

INFERNO



INFERNO

DANTE ALIGHIERI

Translated into English Prose by

A . S . K L I N E

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I

1
*The dark wood and
the hill*



IN THE MIDDLE of the journey of our life, I came to myself, in a dark wood, where the direct way was lost. It is a hard thing to speak of, how wild, harsh and impenetrable that wood was, so that thinking of it recreates the fear. It is scarcely less bitter than death: but, in order to tell of the good that I found there, I must tell of the other things I saw there.

I cannot rightly say how I entered it. I was so full of sleep, at that point where I abandoned the true way. But when I reached the foot of a hill, where the valley, that had pierced my heart with fear, came to an end, I looked up and saw its shoulders brightened with the rays of that sun that leads men rightly on every road. Then the fear, that had settled in the lake of my heart, through the night that I had spent so miserably, became a little calmer. And as a man, who, with panting breath, has escaped from the deep sea to the shore, turns back towards the perilous waters and stares, so my mind, still fugitive, turned back to see that pass again, that no living person ever left.

After I had rested my tired body a while, I made my way again over empty ground, always bearing upwards to the right. And, behold, almost at the start of the slope, a light swift leopard with spotted coat. It would not turn from before my face, and so obstructed my path, that I often turned, in order to return.

The time was at the beginning of the morning, and the sun was mounting up with all those stars, that were with him when Divine Love first moved all delightful things, so that the hour of day, and the sweet season, gave me fair hopes of that creature with the bright pelt. But not so fair that I could avoid fear at the sight of a lion, that appeared, and seemed to come at me, with raised head and rabid hunger, so that it seemed the air itself was afraid; and a she-wolf that looked full of craving in its leanness, and, before now, has

CANTO I

made many men live in sadness. She brought me such heaviness of fear, from the aspect of her face, that I lost all hope of ascending. And as one who is eager for gain, weeps, and is afflicted in his thoughts, if the moment arrives when he loses, so that creature, without rest, made me like him: and coming at me, little by little, drove me back to where the sun is silent.

While I was returning to the depths, one appeared, in front of my eyes, who seemed hoarse from long silence. When I saw him, in the great emptiness, I cried out to him 'Have pity on me, whoever you are, whether a man, in truth, or a shadow!' He answered me: 'Not a man: but a man I once was, and my parents were Lombards, and both of them, by their native place, Mantuans.

I was born sub Julio though late, and lived in Rome, under the good Augustus, in the age of false, deceitful gods. I was a poet, and sang of Aeneas, that virtuous son of Anchises, who came from Troy when proud Ilium was burned. But you, why do you turn back towards such pain? Why do you not climb the delightful mountain, that is the origin and cause of all joy?'

I answered him, with a humble expression: 'Are you then that Virgil, and that fountain, that pours out so great a river of speech? O, glory and light to other poets, may that long study, and the great love, that made me scan your work, be worth something now. You are my master, and my author: you alone are the one from whom I learnt the high style that has brought me honour. See the creature that I turned back from: O, sage, famous in wisdom, save me from her, she that makes my veins and my pulse tremble.'

When he saw me weeping, he answered: 'You must go another road, if you wish to escape this savage place. This creature, that distresses you, allows no man to cross her path, but obstructs him, to destroy him, and she has so vicious and perverse a nature, that she never sates her greedy appetite, and after food is hungrier than before.'

'Many are the creatures she mates with, and there will be many more, until the Greyhound comes who will make her die in pain. He will not feed himself on land or wealth, but on wisdom, love and virtue, and his birthplace will lie between Feltro and Feltro. He will be the salvation of that lower Italy for which virgin Camilla died of wounds, and Euryalus, Turnus, and Nisus. He will chase the she-wolf through every city, until he has returned her to

61
Dante meets Virgil

100
*The salvation
of Italy*

INFERNO

Hell, from which envy first loosed her.'

112

*Virgil will be his
guide through Hell*

☞ 'It is best, as I think and understand, for you to follow me, and I will be your guide, and lead you from here through an eternal space where you will hear the desperate shouts, will see the ancient spirits in pain, so that each one cries out for a second death: and then you will see others at peace in the flames, because they hope to come, whenever it may be, among the blessed. Then if you desire to climb to them, there will be a spirit, fitter than I am, to guide you, and I will leave you with her, when we part, since the Lord, who rules above, does not wish me to enter his city, because I was rebellious to his law.

He is lord everywhere, but there he rules, and there is his city, and his high throne: O, happy is he, whom he chooses to go there!'

And I to him: 'Poet, I beg you, by the God, you did not acknowledge, lead me where you said, so that I might escape this evil or worse, and see the Gate of St. Peter, and those whom you make out to be so saddened.'

Then he moved: and I moved on behind him.

CANTO II

II

THE DAY WAS GOING, and the dusky air was freeing the creatures of the earth, from their labours, and I, one, alone, prepared myself to endure the inner war, of the journey and its pity, that the mind, without error, shall recall.

O Muses, O high invention, aid me, now! O memory, that has engraved what I saw, here your nobility will be shown.

I began: 'Poet, who guides me, examine my virtue, see if I am fitting, before you trust me to the steep way. You say that Aeneas, the father of Sylvius, while still corruptible flesh, went to the eternal world, and in his senses. But if God, who opposes every evil, was gracious to him, thinking of the noble consequence, of who and what should derive from him, then that does not seem unreasonable to a man of intellect, since he was chosen to be the father of benign Rome, and of her empire. Both of them were founded as a sacred place, where the successor of the great Peter is enthroned. By that journey, by which you graced him, Aeneas learned things that were the source of his victory and of the Papal Mantle. Afterwards Paul, the Chosen Vessel, went there, to bring confirmation of the faith that is the entrance to the way of salvation.

But why should I go there? Who allows it? I am not Aeneas: I am not Paul. Neither I, nor others, think me worthy of it. So, if I resign myself to going, I fear that going there may prove foolish: you know, and understand, better than I can say.' And I rendered myself, on that dark shore, like one who unwishes what he wished, and changes his purpose, in new thinking, so that he leaves off what he began, completely, since in thought I consumed action, that had been so ready to begin.

The ghost of the generous poet replied: 'If I have understood your words correctly, your spirit is attacked by cowardly fear, that often weighs men

1
*Dante's doubts
as to his fitness
for the journey*

43
*Virgil explains his
mission: Beatrice*

INFERNO

down, so that it deflects them from honourable action, like a creature seeing phantoms in the dusk. That you may shake off this dread yourself, I will tell you why I came, and what I heard at the first moment when I took pity on you.

I was among those, in Limbo, in suspense, and a lady called to me, she so beautiful, so blessed, that I begged her to command me. Her eyes shone more brightly than the stars, and she began to speak, gently, quietly, in an angelic voice, in her language: ‘O noble Mantuan spirit, whose fame still endures in the world, and will endure as long as time endures, my friend, not fortune’s friend, is so obstructed in his way, along the desert strand, that he turns back in terror, and I fear he is already so far lost, that I have started too late to his aid, from what I heard of him in heaven. Now go, and help him so, with your eloquence, and with whatever is needed for his relief, that I may be comforted. I am Beatrice, who asks you to go: I come from a place I long to return to: love moved me that made me speak. When I am before my Lord, I will often praise you to him.’

Then she was silent, and I began: ‘O lady of virtue, in whom, alone, humanity exceeds all that is contained in the lunar heaven, which has the smallest sphere, your command is so pleasing to me, that, obeying, were it done already, it were done too slow: you have no need to explain your wishes further. But tell me why you do not hesitate to descend here, to this centre below, from the wide space you burn to return to.’

She replied: ‘Since you wish to know, I will tell you this much, briefly, of why I do not fear to enter here. Those things that have the power to hurt are to be feared: not those other things that are not fearful. I am made such, by God’s grace, that your suffering does not touch me, nor does the fire of this burning scorch me.’

☞ “There is a gentle lady in heaven, who has such compassion, for this trouble I send you to relieve, that she overrules the strict laws on high. She called Lucia, to carry out her request, and said: “Now, he who is faithful to you, needs you, and I commend him to you.” Lucia, who is opposed to all cruelty, rose and came to the place where I was, where I sat with that Rachel of antiquity. Lucia said: “Beatrice, God’s true praise, why do you not help him, who loved you, so intensely, he left behind the common crowd for you? Do

CANTO II

you not hear how pitiful his grief is? Do you not see the spiritual death that comes to meet him, on that dark river, over which the sea has no power?"

No one on earth was ever as quick to search for their good, or run from harm, as I to descend, from my blessed place, after these words were spoken, and place my faith in your true speech, that honours you and those who hear it.' She turned away, with tears in her bright eyes, after saying this to me, and made me, by that, come here all the quicker: and so I came to you, as she wished, and rescued you in the face of that wild creature, that denied you the shortest path to the lovely mountain.'

'What is it then? Why, do you hold back? Why? Why let such cowardly fear into your heart? Why, when three such blessed ladies, in the courts of heaven, care for you, and my words promise you so much good, are you not free and ardent?'

As the flowers, bent down and closed, by the night's cold, erect themselves, all open, on their stems, when the sun shines on them, so I rose from weakened courage: and so fine an ardour coursed through my heart, that I began to speak, like one who is freed: 'O she, who pities, who helps me, and you, so gentle, who swiftly obeyed the true words she commanded, you have filled my heart with such desire, by what you have said, to go forward, that I have turned back to my first purpose.

Go now, for the two of us have but one will, you, the guide, the lord, the master.' So I spoke to him, and he going on, I entered on the steep, tree-shadowed, way.

121
*Virgil strengthens
Dante's will*

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THE GATE OF HELL

THROUGH ME THE WAY
TO THE INFERNAL CITY:
THROUGH ME THE WAY
TO ETERNAL SADNESS:
THROUGH ME THE WAY
TO THE LOST PEOPLE.
JUSTICE MOVED MY
SUPREME MAKER:
I WAS SHAPED
BY DIVINE POWER,
BY HIGHEST WISDOM,
AND BY PRIMAL LOVE.
BEFORE ME,
NOTHING WAS CREATED,
THAT IS NOT ETERNAL:
AND ETERNAL I ENDURE.
FORSAKE ALL HOPE,
ALL YOU THAT ENTER HERE.

CANTO III

III

THESE WERE THE WORDS, with their dark colour, that I saw written above the gate, at which I said: ‘Master, their meaning, to me, is hard.’ And he replied to me, as one who knows: ‘Here, all uncertainty must be left behind: all cowardice must be dead. We have come to the place where I told you that you would see the sad people who have lost the good of the intellect.’ And placing his hand on mine, with a calm expression, that comforted me, he led me towards the hidden things.

Here sighs, complaints, and deep groans, sounded through the starless air, so that it made me weep at first. Many tongues, a terrible crying, words of sadness, accents of anger, voices deep and hoarse, with sounds of hands amongst them, making a turbulence that turns forever, in that air, stained, eternally, like sand spiralling in a whirlwind. And I, my head surrounded by the horror, said: ‘Master, what is this I hear, and what race are these, that seem so overcome by suffering?’

And he to me: ‘This is the miserable mode in which those exist, who lived without praise, without blame. They are mixed in with the despised choir of angels, those not rebellious, not faithful to God, but for themselves. Heaven drove them out, to maintain its beauty, and deep Hell does not accept them, lest the evil have glory over them.’ And I: ‘Master, what is so heavy on them, that makes them moan so deeply?’ He replied: ‘I will tell you, briefly. They have no hope of death, and their darkened life is so mean that they are envious of every other fate. Earth allows no mention of them to exist: mercy and justice reject them: let us not talk of them, but look and pass.’

And I, who looked back, saw a banner, that twirling round, moved so quickly, that it seemed to me scornful of any pause, and behind it came so long a line of people, I never would have believed that death had undone so many.

22
The spiritually neutral

INFERNO

58 ☞ When I had recognised some among them, I saw and knew the shade
Their punishment of him who from cowardice made 'the great refusal'. Immediately I understood that this was the despicable crew, hateful to God and his enemies. These wretches, who never truly lived, were naked, and goaded viciously by hornets, and wasps, there, making their faces stream with blood, that, mixed with tears, was collected, at their feet, by loathsome worms.

90 ☞ And then, as I looked onwards, I saw people on the bank of a great river,
Charon, the ferryman of the Acheron at which I said: 'Master, now let me understand who these are, and what custom makes them so ready to cross over, as I can see by the dim light.' And he to me: 'The thing will be told you, when we halt our steps, on the sad strand of Acheron.' Then, fearing that my words might have offended him, I stopped myself from speaking, with eyes ashamed and downcast, till we had reached the flood.

And see, an old man, with white hoary locks, came towards us in a boat, shouting: 'Woe to you, wicked spirits! Never hope to see heaven: I come to carry you to the other shore, into eternal darkness, into fire and ice. And you, who are there, a living spirit, depart from those who are dead.'

But when he saw that I did not depart, he said: 'By other ways, by other means of passage, you will cross to the shore: a quicker boat must carry you.' And my guide said to him: 'Charon, do not vex yourself: it is willed there, where what is willed is done: ask no more.' Then the bearded mouth, of the ferryman of the livid marsh, who had wheels of flame round his eyes, was stilled.

100 ☞ But those spirits, who were naked and weary, altered colour, and gnashed
The souls by the Shore of Acheron their teeth, when they heard his former, cruel words. They blasphemed against God, and their parents, the human species, the place, time, and seed of their conception, and of their birth. Then, all together, weeping bitterly, they neared the cursed shore that waits for every one who has no fear of God.

Charon, the demon, with eyes of burning coal, beckoning, gathers them all: and strikes with his oar whoever lingers. As the autumn leaves fall, one after another, till the branches see all their spoilage on the ground, so, one by one, the evil seed of Adam, threw themselves down from the bank when signalled, like the falcon at its call. So they vanish on the dark water, and before they have landed over there, over here a fresh crowd collects.

CANTO III

The courteous Master said: 'My son, those who die subject to God's anger, all gather here, from every country, and they are quick to cross the river, since divine justice goads them on, so that their fear is turned to desire. This way no good spirit ever passes, and so if Charon complains at you, you can well understand, now, the meaning of his words.

When he had ended, the gloomy ground trembled so violently, that the memory of my terror still drenches me with sweat. The weeping earth gave vent, and flashed with crimson light, overpowering all my senses, and I fell, like a man overcome by sleep.

INFERNO

IV

1
*The first circle:
Limbo
The heathens*

A HEAVY THUNDER shattered the deep sleep in my head, so that I came to myself, like someone woken by force, and standing up, I moved my eyes, now refreshed, and looked round, steadily, to find out what place I was in. I found myself, in truth, on the brink of the valley of the sad abyss that gathers the thunder of an infinite howling. It was so dark, and deep, and clouded, that I could see nothing by staring into its depths.

The poet, white of face, began: 'Now, let us descend into the blind world below: I will go first, and you go second.' And I, who saw his altered colour, said: 'How can I go on, if you are afraid, who are my comfort when I hesitate?' And he to me: 'The anguish of the people, here below, brings that look of pity to my face, that you mistake for fear. Let us go, for the length of our journey demands it.' So he entered, and so he made me enter, into the first circle that surrounds the abyss.

Here there was no sound to be heard, except the sighing, that made the eternal air tremble, and it came from the sorrow of the vast and varied crowds of children, of women, and of men, free of torment. The good Master said to me: 'You do not demand to know who these spirits are that you see. I want you to learn, before you go further, that they had no sin, yet, though they have worth, it is not sufficient, because they were not baptised, and baptism is the gateway to the faith that you believe in. Since they lived before Christianity, they did not worship God correctly, and I myself am one of them. For this defect, and for no other fault, we are lost, and we are only tormented, in that without hope we live in desire.'

When I heard this, great sadness gripped my heart, because I knew of people of great value, who must be suspended in that Limbo. Wishing to be certain in that faith that overcomes every error, I began: 'Tell me my

CANTO IV

Master, tell me, sir, did anyone ever go from here, through his own merit or because of others' merit, who afterwards was blessed?

And he, understanding my veiled question, replied: 'I was new to this state, when I saw a great one come here crowned with the sign of victory. He took from us the shade of Adam, our first parent, of his son Abel, and that of Noah, of Moses the lawgiver, and Abraham, the obedient Patriarch, King David, Jacob with his father Isaac, and his children, and Rachel, for whom he laboured so long, and many others, and made them blessed, and I wish you to know that no human souls were saved before these.'

We did not cease moving, though he was speaking, but passed the wood meanwhile, the wood, I say, of crowded spirits. We had not gone far from where I slept, when I saw a flame that overcame a hemisphere of shadows. We were still some way from it, but not so far that I failed to discern in part what noble people occupied that place.

'O you, who value every science and art, who are these, who have such honour that they stand apart from all the rest?' And he to me: 'Their fame, that sounds out for them, honoured in that life of yours, brings them heaven's grace that advances them.' Meanwhile I heard a voice: 'Honour the great poet: his departed shade returns.'

After the voice had paused, and was quiet, I saw four great shadows come towards us, with faces that were neither sad nor happy. The good Master began to speak: 'Take note of him, with a sword in hand, who comes in front of the other three, as if he were their lord: that is Homer, the sovereign poet: next Horace the satirist: Ovid is the third, and last is Lucan. Because each is worthy, with me, of that name the one voice sounded, they do me honour, and, in doing so, do good.'

So I saw gathered together the noble school, of the lord of highest song, who soars, like an eagle, above the rest. After they had talked for a while amongst themselves, they turned towards me with a sign of greeting, at which my Master smiled. And they honoured me further still, since they made me one of their company, so that I made a sixth among the wise.

So we went onwards to the light, speaking of things about which it is best to be silent, just as it was best to speak of them, where I was.

64
The Great Poets

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106
*The heroes and
heroines*

☞ We came to the base of a noble castle; surrounded seven times by a high wall; defended by a beautiful, encircling, stream. This we crossed as if it were solid earth: I entered through seven gates, with the wise: we reached a meadow of fresh turf. The people there were of great authority in appearance, with calm, and serious looks, speaking seldom, and then with soft voices. We moved to one side, into an open space, bright and high, so that every one, of them all, could be seen. There, on the green enamel, the great spirits were pointed out to me, directly, so that I feel exalted, inside me, at having seen them.

I saw Electra with many others, amongst whom I knew Hector, Aeneas and Caesar, armed, with his eagle eye. I saw Camilla and Penthesilea, on the other side, and the King of Latium, Latinus, with Lavinia his daughter. I saw that Brutus who expelled Tarquin, Lucretia, Julia, Marcia, and Cornelia, and I saw Saladin, by himself, apart.

130
*The philosophers and
other great spirits*

☞ When I lifted my eyes a little higher, I saw the Master of those who know, Aristotle, sitting amongst the company of philosophers. All gaze at him: all show him honour. There I saw Socrates, and Plato, who stand nearest to him of all of them; Democritus, who ascribes the world to chance, Diogenes, Anaxagoras, and Thales; Empedocles, Heraclitus, and Zeno; and I saw the good collector of the qualities of plants, I mean Dioscorides: and saw Orpheus, Cicero, Linus, and Seneca the moralist; Euclid the geometer, and Ptolemaeus; Hippocrates, Avicenna, and Galen; and Averrhoës, who wrote the vast commentary.

I cannot speak of them all in full, because the great theme drives me on, so that the word falls, many times, short of the fact. The six companions reduce to two: the wise guide leads me, by another path, out of the quiet, into the trembling air, and I come to a region, where nothing shines.

CANTO V

V

S O I DESCENDED from the first circle to the second, that encloses a smaller space, and so much more pain it provokes howling. There Minos stands, grinning horribly, examines the crimes on entrance, judges, and sends the guilty down as far as is signified by his coils: I mean that when the evil-born spirit comes before him, it confesses everything, and that knower of sins decides the proper place in hell for it, and makes as many coils with his tail, as the circles he will force it descend. A multitude always stand before him, and go in turn to be judged, speak and hear, and then are whirled downwards.

When Minos saw me, passing by the actions of his great office, he said: 'O you, who come to the house of pain, take care how you enter, and in whom you trust, do not let the width of the entrance deceive you.' And my guide replied: 'Why do you cry out? Do not obstruct his destined journey: so it is willed, where what is willed is done: demand no more.' Now the mournful notes begin to reach me: now I come where much sorrowing hurts me.

I came to a place devoid of light, that moans like a tempestuous sea, when it is buffeted by warring winds. The hellish storm that never ceases drives the spirits with its force, and, whirling and striking, it molests them. When they come to the ruins there are shouts, moaning and crying, where they blaspheme against divine power. I learnt that the carnal sinners are condemned to these torments, they who subject their reason to their lust.

