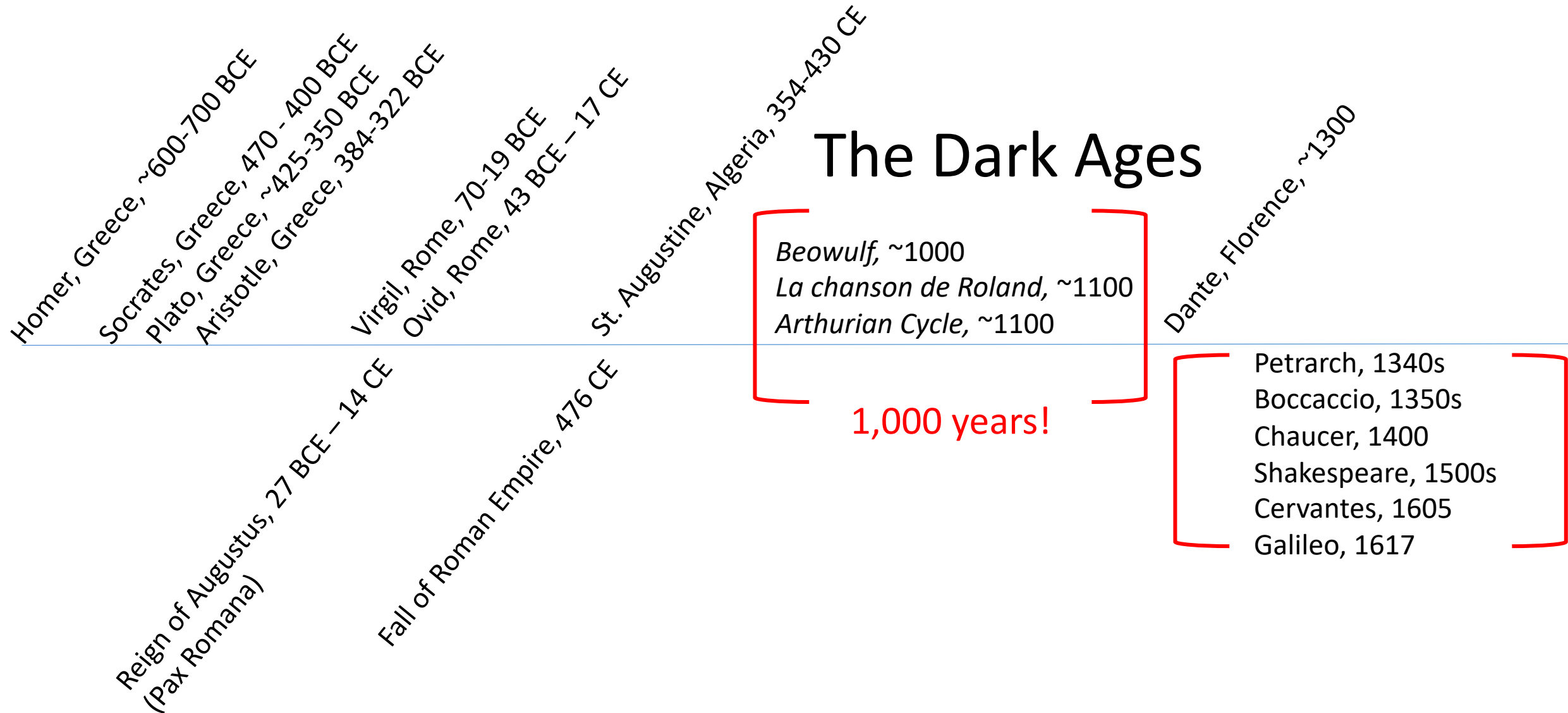


Purgatorio: XXVIII - XXXIII

13 April 2020

Midterm review: Why are we reading this?



The Middle Ages / Medieval / Dark Ages

- Rome falls and is cut off from ancient texts and the knowledge of those texts
- The “Dark Ages” is a historical periodization traditionally referring to the Middle Ages that asserts a cultural deterioration in Western Europe after the decline of the Roman Empire
- The concept originates with Francesco Petrarca (Petrarch) in the 1330s, who regards the post-Roman centuries as ‘dark’ compared to the light of classical antiquity. It characterizes the whole Middle Ages between the fall of Rome and the Renaissance
- Christian writers had traditionally used the light v. dark metaphor to describe good v. evil or pagan v. Christian. Petrarch turns the metaphor on its head in a secular reading that alleges the arrival of Christianity and Christian thought as heralding an age of ‘darkness’

