

Inferno XVIII-XXX (Selections)

9 March 2020

Sicilian School



- The Court of Frederick II in Sicily
- 1230-1266, produced 100s of courtly love poems
- Inspired by Provençal troubadour poetry of France
 - Provençal poetry applied the feudal code of honor (between a king and his vassal) to the relationship between a man and a woman
 - The *distinguishing element* is that the Italian woman who is the focus of the poetry, is kinder and gentler than the French version
- It is revolutionary because:
 - Marks a role reversal
 - First use of standardized written vernacular
 - Moved from Christian to Neoplatonic models

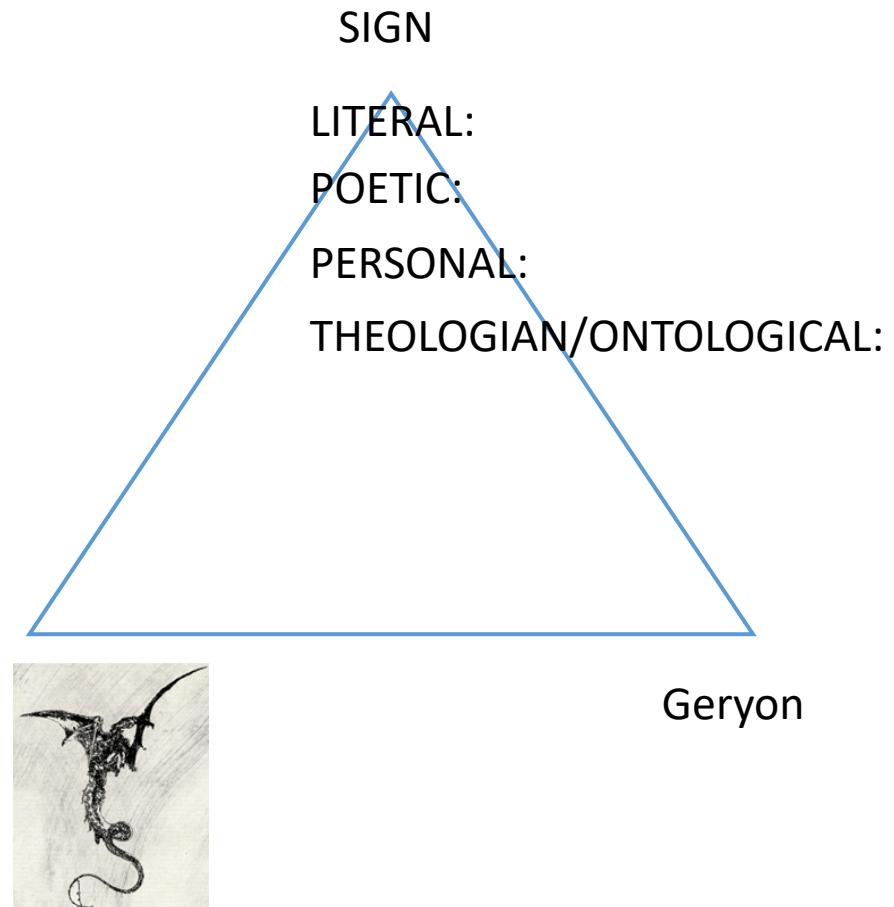
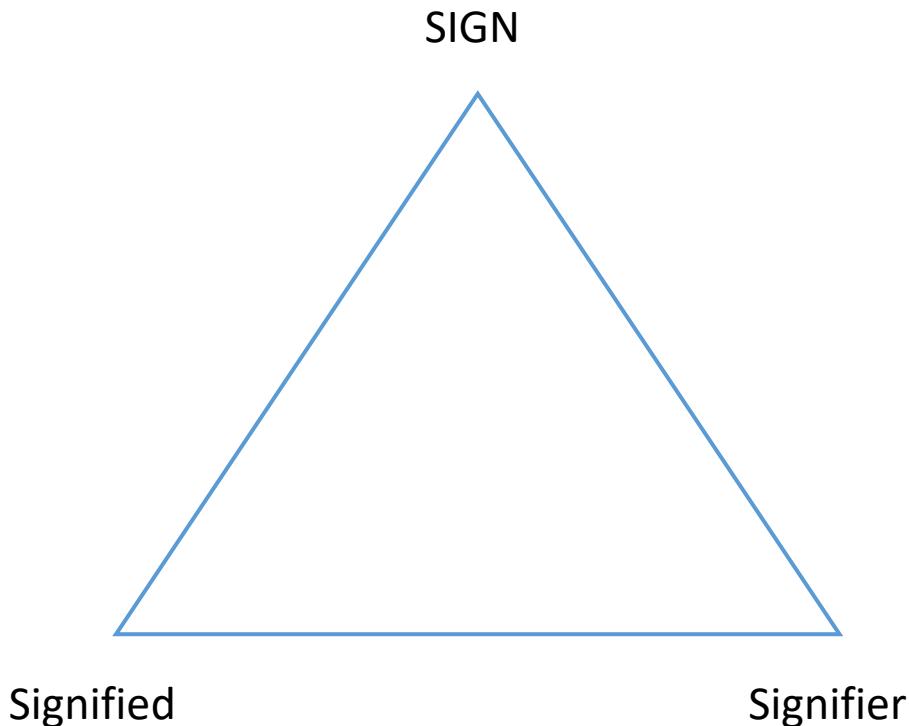
Finishing up last week's reading

Recap, Cantos XIII - XVII

- We passed through the circles of violence
- We met Pier delle Vigne
 - Virgil: “therefore look / carefully; and you will see things that would / make you disbelieve my speech.” ll. 19-21
- We met Brunetto Latini
 - Brunetto Latini: “What fortune or destiny leads you / down here before your last days? [...] If you follow your star, you / cannot fail to reach a glorious port.” ll. 46-47, 55-57
 - Dante-Pilgrim: “You used to teach me how man makes himself / eternal; and how grateful I am for that [...] What you narrate about my path I am writing / down [...] As long as my conscience does not reproach me I am / ready for Fortune, whatever she will.” ll. 85-95
- We met Geryon
 - “Always to **that truth which has the face of / falsehood** one must close one’s lips as long as one can, for without any guilt it brings shame.” 16 ll. 124-127
 - “I cannot conceal it, and by the notes of / this comedy, reader, I swear to you, so that they not / fail to find long favor, / that I saw, through that thick and dark air, a figure / swimming upward, fearful to the most / confident heart.” 16. 127-132

“Some new thing must answer [...] the strange sign.” II. 115-116

Where does the truth lie in the *Divine Comedy*?



