are, are easily persuaded, at least according to Ulysses. Of course, in the Middle Ages, Ulysses had a reputation as a liar, but here he says:

“So eager did I render my companions,
 With this brief exhortation, for the voyage,
 That then I hardly could have held them
 back.”

(Longfellow 26.121-123)

In my opinion, the journey is made for unethical reasons. Ulysses wishes to acquire knowledge, including forbidden knowledge, and experience, including forbidden experience. One way to really know vice is to participate in it.

Ulysses does not trust anything other than his own knowledge or his own experience. No one can tell him not to experience something. I would imagine that his wife and his son would want him to stay at home, but Ulysses is very eager to begin another adventure. Ulysses is saying to the old men, “Trust me,” but Ulysses trusts nothing except for his own knowledge and experience.

• **How do Ulysses and his men die?**

He and his men sail past the Straits of Gibraltar and into the ocean. They reach the other hemisphere, see the Mountain of Purgatory, and then drown when the ship sinks in a storm.

“Joyful were we, and soon it turned to weeping;
 For out of the new land a whirlwind rose,

And smote upon the fore part of the ship.
 Three times it made her whirl with all the waters,
 At the fourth time it made the stern uplift,
 And the prow downward go, as pleased An-
 other,
 Until the sea above us closed again.”

(Longfellow 26.136-142)

Let me emphasize that educated people of Dante’s day knew that the Earth is round. They didn’t know how big the Earth is — they thought it was smaller than it really is. When Christopher Columbus sailed West to reach the Indies and ran into the Americas, he thought that he had reached the Indies.

The educated people of Dante’s day, however, believed that water covered the Southern Hemisphere.

• By the way, why is the flame of Ulysses/Diomed divided at the top (Musa, *Inferno* 26.52)?

Dante asks Virgil:

“Who is within that fire, which comes so cleft
 At top, it seems uprising from the pyre
 Where was Eteocles with his brother placed.”

(Longfellow 26.52-54)

Part of the punishment of Ulysses and Diomed are to be together forever, although — or because — they are angry at each other (Musa, *Inferno* 25.56). This anger is shown in how the flame splits in two just like the flame over the funeral pyre of Eteocles and Polynices.

• In mythology, who were Eteocles and Polynices ?

According to mythology, Eteocles and Polynices were two brothers who agreed to take turns ruling the city of Thebes. One brother was supposed to rule for a year, and then the other brother would rule for a year, and so on. Eteocles ruled for the first year, but then he refused to give up the throne so that his brother could rule for a year. Angry, Polynices gathered an army together and marched against Thebes, creating the myth of the Seven Against Thebes. The two brothers killed each other in combat, and when their corpses were cremated, the flame split in two over their corpses because even in death they were still angry at each other.

Chapter 27: “Canto 27: Guido da Montefeltro”

- **Virgil dismisses Ulysses with the words “you may move on, I won’t ask more of you” (Musa, *Inferno* 27.21). Ulysses obeys and moves on. Does Virgil have any special powers over the damned?**

In the Middle Ages, Virgil had a reputation as a magician. Of course, Dante would have regarded Virgil’s magic as white rather than black; otherwise, Virgil would not be in Limbo but in a deeper Circle of the *Inferno*. In the *Inferno*, any special powers that Virgil has over the damned would come from God. Virgil is a symbol of Human Reason, and according to the thought of the Middle Ages, Human Reason is supposed to be the handmaiden of Divine Love. (Of course, Human Reason may be misused by evil people.) Medieval philosophers use their reason to study God; thus, reason is the handmaiden of theology. Of course, Virgil is undertaking this journey as guide to Dante at the request of Beatrice, who is one of the three heavenly ladies who are concerned about the state of the soul of Dante the Pilgrim. Therefore, Virgil is Human Reason serving the wishes of Divine Love. Virgil is on a mission from God, and that apparently gives him some authority over the sinners in the *Inferno*.

- **After the meeting with Ulysses, Virgil and Dante hear a roaring that is compared to the cries of the Sicilian bull. What is the story of the Sicilian bull and why is it relevant here?**

Phalaris was a cruel ruler of the city Agrigentum in Sicily. He commissioned Perillus to construct a hollow bull of metal to be used as an instrument of torture. The victim would be placed inside the bull, and then the bull would be heated. As the victim roasted, the victim screamed. Phalaris ordered that the bull be constructed in such a way that the screams of the victims would sound like the bellowing of a bull.

After Perillus used his great abilities to construct the bull — something that he ought not to have done — Phalaris made him the first victim to be placed in the bull and roasted. This is poetic justice, and *contrapasso* is very much concerned with poetic justice. Additional poetic justice occurred when Phalaris was overthrown and also became a victim of the bull.

In this myth, we see a person being punished for the **Misuse of Great Abilities**, and of course, the sinners in this bolgia are being punished for that sin.

Guido da Montefeltro is like Perillus. He sins at the request of another person, and he pays for that sin.

• **Dante talks with Guido da Montefeltro, an older contemporary of his. Who was Guido da Montefeltro?**

Guido da Montefeltro was recently dead in 1300, so he has not been in the Inferno very long. He was a Ghibelline, and he was very involved in politics and in advising Pope Boniface VIII. However, near the end of his life he became a Franciscan monk.

• **Guido da Montefeltro recognizes Virgil's dialect. What does he ask Virgil about? (Virgil requests that Dante answer Guido's question.)**

Guido da Montefeltro asks about military matters: “tell me, are the Romagnols at war or peace?” (Musa, *Inferno* 27.28). Of course, sinners in the Inferno have no knowledge of the present, although they can gain knowledge of current events from sinners newly arrived in the Inferno.

The important point here is that Guido's request reveals his interests. He is interested in warfare and in politics. A Benedictine monk should be interested in peace and in religion.

• **How is Guido da Montefeltro's story directly relevant to Dante? (And how is Ulysses' story directly relevant to Dante?)**

We may wonder which sin is punished in this bolgia, and perhaps we can find out by seeing what Ulysses' story and Guido da Montefeltro's story have in common.

Guido da Montefeltro's story is directly relevant to Dante because Guido was involved in shenanigans with Pope Boniface VIII, who is responsible for helping the Black Guelfs to exile Dante and the other White Guelfs.

However, we know that when Dante speaks to sinners in the afterlife he does so because they have something important to teach him. Of course, since the sinners are in the Inferno they teach him what not to do.

We can wonder what it is that Ulysses and Guido are teaching Dante not to do. In Ulysses' case, we have a man of great ability who misuses his ability. He uses his considerable rhetorical ability to advise old men to set sail with him. He uses his considerable abilities to seek forbidden knowledge and forbidden experience.

Perhaps Ulysses is teaching Dante to not misuse his own considerable abilities. Perhaps the sin punished in this bolgia is the misuse of great abilities — that is, using great abilities to harm others. Perhaps Dante must be careful to use his own great abilities to help other people and not to harm them.

One way to test this supposition is to look at the story of Guido da Montefeltro. If he is a man of great abilities who misused his great abilities to harm other people, then that is good evidence that the **Misuse of Great Abilities** is the sin being punished here. This is the sin of **Great But Misdirected Abilities**.

• Does Guido da Montefeltro want to be remembered on Earth?

No, he does not. He says that if he thought that Dante could ever return to the living world, he would not identify himself and tell him his story. However, since he believes that no one ever escapes from the Inferno, he does tell Dante his story.

• How does Guido da Montefeltro tell his story? (Which story does he tell?)

Guido says:

“I was a man of arms, then Cordelier,
 Believing thus begirt to make amends;
 And truly my belief had been fulfilled
 But for the High Priest, whom may ill betide,
 Who put me back into my former sins;
 And how and wherefore I will have thee hear.
 While I was still the form of bone and pulp
 My mother gave to me, the deeds I did
 Were not those of a lion, but a fox.
 The machinations and the covert ways
 I knew them all, and practised so their craft,
 That to the ends of earth the sound went
 forth.”

(Longfellow 27.67-78)

The “High Priest” whom Guido refers to is Pope Boniface VIII.

We see a few things in Guido’s story:

- Guido had two careers: First he was a soldier and then he was a priest.
- Guido blames Pope Boniface VIII for his being in Hell.
- Like Ulysses, he was wily like a fox. Both men were shrewd and had great abilities. They were warriors, but they were also known for trickery. Ulysses, of course, came up with the idea of the Trojan Horse. We will see Guido's trick later.
- Guido is overestimating his fame. He was important regionally, but he was hardly famous throughout the world.

• What does Guido da Montefeltro do when he reaches old age?

Guido continues:

“When I saw that the time of life had come
 for me, as it must come for every man
 to lower the sails and gather in the lines,
 things I once found pleasure in then grieved me;
 repentant and confessed, I took the vows
 a monk takes. And, oh, to think it could have
 worked!”

(Musa 27.79-84)

When he got old, he started thinking that it was time to think about his soul. He became a Franciscan monk.

• After talking about retiring to become a religious man, Guido da Montefeltro says, “And, oh, to think it could

have worked!” (Musa, *Inferno* 27.84). How can we interpret that line?

Guido is tricky, as we will see, and I think in this line we see him attempting to be tricky. Guido tried to scam God by becoming a monk. He was wily like a fox throughout his career, and he tried to be wily like a fox and scam God into letting him into Paradise.

• How does Pope Boniface VIII convince the Franciscan monk Guido da Montefeltro to give him military advice?

Guido da Montefeltro is now Brother Guido, but Pope Boniface VIII runs into a problem. He is fighting the Colonna family, and the Colonna family is barricaded inside Palestrina, a fortified city at the top of a mountain in Italy. Because of the location of the fortified city, it is going to be very, very difficult to take.

Knowing that Guido is a sly fox, Pope Boniface VIII comes to him to ask for advice. This is what happens:

“But even as Constantine sought out Sylvester
 To cure his leprosy, within Soracte,
 So this one sought me out as an adept
 To cure him of the fever of his pride.
 Counsel he asked of me, and I was silent,
 Because his words appeared inebriate.”
 (Longfellow 27.94-99)

This Constantine is the Constantine of the Donation of Constantine, and he is in Paradise. Pope Sylvester I used baptismal water to cure the leprosy of Constantine.

Basically, Pope Boniface VIII is asking for advice from Brother Guido about how to kill Christians. After all, the

Colonna family is Christian, and here we have a fight among Christians: the Pope's forces versus the Colonna family. Pope Boniface VIII became Pope when Celestine V resigned, but the Colonna family did not believe that the resignation of Pope Celestine V was valid; therefore, the Colonna family opposed Pope Boniface VIII.

• **What argument does Pope Boniface VIII use to convince Guido da Montefeltro to give him military advice?**

Brother Guido hesitates because giving advice about how to kill Christians is not what a Franciscan monk should do. Therefore, Pope Boniface VIII begins to make arguments to persuade him:

“And then he said: ‘Be not thy heart afraid;
 Henceforth I thee absolve; and thou instruct
 me
 How to raze Palestrina to the ground.
 Heaven have I power to lock and to unlock,
 As thou dost know; therefore the keys are
 two,
 The which my predecessor held not dear.’”
 (Longfellow 27.100-105)

• **What will happen to Pope Boniface VIII when he dies?**

We know what will happen to Pope Boniface VIII when he dies, although he is still alive in 1300, the time that *The Divine Comedy* is set. Pope Boniface VIII will be in the 3rd bolgia of Circle 8 of the Inferno; this part of the Inferno is dedicated to punishing the Simonists. Pope Boniface VIII says that he has the keys “to lock and unlock Heaven” (Musa, *Inferno* 27.104), but he was unable to keep himself out of the Inferno.

In fact, Pope Boniface VIII does not have those keys. We will see those keys on the Mountain of Purgatory. An angel has those two keys, and the angel unlocks a gate when a sinner is ready to begin climbing the Mountain of Purgatory and purge his or her sins.

• Is Pope Boniface VIII scamming Guido da Montefeltro?

Yes, he is. Pope Boniface VIII is not able to forgive a sin committed against another person or family. You can forgive a sin committed against yourself, but you can't forgive a sin committed against someone else. Only God can forgive a sin committed against someone else.

In addition, Pope Boniface VIII does not decide who gets into Heaven or Hell. If he did, he would not end up being punished eternally with the other Simonists when he dies.

• Is Brother Guido's repentance sincere?

This is what Brother Guido says next:

“Then urged me on his weighty arguments

There, where my silence was the worst advice;

And said I: ‘Father, since thou washest me

Of that sin into which I now must fall,

The promise long with the fulfilment short

Will make thee triumph in thy lofty seat.”

(Longfellow 27.106-111)

Brother Guido falls for the scam. He fails to recognize the fallacy in what Pope Boniface VIII promises him.

Think about this. Brother Guido wants to be forgiven for a sin before he commits it. However, that is not the way that repentance works. With repentance, you sin, then you regret having committed the sin and you do your best not to repeat the sin. You will be forgiven the sin if your repentance is honest. Of course, Brother Guido's repentance is not honest. He goes ahead and sins, knowing that he is sinning. Brother Guido's repentance was not honest when he became a monk, and his repentance is not honest when he asks for his sin to be forgiven before he commits it.

Imagine that you want to murder someone. You go to confession, confess to murder, and perform your repentance. Then you commit murder. While committing the murder, you are mortally wounded and die. You tell God, "You have to let me into Heaven. After all, I repented my sin of murder." What is God going to say to you? I think we all know that God is going to say: "YOU GO TO HELL!"

Brother Guido is a scammer, but he falls for Pope Boniface VIII's scam. Brother Guido is smart, but not smart enough.

Guido da Montefeltro did not truly repent when he became a monk. He was trying to scam God into letting him into Heaven. We see that in these lines he speaks: "I took the vows / a monk takes. And, oh, to think it could have worked!" (Musa, *Inferno* 27.83-84).

• Which advice does Guido da Montefeltro give Pope Boniface VIII regarding his military problem?

The advice is this, along with the acknowledgement by Guido that he is committing a sin:

"I said, 'Father, since you grant me absolution

for this sin that I find I must fall into now:

ample promise with a scant fulfillment
will bring you triumph on your lofty throne.”

(Musa 27.108-111)

Notice that Brother Guido recognizes that he is sinning by offering this advice. The advice is to make promises, then not keep your promises. Tell the Colonna family that you want to be friends and that you will give them what they want, and then when they come out of the fortified city, destroy the city so that the Colonna family no longer has this stronghold. In other words, arrange a truce, and then break the truce as soon as it is advantageous for you.

The Pope followed this advice. When the Colonna family left Palestrina, a fortified city at the top of a mountain in Italy, the Pope had it destroyed.

• **Is the advice of Guido da Montefeltro the kind of advice that a Franciscan ought to give?**

Brother Guido is supposed to be a Franciscan. Franciscans are for peace, not war. A Franciscan ought not to give this kind of advice.

In addition, Franciscans favor the repentance of sins. A Franciscan friar ought to know that the arguments of Pope Boniface VIII are totally and completely bogus.

• **What happens when Guido da Montefeltro dies?**

Because he is a Franciscan friar, and because Pope Boniface VIII gave him his word that his sin would be forgiven and that he would enter Heaven (the Pope said that he has the key to Heaven), Brother Guido expects to enter Heaven when he dies. In fact, Saint Francis comes to get his soul.

Unfortunately for Brother Guido, however, one of the black Cherubim also comes for his soul, arguing that Brother Guido has not repented his sin.

Brother Guido says:

“Saint Francis came to get me when I died,
 but one of the black Cherubim cried out:
 ‘Don’t touch him, don’t cheat me of what is
 mine!
 ““He must come down to join my other servants
 for the false counsel he gave. From then to
 now
 I have been ready at his hair, because
 one cannot be absolved unless repentant,
 nor can one both repent and will a thing
 at once — the one is cancelled out by the
 other.””

(Musa 27.112-120)

The black angel says that a sinner cannot “both repent and will a thing / at once — the one is cancelled out by the other” (*Inferno* 27.119-120). Of course, that is exactly what Brother Guido was doing. He wanted his sin to be forgiven, but at the same time he was planning to sin (by giving the Pope the unethical advice that the Pope wanted).

