

# Bob Dylan and that “Italian Poet from the Thirteenth Century”

Matthew Collins

Harvard University

[mcollins@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:mcollins@fas.harvard.edu)

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6818-8172>



## Abstract

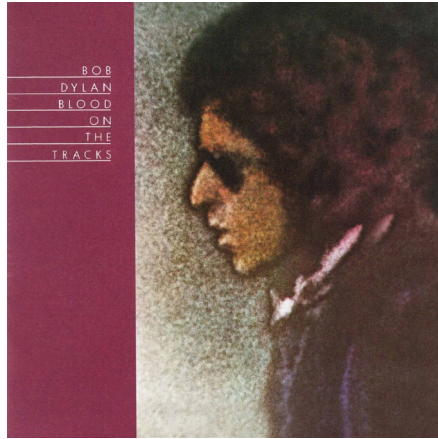
Beginning with a verse in Bob Dylan’s “Tangled up in Blue” that details two characters reading a book of poems by an unnamed Italian poet from the thirteenth century, the direct and ‘diffused’ influence of Dante upon the great American songwriter and Nobel Laureate is investigated. Further, a possibly intentional narrative similarity is proposed between the story told in “Tangled up in Blue” and the one Francesca tells in *Inferno* 5. After exploring the available evidence regarding the explicit influence of Dante’s work upon the songwriter, and other hypotheses related to the verse from this song in particular, sources for Dante’s diffused influence upon Dylan are discussed. With often enigmatic lyrics and elusive statements, this latter point regarding Dante’s abundant presence in literary works that we know Dylan read confirms the role Dante plays—in one way or another—within Dylan’s lyrical oeuvre, even if the identity of that thirteenth century Italian poet in the song will likely remain a mystery.

**Key Words:** Dante Alighieri; Bob Dylan; *Tangled up in Blue*; *Inferno* 5; Ezra Pound; T.S. Eliot.

## Riassunto

A partire da un verso di “Tangled up in Blue” di Bob Dylan che descrive due personaggi che leggono un libro di poesie di un poeta italiano del XIII secolo, si indaga l’influenza diretta e ‘diffusa’ di Dante sul grande cantautore americano e Premio Nobel. Inoltre, viene proposta una somiglianza narrativa forse intenzionale tra la storia raccontata in “Tangled up in Blue” e quella che Francesca racconta in *Inferno* 5. Dopo aver esaminato le prove disponibili riguardanti l’influenza esplicita dell’opera di Dante sul cantautore, e altre ipotesi relative al verso di questa canzone in particolare, viene affrontata la questione delle fonti dell’influenza diffusa di Dante su Dylan. Sviluppato per mezzo di testi spesso enigmatici e affermazioni elusive, quest’ultimo aspetto, quello cioè riguardante l’abbondante presenza di Dante nelle opere letterarie che sappiamo lette da Dylan, conferma il ruolo di Dante, in un modo o nell’altro, nell’opera lirica del cantautore, anche se l’identità del poeta italiano del XIII secolo nella canzone rimarrà probabilmente un mistero.

**Parole chiave:** Dante Alighieri; Bob Dylan; *Tangled up in Blue*; *Inferno* 5; Ezra Pound; T.S. Eliot.



There is a line in “Tangled up in Blue,” the first song on Bob Dylan’s 1975 album *Blood on the Tracks*, that comes tauntingly close to tying together the oeuvres of two writers that are in many ways worlds apart: Dante and Dylan. This line refers to “a book of poems” that were “written by an Italian poet from the thirteenth century.” What Dylan writes about that book is potentially fascinating as it relates to Dante’s reception history. It also calls to mind the various avenues through which the Italian poet’s work reached Dylan, at least as a result of the American songwriter’s immersion within literary traditions that point back to Dante, if not the result of some degree of extended reading by Dylan of the Duecento-Trecento Italian poet. Here is the line in its context:

Then she opened up a book of poems  
 And handed it to me  
 Written by an Italian poet  
 From the thirteenth century  
 And every one of them words rang true  
 And glowed like burnin’ coal  
 Pourin’ off of every page  
 Like it was written in my soul  
 From me to you  
 (Dylan 2016:332).