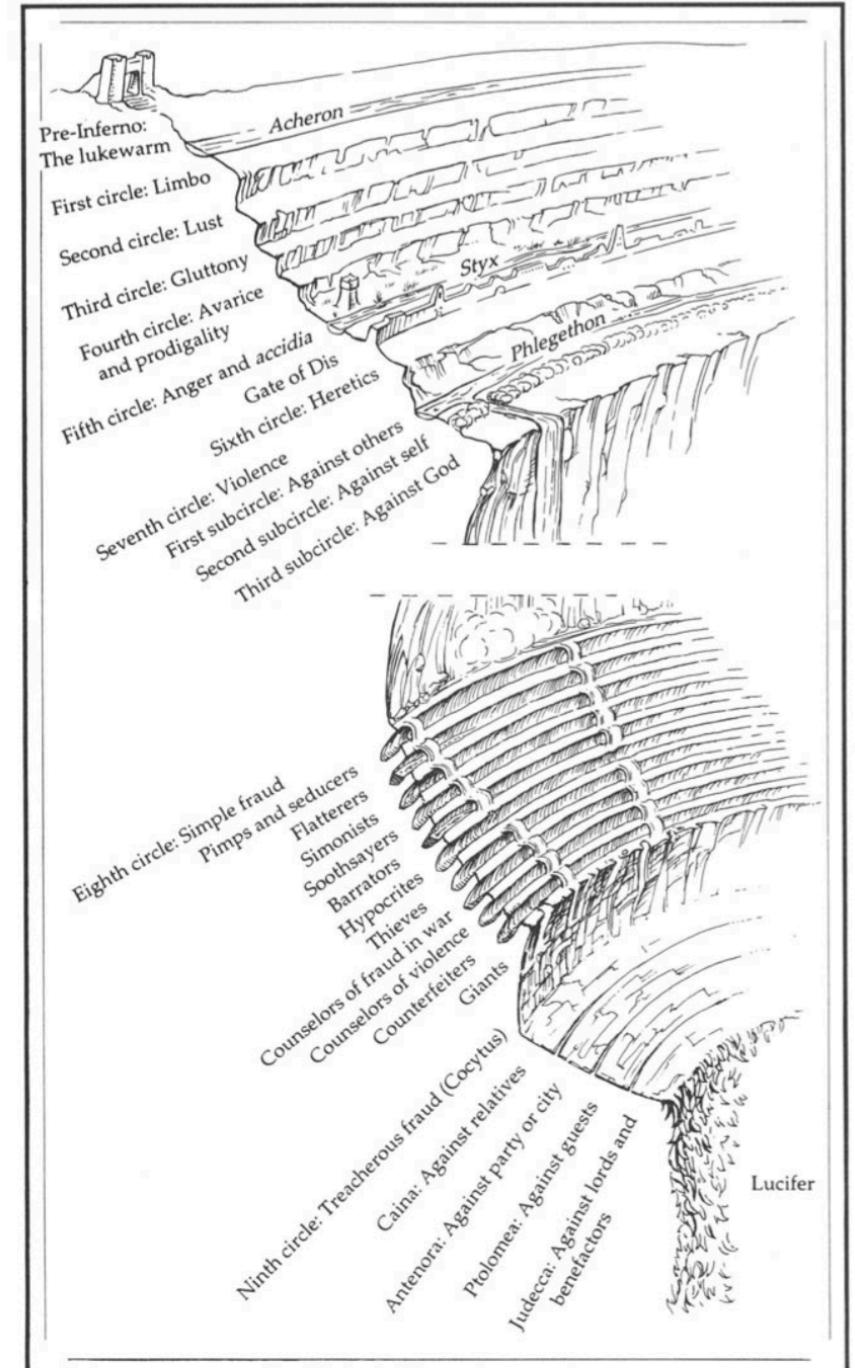
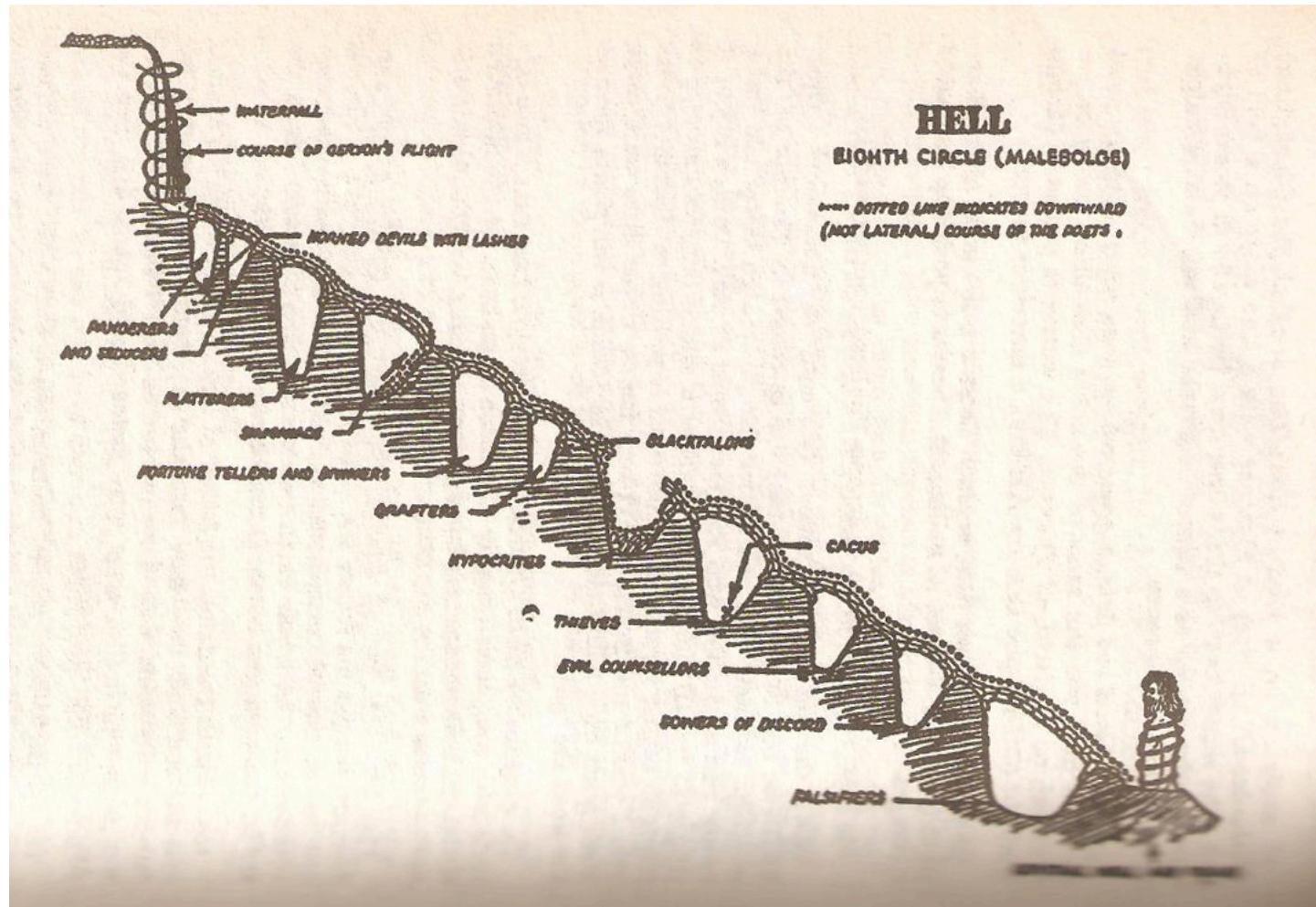
Freccero Reading