And, as their wings carry the starlings, in a vast, crowded flock, in the cold season, so that wind carries the wicked spirits, and leads them here and there, and up and down. No hope of rest, or even lesser torment, comforts them. And as the cranes go, making their sounds, forming a long flight, of themselves, in the air, so I saw the shadows come, moaning, carried by that war of winds, at which I said: 'Master, who are these people, that the black air chastises so?'

I
The second circle:
Minors
The carnal sinners

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52

*Virgil names the
sinners*

☞ He replied: ‘The first, of those you wish to know of, was Empress of many languages, so corrupted by the vice of luxury, that she made licence lawful in her code, to clear away the guilt she had incurred. She is Semiramis, of whom we read, that she succeeded Ninus, and was his wife: she held the countries that the Sultan rules.

The next is Dido who killed herself for love, and broke faith with Sichaeus’s ashes: then comes licentious Cleopatra. See Helen, for whom, so long, the mills of war revolved: and see the great Achilles, who fought in the end with love, of Polyxena. See Paris ; Tristan ; and he pointed out more than a thousand shadows with his finger, naming, for me, those whom love had severed from life.

70

Paolo and Francesca

☞ After I had heard my teacher name the ancient knights and ladies, pity overcame me, and I was as if dazed. I began: ‘Poet, I would speak, willingly, to those two who go together, and seem so light upon the wind.’ And he to me: ‘You will see, when they are nearer to us, you can beg them, then, by the love that leads them, and they will come.’

As soon as the wind brought them to us, I raised my voice: ‘O weary souls, come and talk with us, if no one prevents it.’ As doves, claimed by desire, fly steadily, with raised wings, through the air, to their sweet nest, carried by the will, so the spirits flew from the crowd where Dido is, coming towards us through malignant air, such was the power of my affecting call.

‘O gracious and benign living creature, that comes to visit us, through the dark air, if the universe’s king were our friend, we, who tainted the earth with blood, would beg him to give you peace, since you take pity on our sad misfortune. While the wind, as now, is silent, we will hear you and speak to you, of what you are pleased to listen to and talk of.

The place where I was born is by the shore, where the River Po runs down to rest at peace, with his attendant streams. Love, that is quickly caught in the gentle heart, filled him with my fair form, now lost to me, and the nature of that love still afflicts me. Love, that allows no loved one to be excused from loving, seized me so fiercely with desire for him it still will not leave me, as you can see. Love led us to one death. Caina, in the ninth circle waits, for him who quenched our life.’

CANTO V

These words carried to us, from them. After I had heard those troubled spirits, I bowed my head, and kept it bowed, until the poet said: 'What are you thinking?' When I replied, I began: 'O, alas, what sweet thoughts, what longing, brought them to this sorrowful state?' Then I turned to them again, and I spoke, and said: 'Francesca, your torment makes me weep with grief and pity. But tell me, in that time of sweet sighs, how did love allow you to know these dubious desires?'

And she to me: 'There is no greater pain, than to remember happy times in misery, and this your teacher knows. But if you have so great a yearning to understand the first root of our love, I will be like one who weeps and tells. We read, one day, to our delight, of Lancelot and how love constrained him: we were alone and without suspicion. Often those words urged our eyes to meet, and coloured our cheeks, but it was a single moment that undid us. When we read how that lover kissed the beloved smile, he who will never be separated from me, kissed my mouth all trembling. That book was a Galeotto, a pandar, and he who wrote it: that day we read no more.'

While the one spirit spoke, the other wept, so that I fainted out of pity, and, as if I were dying, fell, as a dead body falls.

INFERNO

VI

1
*The third circle:
Cerberus
The gluttonous*

☞ **WHEN MY SENSES** return, that closed themselves off from pity of those two kindred, who stunned me with complete sadness, I see around me new torments, and new tormented souls, wherever I move, or turn, and wherever I gaze. I am in the third circle, of eternal, accursed, cold and heavy rain: its kind and quality is never new. Large hail, tainted water, and sleet, pour down through the shadowy air: and the earth is putrid that receives it.

Cerberus, the fierce and strange monster, triple-throated, barks dog-like over the people submerged in it. His eyes are crimson, his beard is foul and black, his belly vast, and his limbs are clawed: he snatches the spirits, flays, and quarters them. The rain makes them howl like dogs: they protect one flank with the other: often writhing: miserable wretches.

When Cerberus, the great worm, saw us, he opened his jaws, and showed his fangs: not a limb of his stayed still. My guide, stretching out his hands, grasped earth, and hurled it in fistfuls into his ravening mouth. Like a dog that whines for food, and grows quiet when he eats it, only fighting and struggling to devour it, so did demon Cerberus's loathsome muzzles that bark, like thunder, at the spirits, so that they wish that they were deaf.

34
Ciacco, the glutton

☞ We passed over the shades, that the heavy rain subdues, and placed our feet on each empty space that seems a body. They were all lying on the ground but one, who sat up straight away when he saw us cross in front of him: He said to me: 'O you, who are led through this Inferno, recognise me if you can: you were made before I was unmade.' And I to him: 'The anguish that you suffer, conceals you perhaps from my memory, so that it seems as if I never knew you. But tell me who you are, that are lodged so sadly, and undergo such punishment, that though there are others greater, none is so unpleasant.'

CANTO VI

And he to me: 'Your city, Florence, that is so full of envy it overflows, held me in the clear life. You, the citizens, called me Ciaccio : and for the damnable sin of gluttony, as you see, I languish beneath the rain: and I am not the only wretched spirit, since all these are punished likewise for like sin. I answered him: 'Ciaccio, your affliction weighs on me, inviting me to weep, but tell me, if you can, what the citizens of that divided city will come to; if any there are just: and the reason why such discord tears it apart.'

And he to me: 'After long struggle, they will come to blood, and, the Whites, the party of the woods, will throw out the Blacks, with great injury. Within three years, then, it must happen, that the Blacks will conquer, with the help of him, who now veers about. That party will hold its head high for a long time, weighing the Whites down, under heavy oppression, however they weep and however ashamed they are. Two men are just, but are not listened to. Pride, Envy and Avarice are the three burning coals that have set all hearts on fire.'

64
*Ciaccio's prophecy
concerning florence*

Here he ended the mournful prophecy, and I said to him: I want you to instruct me still, and grant me a little more speech. Tell me where Farinata and Tegghiaio are, who were worthy enough, and Jacopo Rusticucci, Arrigo, Mosca, and the rest who set their minds to doing good: let me know of them, for a great longing urges me to discover whether Heaven soothes them, or Hell poisons them.'

And he to me: 'They are among the blackest spirits, another crime weighs them to the bottom: if you descend so deep, you may see them. But when you are, again, in the sweet world, I beg you to recall me to other minds: I tell you no more, and more I will not answer.' At that he turned his fixed gaze askance, and looked at me a while: then, bent his head, and lowered himself, and it, among his blind companions.

And my guide said to me: 'He will not stir further, until the angelic trumpet sounds, when the Power opposing evil will come: each will revisit his sad grave, resume his flesh and form, and hear what will resound through eternity.' So we passed over the foul brew of rain and shadows, with slow steps, speaking a little of the future life.

94
*Virgil speaks of the
Day of Judgement*

INFERNO

Of this I asked: 'Master, will these torments increase, after the great judgement, or lessen, or stay as fierce?' And he to me: 'Remember your science, that says, that the more perfect a thing is, the more it feels pleasure and pain. Though these accursed ones will never achieve true perfection, they will be nearer to it after, than before.'

We circled along that road, speaking of much more than I repeat: we came to the place where the descent begins, where we found Plutus, the god of wealth, the great enemy.

CANTO VII

VII



PAPE SATAN, PAPE Satan alleppe,' Plutus, began to croak, and the gentle sage, who understood all things, comforted me, saying: 'Do not let fear hurt you, since whatever power he has, he will not prevent you descending this rock.' Then he turned to that swollen face and said: 'Peace, evil wolf! Devour yourself inside, in your rage. Our journey to the depths is not without reason: it is willed on high, there where Michael made war on the great dragon's adulterating pride.'

Like a sail, bellying in the wind, that falls, in a heap, if the mast breaks, so that cruel creature fell to earth. In that way we descended into the fourth circle, taking in a greater width of the dismal bank, that encloses every evil of the universe.

O Divine Justice! Who can tell the many new pains and troubles, that I saw, and why our guilt so destroys us? As the wave, over Charybdis, strikes against the wave it counters, so the people here are made to dance. I found more people here than elsewhere, on the one side and on the other, rolling weights by pushing with their chests, with loud howling. They struck against each other, and then each wheeled around where they were, rolling the reverse way, shouting: 'Why do you hold?' and 'Why do you throw away.'

So they returned along the gloomy circle, from either side to the opposite point, shouting again their measure of reproach. Then each one, when he had reached it, wheeled through his half circle onto the other track. And I, who felt as if my heart were pierced, said: 'My Master, show me now who these people are: and whether all those, with tonsures, on our left were churchmen.'

And he to me: 'They were so twisted in mind in their first life, that they made no balanced expenditure. Their voices bark this out most clearly when they come to the two ends of the circle, where opposing sins divide them.'

1
*The fourth circle:
Plutus
The avaricious*

40
*The avaricious and
prodigal Churchmen*

INFERNO

These were priests, that are without hair on their heads, and Popes and Cardinals, in whom avarice does its worst. And I: 'Master, surely, amongst this crowd, I ought to recognise some of those tainted with these evils.' And he to me: 'You link idle thoughts: the life without knowledge, that made them ignoble, now makes them incapable of being known. They will go butting each other to eternity: and these will rise from their graves with grasping fists, and those with shorn hair.'

Useless giving, and useless keeping, has robbed them of the bright world, and set them to this struggle: what struggle it is, I do not amplify. But you, my son, can see now the vain mockery of the wealth =controlled by Fortune, for which the human race fight with each other, since all the gold under the moon, that ever was, could not give peace to one of these weary souls.'

67
*Virgil speaks about
fortune*

☞ I said to him: 'Master, now tell me about Fortune also, that subject you touched on, who is she, who has the wealth of the world in her arms?' And he to me: 'O, blind creatures, how great is the ignorance that surrounds you! I want you, now, to hear my judgement of her.'

He whose wisdom transcends all things, made the heavens, and gave them ruling powers, so that each part illuminates the others, distributing the light equally. Similarly he put in place a controller, and a guide, for earthly splendour, to alter, from time to time, idle possession, between nation and nation, and from kin to kin, beyond the schemes of human reason. So one people commands: another wanes, obeying her judgement, she who is concealed, like a snake in the grass.

Your wisdom cannot comprehend her: she furnishes, adjudicates, and maintains her kingdom, as the other gods do theirs. Her permutations never end: necessity makes her swift: so, often, someone comes who creates change. This is she: so often reviled, even by those who ought to praise her, but, wrongly, blame her, with malicious words. Still, she is in bliss, and does not hear: she spins her globe, joyfully, among the other primal spirits, and tastes her bliss.

Now let us descend to greater misery: already every star is declining, that was rising when I set out, and we are not allowed to stay too long.'

CANTO VI

We crossed the circle to the other bank, near a spring, that boils and pours down, through a gap that it has made. The water was darker than a dark blue-grey, and we entered the descent by a strange path, in company with the dusky waves. This woeful stream forms the marsh called Styx, when it has fallen to the foot of the grey malignant walls. And I who stood there, intent on seeing, saw muddy people in the fen, naked, and all with the look of anger. They were striking each other, not only with hands, but head, chest, and feet, mangling each other with their teeth, bite by bite.

100
*The styx: they view
the fifth circle*

The kind Master said: 'Now, son, see the souls of those overcome by anger, and also, I want you to know, in truth, there are people under the water, who sigh, and make it bubble on the surface, as your eye can see whichever way it turns. Fixed in the slime they say: "We were sullen in the sweet air, that is gladdened by the sun, bearing indolent smoke in our hearts: now we lie here, sullen, in the black mire." This measure they gurgle in their throats, because they cannot utter it in full speech.'

So we covered a large arc of the loathsome swamp, between the dry bank and its core, our eyes turned towards those who swallow its filth: we came at last to the base of a tower.

VIII

1
*The fifth circle:
 Phlegyas
 The wrathful*

☞ **T**SAY, PURSUING my theme, that, long before we reached the base of the high tower, our eyes looked upwards to its summit, because we saw two beacon-flames set there, and another, from so far away that the eye could scarcely see it, gave a signal in return. And I turned to the fount of all knowledge, and asked: ‘What does it say? And what does the other light reply? And who has made the signal?’ And he to me: ‘Already you can see, what is expected, coming over the foul waters, if the marsh vapours do not hide it from you.’

No bowstring ever shot an arrow that flew through the air so quickly, as the little boat, that I saw coming towards us, through the waves, under the control of a single steersman, who cried: ‘Are you here, now, fierce spirit?’ My Master said: ‘Phlegyas, Phlegyas, this time you cry in vain: you shall not keep us longer than it takes us to pass the marsh.’

Phlegyas in his growing anger, was like someone who listens to some great wrong done him, and then fills with resentment. My guide climbed down into the boat, and then made me board after him, and it only sank in the water when I was in. As soon as my guide and I were in the craft, its prow went forward, ploughing deeper through the water than it does carrying others.

31
*They meet
 Filippo Argenti*

☞ While we were running through the dead channel, one rose up in front of me, covered with mud, and said: ‘Who are you, that come before your time?’ And I to him: ‘If I come, I do not stay here: but who are you, who are so mired?’ He answered: ‘You see that I am one who weeps.’ And I to him: ‘Cursed spirit, remain weeping and in sorrow! For I know you, muddy as you are.’

Then he stretched both hands out to the boat, at which the cautious Master pushed him off, saying: ‘Away, there, with the other dogs!’ Then he put his arms around my neck, kissed my face, and said: ‘Blessed be she who bore you, soul, who are rightly indignant. He was an arrogant spirit in your

CANTO VIII

world: there is nothing good with which to adorn his memory: so, his furious shade is here. How many up there think themselves mighty kings, that will lie here like pigs in mire, leaving behind them dire condemnation!

And I: 'Master, I would be glad to see him doused in this swill before we quit the lake'. And he to me: 'You will be satisfied, before the shore is visible to you: it is right that your wish should be gratified.' Not long after this I saw the muddy people make such a rending of him, that I still give God thanks and praise for it. All shouted: 'At Filippo Argenti!' That fierce Florentine spirit turned his teeth in vengeance on himself.

We left him there, so that I can say no more of him, but a sound of wailing assailed my ears, so that I turned my gaze in front, intently. The kind Master said: 'Now, my son, we approach the city they call Dis, with its grave citizens, a vast crowd.' And I: 'Master, I can already see its towers, clearly there in the valley, glowing red, as if they issued from the fire.' And he to me: 'The eternal fire, that burns them from within, makes them appear reddened, as you see, in this deep Hell.'

64
*They approach the
city of Dis*

We now arrived in the steep ditch, that forms the moat to the joyless city: the walls seemed to me as if they were made of iron. Not until we had made a wide circuit, did we reach a place where the ferryman said to us: 'Disembark: here is the entrance.'

I saw more than a thousand of those angels, that fell from Heaven like rain, above the gates, who cried angrily: 'Who is this, that, without death goes through the kingdom of the dead?' And my wise Master made a sign to them, of wishing to speak in private. Then they furred their great disdain, and said: 'Come on, alone, and let him go, who enters this kingdom with such audacity. Let him return, alone, on his foolish road: see if he can: and you, remain, who have escorted him, through so dark a land.'

82
*The fallen Angels
obstruct them*

Think, Reader, whether I was not disheartened at the sound of those accursed words, not believing I could ever return here. I said: 'O my dear guide, who has ensured my safety more than the seven times, and snatched me from certain danger that faced me, do not leave me, so helpless: and if we are prevented from going on, let us quickly retrace our steps.' And that lord, who had led me there, said to me: 'Have no fear: since no one

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can deny us passage: it was given us by so great an authority. But you, wait for me, and comfort and nourish your spirit with fresh hope, for I will not abandon you in the lower world.'

So the gentle father goes, and leaves me there, and I am left in doubt: since 'yes' and 'no' war inside my head. I could not hear what terms he offered them, but he had not been standing there long with them, when, each vying with the other, they rushed back. Our adversaries closed the gate in my lord's face, leaving him outside, and he turned to me again with slow steps. His eyes were on the ground, and his expression devoid of all daring, and he said, sighing: 'Who are these who deny me entrance to the house of pain?' And to me he said: 'Though I am angered, do not you be dismayed: I will win the trial, whatever obstacle those inside contrive. This insolence of theirs is nothing new, for they displayed it once before, at that less secret gate we passed, that has remained unbarred. Over it you saw the fatal writing, and already on this side of its entrance, one is coming, down the steep, passing the circles unescorted, one for whom the city shall open to us.'

CANTO IX

IX

THE COLOR THAT COWARDICE had printed on my face, seeing my guide turn back, made him repress his own heightened colour more swiftly. He stopped, attentive, like one who listens, since his eyes could not penetrate far, through the black air and the thick fog. ‘Nevertheless we must win this struggle,’ he began, ‘if not ... then help such as this was offered to us. Oh, how long it seems to me, that other’s coming!’ I saw clearly, how he hid the meaning of his opening words with their sequel, words differing from his initial thought. None the less his speech made me afraid, perhaps because I took his broken phrases to hold a worse meaning than they did.

‘Do any of those whose only punishment is deprivation of hope, ever descend, into the depths of this sad chasm, from the first circle?’ I asked this question, and he answered me: ‘It rarely happens, that any of us make the journey that I go on. It is true that I was down here, once before, conjured to do so by that fierce sorceress Erichtho, who recalled spirits to their corpses. My flesh had only been stripped from me a while when she forced me to enter inside that wall, to bring a spirit out of the circle of Judas. That is the deepest place, and the darkest, and the furthest from that Heaven that surrounds all things: I know the way well: so be reassured. This marsh, that breathes its foul stench, circles the woeful city round about, where we also cannot enter now without anger.’

And he said more that I do not remember, because my eyes had been drawn to the high tower, with the glowing crest, where, in an instant, three hellish Furies, stained with blood, had risen, that had the limbs and aspects of women, covered with a tangle of green hydras, their hideous foreheads bound with little adders, and horned vipers. And Virgil, who knew the handmaids of the queen of eternal sadness well, said to me: ‘See, the fierce Erinyes.’

1
Dante asks about precedents

34
The furies (conscience) and Medusa (obduracy)

INFERNO

That is Megaera on the left: the one that weeps, on the right, is Alecto: Tisiphone is in the middle.’: then he was silent. Each one was tearing at her breast with her claws, beating with her hands, and crying out so loudly, that I pressed close to the poet, out of fear. ‘Let Medusa come,’ they all said, looking down on us, ‘so that we can turn him to stone: we did not fully revenge Theseus’s attack.’

‘Turn your back.’ said the Master, and he himself turned me round. ‘Keep your eyes closed, since there will be no return upwards, if she were to show herself, and you were to see her.’ Not leaving it to me, he covered them, also, with his own hands.

O you, who have clear minds, take note of the meaning that conceals itself under the veil of clouded verse!

64
*The messenger
from Heaven*

☞ Now, over the turbid waves, there came a fearful crash of sound, at which both shores trembled; a sound like a strong wind, born of conflicting heat, that strikes the forest, remorselessly, breaks the branches, and beats them down, and carries them away, advances proudly in a cloud of dust, and makes wild creatures, and shepherds, run for safety. Virgil uncovered my eyes, and said: ‘Now direct your vision to that ancient marsh, there, where the mists are thickest.’ Like frogs, that all scatter through the water, in front of their enemy the snake, until each one squats on the bottom, so I saw more than a thousand damaged spirits scatter, in front of one who passed the Stygian ferry with dry feet. He waved that putrid air from his face, often waving his left hand before it, and only that annoyance seemed to weary him. I well knew he was a messenger from Heaven, and I turned to the Master, who made a gesture that I should stay quiet, and bow to him.

How full of indignation he seemed to me! He reached the gate, and opened it with a wand: there was no resistance. On the vile threshold he began to speak: ‘O, outcasts from Heaven, why does this insolence still live in you? Why are you recalcitrant to that will, whose aims can never be frustrated, and that has often increased your torment? What use is it to butt your heads against the Fates? If you remember, your Cerberus still shows a throat and chin scarred from doing so.’

CANTO IX

Then he returned, over the miry pool, and spoke no word to us, but looked like one preoccupied and driven by other cares, than of those who stand before him. And we stirred our feet towards the city, in safety, after his sacred speech.

We entered Dis without a conflict, and I gazed around, as soon as I was inside, eager to know what punishment the place enclosed, and saw on all sides a vast plain full of pain and vile torment.

