

Canto 1

Midway on our life's journey, I found myself
In dark woods, the right road lost. To tell
About those woods is hard--so tangled and rough

And savage that thinking of it now, I feel
The old fear stirring: death is hardly more bitter.
And yet, to treat the good I found there as well

I'll tell what I saw, though how I came to enter
I cannot well say, being so full of sleep
Whatever moment it was I began to blunder

Off the true path. But when I came to stop
Below a hill that marked one end of the valley
That had pierced my heart with terror, I looked up

Toward the crest and saw its shoulders already
Mantled in rays of that bright planet that shows
The road to everyone, whatever our journey.

Then I could feel the terror begin to ease
That churned in my heart's lake all through the night.
As one still panting, ashore from dangerous seas,

Looks back at the deep he has escaped, my thought
Returned, still fleeing, to regard that grim defile
That never left any alive who stayed in it.

After I had rested my weary body awhile
I started again across the wilderness,
My left foot always lower on the hill,

And suddenly--a leopard, near the place
The way grew steep: lithe, spotted, quick of foot.
Blocking the path, she stayed before my face

And more than once she made me turn about
To go back down. It was early morning still,
The fair sun rising with the stars attending it

As when Divine Love set those beautiful
Lights into motion at creation's dawn,

And the time of day and season combined to fill

My heart with hope of that beast with festive skin--
But not so much that the next sight wasn't fearful:
A lion came at me, his head high as he ran,

Roaring with hunger so the air appeared to tremble.
Then, a grim she-wolf--whose leanness seemed to compress
All the world's cravings, that had made miserable

Such multitudes; she put such heaviness
Into my spirit, I lost hope of the crest.
Like someone eager to win, who tested by loss

Surrenders to gloom and weeps, so did that beast
Make me feel, as harrying toward me at a lope
She forced me back toward where the sun is lost.

While I was ruining myself back down th the deep,
Someone appeared--one who seemed nearly to fade
As though from long silence. I cried to his human shape

In that great wasteland: "Living man or shade,
Have pity and help me, whichever you may be!"
"No living man, though once I was," he relied.

"My parents both were Mantuans from Lombardy,
And I was born sub Julio, the latter end.
I lived in good Augustus's Rome, in the day

Of the false gods who lied. A poet, I hymned
Anchises' noble son, who came from troy
When superb Ilium in its pride was burned

But you--why go back down to such misery?
Why not ascend the delightful mountain, source
And principle that causes every joy?"

"Then are you Virgil? Are you the font that pours
So overwhelming a river of human speech?"
I answered, shamefaced. "The glory and light are yours,

That poets follow--may the love that made me search
Your book in patient study avail me, Master!

You are my guide and author, whose verses teach

The graceful style whose model has done me honor.
See this beast driving me backward--help me resist,
For she makes all my veins and pulses shudder."

"A different path from this on would be best
For you to find your way from this feral place,"
He answered, seeing how I wept. "This beast,

The cause of your complaint, lets no one pass
Her way--but harries all to death. Her nature
Is so malign and vicious she cannot appease

Her voracity, for feeding makes her hungrier.
Many are the beasts she mates: there will be more,
Until the Hound comes who will give this creature

A painful death. Not nourished by earthly fare,
He will be fed by wisdom, goodness and love.
Born between Feltro and Feltro, he shall restore

Low Italy, as Nisus fought to achieve.
And Turnus, Euryalus, Camilla the maiden--
All dead from wounds in war. He will remove

This lean wolf, hunting her through every region
Till he has thrust her back to Hell's abyss
Where Envy first dipatched her on her mission.

Therefore I judge it best that you should choose
To follow me, and I will be your guide
Away from here and through an eternal place:

To hear the cries of despair, and to behold
Ancient tormented spirits as they lament
In chorus the second death they must abide.

Then you shall see those souls who are content
To dwell in fire because they hope some day
To join in the blessed: toward whom, if your ascent

Continues, your guide will be one worthier than I--
When I must leave you, you will be with her.

For the Emperor who governs from on high

Wills I not enter His city, where none may appear
Who lived like me in rebellion to His law.
His empire is everything and everywhere,

But that is His kingdom, His city, His seat of awe.
Happy is the soul He chooses for that place!"
I: "Poet, please--by the God you did not know--

Help me escape this evil that I face,
And worse. Lead me to witness what you have said,
Saint Peter's gate, and the multitude of woes--"

Then he set out, and I followed where he led.

Canto II

Day was departing, and the darkening air
Called all earth's creatures to their evening quiet
While I alone was preparing as though for war

To struggle with my journey and with the spirit
Of pity, which flawless memory will redraw:
O Muses, O genius of art, O memory whose merit

Has inscribed inwardly those things I saw--
Help me fulfill the perfection of your nature.
I commenced: "Poet, take my measure now:

Appraise my powers before you trust me to venture
Through that deep passage where you would be my guide.
You write of the journey Silvius's father

Made to immortal realms although he stayed
A mortal witness, in his corruptible body.
That the Opponent of all evil bestowed

Such favor on him befits him, chosen for glory
By highest heaven to be the father of Rome
And of Rome's empire--later established Holy,

Seat of great Peter's heir. You say he came
To that immortal world, and things he learned
There led to the papal mantle--and triumph for him.

Later, the Chosen Vessel too went and returned,
Carrying confirmation of that faith
Which opens the way with salvation at its end.

But I--what cause, whose favor, could send me forth
On such a voyage? I am no Aeneas or Paul:
Not I nor others think me of such worth,

And therefore I have my fears of playing the fool
To embark on such a venture. You are wise:
You know my meaning better than I can tell."

And then, like one who unchooses his own choice
And thinking again undoes what he has started,

So I became: a nullifying unease

Overcame my soul on that dark slope and voided
The undertaking I had so quickly embraced.
"If I understand," the generous shade retorted,

"Cowardice grips your spirit--which can twist
A man away from the noblest enterprise
As a trick of vision startles a shying beast.

To ease burden of fear, I will disclose
Why I came here, and what I heard that compelled
Me first to feel compassion for you: it was

A lady's voice that called me where I dwelled
In Limbo--a lady so blessed and fairly featured
I prayed her to command me. Her eyes out-jeweled

The stars in splendor. 'O generous Mantuan spirit,'
She began in a soft voice of angelic sound,
'Whose fame lives still, that the world will still inherit

As long as the world itself shall live: my friend--
No friend of Fortune--has found his way impeded
On the barren slope, and fear has turned him round.

I fear he may be already lost, unaided:
So far astray, I've come from Heaven too late.
Go now, with your fair speech and what is needed

To save him; offer the help you have to give
Before he is lost, and I will be consoled.
I am Beatrice, come from where I crave

To be again, who asks this. As love has willed,
So have I spoken. And when I return
Before my Lord, He will hear your praises told.'

Then she was silent; and I in turn began,
'O lady of goodness, through whom alone mankind
Exceeds what the sky's least circle can contain

Within its compass: so sweet is your command
Had I already obeyed, it would feel too late.

But tell me how you so fearlessly descend

To such a center--from that encompassing state
You long to see again?' 'You yearn for the answer
Deeply,' she said, 'so I will tell in short

How I come to Limbo, yet feel no terror:
Fear befits things with power for injury,
Not things that lack such power. God the creator

Has by His mercy made me such that I
Cannot feel what you suffer: none of this fire
Assails me. In Heaven a Lady feels such pity

For this impediment where I send you, severe
Judgement is broken by her grace on high.
To Lucy she said: "Your faithful follower

Needs you: I commend him to you." Lucy, the foe
Of every cruelty, found me where I sat
With Rachel of old, and urged me: "Beatrice, true

Glory of God, can you not come to the aid
Of one whod had such love for you he rose
Above the common crowd? Do you not heed

The pity of his cries? And do your eyes
Not see death near him, in a flood the ocean
Itself can boast no power to surpass?"

Never on earth was anyone spurred to motion
So quickly, to seize advantage or fly from danger,
As at these words I hurried here from Heaven--

trusting your eloquence, whose gift brings honor
Both to yourself and to all those who listen.'
Having said this, she turned toward me the splendor

Of her eyes lucent with tears--which made me hasten
To save you, even more eagerly that before:
And so I rescued you on the fair mountain

Where the beast blocked the short way up. Therefore,
What is this? Why, why should you hold back?

Why be a coward rather than bolder, freer--

Since in the court of Heaven for your sake
Three blessed ladies watch, and words of mine
Have promised a good as great as you might seek?"

As flowers bent and shrunken by night at dawn
Unfold and straighten on their stems, to wake
Brightened by sunlight, so I grew strong again--

Good courage coursing through my heart, I spoke
Like one set free: "How full of true compassion
Was she who helped me, how courteous and quick

Were you to follow her bidding--and your narration
Has restored my spirit. Now, on: for I feel eager
To go with you, and cleave to my first intention.

From now, we two will share one will together:
You are my teacher, my master, and my guide."
So I spoke, and when he moved I followed after

And entered on that deep and savage road.

Canto III

THROUGH ME YOU ENTER INTO THE CITY OF WOES,
THROUGH ME YOU ENTER INTO ETERNAL PAIN,
THROUGH ME YOU ENTER THE POPLULATION OF LOSS

JUSTICE MOVED MY HIGH MAKER, IN POWER DIVINE,
WISDOM SUPREME, LOVE PRIMAL. NO THINGS WERE
BEFORE ME NOT ETERNAL; ETERNAL I REMAIN.

ABANDON ALL HOPE, YOU WHO ENTER HERE.
These words I saw inscribed in some dark color
Over a portal. "Master," I said, "make clear

Their meaning, which I find too hard to gather."
Then he, as one who understands: "All fear
Must be left here, and cowardice die. Together

We have arrived where I have told you: here
You will behold the wretched souls who've lost
The good of intellect." Then, with good cheer

In his expression to encourage me, he placed
His hand on mine: so trusting to my guide,
I followed him among things undisclosed.

The sighs, groans and laments at first were so loud,
Resounding through starless air, I began to weep:
Strange languages, horrible screams, words imbued

With rage or despair, cries as of troubled sleep
Of of a tortured shrillness--they rose in a coil
Of tumult, along with noises like the slap

Of beating hands, all fused in a ceaseless flail
That churns and frenzies that dark and timeless air
Like sand in a whirlwind. And I, my head in a swirl

Of error, cried: "Master, what is this I hear?
What people are these, whom pain has overcome?"
He: "This is the sorrowful state of souls unsure,

Whose lives earned neither honor nor bad fame.
And they are mingled with angels of that base sort

Who, neither rebellious to God nor faithful to Him,

Chose neither side, but kept themselves apart--
Now Heaven expels them, not to mar its splendor
And Hell rejects them, lest the wicked of heart

Take glory over them." And then I: "Master,
What agony is it, that makes them keen their grief
With so much force?" He: "I will make brief answer:

They have no hope of death, but a blind life
So abject, they envy any other fate.
To all memory of them, the world is deaf.

Mercy and justice disdain them. Let us not
Speak of them: look and pass on." I looked again:
A whirling banner sped at such a rate

It seemed it might never stop; behind it a train
Of souls, so long that I would not have thought
Death had undone so many. When more than one

I recognized had passed, I beheld the shade
Of him who made the Great Refusal, impelled
By cowardice: so at once I understood

Beyond all doubt that this was the dreary guild
Repellant both to God and His enemies--
Hapless ones never alive, their bare skin galled

By wasps and flies, blood trickling down the face,
Mingling with tears for harvest underfoot
By writhing maggots. Then when I turned my eyes

Farther along our course, I could make out
People upon the shore of some great river.
"Master," I said, "it seems by this dim light

That all of these are eager to cross over--
Can you tell me by what law, and who they are?"
He answered, "Those are things you will discover

When we have paused at Acheron's dismal shore."
I walked on with my head down after that,

Fearful I had displeased him, and spoke no more.

Then, at the river--an old man in a boat:
White-haired, as he drew closer shouting at us,
"Woe to you, wicked souls! Give up the thought

Of Heaven! I come to ferry you across
Into eternal dark on the opposite side,
Into fire and ice! And you there--leave this place,

You living soul, stand clear of these who are dead!"
And then, when he saw that I did not obey:
"By other ports, in a lighter boat," he said

"You will be brought to shore by another way."
My master spoke then, "Charon, do not rage:
Thus it is willed where everything may be

Simply if it is willed. Therefore, oblige,
And ask no more." That silenced the grizzled jaws
Of the gray ferryman of the livid marsh,

Who had red wheels of flame about his eyes.
But at his words the forlorn and naked souls
Were changing color, cursing the human race,

God and their parents. Teeth chattering in their skulls,
They called curses on the seed, the place, the hour
Of their own begetting and their birth. With wails

And tears they gathered on the evil shore
That waits for all who don't fear God. There demon
Charon beckons them, with his eyes of fire;

Crowded in a herd, they obey if he should summon,
And he strikes at any laggards with his oar.
As leaves in quick succession sail down in autumn

Until the bough beholds its entire store
Fallen to the earth, so Adam's evil seed
Swoop from the bank when each is called, as sure

As a trained falcon, to cross to the other side
Of the dark water; and before one throng can land

On the far shore, on this side new souls crowd.

"My son," said the gentle master, "here are joined
The souls of all who die in the wrath of God.
From every country, all of them eager to find

Their way across the water--for the goad
Of Divine Justice spurs them so, their fear
Is transmuted to desire. Souls who are good

Never pass this way; therefore, if you hear
Charon complaining at your presence, consider
What that means." Then, the earth of that grim shore

Began to shake: so violently, I shudder
And sweat recalling it now. A wind burst up
From the tear-soaked ground to erupt red light and batter

My senses--and so I fell, as though seized by sleep.

Canto IV

breaking the deep sleep that filled my head,
A heavy clap of thunder startled me up
As though by force; with rested eyes I stood

Peering to find where I was--in truth, the lip
Above the chasm of pain, which holds the din
Of infinite grief: a gulf so dark and deep

And murky that though I gazed intently down
Into the canyon, I could see nothing below.
"Now we descend into the sightless zone,"

The poet began, dead pale now: "I will go
Ahead, you second." I answered, seeing his pallor,
"How can I venture here if even you,

Who have encouraged me every time I falter,
Turn white with fear?" And he: "It is the pain
People here suffer that paints my face this color

Of pity, which you mistake for fear. Now on:
Our long road urges us forward." And he entered
The abyss's first engirdling circle, and down

He had me enter it too. Here we encountered
No laments that we could hear--except for sighs
That trembled the timeless air: they emanated

From the shadowy sadnesses, not agonies,
Of multitudes of children and women and men.
He said, "And don't you ask, what spirits are these?"

Before you go on, I tell you: they did not sin;
If they have merit, it can't suffice without
Baptism, portal to the faith you maintain.

Some lived before the Christian faith, so that
They did not worship God aright--and I
Am one of these. Through this, no other fault,

We are lost, afflicted only this one way:
That having no hope, we live in longing." I heard

These words with heartfelt grief that seized on me

Knowing how many worthy souls endured
Suspension in that Limbo. "Dear sir, my master,"
I began, wanting to be reassured

In the faith that conquers every error, "Did ever
Anyone go forth from here--by his own good
Or perhaps another's--to join the blessed, after?"

He understood my covert meaning and said,
"I was new to this condition when I beheld
A Mighty One who descended here, arrayed

With a crown of victory. And He re-called
Back from this place the shade of our first parent,
And his son, Abel, and other shades who dwelled

In Limbo. Noah, and Moses the obedient
Giver of laws, went with Him, and Abraham
The patriarch. King David and Israel went,

And Israel's sire and children, and Rachel for whom
He labored so long, and many others--and His
Coming here made them blessed, and rescued them.