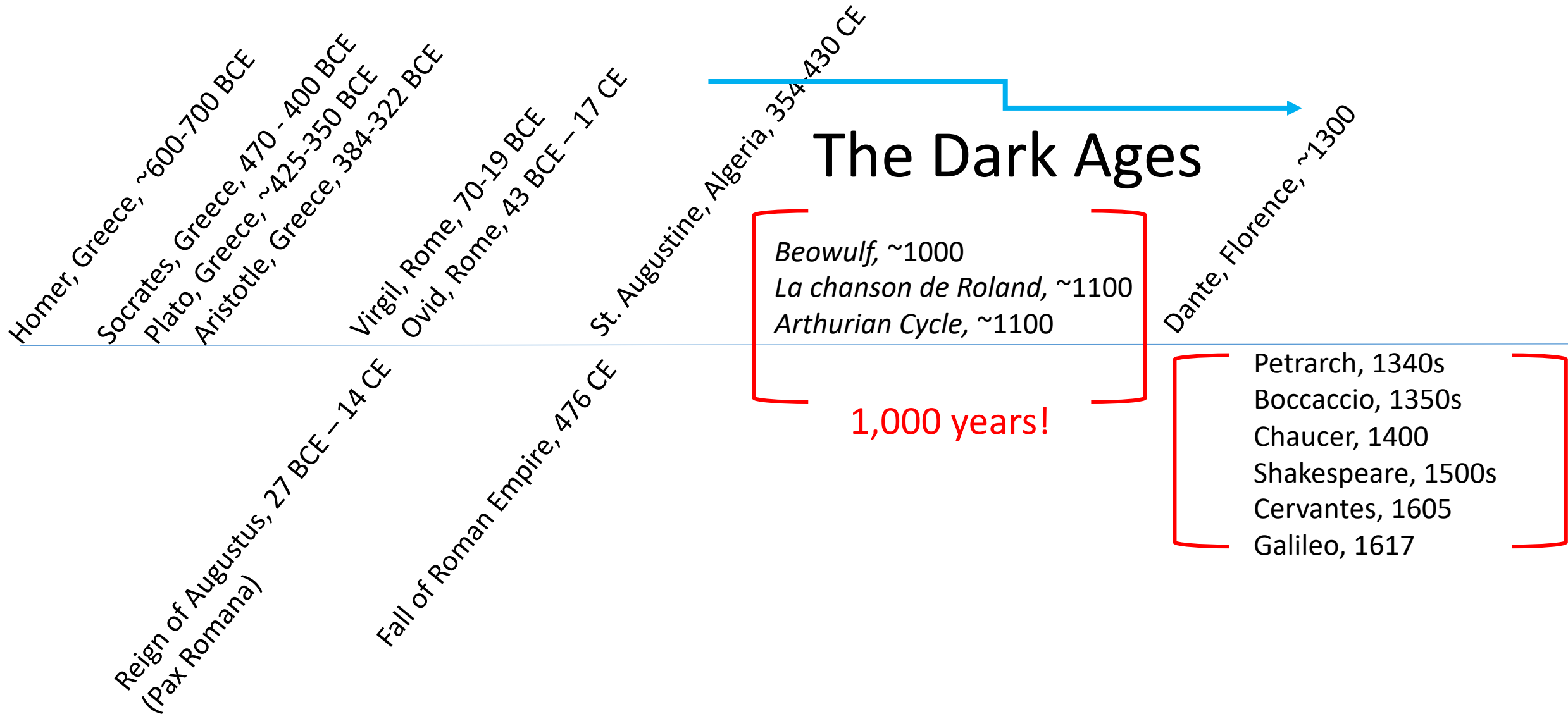
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Classical Texts

- Dante is one of the first authors since the dawn of the Dark Ages to rely on knowledge production from antiquity and classical texts
- Thus he is effectively a (the?) bridge author in the West, who creates a link between the classical and early-modern/renaissance period

A reminder: Why are we reading this?



Language

- Dante is, arguably, the earliest important author that modern Europe has a living relationship with
- Classical texts are written in dead languages
- Even Chaucer is written in Middle English (incomprehensible)
- Like Shakespeare is written in a living language, so Dante's work is, because he becomes the foundation for modern Italian

Whan that Aprille with his shoures soote
The droghte of Marche hath perced to the roote,
And bathed every veyne in swich licour,
Of which vertu engendred is the flour;
Whan Zephirus eek with his swete breeth
Inspired hath in every holt and heeth
The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne
Hath in the Ram his halfe cours y-ronne,
And smale fowles maken melodye,
That slepen al the night with open ye,
So priketh hem nature in hir corages:
Than longen folk to goon on pilgrimages.

Italy

- Italy, especially Florence, was an epicenter of change.
- In Italy, there was Rome.
- In Italy, there was the seat of the Pope.
- In Italy, there was the rise of banking (which allowed for the patronage of Renaissance art)

European History

- The text is situated at a pivotal point in European history, between the Dark Ages and the Renaissance, early modern, rise of Humanism
 - Transition from Religious to Humanist philosophy
 - Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism
 - Birth of the early-Modern
- Relationship between the Dark Ages and Religious Power/Thought
 - The long-lasting effects of this time period
 - The oppression of the Papacy
 - The suppression of knowledge (see: Galileo, Inquisitions)
 - The underlying causes of the French and American Revolutions and the shape of modern States in the west

Social Currency

- We could have maybe chosen another text from around this time. We could have read Chaucer, Boccaccio or Petrarch, for example. All written within 100 years of the *Divine Comedy*.
- But none of those texts have the same currency in the west that Dante's does.
- Having read the *Divine Comedy* means something in the West, it implies something about what kind of scholar you are and how deep your knowledge is of European history

Questions?