If Dylan meant to indicate, in this book of poems, a work by Dante, then he left us with a lively cluster of verbal images that convey his personal understanding of the potential effects of Dante’s poetry upon readers—even in a very different time and place. Dylan suggests that these words of poetry written centuries ago still have the potential to catch metaphorical fire on an opened page, to be reduced to their essence, and to pour into one’s soul.

Further, the resonance of the effect is such that at times it seems these words were just written, and just intimately shared. Such an effect can establish a bridge that, even if fleetingly, links vastly different cultures: Dylan's modern American culture (with a wide range of roots and influences) and the cultural era from which Dante's writing emerged.

There are definitive links between Dylan and Dante on a radio program that the songwriter hosted for three years, and within the songwriter's memoir in which he references his encounter with a volume of *Inferno*—points to which I will return. But my principal interest here is the presence of Dante's influence particularly within Dylan's lyrical oeuvre, for which he specifically won the Nobel Prize in Literature for 2016.<sup>1</sup> According to the official statement from the Swedish Academy, he was awarded the prize “for having created new poetic expressions within the great American song tradition” (Nobel Prize in Literature, 2016). Accepting this premise, Dante's potential presence specifically within Dylan's songwriting is of especially compelling interest.

Readers of Dante may well want to affirm that he is this thirteenth century Italian poet. There are quite many passages of his poetry that can create the effect that Dylan describes. But if Dylan were indeed referring to Dante here, it would seem appropriate to discount the *Commedia* as the book to which he was referring, because it was written during the century after the one used to designate this unnamed Italian poet, who could just as well be referred to as a poet from the fourteenth century when he wrote his masterpiece. But such precision, as we will see, may not be necessary or even suitable when it comes to Bob Dylan. Therefore, I will specifically suggest that there is a striking resonance between “Tangled up in Blue” and the fifth canto of *Inferno*—even though a “book of poems” would seem to more appropriately refer to the *Rime* or the *Vita nova*, both of which are also more accurately identified with the thirteenth century.

Of course, there were other noteworthy Italian poets alive in the thirteenth century; given that he lived during two different centuries, the particular designation may seem better suited for Guido Guinizelli or Guido Cavalcanti, both of whom lived exclusively in the thirteenth century, with the exception of one year on the part of the latter poet. Romantically-charged words that may well incite reactions in a reader, even centuries later, is also characteristic of the poetic works of these two elder *stilnovisti*. But Dylan is not one for academic precision, or the kinds of inquiry expressed by words on a “professor's

1. With a characteristic twist of dylan-esque irony, the character Dylan plays in *Masked and Anonymous*, a film for which he was also co-writer under pseudonym, reacts unenthusiastically to a manager who tells him that “there's people out there giving prizes to people like you,” adding that “people are impressed by people who win things.” “Ain't that the truth,” he mutters back, underwhelmed at the prospect. There seemed to have been an element of this in Dylan's delayed response to this prized literary accolade.

tongue / Too serious to fool,” as he phrased it in “My Back Pages” (Dylan 2016: 125). And so this inquiry could easily go on endlessly, advanced and retracted by a variety of arguments, but never leading to any definitive conclusions. I once tried to get as close as I could to an answer (knowing rather certainly I would not succeed) by writing to Dylan’s agent, Bryan Greenbaum. In short, I asked him to try to get a word from the writer himself on whether or not this thirteenth century Italian poet was Dante. Greenbaum responded: “There is no answer to your question because Bob will never say.”<sup>2</sup> He went on to refer me to an online fanzine of sorts that was in especially active use in the 90s. In it, Dylan’s words and phrases were investigated, and a full page, it turns out, was dedicated to this very question of the unnamed Italian poet (The Bob Dylan Who’s Who, 1995: “The Italian Poet”).

