

150 *The other was he* This is the Francesco Cavalcanti referred to in the note to line 140 (though Dante, as previously remarked, studiously avoids naming him).

## Canto XXVI

1 *Rejoice, O Florence* This opening apostrophe recalls the invective against the followers of Simon Magus with which Canto XIX began, or the condemnation of Pistoia in Canto XXV (10–12). Indictments of Pisa (XXXIII.79–90) and Genoa (XXXIII.151–52) are still to come. It has been pointed out that Dante's spelling "Fiorenza" is an anagram, if we remove the *z*, of the name of the Inferno.

9 *Prato* Florence's closest Tuscan neighbor (ten miles away) and a commercial rival, on the Bisenzio River, about halfway between Florence and Pistoia. Prato was forced into an unwelcome alliance with more powerful Florence to counter the expansionist threat from Pistoia. The exiled Dante, speaking in his own voice as author, identifies with Florence's enemies in their desire for her comeuppance.

21–24 *I rein in my native genius* Dante, still speaking in the authorial voice, stresses the need for self-control and self-discipline and the metaphorical reins of virtue.

23 *a kind star* It was Brunetto Latini who referred to the favor of the heavens toward Dante (XV.55–60).

25 *In the season* Summer is the season in which the sun hides his face least. The fly yields to the mosquito after sunset.

34 *the prophet who was avenged by bears* After witnessing Elias (Elijah) carried up to heaven in a whirlwind by a fiery chariot drawn by fiery horses, Eliseus (Elisha) was mocked for his baldness by the children of Bethel. He cursed them in the name of the Lord, and two bears came out of the forest and mauled forty-two of them (4 Kings 2).

45 *I would have fallen below* Again, the author's comment dramatizes the pilgrim's eagerness for knowledge "of men's vices and their valor" (line 99) and its inherent dangers.

54 *Eteocles* Son of Oedipus and Oedipus' mother Jocasta, elder brother of Polynices, Ismene, and Antigone. When Oedipus banished himself from Thebes, the two brothers, though cursed by their father, agreed to rule in alternate years. Eteocles, however, reneged on the deal and refused to give up the throne. Thereupon Polynices returned with the Seven against Thebes, and the two brothers met in single combat and killed one another. Their mutual hatred was such that, when their bodies were cremated together, the flame from the pyre separated and its two tongues continued to vie with each other for supremacy. The episode is recounted in Book XII of Statius' *Thebaid*.

55 *Ulysses and Diomedes* Two of the most famous Greek heroes of the war against Troy. Ulysses is the Roman name of the wily Greek Odysseus, son of Laertes, husband of Penelope, and king of Ithaca, one of the heroes of Homer's *Iliad* and the central figure in his *Odyssey* (neither of which Dante knew firsthand). As a warrior, Diomedes, son of Tydeus and king of Aetolia, was second only to Achilles. Diomedes inflicted a wound on the Trojan Aeneas, who was healed by his mother Venus (in Greek Aphrodite). Ulysses and Diomedes performed several cunning deeds together, including the stratagem of the Trojan Horse and the theft of the Palladium (a statue of the goddess Pallas Athena that protected the city of Troy). According to the only surviving book of Statius' unfinished epic *Achilleid*, the pair discovered Achilles disguised as a girl on the island of Scyros, where his mother Thetis had hidden him in hope of keeping him away from Troy and his prophesied death. While in Scyros, he had seduced Deidamia, the king's daughter, by whom he had a son, Neoptolemus or Pyrrhus. See note to V.65.

60 *the noble seed of Rome* In Virgil's *Aeneid*, dutiful Aeneas, destined to become the founder of Rome, describes to Dido how he carried his father Anchises on his shoulders out through the gates of burning Troy, leading his son Ascanius by the hand, followed, as he thought, by his faithful wife Creüsa. When he no longer saw her, he returned to look for her, only to encounter her shade, who took leave of him, prophesying his long exile and his destiny to be crowned at long last with "happy times, kingship, and a royal wife" (*Aen.* II.924–25).

69 *how strongly desire inclines me toward it* Multiplying his prayer a thousand times, the pilgrim leans like a flame toward the flame. A moment later, before the *tongue* of flame, Virgil will tell Dante to restrain his *tongue* (line 72), providing more clues to Dante's vital involvement in this encounter.

74 *because they were Greeks* In a controversial poem in four languages (Provençal, French, Latin, and Italian), *Ai faus ris, pour quoi traï aves* ("Alas, false smile, why have you betrayed") attributed by some authorities to Dante, line 4, *Iam audivissent verba mea Greci!* ("Even Greeks might have listened to my words"), seems to refer to the proverbial arrogance and aloofness of the Greeks. The Latin-Lombard Virgil will be the intermediary between Dante and these ancient Greeks, with whose language Dante is not familiar. In his address to the classical heroes (79–84), Virgil will deploy his most persuasive rhetoric in a *captatio benevolentiae*, or flattering appeal meant to capture the favor of his audience, a ploy that is still used by the skilled public speaker.

90–91 *When I left / Circe* The speaker is Ulysses. During his adventurous return from Troy to his native Ithaca, narrated by Homer in the *Odyssey* but known to Dante in a fragmentary manner from later Roman and medieval sources, Ulysses and his men were guests of the enchantress Circe (who at first cast a spell on his followers, changing them into swine, and was later prevailed upon to change them back).