Know this: no human soul was saved, till these."
We did not stop our traveling while he spoke,
But kept on passing through the woods--not trees,

But a wood of thronging spirits; nor did we make
Much distance from the place where I had slept,
When I saw a fire that overcame a bleak

Hemisphere of darkness. Well before we stopped
To address them, I could see people there and sense
They were honorable folk. "O Master apt

In science and art, who honor both, what wins
These shades distinction? Who are they who command
A place so separate from the other ones?"

And he: "Their honored names, which still resound
In your life above, have earned them Heaven's grace,

Advancing them here." Meanwhile a voice intoned:

"Hail the great Poet, whose shade had left this place
And now returns!" After the voice fell still,
I saw four great shades making their way to us,

Their aspect neither sad nor joyful. "Note well,"
My master began, "the one who carries a sword
And strides before the others, as fits his role

Among these giants: he is Homer, their lord
The sovereign poet; the satirist follows him--
Horace, with Lucan last, and Ovid third:

That lone voice just now hailed me by a name
Each of them shares with me; in such accord
They honor me well." And so I saw, all come

Together there, the splendid school of the lord
Of highest song who like an eagle soars high
Above the others. After they had shared a word

Among themselves, they turned and greeted me
With cordial gestures, at which my master smiled;
And far more honor: that fair company

Then made me one among them--so as we traveled
Onward toward the light I made a sixth
Amid such store of wisdom. Thus we strolled,

Speaking of matters I will not give breath,
Silence as fitting now as speech was there.
At length, a noble castle blocked our path,

Encircled seven times by a barrier
Of lofty walls, and defended round about
By a handsome stream we strode across: it bore

Our weight like solid ground; and after that
I passed through seven gateways with the sages.
We came to a fresh green meadow, where we met

A group of people. With grave, deliberate gazes
And manners of great authority, they spoke

Sparingly and in gentle, courtly voices.

We drew aside to a place where we could look
From a spacious well-lit height and view them all:
On that enameled green I saw--and take

Glory within me for having seen them, still--
The spirits of the great: I saw Electra
With many companions, among whom I knew well

Which shades were those of Aeneas and of Hector,
And Caesar--who wore his armor, falcon-eyed.
I saw Camilla, and Penthesilea beside her;

I saw King Latinus on the other side,
And sitting by him his daughter Lavinia.
I saw that brutus from whom Tarquin fled,

I saw Lucretia, Julia, Marcia, Cornelia;
And sitting at a distance separately
I saw lone Saladin of Arabia.

I raised my eyes a little, and there was he
Who is acknowledged Master of those who know,
Sitting in a philosophic family

Who look to him and do him honor. I saw
Nearest him, in front, Plato and Socrates.
I saw Democritus, who strove to show

That the world is chance; Zeno, Empedocles
Anaxagoras, Thales, Heraclitus,
Diogenes. The collector of qualities

Of things, Dioscorides. And Orpheus,
Cicero, Linus, Seneca the moralist,
Euclid the geometer, Ptolemy, Hippocrates,

Galen, Avicenna, Averroes who discussed
The Philosopher in his great commentary--
I saw so many I cannot tally the list;

For my demanding theme so pulls my story,
To multiply the telling would be too little

For the multitude of fact that filled my journey.

The company of six divide and dwindle
To two; my wise guide leads me from that quiet
Another way--again I see air tremble,

And come to a part that has no light inside it.

Canto V

So I descended from first to second circle--
Which girdles a smaller space and greater pain,
Which spurs more lamentation. Minos the dreadful

Snarls at the gate. he examines each one's sin,
Judging and disposing as he curls his tail:
That is, when an ill-begotten soul comes down,

It comes before him, and confesses all;
Minos, great connoisseur of sin, discerns
For every spirit its proper place in Hell,

And wraps himself in his tail with as many turns
As levels down that shade will have to dwell
A crowd is always waiting: here each one learns

His judgement and is assigned a place in Hell.
They tell; they hear--and down they all are cast.
"You, who have come to sorrow's hospice, think well,"

Said Minos, who at the sight of me had paused
To interrupt his solemn task mid-deed:
"Beware how you come in and whom you trust,

Don't be deceived because the gate is wide."
My leader answered, "Must you too scold this way?"
His destined path is not for you to impede:

Thus it is willed where every thing may be
Because it has been willed. So ask no more."
And now I can hear the notes of agony

In sad crescendo beginning to reach my ear;
Now I am where the noise of lamentation
Comes at me in blasts of sorrow. I am where

All light is mute, with a bellowing like the ocean
Turbulent in a storm of warring winds,
The hurricane of Hell in perpetual motion

Sweeping the ravaged spirits as it rends,
Twists, and torments them. Driven as if to land,

They reach the ruin: groaning, tears, laments,

And cursing of the power of Heaven. I learned
They suffer here who sinned in carnal things--
Their reason mastered by desire, suborned.

As winter starlings riding on their wings
Form crowded flocks, so spirits dip and veer
Foundering in the wind's rough buffetings,

Upward or downward, driven here and there
With never ease from pain nor hope of rest.
As chanting cranes will form a line in air,

So I saw souls come uttering cries--wind-tossed,
And lofted by the storm. "Master," I cried,
"Who are these people, by black air oppressed?"

"First among these you wish to know," he said,
"Was empress of many tongues--she so embraced
Lechery that she decreed it justified

Legally, to evade the scandal of her lust:
She is that Semiramis of whom we read,
Successor and wife of Ninus, she possessed

The lands the Sultan rules. Next, she who died
By her own hand for love, and broke her vow
To Sychaeus's ashes. After her comes lewd

And wanton Cleopatra. See Helen, too,
Who caused a cycle of many evil years;
And great Achilles, the hero whom love slew

In his battle. Paris and tristan are here--"
He pointed out by name a thousand souls
Whom love had parted from our life, or more.

When I had heard my teacher tell the rolls
Of knights and ladies of antiquity,
Pity overwhelmed me. Half-lost in its coils,

"Poet," I told him, "I would willingly
Speak with those two who move along together,

And seem so light upon the wind." And he:

"When they drift closer--then entreat them hither,
In the name of love that leads them: they will respond."
Soon their course shifted, and the merciless weather

Battered them toward us. I called against the wind,
"O wearied souls! If Another does not forbid,
Come speak with us." As doves whom desire has summoned,

With raised wings steady against the current, glide
Guided by will to the sweetness of their nest,
So leaving the flock where Dido was, the two sped

Through the malignant air till they had crossed
To where we stood--so strong was the compulsion
Of my loving call. They spoke across the blast:

"O living soul, who with courtesy and compassion
Voyage through black air visiting us who stained
The world with blood: if heaven's King bore affection

For such as we are, suffering in this wind,
Then we would pray to Him to grant you peace
For pitying us in this, our evil end.

Now we shall speak and hear as you may please
To speak and hear, while the wind, for our discourse,
Is still. My birthplace is a city that lies

Where the Po finds peace with all its followers.
Love, which in gentle hearts is quickly born,
Seized him for my fair body--which, in a fierce

Manner that still torments my soul, was torn
Untimely away from me. Love, which absolves
None who are loved from loving, made my heart burn

With joy so strong that as you see it cleaves
Still to him, here. Love gave us both one death.
Caina awaits the one who took our lives."

These words were borne across from them to us.
When I had heard those afflicted souls, I lowered

My head, and held it so till I heard the voice

Of the poet ask, "What are you thinking?" I answered
"Alas--that sweet conceptions and passion so deep
Should bring them here!" Then, looking up toward

The lovers: "Francesca, your suffering makes me weep
For sorrow and pity--but tell me, in the hours
Of sweetest sighing, how and in what shape

Or manner did Love first show you those desires
So hemmed by doubt?" And she to me: "No sadness
Is greater than in misery to rehearse

Memories of joy, as your teacher well can witness.
But if you have so great a craving to measure
Our love's first root, I'll tell it, with the fitness

Of one who weeps and tells. One day, for pleasure,
We read of Lancelot, by love constrained:
Alone, suspecting nothing at our leisure.

Sometimes at what we read our glances joined,
Looking from the book each to the other's eyes,
And then the color in our faces drained.

But one particular moment alone it was
Defeated us: the longed-for smile, it said,
Was kissed by that most noble lover: at this,

This one, who now will never leave my side,
Kissed my mouth, trembling. A Galeotto, that book!
And so was he who wrote it; that day we read

No further." All the while the one shade spoke,
The other at her side was weeping; my pity
Overwhelmed me and I felt myself go slack:

Swooning as in death, I fell like a dying body.

Canto VI

Upon my mind's return from swooning shut
At hearing the piteous tale of those two kin,
Which confounded me with sadness at their plight,

I see new torments and tormented ones again
Wherever I step or look. I am in the third
Circle, a realm of cold and heavy rain--

A dark, accursed torrent eternally, poured
With changeless measure and nature. Enormous hail
And tainted water mixed with snow are showered

Steadily through the shadowy air of Hell;
The soil they drench gives off a purtrid odor.
Three-headed Cerebus, monstrous and cruel,

Barks doglike at the souls immersed here, louder
For his triple throat. His eyes are red, his beard
Grease-black, he has the belly of a meat-feeder

And talons on his hands: he claws the horde
Of spirits, he flays and quarters them in the rain.
The wretches, howling like dogs where they are mired

And pelted, squirm about again and again,
Turning to make each side a shield for the other.
Seeing us, Cerebus made his three mouths yawn

To show the fangs--his reptile body aquiver
In all its members. My leader, reaching out
To fill both fists with as much as he could gather,

Threw gobbets of earth down each voracious throat.
Just as a braking dog grows suddenly still
The moment he begins to gnaw his meat,

Struggling and straining to devour it all,
So the foul faces of Cerebus became--
Who thundered so loudly at the souls in Hell

The wished that they were deaf. We two had come
Over the shades subdued by the heavy rain--

Treading upon their emptinesses, which seem

Like real bodies. All lay on the ground but one,
Who sat up, seeing us pass. "You who are led
Through this Hell--recognize me if you can:

You who were made before I was unmade."
And I to him: "The anguish you endure
Perhaps effaces whatever memory I had,

Making it seem I have not seen you before;
But tell me who you are, assigned so sad
A station as punishment--if any is more

Agony, none is so repellent." He said:
"Your city, so full of envy that the sack
Spills over, held me once when I enjoyed

The bright life up above. The name I took
Among you citizens was Ciacco; the sin
Of gluttony brought me here. You see me soak

To ruin in battering rain--but not alone
For all of these around me share the same
Penalty for the same transgression as mine."

Then he fell silent, but I answered him,
"Ciacco, I feel your misery; its weight
Bids me to weep. But what of things to come?--

Tell if you can the divided city's fate,
And of the citizens: is any one just?
And tell me why such schism threatens it."

He answered, "After long argument they must
Descend to bloodshed, and the rustic bloc
With much offense will expel the other first.

Then, through the power of one who while we speak
Is temporizing, that party too will fall
Within three years, the ousted coming back

With head held high; and long will they prevail
Despite the others' cries of shame and despair

Under their burdens. Only two men of all

Are truly just--whose words the rest ignore.
For the triple sparks of envy, greed and pride
Ignite their hearts." "I'd have you tell me more,"

I pleaded, once his grievous words were said,
"Farinata, Mosca, Tegghiaio, men of good reason,
Jacopo Rusticucci, Arrigo: the good

Was their hearts' purpose in life, so tell what portion
Their souls inherit now. I long to know
If they feel Heaven's sweetness, or Infernal poison."

He said, "Their souls are among the blackest in Hell,
With different faults that weigh them to the pit.
If you descend that far you may see them all--

But pray you: when you return to earth's sweet light,
Recall my memory there to the human world.
Now, I respond and speak no more." With that

His eyes went crooked and squinted, his head rolled;
He regarded me a moment, then bent his head
And fell back down with the others, blind and quelled.

"He will not wake again," my master said,
"Until the angel's conclusive trumpet sounds
And the hostile Power comes--and the waiting dead

Wake to go searching for their unhappy tombs:
And resume again the form and flesh they had,
And hear that which eternally, resounds."

So with slow steps we traversed that place of mud
Through rain and shades commingled, once or twice
Speaking of the future life: and so I said,

"Master, these torments--tell me, will they increase
After the Judgement, or lessen, or merely endure,
Burning as much as now?" He said, "In this

Go back to your science, which teaches that the more
A creature is perfect, the more it perceives the good--

And likewise, pain. The accursed people here

Can never come to true perfection; instead,
They can expect to come closer then than now."
Traveling the course of the encircling road,

And speaking more than I repeat, we two
Continued our way, until the circuit came
To where the path descends--and there we saw

Plutus, the great Enemy, and confronted him.

Canto VII

"Pape Satàn, pape Satàn, aleppe!"
Plutus began in a guttural, clucking voice.
The courteous sage who knew all reassured me:

"Don't let fear harm you; whatever power he has
Cannot prevent us climbing down this rock."
Then, turning back toward that swollen face,

He answered--"Silence, accursed wolf! Attack
Your own insides with your devouring rage:
Bound for the pit, this is no causeless trek.

It is willed above, where Michael wreaked revenge
On pride's rebellion." Just as sails swollen with wind
As soon as the mast is snapped collapse and plunge,

That savage beast fell shrinking to the ground.
So we descended to the fourth defile
To experience more of that despondent land

That sacks up all the universe's ill.
Justice of God! Who is it that heaps together
So much peculiar torture and travail?

How is it that we choose to sin and wither?
Like waves above Charybdis, each crashing apart
Against the one it rushes to meet, here gather

People who hurry forward till they must meet
And dance their round. Here I saw more souls
Than elsewhere, spreading far to the left and right:

Each pushes a weight against his chest, and howls
At his opponent each time that they clash:
"Why do you squander?" and "Why do you hoard?" Each wheels

To roll his weight back round again: they rush
Toward the circle's opposite point, collide
Painfully once more, and curse each other afresh;

And after that refrain each one must head
Through his half-circle again, to his next joust.

My own heart pained by those collisions, I said:

"Who are these, Master?--and are the shades who contest
Here on our left all clergy, with tonsured head?"
He answered: "Every one of the shades here massed

In the first life had a mind so squinty-eyed
That in his spending he heeded no proportion--
A fact they bark out plainly when they collide

At the circle's facing points, that mark division
Between opposite faults. Those bare of head
Were clerics, cardinals, popes, in whom the passion

Of avarice had wrought excess." I said,
"Among these, Master, I'm sure I'll recognize
Some who were thus polluted." He replied,

"The thought you hold is vain: just as the ways
That made these souls so foul were undiscerning,
So they are dim to discernment in this place.

Here they will keep eternally returning
To the two butting places: from the grave
These will arise fists closed; and those, pates shining

Wrongness in how to give and how to have
Took the fair world from them and brought them this,
Their ugly brawl, which words need not retrieve.