On the site, Dylan aficionados valiantly raised many of the same possibilities that a dantista steeped in medieval Italian poetry would mention were (s)he asked who the unnamed poet in this verse might be. Then one contributor pointed out an especially noteworthy detail: during an interview in 1978, Dylan was explicitly asked about this thirteenth century Italian poet.<sup>3</sup> Here was the significant moment, when interviewer Craig McGregor brought up “Tangled up in Blue”:

Dylan: I like that song. Yeah, that poet from the 13th Century.

McGregor: Who was that?

Dylan: Plutarch. Is that his name?

(Dylan and McGregor 1978: 31-35).

Dylan is truly not one for academic precision. According to his own account in his memoir (to which we will return), he did not read literature in any traditionally systemic fashion, and here he neither recalls it with accuracy. He would have meant to say Petrarch, and if he did really intend to refer to Petrarch in that song, he would have confused his centuries. Not a day of Petrarch’s life took place in the thirteenth century. He was born in 1304. What then can we conclude from Dylan’s possibly inaccurate, imprecise, and/or elusive answer? Does his statement, especially given its inherent confusion, rule out Dante? It seems that we are back at Greenbaum’s note: “Bob will never say.”

But I do think just a little more discussion concerning the possibility that Dante is this thirteenth century poet may be worthwhile, which I will do before turning to another point concerning the *diffused Dante* within the lyrics of Dylan. At least three arguments could further support the possibility

2. Private correspondence, June 9, 2012.

3. This published exchange that was not included in Jonathan Cott’s anthology of Dylan interviews (Cott, 2007).

that it was Dante who was referred to in this verse from his 1975 album. The first is Dylan’s recorded reading of eighteen lines of *Inferno*; the next relates to Dylan’s recounted reading habits, including a specific mention of Dante, and the third is a certain resonance of note between “Tangled up in Blue” and *Inferno* V. Also deserving mention here are two other studies that have explored the possible links between Dylan and Dante as specifically indicated in this verse of “Tangled up in Blue.” The first is by Richard Thomas, who suggests *Purgatorio* 21.94-99 as a passage worth considering, especially because it is an acknowledgement of layered intertexts from Virgil to Statius to Dante (Thomas, 2007: 45). This is a directly relevant possibility in light of the broader context of Thomas’ essay, which begins with his realization that Dylan borrowed from Mandelbaum’s translation of *Aeneid* 6.851-853 in “Lonesome Day Blues,” and goes on to show the extent to which Dylan (like Dante and Virgil) is an actively intertextual writer (Thomas, 2007: 3). A second study, by Giulio Carlo Pantalei, also proposes a certain intertext within the immediate context of Dylan’s reference to the words of this thirteenth century Italian poet. The phrase regarding these words, that they “glowed like burnin’ coal,” mirrors the description, in translation, of Charon’s eyes (Pantalei, 2016: 18-19). Pantalei specifically highlights the phrase as it appears in George Musgrave’s translation, realized in Spenser’s nine-line meter: “eyes of burning coal” (*Inferno* 3. 120). In fact, the phrase, “occhi di bragia” in Dante’s Italian, is identically translated by Henry Francis Cary as well, whose version, we will now see, Dylan most certainly did encounter—at least at a later point.

As I have said, there is nearly explicit evidence, beyond the interpretation of Bob Dylan’s often obscure lyrics, that he read Dante. There is also an explicit example that I will only quickly mention here, being the more clear-cut evidence that it is: one can listen to Dylan reading from Cary’s translation of *Inferno* 10.114-131 near the conclusion of his *Theme Time Radio Hour* episode on the topic of heat.<sup>4</sup> His own introduction to this poetic reading hardly indicates he had an especially careful familiarity of Italian poet’s work—rather, he says something quite reminiscent of his aforementioned confused reference to Petrarch as Plutarch. Concerning this passage about the heretics of Hell’s sixth circle, he says: “here’s what Dante Alighieri had to say about the ninth circle of Hell from his epic poem, *The Divine Comedy*.”<sup>5</sup> Again, he is

4. *Theme Time Radio Hour* was a weekly radio program hosted by Bob Dylan from 2006-2009. Originally broadcast by XM Satellite Radio, all shows are now available at <http://www.themetimeradio.com> (last accessed June 30, 2018).