As at Arles, where the Rhone stagnates, or Pola, near the Gulf of Quarnaro, that confines Italy, and bathes its coast, the sepulchres make the ground uneven, so they did here, all around, only here the nature of it was more terrible.

Flames were scattered amongst the tombs, by which they were made so red-hot all over, that no smith's art needs hotter metal. Their lids were all lifted, and such fierce groans came from them, that, indeed, they seemed to be those of the sad and wounded.

And I said: 'Master, who are these people, entombed in those vaults, who make themselves known by tormented sighing?' And he to me: 'Here are the arch-heretics, with their followers, of every sect: and the tombs contain many more than you might think. Here like is buried with like, and the monuments differ in degrees of heat.' Then after turning to the right, we passed between the tormented, and the steep ramparts.

106
*The sixth circle:
Dis
The heretics*

X

1
*Epicurus and
his followers*

☞ **HOW MY MASTER GOES**, and I, behind him, by a secret path between the city walls and the torments. I began: ‘O, summit of virtue, who leads me round through the circles of sin, as you please, speak to me, and satisfy my longing. Can those people, who lie in the sepulchres, be seen? The lids are all raised, and no one keeps guard.’ And he to me: ‘They will all be shut, when they return here, from Jehoshaphat, with the bodies they left above. In this place Epicurus and all his followers are entombed, who say the soul dies with body. Therefore, you will soon be satisfied, with an answer to the question that you ask me, and also the longing that you hide from me, here, inside.’ And I: ‘Kind guide, I do not keep my heart hidden from you, except by speaking too briefly, something to which you have previously inclined me.’

22
Farinata degli Uberti

☞ ‘O Tuscan, who goes alive through the city of fire, speaking so politely, may it please you to rest in this place. Your speech shows clearly you are a native of that noble city that I perhaps troubled too much.’ This sound came suddenly from one of the vaults, at which, in fear, I drew a little closer to my guide. And he said to me: ‘Turn round: what are you doing: look at Farinata, who has raised himself: you can see him all from the waist up.’

I had already fixed my gaze on him, and he rose erect in stance and aspect, as if he held the Inferno in great disdain. The spirited and eager hands of my guide pushed me through the sepulchres towards him, saying: ‘Make sure your words are measured.’ When I was at the base of the tomb, Farinata looked at me for a while, and then almost contemptuously, he demanded of me: ‘Who were your ancestors?’

I, desiring to obey, concealed nothing, but revealed the whole to him, at which he raised his brows a little. Then he said: ‘They were fiercely opposed to me, and my ancestors and my party, so that I scattered them twice.’ I

CANTO X

replied: 'Though they were driven out, they returned from wherever they were, the first and the second time, but your party have not yet learnt that skill.'

Then, a shadow rose behind him, from the unclosed space, visible down to the tip of its chin: I think it had raised itself on to its knees. It gazed around me, as if it wished to see whether anyone was with me, but when all its hopes were quenched, it said, weeping: 'If by power of intellect, you go through this blind prison, where is my son, and why is he not with you?' And I to him: 'I do not come through my own initiative: he that waits there, whom your Guido disdained perhaps, leads me through this place'

His words and the nature of his punishment had spelt his name to me, so that my answer was a full one. Suddenly raising himself erect, he cried: 'What did you say? Disdained? Is he not still alive? Does the sweet light not strike his eyes?' When he saw that I delayed in answering, he dropped supine again, and showed himself no more.

But the other one, at whose wish I had first stopped, generously did not alter his aspect or move his neck, or turn his side. Continuing his previous words, he said: 'And if my party have learnt that art of return badly, it tortures me more than this bed, but the face of the moon-goddess Persephone, who rules here, will not be crescent fifty times, before you learn the difficulty of that art. And, as you wish to return to the sweet world, tell me why that people is so fierce towards my kin, in all its lawmaking?' At which I answered him: 'The great slaughter and havoc, that dyed the Arbia red, is the cause of those indictments against them, in our churches.'

Then he shook his head, sighing, and said: 'I was not alone in that matter, nor would I have joined with the others without good cause, but I was alone, there, when all agreed to raze Florence to the ground, and I openly defended her.'

'Ah, as I hope your descendants might sometime have peace,' I begged him, 'solve the puzzle that has entangled my mind. It seems, if I hear right, that you see beforehand what time brings, but have a different knowledge of the present.' 'Like one who has imperfect vision,' he said, 'we see things that are distant from us: so much of the light the supreme Lord still allows us. But when they approach, or come to be, our intelligence is wholly void,

52
Cavalcante Cavalcanti

73
*Farinata prophesies
Dante's long exile*

94
*The prophetic vision
of the Damned*

INFERNO

and we know nothing of your human state, except what others tell us. So you may understand that all our knowledge of the future will end, from the moment when the Day of Judgement closes the gate of futurity.'

Then, as if conscious of guilt, I said: 'Will you therefore, tell that fallen one, now, that his son is still joined to the living. And if I was silent before in reply, let him know it was because my thoughts were already entangled in that error you have resolved for me.'

And now my Master was recalling me, at which I begged the spirit, with more haste, to tell me who was with him. He said to me: 'I lie here with more than a thousand: here inside is Frederick the Second, and the Cardinal, Ubaldini, and of the rest I am silent.' At that he hid himself, and I turned my steps towards the poet of antiquity, reflecting on the words that boded trouble for me.

Virgil moved on, and then, as we were leaving, said to me: 'Why are you so bewildered?' And I satisfied his question. The sage exhorted me: 'Let your mind retain what you have heard of your fate, and note this,' and he raised his finger, 'When you stand before the sweet rays of that lady, whose bright eyes see everything, you will learn the journey of your life through her.'

Then he turned his feet towards the left: we abandoned the wall, and went towards the middle, by a path that makes its way into a valley, that, even up there, forced us to breathe its foulness.

CANTO XI

XI



N THE EDGE of a high bank, made of great broken rocks in a circle, we came above a still more cruel crowd, and here, because of the repulsive, excessive stench that the deep abyss throws out, we approached it in the shelter of a grand monument, on which I saw an inscription that said: 'I hold Anastasius, that Photinus drew away from the true path.'

The Master said: 'We must delay our descent until our sense is somewhat used to the foul wind, and then we will not notice it.' I said to him: 'Find us something to compensate, so that the time is not wasted.' And he: 'See, I have thought of it.' He began: 'My son, within these walls of stone, are three graduated circles like those you are leaving. They are all filled with accursed spirits: but so that the sight of them may be enough to inform you, in future, listen how and why they are constrained.'

The outcome of all maliciousness, that Heaven hates, is harm: and every such outcome, hurts others, either by force or deceit. But because deceit is a vice peculiar to human beings, it displeases God more, and therefore the fraudulent are placed below, and more pain grieves them. The whole of the seventh circle is for the violent, but, since violence can be done to three persons, it is constructed and divided in three rings. I say violence may be done to God, or to oneself, or one's neighbour, and their person or possessions, as you will hear, in clear discourse.

Death or painful wounds may be inflicted on one's neighbour; and devastation, fire, and pillage, on his substance. Therefore the first ring torments all homicides; every one who lashes out maliciously; and thieves and robbers; in their diverse groups.

A man may do violence to himself and to his property, and so, in the second ring, all must repent, in vain, who deprive themselves of your world; or gamble away and dissipate their wealth; or weep there, when they should be happy.

I
The structure of Hell:
the lower circles

INFERNO

Violence may be done, against the Deity, denying him and blaspheming in the heart, and scorning Nature and her gifts, and so the smallest ring stamps with its seal both Sodom and Cahors, and those who speak scornfully of God, in their hearts.

Human beings may practise deceit, which gnaws at every conscience, on one who trusts them, or on one who places no trust. This latter form of fraud only severs the bond of love that Nature created, and so, in the eighth circle, are nested hypocrisy; sorcery; flattery; cheating; theft and selling of holy orders; pimps; corrupters of public office; and similar filth.

In the previous form, that love that Nature creates is forgotten, and also that which is added later, giving rise to special trust. So, in the ninth, the smallest circle, at the base of the universe, where Dis has his throne, every traitor is consumed eternally.'

67

*The structure of Hell:
the upper circles*

☞ And I said: 'Master, your reasoning proceeds most clearly, and lays out excellently this gulf, and those that populate it, but tell me why those of the great marsh, those whom the wind drives, and the rain beats, and those who come together with sharp words, are not punished in the burning city, if God's anger is directed towards them? And if not why they are in such a state?' And he to me: 'Why does your mind err so much more than usual, or are your thoughts somewhere else?'

Do you not remember the words with which your Aristotelian Ethics speaks of the three natures that Heaven does not will: incontinence, malice and mad brutishness, and how incontinence offends God less and incurs less blame? If you consider this doctrine correctly, and recall to mind who those are, that suffer punishment out there, above, you will see, easily, why they are separated from these destructive spirits, and why divine justice strikes them with less anger.'

I said: 'O Sun, that heals all troubled sight, you make me so content when you explain to me, that to question is as delightful as to know.'

94

Virgil explains usury

☞ 'Go back a moment, to where you said that usury offends divine goodness, and unravel that knot.' He said to me: 'To him who attends, Philosophy shows, in more than one place, how Nature takes her path from the Divine Intelligence, and its arts, and if you note your Physics well, you will find, not

CANTO XI

many pages in, that art, follows her, as well as it can, as the pupil does the master, so that your art is as it were the grandchild of God. By these two, art and nature, man must earn his bread and flourish, if you recall to mind Genesis, near its beginning.

Because the usurer holds to another course, he denies Nature, in herself, and in that which follows her ways, putting his hopes elsewhere.

But follow me, now, by the path I choose, for Pisces quivers on the horizon, and all Bootës covers Caurus, the north-west wind, and over there, some way, we descend the cliff.'

XII

1
*Above the seventh
 circle: the Minotaur*



THE PLACE WE REACHED to climb down the bank was craggy, and, because of the creature there, also, a path that every eye would shun. The descent of that rocky precipice was like the landslide that struck the left bank of the Adige, this side of Trento, caused by an earthquake or a faulty buttress, since the rock is so shattered, from the summit of the mountain, where it started, to the plain, that it might form a route, for someone above: and at the top of the broken gully, the infamy of Crete, the Minotaur, conceived on Pasiphaë, in the wooden cow, lay stretched out.

When he saw us he gnawed himself, like someone consumed by anger inside. My wise guide called to him: ‘Perhaps you think that Theseus, the Duke of Athens, is here, who brought about your death, in the world above? Leave here, monstrous creature. This man does not come here, aided by your sister, Ariadne, but passes through to see the punishments.’

Like a bull, breaking loose, at the moment when it receives the fatal blow, that cannot go forward, but plunges here and there, so I saw the Minotaur, and my cautious guide cried: ‘Run to the passage: while he is in a fury, it is time for you to descend.’

28
*The descent to the
 seventh circle*

So we made our way, downwards, over the landslide of stones, that often shifted beneath my feet, from the unaccustomed weight. I went thoughtfully, and he said: ‘Perhaps you are contemplating this fallen mass of rock, guarded by the bestial anger that I quelled a moment ago. I would have you know that the previous time I came down here to the deep Inferno, this spill had not yet fallen. But, if I discern the truth, the deep and loathsome valley, shook, not long before He came to take the great ones of the highest circle, so that I thought the universe thrilled with love, by which as some believe, the world has often been overwhelmed by chaos. In that moment ancient rocks, here and elsewhere, tumbled.

CANTO XII

But fix your gaze on the valley, because we near the river of blood, in which those who injure others by violence are boiled.'

O blind desires, evil and foolish, which so goad us in our brief life, and then, in the eternal one, ruin us so bitterly! I saw a wide canal bent in an arc, looking as if it surrounded the whole plain, from what my guide had told me. Centaurs were racing, one behind another, between it and the foot of the bank, armed with weapons, as they were accustomed to hunt on earth.

Seeing us descend they all stood still, and three, elected leaders, came from the group, armed with bows and spears. And one of them shouted from the distance: 'What torment do you come for, you that descend the rampart? Speak from there, if not, I draw the bow.' My Master said: 'We will make our reply to Chiron, who is there, nearby. Sadly, your nature was always rash.' Then he touched me, and said: 'That is Nessus, who died because of his theft of the lovely Deianira, and, for his blood, took vengeance, through his blood.'

He, in the centre, whose head is bowed to his chest, is the great Chiron, who nursed Achilles: the other is Pholus, who was so full of rage. They race around the ditch, in thousands, piercing with arrows any spirit that climbs further from the blood than its guilt has condemned it to. We drew near the swift creatures. Chiron took an arrow, and pushed back his beard from his face with the notched flight. When he had uncovered his huge mouth, he said to his companions: 'Have you noticed that the one behind moves whatever he touches? The feet of dead men do not usually do so.'

And my good guide, who was by Chiron's front part, where the two natures join, replied: 'He is truly alive, and, alone, I have to show him the dark valley. Necessity brings him here, and not desire. She, who gave me this new duty, came from singing Alleluiahs: he is no thief: nor am I a wicked spirit. But, by that virtue, by means of which I set my feet on so unsafe a path, lend us one of your people whom we can follow, so that he may show us where the ford is, and carry this one over on his back, since he cannot fly as a spirit through the air.'

Chiron twisted to his right, and said to Nessus: 'Turn, and guide them, then, and if another crew meet you, keep them off.'

49
*The first ring:
The centaurs
The violent*

INFERNO

100
*The tyrants,
murderers, and
warriors*

☞ We moved onwards with our trustworthy guide, along the margin of the crimson boiling, in which the boiled were shrieking loudly. I saw people immersed as far as the eyebrows, and the great Centaur said: 'These are tyrants who indulged in blood, and rapine. Here they lament their offences, done without mercy. Here is Alexander, and fierce Dionysius of Syracuse, who gave Sicily years of pain. That head of black hair is Azzolino, and the other, which is blonde, is Obizzo da Este, whose life was quenched, in truth, by his stepson, up in the world.' Then I turned to the poet, and he said: 'Let him guide you first, now, and I second.'

A little further on, Nessus paused, next to people who seemed to be sunk in the boiling stream up to their throat. He showed us a shade, apart by itself, saying: 'That one, Guy de Montfort, in God's church, pierced that heart that is still venerated by the Thames.'

Then I saw others, who held their heads and all their chests, likewise, free of the river: and I knew many of these. So the blood grew shallower and shallower, until it only cooked their feet, and here was our ford through the ditch.

The Centaur said: 'As you see the boiling stream continually diminishing, on this side, so, on the other, it sinks more and more, till it comes again to where tyrants are doomed to grieve. Divine Justice here torments Attila, the scourge of the earth; and Pyrrhus, and Sextus Pompeius; and for eternity milks tears, produced by the boiling, from Rinier da Corneto, and Rinier Pazzo, who made war on the highways.' Then he turned back, and recrossed the ford.

CANTO XIII

XIII



NESSUS HAD NOT YET returned to the other side, when we entered a wood, unmarked by any path. The foliage was not green, but a dusky colour: the branches were not smooth, but warped and knotted: there were no fruits there, but poisonous thorns. The wild beasts, that hate the cultivated fields, in the Tuscan Maremma, between Cecina and Corneto, have lairs less thick and tangled. Here the brutish Harpies make their nests, they who chased the Trojans from the Strophades, with dismal pronouncements of future tribulations.

They have broad wings, and human necks and faces, clawed feet, and large feathered bellies, and they make mournful cries in that strange wood. The kind Master said: 'Before you go further, be aware you are in the second ring, and will be until you come to the dreadful sands. So look carefully, and you will see things that might make you mistrust my words.'

Already I heard sighs on every side, and saw no one to make them, at which, I stood totally bewildered. I think that he thought that I was thinking that many of those voices came from among the trees, from people who hid themselves because of us. So the Master said: 'If you break a little twig from one of these branches, the thoughts you have will be seen to be in error.'

Then I stretched my hand out a little, and broke a small branch from a large thorn, and its trunk cried out: 'Why do you tear at me?' And when it had grown dark with blood, it began to cry out again: 'Why do you splinter me? Have you no breath of pity? We were men, and we are changed to trees: truly, your hand would be more merciful, if we were merely the souls of snakes.'

Just as a green branch, burning at one end, spits and hisses with escaping air at the other, so from that broken wood, blood and words came out together: at which I let the branch fall, and stood, like a man afraid. My wise sage replied: 'Wounded spirit, if he had only believed, before, what he had

1
*The second ring:
The harpies
The suicides*

49
*The wood of suicides:
Pier delle Vigne*

INFERNO

read in my verse, he would not have lifted his hand to you, but the incredible nature of the thing made me urge him to do what grieves me. But tell him who you were, so that he might make you some amends, and renew your fame up in the world, to which he is allowed to return.

And the tree replied: 'You tempt me so, with your sweet words, that I cannot keep silent, but do not object if I am expansive in speech. I am Pier delle Vigne, who held both the keys to Frederick's heart, and employed them, locking and unlocking, so quietly, that I kept almost everyone else from his secrets. I was so faithful to that glorious office that through it I lost my sleep and my life.

The whore that never turned her eyes from Caesar's household, Envy, the common disease and vice of courts, stirred all minds against me, and being stirred they stirred Augustus, so that my fine honours were changed to grievous sorrows. My spirit, in a scornful mode, thinking to escape scorn by death, made me, though I was just, unjust to myself. By the strange roots of this tree, I swear to you, I never broke faith with my lord, so worthy of honour. If either of you return to the world, raise and cherish the memory of me, that still lies low from the blow Envy gave me.'

79

*The fate of
the suicides*

☞ The poet listened for a while, then said to me: 'Since he is silent, do not lose the moment, but speak, and ask him to tell you more.' At which I aid to him: 'You ask him further, about what you think will interest me, because I could not, such pity fills my heart.' So he continued: 'That the man may do freely what your words request from him, imprisoned spirit, be pleased to tell us further how the spirits are caught in these knots: and tell us, if you can, whether any of them free themselves from these limbs.'

Then the trunk blew fiercely, and the breath was turned to words like these: 'My reply will be brief. When the savage spirit leaves the body, from which it has ripped itself, Minos sends it to the seventh gulf. It falls into this wood, and no place is set for it, but, wherever chance hurls it, there it sprouts, like a grain of German wheat, shoots up as a sapling, and then as a wild tree. The Harpies feeding then on its leaves hurt it, and give an outlet to its hurt.

Like others we shall go to our corpses on the Day of Judgement, but not so that any of us may inhabit them again, because it would not be just to have

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what we took from ourselves. We shall drag them here, and our bodies will be hung through the dismal wood, each on the thorn-tree of its tormented shade.

We were still listening to the tree, thinking it might tell us more, when we were startled by a noise, like those who think the wild boar is nearing where they stand, and hear the animals and the crashing of branches. Behold, on the left, two naked, torn spirits, running so hard they broke every thicket of the wood. The leader, cried: 'Come Death, come now!' and the other, Jacomo, who felt himself to be too slow cried: 'Lano, your legs were not so swift at the jousts of Toppo.' And since perhaps his breath was failing him, he merged himself with a bush.

109
*Lano Maconi and
Jacomo de
Sant' Andrea*

The wood behind them was filled with black bitch hounds, eager and quick as greyhounds that have slipped the leash. They clamped their teeth into Lano, who squatted, and tore him bit by bit, then carried off his miserable limbs.

My guide now took me by the hand, and led me to the bush, which was grieving, in vain, through its bleeding splinters, crying: 'O Jacomo da Sant' Andrea, what have you gained by making me your screen? What blame do I have for your sinful life? When the Master had stopped next to it, he said: 'Who were you, that breathe out your mournful speech, with blood, through so many wounds?'

130
*The Unnamed
Florentine
"Miserable"*

And he to us: 'You spirits, who have come to view the dishonourable mangling that has torn my leaves from me, gather them round the foot of this sad tree. I was of Florence, that city, which changed Mars, its patron, for St John the Baptist, because of which that god, through his powers, will always make it sorrowful. Were it not that some fragments of his statue remain where Ponte Vecchio crosses the Arno, those citizens, who rebuilt it on the ashes Attila left, would have worked in vain. I made a gibbet for myself, from my own roofbeam.'

XIV

1
*The third ring:
 the violent
 against God*

☞ **AS THE LOVE OF** my native place stirred in me, I gathered up the scattered leaves, and gave them back to him who was already hoarse. Then we came to the edge, where the second round is divided from the third, where a fearsome form of justice is seen. To make these new things clear, I say we reached a plain, where the land repels all vegetation. The mournful wood makes a circle round it, as the ditch surrounds the wood: here we stepped close to its very rim.

The ground was dry, thick sand, no different in form than that which Cato once trod. O God's vengeance, how what was shown to my sight should be feared, by all who read! I saw many groups of naked spirits, who were all moaning bitterly: and there seemed to be diverse rules applied to them. Some were lying face upward on the ground; some sat all crouched: and others roamed around continuously.