Now you can see, my son, how ludicrous
And brief are all the goods in Fortune's ken,
Which humankind contend for: you see from this

How all the gold there is beneath the moon,
Or that there ever was, could not relieve
One of these weary souls." I: "Master, say then

What is this Fortune you mention, that it should have
The world's goods in its grip?" He: "Foolish creatures,
How great an ignorance plagues you. May you receive

My teaching: He who made all of Heaven's features
In His transcendent wisdom gave them guides

So each part shines on all the others, all nature's

Illumination apportioned. So too, for goods
Of worldly splendor He assigned a guide
And minister--she, when time seems proper, spreads

Those vanities from race to race, this blood
Then that, beyond prevention of human wit.
Thus one clan languishes for another's good

According to how her judgment may dictate--
Which is invisible, like a snake in the grass.
Your wisdom cannot resist her; in her might

Fortune, like any other god, foresees,
Judges, and rules her appointed realm. No truces
Can stop her turning. Necessity decrees

That she be swift, and so men change their places
In rapid permutation. She is cursed
Too often by those who ought to sing her praises,

Wrongfully blamed and defamed. But she is blest,
And does not hear it; happy among the choir
Of other primal creatures, she too is placed

In bliss, rejoicing as she turns her sphere.
Now we descend to greater wretchedness:
Already every star that was rising higher

When I set out is sinking, and long delays
Have been forbidden us." We traveled across
To the circle's farther edge, above the place

Where a foaming spring spills over into a fosse.
The water was purple-black; we followed its current
Down a strange passage. This dismal watercourse

descends the grayish slopes until its torrent
Discharges into the marsh whose name is Styx.
Gazing intently, I saw there were people warren'd

Within that bog, all naked and muddy--with looks
Of fury, striking each other: with a hand

But also with their heads, chests, feet, and backs,

Teeth tearing piecemeal. My kindly master explained:

"These are the souls whom anger overcame,
My son; know also that under the water are found

Others, whose sighing makes these bubbles come
That pock the surface everywhere you look.
Lodged in the slime they say: 'Once we were grim

And sullen in the sweet air above, that took
A further gladness from the play of sun;
Inside us, we bore acedia's dismal smoke.

We have this black mire now to be sullen in.'
This canticle they gargle from the craw,
Unable to speak whole words." We traveled on

Through a great arc of swamp between that slough
And the dry bank--all the while with eyes
Turned toward those who swallow the muck below;

And then at length we came to a tower's base.

Canto VIII

Continuing, I tell how for some time
Before we reached the lofty tower's base
Our eyes were following two points of flame

Visible at the top; and answering these
Another returned the signal, so far away
The eye could barely catch it. I turned to face

My sea of knowledge and said, "O Master, say:
What does this beacon mean? And the other fire--
What answer does it signal? And who are they

Who set it there?" He said: "It should be clear:
Over these fetid waves, you can perceive
What is expected--if this atmosphere

Of marsh fumes doesn't hide it." Bow never drove
Arrow through air so quickly as then came
Skimming across the water a little skiff

Guided by a single boatman at the helm:
"Now evil soul, he cried out, "you are caught!"
"Phlegyas, Phlegyas,--you roar in vain this time,"

My lord responded. "You'll have us in your boat
Only as long as it takes to cross the fen."
Like one convinced that he has been the butt

Of gross deception, and bursting to complain,
Phlegyas held his wrath. We boarded the boat,
My leader first--it bobbed without a sign

Of being laden until it carried my weight.
As soon as we embarked, the ancient prow
Turned swiftly from shore; it made a deeper cut

Into the water than it was wont to do
With others. In the dead channel one rose abeam
Coated with mud, and addressed me: "Who are you,

To come here before your time?" And I to him:
"Although I come, I do not come to remain--"

Then added, "Who are you, who have become

So brutally foul?" "You see me: I am one
Who weeps," he answered. And I to him, "In weeping
And sorrow remain, cursed soul--for I have seen

Through all that filth: I know you!" He started gripping
With both hands at the boat. My master stood
And thrust him back off, saying, "Back to safekeeping

Among the other dogs." And then my guide
Embraced my neck and kissed me on the face
And said, "Indignant soul, blessed indeed

Is she who bore you. Arrogant in his vice
Was that one when he lived. No goodness whatever
Adorning his memory, his shade is furious.

In the world above, how many a self-deceiver
Now counting himself a mighty king will sprawl
Swinelike amid the mire when life is over,

Leaving behind a name that men revile."
And I said, "Master, truly I should like
To see that spirit pickled in this swill,

Before we've made our way across the lake."
And he to me: "Before we see the shore,
You will be satisfied, for what you seek

Is fitting." After a little, I saw him endure
Fierce mangling by the people of the mud--
A sight I give God thanks and praises for:

"Come get Filippo Argenti!" they all cried,
And crazed with rage the Florentine spirit bit
At his own body. Let no more be said

Of him, but that we left him still beset;
New cries of lamentation reached my ear,
And I leaned forward to peer intently out.

My kindly master said, "A city draws near
Whose name is Dis, of solemn citizenry

And mighty garrison." I: "Already clear

Are mosques--I see them there within the valley,
Baked red as though just taken from the fire."
And he, "It is fire blazing eternally

Inside of them that makes them so appear
Within this nether Hell." We had progressed
Into the deep-dug moats that circle near

The walls of that bleak city, which seemed cast
Of solid iron; we journeyed on, to complete
An immense circuit before we reached at last

A place where the boatman shouted, "Now get out!
Here is the entrance." Above the gates I saw
More than a thousand of those whom Heaven had spat

Like rain, all raging: "Who is this, who'd go
Without death through the kingdom of the dead?"
And my wise master made a sign, to show

That he desired to speak with them aside.
And then they tempered their great disdain a bit,
Answering: "You, by yourself, may come inside;

But let that other depart, who dares set foot
Within this kingdom. Let him retrace alone
His foolish way--try if he can!--and let

You remain here, who have guided such a one
Over terrain so dark." You judge, O reader,
If I did not lose heart, or believe then,

Hearing that cursed voice, that I would never
Return from there. "O my dear guide," I said,
"Who has restored my confidence seven times over,

And drawn me out of peril--stay at my side,
Do not desert me now like this, undone.
If we can go no farther, let us instead

Retrace our steps together." That nobleman
Who led me there then told me, "Do not fear:

None can deprive us of the passage One

Has willed for us to have. Wait for me here
And feed your spirit hope and comfort: remember,
I won't abandon you in this nether sphere."

So he goes away and leaves me, the gentle father,
While I remain in doubt, with yes and no
Vying in my head. What they discussed together

Or what my guide proposed, I do not know,
For they were out of hearing. Before much time,
The demons scrambled back, where we would go--

And then I saw our adversaries slam
The portals of the entrance in the face
Of my master, who remained outside and came

Back to me walking slowly, with downcast eyes.
His brow devoid of confidence, he said,
"Who has denied me this abode of sighs?"

And then he said to me, "Don't be dismayed
By my vexation: I will conquer this crew,
However they contrive to block our road.

This insolence of theirs is nothing new;
At a less secret gate they've shown it before,
One still unbolted and open, as you know:

You read the deadly inscription that it bore.
Already on this side of it--down the steep pass,
Passing the circles without an escort--be sure

Someone is coming to open the city to us."

Canto IX

The outward color cowardice painted me
When I beheld my leader turning back
Repressed his own new pallor more hurriedly.

He paused with an attentive air, but like
One listening, not watching--for the eye
Saw little in air so dark and fog so thick.

"We have to win this battle," he started to say,
"Or else . . . and she, who offered so much aid--
Late though it seems to be, and still on the way."

I could see plainly how he strove to hide
His sentence's beginning with its close,
In different words from those he would have said--

Scaring me none the less, each broken phrase
Leading me to a meaning perhaps much worse
Than any it held. "Does anyone whose place

Is the first circle, where the only curse
Is having no hope, ever come down so far
As this grim hollow?" I asked him. "Such a course,"

He said, "is rare among us, though once before
I have been down here--beckoned as a shade
By wicked Erichtho, the conjuror

Who used to summon spirits of the dead
Back to their bodies. My own flesh was but still
A little while denuded of my shade,

The time she made me enter within this wall
To draw a spirit from the circle of Judas--
Which is the lowest and darkest place of all,

And farthest from the heaven whose dome encloses
Everything in creation. I know the way:
Be sure of that. This quagmire which produces

So strong a stench surrounds the city of woe
We cannot enter now except with wrath."

And he said more that I don't remember now--

My eyes were on the tower we stood beneath,
For at its glowing top three hellish Furies
Suddenly appeared: like women, but with a wreath

Of bright green hydras girdled about their bodies,
Bloodstained, with squirming vipers in a crown
Fringing their savage temples. "The fierce Erinyes,"

He said, who knew those handmaids of the queen
Of eternal sorrows: "Megaera on the left;
Alecto howls on the right; and in between,

Tisiphone." Each one was clawing her breast,
And each was beating herself--and screamed so loud
I pressed against him, flinching at the blast.

"O let Medusa come," the Furies bayed
As they looked down, "to make him stone! We grieve
Not avenging the assault of Theseus!" He said,

"Turn your back; close your eyes: should Gorgon arrive
And show herself, then if you looked at her--
There would be no returning back above."

He turned me around himself, and to make sure,
Not trusting mine alone he covered my face
With his hands too. O you whose mind is clear:

Understand well the lesson that underlies
The veil of these strange verses I have written.
Across the turbid waves now came the noise

Of a fearsome crash, by which both shores were shaken:
A sound like that of a wind that gathers force
From waves of heat in violent collision

And batters the forest, and on its unchecked course
Shatters the branches and tears them to the ground
And sweeps them off in dustclouds, with scornful roars,

And the wild beasts and shepherds flee at the sound.
Taking his hands from my eyes, he said, "Now look:

There where the very harshest fumes abound,

Across the ancient scum." As frogs are quick
To vanish through water and hunch on bottom sand
As soon as they see their enemy the snake,

So I saw more than a thousand souls of the ruined
Flee before one who strode across the Styx
Dry-shod as though on land. With his left hand

He cleared the polluted air before his face
And only in that annoyance did he seem tired.
I knew assuredly he was sent to us

From Heaven, and I turned my head to regard
The master--who signaled that I should be mute
And bow before him. Ah, to me he appeared

So full of high disdain! He went to the gate
And opened it by means of a little wand,
And there was no resistance. "O race cast out

From Heaven, exiles despised there," he intoned
From that grim threshold, "Why this insolence?
Why do you kick against the Will whose end

Cannot be thwarted, and whose punishments
Many times over have increased your pain?
What use to butt at what the fates dispense?

Remember, your Cerebus's throat and chin,
For just this reason, still are stripped of fur."
Then he turned back on the filthy path again,

Not speaking a word to us, but with the air
Of one whom other matters must concern
Than those who stand before him. And so, secure

After those holy words, we in our turn
Stepped forward toward the city and through the gate,
Entering without dispute. Anxious to learn

What their condition was who populate
A fortress so guarded, I cast my eye around

As soon as I was in--and saw a great

Plain filled with woe and torment. As on the land
At Arles where the river Rhone grows more subdued,
Or at Pola where the Quarnero sets a bound

For Italy, bathing her borders, on every side
The ground is made uneven by the tombs--
So it was here: but these were of a mode

More bitter, for among the graves were flames
That made the sepulchers glow with fiercer heat
Than a smith could need. Among these catacombs

The lids were raised, with sounds of woe so great
Those within surely suffered horrible pain.
"Master," I said, "who are these people that are shut

Ensepulchered within these coffers of stone,
Making their sounds of anguish from inside?"
He answered, "Here, arch-heretics lie--and groan

Along with all the converts that they made,
The followers of every sect, with like
Entombed with like. A greater multitude

Crowds into these graves than you may think they take.
Some sepulchers grow hotter, and some less."
He turned to the right, and we continued to walk

Between the anguish and the high parapets.

Canto X

And now, along the narrow pathway that ran
Between those tortures and the city wall,
I followed my master. "O matchless power," I began,

"Who leads me through evil's circles at your will,
Speak to me with the answers that I crave
About these souls and the sepulchers they fill:

Might they be seen? The cover of each grave
Is lifted open, and no one is on guard."
"When they return from Jehoshaphat above,"

He answered, "bearing the bodies that they had,
All shall be closed. Here Epicurus lies
With all his followers, who call the soul dead

When the flesh dies. The question that you raise
Will soon be answered now that we are inside--
and so will the secret wish you don't express."

I said, "Dear guide, believe me: I do not hide
My heart from you, except through my intention
To speak but little, the way that you have said

Earlier I ought to be disposed." "O Tuscan!--
Who travel alive through this, the city of fire,
While speaking in so courteous a fashion--

If it should please you, stop a moment here.
Your way of speaking shows that you were born
In the same noble fatherland: there where

I possibly have wrought excessive harm."
This sound erupted from a coffer of stone--
I drew back toward my guide in my alarm.

"What are you doing?" he said. "Go back again!
And see where Farinata has sat up straight;
From the waist up, you may behold the man."

Already my eyes were on his: he sat upright,
And seemed by how he bore his chest and brow

To have great scorn for Hell. My leader set

Firm hands upon me at once, and made me go
Forward between the rows of sepulchers,
Saying: "Choose fitting words," as we wended through.

At his tomb's foot, I felt his proud gaze pierce
Mine for a moment; and then as if in disdain
He spoke and asked me, "Who were your ancestors?"

Eager to comply with that, I made all plain,
Concealing nothing: whereupon he raised
His brows a little. Then he said, "These men

Were enemies to me; they fiercely opposed
Me and my forebears and my party--so, twice,
I scattered them." "If ousted and abused,"

I answered, "they returned to claim their place
From every quarter: yours have not learned that art
Of return so well." Then suddenly the face

Of a shade appeared beside him, showing the part
From the chin up--I think through having risen
Erect on his knees: his gaze began to dart

Anxiously round me, as though in expectation
Of someone with me. But when that hope was gone
He wept: "If you can journey through this blind prison

By virtue of high genius--where is my son,
And why is he not with you?" And my rejoinder:
"My own strength has not brought me, but that of one

Who guides me through here, and is waiting yonder--
Toward one your Guido perhaps had scorned." I well
Deduced his name from his words and from his manner

Of punishment, and thus could answer in full.
Suddenly straightening up, the shade cried out,
"What?--did I hear you say he 'had'? Oh tell:

Is he not still alive? Does the sweet light
Not strike his eyes?" Perceiving my delay

In giving any answer, he fell back flat,

Face upward, appearing no more. But not so he,
The great soul at whose beckoning I had paused;
He did not change his features in any way,

Nor bend his neck or waist. "The point you raised--"
He resumed where interrupted: "My kin not good
At learning that art--I feel more agonized

By that accursed fact than by this bed.
But when the Lady's face who rules this place
Has kindled fewer than fifty times," he said,

"Then you will know how heavy that art weighs.
Now tell me (may you regain the sweet world's vantage),
Why is that people so fierce in its decrees

Toward my kin?" I answered, "It was the carnage
And devastation that dyed the Arbia red
Which made the prayers in our temple savage."

Shaking his head, "I was not alone," he sighed.
"And surely I would not have chosen to join
The others without some cause, but where all agreed

To level Florence--there, I was alone:
One, who defended her before them all."
"Ah, pray you (so may your seed find peace again)

Unravel a knot that makes my reason fail,"
I said, "If I hear rightly, you seem to foresee
What time will bring, and yet you seem to deal

Differently with the present." He answered me:
"Like someone with faulty vision, we can behold
Remote things well, for so much light does He

Who rules supreme still grant us; but we are foiled
When things draw near us, and our intelligence
Is useless when they are present. So of your world

In its present state, we have no evidence
Or knowledge, except if others bring us word:

Thus you can understand that with no sense

Left to us, all our knowledge will be dead
From that Moment when the future's door is shut."
Then, moved by compunction for my fault, I said:

"Will you now tell the one who fell back flat
His son is truly still among the living?
Tell him what caused my silence: that my thought

Had wandered into that error which your resolving
Just wiped away." And now I heard my guide
Calling me back; so, hurriedly contriving

To learn, I begged the shade to say if he could
Who lay there with him, and I heard him answer:
"I lie with over a thousand of the dead;

The second Frederick is among the number,
And the Cardinal; of others I will not speak."
With that he did himself. I walked back over

To the ancient poet, with my thoughts at work
Mulling the words that bore such menace to me.
My guide set out, and as we walked he spoke:

"Why is it you're disturbed?" I told him why;
"Preserve in memory what you have heard
Against yourself," the sage advised. "And I pray

You, listen" --he raised a finger at the word.
"When you confront her radiance, whose eyes can see
Everything in their fair clarity, be assured

Then you shall learn what your life's journey will be."
He turned to the left; and leaving the city wall
Behind our backs we continued on our way

Toward the center which was now our goal,
Following a path that strikes the valley floor:
And from that valley rose an odor so foul

The stench repelled us even high up there.

