

## Inferno XXVI: Evil Counselors

Canto XXVI Circle 8, Bolgia 8

### Evil Counselors Ulysses and Diomedes

**Spiritual:** Ciardi says in his introduction to Canto XXVI that Dante is highly critical of the Evil Counselors, whom he sees as “all men of gift who abused their genius, perverting it to wiles and stratagems. Seeing them in Hell, [Dante] knows his must be another road: his way shall not be by deception” (Ciardi 220). Their punishment is spiritual in its symbolism. “As they stole from God in their lives and worked by hidden ways, so are they stolen from sight and hidden in the great flames which are their own guilty consciences...as they sinned by glibness of tongue, so are the flames made into a fiery travesty of tongues” (Ciardi 220). See text, lines 19-24.

“Commentators have traditionally stressed that the flames Dante sees in Canto XXVI are a pointed parody of the descent of the Pentecostal tongues of fire upon Christ’s disciples, and that Ulysses’ sin of evil counseling is primarily a sin against the good counsel of the Holy Spirit. It might be added in this context that the production of sound through the metaphor of the wind ironically recalls Acts 2:2 in which the descent of the Spirit is described as occurring in tongues of flames and to the sound of a mighty wind” (Mazzotta 354).

### Canto XXVII Circle 8, Bolgia 8

#### Evil Counselors Count Guido da Montefeltro

**Literal/Historical:** Lines 64-108. Count Guido da Montefeltro gave Pope Boniface VIII advice about how to trap his enemies, the Collona, whom he lured out of their secure castle at Penestrino with loop-holed promises and then destroyed.

**Political:** Guido da Montefeltro hears Dante speak Italian (Lombard) and asks about Romagna. In lines 35-54, Dante answers his question about war saying, “none flared openly when I left just now. Ravenna’s fortunes stand as they have stood these many years,” while explaining the political issues as forces including Malatesta (in Verrucchio), Guido Vecchio da Polenta (Ravenna), Maginardo de’Pagani (ruler of Faenza) and Sinibaldo degli Ordelaffi (in Forli)

**Moral/Psychological:** “If I believed that my reply were made/to one who could ever climb to the world again,/ this flame would shake no more. But since no shade/ever returned—if what I am told is true--/ from this blind world into the living light, without fear of dishonor I answer you.” As he tells his story, he reveals that he resisted Pope Boniface VIII’s request for advice in advancing his corrupt war on other Christians, until the Pope offered him absolution...but he never repented. So, when he died, Guido went to hell. He was a logician, and the Black Angel’s comment in lines 111-117 makes sense—so Count Guido da Montefeltro went to hell, and he is still just as conniving as he tells his “confession” to Dante, only because, once again erroneously, he believes Dante cannot return to the earth to tell anyone else. This shows his **spiritual**

**blindness**; he is clever, but unable to illuminate his sophistry (arguing the letter of the law with false intent, trying to subvert its spirit) with mere reason.

#### Works Cited

Alighieri, Dante. *The Inferno*. Trans. John Ciardi. New York: Mentor/Penguin, 1982.

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