We know what happens to unrepentant sinners. They end up in the Inferno — exactly as does Brother Guido.

• **Who are the black Cherubim?**

The Cherubim are the 8th order of angels. Some of the Cherubim rebelled against God and became fallen angels; they are the black Cherubim. Note that the black Cherubim, who were members of the 8th order of angels, appear in the 8th pocket of the 8th circle of the Inferno.

• **Has Guido da Montefeltro lost the “good of intellect”?**

Guido spent his life scamming others, yet he does not recognize the scam when Pope Boniface VIII scams him. He has lost the “good of intellect.”

I think we can argue that Dante’s Ulysses has also lost the good of intellect. He should know that it would be a good idea to stay home with his family now that he is old. He should also realize that it is better not to experience and not to know some things. However, as we have seen, he goes on a final voyage and gets himself and his men killed.

• **Why does Dante spend so much time in this bolgia? What does he learn from Ulysses and from Guido da Montefeltro?**

We know that both Ulysses and Guido da Montefeltro are very intelligent people. Both felt a temptation to misuse their intelligence and their powers of persuasion. Both scammed other people.

As a very intelligent man, Dante likely would have felt the temptation to misuse his intelligence and his powers of persuasion. Here in the Inferno he is learning not to do that.

In addition, both Ulysses and Guido da Montefeltro gave false counsel. Dante must tell the truth and not lie in *The Divine Comedy*.

Ulysses, Diomed, Guido da Montefeltro, and Dante all have great abilities. If Dante misuses his great abilities, he can end

up in the Inferno just like Ulysses, Diomed, and Guido da Montefeltro.

• Do you know of anyone who has misused his or her intelligence and powers of persuasion?

Most criminals are very stupid, thankfully; however, some are intelligent. One person was a very good computer programmer, and he knew that when someone throws something away, that another person can legally take it. He also knew that banks round off their transactions. For example, the figure \$12.914 may be rounded off to \$12.91, thus throwing away .004.

Therefore, when he was hired to do computer programming for a huge bank that did billions of transactions per day, he wrote code that directed that the money that had been rounded off (or thrown away) be put into his bank account. Because the bank did so many billions of transactions per day, quickly this grew to a sizable amount of money, which he spent. When he was caught, he said that he was merely taking what the bank was throwing away. (No, he did not get away with it.)

Here's another example. During the gold rush in California, a man worked in a saloon. Prospectors would come in with bags of gold dust instead of money, and this man's job was to weigh the gold dust and let the prospectors know how much they could spend. This man had long hair, and he frequently ran his fingers through his hair. Each night, he would go home, rinse out his hair, and pick out the gold dust from the bottom of the basin.

Chapter 28: “Canto 28: The Schismatics”

• What does “schism” mean?

A schism is a break. It is especially a break within a church, as between Catholics and Protestants, or between the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church, or between Islam and Christianity. However, a schism can also occur in politics, as when rival, hate-filled political parties are formed, or within families, as when a son and a father hate each other.

• Why does Dante begin this canto by referring to so many battles that had taken place in the southeastern section of the Italian peninsula?

The battles Dante mentions were bloody, and many, many soldiers suffered horrible wounds. In the 9th bolgia, the Schismatics are punished with bloody wounds. The many bloody and wounded Schismatics are like the many bloody and wounded soldiers following a battle.

Dante refers to “great spoils of golden rings” (Musa, *Inferno* 28.11) when he is mentioning bloody battles. During the Second Punic War, the Carthaginian general Hannibal crossed the Alps (with war elephants!) and invaded Italy. He had much early success in the war, although the Romans eventually won. One of his greatest successes was at the Battle of Cannae. So many Roman soldiers were killed that the Roman historian Livy related that the Carthaginian soldiers gathered three bushels of gold rings from the fingers of the dead Roman soldiers.

• What is the punishment given to the creators of schism, and why is it fitting?

In the 9th bolgia are punished those who caused divisions, whether within religions or within politics or within families.

These sinners caused splits in religions, politics, or families, and they are punished by being slit by a devil with a sword.

Sowers of Religious Discord

Dante believed that Muhammad and Ali, the founders of Islam, caused a schism within the Christian Church by having Islam break away from Christianity. Because of this, these two Schismatics are punished by being slit with a sword wielded by a devil. (Please note that Dante uses the name “Mahomet” for Muhammad.)

Sowers of Political Discord

Sowers of political discord are also punished here. These sinners include Curio, who advised Julius Caesar to cross the Rubicon River into Italy, although the Roman Senate had forbade him to do that. This action by Julius Caesar started the Roman Civil War. Also punished here is Mosca dei Lamberti, who contributed to the development of the Guelf and the Ghibelline factions in Florence.

Sowers of Familial Discord

Bertran de Born caused a son to rebel against his father; therefore, his punishment is to have his head chopped off, a punishment he calls “the perfect *contrapasso*” (*Musa, Inferno* 28.142). This is the only place in the epic poem that Dante uses this word.

These sinners slowly heal as they walk around the Circle. They are fully healed by the time they reach the devil, who slits them again.

• Who are Muhammad and Ali? Why did Dante put them in the ninth bolgia of Circle 8?

The *Inferno* is not popular with Muslims because of this canto. Dante believed that Muhammad caused a split in an

old religion (Christianity) — according to Dante, Muhammad did not start a new religion (Islam).

Muhammad is the prophet of Allah, and Muhammad started the Muslim religion. Ali is his son-in-law, and when Muhammad died, Ali wanted to become the head of Islam. Some people accepted him — this group became the first Shiites. Other people did not — this group became the first Sunnis. We see this factionalism running its course in Iraq today.

Muhammad is split from the chin to his anus. His intestines are hanging out. Dante occasionally uses low language in the *Inferno*, as it is suitable for Hell, and he does that here as he writes about Mahomet's (Muhammad's) wounds:

No wine cask with its stave or cant-bar sprung
 was ever split the way I saw someone
 ripped open from his chin to where we fart.
 Between his legs his guts spilled out, with the heart
 And other vital parts, and the dirty sack
 That turns to shit whatever the mouth gulps
 down.

(Musa 28.22-27)

Ali's head is split from chin to brow — this wound is what caused the death of his mortal body. He was mortally wounded while praying.

Here we see some of the bathroom language that occasionally appears in the *Inferno*, where such language is appropriate.

• **Where do we see Muslims in the Inferno?**

In Limbo, Dante placed some great Muslims who contributed great knowledge to the world. Here, as we can see, he puts Muhammad and Ali in Hell. In the City of Dis (where the Heretics are buried) are flaming mosques.

• **Should Muslims read *The Divine Comedy*?**

The Divine Comedy was not translated into Arabic until the 20th century; frequently, the references to Muhammad and to Ali are left out.

Note: If I were Muslim, I would say, “Peace be upon him,” each time I spoke the word “Muhammad” or referred to “the Prophet,” meaning of course Muhammad. I would do the same thing when writing about Muhammad, aka the Prophet.

Hesham A. Hassaballa wrote, “Yet, the Prophet (peace be upon him) once said that wisdom is the ‘lost animal’ of the believer: wherever it may be, he should seek it.” (Source: Hesham A. Hassaballa, “Finding the ‘Light in Your Eyes’: How Sheryl Crow brought me closer to Allah.” 2006 <http://www.beliefnet.com/story/161/story_16175.html>.)

In my opinion, a Muslim can read *The Divine Comedy* for whatever wisdom it contains and reject the parts that do not contain wisdom. (I enjoy reading *The Divine Comedy*, yet I would not put gay people in Hell.)

• **What is Muhammad like in the *Inferno*?**

Muhammad is an interesting character in the *Inferno*. He is not rebellious as were Capaneus and Jason. In fact, he seems helpful. He readily explains to Dante the Pilgrim what type of sin is punished in this bolgia, and he asks Dante to give a warning to a man who is still living:

“Now say to Fra Dolcino, then, to arm him,

Thou, who perhaps wilt shortly see the sun,
 If soon he wish not here to follow me,
 So with provisions, that no stress of snow
 May give the victory to the Novarese,
 Which otherwise to gain would not be easy.”

(Longfellow 28.55-60)

Fra Dolcino was a heretic who in 1307 was burned at the stake. Pope Clement V opposed him, and Fra Dolcino hid out in some hills near Novaro. He and his followers ran out of food, and the forces of the Pope were able to capture him and burn him at the stake.

• **Who are some of the other sinners in this part of the Circle?**

Pier da Medicina

Mark Musa points out that early commentators on the *Inferno* identify Pier of Medicina as fomenting discord between two families: the Polenta family and the Malatesta family (Musa, *Inferno* 331).

Curio

Curio's tongue is cut out each time he completes a journey around the Circle. Curio urged Julius Caesar (who is in Limbo) to cross the Rubicon River, thus starting civil war among the Romans. When Julius Caesar crossed the Rubicon River, he said, "Thus the die is cast," meaning that there was no turning back now, as he had disobeyed the orders of the Roman Senate.

Mosca dei Lamberti

Mosca started the split of Florentines into rival Ghibelline and Guelf factions. Buondelmonte de' Buondelmonti was engaged to be married to the daughter of Lambertuccio degli Amidei, but when a better offer came along — Aldruda, a member of the Donati family, offered him her daughter — he took it. Although Aldruda offered to pay the expenses of the broken engagement, this was a major insult to the family of the jilted bride, and Mosca advised that Buondelmonte de' Buondelmonti be killed. After he was killed, the two factions of the Guelfs and the Ghibellines began.

Bertran de Born

Bertran de Born carries his head like a lantern. He is the sinner who says that his punishment is the perfect *contrapasso*. Of course, a good definition of *contrapasso* is that of Mark Musa: “the law of divine retribution” (Musa, *Inferno* 333). Dante believed that Bertran de Born had urged Prince Henry of England (1155-83) to rebel against his father, who was King Henry II. Thus, he had urged the son of a family to rebel against its head, and so Bertran de Born's head is cut off each time he completes a journey around the Circle.

• **What are the sinners in Canto 28 like?**

We have already seen that Muhammad is helpful to Dante and wants to give a warning to a living man. Another Schismatic, Pier da Medicina, also warns Dante to convey a warning to two men living in 1300 — Messer Guido and Angiolillo, both of Fano — about a plot to murder them.

In addition, none of the Schismatics seem to rebel against their fate. Even Bertrand de Born, who is decapitated each time he completes his journey around the Circle, does not protest against his fate.

These sinners may have died unrepentant, but perhaps they have learned something during their stay — which Dante apparently regards as eternal — in the Inferno. This, however, is most likely incorrect. Unrepentant sinners must stay unrepentant; otherwise, they would not deserve to be in the Inferno. Of course, sinners in the Inferno regret having been caught in their sins, and they regret being punished for their sins, but that is not the same thing as true repentance.

• Do any sinners in the 9th bolgia of Circle 8 want to be remembered on Earth?

Remarkably, the sinners who are punished in the 9th bolgia of Circle 8 seem to want to be remembered on Earth. None of these sinners seems to want to keep his name from Dante and Virgil. All of them are forthcoming with information, except for the sinner (Curio) whose tongue is cut off and so he cannot speak (Musa, *Inferno* 28.96).

Pier da Medicina, called by an early commentator (Benvenuto da Imola) a sower of discord between two families, the Polenta and the Malatesta families (Musa 331), wants to be remembered by Dante should Dante return to the living world:

“Call to remembrance Pier da Medicina,
 If e’er thou see again the lovely plain
 That from Vercelli slopes to Marcabo,”

(Longfellow 28.73-75)

Bertran de Born, who encouraged Prince Henry to rebel against his father, King Henry II of England, wants to be remembered on Earth. He tells Dante:

“And so that thou may carry news of me,
 Know that Bertram de Born am I, the same

Who gave to the Young King the evil comfort.”

(Longfellow 28.133-135)

• **Does Canto 28 have a problem?**

Problems in literature can be interesting. In this canto, I, the writer of this commentary on the *Inferno*, see the sinners as being helpful to Dante and as being helpful in warning other sinners on earth to beware of not changing their ways or to beware of treachery. In addition, it is interesting that these sinners want to be remembered on Earth, although they are very deep in the *Inferno*. I find these things puzzling.

When something is puzzling in a work of literature, that thing can become the subject of a very interesting essay. Of course, one possible explanation is that I am reading the canto incorrectly. Other sinners have wanted to be remembered on Earth, so perhaps these sinners wanting to be remembered on unearth is not a problem. Other sinners have made predictions, and these predictions came true, so perhaps the warnings these sinners make may actually be simple predictions rather than warnings.

These sinners know the future, and so they know that what they predict will occur. What seem like specific warnings may not be really be warnings, but only predictions.

One guiding rule of interpreting the *Inferno* is that God does not make mistakes — the sinners who are punished in the *Inferno* deserve to be punished there. That applies to Francesca da Rimini in Circle 2, and it applies to the Schismatics who are punished in the 9th bolgia of Circle 8.

John Ciardi writes, “The souls of the damned are not permitted to repent, for repentance is a divine grace” (Ciardi, *The Divine Comedy*, 36).

The answer to the problem may be that Dante respects these sinners, and therefore he treats them well. He believes that they have sinned and that they deserve to be in Hell, but he still respects them as individuals. We can definitively make a case that Dante respects the poetry of Bertran de Born. We have seen that Dante is not anti-Semitic. Perhaps he respects Muslims as individuals, and perhaps he respects the founder of Islam as an individual. We have seen that both Dante and Virgil respected some of the Sodomites.

Or perhaps sowing Schism is such a bad sin that those who committed that sin have to be aware of its evil. After all, Pope Nicholas III was aware that Simony is a bad sin.

• **What can Dante learn from the Schismatics?**

Of course, Dante is undertaking this journey through the afterlife in order to learn something — specifically, he wants to learn how to avoid ending up in the Inferno and instead gain a place in Paradise.

What can he learn from the Schismatics? He can learn mainly to avoid destructive factionalism. This, of course, is something that he has been learning throughout his journey through the Inferno.

We do see that Dante realizes the destructiveness of factionalism in how he speaks to Mosca, who caused the factionalism between the Guelfs and the Ghibellines, a schism that greatly harmed Florence. When Mosca identifies himself, Dante replies to him harshly:

Cried out: “Thou shalt remember Mosca also,
 Who said, alas! ‘A thing done has an end!’
 Which was an ill seed for the Tuscan people.”
 “And death unto thy race,” thereto I added;

(Longfellow 28.106-109)

In the *Inferno*, Dante starts out naïve and he ends up smart. We can see that he learns many important lessons as he continues his journey.

As we will see in Dante's *Purgatory* and *Paradise*, Dante becomes very intelligent indeed. In the *Paradise*, we will see that Dante will be saved. After he dies, he will go to Eternal Paradise.

• **In speaking with Muhammad, Virgil explains his purpose as a guide for Dante the Pilgrim (Musa, *Inferno* 28.46-51).**

In Canto 28, Virgil describes his purpose as a guide for Dante the Pilgrim.

Virgil tells Muhammad about Dante the Pilgrim:

“Nor death hath reached him yet, nor guilt doth bring him,”

My Master made reply, “to be tormented;

But to procure him full experience,

Me, who am dead, behoves it to conduct him

Down here through Hell, from circle unto circle;

And this is true as that I speak to thee.”

(Longfellow 28.46-51)

Virgil's purpose is to educate Dante by taking him on a journey through the *Inferno*, and later, as we will find out, up the Mountain of *Purgatory*.

Chapter 29: “Canto 29: The Falsifiers (Alchemists)”

• Who is Geri del Bello, and what can we learn from his story?

Geri del Bello, a first cousin of Dante’s father, was murdered in a blood feud between families. Geri del Bello is angry at Dante because his murder — probably at the hands of the Sacchetti family — has not been avenged. Geri del Bello wants Dante to murder a member of the Sacchetti family to avenge his death. That is why Geri del Bello makes threatening gestures at Dante, who does not notice them or Geri del Bello because he is busy noticing Bertran de Born. Of course, if Dante were to avenge the death of Geri del Bello, a member of the Sacchetti family would kill either Dante or a member of Dante’s family in retaliation, and the blood feud would continue. In addition, Dante would most likely end up in the Inferno when he died.