Canto XI

Up on the topmost rim of a deep-cut bank
Formed by a circle of massive, fissured rock
We stood above a pen more cruel. The stink

Thrown up from the abyss had grown so thick
Its excess drove us to shelter in the space
Behind a great tomb's lid. It bore a plaque

Inscribed: "I hold Pope Anastasius,
Drawn by Photinus from the proper path."
"We must put off descending farther than this,"

My master said, "until this rotten breath
Has become familiar to our sense of smell."
"Discover some matter to fill the lost time with,

Pray you," I answered, "so we may use it well."
"I am so minded," he said, and then: "My son,
Within these rocks three lesser circles fall,

Each one below another, like those you have seen,
And all of them are packed with accursed souls;
In order that hereafter the sight alone

May be sufficient, you will hear what rules
Determine how and why they are constrained.
The end of every wickedness that feels

Heaven's hatred is injustice--and each end
Of this kind, whether by force or fraud, afflicts
Some other person. But since fraud is found

In humankind as its peculiar vice,
It angers God more: so the fraudulent
Are lower, and suffer more unhappiness.

The whole first circle is for the violent;
But, because violence involves a deed
Against three persons, its apportionment

And fabrication are in three rings: to God,
To one's self, or one's neighbor, all violence

Is done--to them, or to their things instead,

As I'll explain. By violence, death and wounds
Of grievous kinds are inflicted on one's neighbor;
And on his property--arson, ruinous offense,

Extortion. So the first ring is the harbor
Of torment for the homicides and those
Who strike out wrongfully: despoiler, robber,

And plunderer, in various companies.
One may lay violent hands on his own being,
Or what belongs to himself, and all of these

Repent in vain within the second ring:
He who deprives himself of your world sins thus;
Or gambles; or dissipates whatever thing

He has of worth; or weeps when he should rejoice.
Violence against the Deity, too, exists:
To deny and blaspheme Him in the heart does this,

As does despising Nature and her gifts;
Therefore the smallest ring imprints its mark
On Sodom and Cahors and him who speaks

Contemptuously of God with all his heart.
Fraud, which bites every conscience, a man may play
Either on one who trusts him, or one who does not.

The latter of the two is seen to destroy
Only those bonds of love that nature makes:
So in the second circle hypocrisy,

Flatterers, sorcery, larceny, simoniacs,
With pimps, barrators, and such filth have their nest.
But the other kind of fraud not only forsakes

The love that nature makes, but the special trust
That further, added love creates: therefore
At the universe's core, inside the least

Circle, the seat of Dis, every betrayer
Eternally, is consumed." "Master, you state

All of this lucidly, and you make clear

Just what it is that distinguishes this pit
And those it holds. But what of those condemned
To languish in the thick marsh, that other set

Beaten by rain, those driven by the wind,
And those who collide and clash with angry tongues:
How is it that all these are not confined

In the red city to suffer, if their wrongs
Have brought God's anger on them? And if not,
Then why are they in such a plight?" "What brings

Your thoughts to wander so from the proper route?
Where has your mind been gazing? Don't you recall
A passage in your Ethics, the words that treat

Three dispositions counter to Heaven's will:
Incontinence, malice, insane brutality?
And how incontinence is less distasteful

To God, and earns less blame? Think carefully
About this doctrine, consider who they are
Whose punishment is above, outside: you'll see

Clearly why they are apart from the wicked here,
And why His vengeance smites them with less wrath."
"O sun, that makes all troubled vision clear,

You give solutions I am so contented with
That asking, no less than knowing, pleases me.
But please," I said, "could we retrace our path

Back to the place where you said usury
Offends celestial Goodness, and solve that knot?"
He said, "For the comprehending, philosophy

Serves in more places than one to demonstrate
How Nature takes her own course from the design
Of the Divine Intelligence and Its art.

Study your Physics well, and you'll be shown
In not too many pages that your art's good

Is to follow Nature insofar as it can,

As a pupil emulates his master; God
Has as it were a grandchild in your art.
By these two, man should thrive and gain his bread--

If you remember Genesis--from the start.
But since the usurer takes a different way,
He contemns Nature both in her own sort

And in her follower as well, while he
Chooses to invest his hope another place.
But now come follow me: it pleases me

To go now; for above us in the skies
The Fish are quivering at the horizon's edge,
And the whole Wagon lies over Caurus--and this,

Farther ahead, is where we descend the ridge."

Canto XII

The alp-like place we came for our descent
Down the steep bank was one no eye would seek,
Because of what was there. This side of Trent,

There is a place a landslide fell and struck
The Adige's flank: because of unstable ground
Or earthquake, rocks once tumbled from the peak

And formed a passage where people can descend.
Such was the footing we had down that ravine--
And at the broken chasm's edge we found

The infamy of Crete, conceived within
The false cow's shell. When he saw us come his way
He bit himself in rage like one insane.

My master called, "Perhaps you think you see
The Duke of Athens--the one who dealt you death
Up in the world. Beast, take yourself away:

This is no man your sister taught; in truth,
He has come here to witness your punishment."
As a bull breaks loose in the deathblow's aftermath,

And plunges back and forth, but though unspent
Cannot go forward, so did the Minotaur act.
My wary guide cried, "Run to the descent--

Go quickly, while he's raging." So we picked
Our way down over a rubble of scattered stone
That shifted under me often as I walked,

With the new weight. While I was climbing down
I thought to myself; and soon my master said,
"You may be thinking about this ruined terrain

Guarded by the feral rage that I defied
And quelled just now. Know then: that other time
I journeyed here, this rock had not yet slid.

It must have been a little before He came
To Dis, if I have reckoned rightly, to take

The great spoil of the upper circle with Him--

When the deep, fetid valley began to shake
Everywhere, so that I thought the universe
Felt love: the force that has brought chaos back

Many times over, say some philosophers.
And at that moment this ancient rock, both here
And elsewhere, tumbled to where it now appears.

But keep your eyes below us, for coming near
Is the river of blood--in which boils everyone
Whose violence hurt others." O blind desire

Of covetousness, O anger gone insane--
That goad us on through life, which is so brief,
To steep in eternal woe when life is done.

I saw a broad moat bending in a curve
Encircling the plain, just as my guide had said:
Between the moat and the bottom of the cliff

Centaur's who were armed with bows and arrows sped
In file, as on a hunt they might be found
When they were in the world. When we appeared

They halted, and three came forward from the band
With bows and shafts they chose, held ready to aim.
One hailed us from a distance: "You who descend

The hillside, for what torment have you come?
Tell us from there-- if not, I draw my bow!"
"We will make answer to Chiron," my guide told him,

"Who is beside you; you always brought yourself woe
Because your will was hasty." He nudged me and said,
"That one is Nessus: he who met death through

Fair Deianira, and by himself satisfied
Vengeance for himself. The middle one whose gaze
Is directed at his breast, with lowered head,

Is the great Chiron, tutor of Achilles.
The other is Pholus, full of rage. They circle

The moat by thousands; if any soul should rise

Out of the blood more than its guilt makes lawful,
They pierce it with their arrows." As we came close
Chiron drew an arrow's notch back through the tangle

Of beard along his jaw to clear a space
For his large mouth, and to the others he said:
"Have you observed how that one's steps displace

Objects his body touches? Feet of the dead
Are not accustomed to behave like that."
Any my good leader, who by this time stood

Quite near the Centaur's chest, just opposite
The place where Chiron's two natures joined, replied:
"He is indeed alive, and in that state,

Alone; it falls to me to be his guide
Through the dark valley. It is necessity,
And not his pleasure, that puts him on this road.

From singing alleluia one came to me
To give me this strange mission; he is no thief,
Nor I a spirit given to larceny.

But by the Power that lets me walk a path
So savage, give us a member of your pack
To come along as companion to us both

And show us where the ford is--and on his back
Carry this one who, not a spirit cannot
Fly through the air." Then Chiron turned and spoke,

Bending his torso toward Nessus on his right,
"Go back and guide them, then; and turn away
The challenge of any other troops you meet."

Now with a trusty escort, we made our way
Along the boiling crimson--those boiled inside
Shrieking beside us. On some it came so high

It covered their eyebrows. The mighty centaur said,
"These are the tyrants given to blood and plunder.

Here they lament the merciless harm they did:

Here's Alexander, and he who held Sicily under
For many a sad year, fierce Dionysius;
That black hari there is Azzolino's; and yonder,

That other fairer head is Obizzo of Esti's:
In the world above, the man his stepson slew."
I turned toward the poet, whose answer was,

"Let him be first guide, I your second, now."
A little farther on, the centaur stopped
At a crowd seeming to rise from the boiling flow

Up to the throat. He showed us one who kept
Off to one side. "Within the bosom of God
He stabbed another's heart, and it has dripped

Blood ever since upon the Thames," he said.
I saw some others whose head and even chest
Came up above the stream, and in that crowd

Were many I recognized. The blood decreased,
Sinking by more and more until it cooked
Only the feet, and that is where we crossed.

"To here, you have seen the boiling stream contract,"
He said. "From here, its bed grows deeper again
Till it completes its circle, to reconnect

With where God's justice makes the tyrants groan:
It goads Attila, a scourge on earth, and Pyrrhus,
And Sextus; there also are eternally drawn

The tears, unlocked by boiling, milked from the eyes
Of Rinier Pazzo and Rinier da Corneto--men
Who brought such warfare to the public ways."

Then he turned back, and crossed the ford again.

Canto XIII

Nessus had not yet reached the other side
When we moved forward into woods unmarked
By any path. The leaves not green, earth-hued;

The boughs not smooth, knotted and crooked-forked;
No fruit, but poisoned thorns. Of the wild beasts
Near Cecina and Corneto, that hate fields worked

By men with plough and harrow, none infests
Thickets that are as rough or dense as this.
Here the repellent Harpies make their nests,

Who drove the Trojans from the Strophades
With dire announcements of the coming woe.
They have broad wings, a human neck and face,

Clawed feet, and swollen, feathered bellies; they caw
Their lamentations in the eerie trees.
Here the good master began, "Before you go

Farther, be aware that now you are in this,
The second ring--and so you shall be until
The horrible sand. Look well, for here one sees

Things which in words would be incredible."
On every side, I heard wailing voices grieve,
Yet I could not see anyone there to wail,

And so I stopped, bewildered. I believe
My guide believed that in my belief the voices
I heard from somewhere in among the grove

Came somehow from people who were in hiding places--
And therefore the master said, "If you remove
A little branch from any one of these pieces

Of foliage around us, the thoughts you have
Will also be broken off." I reached my hand
A little in front of me and twisted off

One shoot of a mighty thornbush--and it moaned,
"Why do you break me?" Then after it had grown

Darker with blood, it began again and mourned,

"Why have you torn me? Have you no pity, then?
Once we were men, now we are stumps of wood:
Your hand should show some mercy, though we had been

The souls of serpents." As flames spurt at one side
Of a green log oozing sap at the other end,
Hissing with escaping air, so that branch flowed

With words and blood together--at which my hand
Released the tip, and I stood like one in dread.
"Had he been able to credit or comprehend

Before, O wounded spirit," my sage replied,
"What he had witnessed only in my verses,
His hand would never have performed this deed

Against you. But the fact belief refuses
Compelled me, though it grieves me, thus to prompt him.
But tell him who you are, so that his praises

May make amends by freshening your fame
When he returns again to the world above,
As he is permitted." And the broken stem:

"Your words have so much sweetness they contrive
To draw me out of silence: I am enticed
To talk a little while, may it not prove

Burdensome to you. I am he who possessed
Both keys to Frederick's heart--and I turned either,
Unlocking and locking with so soft a twist

I kept his secrets from almost any other.
To this, my glorious office, I stayed so true
I lost both sleep and life. The harlot that never

Takes its whore's eyes from Caesar's retinue--
The common fatal Vice of courts--inflamed
All minds against me; and they, inflamed so,

So inflamed Augustus that the honors I claimed
In gladness were converted into pain.

My mind, in its disdainful temper, assumed

Dying would be a way to escape disdain,
Making me treat my juster self unjustly.
And by this tree's strange roots, I swear again:

I never betrayed my lord, who was so worthy
Of honor. If you return to the world above,
Either of you, please comfort my memory

Still prostrate from the blow that Envy gave."
The poet waited a moment, then said to me,
"Since he is silent, don't waste the time you have,

But speak, and ask him what you wish." And I:
"You question him, and ask what you discern
Would satisfy me; I cannot because of pity

That fills my heart." Therefore my guide began,
"For this man freely to do the things you say,
Imprisoned spirit, tell him if you can

And if it pleases you, in just what way
The soul is bound in knots like these; give word
Also, if any soul could be set free

From members such as these." It puffed air hard,
And soon that exhalation became a voice.
"You shall be answered briefly then," it uttered;

"When the fierce soul has quit the fleshly case
It tore itself from, Minos sends it down
To the seventh depth. It falls to this wooded place--

No chosen spot, but where fortune flings it in--
And there it sprouts like a grain of spelt, to shoot
Up as a sapling, then a wild plant: and then

The Harpies, feeding on the foliage, create
Pain, and an outlet for the pain as well.
We too shall come like the rest, each one to get

His cast-off body--but not for us to dwell
Within again, for justice must forbid

Having what one has robbed oneself of; still,

Here we shall drag them, and through the mournful wood
Our bodies will be hung: with every one
Fixed on the thornbush of its wounding shade."

We both were still attentive when it was done,
Thinking it might have more to say to us--
When an uproar surprised us, just as when

A hunter mindful of wild boar and the chase
Suddenly hears the beasts and crashing brush.
There on our left came two at a desperate pace,

Naked, torn, so hard preseed they seemed to crash
Headlong through every tangle the wood contained.
The one in front cried, "Come now, come in a rush,

O death!" The other shouted, falling behind,
"Your legs were not so nimble when you ran
At the jousting of the Toppo, Lano my friend!"

And then, perhaps because his breath began
To fail him, he stopped and hunched against a bush
As if to make himself and its branches one.

Behind them, eager as greyhounds off the leash,
Black bitches filled the woods, avid and quick.
They set their teeth on the one who stopped to crouch,

And tore his limbs apart; and then they took
The wretched members away. Then my escort
Led me by one hand to the bush--which spoke,

Grieving in vain through places where it was hurt
And bled: "Jacopo da Santo Andrea," it cried,
"What did you gain by shielding in me? What part

Had I in your sinful life?" My master said,
When he was standing above it, "And who were you,
Who through so many wounds exhale this blood

Mixed with sad words?" It answered, "O souls--you two
Who arrive to see this shameful havoc crush

My leaves and tear them from me--gather them now,

And bring them to the foot of this wretched bush.

In life I was of the city that chose to leave

Mars, her first patron, and take the Baptist: for which

The art of Mars will always make her grieve.

And if his semblance did not in part remain

Still at the Arno, she would not survive--

And later, when they pitched the city again

Over the ashes left by Attila, those

Striving to refound it would have worked in vain.

And I--I made my own house be my gallows."

Canto XIV

Compelled by the love I bear my native place,
I gathered the scattered sprays and gave them again
To him who was already faint of voice.

From there we proceeded to the boundary line
At which the third and second rings divide:
And there a dreadful form of justice is seen.