- Freccero lays it out like this:
- Dante doesn't think the allegory is theologian, because if he did, we would have to believe that Dante saw his story as true at all levels. That is, that it is "not fiction, but fact." p. 174
- Freccero says 'No. That's absurd, it would literally mean that Dante believes, aside from all the other fantastic sights, that he saw the message on the Gates of Hell in Italian in *terza rima*.'
- Rather, Dante's story is theologian, or Biblical, in the sense that the narrative copies the device of the Bible.

Freccero Reading

- Rather, Dante's story is theologian, or Biblical, in the sense that the narrative copies the device of the Bible.
 - The Bible is predicated on an act of Faith
 - -> If you believed this absurd thing, that Jesus of Nazareth died and came back to life, THEN you can begin to access and *believe* the truths that lie beyond that act of faith, which are largely ethical/moral/ontological.
 - The Divine Comedy is predicated on an act of Faith
 - -> If you believe that I, Dante, went down to Hell and met a monster named Geryon, THEN you can begin to access and *believe* the truths that lie beyond that act of faith, which are largely ethical/moral/ontological.
- That is, Dante doesn't want this to be read as allegorical. He wants it to be read for the new TRUTHS revealed (created?) by the allegory.
 - **"that truth which has the face of / falsehood"**

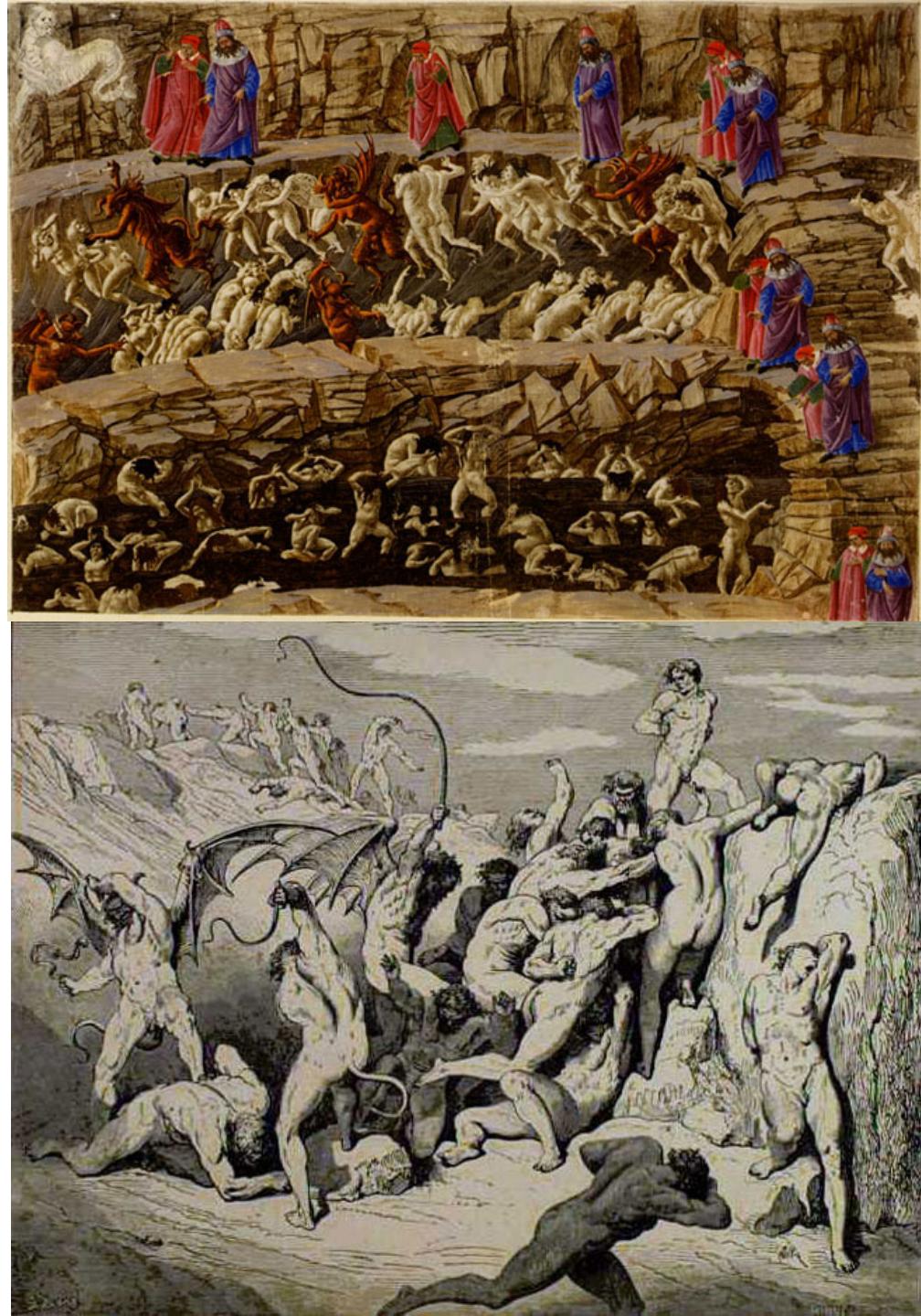
This week's reading



The Structure of Dante's Hell.

Cantos XVIII - XXX

- Canto XVIII
 - “There is in Hell a place called Malebolge...”
- Malebolgia 1:
 - Panderers and seducers
 - Whipped by demons
- Malebolgia 2:
 - Flatterers
 - Submerged in a river of excrement



Cantos XVIII - XXX

- Canto XIX
 - Malebolgia 3:
 - Simoniacs (sinners guilty of selling church offices for personal gain)
 - Turned upside down in baptismal fonts, with their feet set ablaze by oily fires.
 - The famous denunciation by Nicholas II of Boniface VIII:
 - “Are you already standing / there,
are you already standing there,
Boniface? The writing lied to me by
several years.” ll. 52-54



Cantos XVIII - XXX

- Canto XX
 - Malebolgia 4:
 - Diviners, astrologers, seers
 - Their heads have been twisted around to face backwards
- Canto XXI - XXII
 - Malebolgia 5:
 - Speculators, extortionists
 - Submerged in a river of pitch and tortured by the demon army