Those who moved were more numerous, and those that lay in torment fewer, but uttering louder cries of pain. Dilated flakes of fire, falling slowly, like snow in the windless mountains, rained down over all the vast sands. Like the flames that Alexander saw falling, in the hot zones of India, over all his army, until they reached the ground, fires that were more easily quenched while they were separate, so that his troops took care to trample the earth - like those, fell this eternal heat, kindling the sand like tinder beneath flint and steel, doubling the pain.

The dance of their tortured hands was never still, now here, now there, shaking off the fresh burning.

43
Capaneus

☞ I began: 'Master, you who overcome everything except the obdurate demons, that came out against us at the entrance to the gate, who is that great spirit, who seems indifferent to the fire, and lies there, scornful, contorted, so that the rain does not seem to deepen his repentance?' And he himself,

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noting that I asked my guide about him, cried: 'What I was when I was living, I am now I am dead. Though Jupiter exhausts Vulcan, his blacksmith, from whom he took, in anger, the fierce lightning bolt, that I was struck down with on my last day, and though he exhausts the others, the Cyclopes, one by one, at the black forge of Aetna, shouting: 'Help, help, good Vulcan', just as he did at the battle of Phlegra, between the gods and giants, and hurls his bolts at me with all his strength, he shall still not enjoy a true revenge.'

Then my guide spoke, with a force I had not heard before: 'O Capaneus, you are punished more in that your pride is not quenched: no torment would produce pain fitting for your fury, except your own raving.' Then he turned to me with gentler voice, saying: 'That was one of the seven kings who laid siege to Thebes: and he held God, and seems to hold him, in disdain, and value him lightly, but as I told him, his spite is an ornament that fits his breast.'

'Now follow me, and be careful not to place your feet yet on the burning sand, but always keep back close to the wood.' We came, in silence, to the place, where a little stream gushes from the wood, the redness of which still makes me shudder. Like the rivulet that runs sulphur-red from the Bulicame spring, near Viterbo, that the sinful women share among themselves, so this ran down over the sand. Its bed and both its sloping banks were petrified, and its nearby margins: so that I realised our way lay there.

'Among all the other things that I have shown you, since we entered though the gate, whose threshold is denied to no one, your eyes have seen nothing as noteworthy as this present stream, that quenches all the flames over it.' These were my guide's words, at which I begged him to grant me food, for which he had given me the appetite.

He then said: 'There is a deserted island in the middle of the sea, named Crete, under whose king Saturn, the world was pure. There is a mountain, there, called Ida, which was once gladdened with waters and vegetation, and now is abandoned like an ancient spoil heap. Rhea chose it, once, as the trusted cradle of her son, and the better to hide him when he wept, caused loud shouts to echo from it.'

Inside the mountain, a great Old Man, stands erect, with his shoulders turned towards Egyptian Damietta, and looks at Rome as if it were his mir-

73
*The old man
of Crete*

INFERNO

ror. His head is formed of pure gold, his arms and his breasts are refined silver: then he is bronze as far as the thighs. Downwards from there he is all of choice iron, except that the right foot is baked clay, and more of his weight is on that one than the other. Every part, except the gold, is cleft with a fissure that sheds tears, which collect and pierce the grotto. Their course falls from rock to rock into this valley. They form Acheron, Styx and Phlegethon, then, by this narrow channel, go down to where there is no further fall, and form Cocytus: you will see what kind of lake that is: so I will not describe it to you here.'

121

*The rivers Phlegethon
and Lethe*

☞ I said to him: 'If the present stream flows down like that from our world, why does it only appear to us on this bank? And he to me: 'You know the place is circular, and though you have come far, always to the left, descending to the depths, you have not yet turned through a complete round, so that if anything new appears to us, it should not bring an expression of wonder to your face.'

And I again: 'Master, where are Phlegethon, and Lethe found, since you do not speak of the latter, and say that the former is created from these tears?' He replied: 'You please me, truly, with all your questions, but the boiling red water might well answer to one of those you ask about. You will see Lethe, but above this abyss, there, on the Mount, where the spirits go to purify themselves, when their guilt is absolved by penitence.'

Then he said: 'Now it is time to leave the wood: see that you follow me: the margins which are not burning form a path, and over them all the fire is quenched.'

CANTO XV

XV



NOW ONE OF THE solid banks takes us on, and the smoke from the stream makes a shadow above, so that it shelters the water and its margins. Just as the Flemings between Bruges and Wissant make their dykes to hold back the sea, fearing the flood that beats against them; and as the Paduans do, along the Brenta, to defend their towns and castles, before Carinthia's mountains feel the thaw; so those banks were similarly formed, though their creator, whoever it might be, made them neither as high or as deep.

Already we were so far from the wood, that I was unable to see where it was, unless I turned back, when we met a group of spirits, coming along the bank, and each of them looked at us, as, at twilight, men look at one another, under a crescent moon, and peered towards us, as an old tailor does at the eye of his needle. Eyed so by that tribe, I was recognised, by one who took me by the skirt of my robe, and said: 'How wonderful!'

And I fixed my eyes on his baked visage, so that the scorching of his aspect did not prevent my mind from knowing him, and bending my face to his I replied: 'Are you here Ser Brunetto?' And he: 'O my son, do not be displeased if Brunetto Latini turns back with you a while, and lets the crowd pass by.' I said: 'I ask it, with all my strength, and, if you want me to sit with you, I will, if it pleases him there, whom I go with.'

He said: 'O my son, whoever of the flock stops for a moment, must lie there for a hundred years after, without cooling himself when the fire beats on him. So go on, I will follow at your heels, and then I will rejoin my crew again, who go mourning their eternal loss.'

I did not dare leave the road to be level with him, but kept my head bowed like one who walks reverently. He began: 'What fate, or chance, bring you down here, before your final hour? Who is this who shows you the way?' I

1
*The violent
against nature:
Brunetto Latini*

43
Brunetto's prophecy

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replied: 'I lost myself, in the clear life up above, in a valley, before my years were complete. Only yesterday morning I turned my back on it: he appeared to me as I was returning to it, and guides me back again, but by this path.'

And he to me: 'If you follow your star, you cannot fail to reach a glorious harbour: if I judged clearly in the sweet life. If I had not died before you, I would have supported you in your work, seeing that Heaven is so kind to you. But that ungrateful, malignant people, who came down from Fiesole to Florence, in ancient times, and still have something of the mountain and the rock, will be inimical to you for the good you do, and with reason, since it is not fitting for the sweet fig tree to fruit, among the sour crab-apples.

Past report on earth declares them blind, an envious, proud and avaricious people: make sure you purge yourself of their faults. Your fate prophesies such honour for you, that both parties will hunger for you, but the goat will be far from the grass. Let the herd from Fiesole make manure of themselves, but not touch the plant in which the sacred seed of those Romans revives, who stayed, when that nest of malice was created, if any plant still springs from their ordure.'

79

Dante accepts his fate

☞ I answered him: 'If my wishes had been completely fulfilled, you would not have been separated, yet, from human nature, since, in my memory, the dear, and kind, paternal image of you is fixed, and now goes to my heart, how, when in the world, hour by hour, you taught me the way man makes himself eternal; and it is fitting my tongue should show what gratitude I hold, while I live. What you tell me of my fate, I write, and retain it with a former text, for a lady, who will know how to comment on it, if I reach her.

I would make this much known to you: I am ready for whatever Fortune wills, as long as conscience does not hurt me. Such prophecies are not new to my ears: so let Fortune turn her wheel as she pleases, and the peasant wield his mattock.' At that, my Master, looked back, on his right, and gazed at me, then said: 'He listens closely, who notes it.'

100

Brunetto names some of his companions

☞ I carry on speaking, no less, with Ser Brunetto, and ask who are the most famous and noblest of his companions. And he to me: 'It is good to know of some: of the rest it would be praiseworthy to keep silent, as the time would be too little for such a speech. In short, know that all were clerks, and great

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scholars, and very famous, tainted with the same sin on earth.

Priscian goes with that miserable crowd, and Francesco d'Accorso : and if you had any desire for such scum, you might have seen Andrea di Mozzi there, who by Boniface, the Pope, servus servorum Dei, servant of servants, was translated from the Arno to Vicenza's Bacchiglione, where he departed from his ill-strained body.

I would say more, but my speech and my departure must not linger, since there I see new smoke, rising from the great sand. People come that I cannot be with: let my Tresoro be commended to you, in which I still live: more I ask not.'

Then he turned back, and seemed like one who runs for the green cloth, at Verona, through the open fields: and seemed one of those who wins, not one who loses.

XVI

1
*Rusticucci, Guide
 Guerra, Aldobrandi*

I WAS ALREADY IN a place where the booming of the water, that fell, into the next circle, sounded like a beehive's humming, when three shades together, running, left a crowd that passed under the sharp burning rain. They came towards us, and each one cried: 'Wait, you, who seem to us, by your clothes, to be someone from our perverse city.'

Ah me, what ancient, and recent, wounds I saw on their limbs, scorched there by the flames! It saddens me now, when I remember it. My teacher listened to their cries, turned his face towards me, and said: 'Wait, now: courtesy is owed them, and if there were not this fire, that the place's nature rains down, I would say that you were more hasty than them.'

As we rested, they started their former laments again, and when they reached us, all three of them formed themselves into a circle. Wheeling round, as champion wrestlers, naked and oiled, do, looking for a hold or an advantage, before they grasp and strike one another, each directed his face at me, so that his neck was turned, all the time, in an opposite direction to his feet.

And one of them began: 'If the misery of this sinful place, and our scorched, stained look, renders us, and our prayers, contemptible, let our fame influence your mind to tell us who you are, that move your living feet, safely, through Hell. He, in whose footsteps you see me tread, all peeled and naked as he is, was greater in degree than you would think. His name is Guido Guerra, grandson of the good lady Gualdrada, and in his life he achieved much in council, and with his sword.

The other, that treads the sand behind me, is Tegghiaio Aldobrandi, whose words should have been listened to in the world. And I, who am placed with them in torment, am Jacopo Rusticucci, and certainly my fierce wife injured me more than anything else.'

CANTO XVI

If I had been sheltered from the fire, I would have dropped down among them below, and I believe my teacher would have allowed it, but as I would have been burned and baked, myself, my fear overcame the goodwill, that made me eager to embrace them.

46
*The condition
of Florence*

Then I began: 'Your condition stirred sadness, not contempt, in me, so deeply, it will not soon be gone, when my guide spoke words to me by which I understood such men as yourselves might be approaching. I am of your city, and I have always heard, and rehearsed, your names and your deeds, with affection. I leave the gall behind, and go towards the sweet fruits promised me by my truthful guide, but first I must go downwards to the centre.'

He replied, then: 'That your soul may long inhabit your body, and your fame shine after you, tell us if courtesy and courage, still live in our city as they used to, or if they have quite forsaken it? Guglielmo Borsiere, who has been in pain with us, a little while, and goes along there with our companions, torments us greatly with what he says.

'New men, and sudden wealth, have created pride and excess in you, Florence, so that you already weep for it.' So I cried with lifted face, and the three, who took this for an answer, gazed at one another, as one gazes at the truth. They replied together: 'Happy are you, if, by speaking according to your will, it costs so little for you to satisfy others! So, if you escape these gloomy spaces, and turn, and see the beauty of the stars again, when you will be glad to say: "I was", see that you tell people of us.'

Then they broke up their circle, and, as they ran, their swift legs seemed wings.

An Amen could not have been said in so quick a time as their vanishing took, at which my Master was pleased to depart. I followed him. We had gone only a little way, when the sound of the water came so near us, that if we had been speaking we would hardly have heard each other.

88
The monster Geryon

Like that river (the first that takes its own course to the eastern seaboard, south of Monte Vesio, where the Po rises, on the left flank of the Apennines, and is called Acquacheta above, before it falls to its lower bed, and loses its name, to become the Montone, at Forlì) which, plunging through a fall, echoes from the mountain, above San Benedetto, where there should be refuge for a thousand, so, down from a steep bank, we found that tainted water

INFERNO

re-echoing, so much so that, in a short while, it would have dazed our hearing.

I had a cord tied round me, and with it I had once thought to catch the leopard with the spotted skin. After I had completely unwound it from myself, as my guide commanded, I held it out to him, gathered up and coiled. Then he turned towards the right, and threw the end of it, away from the edge a little, down into the steep gulf. I said to myself: 'Surely something strange will follow this new sign of our intentions, that my master tracks with his eyes, as it falls.'

Ah, how careful men should be with those who do not only see our actions but, with their understanding, see into our thoughts! He said to me: 'That which I expect will soon ascend, and, what your thoughts speculate about, will soon be apparent to your sight.'

A man should always shut his lips, as far as he can, to truth that seems like falsehood, since he incurs reproach, though he is blameless, but I cannot be silent here: and Reader, I swear to you, by the words of this *Commedia*, that they may not be free of lasting favour, that I saw a shape, marvellous, to every unshaken heart, come swimming upwards through the dense, dark air, as a man rises, who has gone down, sometime, to loose an anchor, caught on a rock or something else, hidden in the water, who spreads his arms out, and draws up his feet.

XVII

SEE THE SAVAGE BEAST, with the pointed tail, that crosses mountains, and pierces walls and armour: see him, who pollutes the whole world.' So my guide began to speak to me, and beckoned to him to land near the end of our rocky path, and that vile image of Fraud came on, and grounded his head and chest, but did not lift his tail onto the cliff.

His face was the face of an honest man, it had so benign and outward aspect: all the rest was a serpent's body. Both arms were covered with hair to the armpits; the back and chest and both flanks were adorned with knots and circles. Tartars or Turks never made cloths with more colour, background and embroidery: nor did Arachne spread such webs on her loom. As the boats rest on the shore, part in water and part on land, and as the beaver, among the guzzling Germans, readies himself for a fight, so that worst of savage creatures lay on the cliff that surrounds the great sand with stone.

The whole of his tail glanced into space, twisting the venomous fork upwards, that armed the tip, like a scorpion. My guide said: 'Now we must direct our path, somewhat, towards the malevolent beast that rests there.'

Then we went down, on the right, and took ten steps towards the edge, so that we could fully avoid the sand and flame, and when we reached him, I saw people sitting near the empty space, a little further away, on the ground.

Here my Master said: 'Go and see the state of them, so that you may take away a complete knowledge of this round. Talk briefly with them: I will speak with this creature, until you return, so that he might carry us on his strong shoulders.' So, still on the extreme edge of the seventh circle, I went, all alone, to where the sad crew were seated.

Their grief was gushing from their eyes: they kept flicking away the flames and sometimes the burning dust, on this side, or on that, with their hands,

1
*The poets
approach Geryon*

31
The users

INFERNO

no differently than dogs do in summer, now with their muzzle, now with their paws, when they are bitten by fleas, or gnats, or horse-flies. When I set my eyes on the faces of several of them, on whom the grievous fire falls, I did not recognise any, but I saw that a pouch hung from the neck of each, that had a certain colour, and a certain seal, and it seemed their eye was feeding on it. And as I came among them, looking, I saw, on a golden-yellow purse, an azure seal that had the look and attitude of a lion.

Then my gaze continuing on its track, I saw another, red as blood, showing a goose whiter than butter. And one who had his white purse stamped with an azure, pregnant sow, said to me: 'What are you doing in this pit? Now go away, and since you are still alive, know that my neighbour, Vitaliano, will come to sit here on my left. I, a Paduan, am with these Florentines. Many a time they deafen my hearing, shouting: 'Let the noble knight come, who will carry the purse with three eagles' beaks!'

Then he distorted his mouth, and thrust his tongue out, like an ox licking its nose, and I, dreading lest a longer stay might anger him, who had warned me to make a brief stay, turned back from those weary spirits.

79

*The poets descend on
Geryon's back*

☞ I found my guide, who had already mounted the flank of the savage creature, and he said to me: 'Be firm and brave. Now we must descend by means of these stairs: you climb in front: I wish to be in the centre, so that the tail may not harm you.'

Like a man whose fit of the quartan fever is so near, that his nails are already pallid, and he shakes all over, by keeping in the shade, so I became when these words were said: but his reproof roused shame in me, that makes the servant brave in the presence of a worthy master. I set myself on those vast shoulders. I wished to say: 'See that you clasp me tight.' but my voice did not come out as I intended. He, who helped me in other difficulties, at other times, embraced me, as soon as I mounted, and held me upright. Then he said: 'Now move, Geryon! Make large circles, and let your descent be gentle: think of the strange burden that you carry.'

As a little boat goes backwards, backwards, from its mooring, so the monster left the cliff, and when he felt himself quite free, he turned his tail around, to where his chest had been, and stretching, flicked it like an eel,

CANTO XVII

and gathered the air towards him with his paws. I do not believe the fear was greater when Phaëthon let slip the reins, and the sky was scorched, as it still appears to be; or when poor Icarus felt the feathers melt from his arms, as the wax was heated, and his father Daedalus cried: 'You are going the wrong way!' as mine was when I saw myself surrounded by the air, on all sides, and saw everything vanish, except the savage beast.

He goes down, swimming slowly, slowly: wheels and falls: but I do not see it except by the wind, on my face, and from below. Already I heard the cataract, on the right, make a terrible roaring underneath us, at which I stretched my neck out, with my gaze downwards. Then I was more afraid to dismount, because I saw fires, and heard moaning, so that I cowered, trembling all over. And then I saw what I had not seen before, our sinking and circling through the great evils that drew close on every side.

As the falcon, that has been long on the wing, descends wearily, without seeing bird or lure, making the falconer cry: 'Ah, you stoop!' and settles far from his master disdainful and sullen, so Geryon set us down, at the base, close to the foot of the fractured rock, and relieved of our weight, shot off, like an arrow from the bow.

XVIII

1
*The eighth circle:
 Malebolge
 Simple fraud*

☞ **H**ERE IS A PLACE in Hell called Malebolge, all of stone, and coloured like iron, as is the cliff that surrounds it. Right in the centre of the malignant space, a well yawns, very wide and deep, whose structure I will speak of in due place.

The margin that remains, between the base of the high rocky bank and the well, is circular, and its floor is divided into ten moats. Like the form the ground reveals, where successive ditches circle a castle, to defend the walls, such was the layout displayed here. And as there are bridges to the outer banks from the thresholds of the fortress, so, from the base of the cliff, causeways ran, crossing the successive banks and ditches, down to the well that terminates and links them.

We found ourselves there, shaken from Geryon's back, and the Poet kept to the left, and I went on, behind him.

22
*The first chasm: the
 pimps and seducers*

☞ On the right I saw new pain and torment, and new tormentors, with which the first chasm was filled. In its depths the sinners were naked: on our inner side of its central round they came towards us, on the outer side, with us, but with larger steps. So the people of Rome, in that year, at the Jubilee, because of the great crowds, initiated this means to pass the people over the bridge: those on the one side all had their faces towards Castello Sant' Angelo, and went to St Peter's: those on the other towards Monte Giordano.

On this side and on that, along the fearful rock, I saw horned demons with large whips, who struck them fiercely, from behind. Ah, how it made them quicken their steps at the first stroke! Truly none waited for the second or third.

40
*The panders: Venedico
 de' Caccianemico*

☞ As I went on, my eyes encountered one of them, and instantly I said: 'This shade I have seen before.' So I stopped to scrutinise him, and the kind guide stood still with me, and allowed me to return a little. And that scourged spirit thought to hide himself, lowering his face, but it did not help,

CANTO XVIII

since I said: 'You, who cast your eyes on the ground, if the features you display are not an illusion, you are Venedico Caccianimico : but what led you into such a biting pickle?'

And he to me: 'I tell it unwillingly, but your clear speech that makes me remember the former world, compels me. It was I who induced the fair Ghisola to do the Marquis of Este's will, however unpleasant the story sounds. And I am not the only Bolognese that weeps here: this place is so filled with us, that as many tongues are no longer taught to say *sipa* for *sì*, between the Savena's stream that is west, and the Reno's, that is east of Bologna. If you want assurance and testimony of it, recall to mind our avaricious hearts.' And as he spoke, a demon struck him with his whip, and said: 'Away, pander, there are no women here to sell.'

I rejoined my guide: then in a few steps we came to where a causeway ran from the cliff. This we climbed very easily, and, turning to the right on its jagged ridge, we moved away from that eternal round. When we reached the arch where it yawns below to leave a path for the scourged, my guide said: 'Wait, and let the aspect of those other ill-born spirits strike you, whose faces you have not yet seen, since they have been going in our direction.'

We viewed their company from the ancient bridge, travelling towards us on the other side, chased likewise by the whip. Without my asking, the kind Master said to me: 'Look at that great soul who comes, and seems not to shed tears of pain: what a royal aspect he still retains! That is Jason, who, by wisdom and courage, robbed the Colchians of the Golden Fleece.'