To make these new things clear: we two now stood
On a plain whose bed rejects all plants--bare, flat,
Garlanded all around by the woeful wood

Just as the wood is by the sorrowful moat.
And here we stayed our steps at the very edge.
The ground was dry deep sand, resembling that

Which Cato trod. O vengeance of God, how much
Should you be feared by all those who read
What my eyes saw! It was a great assemblage

Of naked souls in herds, all of whom mourned
Most miserably and seemed to be subject
To different laws. Some lay upon the ground,

Supine; some sat hunched up; while others walked
Restlessly about. It seemed that those who moved
Were the more numerous, those who lay abject

In torment, fewest--but it was they who grieved
With tongues most loosened by pain. All over the sand
Distended flakes of fire drifted from aloft

Slowly as mountain snow without a wind.
As when Alexander in India's hottest region
Saw flames fall on his army, intact to the ground,

And has his soldiers tramp the accumulation
To extinguish them before the fire could spread,
Eternal fire descended in such profusion

Sand kindled like tinder under flint, and made
The pain redouble--with their dancing hands

Not resting even for a moment they pawed

Themselves now here, now there, and beat the brands
Of fresh fire off. "O Master," I began,
"Who vanquish all except the stubborn fiends

That opposed us at the gate: who is that one,
The great one seeming to pay no heed to the fire,
Who lies disdainful and scowling, so that the rain

Seems not to ripen him?" He appeared to hear
Me ask about him, and shouted, "What I was
Alive, I am in death!" Though Jove may wear

His smith out, from whom anger made him seize
The sharpened bolt that smote me my last day;
And though he wears out every smith he has

At Mongibello's black forge; and though he cry,
'Help, help, good Vulcan!' just the way he did
Amid the battle of Phlegra, and hurl at me

With all his might--he still will not have had
The pleasure of his vengeance." Then my guide
Spoke with more force than I had heard, and said,

"O Capaneus, that this unquenched pride
Remains in you punishes you the more:
No torment but this raging of yours could goad

With agony enough to match your ire."
Then gentler, to me: "He was one of seven kings
Who besieged Thebes, and bore--seems still to bear--

Disdain for God. But as I said, his revilings
Earn his breast fitting badges. Now follow my steps:
Tread, not the scorching sand, but a path that clings

Close to the wood." In silence we reached a place
Where gushing from the woods a small stream poured
So red that it still makes me shudder. As issues

That stream from Bulicame that is shared
Among the prostitutes, so this brook flowed

Down and across the sand. It was stone-floored;

Stone lined both banks and the margins on each side;
And I could see that this would be our route.

"In all that I have shown you," my master said,

"Since first we entered through that open gate
Whose threshold no one ever is denied,
Nothing your eyes have seen is so worth note

As this present stream which quenches in its flood
All of the flames above it." So word for word
My master spoke, and I asked him for the food

To fill the appetite these words inspired.
He answered, "In the middle of the sea
Lies a waste land called Crete, a realm whose lord

Goverened the world in its age of purity.
The mountain Ida is there, which once was glad
With foliage and waters, and now must lie

Deserted, like some worn thing by time decayed.
Long ago Rhea chose it for her child
As his safe cradle; and since they had to hide,

Made all there shout whenever her infant wailed.
Within the mountain stands an immense Old Man,
Who turns his back toward Damietta, to hold

His gaze on Rome as on his mirror: of fine
Gold is his head, pure silver his arms and breast;
Down to the fork is brass, and from there down

The choicest iron comprises all the rest
But the right foot, of clay baked hard as brick:
On it, more weight than on the left is pressed.

Every part but the gold head bears a crack,
A fissure dripping tears that collect and force
Their passage down the cavern from rock to rock

Into this valley's depth, where as a source
They form the Acheron, Styx, and Phlegethon.

Then their way down is by this narrow course

Until, where all descending has been done,
They form Cocytus--and about that pool
I shall say nothing, for you will see it soon."

And I to him: "But if this stream does fall
Thus from our world, then why does it appear
At only this border?" And he: "As you know well,

The place is round; although you have come far,
Toward the pit by left turns always down,
You haven't completed all the circle: therefore,

If anything new appears that we haven't seen,
It should not bring amazement to your face."
And I said, "Where are Lethe and Phlegethon?

For you are silent regarding one of these,
And say the rain of tears creates the other."
He: "All your questions please me; but in one case

The boiling of this red water should give the answer.
Lethe you shall see, but out of this abyss:
There where, repented guilt removed, souls gather

To cleanse themselves." Then, "Now it is time for us
To leave the wood. The margins are not afire,
And make a pathway--over them, come close

Behind me: every flame is extinguished here."

Canto XV

Now the firm margin bears us, under the vapor
Rising from the stream to form a shade and fend
The fire off, sheltering both banks and water.

As Flemings between Wissant and Bruges, to defend
Against the tide that rushes in on them,
Construct a bulwark to drive the sea from land;

And Paduans on the Brenta do, to stem
The water and protect their castle and town
Before Carcetana feels the heat--in the same

Manner those banks were made, except the one
Who built them did not make them as high or thick,
Whoever he was. And I could not have seen

The wood that lay behind us, had I looked back,
When we encountered another troop of souls
Who looked at us the way that men will look

At one another at dusk, when daylight fails
Under a new moon: knitting their brows at us
The way old tailors do when threading needles.

While I was being examined by them thus,
One recognized me, and took me by the hem,
Crying, "Why what a marvel" I fixed my eyes

On his scorched face as he reached out his arm,
And the baked features I saw did not forestall
My knowing him--I reached back down to him,

My hand toward his face, and answered his call:
"Are you here, Ser Brunetto?" He replied,
"My son, may it not displease you, if awhile

Brunetto Latini turns back to walk instead
With you a little, and lets the train go on."
"I beg it of you with all my heart," I said--

"And should you prefer that you and I sit down,
If it pleases him with whom I go, I will."

He said, "If any of this flock, O son,

Stops even for an instant, he must lie still
A hundred years, not brushing off the fire
That stikes him. Go, then: I'll follow at your heel,

And then rejoin my band who walk in a choir
Lamenting their eternal woes." Afraid
To step down to his level from where we were,

I bent my head, as in reverence. He said,
"What destiny of fortune makes you come
Before your final day; and who is this guide?"

"In the bright life above," I answered him,
"I came into a valley and lost my way,
Before my age had reached its ripening time--

I turned my back on the place but yesterday.
He appeared to me at dawn, when I had turned
To go back down, and this path is the way

By which he leads me home." Then he returned:
"If you keep navigating by your star
You'll find a glorious port, if I discerned

Well in the fair life. Had my years been more,
So I could witness how heaven has been kind
To you, I would have wished your work good cheer.

But that ungrateful, malignant folk who descend
From those brought down from Fiesole long ago,
And who still smack of mountains and rocky ground,

Will make themselves, for good things that you do,
Your enemies--and there is reason in that:
Among the bitter sorb-trees, it seems undue

When the sweet fig in season comes to fruit.
The world's old saying is that they are blind:
A people greedy, envious, proud--see fit

To cleanse their habits from yourself. You'll find
Your fortune holds such honor as will induce

One party and the other to contend

In hunger to consume you--then the grass
Will be well kept at a distance from the goat.
Let the Fiesolan beasts go find their mess

By feeding on themselves, and spare the shoot
(If any still should grow on their heap of dung)
In which the sacred seed is living yet

Of Romans who remained when Florence went wrong,
Becoming a nest for the malevolent."
"Could I have everything for which I long,

You would not still endure this banishment
Away from human nature," I replied.
"Your image--dear, fatherly, benevolent--

Being fixed inside my memory, has imbued
My heart: when in the fair world, hour by hour
You taught me, patiently, it was you who showed

The way man makes himself eternal; therefore,
The gratitude I feel toward you makes fit
That while I live, I should declare it here.

And what you tell me of my future, I write--
And keep it with another text as well,
Till both are glossed by a lady of good wit

And knowledge, if I reach her. This much still
I say: so long as conscience is not betrayed,
I am prepared for Fortune to do her will.

My ears find nothing strange in what you have said:
As Fortune pleases let her wheel be turned,
And as he must let the peasant turn his spade."

When he heard these words my master's head inclined
Toward the right, and looking at me he said,
"He who has listened well will understand."

And none the less I continued as I had
In speech with Ser Brunetto--would he tell

Which among his companions had enjoyed

Most eminence and fame in life? "It is well,"
He answered, "for me to say the names of some
But nothing of the rest. To name them all

Would demand speaking more words than we have time--
All clerics and men of letters, all renowned,
And in the world all stained by this one crime.

Priscian trudges in that unhappy band,
As does Francesco d'Accorso. And if you crave
To see such scurf, among them you can find

One whom the Servant of Servants asked to leave
The Arno for Bacchiglione; and there
He left his body, distended in its nerve

And muscle. And now, although I would say more,
My speech and walking with you must be brief:
On the sand, I see new smoke rise, where appear

New souls, with whom I must not be. I live
In my Tesoro--your judgment being won
For it, I ask no more." And he went off,

Seeming to me like one of those who run
Competing for the green cloth in the races
Upon Verona's field--and of them, like one

Who gains the victory, not one who loses.

Canto XVI

I was already where we heard the noise
Of water winding downward as it spilled
To the next circle with a sound like bees,

When three shades bolted from a troop that filed
Under the rain of torment. Running toward us,
They cried: "Stop here, O you who are appareled

Like one in our own degenerate city's dress."
Ah me!--what wounds both old and new I saw
Where flames had burned their limbs: the same distress

Pains me again when I recall it now.
My teacher heeded their cries, then faced me to say,
"Now wait a little: to these three, one should show

Courtesy. Were it not for the fire let fly
By the nature of this place, I'd say such haste
Befits you more than them." We stopped; the three

Resumed their old lament--and when they had raced
Up to us, linked their bodies in a wheel.
As champions, naked and oiled, before the thrust

And parry begin, will eye their grip and circle
Seeking advantage, so each directed his face
Toward me, turning his neck against the pull

Of the ever-moving feet. "If our sandy place
Of squalor and charred features scorched of hair,"
One of them said, "lead you to show to us,

And what we ask, contempt--may our fame inspire
You to inform us who you are who pass
Through Hell with living footsteps. This man here,

Whose tracks you see me trample, though he goes
Naked and peeled was of a rank more high
Than you suppose: his noble grandmother was

The good Gualdrada; his own name used to be
Guido Guerra, and in his life he attained

Much with his counsel and his sword. And he

Who treads the sand behind my feet is named
Tegghiaio Aldobrandi, a man whose voice
The world should more have prized. And I, condemned

With them, am Jacopo Rusticucci, whose fierce
Wife more than anything brought me wretchedness."
Could I be shielded from the fire, at this

I would have thrown myself down into the fosse
Among them--and so my teacher would permit,
I think; but knowing how that fiery place

Would burn and bake me, fear drained the appetite
My good will gave me to embrace them. I said,
"No: it was not contempt but sorrow I felt

At your condition--inscribed so deep inside
It will not leave me soon--when this my lord
Spoke words to me which I knew prophesied

Such men as you were coming, I always heard
(Since I am of your city), and have told over
Lovingly, your names and actions, both revered.

I leave the bitter gall behind, and aspire
Toward the sweet fruits promised by my guide,
But first I must go downward to the core."

"As your soul long may guide your limbs," he said,
"With your fame shining after you: so tell
If courtesy and valor still abide

Within our city, where they used to dwell.
Or are they gone from it entirely now--
By Guglielmo Borsiere, who came to Hell

Only a short time past, whom you see go
Among our legion, we have heard things said
That cause us much affliction." "Newcomers to you,

O Florence, and sudden profits, have led to pride
And excess that you already mourn!" I spoke

With face uplifted; the three, who understood,

Then looked at one another with the look
Of men who hear the truth. "If times occur,"
They all replied, "when it again will take

So little effort to answer another's desire,
Count yourself happy speaking as you wish.
Therefore, if you escape from this dark sphere

To see the beauty of the stars, and relish
The pleasure then of saying, 'I was there'--
Speak word of us to others." Then in a rush

They broke their wheel, and as they fled, the blur
Of legs resembled wings; it took less time
Than saying "Amen" for them to disappear.

And then my master left, I after him;
And we had traveled but a little distance
Before the sound of falling water came

From so near we could scarcely hear our voices.
As the river which is first to carve its course
East down the Apennines from Viso's sources--

Called Acquacheta up high, before it pours
To its low bed at Forlì--clears the spine
Above San Benedetto dell'Alpe and roars

In a single cataract that might have been
A thousand; just so, down a precipitous bank,
Dark water drummed so loudly it would pain

Our ears before much longer. I had a hank
Of cord wrapped round me--with it I had planned
To take the leopard with the painted flank;

I loosed it from me at my master's command
And passed it to him, knotted and coiled up.
Turning to the right he flung it from his hand

Some distance off the edge and down the slope,

Into the depth of the abyss. I thought,
"Some strangeness surely will answer from the deep

The strange signal the master just set out,
And follows so attentively with his eye"--
One must take care with those who have the wit

Not only to observe the action, but see
The thought as well! For, "Soon now will arise
The thing I look for: soon," he said to me

"What your mind dreams will be before your eyes."
A man should close his lips, if he's able to,
When faced by truth that has the face of lies,

But here I cannot be silent; reader, I vow
By my Commedia's lines--so may they not fail
Of lasting favor--that as I was peering through

That murky air, a shape swam up to instill
Amazement in the firmest heart: a thing
Rising the way a man who dives to pull

His anchor free from shoals it is caught among,
Or something else hidden in the sea, with feet
Drawn in beneath him, surges--surfacing

Back from the deep with both arms held up straight.

Canto XVII

"Behold the beast that has the pointed tail,
That crosses mountains, leaves walls and weapons broken,
And makes the stench of which the world is full!"

So did my leader address me, then paused to beckon
Him ashore near where the causeway came to an end.
And fraud's foul emblem came closer, till he had taken

His head and chest from the deep to rest on land
Before us, not drawing his tail up onto the bank.
His face was just a man's face, outwardly kind,

And he was like a serpent all down his trunk.
He had two paws, both hairy to the armpits;
His back and breast and both sides down to the shank

Were painted with designs of knots and circlets.
No Tartar or Turk has ever worn a cloth
More colored in field and figure, nor were the nets

Arachne loomed. The way beached boats are both
On land and partly in water, or the way
The beaver squats to battle fish to the death

In the deep-drinking Germans' land--so lay
That worst of beasts upon the edge of stone
That bounds the sand. His tail was quivery

And restless in the void where it hung down
Squirring its venomous fork with an upward twist,
Armed like a scorpion. "Now we must incline

Our path a little--as far as the evil beast
That crouches over there," my master said.
So we descended on the right, and paced

Ten steps along the edge to keep well wide
Of sand and flames. Coming to where he was,
I saw on the sand just on from where we stood

Some people sitting near the open space.
The master said, "To experience this ring

Fully, go forward: learn what their state is,

But let your conversation not be long.
Till you return, I'll parley with this beast,
So we may borrow his shoulders." I went along

The seventh circle's margin alone, and passed
To where those doleful people sat. Their woes
Burst from their eyes, their hands were doing their best

To shield them from the torments, shifting place
From here to there--one moment from falling flames,
The next, the burning ground: just like the ways

Of dogs in summer when they scratch, sometimes
With paw and others with muzzle, they behaved
As though fleas or flies or gadflies bit their limbs.

When I grew closer to the people grieved
By the flames falling on them, I did not find
Any I recognized, but I perceived

Each had a purse hung round his neck--adorned
With certain colors and a certain device,
Which each of them with hungry eyes consumed.