5. Just before turning to this reading, he had played Johnny Cash’s Spanish-language version of “Ring of Fire,” translated as “Fuego D’Amor,” and in Dylan’s characteristic free-associating fashion, he managed to connect the lyrics of Johnny Cash to the poetry of Dante Alighieri in the line preceding the one quoted above: “and if you talk about rings of fire, you can’t leave out the ultimate destination, the ninth circle of Hell.” After reading from *Inferno* 10,

not one to worry much about precision. But this was around three decades after he wrote “Tangled up in Blue,” and we cannot know how long he had been familiar with this and other passages from the *Commedia* before he read from Cary’s translation. But we do have some basis to argue in favor of his reasonable familiarity with Dante’s poem by the time he wrote the lines under present consideration.

Dylan’s memoir is strongly suggestive, and yet a bit elusive, even while being close to near proof that he spent some time with Dante’s poem in his formative years—though he evidently did not do so with particular care, as his later radio program would suggest. What he writes in *Chronicles*, however, includes an element of uncertainty, in part because he may well have made up this account in which he described an almost utopic space with notably literary dimensions (Thomas, 2017: 101). He writes that, upon his arrival in Greenwich Village, he often stayed in the apartment of a certain Ray Gooch, “an intellectual and a scholar and a romantic” with a truly vast book collection (Dylan, 2004: 26). Dylan adds that, “the place had an overpowering presence of literature” (Dylan, 2004: 35), and he goes on to recall the range of topics and books within this collection from which he often read voraciously. Dante’s name appears near the start of his kaleidoscopic list of books and authors, their lack of systematic reference conveying a sense of his similarly unsystematic reading. Among them, in the following (selective) order, were: Gogol, Dickens, Balzac, Machiavelli, Rousseau, Ovid, Faulkner, Albertus Magnus, Thucydides, Byron, Longfellow, Leopardi, Milton, Pushkin—and the range of non-fiction he recounts is similarly dizzying (Dylan, 2004: 36-41). His sentence on Dante, whose name appears immediately after Machiavelli’s, is as follows: “‘The cosmopolitan man’ was written on the title page of Dante’s *Inferno*” (Dylan, 2004: 36). During this time, did he go beyond merely opening the cover and reading the inscribed title page of this particular copy of the first canticle of the *Commedia*? It seems likely, given that he chose to specifically reference it among the books he happily encountered and fondly recalled so many decades later while writing his memoir. And even if the apartment of Roy Gooch was an invention, along with this particular copy of *Inferno* and its curious inscription, his literary encounters—however they may have actually taken place—were almost certainly not fabrications.

If Dylan did read at least some of *Inferno*, did he get to the latter half of the fifth canto—containing the tale of Paolo and Francesca—or perhaps skip to it? Even if he did not get through all of *Inferno* 1, let alone reach the end of the fourth canto, there is a reasonable possibility that a well-informed reader, such as an actual (or mythical) Gooch whose used book was

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and before moving on to a quote from Harry Truman, he says another brief word about the poet: “I’ll leave you with one last thought—this one isn’t quite as deep as Dante.”

in the hands of Dylan, may have read only selections of even this first canticle of the *Commedia*. The most common selective reading, especially from the nineteenth century onward, would include the tale of Paolo and Francesca.<sup>6</sup> Material indications of the cultural importance of this canto could have been reflected in markings, or the selective wear within the book that might lead more naturally to the corresponding pages. This seems to be as far one can reasonably go in search of evidence that Dylan read Dante, and to be more particular for present purposes, the story of Paolo and Francesca in the latter part of *Inferno*'s fifth canto.