• Which examples of extreme factionalism between families are you aware of?

Of course, the extreme factionalism between the Guelfs and the Ghibellines started as a disagreement between families, one that led to murder and a blood feud.

The Hatfields and the McCoys had a real-life feud in the United States. In Mark Twain’s *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, the feud between the Shepherdsons and the Grangerfords is partly based on historical feuds like that between the Hatfields and the McCoys.

In Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, extreme factionalism exists between the Capulets and the Montagues. These families and their factionalism actually existed. The Romeo and Juliet story also plays a role in the feud between the Shepherdsons and the Grangerfords in Mark Twain’s *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

• What is the punishment given to the Falsifiers, and why is it fitting?

In the 10th and final bolgia are punished those who are Falsifiers of various kinds, including Counterfeiters. These sinners are punished with various illnesses, including insanity. This may reflect the idea that sin is a kind of illness or disease.

Various kinds of falsification are punished with various kinds of illness:

Alchemists

The Alchemists have leprosy (the Alchemists tried to change lead into gold, and now their skin turns from healthy to diseased).

Evil Impersonators

The Evil Impersonators are insane (the Evil Impersonators made other people confused about who the Evil Impersonators were; now the Evil Impersonators, who are insane, are confused about who they are).

Counterfeiters

The Counterfeiters — who made what they had bigger than it should be — have dropsy (which makes part of their body swell up and be bigger than it should be).

Liars

The Liars — whose testimony stank — are feverous and stink.

• What are the four kinds of falsifiers found in the 10th bolgia?

John Ciardi identifies four kinds of falsifiers in the 10th bolgia:

Alchemists: Falsifiers of Things (225)

Evil Impersonators: Falsifiers of Persons (232)

Counterfeiters: Falsifiers of Money (232)

False Witnesses: Falsifiers of Words (232)

The Alchemists are written about in Canto 29; the other kinds of falsifiers are written about in Canto 30.

• **What is Alchemy?**

Alchemy is a bastard form of chemistry. Alchemy is the study of how to turn base metals into gold; for example, an alchemist would love to turn iron, which is cheap, into gold, which is expensive.

Many alchemists, of course, were tricksters. They would get money from other people whom they would trick.

In *The Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer attacks alchemy in “The Canon’s Yeoman’s Tale” and in the Prologue to that Tale.

• **Who are some Alchemists being punished in this part of the Circle?**

Here are some of the alchemists:

Griffolino

Griffolino da Arezzo told a bishop’s son that he could teach him to fly, so that then the bishop’s son could fly through the window of any woman. Alberto da Siena paid him well to teach him how to fly, but of course Arezzo could not deliver on his promise; therefore, Albert reported him to the authorities as a magician, and he was burned at the stake. This, of course, makes him guilty of fraud, but he is punished in the Inferno for another kind of fraud — that of being an alchemist.

Interestingly, this fraud of claiming to be able to teach people to fly continues today. You can pay money to people who claim to be able to do this. If you pay the money, you will spend a lot of the time sitting on the floor and using your buttock muscles to try to launch yourself into the air. The claim is that eventually you will learn how to fly. (Don't do this, or you will be silly as Albert the Sienese man, aka Albert da Siena.)

Capocchio

Dante apparently knew him when they both were students. Capocchio was burned at the stake for alchemy. Capocchio likes to make jokes about silly the Sienese are.

• **Can Minos make mistakes?**

We find out that Minos cannot make mistakes, and the sinners know it, although some may try to deny it. Of course, since Minos works for God, we would not expect him to make mistakes. Griffolino da Arezzo says,

“But unto the last Bolgia of the ten,
For alchemy, which in the world I practised,
Minos, who cannot err, has me condemned.”

(Longfellow 29.118-120)

• **What was the Spendthrifts' Brigade?**

This was a club of wealthy Sienese who deliberately wasted their fortunes. Capocchio greatly criticizes the Sienese, and he does criticize these Sienese.

One member of the Spendthrifts' Brigade was Niccolo de' Salimbeni. At the time, cloves were very expensive. He introduced the use of this spice to Siena, and he used to set a bed of cloves on fire and roast pheasants over them.

• **How does Virgil describe his purpose as a guide for Dante the Pilgrim (Musa, *Inferno* 29.94-96)?**

One of the sinners in this canto asks Virgil who he is. In answering, Virgil describes his purpose as a guide for Dante the Pilgrim:

And said the Guide: "One am I who descends
Down with this living man from cliff to cliff,
And I intend to show Hell unto him."

(Longfellow 29.94-96)

Chapter 30: “Canto 30: The Falsifiers (Impersonators, Counterfeiters, and Liars)”

• What is the punishment given to the Falsifiers, and why is it fitting?

Various kinds of falsification are punished with various kinds of illness:

Alchemists

The Alchemists have leprosy (the Alchemists tried to change lead into gold, and now their skin turns from healthy to diseased).

Evil Impersonators

The Evil Impersonators are insane (the Evil Impersonators made other people confused about who the Impersonators were; now the Evil Impersonators, who are insane, are confused about who they are).

Counterfeiters

The Counterfeiters — who made what they had bigger than it should be — have dropsy (which makes part of their body swell up and be bigger than it should be).

Liars

The Liars — whose testimony stank — are feverous and stink.

We should note that for the most part the punishment here comes from within.

Of course, the sinners afflicted with insanity do torment the other falsifiers; for example, the insane sinner Gianni Schicchi bites into Capocchio’s neck and drags him away.

The worst sin comes from within; it is caused by an evil will.

We should also note that the association of sins with animals continues. The insane sinners are “rabid” (Musa, *Inferno* 30.33) like a mad dog or like people who have been bitten by an animal with rabies. Dante the Poet also compares the insane sinners to “pigs, directionless, broken from their pen” (Musa, *Inferno* 30.27).

• The Impersonators are punished with insanity. Explain the first example of insanity we read about at the beginning of Canto 30: King Athamas.

In ancient Greek/Roman mythology, Zeus/Jupiter has many, many affairs with mortal women. His wife, Hera/Juno is jealous, and she wreaks vengeance on these mortal women and on their families. (The ancient Greek and Roman gods were NOT benevolent.) In this case, Jupiter (his Roman name) has sex with Semele, who bears him the god Dionysus/Bacchus. Semele died after insisting that Jupiter reveal himself in his divine form, something that mortals are unable to look upon and live. In another version of the myth, Juno (her Roman name) has Semele killed by a bolt of lightning. Juno also made insane King Athamas, the husband of Ino, Semele’s sister, who incurred Hera’s/Juno anger by raising Dionysus/Bacchus, Ino’s nephew. While insane, King Athamas killed one of his own sons, a horrific act.

After Hera/Juno drove King Athamas insane, he saw Ino, his wife, coming toward him with two sons — each of her arms held a son. He thought that she was a lioness and his two sons were lion cubs, and he wanted to kill them. He grabbed one son, whose name was Learchus, and dashed his brains out against a rock. His wife drowned herself and her other son.

• The Impersonators are punished with insanity. Explain the second example of insanity we read about at the beginning of Canto 30: Hecuba.

Hecuba was the aged Queen of Troy when it fell to the Greek armies led by King Agamemnon. We read about her in Homer's *Iliad*. Many bad things happened to her at the end of her life. In the *Iliad*, we learn that she saw the great Greek warrior Achilles kill her son Hector, the defender of Troy. In Virgil's *Aeneid*, we learn that she saw Achilles' son, Neoptolemus, kill her husband, Priam, during the fall of Troy. Of course, she saw Troy fall. After Troy fell, Hector's son, Astyanax, was murdered by being thrown from the high walls of Troy. In addition, Hecuba and the other women and children of Troy were made slaves. Dante mentions two other things that made Hecuba grieve so much that she suffered from insanity:

- 1) One of her daughters, Polyxena, was sacrificed on the grave of Achilles, and
- 2) One of her sons, Polydorus, who had been sent away from Troy to Thrace so that the royal bloodline would continue even if Troy were to fall, was murdered for the treasure he had. Hecuba saw the unburied corpse of this son.

That the corpse of her son was unburied is important because the ancient Greeks believed that the soul of the dead person could not enter the Land of the Dead unless the person's corpse had been buried. To be unable to enter the Land of the Dead is a horrible fate for a soul. According to Virgil's *Aeneid*, after 100 years had passed, Charon would ferry the soul the soul across the river to the Land of the Dead. Apparently, after 100 years their bones will be buried by natural forces. Here is this important passage, which is spoken by Palinurus:

“And no spirits may be conveyed

across the horrendous banks and hoarse, roaring
flood

until their bones are buried, and they rest in peace ...

A hundred years they wander, hovering around these shores

till at last they may return and see once more the pools

they long to cross.”

(Fagles 6.371-376)

• Who are some Evil Impersonators being punished in this part of the Circle?

Gianni Schicchi

Gianni Schicchi is an evil impersonator. He had acting ability and he could imitate well the voices of other people, so Simone Donati, the son of a wealthy Florentine patriarch named Buoso Donati, hired him after the patriarch died because he was afraid that the patriarch had left much wealth outside of the family and he wanted Gianni Schicchi to dictate a new will that would leave the wealth to the family. Gianni Schicchi did dictate a new will, but he stated (pretending to be the dying patriarch) that he wanted a lot of the wealth, including a very valuable mare, to go to Gianni Schicchi. The name of the wealthy Florentine patriarch was Buoso Donati, and the name of the patriarch’s son was Simone Donati.

Giacomo Puccini wrote the comic opera *Gianni Schicchi*, which of course is based on this story.

Myrrha

Ovid tells the story of Myrrha in his *Metamorphoses* X. She fell in love with her own father, pretended to be someone else and slept with him, fled, and was changed into a myrrh

tree by the gods. As you may guess from the title, *Metamorphoses* tells stories of transformations.

• **Master Adamo is a Counterfeiter being punished in this part of the Circle. What is his story, and what does he want?**

Master Adamo is a Counterfeiter who is being punished here. Counterfeiters make what they have more than it should be, so they have dropsy, which makes part of their body swell up with serous liquid. Master Adamo's legs are swollen with dropsy (Musa, *Inferno* 30.107).

Master Adamo did not use 24-carat gold in his coins; his coins had 21 carats. By counterfeiting coins on a large scale, he created a currency crisis in Northern Italy (John Ciardi, *Divine Comedy*, 238).

He would love to see his former employers punished, and he says that he would be willing to drag his diseased body one inch each century until he could see that. We learn that the Circle is 11 miles long, so the journey would take millions of years.

One of Master Adamo's former employers is here: Guido, who died in 1292. Master Adamo's former employers were the Conti Guidi; their names were Guido, Alexander, Agnolfo, and Ildebrando.

Master Adamo, like some sinners in the Inferno such as Francesca da Rimini, does not take responsibility for his sin. He says this about the people who encouraged him to counterfeit florins, thereby placing him in this "family" of sinners:

“For them am I in such a family;
They did induce me into coining florins,
Which had three carats of impurity.”

(Longfellow 30.88-90)

The people he blames are “the Conti Guidi (Guido, Alexander, Aghinolfi, and Ildebrando),” according to Mark Musa’s note on p. 349).

It is interesting to note that Master Adamo voluntarily gives his name to Dante and Virgil. Some of the sinners in this bolgia do that, although other sinners do not. For example, Sinon the Lying Greek hits Master Adamo (who hits him back) because he is angry that Master Adamo tells Dante and Virgil who he is (*Inferno* 30.100-102).

• Who are some False Witnesses being punished in this part of the Circle?

Potiphar’s Wife

The wife of Potiphar fell in love with Joseph, and wanted to have an affair with him. He declined, and she told her husband that Joseph had been trying to sleep with her. This story is told in Genesis, chapter 39.

Sinon the Lying Greek

Sinon the lying Greek appears in Book 2 of Virgil’s *Aeneid*. This book tells the story of the fall of Troy. Sinon was a persuasive liar who persuaded the Trojans to take the wooden horse inside the walls of the city. He convinced the Trojans that if the Trojan Horse were taken inside the city, then Troy would never fall. Of course, he lied. The Trojan Horse was filled with Greek warriors who came out of the horse during the night. They went to the gates of the city, killed the guards, and then opened the gates to let in Agamemnon, leader of the Greek army, and his soldiers. Troy fell that night.

• At the end of the canto, Sinon the Lying Greek and Master Adamo the Counterfeiter have an argument,

which Dante the Pilgrim listens to intently. What is Virgil's reaction?

Virgil becomes angry at Dante because he is listening so intently to the argument. He tells Dante the Pilgrim, "Keep right on looking, / a little more, and I shall lose my patience" (Musa, *Inferno* 30.131-132).

Dante is instantly contrite, and Virgil stops being angry. From this little incident, we can learn that we ought not to listen to petty wrangling between sinners.

Chapter 31: “Canto 31: Towering Giants”

• **What is the story of the horn of Roland?**

The Song of Roland (La Chanson de Roland) is the oldest surviving work of French literature. It tells the story of Roland, one of the paladins of Charlemagne. Roland leads the rearguard, and he and his men are attacked in a pass. Roland is proud and he does not blow his horn for help until it is too late. He and all of his men are killed.

Dante hears a horn that is louder than thunder. He says that the sound of this horn is more ominous than that of the horn of Roland.

He later finds out that the horn is blown by Nimrod, a giant who attempted to build the Tower of Babel and reach Heaven.

• **Which sins did the giants commit, and how are they punished?**

Many giants were guilty of the sin of pride, and they rebelled against their ancient gods just like the angels of Christian mythology rebelled against God.

Dante believes that he sees huge towers in the distance, but Virgil tells him that these are giants. The giants are immersed halfway into the ground. Most of the giants are chained to keep them immobile.

We see how great the evil of the giants is in this passage:

For when the faculty of intellect
is joined with brute force and with evil will,
no man can win against such an alliance.

(Musa 31.55-57)

This is a lethal combination. A being with great intellect and great strength who wishes to do great evil can cause much destruction. We prefer that criminals who wish to do great evil be stupid and weak.

Briefly, these are some of the giants whom Virgil identifies, and their sins:

Nimrod

Nimrod is the builder of the Tower of Babel. (The Old Testament does not identify Nimrod, the first king of Babylon, as a giant.)

Ephialtes and Briareus

Ephialtes and Briareus: both warred against the ancient gods.

Tityos and Typhon

Tityos and Typhon: both insulted Jupiter/J Zeus.

Antaeus

Antaeus refrained from warring against the gods; because he refrained, the gods were able to resist the giants. He is not bound, unlike the other giants. (Not all the guards in the Inferno have been evil. For example, Minos was not evil, and neither was the Centaur Chiron. However, Antaeus would challenge travelers to a wrestling match. He would defeat them, kill them, and collect their skulls to make a temple to his father: the god Poseidon.)

According to John Ciardi,

[The giants] are the sons of earth, embodiments of elemental forces unbalanced by love, desire without restraint and without acknowledgement of moral and theological law. They are symbols of the earth-trace that every devout man must clear from his soul, the unchecked passions of the beast. Raised from the

earth, they make the very gods tremble. Now they are returned to the darkness of their origins, guardians of earth's last depth. (*The Divine Comedy* 240)

We find out that the race of giants is extinct in the living world. Dante the Poet says, "Nature [...] cast away the mold / for shaping beasts like these" (Musa, *Inferno* 31.49-50).

• **Who was Nimrod?**

Nimrod is the giant behind the building of the Tower of Babel. Here, he speaks gibberish, which is fitting because the building of the Tower of Babel led to many languages being created out of one. Nimrod was so proud that he thought that he could build a tower that would reach Heaven. To stop this from happening, God created many languages instead of the one language that human beings had spoken until that time. Because the workers were now speaking different languages, they were unable to coordinate their actions and so the Tower of Babel was not built.