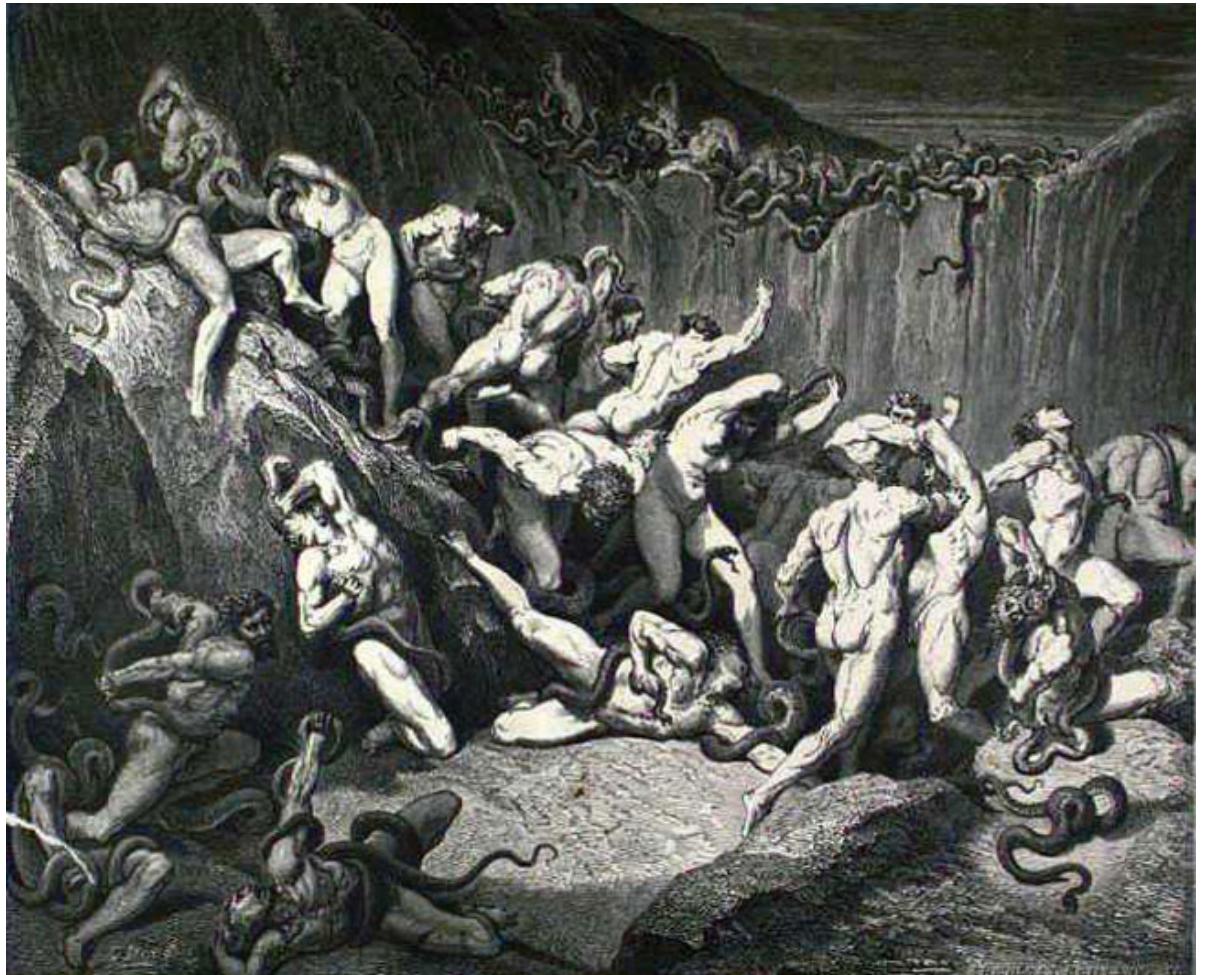
Cantos XVIII - XXX

- Canto XXIII
 - The pilgrims' imagined escape
 - Malebolgia 6:
 - Hypocrites
 - Wear gilded leaden capes



Cantos XVIII - XXX

- Cantos XXIV-XXV
 - Malebolgia 7:
 - Thieves
 - Metamorphoses: snakes and dragons bite and torture the souls, causing them to burst into flames and regenerate. Thieves have non-human forms and can only gain their human form by stealing it from another human