He sailed by the Isle of Lemnos, after the bold merciless women there had put all their males to death. There with gifts and sweet words he deceived the young Hypsipyle, who had saved her father by deceiving all the rest. He left her there, pregnant and lonely: such guilt condemns him to such torment: and revenge is also taken for his abandoning Medea. With him go all who practise like deceit, and let this be enough for knowledge of the first chasm, and those whom it swallows.'

We had already come to where the narrow causeway crosses the second bank, and forms a buttress to a second arch. Here we heard people whining in the next chasm, and blowing with their muzzles, and striking themselves with their palms.

↪ 67
The seducers: Jason

↪ 100
*The second chasm:
the flatterers*

INFERNO

The banks were crusted, with a mould from the fumes below that condenses on them, and attacks the eyes and nose. The floor is so deep, that we could not see any part of it, except by climbing to the ridge of the arch, where the rock is highest. We came there, and from it, in the ditch below, I saw people immersed in excrement, that looked as if it flowed from human privies. And while I was searching it, down there, with my eyes, I saw one with a head so smeared with ordure, that it was not clear if he was clerk or layman.

He shouted at me: 'Why are you so keen to gaze at me more than the other mired ones?' And I to him: 'Because, if I remember rightly, I have seen you before with dry head, and you are Alessio Interminei of Lucca: so I eye you more than all the others.' And he then, beating his forehead: 'The flatteries, of which my tongue never wearied, have brought me down to this!'

At which my guide said to me: 'Advance your head a little, so that your eyes can clearly see, over there, the face of that filthy and dishevelled piece, who scratches herself, with her soiled nails, now crouching down, now rising to her feet. It is Thais, the whore, who answered her lover's message, in which he asked: "Do you really return me great thanks?" with "No, wondrous thanks." And let our looking be sated with this.'

CANTO XIX

XIX



SIMON MAGUS! O you, his rapacious, wretched followers, who prostitute, for gold and silver, the things of God that should be wedded to virtue! Now the trumpets must sound for you, since you are in the third chasm.

Already we had climbed to the next arch, onto that part of the causeway that hangs right over the centre of the ditch. O Supreme Wisdom, how great the art is, that you display, in the heavens, on earth, and in the underworld, and how justly your virtue acts. On the sides and floor of the fosse, I saw the livid stone full of holes, all of one width, and each one rounded. They seemed no narrower or larger, than those in my beautiful Baptistery of St John, made as places to protect those baptising, one of which I broke, not many years ago, to aid a child inside: and let this be a sign of the truth to end all speculation.

From the mouth of each hole, a sinner's feet and legs emerged, up to the calf, and the rest remained inside. The soles were all on fire, so that the joints quivered so strongly, that they would have snapped grass ropes and willow branches. As the flame of burning oily liquids moves only on the surface, so it was in their case, from the heels to the legs.

I said: 'Master, who is that, who twists himself about, writhing more than all his companions, and licked by redder flames?' And he to me: 'If you will let me carry you down there by the lower bank, you will learn from him about his sins and himself.' And I: 'Whatever pleases you is good for me: you are my lord, and know that I do not deviate from your will, also you know what is not spoken.'

Then we came onto the fourth buttress: we turned and descended, on the left, down into the narrow and perforated depths. The kind master did not let me leave his side until he took me to the hole occupied by the one who so agonised with his feet.

1
*The third chasm:
the sellers of
sacred offices*

31
Pope Nicholas III

INFERNO

I began to speak: ‘O, unhappy spirit, whoever you are, who have your upper parts below, planted like a stake, form words if you can.’ I stood like the friar who gives confession to a treacherous assassin, who, after being fixed in the ground, calls the confessor back, and so delays his burial. And he cried: ‘Are you standing there already, Boniface, are you standing there already? The book of the future has deceived me by several years. Are you sated, so swiftly, with that wealth, for which you did not hesitate to seize the Church, our lovely lady, and then destroy her?’

I became like those who stand, not knowing what has been said to them, and unable to reply, exposed to scorn. Then Virgil said: ‘Quickly, say to him, “I am not him, I am not whom you think.”’ And I replied as I was instructed. At which the spirit’s legs writhed fiercely: then, sighing, in a tearful voice, he said to me: ‘Then what do you want of me? If it concerns you so much to know who I am, that you have left the ridge, know that I wore the Great Mantle, and truly I was son of the Orsini she-bear, so eager to advance her cubs, that I pursued up wealth, above, and here myself.’

The other simonists, who came before me, are drawn down below my head, cowering inside the cracks in the stone. I too will drop down there, when Boniface comes, the one I mistook you for when I put my startled question. But the extent of time, in which I have baked my feet, and stood like this, reversed, is already longer than the time he shall stand planted in turn with glowing feet, since, after him, will come Clement, the lawless shepherd, of uglier actions, fit indeed to cap Boniface and me.

He will be a new Jason, the high priest, whom we read about in Maccabees: and as his king Antiochus was compliant, so will Philip be, who governs France.’

88

*Dante speaks against
simony*

☞ I do not know if I was too foolhardy then, but I answered him in this way: ‘Ah, now tell me, how much wealth the Lord demanded of Peter, before he gave the keys of the Church into his keeping? Surely he demanded nothing, saying only: ‘Follow me.’ Nor did Peter or the other Apostles, ask gold or silver of Matthias, when he was chosen to fill the place that Judas, the guilty soul, had forfeited. So, remain here, since you are justly punished, and keep well the ill-gotten money, that made you so bold against Charles of Anjou.’

CANTO XIX

And were it not that I am still restrained by reverence for the great keys that you held in your hand in the joyful life, I would use even more forceful words, since your avarice grieves the world, trampling the good, and raising the wicked. John the Evangelist spoke of shepherds such as you, when he saw 'the great whore that sitteth upon many waters, with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication', she that was born with seven heads and, as long as virtue pleased her spouse, had justification.

You have made a god for yourselves of gold and silver, and how do you differ from the idolaters, except that he worships one image and you a hundred? Ah, Constantine, how much evil you gave birth to, not in your conversion, but in that Donation that the first wealthy Pope, Sylvester, received from you!

And while I sung these notes to him, he thrashed violently with both his feet, either rage or conscience gnawing him. I think it pleased my guide, greatly, he had so satisfied an expression, listening to the sound of the true words I spoke. So he lifted me with both his arms, and when he had me quite upon his breast, climbed back up the path he had descended, and did not tire of carrying me clasped to him, till he had borne me to the summit of the arch, that crosses from the fourth to the fifth rampart.

Here he set his burden down, lightly: light for him, on the rough steep cliff, that would be a difficult path for a goat. From there another valley was visible to me.

XX

1
*The fourth chasm:
 the seers and sorcerers*



MUST MAKE VERSES of new torments, and give matter for this twentieth Canto, of the Inferno that treats of the damned. I was now quite ready to look into the ditch, bathed with tears of anguish, which was revealed to me: I saw people coming, silent and weeping, through the circling valley, at a pace which processions, that chant Litanies, take through the world. When my eyes looked further down on them, each of them appeared strangely distorted, between the chin and the start of the chest, since the head was reversed towards the body, and they had to move backwards, since they were not allowed to look forwards. Perhaps one might be so distorted by palsy, but I have not seen it, and do not credit it.

Reader, as God may grant that you profit from your reading, think now yourself how I could keep from weeping, when I saw our image so contorted, nearby, that the tears from their eyes bathed their hind parts at the cleft. Truly, I wept, leaning against one of the rocks of the solid cliff, so that my guide said to me: ‘Are you like other fools, as well? Pity is alive here, where it is best forgotten. Who is more impious than one who bears compassion for God’s judgement?’

31
The seers

‘Lift your head, lift it and see him for whom earth opened, under the eyes of the Thebans, at which they all shouted: “Where are you rushing, Amphiaräus? Why do you quit the battle?” And he did not stop his downward rush until he reached Minos, who grasps every sinner. Note how he has made a chest of his shoulders: because he willed to see too far beyond him, he now looks behind and goes backwards.

See Tiresias, who changed his form, when he was made a woman, all his limbs altering: and later he had to strike the two entwined snakes with his staff, a second time, before he could resume a male aspect.

That one is Aruns, who has his back to Tiresias’s belly, he who in the

CANTO XX

mountains of Tuscan Luni, where the Carrarese hoe, who live beneath them, had a cave to live in, among the white marble, from which he could gaze at the stars and the sea, with nothing to spoil his view.'

'And she that hides her breasts, that you cannot see, with her flowing tresses, and has all hairy skin on the other side, was Manto, who searched through many lands, then settled where I was born, about which it pleases me to have you listen to me speak a while. ◁

52
*Manto and
the founding
of Mantua*

After her father departed from life, and Thebes, the city of Bacchus, came to be enslaved, she roamed the world a long time. A lake, Lake Garda, lies at the foot of the Alps, up in beautiful Italy, where Germany is closed off beyond the Tyrol. Mount Apennino, between the town of Garda and Val Camonica, is bathed by the water that settles in the lake. In the middle there is a place where the Bishops of Trent, Brescia, and Verona might equally give the blessing if they went that way. A strong and beautiful fortress stands, where the shoreline is lowest, to challenge the Brescians and Bergamese.

There, all the water that cannot remain in the breast of Lake Garda, has to descend through the green fields, and form a river. As soon as the water has its head, it is no longer Garda, but Mincio, down to Governolo where it joins the Po. It has not flowed far before it finds the level, on which it spreads and makes a marsh there, and in summer tends to be unwholesome. Manto, the wild virgin, passing that way, saw untilled land, naked of inhabitants, among the fens. There, to avoid all human contact, she stayed, with her followers, to practise her arts, and lived there, and left her empty body.

Then the people who were scattered round gathered together in that place, which was well defended by the marshes on every side. They built the city over those dead bones, and without other augury, called it Mantua, after her who first chose the place. Once there were more inhabitants, before Casalodi, was foolishly deceived by Pinamonte. So, I charge you, if you ever hear another story of the origin of my city, do not let falsehoods destroy the truth.'

And I said: 'Master, your speeches are so sound to me, and so hold my belief, that any others are like spent ashes. But tell me about the people who are passing, if you see any of them worth noting, since my mind returns to that alone.' ◁

100
*The soothsayers
and astrologers*

INFERNO

Then he said to me: 'That one, whose beard stretches down from his cheeks, over his dusky shoulders, was an augur, when Greece was so emptied of males, for the expedition against Troy, that there were scarcely any left, even in their cradles. Like Calchas at Aulis, he set the moment for cutting loose the first cable. Eurypylus is his name, and my high Poem sings of it in a certain place: you know it well, who know the whole thing.

The other, so thin about the flanks, is Michael Scott, who truly understood the fraudulent game of magic. See Guido Bonatti, see Asdente, who wishes now he had attended more to his shoemaker's leather and cord, but repents too late. See the miserable women who abandoned needle, shuttle and spindle, and became prophetesses: they made witchcraft, using herbs and images.

But come, now, for Cain with his bundle of thorns, that Man in the Moon, reaches the western confines of both hemispheres, and touches the waves south of Seville, and already, last night, the Moon was full: you must remember it clearly, since she did not serve you badly in the deep wood.' So he spoke to me, and meanwhile we moved on.

XXI

SO FROM BRIDGE to bridge we went, with other conversation which my *Commedia* does not choose to recall, and were at the summit arch when we stopped to see the next cleft of Malebolge, and more vain grieving, and I found it marvellously dark.

As, in the Venetian Arsenal, the glutinous pitch boils in winter, that they use to caulk the leaking boats they cannot sail; and so, instead one man builds a new boat, another plugs the seams of his, that has made many voyages, one hammers at the prow, another at the stern, some make oars, and some twist rope, one mends a jib, the other a mainsail; so, a dense pitch boiled down there, not melted by fire, but by divine skill, and glued the banks over, on every side.

I saw it, but nothing in it, except the bubbles that the boiling caused, and the heaving of it all, and the cooling part's submergence. While I was gazing fixedly at it, my guide said: 'Take care. Take care!' and drew me towards him, from where I stood. Then I turned round, like one who has to see what he must run from, and who is attacked by sudden fear, so that he dare not stop to look: and behind us I saw a black Demon come running up the cliff.

Ah, how fierce his aspect was! And how cruel he seemed in action, with his outspread wings, and nimble legs! His high pointed shoulders, carried a sinner's two haunches, and he held the sinews of each foot tight.

He cried: 'You, Malebranche, the Evil-clawed, see here is one of Lucca's elders, that city whose patron is Santa Zita : push him under while I go back for the rest, back to that city which is well provided with them: every one there is a barrator, except Bonturo ; there they make 'Yes' of 'No' for money.

He threw him down, then wheeled back along the stony cliff, and never was a mastiff loosed so readily to catch a thief. The sinner plunged in, and

1
*The fifth chasm:
the sellers of
public offices*

31
The barrators

INFERNO

rose again writhing, but the demons under cover of the bridge, shouted: 'Here the face of Christ, carved in your cathedral, is of no avail: here you swim differently than in the Serchio: so, unless you want to try our grapples, do not emerge above the pitch.'

Then they struck at him with more than a hundred prongs, and said: 'Here you must dance, concealed, so that you steal in private, if you can.' No different is it, when the cooks make their underlings push the meat down into the depths of the cauldrons with their hooks, to stop it floating.

59

Virgil challenges the demon's threats

☞ The good master said to me: 'Cower down behind a rock, so that you have a screen to protect yourself, and so that it is not obvious that you are here, and whatever insult is offered to me, have no fear, since I know these matters, having been in a similar danger before.' Then he passed beyond the bridgehead, and when he arrived on the sixth bank, it was necessary for him to present a bold front.

The demons rushed from below the bridge, and turned their weapons against him, with the storm and fury with which a dog rushes at a poor beggar, who suddenly seeks alms when he stops. But Virgil cried: 'None, of you, commit an outrage. Before you touch me with your forks, one of you come over here, to listen, and then discuss whether you will grapple me.' They all cried: 'You go, Malacoda' at which one moved while the others stood still, and came towards Virgil, saying: 'What good will it do him?'

My Master said: 'Malacoda, do you think I have come here without the Divine Will, and propitious fate, safe from all your obstructions? Let me go by, since it is willed, in Heaven, that I show another this wild road.' Then the demon's pride was so down, that he let the hook drop at his feet, and said to the others: 'Now, do not hurt him!' And my guide to me: 'O you, who are sitting, crouching, crouching amongst the bridge's crags, return to me safely, now!' At which I moved, and came to him quickly, and the devils all pressed forward so that I was afraid they would not hold to their orders. So I once saw the infantry, marching out, under treaty of surrender, from Caprona, afraid at finding themselves surrounded by so many enemies.

97

The demons escort the poets

☞ I pressed my whole body close to my guide, and did not take my eyes away from their aspect, which was hostile. They lowered their hooks, and kept

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saying, to one another: 'Shall I touch him on the backside?' and answering, 'Yes, see that you give him a nick.'

But that demon who was talking to my guide, turned round quickly, and said: 'Be quiet, be quiet, Scarmiglione.' Then he said to us: 'It will not be possible to go any further along this causeway, since the sixth arch is lying broken at the base, and if you desire still to go forward, go along this ridge, and nearby is another cliff that forms a causeway. Yesterday, five hours later than this hour, twelve hundred and sixty-six years were completed, since this path here was destroyed.

I am sending some of my company here to see if anyone is out for an airing: go with them, they will not commit treachery.' Then he began speaking: 'Advance, Alichino and Calcabrina, and you, Cagnazzo: let Barbariccia lead the ten. Let Libicocco come as well, and Draghignazzo, tusked Ciriatto, Grafficane, Farfarello, and Rubicante the mad one. Search round the boiling glue: see these two safe, as far as the other cliff that crosses the chasms, completely, without a break.'

I said: 'O me! Master, what do I see? Oh, let us go alone, without an escort, if you know the way: as for me, I would prefer not. If you are as cautious as usual, do you not see how they grind their teeth, and darken their brows, threatening us with mischief?' And he to me: 'I do not want you to be afraid: let them grin away at their will: since they do it for the boiled wretches.'

They turned by the left bank: but first, each of them had stuck his tongue out, between his teeth, towards their leader, as a signal, and he had made a trumpet of his arse.

XXII

1
*The poets view more
 of the fifth chasm*



I HAVE SEEN cavalry moving camp, before now, starting a foray, holding muster, and now and then retiring to escape; I have seen war-horses on your territory, O Aretines, and seen the foraging parties, the clash of tournaments, and repeated jousts; now with trumpets, now with bells, with drums and rampart signals, with native and foreign devices, but I never yet saw infantry or cavalry, or ship at sight of shore or star, move to such an obscene trumpet.

We went with the ten demons: ah, savage company! But, they say: 'In church with the saints, and in the inn with the drunkards.' But my mind was on the boiling pitch, to see each feature of the chasm, and the people who were burning in it. Like dolphins, arching their backs, telling the sailors to get ready to save their ship, so, now and then, to ease the punishment, some sinner showed his back, and hid as quick as lightning.

And as frogs squat, at the edge of the ditchwater, with only mouths showing, so that their feet and the rest of them are hidden, so the sinners stood on every side: but they instantly shot beneath the seething, as Barbariccia approached.

31
Ciampolo

I saw, and my heart still shudders at it, one linger, just as one frog remains when the others scatter: and Graffiacane, who was nearest him, hooked his pitchy hair, and hauled him up, looking, to me, like an otter. I already knew the names of every demon, so I noted them well as they were called, and when they shouted to each other, listened out.

'O Rubicante, see you get your clutches in him, and flay him,' all the accursed tribe cried together. And I: 'Master, make out if you can, who that wretch is, who has fallen into the hands of his enemies.' My guide drew close to him, and asked him where he came from, and he answered: 'I was born in the kingdom of Navarre. My mother placed me as a servant to a

CANTO XXII

lord, since she had borne me to a scurrilous waster of himself and his possessions. Then I was of the household of good King Thibaut, and there I took to selling offices, for which I serve my sentence in this heat.'

And Ciriatto, from whose mouth a tusk, like a boar's, projected on each side, made him feel how one of them could rip. The mouse had come among the evil cats: but Barbariccia caught him in his arms, and said: 'Stand back, while I fork him!' And, turning to my Master, he said: 'Ask away, if you want to learn more from him, before someone else gets at him.'

So my guide said: 'Now say, do you know any of the other sinners under the boiling pitch that is a Latian?' And Ciampolo replied: 'I separated, just now, from one who was a neighbour of theirs over there, and I wish I were still beneath him, since I should not then fear claw or hook!' And Libicocco cried: 'We have endured this too long!' and grappled Ciampolo's arm with the prong, and, mangling it, carried away a chunk. Draghignazzo, too, wanted a swipe at the legs, below: at which their leader twisted round and round on them with an evil frown.

When they had settled a little, without waiting, my guide asked Ciampolo, who was still gazing at his wound: 'Who was he, from whom you say you unluckily separated, to come on land?' He replied: 'It was Friar Gomita, he of Gallura, in Sardinia, the vessel of every fraud, who held his master's prisoners in his hands, and treated them so that they all praise him for it, taking money for himself, and letting them go, quietly: and in his other roles, he was a high, and not a low, barrator.'

76
*Ciampolo names
other barrators*

With him, Don Michel Zanche of Logodoro, keeps company, and their tongues never tire of speaking of Sardinia. O me! See that other demon grinning: I would speak more, but I fear he is getting ready to claw my skin.' And their great captain, turning to Farfarello, who was rolling his eyes to strike, said: 'Away with you, cursed bird.'

The scared sinner then resumed: 'If you want to see or hear Tuscans or Lombards, I will make them come, but let the Malebranche hold back a little, so that the others may not feel their vengeance, and sitting here, I, who am one, will make seven appear, by whistling, as we do, when any of us gets out.' Cagnazzo raised his snout, at these words, and, shaking his head, said:

97
*Ciampolo breaks
free of the demons*

INFERNO

‘Hear the wicked scheme he has contrived to plunge back down.’ At which Ciampolo, who had a great store of tricks, replied: ‘I would be malicious indeed, if I contrived greater sorrow for my companions.’

Alichino, could contain himself no longer, and contrary to the others said to him: ‘If you run, I will not charge after you, but beat my wings above the boiling pitch: forget the cliff, and let the bank be a course, and see if you alone can beat us.’ O you that read this, hear of this new sport! They all glanced towards the cliff side, he above all who had been most unwilling for this. The Navarrese picked his moment well, planted his feet on the ground, and in an instant plunged, and freed himself from their intention.