Dante compares Nimrod's face to a sculpture of an over-7-foot pine cone — this sculpture is still in the gardens of the Vatican.

Nimrod often blows his horn, causing a sound that "would have made a thunder-clap sound dim" (Musa, *Inferno* 31.13). The sound of the horn is also very ominous. Dante writes that "the sound of Roland's horn was not as ominous" (Musa, *Inferno* 31.18). The sound of Roland's horn was ominous indeed; since he did not blow it to summon help until too late, he and his men were wiped out in battle. Roland's sin in not blowing his horn earlier is the same as that of the giants: pride.

• **How does Virgil treat Nimrod?**

Virgil does not treat Nimrod with any respect at all; instead, he calls him "Blathering idiot" (Musa, *Inferno* 31.70). This

description is accurate, as apparently Nimrod is unable to form intelligent speech, saying instead a series of syllables that most modern critics think is meant by Dante the Poet to be untranslatable gibberish.

• **Who was Ephialtes?**

Ephialtes once fought the gods, and he is chained here. He was so proud that he thought that he could overcome Zeus /Jupiter and the other gods. He and his brother (Otus, a twin) attempted to put one mountain on top of another mountain in order to reach the gods and make war on them. The god Apollo killed both brothers.

• **Who was Antaeus?**

Antaeus is another giant. He was strong as long as he touched the Earth, his mother, but he became weak when he was lifted into the air. He used to challenge passersby, kill them, and collect their skulls hoping to eventually have enough to make a temple to Poseidon/Neptune, his father.

Antaeus fought Hercules, who discovered his secret. After hurling Antaeus to the ground a number of times, eventually Hercules lifted him into the air and strangled him. Antaeus did not take part in the war of the giants against the pagan gods, so he is unbound here.

• **How does Virgil treat Antaeus?**

Virgil treats Antaeus with some respect. After all, Antaeus is deserving of some respect. He is unchained, so apparently he is a guard here rather than a sinner who is being punished, although of course he killed many humans while he was alive.

Virgil displays a command of rhetoric here. He wishes to persuade Antaeus to let him and Dante down into the lowest Circle of Hell, so he tells Antaeus that Dante, who is still

living, can do him the favor of spreading Antaeus' fame in the living world, which of course Dante did by writing the *Inferno*.

Virgil also praises Antaeus' hunting skill. He mentions that Antaeus "once captured a thousand lions as your [Antaeus'] quarry" (Musa, *Inferno* 30.118).

• How do Virgil and Dante get to the lowest Circle of Hell?

Antaeus lifts them in his hand and lowers them to the final Circle.

• The Ninth Circle punishes Complex Fraud. Into which four parts can the Ninth Circle be divided?

Here we are in the 9th and final Circle, which is devoted to punishing the sins of complex fraud, in which sinners try to defraud kin/family, country, guests, and/or their lords, including God. We can regard these sinners as traitors.

This 9th Circle is divided into four parts:

1) *Caina*

Where traitors to their kindred (family) are punished.

2) *Antenora*

Where traitors to their country are punished.

3) *Tolomea*

Where traitors to their guests are punished. An alternative spelling of this name is Ptolomea; John Ciardi uses this spelling.

4) *Judecca*

Where traitors to their benefactors, whether spiritual or temporal, are punished.

Evil will plays a major role in the sin of complex fraud.

On p. 359 of his translation, Mark Musa makes a case that complex fraud = simple fraud + violence. In the lowest Circle of the Inferno, the sinners committed violence or tried to commit violence against kindred (family), country, guests, and benefactors.

Chapter 32: “Canto 32: Caina and Antenora”

• What is the punishment of the Traitors, and how is it fitting?

The Ninth Circle is divided into four rings. Each ring punishes one kind of traitor: traitors against kin/family, traitors against government, traitors against guests, and traitors against benefactors, including God. The traitors are punished by being frozen in ice, perhaps reflecting the idea that being a traitor is a sin committed in cold blood. Mark Musa also points out that in the sinners punished here “all warmth of love for God and for their fellow man has been extinguished” (384). In addition, the traitors were engaged in actively betraying others, so now they are condemned to perpetual immobility.

Because the traitors are frozen in the ice, they can do nothing should someone — such as Dante the Pilgrim — kick one of them in the head. As soon as the sinners are aware of the presence of Dante in the 9th Circle, a sinner requests that he be careful not to kick any of the sinners in the head (Musa, *Inferno* 32.19-21). Later, Dante does exactly that — perhaps by accident, but perhaps on purpose (Musa, *Inferno* 32.76-78). Dante the Pilgrim believes that these traitors deserve to be treated badly.

• What are the four rings of the Ninth Circle, and who are they named after?

Caina

In the first ring, Caina, which is named after Cain, who slew Abel, are punished those who were treacherous against kin/family. They are frozen “in ice / up to where a person’s shame appears” (Musa, *Inferno* 32.34-35). This means that they are buried up to their necks; shame appears with a blush in a person’s face.

Antenora

In the second ring, Antenora, which is named after a Trojan who betrayed his city, are punished those who were treacherous against their countries or political parties.

Tolomea

In the third ring, Tolomea, which is named after Ptolemy, a captain of Jericho who murdered his father-in-law and his father-in-law's two sons after inviting them to a feast, are punished those who were treacherous against guests. In this ring we will see some traitors who are completely buried under the ice.

Judecca

The very bottom of the Inferno is reserved for the worst sinners of all. In this fourth and final ring of the ninth and final Circle of the Inferno, Judecca, which is named after the apostle Judas, who betrayed Christ, are punished those who were treacherous against their benefactors, and especially God. Lucifer, the angel who led the rebellion against God, is punished here by being buried in the ice with his head and wings outside the ice. He has one head, but three faces, and three mouths. In each mouth, he chews a great sinner. In the middle mouth is Judas, and in the other mouths are Brutus and Cassius, who betrayed Julius Caesar and thus postponed the coming into being of the Roman Empire, which Dante felt was desired by God. Lucifer chews on these great sinners in a parody of the Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist.

• **What is Cocytus?**

A river has been flowing throughout Hell. At various places it has different names. Here it is called Cocytus (which means "Lamentation"), and it is a frozen lake. The traitors are frozen in the lake.

• **What does Dante think when he first sees Circle 9 of Hell?**

Dante looks around, and he wonders whether he can ever be able to find words harsh and grating enough to describe what he saw. To do that, he says that he would need the help of the Muses, who helped Amphion to build walls around the city of Thebes. They helped him to play the lyre so well that stones moved on their own and built the wall by themselves.

• **How are the traitors to kin/family punished in Caina?**

In Ring #1 are punished traitors to kin/family. This ring is called Caina, and it is named after Cain, who slew Abel, his brother.

The traitors to kin/family are punished by being frozen in ice, like the other sinners in the 9th Circle. The traitors to kin/family have their heads sticking out of the ice, and they are able to bow their heads down towards the ice. This has an important advantage: Their tears fall to the ground instead of freezing the sinners' eyes shut. These sinners, like most of the sinners in the Inferno, continually cry. Being able to cry is better than having one's eyes frozen shut so that the sinner is unable to cry. Later, a sinner will ask Dante to remove the frozen tears from his eyes so that the sinner can get a little relief by being able to cry some more tears.

We read of a sinner whose ears have been frozen off (Musa, *Inferno* 32.52). Apparently, his ears froze, and then the wind from the beating of Lucifer's wings broke off his ears. This can happen during cold winters to livestock.

• **Who are Napoleone and Alessandro?**

Napoleone and Alessandro were brothers and rivals in two different political factions. Alessandro was a Guelf, while Napoleone was a Ghibelline. They murdered each other — not because of politics, but over their inheritance.

The two are frozen together in the ice. Here we see that they still hate each other, as they are still fighting each other:

Clamp never bound together wood with wood
 So strongly; whereat they, like two he-goats,
 Butted together, so much wrath o'ercame
 them.

(Longfellow 32.49-51)

When these two sinners look up at Dante, their tears freeze their eyes (Musa, *Inferno* 32.46-48).

Part of their punishment is to cause each other pain, and in doing so, to cause themselves pain. Using your head to butt someone else's head is painful to both of you.

• **Who is Camicion de' Pazzi?**

Camicion de' Pazzi murdered a relative named Ubertino. Camicion identifies the sinners Napoleone and Allessandro to Dante. His ears have been frozen off. By the way, the weather can get so cold in real life that the ears of herding animals will freeze and then wind will break the ears off.

Interestingly, Camicion de' Pazzi voluntarily tells Dante his name, although other sinners do not want Dante to know their names. Camicion de' Pazzi may volunteer his name simply so that he can mention "Carlin, whose guilt will make my own seem less" (Musa, *Inferno* 32.69). Carlin is Carlino de' Pazzi, who, in July of 1302, will surrender a castle to the Black Guelfs of Florence after accepting a bribe, even though he was supposed to be defending the castle for the White Guelfs of Florence. Carlin will be a traitor to country and so will be punished in Antenora, a lower place in Hell than the place that punishes Camicion de' Pazzi.

• **Who is Mordred?**

Mordred was the nephew of King Arthur of Camelot, but he was a traitor to the King, his uncle. In their final battle, nearly everyone was dead. King Arthur charged at Mordred and killed him, but Mordred mortally wounded King Arthur. When King Arthur stabbed Mordred with a spear, the hole created in Mordred was so big that the Sun shone through it, putting a hole in his shadow. Merlin the magician put King Arthur in a trance and hid him in a cave.

Mordred's greed for power — along with Sir Lancelot's adulterous relationship with King Arthur's Queen — helped to destroy a civilization. According to the King Arthur myth, King Arthur instituted a great civilization, but after the civil war started that was caused by Sir Lancelot's adulterous relationship with King Arthur's Queen and by Sir Mordred's greed for power, England's civilization was destroyed and England slipped back into a Dark Age.

• **In Ring #2 (Antenora) are punished traitors to political party or city or country. Who is this ring named after?**

Antenora is ring #2. It is named after Antenor, who was a traitor to his city: Troy. He opened the gates of the city after tacking a panther skin on his door. The panther skin alerted the Greeks that this was Antenor's house, and it was not destroyed as were the other houses.

• **Who is Bocca?**

Bocca was a traitor to his city. At the Battle of Montaperti (1260), in which Farinata (the heretic) was one of the generals of the troops fighting against Florence, Farinata's troops were outnumbered. However, Farinata had a secret trick. He had Bocca on his side. Bocca supposedly was on the side of the Guelfs in the battle, but during the fighting he cut off the hand of the man bearing the Florentine standard. The standard fell, and this led to confusion among the Guelfs, who

thought that their generals had been captured. This confusion led to the Ghibellines defeating the Guelfs.

• **Who is Ganelon?**

Ganelon was another traitor. He betrayed Roland's rear guard, which led to the deaths of Roland and all of his men.

• **How does Dante find out the names of some of the sinners in Ring #2 of the Circle?**

Dante kicks a sinner in the face — Dante says perhaps by accident, but perhaps not — and then he asks the sinner who he is. The sinner will not say, although Dante pulls out a lot of the sinner's hair. Eventually, another sinner reveals this sinner's name — Bocca — and Bocca in revenge tells Dante the names of other sinners near him.

Note that Dante is treating the sinners badly — as they deserve to be treated. We should look at this as a sign of Dante's maturing.

• **Do the sinners in the lowest part of the Inferno want to be remembered on Earth?**

The sinners in this lowest of the Circles do not want their names to be remembered on Earth. Apparently, they are aware of having sinned very greatly, and they do not want to be remembered.

Before learning Bocca's name, Dante tells him that he can give him fame on Earth if he will identify himself. Bocca replies, "That's the last thing I would want!" (Musa, *Inferno* 32.94).

Of course, Bocca gets the enduring fame — we read about him in *The Divine Comedy*, which was written 700 years ago — that he did not want.

• At the end of Canto 32, Dante sees two figures, one of whom is gnawing the head of the other. (We will hear their story in the next canto.) This sight reminds him of the myth of Tydeus gnawing the head of Menalippus (Musa, *Inferno* 32.130-132). What is that myth?

In the *Thebaid*, Statius recounts the story that Menalippus mortally wounded Tydeus in battle, although Tydeus was able to kill Menalippus. Knowing that he would die, Tydeus ordered that the head of Menalippus be brought to him. When it arrived, Tydeus gnawed at the head. By the way, Tydeus was the father of Diomed, who is punished with Odysseus in the 8th bolgia, which is dedicated to punishing the Evil Deceivers (or the Misusers of Great Abilities).

Chapter 33: “Canto 33: Tolomea (Ugolino and Ruggieri)”

• **Since Canto 31, we have been in the bottom of Hell, the 9th Circle. Here we see complex fraud, fraud directed against those who have a special claim on the sinner, those to whom the sinner owes a special trust. Sinners who commit complex fraud are traitors of various kinds: e.g., traitors to kin/family, traitors to government, traitors to guests, or traitors to benefactors (whether temporal or spiritual).**

Now, of course, we get to see the worst of the worst — the bottom two rings of the bottom Circle of Hell. In the 3rd ring of the 9th Circle, we see those who betrayed guests, and in the final ring we see those who betrayed their lords, including God. At the very bottom of Hell we see Lucifer, who betrayed God by rebelling against Him.

• **Why do you think Dante uses ice, not fire, at the bottom of Hell?**

We have seen fire used in the Inferno; for example, fire was used in a parody of Pentecost as it danced on the feet of the Simonists who were pocketed in holes in the earth.

Both extremes — fire and cold — are painful. Here, some sinners are completely encased in ice, and Dante is not able to speak to them.

We speak of someone murdering someone else in cold blood, so perhaps that is why we have ice here.

• **What is Ugolino doing to the head of Ruggieri?**

Ugolino is gnawing on the head of Ruggieri. We see cannibalism in action. The two are frozen in the ice, but their heads are above the ice, thus allowing Ugolino to gnaw on Ruggieri’s head.

• **Like other sinners in Hell, Ugolino commits the fallacy of suppressed evidence. He tells the bad things that Ruggieri did to him, but he leaves out the bad things he did to Ruggieri.**

Both people are unrepentant sinners, as we know from the fact that they are in the Inferno. Both betrayed the other. Both did some pretty nasty things to each other.

We do learn that these two sinners are on the boundary between Antenora and Tolomea. In Antenora, traitors to city or country are punished, and Ugolino is punished there. In Tolomea, traitors to guests and associates are punished, and Ruggieri is punished there.

Ugolino is punished because he betrayed his country, Pisa, and Ruggieri is punished because he betrayed his associate, Ugolino.

• **Dante does not just stick his enemies in Hell. He puts Ghibellines *and* Guelfs in Hell.**

Ugolino is a Guelf, while Ruggieri is a Ghibelline.

Dante learns a lot during his journey through the Inferno. He learns that extreme factionalism can be very bad, no matter which side practices it. He learns that innocent people can be killed because of extreme factionalism. Finally, he learns that both Guelfs and Ghibellines are part of the problem of extreme factionalism.

Let me emphasize that there is good factionalism and bad factionalism. People can agree to disagree without killing each other. The kind of bad factionalism that Dante writes about involves power struggles, people being thrown into exile on unjust charges, people being killed in battles, and innocent people dying.

Farinata and Cavalcante illustrated bad factionalism, and Ugolino and Ruggieri illustrate very bad factionalism.