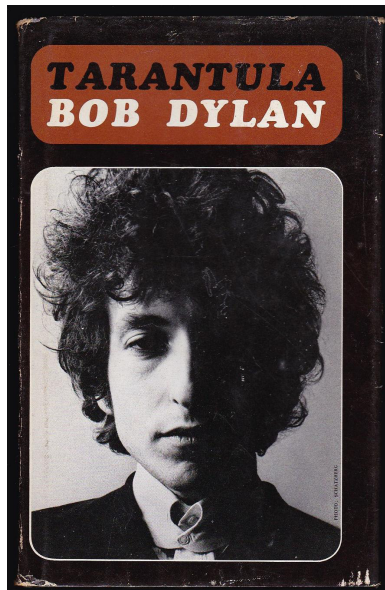
But there is another angle from which to explore this possible connection between *Inferno* 5 and “Tangled up in Blue,” which is a specific narrative harmony that exists between these two works. There are some obvious but less convincing connections: for example, each are stories of romance in which the ladies were married. Similarities like this one, and others, could easily be mere coincidence. More significant is the verse in “Tangled up in Blue” that recalls the turning point in the unnamed protagonists' relationship. As a song that willingly rearranges chronology, the verse that recalls the first private encounter between the two main characters of the narrative takes place in the middle, immediately following the verse that details their very first public interaction. The center and turning point of this private moment is—just as with Paolo and Francesca—a book, *the* book “of poetry...written by an Italian poet from the thirteenth century.” The intimacy that follows is never detailed, quite like *Inferno* 5 which only mentions a kiss, and also stops with the book; “quel giorno più non vi leggemmo avante” (138). These Americans were reading a book of Italian poetry, and “the words rang true and glowed like burnin' coal” in much the same way as the Italians Paolo and Francesca had been reading French poetry—particularly “di Lancialotto come amor lo strinse” (127). Is it possible that the unnamed lady in Dylan's song opened up and handed over the latter section of *Inferno* 5 to be read aloud? Here we must be halted yet again by Greenbaum: Bob will never say.

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6. A culturally-informed individual in the mid-twentieth century could have become familiar with Paolo and Francesca through all manner of potential avenues that might bring him or her to the original source of the story in *Inferno* 5. Included within the long list of visual artists who represented Francesca's tale are Auguste Rodin (*Le Baiser*), Eugène Delacroix (*Paolo et Francesca*), Dante Gabriel Rossetti (*Paolo and Francesca da Rimini*), and Antonio Canova (*Paolo et Francesca da Rimini*). One might also come to know the story through music, via works such as Rachmaninoff's opera *Francesca da Rimini*, or Tchaikovsky's, *Francesca da Rimini: Symphonic Poem*. Paolo and Francesca were strongly present as well in Anglophone literature (see Bugliani-Knox, 1997).

Whoever this “Italian poet from the thirteenth century” is—and there will almost certainly never be absolute proof in any direction—the final lines of this verse, speaking to the lively and present effect of the relatively ancient poet’s words, makes a noteworthy shift. The subjects in this first person narrative had previously been *she* and *me*, but then the words of the Italian poet are described in this way: “like it was written in my soul from *me* to *you*.” Dylan suddenly brings in the second person, as if speaking now as a poet himself, who has absorbed that Italian poet’s words and re-presented them to the song’s listeners—which very well may be precisely what he is doing.

This suggestive shift in person points toward Dylan’s awareness of literary diffusion—that is, the continual process of reception, absorption and continuation among generations of writers, concerning which T.S. Eliot has insightfully written (1932: 3-11). Indeed, in Dylan’s own way he has expressed his understanding and practice of precisely this aspect of cultural transmission in the act of songwriting: in his Nobel Lecture he said, describing his own experience: “You pick up the vernacular. You internalize it” (Dylan, 2017: 4). For the entirety of the next paragraph, he goes on to demonstrate this point—though never explaining he is doing it—by stringing together references to the lyrics of others’ songs, mostly traditional and unattributed. Together they compose this entirely unique, apparently stream-of-consciousness paragraph, the final composition most immediately calling to mind his book *Tarantula* (Dylan, 1971).