124
*The Malebranche
quarrel*

☞ Each of the demons was stung with guilt, but Alichino most who had caused the error: so he started up and shouted: ‘You are caught!’ But it helped him little, since wings could not outrun terror: the sinner dived down: and Alichino, flying, lifted his breast. The duck dives like that when the falcon nears, and the hawk flies back up, angry and thwarted.

Calcabrina, furious at the trick, flew on after him, wanting the sinner to escape, in order to quarrel. And when the barrator had vanished, he turned his claws on his friend, and grappled with him above the ditch. But the other was sparrow hawk enough to claw him thoroughly, and both dropped down, into the centre of the boiling pond.

The heat, instantly, separated them, but they could not rise, their wings were so glued up. Barbariccia, lamenting with the rest, made four fly over to the other bank, with all their grappling irons, and they dropped rapidly on both sides to the shore. They stretched their hooks out to the trapped pair, who were already scaled by the crust, and we left them, like that, embroiled.

XXIII

SILENT, ALONE, AND FREE of company, we went on, one in front, and the other after, like minor friars journeying on their way. My thoughts were turned, by the recent quarrel, to Aesop's fable of the frog and mouse, since 'Si' and 'Yes' are not better matched, than the one case with the other, if the thoughtful mind couples the beginning and end.

And as one thought springs from another, so another sprang from that, redoubling my fear. I thought of this: 'Through us, these are mocked, and with a kind of hurt and ridicule, that I guess must annoy them. If anger is added to their malice, they will chase after us, fiercer than snapping dogs that chase a leveret.' I felt my hair already lifting in fright, and was looking back intently, as I said: 'Master, if you do not hide us both, quickly, I am afraid of the Malebranche: they are already behind us: I imagine I can hear them now.'

And he: 'If I were made of silvered glass, I could not take up your image from outside more rapidly than I fix that image from within. Even now your thoughts were entering mine, with similar form and action, so that, from both, I have made one decision. If the right bank slopes enough, that we can drop down, into the next chasm, we will escape this imaginary pursuit.' he had not finished stating this resolve, when I saw them, not far off, coming with extended wings, with desire to seize us.

My guide suddenly took me up like a mother, wakened by a noise, seeing flames burning in front of her eyes, who takes her child and runs, and caring more about him than herself, does not even wait to look around her. Down from the ridge of the solid bank, he threw himself forward on to the hanging cliff that dams up the side of the next chasm. Water never ran as fast through the conduit, turning a mill-wheel on land, when it reaches the paddles, as my Master, down that bank, carrying me, against his breast, like a son, and not a companion.

1
*The sixth chasm:
the hypocrites*

INFERNO

His feet had hardly touched the floor, of the depth below, before the demons were on the heights above us, but it gave him no fear, since the high Providence, that willed them to be the guardians of the fifth moat, takes, from all of them, the power to leave it.

58

The hypocrites

☞ Down below we found a metal-coated tribe, weeping, circling with very slow steps, and weary and defeated in their aspect. They had cloaks, with deep hoods over the eyes, in the shape they make for the monks of Cologne. On the outside they are gilded so it dazzles, but inside all leaden, and so heavy, that compared to them Frederick's were made of straw.

O weary mantle for eternity! We turned to the left again, beside them, who were intent on their sad weeping, but those people, tired by their burden, came on so slowly that our companions were new at every step. At which, I said to my guide: 'Make a search for someone known to us, by name or action, and gaze around as we move by.' And one of them, who understood the Tuscan language, called after us: 'Rest your feet, you who speed so fast through the dark air, maybe you will get from me what you request.' At which my guide turned round and said: 'Wait, and then go on, at his pace.'

82

*The Fraudi Gaudenti:
Caiaphas*

☞ I stood still, and saw two spirits, who were eager in mind to join me, but their burden and the narrow path delayed them. When they arrived, they eyed me askance, for a long time, without speaking a word, then they turned to one another and said: 'This one seems alive, by the movement of his throat, and if they are dead, by what grace are they moving, free of the heavy cloaks?'

Then they said to me: 'O Tuscan, you have come to the college of sad hypocrites: do not scorn to tell us who you are.' And I to them: 'I was born, and I grew up, by Arno's lovely river, in the great city: and I am in the body I have always worn. But you, who are you, from whom such sadness is distilled, that I see, coursing down your cheeks? And what punishment is this, that glitters so?' And one of them replied: 'Our orange mantles are of such dense lead, that weights made of it cause the scales to creak.'

We were Fraudi Gaudenti, of that Bolognese order called the 'Jovial Friars': I am Catalano, and he is Loderingo, chosen by your city, as usually only one is chosen, to keep the peace: and we wrought such as still appears

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round your district of Gardingo. ‘O Friars, your evil...’ I began, but said no more, because one came in sight, crucified, on the ground, with three stakes. When he saw me he writhed all over, puffing into his beard, and sighing, and Friar Catalano, who saw this, said to me: ‘That one you look at, who is transfixed, is Caiaphas, the high priest, who counselled the Pharisees, that it was right to martyr one man for the sake of the people. Crosswise and naked he lies in the road, as you see, and feels the weight of everyone who passes: and his father-in-law Annas is racked, in this chasm, and the others of that Council, that was a source of evil to the Jews.’

Then I saw Virgil wonder at him, stretched out on the cross, so vilely, in eternal exile.

He addressed these words to the Friars, afterwards: ‘If it is lawful for you, may it not displease you, to tell us if there is any gap on the right, by which we might leave here, without forcing any of the black angels to come and extricate us from this deep.’ He replied: ‘There is a causeway that runs from the great circular wall and crosses all the cruel valleys, nearer at hand than you think, except that it is broken here and does not cover this one: you will be able to climb up among its ruins, that slope down the side, and form a mound at the base.’

Virgil stood, for a while, with bowed head, then said: ‘Malacoda, who grapples sinners over there, told us the way wrongly.’ And the Friar said: ‘I once heard the Devil’s vices related at Bologna, amongst which I heard that he is a liar, and the father of lies.’ Then my guide went striding on, his face somewhat disturbed by anger, at which I parted from the burdened souls, following the prints of his beloved feet.

76
*The poets leave
the sixth chasm*

INFERNO

XXIV

1
*The poets climb up:
Virgil exhorts Dante*



IN THAT PART of the new year, when the sun cools his rays under Aquarius, and the nights already shorten towards the equinox; when the hoar-frost copies its white sister the snow's image on the ground, but the hardness of its tracery lasts only a little time; the peasant, whose fodder is exhausted, rises and looks out, and sees the fields all white, at which he strikes his thigh, goes back into the house, and wanders to and fro, lamenting, like a wretch who does not know what to do; then comes out again, and regains hope, seeing how the world has changed its aspect, in a moment; and takes his crook, and chases his lambs out to feed; so the Master made me disheartened, when I saw his forehead so troubled: but the plaster arrived quickly for the wound.

For, when we reached the shattered arch, my guide turned to me with that sweet aspect, that I first saw at the base of the mountain. He opened his arms, after having made some plan in his mind, first looking carefully at the ruin, and took hold of me. And like one who prepares and calculates, always seeming to provide in advance, so he, lifting me up towards the summit of one big block, searched for another fragment, saying: 'Now clamber over that, but check first if it will carry you.'

It was no route for one clothed in a cloak of lead, since we could hardly climb from rock to rock, he weighing little, and I pushed from behind. And if the ascent were not shorter on that side than on the other, I would truly have been defeated, I do not know about him. But as Malebolge all drops towards the entrance to the lowest well, the position of every valley implies that the one side rises, and the other falls: at last, we came, however, to the point at which the last boulder ends.

The breath was so driven from my lungs, when I was up, that I could go no further: in fact, I sat down when I arrived. The Master said: 'Now, you

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must free yourself from sloth: men do not achieve fame, sitting on down, or under coverlets; fame, without which whoever consumes his life leaves only such trace of himself, on earth, as smoke does in the air, or foam on water: so rise, and overcome weariness with spirit, that wins every battle, if it does not lie down with the gross body. A longer ladder must be climbed: to have left these behind is not enough: if you understand me, act now so it may profit you.'

I rose then, showing myself to be better filled with breath than I thought, and said: 'Go on, I am strong again and ardent.'

We made our way along the causeway, which was rugged, narrow, difficult, and much steeper than before. I went, speaking, so that I might not seem weak, at which a voice came from the next moat, inadequate for forming words. I do not know what it said, though I was already on the summit of the bridge that crosses there, but he who spoke seemed full of anger. I had turned to look downwards, but my living eyes could not see the floor, for the darkness, so that I said: 'Master, make sure you get to the other side, and let us climb down the wall, since as I hear sounds from below, but do not understand them, so I see down there, and make out nothing.' He said: 'I make you no answer, but by action, since a fair request should be followed, in silence, by the work.'

61
*The seventh chasm:
the thieves*

We went down the bridge, at the head of it, where it meets the eighth bank, and then the seventh chasm was open to me. I saw a fearful mass of snakes inside, and of such strange appearance, that even now the memory freezes my blood. Let Libya no longer vaunt its sands: though it engenders chelydri, and jaculi; pareae; and cenchres with amphisbaena; it never showed pests so numerous or dreadful, nor did Ethiopia, nor Arabia, the land that lies along the Red Sea. Amongst this cruel and mournful swarm, people were running, naked and terrified, without hope of concealment, or of that stone, the heliotrope, that renders the wearer invisible.

They had their hands tied behind them, with serpents, that fixed their head and tail between the loins, and were coiled in knots in front.

And see, a serpent struck at one who was near our bank, and transfixed him, there, where the neck is joined to the shoulders. Neither 'o' nor 'i'

97
*Vanni Fucci and
the serpent*

INFERNO

was ever written as swiftly as he took fire, and burned, and dropped down, transformed to ashes: and after he was heaped on the ground, the powder gathered itself together, and immediately returned to its previous shape. So, great sages say, the phoenix dies, and then renews, when it nears its five-hundredth year. In its life it does not eat grass or grain, but only tears of incense, and amomum: and its last shroud is nard and myrrh.

The sinner when he rose was like one who falls, and does not know how, through the power of a demon that drags him down to the ground, or through some other affliction that binds men, and, when he rises, gazes round himself, all dazed by the great anguish he has suffered, and as he gazes, sighs. O how heavy the power of God, that showers down such blows in vengeance!

The guide then asked him who he was, at which he answered: 'I rained down from Tuscany into this gully, a short while back. Brutish, not human, life pleased me, mule that I was: I am Vanni Fucci, the wild beast, and Pistoia was a fitting den for me.' And I to the guide: 'Tell him not to move: and ask what crime sank him down here, since I knew him as a man of blood and anger.'

130

Vanni Fucci's prophecy

☞ And the sinner, who heard me, did not pretend, but turned his face and mind on me, and gave a look of saddened shame. Then he said: 'It hurts me more for you to catch me, trapped, in the misery you see me in, than the moment of my being snatched from the other life. I cannot deny you what you ask. I am placed so deep down because I robbed the sacristy of its fine treasures, and it was once wrongly attributed to others. But, so that you might not take joy from this sight if you ever escape the gloomy regions, open your ears, and hear what I declare :

Pistoia first is thinned of Blacks: then Florence changes her people and her laws. Mars brings a vapour, from Valdimagra cloaked in turbid cloud, and a battle will be fought on the field of Piceno, in an angry and eager tempest, that will suddenly tear the mist open, so that every White is wounded by it. And I have said this to give you pain.'

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AT THE END of his speech, the thief raised his hands, both making the fig, the obscene gesture, with thumb between fingers, shouting: ‘Take this, God, I aim it at you.’ From that moment the snakes were my friends, since one of them coiled itself round his neck, as if hissing: ‘You will not be able to speak again.’ Another, round his arms, tied him again, knotting itself so firmly in front, that he could not even shake them.

Ah, Pistoia, Pistoia, why do you not order yourself to be turned to ash, so that you may remain no longer, since you outdo your seed in evil-doing? I saw no spirit so arrogant towards God, through all the dark circles of the Inferno, not even, Capaneus, he who fell from the wall at Thebes. Vanni Fucci fled, saying not another word, and I saw a Centaur, full of rage, come, shouting: ‘Where is he, where is the bitter one?’

I do not believe Maremma has as many snakes, as he had on his haunches, there, where the human part begins. Over his shoulders, behind the head, lay a dragon with outstretched wings, and it scorches every one he meets. My Master said: ‘That is Cacus, who often made a lake of blood, below the rocks of Mount Aventine. He does not go with his brothers on the same road, above, because of his cunning theft from the great herd of oxen, pastured near him: for which his thieving actions ended, under the club of Hercules, who gave him a hundred blows perhaps with it, and he did not feel a tenth.’

While he said this, the Centaur ran past, and three spirits came by, also, beneath us, whom neither I, nor my guide, saw, until they cried: ‘Who are you?’ Our words ceased, then, and we gave our attention to them, alone.

I did not know them, but it happened, as it usually does for some reason, that one had to call the other, saying: ‘Where has Cianfa gone?’ At which I placed my finger over my mouth, in order to make my guide stop and wait.

1
Cacus

34
Cianfa and Agnello

INFERNO

Reader, if you are slow to credit, now, what I have to tell, it will be no wonder, since I who saw it, scarcely credit it myself. While I kept looking at them, a six-footed serpent darted in front of one of them, and fastened itself on him, completely. It clasped his belly with its middle feet, seized his arms with the front ones, and then fixed its teeth in both his cheeks. The rear feet it stretched along his thighs, and put its tail between them, and curled it upwards round his loins, behind.

Ivy was never rooted to a tree, as the foul monster twined its limbs around the other. Then they clung together, as if they were melted wax, and mixed their colours: neither the one nor the other seemed what it had at first: just as in front of the flame on burning paper, a brown colour appears, not yet black, and the white is consumed.

The other two looked on, and each cried: 'Ah me, Agnello, how you change! See, you are already not two, not one!' The two heads had now become one, where two forms seemed to us merged in one face, and both were lost. Two limbs were made of the four forearms, the thighs, legs, belly and chest became such members as were never seen before. The former shape was all extinguished in them: the perverse image seemed both, and neither, and like that it moved away with slow steps.

79
*Buoso degli Abati
and Francesco*

☞ As the lizard, in the great heat of the Dog days, appears like a flash of lightning, scurrying from hedge to hedge, if it crosses the track, so a little reptile came towards the bellies of the other two, burning with rage, black and livid as peppercorn. And it pierced that part, in one of them, where we first receive our nourishment from our mothers: then fell down, stretched out in front of him. The thief, transfixed, gazed at it but said nothing, but with motionless feet, only yawned, as if sleep or fever had overcome him. He looked at the snake: it looked at him: the one gave out smoke, violently, from his wound, the other from its mouth, and the smoke met.

Let Lucan now be silent, about Sabellus and Nasidius, and wait to hear that which I now tell. Let Ovid be silent about Cadmus and Arethusa: if he in poetry changes one into a snake, and the other into a fountain, I do not envy him, since he never transmuted two natures, face to face, so that both forms were eager to exchange their substance.

CANTO XXV

They merged together in such a way, that the serpent split its tail into a fork, and the wounded spirit brought his feet together. Along with them, the legs and thighs, so stuck to one another, that soon the join left no visible mark. The cleft tail took on the form lost in the other, and its skin grew soft, the other's hard. I saw the arms enter the armpits: and the two feet of the beast that were short, lengthened themselves by as much as the arms were shortened. Then the two hind feet twisted together, and became the organ that a man conceals, and the wretch, from his, had two pushed out.

While the smoke covers them both with a new colour, and generates hair on one part, and strips it from another, the one rose up, erect, and the other fell, prostrate: not by that shifting their impious gaze, beneath which they mutually exchanged features. The erect one drew his face towards the temples, and from the excess of matter that swelled there, ears came, out of the smooth cheeks. That which did not slip back, but remained, formed a nose from the superfluous flesh, and enlarged the lips to their right size. He that lay prone, thrust his sharpened visage forward, and drew his ears back into his head, as the snail does its horns into its shell, and his tongue, which was solid before, and fit for speech, splits itself. In the other the forked tongue melds, and the smoke is still.

The soul that had become a beast, sped, hissing, along the valley, leaving the other, speaking and spluttering, behind him. Then the second turned his new-won shoulders towards him, and called to the other: 'Buoso shall crawl, as I did, along this road.' So I saw the seventh chasm's bodies mutate and transmutate: and let the novelty of it be the excuse, if my pen has gone astray.

Though my sight was somewhat confused, and my mind dismayed, they could not flee so secretly, but that I clearly saw Puccio Sciancato : and it was he, alone, of the three companions, who had first arrived, who was not changed. One of the others, Francesco, was he who caused you, the people of Gaville, to weep.

XXVI

1
*The eighth chasm:
 the evil counsellors*

☞ **R**EJOICE, FLORENCE, THAT, since you are so mighty, you beat your wings over land and sea, and your name spreads through Hell itself. So, among the thieves, I found five of your citizens: at which I am ashamed, and you do not rise to great honour by it either. But if the truth is dreamed, as morning comes, you will soon feel what Prato, and others, wish on you. And, if it were come already, it would not be too soon: would it were so, now, as indeed it must come, since it will trouble me more, the older I am.

We left there, and my guide remounted by the stairs that the stones had made for us to descend, and drew me up: and, following our solitary way, among the crags and splinters of the cliff, the foot made no progress without the hand.

I was saddened then, and sadden now, again, when I direct my mind to what I saw, and rein in my intellect more than I am used, so that it does not run where virtue would not guide it, and so that, if a good star, or some truer power, has granted me the talent, I may not abuse the gift.

The eighth chasm was gleaming with flames, as numerous as the fireflies the peasant sees, as he rests on the hill, when the sun, who lights the world, hides his face least from us, and the fly gives way to the gnat down there, along the valley, where he gathers grapes, perhaps, and ploughs.

As soon as I came to where the floor showed itself, I saw them, and, as Elisha, the mockery of whom by children was avenged by bears, saw Elijah's chariot departing, when the horses rose straight to Heaven, and could not follow it with his eyes, except by the flame alone, like a little cloud, ascending, so each of those flames moved, along the throat of the ditch, for none of them show the theft, but every flame steals a sinner.

34
Ulysses and Diomedes

☞ I stood on the bridge, having so risen to look, that if I had not caught hold of a rock I should have fallen in without being pushed. And the guide, who

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saw me so intent, said: 'The spirits are inside those fires: each veils himself in that which burns him.' I replied: 'Master, I feel more assured from hearing you, but had already seen that it was so, and already wished to say to you, who is in that fire, that moves, divided at the summit, as if it rose from the pyre where Eteocles was cremated with his brother, Polynices ?'

He answered me: 'In there, Ulysses and Diomede are tormented, and so they go, together in punishment, as formerly in war: and, in their fire, they groan at the ambush of the Trojan horse, that made a doorway, by which Aeneas, the noble seed of the Romans issued out. In there they lament the trick, by which Deidamia, in death, still weeps for Achilles : and there, for the Palladium, they endure punishment.'

I said: 'Master, I beg you greatly, and beg again so that my prayers may be a thousand, if those inside the fires can speak, do not refuse my waiting until the horned flame comes here: you see how I lean towards it with desire.' And he to me: 'Your request is worth much praise, and so I accept it, but restrain your tongue. Let me speak: since I conceive what you wish, and because they were Greeks they might disdain your Trojan words.'

When the flame had come, where the time and place seemed fitting, to my guide, I heard him speak, so: 'O you, who are two in one fire, if I was worthy of you when I lived, if I was worthy of you, greatly or a little, when on earth I wrote the high verses, do not go, but let one of you tell where he, being lost through his own actions, went to die.'

The greater horn of the ancient flame started to shake itself, murmuring, like a flame struggling in the wind. Then moving the tip, as if it were a tongue speaking, gave out a voice, and said: 'When I left Circe, who held me for more than a year, near to Gaeta, before Aeneas named it, not even my fondness for my son, Telemachus, my reverence for my aged father, Laërtes, nor the debt of love that should have made Penelope happy, could restrain in me the desire I had, to gain experience of the world, and of human vice and worth.'

I set out on the wide, deep ocean, with only one ship, and that little company, that had not abandoned me. I saw both shores, as far as Spain, as far as Morocco, and the isle of Sardinia, and the other islands that sea washes.

85
*Ulysses's
last voyage*

INFERNO


I, and my companions, were old, and slow, when we came to that narrow strait, where Hercules set up his pillars, to warn men from going further. I left Seville to starboard: already Ceuta was left behind on the other side.

I said: 'O my brothers, who have reached the west, through a thousand dangers, do not deny the brief vigil, your senses have left to them, experience of the unpopulated world beyond the Sun. Consider your origin: you were not made to live like brutes, but to follow virtue and knowledge.' With this brief speech I made my companions so eager for the voyage, that I could hardly have restrained them, and turning the prow towards morning, we made wings of our oars for that foolish flight, always turning south.