Canto XXVII: ll. 124-142

- Where are they? What happens?
 - “My son, you have come to a / place where I by myself discern no further.”
 - “No longer away any word or sign from me: free, / upright, and whole is your will, and it would be a / fault not to act according to its intent. / Therefore you over yourself I crown and mitre.”

Canto XXVIII

- What have you noticed?
 - Ll. 22-30
 - Ll. 133-144

Canto XXIX

- Significant events?
- Significant formal aspects?
- Your impressions?

Canto XXX: GROUP DISCUSSION

- What are the two main events of this canto?
- How is Beatrice in appearance?
- What does she say to Dante?
- How does he respond?
- How had you expected her to be and how did you find her?

Canto XXXI

- How is this Canto related to *Vita Nova*?
- How is it related to the courtly poetry of *Dolce Stil Novo*, which is concerned with the nature of love?

Canto XXXII

- Ll. 100-106
- 1:
 - Paradise as “Rome”
- 2:
 - “Therefore, for the good of the world / that lives ill, keep your eyes now [...] and what you see, returning back there, be sure that / you write.”
- What is implicit here?
 - -> We need a new book. A book that incorporates classical thought. A book that doesn't come from monks or church leaders, a book that comes from a poet, a merchant, a scholar.
 - -> That is what we do, here. Through philosophy and literature, what do you think you are attempting to learn at university?

The Humanities / Humanism

- We take it for granted, perhaps, today. But what is the goal of Humanist studies? What are our texts?
- Humanism: an outlook or system of thought attaching prime importance to human rather than divine or supernatural matters. Humanist beliefs stress the potential value and goodness of human beings, emphasize common human needs, and seek solely rational ways of solving human problems.
- Renaissance Humanism:
 - Renaissance cultural movement which turned away from medieval scholasticism and revived interest in ancient Greek and Roman thought.
 - Renaissance humanism is the study of classical antiquity, at first in Italy and then spreading across Western Europe in the 14th, 15th, and 16th centuries.
 - Humanists sought to create a citizenry able to speak and write with eloquence and clarity and thus capable of engaging in the civic life of their communities and persuading others to virtuous actions.
 - Accomplished through the study of the the 'humanities': rhetoric, history, poetry (today: literature, more broadly), moral philosophy
- Renaissance humanism was an intellectual movement in Europe of the later Middle Ages and the Early Modern period. Petrarch (1304-1374) is considered the first Renaissance humanist, as he was "the first to put into words the notion that the centuries between the fall of Rome and the present had been the age of Darkness". **According to Petrarch, what was needed to remedy this situation was the careful study and imitation of the great classical authors.**

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Dante as the first great proto-Humanist

- So:
 - when Beatrice says: “Therefore, for the good of the world / that lives ill, keep your eyes now [...] and be sure that / you write”
 - It is the first significant time in a millennium that a regular-old person, in a regular-old language took up a pen and set out to ask simple ontological and epistemological questions outside of the constructs of Christian thought.
 - What does it mean to be good or ill (according to neoplatonic thought, as Dante largely devises his system)?
 - What is love (in an Aristotilian sense)?
 - How can we arrive at determinations about these abstract ideas through rational study and logic, rather than relying on supernatural beliefs and doctrines based in those beliefs?
 - Beatrice repeats again: “Do you take note and just as they come from me / write these words to those who live the life that is a / race to death. / And remember that when you write, not to hide / what you have seen.” 52-55
 - What does this last citation have to do with the Harrison reading?

Beatrice commands Dante to write

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 - What does this last citation have to do with the Harrison reading?
- Consider this admonition in the last Canto when Dante asks why she speaks of things he can’t understand:
 - Beatrice says I speak like this “So that you may know the school / you have followed and see how tell its teachings can follow my words, / and may see that your way is distant from God’s.” 85-89
 - What is the ‘school’ here that has taught Dante incorrectly? What has he learned incorrectly?

CANTO XXX

- Allusions to seeing/not seeing
- Inexpressibility topos
- Bow and arrow imagery
- Apostrophes
- Final line: “stelle”

Borges

- What is Borges's main argument?
- What is implicit in Borges's argument?
 - That is, what is the greater meaning behind the stated meaning?

Next week

- We start *Paradiso*
 - We begin to consider, in earnest, the central influence of Neoplatonism
 - Plato's *Timaeus*
 - Plotinus's idea of the One (the first Good), the Nous (the Intellect), the Soul
 - -> Search for authentic Human happiness
 - This cosmos, formally Christian, reveals itself fundamentally classic/humanist