Looking among them, I saw a yellow purse
That bore a lion in azure. Looking farther,
I saw another, blood-red, that showed a goose

Depicted in a color whiter than butter.
Then one of them--whose wallet, which was white,
Displayed a pregnant sow portrayed in azure--

Said to me: "What are you doing in this pit?
Be off with you! And since you are living, know
My neighbor Vitaliano will come to sit

Here on my left. These Florentines din me so
Because I am a Paduan; often they cry,
'Bring on the sovereign knight whose sack will show

Three goats!'" With that, he twisted his mouth awry
In a perverse grimace, and like an ox

Licking its nose, thrust out his tongue at me.

Then, fearing that a longer stay might vex
Him who had cautioned that the time I spent
With them be brief, I left those worn-out souls--

And found my leader already on our mount,
Seated upon that savage creature's back.
He said, "Be bold and strong; for now the descent

Must be by such a stairway. The place you take
Should be in front, so I can come between
To protect you from the tail." Like those who shake,

Feeling the quartan fever coming on--
Their nails already blue, so that they shiver
At the mere sight of shade--such I was then;

But shame rebuked me, which makes a servant braver
In a good master's presence. I took my seat
Upon those ugly shoulders. I did endeavor

(But my voice would not come the way I thought)
To say, "Be sure you hold me tight!" But he,
Who'd rescued me from other dangers, put

His two strong arms around me to steady me
As soon as I had mounted up, commanding,
"Geryon, move ahead--but carefully:

Keep your arcs wide; go slowly when descending;
Be mindful of this new burden that you bear."
As a boat moves back and back, to leave its landing,

So slowly did Geryon withdraw from shore.
Then when he felt himself quite free, he turned
And brought his tail to where his foreparts were,

And stretching it out he moved it so it churned
The way a swimming eel does; and his paws
Gathered the air toward him. When Phaëthon spurned

The reins, so that the sky as one still sees
Was scorched, I doubt that there was greater fear

(Nor when pathetic Icarus felt his thighs

Unfeathering from the melting wax, to hear
His father crying, "You are falling now!")
Than mine, perceiving I was in sheer air--

Surrounded by it, and realizing I saw
Nothing at all around me but the beast.
Onward he swam with motion more and more slow

As he wheeled round descending; but that I guessed
Only by feeling the wind against my face
And from below. On our right the sound increased

From the whirlpool roaring horribly under us.
I stretched my head out forward, looking down--
Growing more frightened even than I was,

Because as we descended I heard the din
Of lamentations and I could see the fire.
And so I shook, the more tightly holding on.

And I saw then--I had not seen it before--
That he was wheeling and making his descent,
For the great torments now were drawing near

On every side. As a falcon being sent
Stays on the wing seeing no lure or bird
A long while, making the falconer lament,

"Ah me, you are sinking now!"--and comes down tired,
With many wheelings, where it swiftly set out,
And alights peeved and sullen, far from its lord:

So Geryon circled and landed at the foot
Of the jagged rock; and once unburdening
His shoulders of our bodies, he did not wait,

But vanished like an arrow from the string.

Canto XVIII

There is a place called Malebolge in Hell,
Constructed wholly of iron-colored stones,
Including the circumferential wall.

Right in the center of this malign field yawns
A wide deep pit: concerning its design
I shall say more in time. A belt remains

Between the base of that high wall of stone
And the central pit, a circular band divided
In ten concentric valleys, as in a plan

Where guardian moats succesively are graded
Around a castle's walls. In such a place
A series of small bridges would be provided,

Out from the fortress threshold and across
To the last bank: just so from the rock wall's foot
Ran spokewise ridges, crossing over each fosse

And its embankement, extending to the pit
That gathers them and cuts them off. This place
Was where we found ourselves when we alit

From Geryon's back; the poet, leading us,
Held to the left, and I came on behind.
To my right side I saw new tortures, new woes,

And new tormentors, with whom the first ditch teemed.
Down at its bottom were naked sinners. The crowd
Massed on our side of the center paced the ground

Headed toward us, while those on the other side
Walked facing as we did, but with a greater pace:
As when the Romans, because of the multitude

Gathered for the Jubilee, had pilgrims cross
The bridge with one side kept for all those bound
Toward St. Peter's, facing the Castle, while those

Headed toward the Mount were all assigned
The other side. Along the dismal rock

In both directions, I saw demons--horned

And carrying large scourges; and they struck
Savagely from behind. Ah, at the first blow
How terribly they forced them to be quick

Lifting their heels! None waited to undergo
The second or the third. As I walked on,
One of the wretches looking from below

Met my eyes: instantly I said, "I have seen
This fellow before," and paused to make him out;
And my kind leader gave me leave to turn

A short way back. That tortured spirit thought
To hide himself by lowering his face,
But that did little good, and I cried out:

"You, looking at the ground there--surely if those
Features you wear are not false, you are named
Venedico Caccianemico. Say what it is

That brings you sauces of such a pungent kind."
And he to me: "I tell it unwillingly;
But your plain speech compels me, bringing to mind

Memories of the former world. It was I
Who brought Ghisolabella to do the will
Of the Marchese, however it may be

That the obscene history is told. But still,
I am not the only Bolognese here,
Crying in torment--in truth, the place is so full

That there are fewer tongues alive up there
Between Savena and Reno, being taught
How to say sipa; and if what you desire

Is evidence to confirm it--just give some thought
To our avaricious nature." And as he spoke,
A demon came and lashed him, crying out,

"Get moving pimp! This is no place to look
For women to sell!" Rejoining my escort,

I came with him to where a ridge of rock

Jutted from the bank; we climbed it without much effort,
And turning right along its craggy bridge
Left that eternal circling. We reached the part

Where a space yawning underneath the ridge
Gives passage to the scourged, and there he said,
"Stop: let the sight of this other great assemblage

Of ill-begotten souls impress you; they strode
The way we did, so you could not see their faces."
From the old bridge we looked down at the crowd

Filing toward us, also driven by lashes.
The kind guide said, without my questioning,
"See where that great one sheds, as he advances,

No tears for pain--how much the look of a king
He still keeps! He is Jason, who took the ram
Of Colchis by courage and canny reckoning.

He passed the isle of Lemnos after the time
When its bold, pitiless women killed every male;
His deceitful gifts and fair words overcame

The young Hypsipyle there, who'd had the skill
To deceive the rest. He left her great with child,
Folorn; and such guilt brings him torment in Hell,

Avenging Medea as well. With him are sealed
All those who cheat such ways: let this suffice
For the first valley, and knowledge of those held

Between its jaws." We had now reached the place
At which the narrow pathway cuts across
The second bank, the shoulder of which supplies

The abutment for another arch's base.
Now we could hear the sound of people's screams
From the next fosse's pocket, and the noise

Made by their puffing snouts and by their palms
As they stuck themselves. The banks were caked with mold

That clings there, formed by an exhalation that streams

From down below, offensive to behold
And to inhale. The bottom is so far down
That we could nowhere see it until we scaled

The ridge's high point at the arch's crown.
When we had reached it, I saw deep down in the fosse
People immersed in filth that seemed to drain

From human privies. Searching it with my eyes
I saw one there whose head was so befouled
With shit, you couldn't tell which one he was--

Layman or cleric. Looking up at me, he howled
"And why are you so greedy to look at me
When all of these are just as filthy?" I called:

"Because, if memory serves me properly,
I saw you once when your hair was dry, before--
I know you are Alessio Interminei

Of Lucca, which is why I eye you more
Than all the rest." And he then, beating his head:
"Down here is where my flatteries, that store

With which my tongue seemed never to be cloyed,
Have sunk me." Then my leader gave me advice:
"Extend your gaze a little farther ahead,

So that your eyes may fully observe the face
Of that disheveled strumpet who in the mire
Scratches her body, as she stands or squats,

With shit-rimmed fingers--she is Thaïs, the whore
Who, asked, 'And is my favor with you great?'
Replied, 'Enormous,' to her paramour--

And let our sight be satisfied with that."

Canto XIX

O Simon Magus, and O you wretched crowd
Of those who follow him and prostitute
In your rapacity the things of God

Which should be brides of righteousness, to get
Silver and gold--it is time the trumpet sounded
For you: the third pouch is where you are put.

Now we were at the next tomb, having ascended
To where the ridge hangs over the fosse's middle.
O Supreme Wisdom, your mighty art is extended

Through Heaven, on earth, and in the world of evil,
And with what justice is your Power assigned!
I saw that the livid stone which lined the channel,

Both walls and floor, was full of holes, all round
And of an equal size. They seemed to me
Not any wider or smaller than those designed

For the baptizings in my fair San Giovanni--
One of which many years ago I broke,
To save one drowning there: and let this be

My seal to clear the matter. From each hole struck
A sinner's feet and legs: the rest of him,
From the calf up, inside. They twitched and shook

Because the soles of both feet were aflame--
So violently, it seemed their joints could burst
Rope or snap withes. As flames on oil will skim

Across the surface, so here the quick fire coursed
From heel to toe. "Master," I asked, "tell me,
Who is that one who seems to squirm the worst

And to be sucked by the reddest flames?" And he:
"If you desire for me to carry you there,
By that bank sloping down more gradually,

Then you can speak with him directly and hear
From him about himself and his misdeeds."

And I: "I like what pleases you. You are

My lord, you know I follow where your will leads--
You also know the things I leave unsaid."
Then we came onto the fourth dike; where its sides

Slope down we descended to our left, and stood
Upon its narrow, perforated floor,
My master not releasing me from his side

Until he reached the hole of that sufferer
Whose legs thrashed out such sorrow. I began,
"O miserable soul, whoever you are,

Planted here like a fence post upside down:
Speak, if you can." I stood as does the friar
Who has confessed a vile assassin--head down,

And tied in place--who calls him back to defer
Death for a little while; and then he cried,
"Boniface, are you already standing there--

Already standing there? The writing lied
By several years! Are you so soon replete
With all that getting, for which you weren't afraid

To take the beautiful Lady by deceit,
And then to do her outrage?" I became
Like those who, feeling laughed at, hesitate,

Not comprehending what's been said to them
And helpless to reply. Then Virgil said,
"Answer him quickly: say you are not him,

Not who he thinks." I spoke as I was bid,
At which the shade squirmed hard with both his feet;
Then, sighing and in a mournful voice, replied,

"What do you ask me, then? If you were brought
Down from the bank to discover who I am,
Then know that I was vested with the great

Mantle of power; a son who truly came
Out of the she-bear, I longed so much to advance

The cubs that filling my purse was my great aim--

And here I have pursed myself, to my expense.
Beneath my head are souls who preceded me
In simony, mashed flat and squeezed through dense

Layers of fissured rock. I too shall lie
Pushed down in turn when that other one has come:
My abrupt question assumed that you were he.

But already longer is the span of time
I have been cooking my feet while planted reversed
Than he, feet scarlet, will be planted the same:

For then a lawless shepherd of the west
Will follow him of uglier deeds, well chosen
For covering him and me when both are pressed

Under his skull. He'll be a second Jason,
And as the first, so Maccabees recounts,
Was treated softly by his monarch, this one

Will get soft treatment from the King of France."
In my reply, I don't know if I erred
With too much boldness in my vehemence:

"Pray tell me: how much treasure did our Lord
Ask of Saint Peter before He put the keys
Into his keeping? Surely He required

Nothing but 'Follow me.' Neither did those
With Peter, or Peter himself, take silver or gold
From Matthias, who was chosen for that place

Lost by the guilty soul. Stay where you're held,
For these are your deserved punishments--
Guard well the ill-earned gains that made you bold

In opposing Charles. Except that reverence
For the great keys you held in the happy life
Forbids, my speech would be still more intense:

For avarice like yours distributes grief,
Afflicting the world by trampling on the good

And raising the wicked. Shepherds like yourself

The Evangelist intended, when he said
That she who sits upon the waters was seen
By him in fornication with kings. She had

Seven heads from birth, and from ten horns had drawn
Her strength--so long as virtue pleased her spouse.
You made a god of gold and silver: wherein

Is it you differ from the idolatrous--
Save that you worship a hundred, they but one?
Ah Constantine! What measure of wickedness

Stems from that mother--not your conversion, I mean:
Rather the dowry that the first rich Father
Accepted from you!" And while I sang this strain,

Whether he felt the bite of conscience, or anger,
He kicked out hard with both his feet; indeed,
I think my guide approved, with a look of pleasure

Listening to the sound of true words said.
And then he lifted me in his arms again,
My weight full on his chest; and when he had,

He climbed the same path he had taken down;
Nor did he tire while holding me embraced
But carried me to the summit of the span

From the fourth dike to the fifth, then gently released
His burden--gently because the passage was hard,
So steep and rocky that goats might be hard pressed;

And there before me another valley appeared.

Canto XX

The new pains of Hell that I saw next demand
New lines for this Canto XX of the first Canzon,
Which is of those submerged in the underground.

Readying myself at the cliff's brink, I looked down
Into the canyon my master had revealed
And saw that it was watered by tears of pain:

All through the circular valley I beheld
A host of people coming, weeping but mute.
They walked at a solemn pace that would be called

Liturgical here above. But as my sight
Moved down their bodies, I sensed a strange distortion
That made the angle of chin and chest not right--

The head was twisted backwards: some cruel torsion
Forced face toward kidneys, and the people strode
Backwards, because deprived of forward vision.

Perhaps some time a palsy has wrung the head
Of a man straight back like these, or a terrible stroke--
But I've never seen one do so, and doubt it could.

Reader (God grant you benefit of this book)
Try to imagine, yourself, how I could have kept
Tears of my own from falling for the sake

Of our human image so grotesquely reshaped,
Contorted so the eyes' tears fell to wet
The buttocks at the cleft. Truly I wept,

Leaning on an outcrop of that rocky site,
And my master spoke to me: "Do you suppose
You are above with the other fools even yet?

Here, pity lives when it is dead to these.
Who could be more impious than one who'd dare
To sorrow at the judgment God decrees?

Raise your head--raise it and see one walking near
For whom the earth split open before the eyes

Of all the Thebans. 'Why are you leaving the war,

Amphiaraus,' the others shouted, 'what place
Are you rushing to?' as he plunged down the crevice
To Minos, who seizes all. See Amphiaraus

Making his shoulders his breast; because his purpose
Was seeing too far ahead, he looks behind
And stumbles backwards. And here is Tiresias--

The seer who changed from male to female, unmanned
Through all his body until the day he struck
A second time with his staff at serpents entwined

And resumed his manly plumage. He with his back
Shoved nose to the other's front is called Aruns.
Living on the slopes the Carrarese work

From villages below, he had clear vistas:
From his cave among white marble he could scan
The stars, or gaze at waves below in the distance.

And she, whose loose hair covers her breasts unseen
On the side away from you, where other hair grows,
Was Manto--who searched through many lands, and then

Settled in the place where I was born. Of this,
Hear me awhile: her father dead, and Bacchus's
City enslaved, she for a long time chose

To roam the world. Where a wall of mountains rises
To form fair Italy's border above Tirolo
Lies Lake Benaco, fed by a thousand sources:

Garda and Val Camonica and Pennino
Are watered by streams that settle in that lake.
The island amid it the pastors of Trentino,

Brescia, of Verona might bless, if they should take
A way that leads there. At the shore's low place,
Peschiera's splendid fortress towers make

Their challenge to the Brescians and Bergamese.
There, all the cascades Benaco cannot contain

Within its bosom join in one river that flows

Through rich green pasture. As soon as it starts to run,
The water, Benaco no more, is Mincio instead,
And joining the Po at Govèrnolo, it soon

Spreads to a marsh--in summer, sometimes fetid.
There Manto the savage virgin saw in mid-fen
A stretch of dry land, untilled uninhabited:

And there she stayed and lived, where she could shun
All humans to ply her arts in a place she shared
Only with servants. And when her life was gone

And her soul descended, there its shell was interred.
Afterward, families scattered about that country
Gathered where marsh on all sides made a ward

Against attackers. And when they built their city
Over her bones, with no lots or divination
They named it Mantua. Before fool Casalodi

Was deceived by Pinamonte, its population
Was larger. So let no other history,
I charge you, belie my city's true inception."