Night already saw the southern pole, with all its stars, and our northern pole was so low, it did not rise from the ocean bed. Five times the light beneath the moon had been quenched and relit, since we had entered on the deep pathways, when a mountain appeared to us, dim with distance, and it seemed to me the highest I had ever seen. We rejoiced, but soon our joy was turned to grief, when a tempest rose from the new land, and struck the prow of our ship. Three times it whirled her round, with all the ocean: at the fourth, it made the stern rise, and the prow sink, as it pleased another, till the sea closed over us.'

CANTO XXVII

XXVII

 **HE FLAME WAS** now erect and quiet, no longer speaking, and was going away from us, with the permission of the sweet poet, when another, that came behind forced us to turn our eyes towards its summit, since a confused sound escaped there.

As the Sicilian bull, that first bellowed with the groans of Perillus, who had smoothed it with his file (and that was right) bellowed with the sufferer's voice, so that, although it was bronze, it seemed pierced with agony, so here, the dismal words, having, at their source, no exit from the fire, were changed into its language. But when they had found a path out through the tip, giving it the movement that the tongue had given in making them, we heard it say: 'O you, at whom I direct my voice, and who, but now, was speaking Lombard, saying: "Now go: no more, I beg you", let it not annoy you to stop and speak with me, though perhaps I have come a little late: you see it does not annoy me, and I burn.

If you are only now fallen into this blind world, from that sweet Latian land, from which I bring all my guilt, tell me if Romagna has peace or war, for I was of the mountains there, between Urbino and Monte Coronaro, the source from which the Tiber springs.'

I was still leaning downwards eagerly, when my leader touched me on the side, saying: 'Speak, this is a Latian.' And I who had my answer ready, began to speak then without delay: 'O spirit, hidden there below, your Romagna is not, and never has been, without war in the hearts of her tyrants: but I left no open war there now.

Ravenna stands, as it has stood for many years: Guido Vecchio da Polenta's eagle broods over it, so that it covers Cervia with its claws. That city, Forlì, that withstood so long a siege, and made a bloody pile of Frenchmen, finds itself again under the paws of Ordelaffi's green lion.

1
*Guido Da
Montefeltro*

31
*The Situation in
Romagna*

INFERNO

Malatesta, the old mastiff of Verruchio, and the young one, Malatestino, who made bad jailors for Montagna, sharpen their teeth, where they used to do. Faenza, on the Lamone, and Imola on the Santerno, those cities lead out Pagano, the lion of the white lair, who changes sides when he goes from south to north, and Cesena, that city whose walls the Savio bathes, where it lies between the mountain and the plain, likewise lives between freedom and tyranny.

Now I beg you, tell us who you are: do not be harder than others have been to you, so that your name may keep its lustre on earth.'

58

Guido's History

☞ When the flame had roared for a while as usual, it flickered the sharp point to and fro, and then gave out this breath: 'If I thought my answer was given to one who could ever return to the world, this flame would flicker no more, but since, if what I hear is true, no one ever returned, alive, from this deep, I reply, without fear of defamation.

I, Guido da Montefeltro, was a man of arms: and then became a Cordelier of Saint Francis, hoping to make amends, so habited: and indeed my hopes would have been realised in full, but for the Great Priest, Boniface, evil to him, who drew me back to my first sins: and how and why, I want you to hear from me.

While I was in the form of bones and pulp, that my mother gave me, my actions were not those of the lion, but of the fox. I knew all the tricks and coverts, and employed the art of them so well, that the noise went out to the ends of the earth. When I found myself arrived at that point of life, when everyone should furl their sails, and gather in the ropes, what had pleased me before, now grieved me, and with repentance and confession, I turned monk. Ah misery! Alas, it would have served me well.

But the Prince of the Pharisees; that Pope waging war near the Lateran, and not with Saracens or Jews, since all his enemies were Christians, and none had been to conquer Acre, or been a merchant in the Sultan's land; had no regard for the highest office, nor holy orders, nor my habit of Saint Francis, that used to make those who wore it leaner; but as the Emperor Constantine sought out Saint Sylvester, on Mount Soracte, to cure his leprosy, so this man called me, as a doctor to cure his feverish pride. He demanded counsel of me, and I kept silent, since his speech seemed drunken.

CANTO XXVII

Then he said to me: 'Do not be doubtful, I absolve you beforehand: and, you, teach me how to act, so that I may raze the fortress of Palestrina to the ground. I can open and close Heaven as you know, with the two keys, that my predecessor, Celestine, did not prize.' Then the weighty arguments forced me to consider silence worse, and I said: 'Father, since you absolve me of that sin, into which I must now fall, large promises to your enemies, with little delivery of them, will give you victory, from your high throne.'

Afterwards, when I was dead, Saint Francis came for me: but one of the Black Cherubim said to him: 'Do not take him: do not wrong me. He must descend among my servants, because he gave a counsel of deceit, since when I have kept him fast by the hair: he who does not repent, cannot be absolved: nor can one repent a thing, and at the same time will it, since the contradiction is not allowed.' O miserable self! How I started, when he seized me, saying to me: 'Perhaps you did not think I was a logician.'

He carried me to Minos, who coiled his tail eight times round his fearful back, and then, biting it in great rage, said: 'This sinner is for the thievish fire', and so I am lost here, as you see, and clothed like this, go inwardly grieving.'

When he had ended his speech, so, the flame went sorrowing, writhing and flickering its sharp horn. We passed on, my guide and I, along the cliff, up to the other arch, that covers the next ditch, in which the reward is paid to those who collect guilt by sowing discord.

XXVIII

1
*The ninth chasm: the
 sowers of discord*

☞ **WHO COULD EVER** fully tell, even with repeated unimprisoned words, the blood and wounds I saw now? Every tongue would certainly fail, since our speech and memory have too small a capacity to comprehend so much. If all the people, too, were gathered, who once grieved for their blood, in the fateful land of Apulia, by reason of the Samnite War of the Romans, of Trojan seed; and those, from that long Punic War, that, as Livy writes, who does not err, yielded so great a wealth of rings, from Cannae's battlefield; and those who felt the pain of blows by withstanding Robert Guiscard; and the rest, whose bones are still heaped at Ceperano, where all the Apulians turned traitor, for Charles of Anjou; and there, at Tagliacozzo where old Alardo's advice to Charles conquered without weapons: and some were to show pierced limbs, and others severed stumps; it would be nothing to equal the hideous state of the ninth chasm.

22
*Mahomet: the
 Caliph Ali*

☞ Even a wine-cask, that has lost a stave in the middle or the end, does not yawn as widely, as a spirit I saw, cleft from the chin down to the part that gives out the foulest sound: the entrails hung between his legs: the organs appeared, and the miserable gut that makes excrement of what is swallowed.

While I stood looking wholly at him, he gazed at me, and opened his chest with his hands, saying: 'See how I tear myself: see how Mahomet is ripped! In front of me, Ali goes, weeping, his face split from chin to scalp, and all the others you see here, were sowers of scandal and schism in their lifetimes: so they are cleft like this. There is a devil behind who tears us cruelly like this, reapplying his sword blade to each of this crowd, when they have wandered round the sad road, since the wounds heal before any reach him again.

But who are you, who muse there on the cliff, maybe to delay your path to punishment, in sentence for your crimes?'

CANTO XXVIII

My Master replied: 'Death has not come to him yet, nor does guilt lead him to torment, but it is incumbent on me, who am dead, to grant him full experience, and lead him, through the Inferno, down here, from circle to circle, and this is truth, that I tell you.' When they heard him, more than a hundred spirits, in the ditch, halted, to look at me, forgetting their agony, in their wonder.

After lifting up one foot, to leave, Mahomet said to me: 'Well now, you who will soon see the sun, perhaps, tell Fra Dolcino of the Apostolic Brothers, if he does not wish to follow me, quickly, down here, to furnish himself with supplies, so that the snow-falls may not bring a victory for the Novarese, that otherwise would be difficult to achieve.' Then, he strode forward to depart.

Another, who had his throat slit, and nose cut off to the eyebrows, and had only a single ear, standing to gaze in wonder with the rest, opened his wind-pipe, that was red outside, all over, and said: 'You, that no guilt condemns, and whom I have seen above on Latian ground, unless resemblance deceives me, remember Pier della Medicina, if you ever return to see the gentle plain, that slopes down from Vercelli to Marcabò. And make known to the worthiest two men in Fano, Messer Guido, and Angiolello, also, that unless our prophetic powers here are in vain, they will be cast out of their boat, and drowned near Cattolica, by treachery. Neptune never saw a greater crime, between the isles of Cyprus and Majorca, not even among those carried out by pirates, or by Greeks. Malatestino, the treacherous one, who only sees with one eye, and holds the land, that one, who is here with me, wishes he had never seen, will make them come to parley with him, then act so that they will have no need of vow or prayer to counter Focara's winds.

And I said to him: 'If you would have me carry news of you, above, show me and explain who he is that rues the sight of it.' Then he placed his hand on the jaw of one of his companions, and opened the mouth, saying: 'This is he: and he does not speak. This outcast quelled Caesar's doubts at the Rubicon, saying that delay always harms men who are ready.' O how dejected, Curio seemed to me, with his tongue slit in his palate, who was so bold in speech!

55
*Pier della Medicina
and others*

91
Curio and Mosca

INFERNO

And one who had both hands severed, lifting the stumps through the dark air, so that their blood stained his face, said: 'You will remember Mosca too, who said, alas, "A thing done, has an end" which was seed of evil to the Tuscan race.' 'And death to your people,' I added, at which he, accumulating pain on pain, went away like one sad and mad.

112

Bertrand de Born

☞ But I remained behind to view the crowd, and saw a thing, which, without more proof, I would be afraid to even tell, except that conscience reassures me, the good companion, that strengthens a man, under the armour of his self-respect.

I saw it clearly, and still seem to see, a headless trunk, that goes on before, like the others, in that miserable crew, and holds its severed head, by the hair, swinging, like a lantern, in its hand. It looked at us, and said: 'Ah me!'. It made a lamp of itself, to light itself, and there were two in one, and one in two: how that can be he knows, who made it so.

When it was right at the foot of our bridge, it lifted its arm high, complete with the head, to bring its words near to us, which were: 'Now you see the grievous punishment, you, who go, alive and breathing, to see the dead: look if any are as great as this. And so that you may carry news of me, know that I am Bertrand de Born, he who gave evil counsel to the Young King. I made the father and the son rebel against each other: Ahithophel did no more for Absalom and David, by his malicious stirrings.

Because I parted those who were once joined, I carry my intellect, alas, split from its origin in this body. So, in me, is seen just retribution.

XXIX

THE MULTITUDE OF PEOPLE, and the many wounds, had made my eyes so tear-filled, that they longed to stop and weep, but Virgil said to me: ‘Why are you still gazing? Why does your sight still rest, down there, on the sad, mutilated shadows? You did not do so at the other chasms. Think, if you wish to number them, that the valley circles twenty-two miles, and the moon is already underneath our feet. The time is short now, that is given us, and there are other things to view, than those you see.’

I replied, then: ‘Had you noticed the reason why I looked, perhaps you might still have allowed me to stay.’ Meanwhile, the guide was moving on, and I went behind him, making my reply, and adding, now: ‘In the hollow where I held my gaze, I believe a spirit of my own blood, laments the guilt that costs so greatly here.’ Then the Master said: ‘Do not let your thoughts be distracted by him: attend to something else: let him stay there. I saw him point to you, at the foot of the little bridge, and threaten, angrily, with his finger: and I heard them call him Geri del Bello. You were so entangled, then, with him who once held Altaforte, that you did not look that way, so he departed.’

I said: ‘Oh, my guide, his violent murder made him indignant, not yet avenged on his behalf, by any that shares his shame: therefore, I guess, he went away, without speaking to me: and, by that, has made me pity him the more.’

So we talked, as far as the first place on the causeway that would have revealed the next valley, right to its floor, if it had been lighter. When we were above the last cloister of Malebolge, so that its lay brothers could be seen, many groans pierced me, whose arrows were barbed with pity, at which I covered my ears with my hands. Such pain there was, as there would be, if the diseases in the hospitals of Valdichiana, Maremma and Sardinia, be-

1
Geri del Bello

37
*The tenth chasm:
the falsifiers*

INFERNO

tween July and September, were all rife in one ditch: a stench arose from it, such as issues from putrid limbs.

We descended on the last bank of the long causeway, again on the left, and then my sight was clearer, down to the depths, where infallible Justice, the minister of the Lord on high, punishes the falsifiers that it accounts for here. I do not think it would have been a greater sadness to see the people of plague-ridden Aegina, when the air was so malignant, that every animal, even the smallest worm, was killed, and afterwards, as Poets say, for certain, the ancient race was restored from the seed of ants, than it was to see the spirits languishing in scattered heaps through that dim valley. This one lay on its belly, that, on the shoulders of the other, and some were crawling along the wretched path.

Step by step we went, without a word, gazing at, and listening to, the sick who could not lift their bodies.

73
*Griffolino and
Capocchio*

☞ I saw two sitting, leaning on each other, as one pan is leant to warm against another: they were marked with scabs from head to foot, and I never saw a stable lad his master waits for, or one who stays awake unwillingly, use a currycomb as fiercely, as each of these two clawed himself with his nails, because of the intensity of their itching, that has no other relief.

And so the nails dragged the scurf off, as a knife does the scales from bream, or other fish with larger scales. My Guide began to speak: 'O you, who strip your chain-mail with your fingers, and often make pincers of them, tell us if there is any Latian among those here, inside: and may your nails be enough for that task for eternity.' One of them replied, weeping: 'We are both Latians, whom you see so mutilated here, but who are you who enquire of us? And the guide said: 'I am one, who with this living man, descends from steep to steep, and mean to show him Hell.'

Then the mutual prop broke, and each one turned, trembling, towards me, along with others that heard him, by the echo.

100
Griffolino's narrative

☞ The good Master addressed me directly, saying: 'Tell them what you wish,' and I began as he desired: 'So that your memory will not fade, from human minds, in the first world, but will live for many suns, tell us who you are, and of what race. Do not let your ugly and revolting punishment make you afraid to reveal yourselves to me.'

CANTO XXIX

The one replied: 'I was Griffolino of Arezzo, and Albero of Siena had me burned: but what I died for did not send me here. It is true I said to him, jesting, "I could lift myself into the air in flight," and he who had great desire and little brain, wished me to show him that art: and only because I could not make him Daedalus, he caused me to be burned, by one who looked on him as a son.

But to the last chasm of the ten, Minos, who cannot err, condemned me, for the alchemy I practised in the world.'

And I said to the poet: 'Now was there ever a people as vain as the Sieneſe? ♡ Certainly not the French, by far.' At which the other leper, hearing me, replied to my words: 'What of Stricca, who contrived to ſpend ſo little: and Niccolò who firſt diſcovered the coſtly uſe of cloves, in that garden, Siena, where ſuch ſeed takes root: and that company in which Caccia of Aciano threw away his vineyard, and his vaſt foreſt, and the Abbagliato ſhowed his wit.

But ſo that you may know who ſeconds you like this againſt the Sieneſe, ſharpen your eye on me, ſo that my face may reply to you: ſo you will ſee I am Capocchio's ſhadow, who made falſe metals, by alchemy, and you muſt remember, if I know you rightly, how well I aped nature.'

121
*The spendthrift
brigade*

INFERNO

XXX

1
Schicci and Myrrha

AT THE TIME when Juno was angry, as she had shown more than once, with the Theban race, because of Jupiter's affair with Semele, she so maddened King Athamas, that, seeing his wife, Ino, go by, carrying her two sons in her arms, he cried: 'Spread the hunting nets, so that I can take the lioness and her cubs, at the pass,' and then stretched out his pitiless talons, snatching the one, named Learchus, and, whirling him round, dashed him against the rock: and Ino drowned herself, and her other burden, Melicertes. And after fortune had brought down the high Trojan pride, that dared all, so that Priam the king, and his kingdom were destroyed, Queen Hecuba, a sad, wretched captive, having witnessed the sacrifice of Polyxena, alone, on the sea-shore, when she recognised the body of her Polydorus, barked like a dog, driven out of her senses, so greatly had her sorrow racked her mind.

But neither Theban nor Trojan Furies were ever seen embodied so cruelly, in stinging creatures, or even less in human limbs, as I saw displayed in two shades, pallid and naked, that ran, biting, as a hungry pig does, when he is driven out of his sty. The one came to Capocchio, and fixed his tusks in his neck, so that dragging him along, it made the solid floor rasp his belly. And the Aretine, Griffolino, who was left, said to me, trembling: 'That goblin is Gianni Schicci, and he goes, rabidly, mangling others like that.' I replied: 'Oh, be pleased to tell us who the other is, before it snatches itself away, and may it not plant its teeth in you.'

And he to me: 'That is the ancient spirit of incestuous Myrrha, who loved her father, Cinyras, with more than lawful love. She came to him, and sinned, under cover of another's name, just as the one who is vanishing there, undertook to disguise himself as Buoso Donati, so as to gain the mare, called the Lady of the Herd, by forging a will, and giving it legal form.'

CANTO XXX

When the furious pair, on whom I had kept my eye, were gone, I turned to look at the other spirits, born to evil.

I saw one, who would have been shaped like a lute, if he had only had his groin cut short, at the place where a man is forked. The heavy dropsy, that swells the limbs, with its badly transformed humours, so that the face does not match the belly, made him hold his lips apart, as the fevered patient does who, through thirst, curls one lip towards the chin, and the other upwards.

49
Adam of Brescia

He said to us: 'O you, who are exempt from punishment in this grim world (and why, I do not know), look and attend to the misery of Master Adam. I had enough of what I wished, when I was alive, and now, alas, I crave a drop of water. The little streams that fall, from the green hills of Casentino, down to the Arno, making cool, moist channels, are constantly in my mind, and not in vain, since the image of them parches me, far more than the disease, that wears the flesh from my face.

The rigid justice, that examines me, takes its opportunity from the place where I sinned, to give my sighs more rapid flight. That is Romena, where I counterfeited the coin of Florence, stamped with the Baptist's image: for that, on earth, I left my body, burned. But if I could see the wretched soul of Guido here, or Alessandro, or Aghinolfo, their brother, I would not exchange that sight for Branda's fountain. Guido is down here already, if the crazed spirits going round speak truly, but what use is it to me, whose limbs are tied?

If I were only light enough to move, even an inch, every hundred years, I would already have started on the road, to find him among this disfigured people, though it winds around eleven miles, and is no less than half a mile across. Because of them I am with such a crew: they induced me to stamp those florins that were adulterated, with three carats alloy.'

I said to him: 'Who are those abject two, lying close to your right edge, and giving off smoke, like a hand, bathed, in winter? He replied: 'I found them here, when I rained down into this pound, and they have not turned since then, and may never turn I believe.

91
Potiphar's Wife

One is the false wife who accused Joseph. The other is lying Sinon, the Greek from Troy. A burning fever makes them stink so strongly.' And Sinon, who perhaps took offence at being named so blackly, struck

INFERNO

Adamo's rigid belly with his fist, so that it resounded, like a drum: and Master Adam struck him in the face with his arm, that seemed no softer, saying to him: 'I have an arm free for such a situation, though I am kept from moving by my heavy limbs.' At which Sinon answered: 'You were not so ready with it, going to the fire, but as ready, and readier, when you were coining.' And he of the dropsy: 'You speak truth in that, but you were not so truthful a witness, there, when you were questioned about the truth at Troy.'

'If I spoke falsely, you falsified the coin,' Sinon said, 'and I am here for the one crime, but you for more than any other devil.' He who had the swollen belly answered: 'Think of the Wooden Horse, you liar, and let it be a torment to you that all the world knows of it.' The Greek replied: 'Let the thirst that cracks the tongue be your torture, and the foul water make your stomach a barrier in front of your eyes.' Then the coiner: 'Your mouth gapes wide as usual, to speak ill. If I have a thirst, and moisture swells me, you have the burning, and a head that hurts you: and you would not need many words of invitation, to lap at the mirror of Narcissus.'

130

Virgil reproves Dante

☞ I was standing, all intent on hearing them, when the Master said to me: 'Now, keep gazing much longer, and I will quarrel with you!' When I heard him speak to me in anger, I turned towards him, with such a feeling of shame that it comes over me again, as I only think of it. And like someone who dreams of something harmful to them, and dreaming, wishes it were a dream, so that they long for what is, as if it were not; that I became, who, lacking power to speak, wished to make an excuse, and all the while did so, not thinking I was doing it.