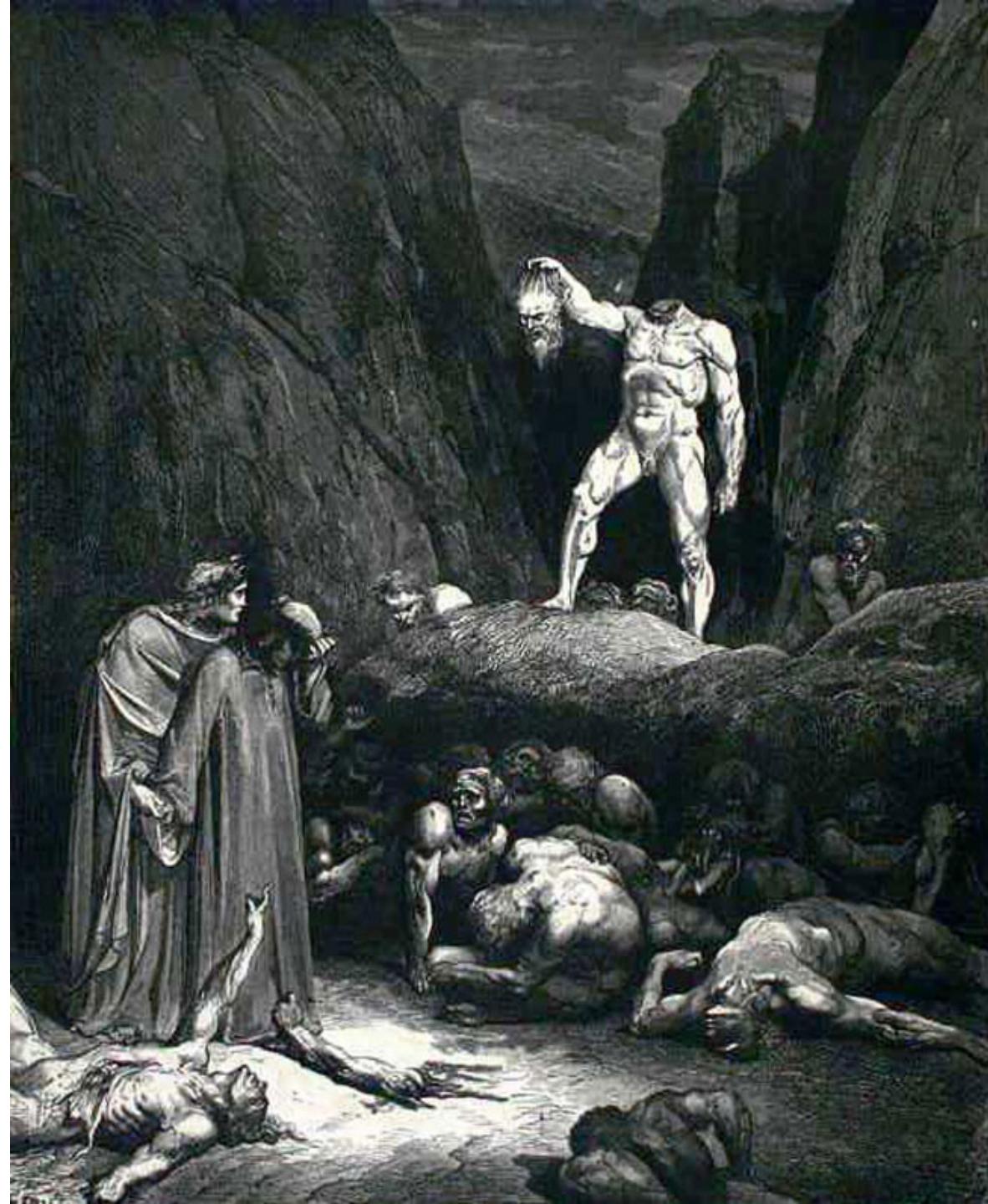
Cantos XVIII - XXX

- Cantos XXVI - XXVII
 - Malebolgia 8:
 - False counselors



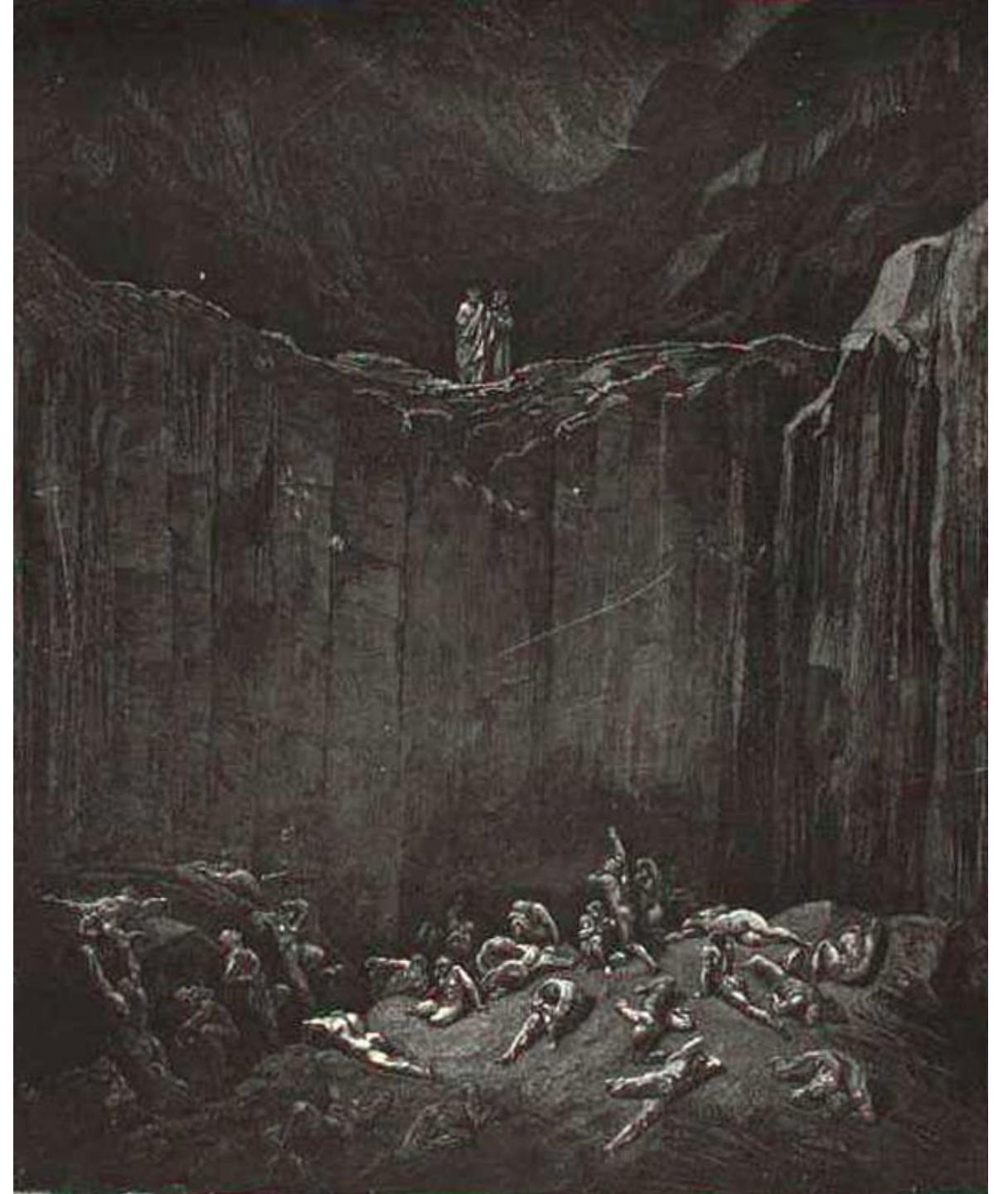
Cantos XVIII - XXX

- Cantos XXVIII - XXIX
 - Malebolgia 9:
 - Sowers of discord
 - They are forced to walk around the circumference of the circle bearing horrible, disfiguring
 - Bertran de Born, famously, carries around his severed head like a lantern



Cantos XVIII - XXX

- Cantos XXIX - XXX
 - Malebolgia 10:
 - Falsifiers, alchemists, counterfeiters



Cantos XXI - XXII

- The mock epic war of the demons
 - “Thus we went from bridge to bridge, speaking of / other things my comedy does not record; and we / were at the summit when / we stood still to see the next cleft of *Malebolge* [...] and I saw behind us a black devil running along the ridge.” XXI ll. 1-4, 29-30



Cantos XXI - XXII

- The mock epic war of the demons
 - “Oh me, master, what do I see?’ I said, ‘Ah, let us go alone, without escort, if you know the way [...] If you are alert as usual, don’t you see how / they are grinding their teeth, and how their eyebrows threaten treachery?”
 - “And he to me: ‘I would not have you fear: let / them snarl as much as they please, they are doing / that for the sufferes in the stew.’” XXI II. 127-135



Cantos XXI - XXII

- Last lines of XXI
 - “They made left face on the bank;
but first each / had bit his tong
toward their leader, as a salute, /
and he of his ass made a trumpet.”
- XXI 136 - 139