• **What is the story of Ugolino and Archbishop Ruggieri?**

Here are a few important facts:

- Ugolino is Ugolino della Gherardesca, the Count of Donortico, and he is a Ghibelline. Ruggieri is Archbishop Rullieri degli Ubaldini, and he is a Guelf.
- Pisa was a Ghibelline city that was surrounded by Guelf cities. Often, the Guelf cities tried to take control over things such as castles in Pisan territory.
- The Archbishop of Pisa, Ruggieri, a Ghibelline, decided that it would be a good idea to hire a Guelf as city manager (*podesta*). Since the city manager will be a Guelf, he will be able to make better deals with the Guelfs; after all, they are from the same party.
- Ugolino was hired to be *podesta* of Pisa.
- Immediately, Ugolino and Ruggieri began jockeying for power. Ugolino betrayed Pisa by giving good deals to Guelf cities, even giving them castles. Ruggieri was worried because now he had to share power with Ugolino. They worked against each other.
- Ruggieri locked Ugolino and his progeny in a tower and starved them to death.
- Ugolino betrayed Pisa by giving good deals and castles to Pisa's Guelf enemies. Ruggieri betrayed Ugolino by locking him and his progeny in a tower and starving them to death.
- **Only Ugolino speaks. Ruggieri is silent. Ugolino speaks although it hurts him to recount his story.**

At the very beginning of Canto 33, we read:

His mouth uplifted from his grim repast,
 That sinner, wiping it upon the hair
 Of the same head that he behind had wasted.
 Then he began: "Thou wilt that I renew
 The desperate grief, which wrings my heart
 already
 To think of only, ere I speak of it;
 But if my words be seed that may bear fruit
 Of infamy to the traitor whom I gnaw,
 Speaking and weeping shalt thou see to-
 gether."

(Longfellow 33.1-9)

Although it hurts him, Ugolino is going to talk about his story. This is similar to what Francesca says back in Canto 5: Although it hurts her, she will tell her story. These sinners are willing to speak so that they can blame someone or something else, and so that they can get revenge on someone. Francesca says that her husband will end up in Hell one day, and Ugolino is here saying bad things about Ruggieri, making him out to be the bad guy while leaving out all the bad things that he (Ugolino) did. Ugolino wants Ruggieri to be remembered on Earth as a great sinner.

Dante believed that sin hurts the sinner, but that doesn't stop the sinner from sinning. We see that here reenacted in Ugolino's telling of his story. It will hurt him, but he will tell the story anyway to get back at Ruggieri by casting all the blame on him.

• **Ugolino tells his story, leaving out the parts where he acted badly.**

Of course, what Ugolino is doing here is casting the blame on Ruggieri. Actually, both Ugolino and Ruggieri behaved horribly.

• **Ugolino has a forecasting dream before he and his children are starved to death.**

Before he hears the door being nailed shut at the time when food is usually brought to them, Ugolino has a dream that forecasts bad things to occur. In the dream a hunter pursues a wolf and the wolf's cubs. Eventually, the hounds of the hunter bite the wolf and the wolf's cubs. Of course, the hunter is Ruggieri, and the wolf and the wolf's cubs are Ugolino and his children. The hounds are people who work for Ruggieri.

• **How do Ugolino and his children die?**

After Ugolino says that he and his children were placed in the tower, he focuses on how his children died. It truly is a pathetic story that can arouse the sympathy of the readers. Of course, one theme of the story is that extreme factionalism results in innocent victims: Here the innocent victims are Ugolino's children who starve to death.

Ugolino and his children are imprisoned in the tower, where apparently they are usually hungry, as his children are "sobbing in their sleep / [...] asking for bread" (*Inferno* 33.38-39).

One day Ugolino hears a door being nailed shut. This door had a slot through which food was passed to them, and Ugolino realizes immediately that he and his children are to be starved to death. The children are so young (apparently; see below for their ages) that they don't realize that they will be starved to death:

"They were awake now, and the hour drew nigh

At which our food used to be brought to us,
 And through his dream was each one apprehensive;

And I heard locking up the under door

Of the horrible tower; whereat without a word

I gazed into the faces of my sons.

I wept not, I within so turned to stone;

They wept; and darling little Anselm mine

Said: 'Thou dost gaze so, father, what doth ail thee?'

Still not a tear I shed, nor answer made

All of that day, nor yet the night thereafter,

Until another sun rose on the world.

As now a little glimmer made its way

Into the dolorous prison, and I saw

Upon four faces my own very aspect,"

(Longfellow 33.43-57)

Ugolino then describes how each of his children died. He would bite his hands in anguish, and his children, thinking that he was biting his hands in hunger, offered to let him kill and eat them:

"And said they: 'Father, much less pain 'twill give us

If thou do eat of us; thyself didst clothe us

With this poor flesh, and do thou strip it off.'"

(Longfellow 33.61-63)

His children die one by one, and Ugolino says:

“There he died. Just as you see me here,
 I saw the other three fall one by one,
 as the fifth day and the sixth day passed. And
 I,
 by then gone blind, groped over their dead bodies.
 Though they were dead, two days I called
 their name.
 Then hunger proved more powerful than
 grief.”

(Musa 33.70-75)

Ugolino and his progeny were imprisoned in June of 1288, and in February 1289, they died of starvation.

• **What does Ugolino mean when he says, “Then hunger proved more powerful than grief” (Musa, *Inferno* 33.75)?**

This line is deliberately ambiguous. It can mean two different things:

- 1) Grief had failed to kill him, but now hunger killed him — he starved to death, or
- 2) His hunger overcame his grief, and he fed on his children’s flesh.

Of course, most people think that the second meaning is the true one. Why? For one thing, we will see a form of cannibalism at the very deepest part of the *Inferno*. For another, we see cannibalism here as Ugolino eats away at Ruggieri’s head.

• **Ugolino’s eating of his children’s bodies is a negation of the *pietas* that Virgil’s Aeneas was famous for.**

We know what Aeneas is famous for: staying loyal to his family, and taking his father and his son out of Troy when it fell — and attempting to take his wife out of the city, but failing. *Pietas* is giving respect where respect is owed: to one’s country, to one’s father, to one’s wife, and to one’s son.

Here we have Ugolino doing the opposite of what he should be doing. Instead of taking care of his children, he is feeding on their flesh. The best way for him to have taken care of his children was to have avoided engaging in extreme factionalism.

• **Of course, this is a story that should make people weep. So why doesn’t Ugolino weep? Instead of weeping, he “turned to stone inside” (Musa, *Inferno* 33.49).**

While telling the story of his children begging for bread, Ugolino tells Dante,

“When I before the morrow was awake,
 Moaning amid their sleep I heard my sons
 Who with me were, and asking after bread.
 Cruel indeed art thou, if yet thou grieve not,
 Thinking of what my heart foreboded me,
 And weep’st thou not, what art thou to weep
 at?”

(Longfellow 33.37-42)

However, a few lines later, he says, “I did not weep, I turned to stone inside” (Musa, *Inferno* 33.49).

Why doesn't Ugolino weep?

Ugolino is an evil man. He has been involved in devious political manipulations and betrayals. At this point, his heart has turned to stone. In Ezekiel 36:26, we read (King James Version):

“A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.”

Ugolino, of course, has not done the things that would earn him a heart of flesh. He has done, however, the kind of things that earn him a heart of stone.

• **Why is the punishment of Ugolino and Ruggieri fitting?**

This punishment reenacts Ugolino's final act on Earth: eating the flesh of his children. He is condemned to reenact this forever.

Ruggieri, of course, placed Ugolino in a position where he was so hungry that he starved to death, so he is the object of Ugolino's cannibalism here.

Note that Ugolino is getting what he wants here: He wants to eat Ruggieri's flesh, and he does exactly that.

• **Does Ugolino change anything in his telling of the story to make the story more sympathetic?**

When we read what Ugolino says, we get the impression that his children are very young. Here, “children” means children and grandchildren. Historically, only one grandchild was a minor. The others imprisoned — two sons and another grandchild — were adults. These are the progeny imprisoned with Ugolino:

Children

Uguiccione

Gaddo

Grandchildren

Brigata

Anselmuccio

Anselmuccio was the youngest imprisoned and starved to death; he was 15 years old and the only minor.

• In the Inferno, is it possible that the sinners are getting basically what they want, at least in some cases?

Francisca and Paolo wanted to be together.

The Wrathful wanted to harm each other.

The Heretics thought that they would be in a tomb forever.

The Hypocrites wanted to be golden on the outside and base on the inside.

The Fortune Tellers wanted special sight, and now that their heads are on backwards, their view is different from our view.

The Thieves wanted to steal.

Ulysses wanted to experience everything, good and bad, and now he is experiencing the bad in the Inferno.

Ugolino wants to feed on Ruggieri's flesh forever.

• Of course, in other cases, the sinners get the opposite of what they wanted.

The sinners in the Vestibule of Hell did not want to feel anything strongly, and now insects continually sting them. They did not want to follow a banner, and now they continually follow a banner.

In the Ninth Circle, the sinners wanted to actively harm other people, and now many of the worst sinners are completely encased in ice, rendering them immobile and inactive.

• **What are some themes that we see in this story?**

One theme that we see is that church and state need to have the proper relationship. Ugolino is a state official (city manager), while Ruggieri is an archbishop. The two engage in a very destructive power struggle. If church and state were to stay in their respective proper spheres of influence and power, neither would interfere destructively with the other.

Another theme that we see, of course, is how bad factionalism can be. For example, we see that the innocent are harmed and killed because of factionalism. Anselmuccio is only 15 years old when he is starved to death with Ugolino and the three others in what became known as the Tower of Hunger.

Dante may be saying that two things can really mess up the world:

- 1) an incorrect relationship between church and state, and
- 2) extreme factionalism.

The image of ultimate evil that we see here is cannibalism.

• **How far can factionalism be pushed?**

What if the only things you care about are stuff (material things) and power? How would you view the world? What if you did not see spiritual things? What would the world look like? Suppose you saw no good deeds and only a struggle for stuff and power. What would the world look like?

In Matthew 26:26-28, we read (King James Version):

26: And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body.

27: And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it;

28: For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.

What would your view of this be if you could not see the spiritual meaning of the Last Supper? You would see cannibalism, and that is what we see at the very bottom, both here with Ugolino and Ruggieri, and later with Lucifer.

• **How did Tolomea get its name?**

Tolomea is where traitors to guests are punished; it gets its name from a story told in 1 Maccabees 11-17. Here is the King James Version:

11: Moreover in the plain of Jericho was Ptolemeus the son of Abubus made captain, and he had abundance of silver and gold:

12: For he was the high priest's son in law.

13: Wherefore his heart being lifted up, he thought to get the country to himself, and thereupon consulted deceitfully against Simon and his sons to destroy them.

14: Now Simon was visiting the cities that were in the country, and taking care for the good ordering of them; at which time he came down himself to Jericho with his sons, Mattathias and Judas, in the hundred threescore and seventeenth year, in the eleventh month, called Sabat:

15: Where the son of Abubus receiving them deceitfully into a little hold, called Docus, which he had built, made them a great banquet: howbeit he had hid men there.

16: So when Simon and his sons had drunk largely, Ptolemee and his men rose up, and took their weapons, and came upon Simon into the banqueting place, and slew him, and his two sons, and certain of his servants.

17: In which doing he committed a great treachery, and recompensed evil for good.

In the story, Ptolemee kills his guests: the Jewish high priest and his sons.

The sinners here lie on their backs, and they can't cry because their tears freeze as soon as they weep.

• How are the sinners in Tolomea punished?

Like the other sinners in the 9th Circle, these sinners are frozen in the ice, but they face upward. This results in their tears freezing over their eyes, forming a kind of crystal visor that prevents them from crying any more (Musa, *Inferno* 33.94-99). These sinners are denied even the comfort of crying.

Another punishment is that a wind is blowing. In Canto 34, we shall see that the wind arises from the futile beating of Lucifer's wings as he struggles to free himself from the ice. However, the beating of his wings only freezes the ice harder, imprisoning him more securely. (people in the Middle Ages believed that wind froze ice more solidly.)

• Who is Friar Alberigo?

A sinner asks Dante to remove the frozen tears from his eyes so that he can cry. Dante asks him for his name, promising him, "if I do not help you, / may I be forced to drop beneath

this ice!” (Musa, *Inferno* 33.116-117). The sinner believes that Dante and Virgil are sinners who have been sentenced to a lower part of Hell than he has (Musa, *Inferno* 33.110-111).

The sinner is Friar Alberigo, who betrayed his guests. He invited a close relative named Manfred and Manfred’s son to supper, then had them murdered. He called for fruit to be served, and “Bring in the fruit” was the prearranged signal for his men to murder his guests (Ciardi, *Divine Comedy*, 263).

Like other sinners in the *Inferno*, Friar Alberigo thinks that he is being punished too severely for his sin. He says that “here dates are served me for the figs I gave” (Musa, *Inferno* 33.120). Dates are more valuable than figs, so Friar Alberigo is saying that his punishment (the dates) is greater than his sins (the figs).

Actually, Friar Alberigo’s body is on Earth moving around, but it is a devil that is wearing the body. Because of Friar Alberigo’s enormous sins, he has been sent to the *Inferno* before his body died.

• Which trick does Dante play on Friar Alberigo?

As I wrote above, a sinner asks Dante to remove the frozen tears from his eyes so that he can cry. Dante asks him for his name, promising him, “if I do not help you, / may I be forced to drop beneath this ice!” (Musa, *Inferno* 33.116-117).

Dante, of course, knows that he is going to go beneath the ice. It is part of his journey through the *Inferno* and up to the Mountain of Purgatory. He has no intention of removing the ice from Friar Alberigo’s eyes.

We are meant to applaud this. Dante is treating these sinners badly, just as they deserve.

• Which other people have sinned so badly that their souls end up in the Inferno while a demon inhabits their body until the body's death?

Another sinner who has sinned so badly that his soul ends up in the Inferno while a demon inhabits his body until the body's death is Ser Branca D'Oria. A third sinner in the same situation is a "close kinsman" (Musa, *Inferno* 33.146) of Ser Branca who helped him commit his crime: Ser Branca invited his father-in-law, Michel Zanche, to dine with him, and then murdered him.

Chapter 34: “Canto 34: The Ultimate Evil”

• **The innermost ring punishes souls who have treacherously betrayed their rightful lords and benefactors, both temporal and spiritual.**

The innermost Circle is called Judecca, and it is named after Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Christ.

Dante sees sinners under the ice; they remain nameless. He does not speak to them, and he is silent when he sees ultimate evil, as he will be at the end of *The Divine Comedy*, when he sees ultimate goodness.

Dante, of course, is unable to speak to these sinners as they are completely encased in ice, having been frozen in grotesque positions:

Some prone are lying, others stand erect,

This with the head, and that one with the soles;

Another, bow-like, face to feet inverts.

(Longfellow 34.13-15)

Of course, these sinners are the worst of the worst, as they have betrayed their benefactors. However, the worst sinner of all time — Lucifer — and the three worst human sinners of all time Dante has yet to see.

As a review, these are the sinners punished in the final circle of the Inferno:

Traitors to Kin/Family: Ring #1 (Caina)

Traitors to City or Country: Ring #2 (Antenora)

Traitors to Guests and Hosts: Ring #3 (Tolomea)

Traitors to Benefactors: Ring #4 (Judecca)

Center of Hell: Lucifer and the three worst human sinners of all time

• Who is Lucifer? For what crime is he being punished, and what is his punishment?

Lucifer rebelled against God, his spiritual benefactor. For that reason, he is guilty of the ultimate evil. Another name for Lucifer is Satan. He is frozen in the ice, although his head and wings are free. His wings flap, creating a breeze which Dante has been feeling at the bottom of the Inferno.

Lucifer is the opposite of God. God is a Trinity: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Lucifer, therefore, is a perversion of the Holy Trinity. He has three mouths, each of which is chewing on a very evil sinner, so we see cannibalism again at the very bottom of Hell.

• How is Lucifer described?

Lucifer was once the most beautiful of the angels; now he is the ugliest. In addition to being ugly, Lucifer is huge:

The Emperor of the kingdom dolorous
 From his mid-breast forth issued from the ice;
 And better with a giant I compare
 Than do the giants with those arms of his;
 Consider now how great must be that whole,
 Which unto such a part conforms itself.

(Longfellow 34.28-33)

One of his notable features is that he has one head with three faces, a perversion of the Holy Trinity. Also we read, “Beneath each face two mighty wings stretched out” (Musa,

Inferno 34.46). These wings are like those of a bat (Musa, *Inferno* 34.49-50).

From his six eyes flow tears, and in each of his three mouths he chews on a sinner.