I: "Master, your speech inspires such certainty
And confidence that any contradiction
Of what you say would be dead coals to me.

But speak again of these souls in sad procession:
Are any passing below us worthy of note?
For my mind keeps turning back in that direction."

Then he: "That one, whose beard has spread in a mat
That covers his brown shoulders, was augur when Greece
Was short of males. He divined the time to cut

The first ship's cable at Aulis along with Calchas.
His name, as my tragedy sings--you who know it
Entirely know the passage--is Eurypylus.

That other with skinny flanks is Michael Scot,
Who truly knew the game of magic fraud.

See Guido Bonatti; and Asdente--too late,

He wishes he'd stuck to leather and cobbler's thread,
Repenting here his celebrated predictions.
And this wretched crowd of women all chose to trade

Loom, spindle, and thimble for the telling of fortunes,
Potions, wax images, incantation and charm.
But come: already, Cain-in-the-moon positions

Both hemispheres with his pale blue thorns, his term
Closes in the waves below Seville--the round moon
That, deep in the wood last night, brought you no harm."

Even while he spoke the words, we were moving on.

Canto XXI

And so we went from bridge to bridge, and spoke
Of things which my Commedia does not mean
To sing. We reached the summit, stopping to look

At the next fissure of Malebolge, the vain
Lamenting that was next--and what I beheld
Was an astounding darkness. As is done

In winter, when the sticky pitch is boiled
In the Venetian Arsenal to caulk
Their unsound vessels while no ship can be sailed,

And so instead one uses the time to make
His ship anew, another one repairs
Much-voyaged ribs, and some with hammers strike

The prow, and some the stern; and this one makes oars
While that one might twist rope, another patch
The jib and mainsail--so, not by any fires

But by some art of Heaven, a heavy pitch
Was boiling there below, which overglued
The banks on every side. I saw that much,

But could see nothing in it but the flood
Of bubbles the boiling raised, and the whole mass
Swelling and settling. While I stared down, my guide,

Crying, "Watch out!--watch out!" pulled me across
Toward him from where I stood. I turned my head
Like someone eager to find out what it is

He must avoid, who finding himself dismayed
By sudden fear, while he is turning back
Does not delay his flight: what I beheld

Hurrying from behind us up the rock
Was a black demon. Ah, in his looks a brute,
How fierce he seemed in action--running the track

With his wings held outspread, and light of foot:
Over one high sharp shoulder he had thrown

A sinner, carrying both haunches' weight

On the one side, with one hand holding on
To both the ankles. Reaching our bridge, he spoke:
"O Malebranche, here is another one

Of Santa Zita's elders! While I go back
To bring more from his homeland, thrust him below.
His city gives us an abundant stock:

Every citizen there except Bonturo
Practices barratry; and given cash
They can contrive a yes from any no."

He hurled the sinner down, then turned to rush
Back down the rocky crag; and no mastiff
Was ever more impatient to shake the leash

And run his fastest after a fleeing thief.
The sinner sank below us, only to rise
Rump up--but demons under the bridge's shelf

Cried, "Here's no place to show your Sacred Face!
You're not out in the Serchio for a swim!
If you don't want to feel our hooks--like this!--

Then stay beneath the pitch." They struck at him
With over a hundred hooks, and said, "You'll need
To dance in secret here--so grab what scam

You're able to, in darkness." Then they did
Just as cooks have their scullions do to steep
The meat well into the cauldron--with a prod

From their forks keeping it from floating up.
My good guide said, "So it will not be seen
That you are here, find some jagged outcrop

And crouch behind it to give yourself a screen.
No matter what offenses they offer me,
Do not be frightened: I know how things are done

Here--once before I was in such a fray."
And then he passed beyond the bridge's head,

And coming to the sixth bank suddenly

He needed to keep a steady front. They bayed
And rushed at him with all the rage and uproar
Of dogs that charge some wretched vagabond

Who suddenly is forced to plead; they tore
From under the bridge and raised their forks at him;
But he cried, "Not so savage!--before you dare

To touch me with your forks, choose one to come
Forward to hear me out, and then decide
Whether to hook me." They all cried out one name:

"Let Malacoda go!" So the others stood
While one strode forward to him, sneering, "What
Good will it do him?" So my master said,

"Do you, O Malacoda, think I could get
Through all of your defenses safely as this
Except by Heaven's will and happy fate?

Now let us pass--for Heaven also decrees
That I should show another this savage road."
The demon's pride fell so much he let loose

His hook, which fell down at his feet, and said:
"Now no one strike him." To me, my leader called,
"Now you may come back safely to my side,

You who crouch squatting behind the splintered shield
Of stone, upon the bridge." At this I stirred
And quickly joined him--and the devils milled

Toward us, pressing forward, so that I feared
They might not keep the pact. So, I once saw
The soldiers frightened when they removed their guard

Out of Caprona by treaty--as they withdrew
Passing among so many enemies.
I kept as close by my guide as I could go,

And all the while I did not take my eyes
Away from their expressions . . . which were not good!

They lowered their hooks, but I heard one give voice:

"Should I just touch him on the rump?" Replied
The others, "Yes--go on and give him a cut."
But the demon who was talking with my guide

Turned around instantly on hearing that,
Saying, "Hold--hold, Scarmiglione!" To us
He said, "You can't go farther by this route,

Because along this ridge the sixth arch lies
All shattered at the bottom. But if you still
Wish to go forward, a ridge not far from this

Does have a place where you can cross at will.
It was yesterday, five hours later than now,
That the twelve hundred and sixty-sixth year fell

Since the road here was ruined. I'm sending a crew
Out of my company in that direction
To see if sinners are taking the air. You go

With them, for they'll not harm you in any fashion.
Come, Alichino and Calcabrina," he cried,
"And you, Cagnazzo; and to be the captain

Of all ten, Barbariccia. And in the squad,
Take Libiocco and Draghighnazzo too,
And Ciriatto with his tusky head,

And also Graffiacane and Farfarello,
And crazy Rubicante. Search all around
The pools of boiling tar. And see these two

Get safely over to where the dens are spanned
By the next ridge, whose arc is undestroyed."
"O me! O master, what do I see," I groaned;

"We need no escort if you know the road--
And as for me, I want none. If you are cautious,
As is your custom, then how can you avoid

Seeing them grind their teeth and with ferocious
Brows threaten to do us harm?" And he returned,

"I tell you, have no fear: it is the wretches

Who boil here that they menace--so let them grind
As fiercely as they like, and scowl their worst."
And then the company of devils turned,

Wheeling along the left-hand bank. But first
Each signaled their leader with the same grimace:
Baring their teeth, through which the tongue was pressed;

And the leader made a trumpet of his ass.

Canto XXII

I have seen horsemen moving camp before,
And when they muster, and when an assault begins,
And beating a retreat when they retire;

I have seen coursers, too, O Aretines,
Over your lands, and raiders setting out,
And openings of joust and tourneys--with signs

By bell and trumpet and drum, and signals set
On castles by native and foreign signalry:
But I never saw so strange a flageolet

Send foot or horsement forth, nor ship at sea
Guided by land or star! We journeyed now
With the ten demons. Ah, savage company--

But as the saying has it, one must go
With boozers in the tavern and saints in church.
Intent upon the pitch, I tried to know

All that I could of the nature of this pouch
And those who burn in it. Like dolphins who warn
Sailors to save their vessels, when they arch

Their backs above the water, so we could discern
From time to time a sinner show his back
To alleviate his pain, and then return

To hiding quicker than a lightning stroke.
And as at water's edge or in a ditch
Frogs lie, concealing their feet and all their bulk

With snouts above the surface: at the approach
Of Barbariccia, sinners who lay just so,
Concealing themselves on every side, would twitch

And pull back under the boiling. I saw--and now
My heart still shudders as I tell it--one stay,
Just as it happens that while one jumps below

Another frog might linger where they lay:
And Graffiacane, who was nearest, hooked

Him by his pitch-thick hair, so it looked to me

As if he had caught an otter. (I could connect
Each of them with his name, for I had noted
Carefully who they were when they were picked,

And also what they called each other.) They shouted,
"O Rubicante, grip him between your claws
And flay him." "Master--this wretch who's so ill-fated

And fallen into the hands of enemies:
I pray you, find out who he is," I said.
Going to his side at once, he asked what place

He came from. "I was born," replied the shade,
"In the kingdom of Navarre. My mother sent
Me to become the servant of a lord,

For she had borne me to a rascal bent
On destroying both himself and all he had.
Being admitted to the establishment

Of good King Thibaut's household, I employed
Myself at barratry--which is the path
I pay for in this boiling." So he said;

Then Ciriatto, the demon from whose mouth
Two boar-like tusks protruded, made him feel
How one of them could rip. The mouse in truth

Had come among some vicious cats; and still
Barbariccia locked him in a tight embrace,
Saying, "Stand back, while I enfork him well,"

But to my master: "Ask him what you please--
If there is more you'd like to learn from him
Before he's butchered by another of us."

So my guide asked, "Among the sinners who swim
Under the pitch, are any others you know
Italian?" He said, "I parted with one who came

From there, just now. Would I were still below
Hidden with him, for then I'd need not dread

Their hooks and talons." Then cried Libiocco,

"We have endured too much!" With that he clawed
His grapple into the other's arm, and tearing
Ripped out a muscle. Draghignazzo also made

As if he meant to give his legs a goring,
At which their captain wheeled against them all.
When they were somewhat quiet, without deferring

His questions, my leader asked the sinner, who still
Was staring at his wound: "Who was it you said
You parted from when you did yourself such ill

By coming ashore?" "Fra Gomita," he replied,
"He of Gallura, vessel of every deceit,
Who kept the enemies that his master had

So cunningly in hand, they praised him for it.
He took their cahs and sent them on their way
Smoothly, as he recounts. And he was great

In other enterprises, equally:
No petty barrator but a lordly one.
Don Michel Zanche of Logodoro and he

Keep company together; when they go on
About Sardinia, their tongues don't tire.
But O me--look at how that other demon

Is grinding his teeth! Though I would tell you more
I fear he's getting ready to scratch my itch."
To Farfarello, whose eyes rolled eager for gore,

Their marshal turned and shouted his reproach:
"Get back, vile bird!" The sinner: "If you would hear
Tuscans or Lombards, there are some I can fetch--

But let the Malebranche stand back there
So these who come will not fear their revenge,
And I will make some seven souls appear

For the lone one that I am--and I won't change
My place from where I sit, but summon them

By whistling, as we do when we can emerge."

Cagnazzo raised his muzzle at this claim;
Shaking his head from side to side, he said,
"Just listen to this cunning trick--his aim

Is to jump back below." And he, who had
A great supply of wiles at his command,
Replied, "It's true that I am cunning indeed

At contriving greater sorrows for the band
I dwell with." Then Alichino held himself in
No longer, and opposed the others: "My friend,"

He said, "if you dare plunge back in again,
I'll not come merely galloping after you
But beating my wings above the pitch. The screen

Formed by the bank will hide us when we go
Down from this ridge: we'll see if you, alone,
Are a match for all of us." O reader, hear now

Of a new sport: led by the very one
Who first opposed it, all now turned their eyes
To the other shore. Timing exactly when,

Feet firm against the ground, the Navarrese
Suddenly leaped and instantly broke free
Out of their custody. Each demon, at this,

Felt stung by his misdoing--especially he
Who caused the blunder. So crying out, "You're caught!"
He flew away in pursuit, but futilely:

Wings could not gain on terror; down out of sight
The sinner dove, and the demon swooped back up,
Raising his breast--no different in his flight

Than when the wild duck makes a sudden escape
By diving just as the falcon plummets close,
Then veers back up, vexed at his thwarted grip.

Then Calcabrina, who was furious

The trick had worked, went flying after the pair,
Eager to see the sinner evade the chase

So there could be a fight. When the barrator
Had disappeared, the demon turned his claws
Upon his comrade and grappled him in midair

Above the fosse. But his opponent was
A full-grown hawk equipped with claws to respond
Truly and well; and as they fought, the brace

Fell into the middle of the boiling pond.
The heat unclenched them at once; but though released
They could not rise, because their wings were gummed

And clotted. Barbariccia, like the rest
Lamenting, hastily dispatched a squad
Of four who flew across to the bank we faced,

Each with a fork; hurrying from either side
They descended to their posts with hooks extended
To the mired pair, already baked inside

Their crusts; and we two left them thus confounded

Canto XXIII

Silent, alone, sans escort, with one behind
And one before, as Friars Minor use,
We journeyed. The present fracas turned my mind

To Aesop's fable of the frog and mouse:
Now and this moment are not more similar
Than did the tale resemble the newer case,

If one is conscientious to compare
Their ends and their beginnings. Then, as one thought
Springs from the one before it, this now bore

Another which redoubled my terror: that--
Having been fooled because of us, with wounds
And mockery to make them the more irate,

With anger added to their malice--the fiends,
More fiercely than a dog attacks a hare,
Would soon come after us. I felt the ends

Of my hair bristling already from the fear.
Intent on what was behind us on the road,
"Master," I said, "unless you can obscure

Both you and me from sight, and soon, I dread
The Malebranche, already after us--
And I imagine them so clearly, indeed

I hear them now." "Were I of lead-backed glass,
I would not take your outward countenance in
Quicker than I do your inward one in this,"

He said; "This moment, your thoughts entered mine--
In aspect and in action so alike
I have made both their counsels into one:

If the right bank is sloped so as to make
A way to reach the next fosse, then we can
Escape the chase we both imagine." He spoke

With barely time to tel me of his plan
Before I saw them coming--wings spread wide,

Eager to seize us, not far and closing in.

My leader took me up at once, and did
As would a mother awakened by a noise
Who sees the flames around her, and takes her child,

Concerned for him more than herself, and flies
Not staying even to put on a shift:
Supine he gave himself to the rocky place

Where the hard bank slopes downward to the cleft,
Forming one side of the adjacent pouch.
No water coursing a sluice was ever as swift

To turn a landmill's wheel on its approach
Toward the vanes, as my master when he passed
On down that bank that slanted to the ditch,

Hurling along with me upon his breast
Not like his mere companion, but like his child.
Just as his feet hit bottom, on the crest

Above us they appeared--but now they held
Nothing to fear, for that high Providence
That made them keepers of the fifth ditch willed

That they should have no power to leave its bounds.
Down at the bottom, we discovered a set
Of painted people, who slowly trod their rounds

Weeping, with looks of weariness and defeat.
Their cloaks, cowls covering the eyes and face,
Resembled those of Cluny's monks in cut.

These cloaks were gilded on the side that shows
So that the eye was dazzled--but all of lead
On the inside: so heavy, compared to these

The capes inflicted by Frederick were made
Of woven straw. O heavy mantle to bear
Through eternity! As ever, we pursued

Our course by turning to the left, and bore
Along with them, intent on how they moaned.