The songs I have been able to identify are in brackets after their respective references:

You know what it's all about. Takin' the pistol out and puttin' it back in your pocket. Whippin' your way through traffic, talkin' in the dark. You know that Stagger Lee was a bad man [Trad. American, "Stagger Lee"] and that Frankie was a good girl [Trad. American, "Frankie and Albert"]. You know that Washington is a bourgeois town [Lead Belly, "The Bourgeois Blues"] and you've heard the deep-pitched voice of John the Revelator [Trad. American, "John the Revelator"] and you saw the *Titanic* sink in a boggy creek [The Carter Family, "Titanic," and later Dylan, "Tempest"]. And you're pals with the wild Irish rover [Trad. Irish, "The Wild Rover"] and the wild colonial boy [Trad. Irish, "The Wild Colonial Boy"]. You heard the muffled drums and the fifes that played lowly [Trad. English, "The Unfortunate Rake," and later trad. American, "Streets of Laredo"]. You've seen the lusty Lord Donald stick a knife in his wife [Trad. English, "Matty Groves"] and a lot of your comrades have been wrapped in white linen [Trad. America, "The Streets of Laredo"] (Dylan 2017: 4-5).

Dylan recognized his own place within the process of literary production as both a reader (or listener) and a writer (or singer). Just as he demonstrated this in the above quoted paragraph from his Nobel Lecture so, in "Tangled up in Blue," via the subtle shift in person—from *she* and *me* to *me* and *you*—he implies a similar process. In his lyrics and beyond, he stands in dialogue with others' writings, on the one hand, and with his audience on the other. In light of the lyricist's own apparent awareness of his place within a particular literary genealogy, suggested by the lines of the very song that at least references someone within Dante's literary orbit, or that references Dante's very own work, I will briefly turn now to a broader discussion regarding the *diffused Dante* that reached Dylan.

Bob Dylan would have encountered many varieties of dantesque borrowings through his reading; numerous of Dylan's known sources of inspiration and unashamed appropriations were thoroughly influenced by the words of Dante, and some directly quoted him. Further, the Italian poet's influence upon the American literary tradition that led directly to Dylan's own time—a tradition within which he read deeply and of which he has now become an integral part—was quite profound.<sup>7</sup> But it is important to bear in mind Dylan's own words in his Nobel Lecture when considering these sources: "I've written all kinds of things into my songs, and I'm not going to worry about it" (Dylan, 2017: 22). In regards to the meaning of his songs, and the sources from which he drew language and ideas, he is fundamentally disinterested

7. See Cambon, 2010 for the influence of Dante on American literature in the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. Cambon wrote in the opening lines of his essay: "one could almost say that Dante has been to modern American poetry what Shakespeare was to Goethe and the German romantics: an awakener and a constant guide" (167).

in engaging with any sort of textual parsing. In this spirit, it seems better to speak of a less precisely-defined *diffusion* when considering alternative ways, through the words of other poets, that Dante came to generally influence Dylan's lyrics.<sup>8</sup>

In "Desolation Row," the hallucinogenic ballad and cultural collage that concludes his 1965 album *Highway 61 Revisited*, Dylan names, within a playful pair of lines, two poets who significantly influenced his thinking and writing: "Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot/ Fighting in the captain's tower" (Dylan, 2016: 183). To propose an interpretation, these two were indeed captains of early-to-mid twentieth century Anglophonic poetry with roots in the classical western languages of Latin and Greek, as well as in the romance languages, including Italian. It is a brilliant pairing that rather ironically juxtaposes an intimate antagonism ("fighting in the captain's tower") with an almost inseparable "composite identity" calling to mind Bonnie and Clyde, Romeo and Juliet, or Tristan and Isolde (Stillman, 2011: 241). But whatever the lines themselves mean, the influence of Pound and Eliot upon Dylan cannot be overstated, nor can the influence of Dante upon Pound and Eliot.