• **Who are the three sinners whom Lucifer is chewing on?**

These three sinners are the most evil people whom Dante knew of:

Judas

Judas is being chewed by Lucifer in the central mouth, thus making him the worst sinner of all time. It is easy to see why Dante would think that, since Judas betrayed Jesus. Judas' head is in Lucifer's mouth, and Judas' feet are sticking out. In contrast, the bottom half of the bodies of Cassius and Brutus are in Lucifer's mouth.

Cassius and Brutus

For the modern reader, it is probably much more difficult to see why Dante would make Cassius and Brutus the second and third worst sinners of all time. Dante believed that God supported the formation of the Roman Empire and so the Roman Empire was divinely willed. The Roman Empire was known for its rule of law, and for its peace (the *Pax Romana*, although of course wars were fought along its borders). By opposing the formation of the Roman Empire through their assassination of Julius Caesar, Brutus and Cassius were traitors to God. Thus, Brutus and Cassius were traitors to their benefactors, both spiritual and temporal. Also, by assassinating Julius Caesar, they ensured that more power struggles would come into existence and more people would be killed before the Roman Empire came into existence.

• **Note the similarity of the punishments of Lucifer and Judas to that of the Simonists.**

Judas' head is in Lucifer's mouth, and Judas' feet are sticking out. Thus, he looks much like the Simonists, who are stuck in holes in the ground with their feet and legs sticking out.

Virgil and Dante use the hair on Lucifer to climb to a cavern with a winding path that leads upward to the Mountain of Purgatory in the Southern Hemisphere. Virgil and Dante climb down, they pass the center of the Earth, then they start climbing up. Virgil and Dante then see the legs of Lucifer sticking up like the legs of the Simonists. Also, of course, Simon Magus fell to the earth, as did Lucifer.

• **How do Dante and Virgil get out of the Inferno?**

Dante and Virgil get out of the Inferno through climbing. They go to a hole in the ice where Lucifer is encased, and they climb along his hairy side and hairy legs.

Suddenly, Dante realizes that they are going up, not down — they have passed the center of the Earth. The last sight that Dante has of Lucifer is of his legs sticking up — thus connecting him with the Simonists in Canto 19, whose legs were sticking out of pockets in the ground.

Virgil and Dante then reach a cavern and climb a winding path until they reach the surface of the Earth.

• **What is the “little stream” (Musa, *Inferno* 34.130) that makes its way into the center of the earth, where Lucifer is entrapped?**

The stream is Lethe, from which saved souls drink after they have climbed the Mountain of Purgatory. The saved souls drink from Lethe, which causes them to stop hurting from sin, although they remember that they have sinned and are grateful that God has forgiven them for their sins. The Inferno draws evil and sin and hurt to itself, so the stream — and the hurt of the sin — flows here.

• **Why does Dante end the *Inferno*, the *Purgatory*, and the *Paradise* with the word “stars”?**

The movement of *The Divine Comedy* is upward, toward God. Even though Dante and Virgil travel downward through the Circles of the *Inferno*, they are doing that so that Dante can learn things he needs to know to avoid eternal punishment in the *Inferno* after he dies. In addition, of course, he is moving ever closer to the Mountain of *Purgatory*, which will lead him closer to God.

Dante uses the word “stars” to end the *Inferno*, *Purgatory*, and *Paradise*. Stars are symbols. According to John Ciardi,

As part of his total symbolism Dante ends each of the three divisions of the *Commedia* with this word [stars]. Every conclusion of the upward soul is toward the stars, God’s shining symbols of hope and virtue. (*Divine Comedy* 270)

The final lines of the *Inferno* are these:

We mounted up, he first and I the second,
Till I beheld through a round aperture
Some of the beauteous things that Heaven
doth bear;

Thence we came forth to rebehold the stars.

(Longfellow 34.136-139)

• **How was the Mountain of *Purgatory* formed?**

One important thing to learn here is that ultimate evil is powerless against ultimate goodness. Lucifer was the leader of the angels against God, and he was flung out of Heaven to the Earth.

When Lucifer was flung to the Earth, the land in the Southern Hemisphere recoiled from Lucifer, going under the ocean, thus making the Southern Hemisphere mostly water, except for the Mountain of Purgatory. Some of the earth that Lucifer displaced in the center of the Earth when he fell to Earth has been pushed up on the side of the Earth directly opposite from Jerusalem (we read that this earth “fled” from Lucifer (Musa, *Inferno* 34.125), thus forming the Mountain of Purgatory. Lucifer hit the Earth directly opposite from Jerusalem.

• **Virgil has been a good guide.**

His task in the *Inferno* was to show Dante the Pilgrim all of the *Inferno*. After he shows Dante Lucifer and the three sinners in Lucifer’s mouths, he says, “Now is the time / to leave this place, for we have seen it all” (Musa, *Inferno* 34.68-69).

Virgil then takes Dante to the Mountain of Purgatory.

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Appendix B: “Dante’s *Inferno*: The Law of *Contra-passo*”

By David Bruce

Introduction

Dante’s *Inferno* is noted for following the law of *contra-passo* or divine retribution. God created the Inferno to punish unrepentant, sinful souls, and He made each punishment appropriate for the sin being punished. In the Inferno, the sins and punishments grow worse the deeper the sinners go. Earlier, the sins and punishments are lighter. The Inferno is divided into various sections. Following Limbo, the sins of incontinence (lack of self-control) are punished, followed by the sins of Heretics. Next, the sins of violence are punished, and finally, and worse of all, the sins of fraud — first simple fraud, then complex fraud — are punished.

The Vestibule of Hell: The Uncommitted

Interestingly, the punishments begin even before the Inferno proper is entered. Outside Hell proper in the Vestibule are the souls of those who never took a stand in life. While living, they were neither for good nor for evil, and now that they are dead, neither Heaven nor Hell wants them. In life, these uncommitted souls did not follow a banner; in death, they follow a banner endlessly, running after it as it travels here and here, never remaining in one place. In life, these uncommitted souls did not take a stand, and so here the banner they follow never stands still and never has a firm position. Similarly, in life, these uncommitted souls never staked out a firm position. In life, these souls never felt deeply, either for good or for evil. Now, these souls do feel deeply, as insects bite them. This punishment is fitting. What these souls avoided doing in life, they now do in death. In addition, these souls did no lasting good or harm on Earth, and they

will not be remembered on Earth. In the *Inferno*, Dante mentions none of them by name.

Charon, the Ferryman

Past the Vestibule of the Inferno is a guard of the Inferno: Charon, the ferryman. He ferries the souls of the dead across the river Acheron into Hell proper. Charon is a mythological figure who performs this same duty in Greek and Roman mythology.

Limbo: The Unbaptized and the Virtuous Pagans

Across the river Acheron is the first Circle. Here are punished the virtuous pagans. However, in the first Circle are no shrieks but only sighs. The virtuous pagans are not tortured and do not suffer physical pain; however, they must exist without the hope of seeing God. These souls did not recognize God, so God does not recognize them. Interestingly, pagans can get into Paradise, as we read later in Dante's *Paradise*. Both Trajan and Ripheus are in Paradise. Unfortunately, the pagans in Circle 1, or Limbo, neither baptized nor worshipped "God the way one should" (IV.38). As we know from Christ's Harrowing of Hell (IV.52-63), it is possible to be born before the birth of Christ yet deserve Paradise.

Minos: The Guard of the Lustful

Past Limbo is a guard of the Inferno. Minos was a renowned king of Crete, and he was known especially for his justice. Here he is a beast with a tail, but he retains his sense of justice. Souls confess their sins to Minos, who then wraps his tail around himself. The number of times that Minos wraps his tail around himself indicates to which Circle a sinner shall be sent. For example, if Minos wraps his tail around himself twice, the sinner shall be sent to the second Circle of Hell.

The Incontinent: The Lustful

The second Circle of Hell is the first of the four Circles that are dedicated to punishing the incontinent — those who were unable to control themselves. In this second Circle are punished those who are guilty of the sin of lust. These sinners could not control their lustful desires, which drove them to do things they should not have done, and in the second Circle they are unable to control themselves, for a storm blows them here and there, but always around in a circle. In this Circle we find Francesca and Paolo, who wanted to be together — adulterously — in life. Now they will be together — eternally — in death.

Cerberus: The Guard of the Gluttons

The next — the third — Circle of Hell punishes the Gluttons, whose guard is Cerberus, the three-headed dog of mythology. Cerberus is a fitting guard of the Gluttons because he is a Glutton himself — having three heads also means having three mouths to feed. When Aeneas visits the Underworld, his guide the Cumaean Sibyl quiets Cerberus by giving him honey-cakes to eat. In Dante's *Inferno*, Dante the Pilgrim's guide, Virgil, also quiets Cerberus by giving him something to eat — in this case, Virgil throws gobs of mud down Cerberus' three throats.

The Incontinent: The Gluttons

Mud is plentiful in the third Circle of the *Inferno* because rain is always falling. The Gluttons wanted to enjoy the good things, but now they are forced to live in uncomfortable surroundings — surroundings much like a muddy pigsty. The Gluttons made pigs of themselves while living, and now, although they are dead, they live like pigs. Dante the Pilgrim speaks briefly with a Florentine Glutton named Ciaccio — a nickname that means “pig” or “hog.” After their brief conversation, Ciaccio lies down and goes to sleep in a stupor in the mud, just like a Glutton would go to sleep in a stupor after enjoying a huge meal.

Plutus: The Guard of the Wasters and the Hoarders

After leaving Ciaccio, Dante the Pilgrim and his guide Virgil travel to the fourth Circle of the Inferno, which is guarded by Plutus, the god of wealth. In the *Inferno*, Plutus is described as a wolf, leading credence to the idea that the she-wolf of Canto 1 may symbolize the sins of incontinence and thus the other two animals described in Canto 1 symbolize the sins of violence and of fraud.

The Incontinent: The Wasters and the Hoarders

As the god of wealth, Plutus is an appropriate guard for the Wasters and the Hoarders, who were incontinent when it came to managing money. The Wasters are Spendthrifts, who spent every penny they could, saving nothing for emergencies. The Hoarders are Misers, who saved every penny they could, spending little even to make themselves comfortable. These two opposed groups are condemned to roll great weights at each other. Each group sets off in an opposing direction around the Circle, and then they meet and crash the weights together, one group crying “Why hoard?” (VII.30) and the other group crying “Why waste?” (VII.30). Then they roll the weights back and meet again on the other side of the Circle. These two groups were opposed to each other in life; now they are eternally opposed to each other in death. In addition, Dante does not recognize any of the souls here. These souls were undiscerning in life — they did not know what true wealth is. Now, in death the souls are unable to be discerned by the living Dante. (He does recognize that some of the souls were monks by their haircuts, but he does not know their names.)

The Incontinent: The Wrathful and the Sullen (or Slothful)

The next group of the incontinent — found in Circle 5 — are the Wrathful and the Sullen (or Slothful). The Wrathful can

be found in a marsh, and they attack each other, biting and scratching and head-butting each other. They are not able to control their anger. Buried in the swamp, their presence noted only by bubbles rising to the top of the water, are the Sullen (or Slothful). Translator Mark Musa believes that the Slothful are found here. In Purgatory, one of the sins purged is Sloth, so it would be unlikely that no Slothful are found in the Inferno. Others believe that these sinners are the Sullen. Either way, these sinners cannot control themselves. The Sullen should have been happy, and the Slothful should have been vigorous. Like all of the incontinent sinners, these sinners have failed to achieve a mean between extremes.

Phlegyas: The Guard of the Wrathful and Sullen (or Slothful)

The guard of the Wrathful and Sullen (or Slothful) is Phlegyas, who also ferries Dante the Pilgrim and Virgil across the River Styx, in which souls of the Wrathful — such as Filippo Argenti — swim. Phlegyas is an appropriate guard of the Wrathful because of the great wrath he felt while he was alive. After the god Apollo raped his daughter, Phlegyas set fire to a temple of Apollo. The pagan gods are not benevolent, and Apollo killed Phlegyas because of his action. In the Inferno, Phlegyas is still “seething in his anger” (VIII.24). Phlegyas would also be an appropriate guard of the Slothful because he took action. The Wrathful are punished in part by being allowed to exercise their wrath. Filippo Argenti becomes so angry that he bites himself. We also read that the other wrathful souls shout, “Get Filippo Argenti!” (*Inferno* VIII.61); Dante writes that “I saw the wretch so mangled / by a gang of muddy souls that, to this day, / I thank my Lord and praise Him for that sight” (VIII.58-60).

The City of Dis and the Guards of the Heretics

Guarding Circle 6, where Arch-Heretics and their lesser counterparts are punished, is the City of Dis, where reside

the mythological figures of Medusa and the Furies and the angels who rebelled with Lucifer against God. Heresy is an interesting sin that does not fit with the pagan classification of sins in the *Inferno*. Heresy is not a sin of incontinence, of violence, or of fraud. Heresy is incorrect thinking about God. Medusa and the Furies are appropriate guards of this Circle because they are pagan figures, and to a Catholic Christian such as Dante, pagans do not think correctly about God. Of course, the rebelling angels are also appropriate guards of this Circle because they did not think correctly about God, as they chose to fight against Him rather than fight against Lucifer. However, we should note that these guards employ themselves in trying to keep good people out of the City of Dis; the heretics themselves are not locked in their tombs but seem to stay in them willingly.

The Heretics

The Heretics whom Dante meets are those who did not believe in life after death. Their punishment is to get exactly what they thought they would get after death: a tomb. The souls of the Heretics are placed in open tombs filled with fire. After the Last Judgment, the souls of the Heretics will be reunited with their bodies and the tops of the tombs will be closed forever. In addition, the vision of the Heretics was faulty on Earth, since they believed in incorrect things. In the *Inferno*, the vision of all the sinners is faulty. They can see the future, but they cannot see the present; thus, Cavalcante does not know whether his son is still alive. After the Last Judgment, the Heretics will have no future and so they will know nothing. Farinata tells Dante the Pilgrim that “all our knowledge / will be completely dead at that time when / the door to future things is closed forever” (X.106-108). Mark Musa writes, “The door of the future will be closed (108) and their remembrance of the past will fade away, since there will no longer be any past, present, or future” (*Inferno* 166).

The Final Three Circles

Following the punishment of the Heretics, we see the punishments given to the sinners who commit the worst sins of all. In the final three Circles of the Inferno, the sins punished are those of violence (Circle 7), simple fraud (Circle 8) and complex fraud (Circle 9). These sins have many different forms, and several cantos will be devoted to each Circle.

Circle 7: The Violent

Circle 7 punishes three categories of the violent: those who are violent against other people, those who are violent against themselves, and those who are violent against God. The main guard here is the Minotaur, who was violent. The Minotaur is the half-human, half-bull offspring of Pasiphaë, the wife of King Minos of Crete, who is the judge of the damned. The Minotaur was violent in that he feasted on the flesh of Athenian young people who were put into the labyrinth with him. Here, as elsewhere, we see a bestial guard. Possibly, Dante is making the point that sin is bestial in nature. Certainly, flesh-eating beasts can be violent.

The Geography of Circle 7

Three sections make up the geography of Circle 7. First, we see a river of blood, where the Violent who physically harmed others are punished. Second, we see a gloomy wood where the Suicides are punished. Finally, we see a scorching desert where the Blasphemers, Sodomites, and Greedy Moneylenders are punished.

The Centaurs: Guards of the Violent Who Physically Harmed Other People

The guards of the Violent who physically harmed other people are the Centaurs. The mythological Centaurs were often violent. In Thessaly, the Centaurs were invited to a wedding, but grew drunk and tried to rape the women guests. Pholus,

one of the Centaurs (now a guard in the Inferno), tried to rape the bride. Another Centaur, Nessus, who is also a guard, seized Hercules' second wife, Dejanira. Hercules killed Nessus, but before Nessus died, he told Dejanira to soak a shirt with his blood, and if she ever doubted Hercules' fidelity to her, to have him wear that shirt. When Dejanira later gave Hercules the shirt to wear, the blood of the Centaur burned his skin so painfully that he committed suicide. Not all of the Centaurs are violent — Chiron (the leader of the guards) was the noted tutor of Achilles — but enough are that they are appropriate guards of the violent who physically harmed others.

