

The conversations of francesca, pier, and ulysses



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The journey of introspection can lead to unbound places and uninhibited realizations. In the course of his travels throughout the Inferno, Dante Alighieri encounters the damned souls of the underworld and experiences their prodigious punishments. Undoubtedly one of the most exalted and enigmatic poems to have ever been written, an unassuming reader can be virtually overwhelmed by all of the multifaceted allegory that distinguishes the Inferno from all other works. Unrequited love that burns its desire in misery, desolate despair that becomes disfigured in perpetual gloom, and falsified deceivers who bluster their shame evermore all become personified in each sinner that Dante approaches. The Inferno invents a complex, elaborate system of hell with each sinner's own hell appropriately suiting the crime committed; as Professor Braden of the University of Virginia states, "the sinner eventually and often grotesquely becomes what they made of themselves." In particular three sinners, (Francesca da' Rimini, Pier della Vigna, and Ulysses) though each committed distinctively different wrongdoings, all entertain a significant conversation with Dante, who desperately seeks the attention of all three individuals. Each leave him moved and more learned, with the profound, chilling realization that though the sinner may be a virtuous person, at times, austere consequences of their actions are inescapable. The Inferno creates two interlocking explanations for the allegory, both of politics and religion. Dante, while writing this poem in exile of his native city Florence, cunningly permeates his own political propaganda noticeable by in the circles of which he places his enemies. Through his own unique placement, punishment, and portrayal of each sinner, Dante sculpts the readers own perception of those who he pities and also of those whom which he frowns at with little more than merciless

disdain, as in with Pope Nicholas III. Clearly shown by sensitive gestures and words, Dante empathizes with Francesca da' Rimini in canto V. A famed and greatly known fate in contemporary 14th century, she had married Gianciotto Malatesta of Rimini, but fell in love with his younger brother, Paolo, as she explains " love, which in gentle hearts is quickly born, seized him for [her] fair body" (41). As history unfolds, her husband found out about the illustrious affair and had them both executed. Francesca has been placed in the 2nd circle amongst the incontinent sins, and at first she describes " love gave [them] both one death," (41) it is evident that her crimes are ones of passion and desire. However, she quickly contradicts herself in altering the impulse that she and her lover suffered from when she clarifies that " A Galeotto, that book!" (42) was the true reason their passion bloomed. Comparing themselves to Lancelot and Guinevere, Fransceca tells Dante that it was while Paulo and she was reading the tale that they gave in to the impulse of desire. Her infinite doom is to rage on in the tempestuous wind, gusting about the 2nd circle of Hell like her emotions had gusted out of her with Paolo. Dante the poet responded overwhelmingly proclaiming, " My pity overwhelmed me and I felt myself go slack: swooning in death, I fell like a dying body," (42) and fainted in sympathy, apparently understanding the energy and influence that the written word can provoke. Further descending down past the sins of incontinence, Virgil leads Dante to the sins of violence, and noteworthy in canto XIII, the sins of violence against oneself. Here surrounded by the decaying disfigured trees who held the souls of those who committed suicide. Dante describes them with " leaves not green, earth-hued; their boughs not smooth(not fruit but poisoned thorns;" (101) each timber is clawed at continuously by bird-like daemons. Amongst the