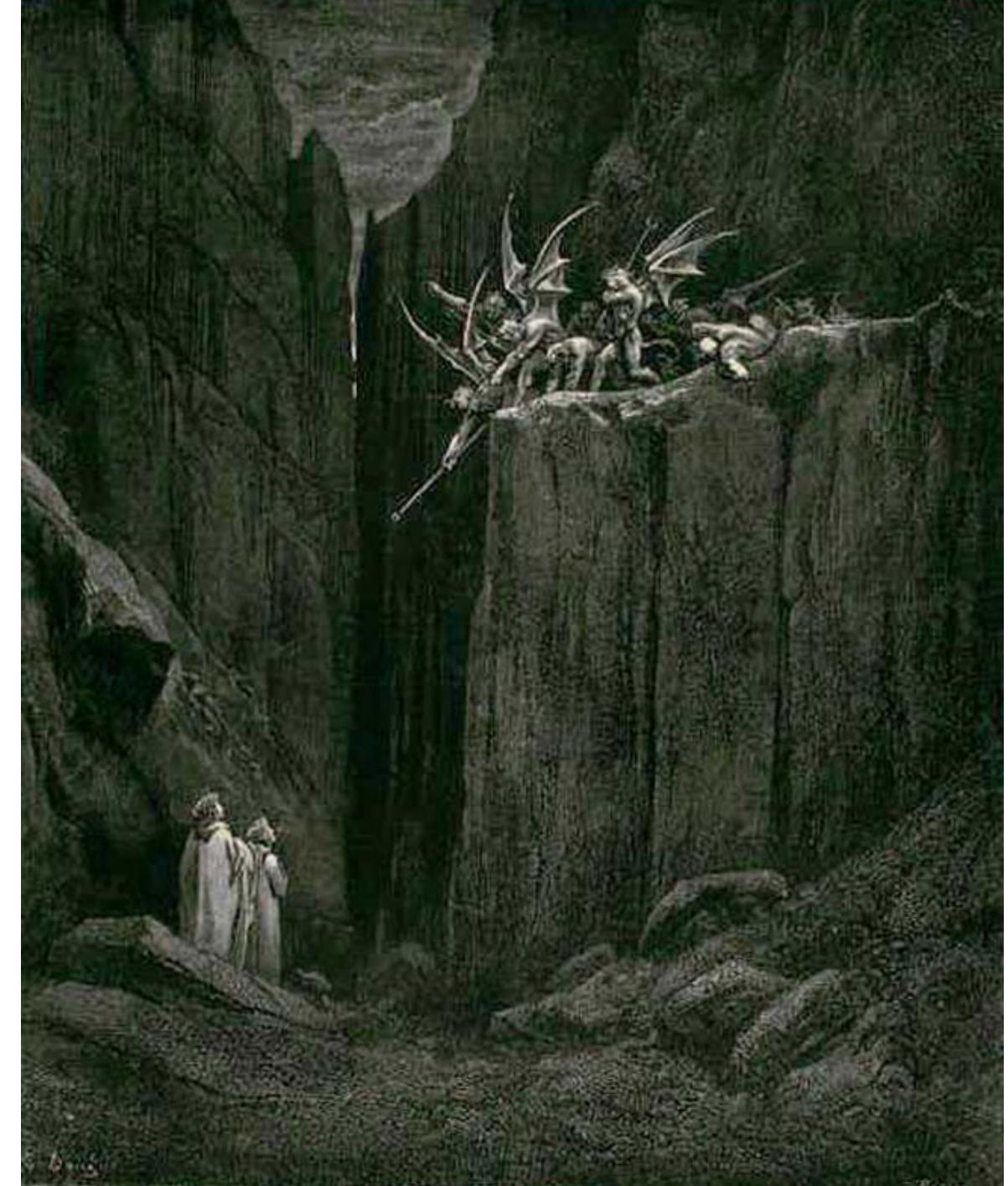
Cantos XXI - XXIII

- First lines of XXII
 - “I have seen knights setting forth, beginning / assaults and standing muster, and sometimes / retreating to save themselves [...] but ever so strange a thing have I seen [...] We were walking with ten demons!” XXII ll. 1-3, 10, 13



Cantos XXI - XXIII

- Imagined escape
 - “Master if you do not hide / yourself and me quickly, I am frightened of the / Evil Claws. They are already behind us; I imagine / them so strongly, I already hear them.” XXIII II. 21-24



Cantos XXVI

- Canto XXVI
 - Malebolgia 8:
 - Ulysses
- *What is the sin in this malebolgia?*
- *What is the contrapasso?*
- *What is Dante-Pilgrim's comportment towards Ulysses and this malebolgia?*
 - *What can you cite to demonstrate this comportment?*



GROUP DISCUSSION: Cantos XXV and XXVI

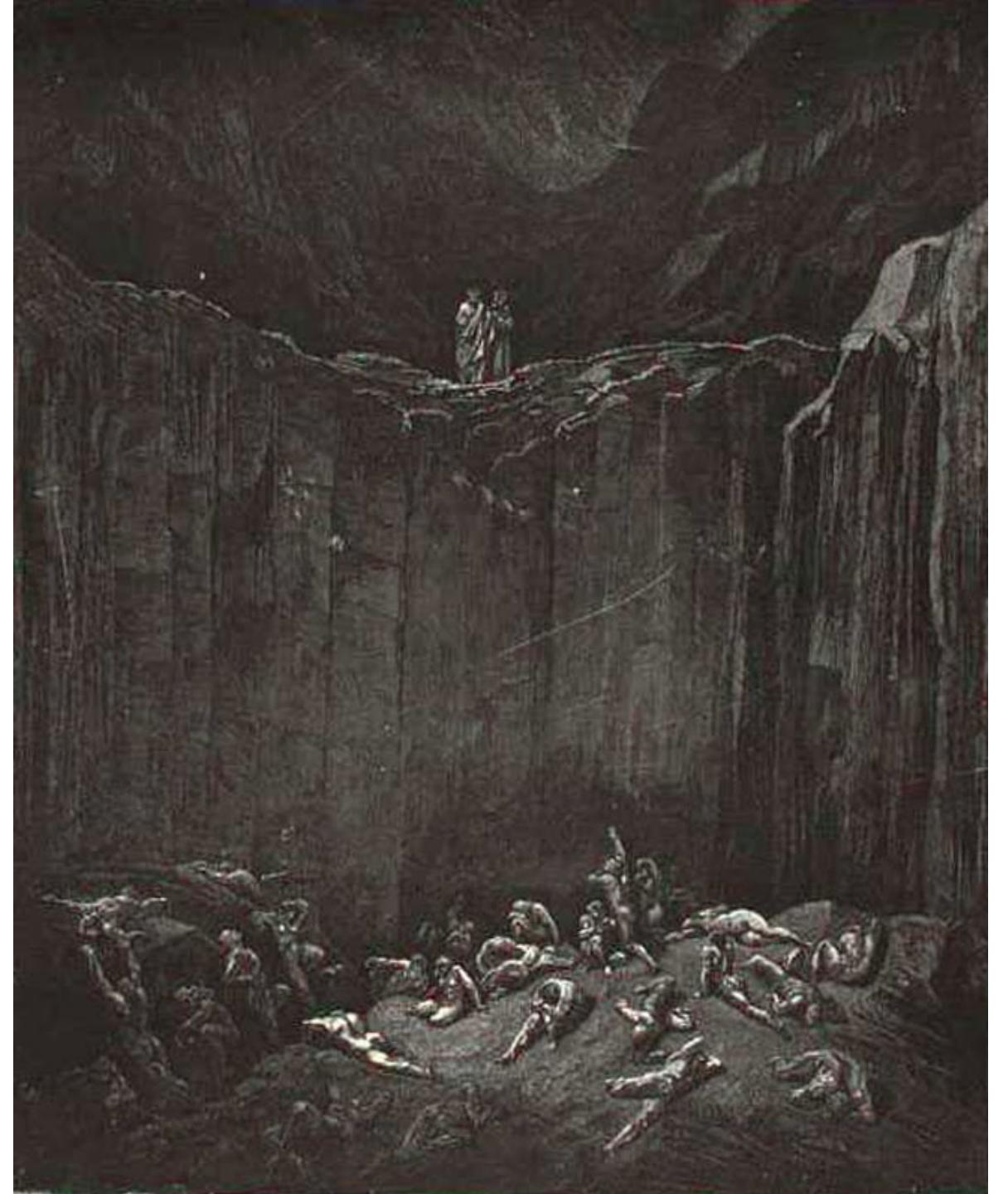
- READ CANTO XXV, LINES 94-102 and 142-151
- *Considering what we have said about Canto 26, discuss in what ways the end of Canto 25 acts as an introduction to Canto 26.*
 - *For example, how does Dante-author position himself as Dante-pilgrim heads into Canto 26? Why might this be important?*
 - *How does this relate to our discussions of earlier characters/cantos?*
- *What do you notice, formally, about this section? What aspect does Dante-author include, which we have already discussed in class?*
 - *What role do formal aspects play in lending import to the section?*