The Violent Who Physically Harmed Other People

These violent people are punished by being immersed in a boiling river of blood. Because these violent people caused the blood of other people to flow, now they are immersed in blood. Each sinner is appointed a certain level to be immersed in the river; the more blood the sinner caused to flow on earth, the lower they must stay in the river. Centaurs shoot arrows at sinners who try to rise above their appointed level in the river.

The Violent Who Harmed Themselves: The Suicides

After leaving the boiling river of blood, Dante and Virgil arrive at a gloomy wood where the Suicides are punished. The Suicides, in fact, are the grubby shrubs of the wood. They can communicate only where a twig or branch is broken, then they use the resulting hole as a mouth until the blood congeals. This punishment is appropriate because by killing themselves, the Suicides gave up the privilege of self-determination. As shrubs, the Suicides have no free will because plants have no free will. This is appropriate because in life the Suicides rejected free will by committing suicide. As grubby shrubs, the Suicides cannot move around and cannot even speak unless someone breaks off a twig or branch. At

the Last Judgment, the Suicides will be given back their bodies, but because they rejected their bodies when they were alive, the bodies will hang from the branches of the shrubs.

The Harpies: The Guards of the Suicides

Guarding the Suicides are the Harpies, who are half-bird and half-woman. Violence is a bestial sin, and this is reflected in the Harpies, who feast on the leaves of the shrubs and so allow the Suicides to complain about their pain.

The Profligate Spenders

Perhaps surprisingly, we see Profligate Spenders among the Suicides. These Profligate Spenders are not among the Spendthrifts who are incontinent because these Profligate Spenders were violent in their spending and because after these Profligate Spenders wasted their wealth, they deliberately courted death by going into battle and hoping to be killed. Black dogs attack these “Suicides” as violently as these “Suicides” wasted their wealth.

The Violent Against God or God’s Gifts

Next we see the scorching desert where the Blasphemers, Sodomites, and Greedy Moneylenders (Usurers) are punished. All of these sinners have committed sins in which they are violent against God or God’s gifts. All of these sinners have committed sins in which they either take something that should be fertile and make it infertile or take something that should be infertile and make it fertile. These sinners are on a sandy plain on which fire rains down and on which nothing can grow.

The Violent Against God or God’s Gifts: The Blasphemers

The Blasphemers ought to love God, but they curse God instead. The love of God ought to be fertile and result in good

things, but the Blasphemers curse something that ought to be regarded as valuable. They lie in the sandy desert and face upward, looking toward that which they cursed. They take something that ought to be fertile and make it infertile.

The Violent Against God or God's Gifts: The Greedy Moneylenders

In contrast to the Blasphemers, the Greedy Moneylenders (Usurers) take something that ought to be infertile and make it fertile. The definition of usury has changed over time, but originally, as in the Bible, it meant lending money at interest. The Bible is against lending money at interest to relatives or to poor people, although Jews are allowed to lend money at interest to non-Jews; thus, Jews became moneylenders in the Middle Ages. In modern times, usury is charging an unethically high rate of interest. (The owners of modern check-cashing places and the CEOs of many credit-card companies in America may end up in the Inferno.) Because the Greedy Moneylenders have been taking something that ought to be infertile and making it fertile, they are in this burning plain with fire raining down on them. Here they are bent over, just like the Greedy Moneylenders of Dante's time who bent over their tables and counted their money. Hanging from their necks are moneybags. Dante cannot recognize any of the Greedy Moneylenders by looking at their faces; they were so preoccupied with making money that they have lost their individuality.

The Violent Against God or God's Gifts: The Sodomites

In contrast to the Greedy Moneylenders, the Sodomites take something that ought to be fertile and make it infertile. Instead of having sex with women and raising families with children, the Sodomites had sex with other men, a form of sex from which no children can result. Thus, they are punished in this infertile field. They continually run, perhaps because they continually ran after men when they were alive.

Circles 8 and 9

Following the Circle of the Inferno dedicated to punishing the violent, Virgil and Dante travel to the two remaining Circles of the Inferno: the Circles dedicated to punishing those who have committed fraud. Circle 8 is devoted to punishing those who have committed simple fraud, while Circle 9 — the lowest Circle of the Inferno — is dedicated to those who have committed complex fraud (fraud to which is added treachery toward those to whom we have a special obligation to be honest and forthright).

Geryon: Guard of the Circles that Punish Sinners Guilty of Fraud

The guard of the Circles dedicated to punishing fraud is Geryon, a creature with the face of an honest man, the body of a beast or combinations of beasts, and a stinging tail like that of a scorpion. Geryon is an appropriate guard because he embodies fraud. His honest face encourages people to trust him, while he hides his tail that will sting his victim.

The Malebolge (Evil Pockets)

As Dante and Virgil travel down to Circle 8 on the back of Geryon, Dante is able to see a bird's-eye view of the malebolge (or evil pockets) that make up the Circle. In all, the Circle contains 10 pockets or ditches in which many kinds of sins are punished.

The First Bolgia: Seducers and Panderers (Guards: Horned Devils)

In the first bolgia are punished Seducers and Panderers. These sinners walk in lines past each other, showing that their sins are related. (Both sins involve unethical sex.) Here we see the first horned devils of the Inferno. These devils whip any sinner who is slow; they also insult the sinners.

These sinners caused others to feel pain in the living world; now they feel pain themselves.

The Second Bolgia: The Flatterers

In the second bolgia are punished Flatterers. This bolgia is filled with human excrement, and the excrement coats the Flatterers. In the living world, insincere flattery — or crap — came from the mouths of the Flatterers, so in the Inferno they are covered with crap. This is the whore is punished here, forming a connection with the previous bolgia, which punished some sinners whose sins had a connection with sex.

The Third Bolgia: The Simonists

In the third bolgia are punished Simonists (who sell church offices for money), including several popes. The Simonists are upside down in holes resembling baptismal fonts, and flames dance on their feet. Several things are going on here. First, the sinners are upside down because they placed things upside down in the living world — they placed material things before spiritual things, thus upsetting their proper order. Second, when Dante speaks with Pope Nicholas III, he is like a confessor by the side of an assassin who is soon to be buried alive upside down — Nicholas III will be pushed deeper into the hole when Pope Boniface VIII arrives in a few years. Third, we see a parody of Pentecost, when flames danced on the heads of the followers of Jesus. Finally, we see a parody of baptism, when water should be splashed on the head of the person being baptized. One thing to note in Canto 19 is that Dante the Pilgrim is in full agreement with Dante the Poet that these sinners richly deserve their punishment.

The Fourth Bolgia: The Fortune-Tellers and Sorcerers

In the fourth bolgia are punished the Fortune-Tellers and Sorcerers, who tried to look too far into the future. Because of this, their heads have been twisted around so that they

always look backwards for their eternal, very appropriate punishment. They weep, and as they weep, their tears flow down between their butt cheeks. These sinners do not have guards.

The Fifth Bolgia: The Barraters or Grafters (Guards: Winged Devils)

In the fifth bolgia are punished those who engaged in graft. These sinners allowed themselves to be bribed. Their punishment is to be submerged in boiling pitch and tormented by winged devils. These winged guards attempt to find a Grafter who is sticking his back out of the boiling pitch to ease his pain. The guards use their pitchforks to fish the Grafter out of the boiling pitch, then torment them with their pitchforks.

The Sixth Bolgia: The Hypocrites

In the sixth bolgia are punished the Hypocrites. The Hypocrites wanted to appear golden on the outside although on the inside they were made of base metal, so for eternity they appropriately wear heavy cloaks that are gold on the outside but lead on the inside.

The Sixth Bolgia: Caiaphas, Annas, and Council Members

Caiaphas, the High Priest of the Jews, allowed Jesus to be crucified although he believed him to be innocent. Caiaphas' father-in-law, Annas, delivered Jesus to Caiaphas for judgment. Members of the council also thought it best that Jesus be crucified.

These people are Hypocrites and Evil Counselors. They are Hypocrites because they thought that Jesus was innocent yet allowed him to be crucified. Thus, it is fitting both that they be crucified and that they bear the weight of the Hypocrites who walk on them.

The Seventh Bolgia: The Thieves (Guard: Cacus)

In the seventh bolgia are punished the Thieves. In the living world, the Thieves appropriated things that belonged to other people, and in this bolgia the only thing they have — their identity — is appropriated by other Thieves. In the seventh bolgia are many, many snakes, which turn out to be other Thieves. When a snake bites or wraps itself around a Thief, one of three things can happen: 1) the Thief can be consumed by fire and reduced to ashes, then be refashioned into his own form again, 2) the Thief and the snake can unite into one body, or 3) the Thief can become a snake as the snake becomes a Thief.

Thieves create a lot of uncertainty. You may think that you have something, but you come home after work and you discover that someone has stolen that thing. In a neighborhood where Thieves constantly prey, you can never be sure that something you own will stay in your possession. Similarly, the Thieves are never sure what will happen when a snake bites a Thief.

The guard here is Cacus, a Centaur who once stole cattle from Hercules.

The Eighth Bolgia: The Evil Deceivers

In the eighth bolgia are punished the Evil Deceivers. They are enclosed in flame for eternity, and their souls cannot be seen. Just as they kept their true motives and thoughts hidden from other people, so are their souls hidden for eternity. One Evil Deceiver is Ulysses/Odysseus, who fiercely desired fame; part of his *contrapasso* is to have his identity hidden. However, the name of the sin punished in this bolgia is controversial. It may well be that the sin punished here is Misuse of Great Abilities. In Dante's *Inferno*, Ulysses/Odysseus misused his great abilities while he was alive.

The Ninth Bolgia: Those Who Caused Divisions

In the ninth bolgia are punished those who caused divisions, whether within religions or within politics or within families. Therefore, a devil punishes the Schismatics by using a sword to slit their bodies in various ways. Dante believed that Mahomet and Ali, the founders of Islam, caused a schism within the church by having Islam break away from Christianity; therefore, they are among the Schismatics. Punished here is Mosca dei Lamberti, who contributed to the development of the Guelf and the Ghibelline factions in Florence. Bertran de Born caused a son to rebel against his father; therefore, his punishment is to have his head chopped off, a punishment he calls “the perfect *contrapasso*” (XXVIII.142). These sinners slowly heal as they walk around the Circle. They are fully healed by the time they reach the devil, who slits them again.

The Tenth Bolgia: The Falsifiers (Alchemists, Impersonators, Counterfeiters, and Liars)

In the tenth and final bolgia are those who are Falsifiers of various kinds. These sinners are punished with various illnesses, including insanity. This may reflect the idea that sin is a kind of illness or disease. Various kinds of falsification are punished with various kinds of illness. The Alchemists have leprosy (the Alchemists tried to change lead into gold, and now their skin turns from healthy to diseased), the Impersonators are insane (the Impersonators made other people confused about who the Impersonators were; now the Impersonators, who are insane, are confused about who they are), the Counterfeiters — who made what they had bigger than it should be — have dropsy (which makes part of their body swell up and be bigger than it should be), and the Liars — whose testimony stank — are feverous and stink.

The Giants: Guards of the Ninth Circle

Following the Malebolge Dante and Virgil, his guide, come to the guards of the ninth and deepest Circle of the Inferno. These guards are giants who rebelled against God, except for

one giant, Antaeus. Because of this, he is not chained, as are the other giants. This reminds us that sinning is a free-will choice; we can either choose to do evil or choose not to do evil. However, Antaeus is guilty of other sins, such as using human skulls as building materials; Hercules eventually killed him. The giant Nimrod built the Tower of Babel, and in the *Inferno* he babbles. Briareus rebelled against the Olympian deities.

The Four Rings of the Ninth Circle

The Ninth Circle is divided into four rings. Each ring punishes one kind of traitor: traitors against kin/family, traitors against government, traitors against guests, and traitors against God. The traitors are punished by being frozen in ice, perhaps reflecting the idea that being a traitor is a sin committed in cold blood. In addition, the traitors were engaged in actively betraying others, so now they are condemned to perpetual inactivity.

The Names of the First Three Rings of the Ninth Circle

In the first ring, *Caina*, named after Cain, who slew Abel, are punished those who were treacherous against kin/family. They are frozen “in ice / up to where a person’s shame appears” (XXXII.34-35). This means that they are buried up to their necks; shame appears with a blush in a person’s face. However, in this Circle we will see some traitors who are completely buried under the ice. In the second ring, *Antenora*, which is named after a Trojan who betrayed his city, are punished those who were treacherous against their countries or political parties. In the third ring, *Tolomea*, which is named after Ptolemy, a captain of Jericho who murdered his father-in-law and his father-in-law’s two sons after inviting them to a feast, are punished those who were treacherous against guests and hosts.

The Fourth and Final Ring of the Ninth Circle

The bottom of the Inferno is reserved for the worst sins of all. In this fourth and final ring of the ninth and final Circle of the Inferno, Judecca, which is named after the apostle who betrayed Christ, are punished those who were treacherous against their benefactors, and especially God. Lucifer, the angel who led the rebellion against God, is punished here by being buried in the ice. He has one head, but three faces, and three mouths. In each mouth, he chews a great sinner. In the middle mouth is Judas, and in the other mouths are Brutus and Cassius, who betrayed Julius Caesar and thus postponed the coming into being of the Roman Empire, which Dante felt was desired by God. Lucifer chews on these great sinners in a parody of the Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist.

Conclusion: The Punishment Fits the Sin

Throughout Dante's *Inferno*, we have seen Dante's use of *contrapasso*, or divine retribution. Dante makes the punishment fit the sin, and sinners usually get one of two things. Sometimes, they get exactly what they wanted or thought they would get, as in the case of the lustful, who wanted to be with the person they lusted after or in the case of the Heretics, who thought that they would end up in a tomb forever. Sometimes, they get exactly the opposite of what they wanted, as in the case of those who never took a stand in life, but are punished by having forever to run after a banner. No matter what the punishment, God has chosen it carefully. God does not make mistakes, and these sinners get the punishment they deserve.

Works Cited

Dante. *Inferno*. Trans. Mark Musa. New York: Penguin, 1984. Print.

Appendix C: Outline of the *Inferno*

Cantos 1-2: Dark Wood of Error

Virgil arrives at the request of three heavenly ladies to be Dante's guide through the *Inferno* and up the Mountain of Purgatory.

Canto 3: Vestibule of Hell

Sinners who never took a stand in life either for or against are punished here. Neither Heaven nor Hell wants them.

Canto 4: Limbo (Circle 1)

Circle 1: The virtuous pagans are separated from God, but they are not tortured.

Cantos 5-8: Sins of Incontinence — Circles 2-5

Canto 5: Circle 2: Lustful

Canto 6: Circle 3: Gluttonous

Canto 7: Circle 4: Spendthrifts and Misers

Cantos 7-8: Circle 5: Angry and Sullen/Slothful.

Cantos 9-10: Sin of Heresy (Circle 6)

Cantos 9-10: Circle 6: Heretics

Canto 11: Virgil Explains the Classification of Sins

Canto 11: Dante and Virgil rest in order to grow used to the stench arising from the lower Circles.

Cantos 12-14: Sins of Violence (Circle 7)

Circle 7 has three concentric parts:

Canto 12: River of Boiling Blood: Violent Against Others

Canto 13: Wood: Suicides, including Violent Wasters

Cantos 14-16: Desert: Blasphemers (Canto 14), Sodomites (Cantos 15-16), Greedy Moneylenders (Canto 16)

Cantos 17-30: Simple Fraud (Without Treachery) — Circle 8

Canto 17: Geryon brings Dante and Virgil down into Circle 8.

Circle 8 has 10 “evil pouches” (Bolge) of Malebolge:

Note: “Bolge” is plural, “bolgia” is singular.