contorted woods lay Pier della Vigna, a primary counselor to Frederick II, who had been wrongly accused of disloyalty to the emperor, and in despair of being denied his love of service, killed himself. He claims his innocence to Dante, " I stayed so true I lost both sleep and life(I never betrayed my lord who was so worthy of honor" (103-105) defending how loyal and diligent he was. Dante discovers that it was " the common fatal Vice of courts" (103) as Pier refers to envy as the sin that coerced his own violence towards himself. He begs Dante to " comfort his memory" (105) when returning back to the living, which presented a not often found sympathy in the poet; so intense was his compassion for Pier, that he had to ask Virgil, his guide to continue conversing with the doomed shade for he " cannot because of pity that fills [his] heart." (105). This example represents the second time that Dante had become overcome by a single encounter with a punished soul. Dante pities both Francesca and Pier, fainting from Francesca and touched so deeply by Pier it left him speechless. Both have committed the " lesser of sins," different from those kept in Malebolge who have committed sins of fraud, like the soon to be introduced Ulysses. Dante has categorized each so the more conscious and deliberate sins are morally worse than those which are done by impulse such as Francesca, motivated by desire, and Pier, who's suicide is punished more severely, but is still sorted amongst the sins of incontinent and violence. These two souls also demonstrate to Dante that often the sinner may still be a virtuous person, though there are irrefutable consequences to one's actions. The two souls do differ in that Pier's suicide put in the deeper seventh circle than the second circle of Francesca, and is punished accordingly. Francesca's sin was derived from love in the lowest form, physical desire. Pier was motivated by madness, anger and depression,

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neither of which emotion involves love. As love is a predominant theme throughout the Divine Comedy, Dante suitably punishes sins because of love less torturously than violence, and in particular, suicide. Becoming gradually more assured of himself as hell becomes more shocking, Dante's growing confidence becomes a valuable virtue. As he enters the 8th circle of Malebolge, he is introduced in canto XVI to one of the greatest heroes of classical literature, Ulysses, who is perplexingly placed amid the false counselors. Ulysses, warrior of the Trojan war and con-artist of the Trojan horse, with Diomedes "grieve for their device, the horse that made the doorway thorough which went forth the Romans' most noble seed." (219). The two schemers have been doomed to swirl in a mist of flames, circling the cliffs like "fireflies a peasant has seen (resting on a hill)" (217). Virgil must again speak with this soul, like he spoke with Pier della Vigna secondly, insisting to Dante to "leave speech to me- Greeks that they were, they might treat words of yours with some disdain," (221) which Robert Pinsky explains as Dante's method of acknowledging that he does not speak Greek. Ulysses is punished, along with being the deceptive strategist, for failure to recognize that he conned his own companions who "grew so keen to journey, spurred by the little speech [he] made" into joining his "insane flight" (223). He tells Dante that nothing could overcome his longing for experience in the world. Dante's placement of Ulysses deep in the 8th circle demonstrates his own values and opinions of lying and fraud; Ulysses defies many Christian principles like lying, cheating, and stealing. Violence, even murder, does not provoke near as much reprimand as falsifying oneself, and adultery does not even begin make a case against it. Ulysses serves as a message to warn that prominence gained fraudulently will gain priority in <https://assignbuster.com/the-conversations-of-francesca-pier-and-ulysses/>

punishment. Francesca and Ulysses both commit similar acts of passion, and succumb to their own desires. Yet Francesca is placed in the 2nd circle and Ulysses in the 8th; Dante distinctively divides them into two ways. The first discrepancy is the deceitful methods Ulysses resorted to that Francesca did not, and the second is that Ulysses is from the ancient Greek world and Francesca is of Dante's Roman contemporary. Ulysses fought against the Trojans and brought down their kingdom, and the most well-known Trojan of course, happens to be Aeneas, founder of Rome. Pier and Ulysses both show Dante's Guelph preference into dealing with the souls he longed to speak with who dealt in the aspects of politics and war, as opposed to his outright scorn for the wicked shades of the religious like Pope Nicholas III. All of these three characters demonstrate the poet's introspective discovery and underlying themes that even though the sinner may have been well-regarded and honorable in their time on earth; in hell, they may still be punished along with the most wretched and vile. All three are left in endless sorrow, never to experience a joyous thought again. God created hell to implement justice; the gates over hell in canto III read " JUSTICE MOVED MY HIGH MAKER, IN POWER DIVINE; WISDOM SUPREME, LOVE PRMAL" (19). Hell's sole purpose is to fulfill God's will of justice, and that the punishment of the damned, even those who were virtuous in their lives, shall be fitting of their sins. Works Cited Pinsky, Robert. *The Inferno of Dante, a New Verse Translation*. The Noonday Press: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux. New York, New York: 1994.