92 *Gaeta* The modern name of ancient *Caieta*, a promontory and a port on the Tyrrhenian Sea, four miles from Formia in southern Latium. Virgil (*Aen.* VII.1–7) says that the locality was named after Aeneas' wet nurse Caieta, who died and was interred there. Aeneas' honoring her is yet another instance of his filial piety. The mention of Aeneas here is a clue to the fact that Ulysses' behavior is being judged (and found wanting) by the standards of *pietas* (defined in P. G. W. Glare's *Oxford Latin Dictionary* as "an attitude of dutiful respect toward those to whom one is bound by ties of religion, consanguinity, etc.") set by the Trojan hero.

94–96 *my son . . . Penelope* Ulysses' son by his wife Penelope was Telemachus, and Ulysses' father was Laertes. By the adventurer's own admission, his loving duty to his family was overcome by his gratuitous curiosity and his burning desire for experience. In this he forms a marked contrast to "pious" Aeneas, who undertook his journey from Troy to Rome out of necessity, accompanied by the surviving members of his family and guided at every stage by the gods.

103–104 *Spain, / as far as Morocco* These are the countries that lie on either side of the Strait of Gibraltar, where the western Mediterranean meets the Atlantic Ocean.

106 *old and slow* They had arrived, in other words, "at that stage of life when it befits a man / to lower his sails and coil up his ropes" (XXVII.80–81), as Guido da Montefeltro, condemned to this same *bolgia*, will point out in the next canto.

108 *Hercules* The actual Pillars of Hercules were two stone columns that stood outside the famous temple of Hercules on the island of Santi Petri, ten miles south of Gades (modern Cadiz). Legend had it, however, that the two facing promontories of Abyla in North Africa and Calpe (the modern Gibraltar—a name of Arabic origin) in Europe, on opposite sides of the *Fretum Gaditanum* (the ancient name of the strait derives from that of Gades), at the outlet from the relatively familiar Mediterranean Sea into the unknown Atlantic Ocean, marked the place where Hercules set up two huge columns with the warning inscription *Non plus ultra* ("Go no farther"). Beyond, for Dante, stretched the undiscovered and uninhabited hemisphere of water, the "unpeopled world" (line 116) from whose bourn no traveler returns.

111 *Ceuta* Ceuta is on Morocco's Mediterranean coast. Seville in Spain is an inland city actually closer to the Atlantic than to the Mediterranean, as Dante seems to think. It was thought of as the farthest western limit of civilization, as *ultima Thule* was the farthest point north.

112 *Brothers* Not only Ulysses' companions but also many post-Romantic critics have been swayed by the hero's appeal to what appear to be their noblest impulses. In the *Odyssey*, Ulysses closed his crew members' ears with wax and had them tie him to the mast so as not to let the Sirens' song lure them into shipwreck; in this canto, Dante casts Ulysses himself in the role of Siren.

119–20 *You were not made* Ulysses' persuasive discourse is manipulative. No one can argue with the syllogism's premise—that we should follow reason in order to live a fully human life. But is his conclusion—that we should follow our curiosity wherever it leads—as unquestionably true? And let us not forget that the Fraudulent (and the Traitorous) are in the lower circles of Hell precisely because they used their God-given reason for evil ends. As if to confirm the validity of the general principle, however, in his treatise *De vulgari eloquentia* (*On Eloquence in the Vernacular*), Dante himself described “those illustrious heroes,” the Hohenstaufen emperor Frederick II and “his worthy son Manfred,” saying “they knew how to reveal the nobility and integrity that were in their hearts; and, as long as fortune allowed, they lived in a manner befitting men, despising the bestial life” (Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia*, edited and translated by Steven Botterill, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996, I.ii.4).

125 *our last, mad run* In Italian “mad run” is *folle volo*. Light is thrown on Dante's attitude to Ulysses' fatal voyage when we remember that the pilgrim himself, at the outset of his journey, sought confirmation from Virgil that his expedition had divine sanction and was not hubristic and presumptuous. There, in II.35, he had used this very adjective, *folle*, to describe what he feared: “I fear it may be madness” (*temo che la venuta non sia folle*).

130 *Five times* The moon has waxed and waned five times since the “mad run” (line 125) began. Five long lunar months have passed.

133 *a mountain* At the beginning of the *Purgatorio*, it will dawn upon the reader that what Ulysses and his crew caught sight of was the island mountain of Purgatory, where the traces of sin are purged in preparation for Heaven. But Purgatory is a supernatural realm, and the only ones who have access to it are the souls of the redeemed dead, ferried there on a boat propelled by an angel's wings without need of oars (see the previous reference at III.93). Whereas Ulysses and his crew made wings of their oars, the angel helmsman makes oars of his wings.

## Canto XXVII

7 *the Sicilian bull* Phalaris, the infamous sixth-century B.C.E. Greek tyrant of Acragas in Sicily (modern Agrigento), a paradigm of cruelty, is reputed to have ordered an Athenian artist named Perillus to construct a hollow brass bull into which he would place his victims, light a fire beneath it, and roast them to death. The bull was designed in such a way that the victims' screams, channeled through resonating chambers, imitated the bellowing of a real wounded bull. When it was finished, Perillus was the first to be put inside to see if it worked. Dante's source for the story is probably Ovid, who remarks in his *Ars amatoria* (I.655–56) that Perillus got what was coming to him.