Regarding Dylan's lyrics, Allen Ginsburg commented: "I would venture to say [...] that there would have been no Bob Dylan without Ezra Pound" (Ginsburg, 2012). As for Pound's use of Dante, much can be said, but it suffices here to quote from James J. Wilhelm, who wrote that in the *Cantos* "Pound decided to write a poem that touches on the three Dantesque spheres, but without solidifying them into canticles" (Wilhelm, 2010: 296). This is not only an interpretation on Wilhelm's part; Pound said as much himself (1950: 239). Just as Ginsburg pondered the extent of Pound's influence on Dylan, one could also ponder Dante's influence on Pound, in turn leading one to wonder what Dylan would have been without Dante, however little he may have seriously read the Italian poet.

Eliot's influence on Dylan is similarly strong; lyrical resonances between the earlier quoted "Desolation Row" and the poetry of T.S. Eliot, most notably *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* and *The Waste Land*, are often cited as an especially strong proof of Eliot's influence on Dylan's lyrical work (Grey, 2008: 206-7). The influence of Dante on Eliot is abundantly evident in numerous of his essays, including one in which Eliot declares that Dante is "the

8. This is not at all to say that there is no reason for identifying specific passages of literature that are reshaped and reused by Dylan, when such identifications are possible. There do seem to be occasions when Dylan practically has the page of a book opened in front of him while writing certain lines. Richard Thomas points out a series of such resonances, beginning with the identification of an unquestionable citation in "Lonesome Day Blues" of the *Aeneid*, lines 6.851-6.853 (in Mandelbaum's translation), and moving well beyond that, identifying specific resonances with the likes of Twain and a relatively minor Japanese war novel (Thomas, 2007).

most *universal* of poets in the modern languages” (Eliot, 1932: 200). Dante’s influence is equally evident in Eliot’s poetry. To name two noteworthy instances in which Dante is directly quoted by T.S. Eliot within a poetic context, he opened *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* with two tercets from *Purgatorio* XXI (Eliot 1963: 3-7), and he dedicated *The Waste Land* to Ezra Pound with a quote from *Purgatorio* XXVI (Eliot 1963: 51-76).



Incidentally (or not), on “Theme Time Radio Hour,” a weekly radio show hosted by Dylan from 2006 to 2009, he once read from *The Waste Land*, a work that does not merely open with a citation of the *Commedia*, but which is steeped in dantesque language and imagery. Glauco Cambon noted, regarding both Pound and Eliot, that “Dante [...] presides over the literary exordium of each of these revolutionary exiles in search of a valid tradition, and he was to remain with them to the very end” (Cambon, 2010: 174). Through them, Dante would also influence Dylan, who has searched out his own compilation of traditions through the years.

One could go on to discuss the details of the links between Dante and Dylan via other American writers, such as Melville, Poe, Twain, and Longfellow, and via European writers that we know Dylan read, and who had also immersed themselves in the work of Dante, including Milton and Leopardi, but I hope that the fundamental point now sufficiently stands and does not require further belaboring—at least not for present purposes. Through his reading of others’ work, including that of Pound and Eliot, Dylan was also

drawing from the work of Dante—perhaps even more than he may consciously realize (or care to consider)—and thus this specific Italian poet made his mark within the sinews of this great American songwriter's lyrics.

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It is perfectly possible that the “Italian poet from the thirteenth century” is Dante. We can be quite confident that this poet born in the thirteenth century played a role, directly—and perhaps even more via diffusion—in shaping the lyrical work of Bob Dylan, who has incorporated many different voices from many different eras, all the while bridging a gap between the past and the present, as if the past “was written in my soul, from me to you.” As Dylan is now officially credited with innovative developments within the tradition of the great American songbook (however unnecessary that official declaration is for those who realized this long before such accolades), one may also give a nod to Dante's ever-present and ever-widening literary influence for playing some role in Dylan's creative process that involves the absorption and re-presentation of all manner of literary sources, many deeply rooted within cultural traditions that lead directly to the heart of this particular Italian poet's work, written in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. His words may have even been the very ones that “glowed like burning coals,” within Dylan's lyrics.

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