My Master said: 'Less shamefacedness would wash away a greater fault than yours, so unburden yourself of sorrow, and know that I am always with you, should it happen that fate takes you, where people are in similar conflict: since the desire to hear it, is a vulgar desire.'

XXXI



ONE AND THE SAME tongue at first wounded me, so that it painted both my cheeks with blushes, and then gave out the ointment for the wound. So I have heard the spear of Achilles, and his father Peleus, was the cause first of sadness, and then of a healing gift.

We turned our back on the wretched valley, crossing without a word, up by the bank that circles round it. Here was less darkness than night and less light than day, so that my vision showed only a little in front: but I heard a high-pitched horn sound, so loudly, that it would have made thunder seem quiet: it directed my eyes, that followed its passage back, straight to a single point. Roland did not sound his horn so fiercely, after the sad rout, when Charlemagne had lost the holy war, at Roncesvalles.

I had kept my head turned for a while in that direction, when I seemed to make out many high towers, at which I said: 'Master, tell me what city this is?' And he to me: 'Because your eyes traverse the darkness from too far away, it follows that you imagine wrongly. You will see, quite plainly, when you reach there, how much the sense is deceived by distance, so press on more strongly.' Then he took me, lovingly, by the hand, and said: 'Before we go further, so that the reality might seem less strange to you, know that they are Giants, not towers, and are in the pit, from the navel downwards, all of them, around its bank.'

As the eye, when a mist is disappearing, gradually recreates what was hidden by the vapour thickening the air, so, while approaching closer and closer to the brink, piercing through that gross, dark atmosphere, error left me, and my fear increased. As Montereccione crowns its round wall with towers, so the terrible giants, whom Jupiter still threatens from the heavens, when he thunders, turreted with half their bodies the bank that circles the well.

I
The giants
that guard the
central pit

INFERNO

46
Nimrod

☞ And I already saw the face of one, the shoulders, chest, the greater part of the belly, and the arms down both sides. When nature abandoned the art of making creatures like these, she certainly did well by removing such killers from warfare, and if she does not repent of making elephants and whales, whoever looks at the issue subtly, considers her more prudent and more right in that, since where the instrument of mind is joined to ill will and power, men have no defence against it.

His face seemed to me as long and large as the bronze pine-cone, in front of St Peter's in Rome, and his other features were in proportion, so that the bank that covered him from the middle onwards, revealed so much of him above that three Frieslanders would have boasted in vain of reaching his hair, since I saw thirty large hand-spans of him down from the place where a man pins his cloak.

The savage mouth, for which no sweeter hymns were fit, began to rave: 'Rafel mai amech sabi almi.' And my guide turning to him, said: 'Foolish spirit, stick to your hunting-horn, and vent your breath through that, when rage or some other passion stirs you. Search round your neck, O confused soul, and you will find the belt where it is slung, and see that which arcs across your huge chest.' Then he said to me: 'He declares himself. This is Nimrod, through whose evil thought, one language is not still used, throughout the whole world. Let us leave him standing here, and not speak to him in vain: since every language, to him, is like his to others, that no one understands.'

82
Ephialtes

☞ So we went on, turning to the left, and, a crossbow-shot away, we found the next one, far larger and fiercer. Who and what the power might be that bound him, I cannot say, but he had his right arm pinioned behind, and the other in front, by a chain that held him tight, from the neck down, and, on the visible part of him, reached its fifth turn.

My guide said: 'This proud spirit had the will to try his strength against high Jupiter, and so has this reward. Ephialtes is his name, and he made the great attempt, when the Giants made the gods fear, and the arms he shook then, now, he never moves.'

97
Antaeus

☞ And I said to him: 'If it were possible, I would wish my eyes to light on vast Briareus.' To which he replied: 'You will see Antaeus, nearby, who

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speaks and is unchained, and will set us down in the deepest abyss of guilt. He whom you wish to see is far beyond, and is formed and bound like this one, except he seems more savage in his features.' No huge earthquake ever shook a tower, as violently as Ephialtes promptly shook himself. Then I feared death more than ever, and the fear alone would have been enough to cause it, had I not seen his chains.

We then went further on, and reached Antaeus, who projected twenty feet from the pit, not including his head. The Master spoke: 'O you, who, of old, took a thousand lions for your prey, in the fateful valley, near Zama, that made Scipio heir to glory, when Hannibal retreated with his army; you, through whom, it might still be believed, the Giant sons of Earth would have overcome the gods, if you had been at the great war with your brothers; set us down, and do not be shy to do it, where the cold imprisons the River Cocytus, in the Ninth Circle.

Do not make us ask Tityos or Typhon. Bend, and do not curl your lips in scorn: this man can give that which is longed for, here: he can refresh your fame on earth, since he is alive, and still expects long life, if grace does not call him to her before his time.' So the Master spoke, and Antaeus quickly stretched out both hands, from which Hercules of old once felt the power, and seized my guide. Virgil when he felt his grasp, said to me: 'Come here, so that I may carry you.' Then he made one bundle of himself and me.

To me, who stood watching to see Antaeus stoop, he seemed as the leaning tower at Bologna, the Carisenda, appears to the view, under the leaning side, when a cloud is passing over it, and it hangs in the opposite direction. It was such a terrible moment I would have wished to have gone by another route, but he set us down gently in the deep, that swallowed Lucifer and Judas, and did not linger there, bent, but straightened himself, like a mast raised in a boat.

XXXII

1
*The ninth circle: the
 frozen river cocytus*

☞ **I F I HAD WORDS**, rough and hoarse enough, to fit the dismal chasm, on which all the other rocky cliffs weigh, and converge, I would squeeze out the juice of my imagination more completely: but since I have not, I bring myself, not without fear, to describe the place: to tell of the pit of the Universe is not a task to be taken up in play, nor in a language that has words like ‘mother’ and ‘father’. But may the Muses, those Ladies, who helped Amphion shut Thebes behind its walls, aid my speech, so that my words may not vary from the truth.

O you people, created evil beyond all others, in this place that is hard to speak of, it were better if you had been sheep or goats here on earth! When we were down, inside the dark well, beneath the Giants’ feet, and much lower, and I was still staring at the steep cliff, I heard a voice say to me: ‘Take care as you pass, so that you do not tread, with your feet, on the heads of the wretched, weary brothers.’ At which I turned, and saw a lake, in front of me and underneath my feet, that, because of the cold, appeared like glass not water.

The Danube, in Austria, never formed so thick a veil for its winter course, nor the Don, far off under the frozen sky, as was here: if Mount Tambernic in the east, or Mount Pietrapana, had fallen on it, it would not have even creaked at the margin. And as frogs sit croaking with their muzzles above water, at the time when peasant women often dream of gleaning, so the sad shadows sat, in the ice, livid to where the blush of shame appears, chattering with their teeth, like storks.

Each one held his face turned down: the cold is witnessed, amongst them, by their mouths: and their sad hearts, by their eyes.

40
*The Caïna:
 the degli Alberti
 Camicion*

☞ When I had a looked around awhile, turning to my feet, I saw two, so compressed together, that the hair of their heads was intermingled. I said:

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‘Tell me, you, who press your bodies together so: who are you?’ And they twisted their necks up, and when they had lifted their faces towards me, their eyes, which were only moist, inwardly, before, gushed at the lids, and the frost iced fast the tears, between them, and sealed them up again. No vice ever clamped wood to wood as firmly: so that they butted one another like two he-goats, overcome by such rage.

And one, who had lost both ears to the cold, with his face still turned down, said: ‘Why are you staring at us, so fiercely? If you want to know who these two are, they are the degli Alberti, Allesandro and Napoleone: the valley where the Bisenzio runs down, was theirs and their father Alberto’s. They issued from one body, and you can search the whole Caïna, and will not find shades more worthy of being set in ice: not even Mordred, whose chest and shadow, were pierced, at one blow, by his father’s, King Arthur’s, lance: nor Focaccia: nor this one, who obstructs my face with his head, so that I cannot see further, who was named Sassol Mascheroni. If you are a Tuscan, now, you know truly what he was.

And so that you do not put me to more speech, know that I am Camicion de’ Pazzi, and am waiting for Carlino, my kinsman, to outdo me.’

Afterwards I saw a thousand faces, made doglike by the cold, at which a trembling overcomes me, and always will, when I think of the frozen fords. And, whether it was will, or fate or chance, I do not know: but walking, among the heads, I struck my foot violently against one face. Weeping it cried out to me: ‘Why do you trample on me? If you do not come to increase the revenge for Montaperti, why do you trouble me?’

And I: ‘My Master, wait here for me, now, so that I can rid me of a doubt concerning him, then you can make as much haste as you please.’ The Master stood, and I said to that shade which still reviled me bitterly: ‘Who are you, who reproach others in this way?’ ‘No, who are you,’ he answered, ‘who go through the Antenora striking the faces of others, in such a way, that if you were alive, it would be an insult?’

I replied: ‘I am alive, and if you long for fame, it might be a precious thing to you, if I put your name among the others.’ And he to me: ‘I long for the opposite: take yourself off, and annoy me no more: since you little know

70
*The Antenora:
Bocca degli Abbati*

INFERNO

how to flatter on this icy slope.’ Then I seized him by the back of the scalp, and said: ‘You need to name yourself, before there is not a hair left on your head!’ At which he said to me: ‘Even if you pluck me, I will not tell you who I am, nor demonstrate it to you, though you tear at my head, a thousand times.’

I already had his hair coiled in my hand, and had pulled away more than one tuft of it, while he barked, and kept his eyes down, when another spirit cried: ‘What is wrong with you, Bocca, is it not enough that you chatter with your jaws, but you have to bark too? What devil is at you?’ I said: ‘Now, accursed traitor, I do not want you to speak: since I will carry true news of you, to your shame.’ He answered: ‘Go, and say what you please, but, if you get out from here, do not be silent about him, who had his tongue so ready just now. Here he regrets taking French silver. You can say, “I saw Buoso de Duera, there, where the sinners stand caught in the ice.”

If you are asked who else was there, you have Tesauro de’ Beccheria, whose throat was slit by Florence. Gianni de’ Soldanier is further on, with Ganelon, and Tribaldello, who unbarred the gate of Faenza while it slept.’

124

Ugolino and Ruggieri

☞ We had already left him, when I saw two spirits frozen in a hole, so close together that the one head capped the other, and the uppermost set his teeth into the other, as bread is chewed, out of hunger, there where the back of the head joins the nape. Tydeus gnawed the head of Menalippus, no differently, out of rage, than this one the skull and other parts.

I said: ‘O you, who, in such a brutal way, inflict the mark of your hatred, on him, whom you devour, tell me why: on condition that, if you complain of him with reason, I, knowing who you are, and his offence, may repay you still in the world above, if the tongue I speak with is not withered.’

XXXIII



HAT SINNER RAISED his mouth from the savage feast, wiping it on the hair, of the head he had stripped behind. Then he began: 'You wish me to renew desperate grief, that wrings my heart at the very thought, before I even tell of it. But if my words are to be the seed, that bears fruit, in the infamy, of the traitor whom I gnaw, you will see me speak and weep together. I do not know who you are, nor by what means you have come down here, but when I hear you, you seem to me, in truth, a Florentine.

You must know that I am Count Ugolino, and this is the Archbishop Ruggieri. Now I will tell you why I am a neighbour such as this to him. It is not necessary to say that, confiding in him, I was taken, through the effects of his evil schemes, and afterwards killed. But what you cannot have learnt, how cruel my death was, you will hear: and know if he has injured me.

A narrow hole inside that tower, which is called *Famine*, from my death, and in which others must yet be imprisoned, had already shown me several moons through its opening, when I slept an evil sleep that tore the curtain of the future for me. This man seemed to me the lord, and master, chasing the wolf and its whelps, on Monte di San Guiliano, that blocks the view of Lucca from the Pisans. He had the Gualandi, Sismondi and Lanfranchi running with him, with hounds, slender, keen, and agile.

After a short chase the father and his sons seemed weary to me, and I thought I saw their flanks torn by sharp teeth. When I woke, before dawn, I heard my sons, who were with me, crying in their sleep, and asking for food. You are truly cruel if you do not sorrow already at the thought of what my heart presaged: and if you do not weep, what do you weep at?

They were awake now, and the hour nearing, at which our food used to be brought to us, and each of us was anxious from dreaming, when below

1
Count Ugolino's
story

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I heard the door of the terrible tower locked up: at which I gazed into the faces of my sons, without saying a word. I did not weep: I grew like stone inside: they wept: and my little Anselm said to me: 'Father you stare so, what is wrong?' But I shed no tears, and did not answer, all that day, or the next night, till another sun rose over the world. When a little ray of light was sent into the mournful gaol, and I saw in their four faces, the aspect of my own, I bit my hands from grief. And they, thinking that I did it from hunger, suddenly stood, and said: 'Father, it will give us less pain, if you gnaw at us: you put this miserable flesh on us, now strip it off, again.'

Then I calmed myself, in order not to make them more unhappy: that day and the next we all were silent. Ah, solid earth, why did you not open? When we had come to the fourth day, Gaddo threw himself down at my feet, saying: 'My father, why do you not help me?' There he died, and even as you see me, I saw the three others fall one by one, between the fifth and sixth days: at which, already blind, I took to groping over each of them, and called out to them for three days, when they were dead: then fasting, at last, had power to overcome grief.'

When he had spoken this, he seized the wretched skull again with his teeth, which were as strong as a dog's on the bone, his eyes distorted. Ah Pisa, shame among the people, of the lovely land where 'si' is heard, let the isles of Caprara and Gorgona shift and block the Arno at its mouth, since your neighbours are so slow to punish you, so that it may drown every living soul. Since if Count Ugolino had the infamy of having betrayed your castles, you ought not to have put his sons to the torture. Their youth made Uguccone and Brigata, and the other two my words above have named, innocents, you modern Thebes.

91
*Friar Alberigo and
Branca d'Oria*

☞ We went further on, where the rugged frost encases another people, not bent down but reversed completely. The very weeping there prevents them weeping: and the grief that makes an impediment to their sight, turns inward to increase their agony: since the first tears form a knot, and like a crystal visor, fill the cavities below their eyebrows. And though all feeling had left my face, through the cold, as though from a callus, it seemed to me now as if I felt a breeze, at which I said: 'Master, what causes this? Is the heat not

CANTO XXXIII

all quenched here below?’ At which he said to me: ‘Soon you will be where your own eyes, will answer that, seeing the source that generates the air.’

And one of the sad shadows, in the icy crust, cried out to us: ‘O spirits, so cruel that the last place of all is reserved for you, remove the solid veils from my face, that I might vent the grief a little that chokes my heart, before the tears freezes again.’ At which I said to him: ‘If you would have my help, tell me who you are: and if I do not disburden you, may I have to journey to the depths of the ice.’

He replied to that: ‘I am Friar Alberigo, I am he of the fruits of the evil garden, who here receive dates made of ice, to match my figs.’ I said to him: ‘O, are you dead already?’ And he to me: ‘How my body stands in the world above, I do not know, such is the power of this Ptolomaea, that the soul often falls down here, before Atropos cuts the thread. And so that you may more willingly clear the frozen tears from your face, know that when the soul betrays, as mine did, her body is taken from her by a demon, there and then, who rules it after that, till its time is complete. She falls, plunging down to this well: and perhaps the body of this other shade, that winters here, behind me, is still visible in the world above.’

You must know it, if you have only now come down here: it is Ser Branca d’Oria, and many years have passed since he was imprisoned here.’ I said to him: ‘I believe you are lying to me: Branca d’Oria is not dead, and eats and drinks, and sleeps, and puts on his clothes.’ He said: ‘Michel Zanche had not yet arrived, in the ditch of the Malebranche above, there where the tenacious pitch boils, when this man left a devil in his place in his own body, and one in the body of his kinsman who did the treachery with him. But reach your hand here: open my eyes.’ And I did not open them for him: and it was a courtesy to be rude to him.

Ah, Genoese, men divorced from all morality, and filled with every corruption, why are you not dispersed from off the earth? I found the worst spirit of Romagna was one of you, who for his actions even now bathes, as a soul, in Cocytus, and still seems alive on earth, in his own body.

XXXIV

1
The Judecca: Satan



EXILLA REGIS PRODEUNT INFERNI, the banners of the King of Hell advance towards us: so look in front of you to see if you discern him,' said my Master. I seemed to see a tall structure, as a mill, that the wind turns, seems from a distance, when a dense mist breathes, or when night falls in our hemisphere, and I shrank back behind my guide, because of the wind, since there was no other shelter.

I had already come, and with fear I put it into words, where the souls were completely enclosed, and shone through like straw in glass. Some are lying down, some stand upright, one on its head, another on the soles of its feet, another bent head to foot, like a bow.

When we had gone on far enough, that my guide was able to show me Lucifer, the monster who was once so fair, he removed himself from me, and made me stop, saying: 'Behold Dis, and behold the place where you must arm yourself with courage.' Reader, do not ask how chilled and hoarse I became, then, since I do not write it, since all words would fail to tell it. I did not die, yet I was not alive. Think, yourself, now, if you have any grain of imagination, what I became, deprived of either state.

The emperor of the sorrowful kingdom stood, waist upwards, from the ice, and I am nearer to a giant in size than the giants are to one of his arms: think how great the whole is that corresponds to such a part. If he was once as fair, as he is now ugly, and lifted up his forehead against his Maker, well may all evil flow from him. O how great a wonder it seemed to me, when I saw three faces on his head! The one in front was fiery red: the other two were joined to it, above the centre of each shoulder, and linked at the top, and the right hand one seemed whitish-yellow: the left was black to look at, like those who come from where the Nile rises. Under each face sprang two vast wings, of a size fit for such a bird: I never saw ship's sails as wide.

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They had no feathers, but were like a bat's in form and texture, and he was flapping them, so that three winds blew out away from him, by which all Cocytus was frozen. He wept from six eyes, and tears and bloody spume gushed down three chins.

He chewed a sinner between his teeth, with every mouth, like a grinder, so, in that way, he kept three of them in torment. To the one in front, the biting was nothing compared to the tearing, since, at times, his back was left completely stripped of skin.

The Master said: 'That soul up there that suffers the greatest punishment, he who has his head inside, and flails his legs outside, is Judas Iscariot. Of the other two who have their heads hanging downwards, the one who hangs from the face that is black is Brutus : see how he writhes and does not utter a word: and the other is Cassius, who seems so long in limb. But night is ascending,, and now we must go, since we have seen it all.'

I clasped his neck, as he wished, and he seized the time and place, and when the wings were wide open, grasped Satan's shaggy sides, and then from tuft to tuft, climbed down, between the matted hair and frozen crust.

When we had come to where the thigh joint turns, just at the swelling of the haunch, my guide, with effort and difficulty, reversed his head to where his feet had been, and grabbed the hair like a climber, so that I thought we were dropping back to Hell. 'Hold tight,' said my guide, panting like a man exhausted, 'since by these stairs, we must depart from all this evil.' Then he clambered into an opening in the rock, and set me down to sit on its edge, then turned his cautious step towards me.

I raised my eyes, thinking to see Lucifer as I had left him, but saw him with his legs projecting upwards, and let those denser people, who do not see what point I had passed, judge if I was confused then, or not.

My Master said: 'Get up, on your feet: the way is long, and difficult the road, and the sun already returns to mid-tierce.' Where we stood was no palace hall, but a natural cell with a rough floor, and short of light. When I had risen, I said: 'My Master, before I leave the abyss, speak to me a while, and lead me out of error. Where is the ice? And why is this monster fixed upside down? And how has the sun moved from evening to dawn in so short a time?'

55
*Judas:
Brutus
Cassius*

1
*The poets
leave Hell*

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And he to me: 'You imagine you are still on the other side of the earth's centre, where I caught hold of the Evil Worm's hair, he who pierces the world. You were on that side of it, as long as I climbed down, but when I reversed myself, you passed the point to which weight is drawn, from everywhere: and are now below the hemisphere opposite that which covers the wide dry land, and opposite that under whose zenith the Man was crucified, who was born, and lived, without sin. You have your feet on a little sphere that forms the other side of the Judecca.

Here it is morning, when it is evening there: and he who made a ladder for us of his hair is still as he was before. He fell from Heaven on this side of the earth, and the land that projected here before, veiled itself with the ocean for fear of him, and entered our hemisphere: and that which now projects on this side, left an empty space here, and shot outwards, maybe in order to escape from him.'

Down there, is a space, as far from Beelzebub as his cave extends, not known by sight, but by the sound of a stream falling through it, along the bed of rock it has hollowed out, into a winding course, and a slow incline. The guide and I entered by that hidden path, to return to the clear world: and, not caring to rest, we climbed up, he first, and I second, until, through a round opening, I saw the beautiful things that the sky holds: and we issued out, from there, to see, again, the stars.

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