Canto 18: Bolgia 1: Panderers and Seducers

Canto 18: Bolgia 2: Flatterers

Canto 19: Bolgia 3: Simonists

Canto 20: Bolgia 4: Sorcerers

Cantos 21-22: Bolgia 5: Grafters

Canto 23: Bolgia 6: Hypocrites

Cantos 24-25: Bolgia 7: Thieves

Cantos 26-27: Bolgia 8: Evil Counselors/Misusers of Great Abilities

Canto 28: Bolgia 9: Schismatics

Cantos 29-30: Bolgia 10: Counterfeiters of Various Kinds (Counterfeiters of Money, Impersonators, Liars, Alchemists)

Cantos 31-34: Complex Fraud (With Treachery) — Circle 9

Canto 31: The giant Antaeus lowers Dante and Virgil into Circle 9.

Circle 9 has 4 concentric rings of ice:

Canto 32: Caina: Traitors to Kin/Family

Canto 32: Antenora: Traitors to City or Country

Canto 33: Tolomea: Traitors to Guests/Hosts

Canto 34: Judecca: Traitors to Benefactors

Appendix D: Short Reaction Memos

The questions in this short guide to Dante's *Inferno* can be used in discussions; however, they can also be used for short reaction memos. For example, I do this at Ohio University. See below for the assignment and sample short reaction memos.

How Do I Complete the Reaction Memo Assignments?

During the quarter, you will have to write a series of short memos in which you write about the readings you have been assigned.

Each memo should be at least 250 words, not counting long quotations from the work of literature. Include a word count for each memo, although that is not normally part of the memo format.

Following the memo heading (To, From, Re, Date, Words), write the question you are answering and the part of the book that the question applies to.

You may answer one question or more than one question. I will supply you with a list of questions that you may answer.

Note that a Works Cited list is needed if you use quotations.

For examples from my Great Books courses at Ohio University in Athens, Ohio, see the following pages.

To: David Bruce

From: Jane Student

Re: *Odyssey*, Book 12 Reaction Memo

Date: Put Today's Date Here

Words: 323

***Odyssey*, Book 12: Is Odysseus a bad leader?**

This is an important question in the *Odyssey*. After all, Odysseus leads 12 ships and many men to Troy, but the ships are all destroyed and all of his men die and he returns home to Ithaca alone. Who is responsible for the deaths of Odysseus' men? Is Odysseus responsible for their deaths, or do the men bear some responsibility for their own deaths? Many readers prefer Odysseus, the great individualist, to Aeneas, the man who founds the Roman people, but then they realize that all of Odysseus' men died, while Aeneas succeeded in bringing many Trojans to Italy. When readers think of that, they begin to have a greater respect for Aeneas.

From the beginning of the *Odyssey*, this has been an issue. The bard says that the men perished because of the "recklessness of their own ways" (1.8). However, we notice that Odysseus is asleep at odd times. In Book 10, Aeolus gives Odysseus a bag in which the contrary winds have been tied up. This allows Odysseus to sail to Ithaca safely. However, they reach the island and see smoke rising from the fires, Odysseus goes to sleep and his men open the bag, letting the contrary winds escape, and the ship is blown back to King Aeolus' island. Similarly, in Book 12, on the island of the Sun-god, Odysseus is asleep when his men sacrifice the Sun-god's cattle.

It does seem that Odysseus does not bear the blame for his men's death. In many cases, they do perish through their own

stupidity. In other cases, of course, they die during war or during adventures, but in those times, Odysseus was with them, and he could have died, too.

One other thing to think about is that Odysseus is telling his own story. Could he be lying? After all, some of the adventures he relates are pretty incredible. (Probably not. The gods vouch for some of what he says.)

Works Cited

Homer. *The Odyssey*. Trans. Robert Fagles. New York: Penguin Books, 1996. Print.

To: David Bruce

From: Jane Student

Re: *Inferno*, Canto 1 Reaction Memo

Date: Put Today's Date Here

Words: 264

***Inferno*, Canto 1**

• What do you need to be a member of the Afterlife in Dante's *Inferno*?

To be a member of the afterlife in Hell, you must meet a number of criteria:

- 1) You must be dead.
- 2) You must be an unrepentant sinner.
- 3) You must be a dead, unrepentant sinner by 1300.

Of course, only dead people — with a few exceptions such as Dante the Pilgrim — can be found in the *Inferno*.

Only unrepentant sinners can be found in the *Inferno*. Everyone has sinned, but sinners who sincerely repented their sins are found in Purgatory or Paradise, not in the *Inferno*.

Dante set his *Divine Comedy* in 1300, so the characters who appear in it are dead in 1300.

***Inferno*, Canto 1**

• What does it mean to repent?

A sinner who repents regrets having committed the sin. The repentant sinner vows not to commit the sin again, and he or she does his or her best not to commit the sin again.

Inferno, Canto 1**• What is the geography of Hell? In *The Divine Comedy*, where is Hell located?**

Hell is located straight down. We will find out later that when Lucifer was thrown out of Paradise, he fell to the Earth, ending up at the center of the Earth. The center of the Earth is the lowest part of Hell. Lucifer created the Mountain of Purgatory when he hit the Earth.

To: David Bruce

From: Jane Student

Re: *Candide*, Ch. 26-30

Date: Today's Date

Words: 368

Ch. 30: Write a brief character analysis of the old man and his family.

When Candide and his friends meet the old man, the old man is “sitting in front of his door beneath an arbor of orange trees, enjoying the fresh air” (119). The old man basically ignores politics that he cannot influence. Some people have recently been killed in Constantinople, and the old man does not even know their names. However, the old man does enjoy some material things, including good food, and he enjoys hospitality.

The old man invites Candide and his friends to enjoy some refreshments inside his house. They are served with “several kinds of fruit-favored drinks” and “boiled cream with pieces of candied citron in it, oranges, lemons, limes, pineapples, pistachio nuts, and mocha coffee” (119). The old man and his family have an abundance of food, but although Candide wonders if the old man has an enormous farm, the old man tells him, “I have only twenty acres of land, which my children and I cultivate. Our work keeps us free of three great evils: boredom, vice, and poverty” (119).

From this brief encounter, we learn several things:

- The old man and his family are content — even happy.
- The old man and his family ignore the wars and murders and crimes that happen elsewhere.

- The old man and his family have enough. They work hard on their little farm, and they have plenty of food and good things to eat.
- The old man and his family have only 20 acres, but 20 acres are enough.

Candide and his friends decide to emulate the old man and his family. Each of them begins to work hard on their little farm. Cunegonde learns to make pastry, Paquette begins to embroider, and the old woman does the laundry and repairs the linen. Brother Giroflée becomes a carpenter, and Candide and the others grow “abundant crops” (120). At the end of the short novel, the group of friends seem to have come the closest they can to happiness in a world filled with evil, but it does take an effort on their part. As Candide says in the short novel’s last words, “... we must cultivate our garden” (120).

Works Cited

Voltaire. *Candide*. Trans. Lowell Bair. New York: Bantam Books, 1981. Print.

To: David Bruce

From: Jane Student

Re: *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, Ch. 1-4 Reaction Memo

Date: Put Today's Date Here

Words: 286

CH. 3: "KNIGHTS OF THE TABLE ROUND"

• What hints do we have of the relationship between Queen Guenever and Sir Launcelot?

Some hanky-panky is going on between Sir Launcelot and King Arthur's wife, Queen Guenever. Some six or eight prisoners address her, and they tell her that they have been captured by Sir Kay the Seneschal. Immediately, surprise and astonishment are felt by everybody present. The queen looks disappointed because she had hoped that the prisoners were captured by Sir Launcelot.

As it turns out, they were. Sir Launcelot first rescued Sir Kay from some attackers, then he took Sir Kay's armor and horse and captured more knights. All of these prisoners were actually captured by Sir Launcelot, not by Sir Kay at all.

Two passages let us know that something is going on between Sir Launcelot and Queen Guenever:

1. The first is subtle; she looks disappointed when Sir Kay says that he captured the knights: "Surprise and astonishment flashed from face to face all over the house; the queen's gratified smile faded out at the name of Sir Kay, and she looked disappointed ..." (503).

2. The other is much more overt and occurs after Guenever learns that the knight who really captured the prisoners was Sir Launcelot: "Well, it was touching to see the queen blush

and smile, and look embarrassed and happy, and fling furtive glances at Sir Launcelot that would have got him shot in Arkansas, to a dead certainty” (503).

Works Cited

Twain, Mark. *Four Complete Novels*. New York: Gramercy Books, 1982. Print.

Appendix E: About the Author

It was a dark and stormy night. Suddenly a cry rang out, and on a hot summer night in 1954, Josephine, wife of Carl Bruce, gave birth to a boy — me. Unfortunately, this young married couple allowed Reuben Saturday, Josephine’s brother, to name their first-born. Reuben, aka “The Joker,” decided that Bruce was a nice name, so he decided to name me Bruce Bruce. I have gone by my middle name — David — ever since.

Being named Bruce David Bruce hasn’t been all bad. Bank tellers remember me very quickly, so I don’t often have to show an ID. It can be fun in charades, also. When I was a counselor as a teenager at Camp Echoing Hills in Warsaw, Ohio, a fellow counselor gave the signs for “sounds like” and “two words,” then she pointed to a bruise on her leg twice. Bruise Bruise? Oh yeah, Bruce Bruce is the answer!

Uncle Reuben, by the way, gave me a haircut when I was in kindergarten. He cut my hair short and shaved a small bald spot on the back of my head. My mother wouldn’t let me go to school until the bald spot grew out again.

Of all my brothers and sisters (six in all), I am the only transplant to Athens, Ohio. I was born in Newark, Ohio, and have lived all around Southeastern Ohio. However, I moved to Athens to go to Ohio University and have never left.

At Ohio U, I never could make up my mind whether to major in English or Philosophy, so I got a bachelor’s degree with a double major in both areas, then I added a Master of Arts degree in English and a Master of Arts degree in Philosophy. Yes, I have my MAMA degree.

Currently, and for a long time to come (I eat fruits and veggies), I am spending my retirement writing books such as *Nadia Comaneci: Perfect 10*, *The Funniest People in Dance*, *Homer’s Iliad: A Retelling in Prose*, and *William Shakespeare’s Othello: A Retelling in Prose*.

If all goes well, I will publish one or two books a year for the rest of my life. (On the other hand, a good way to make God laugh is to tell Her your plans.)

By the way, my sister Brenda Kennedy writes romances such as *A New Beginning* and *Shattered Dreams*.

Appendix F: Some Books by David Bruce

Retellings of a Classic Work of Literature

Ben Jonson's The Alchemist: A Retelling

Ben Jonson's Bartholomew Fair: A Retelling

Ben Jonson's The Case is Altered: A Retelling

Ben Jonson's Catiline's Conspiracy: A Retelling

Ben Jonson's The Devil is an Ass: A Retelling

Ben Jonson's Epicene: A Retelling

Ben Jonson's Every Man in His Humor: A Retelling

Ben Jonson's Every Man Out of His Humor: A Retelling

Ben Jonson's The Fountain of Self-Love, or Cynthia's Revels: A Retelling

Ben Jonson's The New Inn: A Retelling

Ben Jonson's The Staple of News: A Retelling

Ben Jonson's Volpone, or the Fox: A Retelling

Christopher Marlowe's Complete Plays: Retellings

Christopher Marlowe's Dido, Queen of Carthage: A Retelling

Christopher Marlowe's Doctor Faustus: Retellings of the 1604 A-Text and of the 1616 B-Text

Christopher Marlowe's Edward II: A Retelling

Christopher Marlowe's The Massacre at Paris: A Retelling

Christopher Marlowe's The Rich Jew of Malta: A Retelling

Christopher Marlowe's Tamburlaine, Parts 1 and 2: Retellings

Dante's Divine Comedy: A Retelling in Prose

Dante's Inferno: A Retelling in Prose

Dante's Purgatory: A Retelling in Prose

Dante's Paradise: A Retelling in Prose

The Famous Victories of Henry V: A Retelling

From the Iliad to the Odyssey: A Retelling in Prose of Quintus of Smyrna's Posthomerica

George Peele: Five Plays Retold in Modern English

George Peele's The Arraignment of Paris: A Retelling

George Peele's The Battle of Alcazar: A Retelling

George Peele's David and Bathsheba, and the Tragedy of Absalom: A Retelling

George Peele's Edward I: A Retelling

George Peele's The Old Wives' Tale: A Retelling

George-A-Greene, The Pinner of Wakefield: A Retelling

The History of King Leir: A Retelling

Homer's Iliad: A Retelling in Prose

Homer's Odyssey: A Retelling in Prose

Jason and the Argonauts: A Retelling in Prose of Apollonius of Rhodes' Argonautica

The Jests of George Peele: A Retelling

John Ford: Eight Plays Translated into Modern English

John Ford's The Broken Heart: A Retelling

John Ford's The Fancies, Chaste and Noble: A Retelling

John Ford's The Lady's Trial: A Retelling

John Ford's The Lover's Melancholy: A Retelling

John Ford's Love's Sacrifice: A Retelling

John Ford's Perkin Warbeck: A Retelling

John Ford's The Queen: A Retelling

John Ford's 'Tis Pity She's a Whore: A Retelling

- John Webster's The White Devil: A Retelling*
- King Edward III: A Retelling*
- The Merry Devil of Edmonton: A Retelling*
- Robert Greene's Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay: A Retelling*
- The Taming of a Shrew: A Retelling*
- Tarlton's Jests: A Retelling*
- The Trojan War and Its Aftermath: Four Ancient Epic Poems*
- Virgil's Aeneid: A Retelling in Prose*
- William Shakespeare's 5 Late Romances: Retellings in Prose*
- William Shakespeare's 10 Histories: Retellings in Prose*
- William Shakespeare's 11 Tragedies: Retellings in Prose*
- William Shakespeare's 12 Comedies: Retellings in Prose*
- William Shakespeare's 38 Plays: Retellings in Prose*
- William Shakespeare's 1 Henry IV, aka Henry IV, Part 1: A Retelling in Prose*
- William Shakespeare's As You Like It: A Retelling in Prose*
- William Shakespeare's The Comedy of Errors: A Retelling in Prose*
- William Shakespeare's Julius Caesar: A Retelling in Prose*
- William Shakespeare's Macbeth: A Retelling in Prose*
- William Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream: A Retelling in Prose*
- William Shakespeare's Much Ado About Nothing: A Retelling in Prose*
- William Shakespeare's Othello: A Retelling in Prose*
- William Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet: A Retelling in Prose*
- William Shakespeare's The Taming of the Shrew: A Retelling in Prose*
- William Shakespeare's Twelfth Night: A Retelling in Prose*
- William Shakespeare's The Tempest: A Retelling in Prose*

Children's Biography

Nadia Comaneci: Perfect Ten

Anecdote Collections

250 Anecdotes About Music

250 Anecdotes About Opera

250 Anecdotes About Religion

250 Anecdotes About Religion: Volume 2

Be a Work of Art: 250 Anecdotes and Stories

The Coolest People in Art: 250 Anecdotes

The Coolest People in the Arts: 250 Anecdotes

The Coolest People in Books: 250 Anecdotes

The Coolest People in Comedy: 250 Anecdotes

Create, Then Take a Break: 250 Anecdotes

Don't Fear the Reaper: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Art: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Books: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Books, Volume 2: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Books, Volume 3: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Comedy: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Dance: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Families: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Families, Volume 2: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Families, Volume 3: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Families, Volume 4: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Families, Volume 5: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Families, Volume 6: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Movies: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Music: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Music, Volume 2: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Music, Volume 3: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Neighborhoods: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Relationships: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Sports: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Sports, Volume 2: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Television and Radio: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Theater: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People Who Live Life: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People Who Live Life, Volume 2: 250 Anecdotes

Maximum Cool: 250 Anecdotes

The Most Interesting People in Movies: 250 Anecdotes

The Most Interesting People in Politics and History: 250 Anecdotes

The Most Interesting People in Politics and History, Volume 2: 250 Anecdotes

The Most Interesting People in Politics and History, Volume 3: 250 Anecdotes

The Most Interesting People in Religion: 250 Anecdotes

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