Dante's first journey coming to a close

- Virgil has emphasized that Dante must 'see' certain things before being allowed to move onto the next stage of his journey.
- As the physical journey through Inferno comes to a close, then, it implies that other journeys must be contemporarily coming to a close. If not, Dante-pilgrim will not be able to continue.
 - The physical journey
 - The poetic journey (wrapped up in Cantos 25-26)
 - The moral journey (wrapped up in Cantos 29-30)

Cantos XVIII - XXX

- Cantos XXIX - XXX
 - Malebolgia 10:
 - Falsifiers, alchemists, counterfeiters



GROUP DISCUSSION: Cantos XXIX and XXX

- READ CANTO XXIX LINES 1-36
 - *Dante is looking back at the 9th malebolgia, where sinners who, in life, promoted scandals, schism, and discord are punished; particularly those who caused schism within the church or within politics.*
 - *What happens between Virgil and Dante here?*
 - *What does Virgil say?*
 - *How does Dante respond?*
- READ CANTO XXIX LINES 37-45
 - *Then he looks forward to bolgia 10, where falsifiers and alchemists are punished.*
 - *What is Dante-pilgrim's experience of it?*

- *How do these emotional reactions by Dante-pilgrim compare to his reaction to Virgil's rebuke at the end of Canto XXX, ll. 130-148?*

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XXX ll. 131-141

“Now keep looking [o pur mira], for I am not far from
quarreling with you!”

When I heard him speaking at my angrily, I turned
toward him with such shame that it still dizzies me in
memory.

Like one who dream of harm, and, dreaming,
Wishes he were dreaming, so that he yearns for what
Is as if it were not,
So I became, unable to speak, wishing to excuse
Myself, and I was excusing myself all along, though I
Did not think so.

Ulysses

- What are Ulysses's sins?
 - All three come from epic stories.
- But as he has proclaimed in Canto 25 ("Let Ovid be silent"), he will also overcome those ancient stories to give Ulysses a new final resting place and this, as Borges says, is the central point of the canto.
- There is a new metamorphosis in this Canto, one that is highly modern and that does not rely on allegory as old metamorphoses did.

GROUP DISCUSSION:

- *In Canto 26, how does Dante-Author prepare himself (and us) for Dante-Pilgrim's entrance into this important and final malebolgia?*
- *How does this relate to Borges's claims in his essay?*

XXVI ll. 19-24

Then I grieved, and now I grieve again, when I
Consider what I saw, and I rein in my wit more than
Is my custom,
That it may not run without virtue guiding it, so
That, if a good star or something better has given me
What is good, I may not deprive myself of it.

XXVI II. 43-45

I was standing erect on the bridge in order to see,
So that if I had not grasped a projection, I would
Have fallen without being pushed.

A METAMORPHOSIS

- We have said that Dante-Pilgrim must learn to overcome certain obstacles (physical and metaphorical) in Inferno in order to be able to continue. Virgil has stated this more than once.
- I have said that in this canto Dante's poetic journey is one that sees him learning to overcome non-virtuous poetry.
 - That is, towards poetry with pure intentions. No tricks of wit, no empty rhetorical devices, no leading his readers down the wrong path with pretty words.
- Indeed, we see that Dante-Author is the one affected and *transformed* by the metamorphosis that he undergoes in this canto.
 - "Then I grieved, and now I grieve again, when I consider what I saw, and I rein in my wit more than is my custom, that it may not run without virtue guiding it, so that, if a good star or something better has given me what is good, I may not deprive myself of it." XXVI ll. 19-24
- So we see how and why he tells Ovid (and his *Metamorphoses*) to be silent. The IMPORTANT transformation here happens in the real world, on the author, and he hopes, on the reader. The ones who interact with these pages, not with the characters themselves.

GROUP DISCUSSION:

- How does that assessment, of the heightened connection between Dante-Author and Dante-Pilgrim in this canto, relate to Borges's assessment of Ulysses journey and Dante's journey?
 - How are Dante and Ulysses similar?
 - How are they different?

FINAL POINT:

- The importance of intentions