But they came slowly, burdened as they were--

So that with every step we took we found
Our company was new. I asked my guide,
"Pray find some person here, by looking round

As we walk on, whom I know by name or deed."
And one among them caught the Tuscan speech:
"Stay your quick steps through this dark air," he cried

As we came past him. "Perhaps what you beseech
You can obtain from me." At which my guide
Turned back to me, with: "Wait: let him approach

And then proceed at his pace." So I stayed,
And saw two coming who by their faces appeared
In a great haste of mind to reach my side

Although their burden held them in retard,
As did the crowding. When they came up together
They looked at me askance without a word

For some good while. Then, turning toward each other
They said, "This one appears to be alive,
Judging by how his throat moves; but if, rather,

These two are dead, what privilege can they have,
To go unencumbered by the heavy stole?"
And then to me, "O Tuscan, you who arrive

At the sad hypocrites' assembly: pray tell--
Not scorning to so address us--who you are."
"At te great town," I said, "on the beautiful

Waters of Arno, I was born, and there
I grew up, and the body I wear now
I have always had--but who are you, who bear

Upon your cheeks these distillates of woe?
What is your punishment that glitters so bright?"
"The orange cloaks are lead," said one of the two,

"So thick, that we their scales creak at the weight.
We both were Jovial Friars, and Bolognese:

As for names, I was Catalano, and that

Was Loderingo, and we were your city's choice--
The way they usually choose one man--
To keep the peace: and what we were still shows

In the Gardingo district." Then I began:
"O Friars, your evil--" but that was all I said,
For as I spoke my eye was caught by one

Upon the ground, where he was crucified
By three stakes. When he saw me there he squirmed
All over, and puffing in his beard, he sighed;

Fra Catalano, observing this, explained:
"The one impaled there you are looking at
Is he who counseled the Pharisees to bend

The expedient way, by letting one man be put
To torture for the people. You see him stretch
Naked across the path to feel the weight

Of everyone who passes; and in this ditch,
Trussed the same way, are racked his father-in-law
And others of that council which was such

A seed of evil for the Jews." I saw
Virgil, who had been marveling over the man
Doomed to be stretched out vilely crosswise so

In the eternal exile. He spoke words then,
Directed to the friar: "Be it allowed,
And if it pleases you, could you explain

What passage there may be on the right-hand side
By which we two can journey away from here,
Without requiring those black angels' aid

To come and take us from this valley floor?"
And he replied, "Nearer than you may hope
Is a rock ridge that starts from the circular

Great wall surrounding us, and spans the top
Of all the savage valleys except for this--

Where it is broken and fallen down the slope

Rather than arching over: and at that place,
You can mount up by climbing the debris
Of rock along the slopes of the crevasse

And piled up at the bottom." Silently
My leader stood a moment bowing his head,
Then, "He who hooks the sinners, back that way,

Supplied a bad account of this," he said.
The friar: "In Bologna the saying goes,
As I have heard, that the Devil is endowed

With many vices--among them, that he lies
And is the father of lies, I have also heard."
And then my guide moved onward, setting the pace

With mighty strides, and with his features stirred
To some disturbance by his anger yet;
And leaving those burdened souls I too went forward,

Following in the tracks of his dear feet.

Canto XXIV

In that part of the young year when the sun
Goes under Aquarius to rinse his beams,
And the long nights already begin to wane

Toward half the day, and when the hoarfrost mimes
The image of her white sister upon the ground--
But only a while, because her pen, it seems,

Is not sharp long--a peasant who has found
That he is running short of fodder might rise
And go outside and see the fields have turned

To white, and slap his thigh, and back in the house
Pace grumbling here and there like some poor wretch
Who can't see what to do; and then he goes

Back out, and finds hope back within his reach,
Seeing in how little time the world outside
Has changed its face, and takes his crook to fetch

His sheep to pasture. I felt this way, dismayed
By my master's stormy brow; and quickly as this,
The hurt had found its plaster. For when we stood

Before the ruined bridge, my leader's face
Turned to me with a sweet expression, the same
As I had first beheld at the mountain's base.

He opened his arms, after he took some time
To consult himself and study the ruin well,
And taking hold of me began the climb.

As one who works and reckons all the while
Seems always to have provided in advance,
So, lifting me up one great boulder's wall,

He kept his eye on another eminence,
Saying, "Next, grapple that one--but make sure
That it will bear you, first." That path of stones

Would not provide a road for those who wore
Lead mantles, for we--he weightless, I helped up--

Could barely make our way from spur to spur.

Had it not been that on that bank the slope
Was shorter than on the other, I do not know
How he'd have fared, but I'd have had to stop

And would have been defeated; but it was true
In each valley that the contour of the land
Made one side higher and the other low,

Because of the way all Malebolge inclined
Downward toward the mouth of the lowest pit.
At length we reached the place at which we found

The last stone broken off, and there I sat
As soon as I was up--so out of breath
Were my spent lungs I felt that I could get

No farther than I was. "To cast off sloth
Now well behooves you," said my master then:
"For resting upon soft down, or underneath

The blanket's cloth, is not how fame is won--
Without which, one spends life to leave behind
As vestige of himself on earth the sign

Smoke leaves on air, or foam on water. So stand
And overcome your panting--with the soul,
Which wins all battles if it does not depsond

Under its heavy body's weight. And still
A longer ladder remains for us to climb;
To leave these shades behind does not fulfill

All that's required. If you understand me, come:
Act now, to profit yourself." I got to my feet,
Showing more breath that I felt, and said to him,

"Go on, for I am strong and resolute."
And so, ascending the ridge, we took our way:
It was quite rugged, narrow and difficult,

Far steeper than the last. To seem to be
Not too fatigued, I was talking while I trudged,

When a voice arose--one ill equipped to say

Actual words--from the new fosse we had reached.
I don't know what it said, though I was now
At the high point of the bridge which overarched

The ditch there, but whoever spoke from below
Seemed to be moving. I turned quick eyes to peer
Down into the dark, but the bottom didn't show--

Wherefore I said, "Master, pray lead from here
To the next belt, and let us descend the wall:
Just as I cannot decipher the things I hear,

So too I look but make out nothing at all
From where we are." "I'll give no other response,"
He said, "but do it, for fitting petitions call

For deeds, not words." Where the bridge's end adjoins
The eighth bank, we descended, and then that pouch
Showed itself to me: I saw in its confines

Serpents--a frightening swarm, of weird kinds such
As to remember now still chills my blood.
Let Libya boast no more of her sands so rich

In reptiles, for though they spawn the chelydrid,
Cenchres with amphisbaena, the jaculi
And phareae, she never, though one include

All Ethiopia and the lands that lie
On the Red Sea, has shown a pestilence
So numerous or of such malignancy.

Amid this horde, cruel, grim and dense,
People were running, naked and terrified,
Without a hope of hiding or a chance

At heliotrope for safety. Their hands were tied
Behind their backs--with snakes, that thrust between
Where the legs meet, entwining tail and head

Into a know in front. And look!--at one
Near us a serpent darted, and transfixed

Him at the point where neck and shoulders join.

No o or i could be made with strokes as fast
As he took fire and burned and withered away,
Sinking; and when his ashes came to rest

Ruined on the ground, the dust spontaneously
Resumed its former shape. Just so expires
The Phoenix in its flames, great sages agree,

To be born again every five hundred years;
During its life, it feeds on neither grain
Nor herb but amomum and incense's tears,

And at its end the sheet it's shrouded in
Is essence of nard and myrrh. As one who falls
And knows not how--if a demon pulled him down,

Or another blockage human life entails--
And when he rises stares about confused
By the great anguish that he knows he feels,

And looking, sighs; so was that sinner dazed
When he stood up again. Oh, power of God!
How severe its vengeance is, to have imposed

Showers of such blows. My leader asked the shade
To tell us who he was. "The time is brief
Since I rained down from Tuscany," he replied,

"Into this gullet. It was a bestial life,
Not human, that pleased me best, mule that I was.
I am Vanni Fucci, beast--and aptly enough,

Pistoia was my den." And, "Master, please
Bid him not slip away, but ask what sin
It was," I said, "that thrust him to this place,

For in his time I have know him as a man
Of blood and rage." The sinner, who had heard,
Without dissembling turned mind and face--which shone

The color of shame--to me; then he declared,
"That you have caught me here amid this grief

Causes me suffering worse than I endured

When I was taken from the other life.
I cannot refuse your question: I must be
Thrust this far down because I was a thief

Who took adornments from the sacristy--
For which another, falsely, was condemned.
But, lest you delight too much in what you see

If ever you escape from this dark ground:
Open your ears to what I now pronounce,
And listen. First, Pistoia strips her land

Of Blacks, then Florence changes her citizens
And ways. From Val di Magra, Mars draws a great
Vapor, and thick clouds muffle its turbulence

Till stormy, bitter, impetuous war breaks out
On Campo Piceno--where suddenly, it breaks through
And tears the mist and strikes at every White:

And I have told it to bring grief to you."

Canto XV

The thief held up his hands when he was through,
And "God," he cried, making the fig with both--
"Take these: I aim them squarely up at you!"

The serpents were my friends from that time forth,
For then one coiled itself about his neck
As if to say, "That's all then, from your mouth,"

And another went around his arms to snake
Them tight and cinch itself in front, so tied
They couldn't budge enough to gesture. Alack,

Pistoia, Pistoia!--Why haven't you decreed
Your own incineration, so that you dwell
On earth no more, since you surpass your seed

In evildoing? In all the circles of Hell
I saw no spirit so arrogant to God,
Not even him who fell from the Theban wall.

Speaking no more then, Vanni Fucci fled,
And next I saw a centaur full of rage:
"Where is he? Where is the bitter one?" he cried

As he charged up. I think more snakes than lodge
In Marcemma's swamp were riding on his croup,
Swarming along his back up to the edge

Of our human form. He bore behind his nape,
Along the shoulders, a dragon with wings spread wide:
If any blocked the path, it burned them up.

"This centaur's name is Cacus," my master said,
"Who underneath the stones of Aventine
Many a time has made a lake of blood.

He doesn't walk the same road as his clan
Because by theft and fraud he tried to get
The splendid herd that lay near him--a sin

That ended his crooked habits: he died for it.
When Hercules's club rained onto his head

Some hundred blows, he lived to feel ten hit."

While he was saying this, the centaur sped
Beyond us, and three new spirits appeared below;
They went unnoticed by me or by my guide

Until they shouted to us, "Who are you?"
At which we ceased our talk and turned to them.
I did not know them, but as people do

When chance disposes, one had some cause to name
Another--"Where have we left Cianfa?" he said.
To be sure my leader heard, I signaled him

To stay alert, with a finger that I laid
From chin to nose. Reader, if you are slow
To credit what I tell you next, it should

Be little wonder, for I who saw it know
That I myself can hardly acknowledge it:
While I was staring at the sinners below

A serpent darted forward that had six feet,
And facing one of the three it fastened on him
All over--with the middle feet it got

A grip upon the belly, with each fore-limb
It clasped an arm; its fangs gripped both his cheeks;
It spread its hind feet out to do the same

To both his thighs, extending its tail to flex
Between them upward through to the loins behind.
No ivy growing in a tree's bark sticks

As firmly as the horrid beast entwined
Its limbs around the other. Then, as if made
Out of hot wax, they clung and made a bond

And mixed their colors; and neither could be construed
As what it was at first--so, as the track
Of flame moves over paper, there is a shade

That moves before it that is not yet black,
And the white dies away. The other two

Were looking on, and cried, "Ah me, now look

At how you change, Agnello!--already you
Are neither two nor one." Now the two heads
Had become one; we watched the two shapes grow

Into one face, where both were lost. The sides
Grew two arms, fused from lengths that had been four;
Thighs, legs, chest, belly merged; and in their steads

Grew members that were never seen before.
All of the former features were blotted out.
A perverse shape, with both not what they were,

Yet neither--such, its pace deliberate,
It moved away. The way a lizard can dash
Under the dog day's scourge, darting out

Between the hedges so that it seems a flash
Of lightning if it spurts across the road,
So did a fiery little serpent rush

Toward the bellies of the two who stayed;
Peppercorn black and livid, it struck out,
Transfixing one in the place where we are fed

When life begins--then fell before his feet,
Outstretched. The pierced one gazed at it and stood
Not speaking, only yawning as if a fit

Of sleep or fever had taken him. He eyed
The serpent, the serpent him. From this one's wound
And that one's mouth smoke violently flowed,

And their smoke met. Let Lucan now attend
In silence, who has told the wretched fates
Of Nasidius and Sabellus--till he had learned

What I will let fly next. And Ovid, who writes
Of Cadmus and Arethusa, let him be still--
For though he in his poet-craft transmutes

One to a serpent, and makes the other spill
Transformed into a fountain, I envy him not:

He never transformed two individual

Front-to-front natures so both forms as they met
Were ready to exchange their substance. The twain
Reacted mutually: the reptile split

Its tail to make a fork; the wounded one
Conjoined his feet. The legs and thighs were pressed
So tight no mark of juncture could be seen;

The split tail took the shape the other lost,
Its skin grew softer, and the other's hard.
I saw the arms draw inward to be encased

Inside the armpits; the animal's feet appeared
To lengthen as the other's arms grew less.
The hind paws, twisting together like a cord,

Became the member man conceals. From his,
The wretch had grown to feet. While the smoke veils
Each one with colors that are new, and grows

Hair here and strips it there, the one shape falls
And one comes upright. But neither turned aside
The unholy lights that stared above the muzzles

They each were changing: the one who newly stood
Drew his in toward his temples, and from the spare
Matter from that, ears issued from the head,

Behind smooth cheeks; what didn't course to an ear
But was retained became the face's nose,
And fleshed lips to the thickness they should bear.

He that lay prone propelled his nose and face
Forward, and shrank his ears back into the head
As a snail does its horns. The tongue that was

Whole and prepared for speech was split instead--
And in the other the forked tongue formed one piece:
And the smoke ceased. The soul that had been made

A beast fled down the valley with a hiss;
The other, speaking now, spat after it,

Turned his new shoulders on it to address

The third, and said: "I'll have Buoso trot
On all fours down this road, as I have done!"
And so I saw that seventh deadweight transmute

And mutate--and may its strangeness excuse my pen,
If it has tangled things. And though my eyes
Were somewhat in confusion at the scene,

My mind somewhat bewildered, yet none of these
Could flee to hide himself so secretly
That I could not distinguish well the face

Of Puccio Sciancato, who of the three
Companions that we first took notice of,
Alone was not transformed; the other was he

Whose death, Gaville, you have good cause to grieve.

Canto XXVI

Rejoice, O Florence, since you are so great,
Beating your wings on land and on the sea,
That in Hell too your name is spread about!

I found among those there for their thievery
Five of your citizens, which carries shame
For me--and you gain no high honor thereby.

But if we dream the truth near morning time,
Then you will feel, before much time has gone
What Prato and others crave for you--and come

Already, it would not have come too soon.
And truly, let it, since it must come to pass:
For it will all the heavier weigh me down,

The older I become. We left the place,
And on the stairway that the jutting stone
A little while before had offered us

On our descent, my guide climbed up again
And drew me up to pursue our lonely course.
Without the hand the foot could not go on,

Climbing that jagged ridge's rocks and spurs.
I sorrowed then, and when I turn my mind
To what I saw next, sorrow again--and force

My art to make its genius more restrained
Than is my usual bent, lest it should run
Where virtue doesn't: so that if any kind

Star or some better thing has made it mine
I won't myself negate the gift in me.
As many as the fireflies a peasant has seen

(Resting on a hill that time of year when he
Who lights the world least hides his face from us,
And at the hour when the fly gives way

To the mosquito) all down the valley's face,
Where perhaps he gathers grapes and tills the ground:

With flames that numerous was Hell's eight fosse

Glittering, as I saw when I attained
A place from which its floor could be made out.
And as the one avenged by bears divined

That what he saw was Elijah's chariot
Carried by rearing horses to Heaven's domain--
For with his eyes he couldn't follow it

Except by looking at the flame alone,
Like a small cloud ascending: so each flame moves
Along the ditch's gullet with not one

Showing its plunder, though every flame contrives
To steal away a sinner. I had climbed up
To balance where the bridge's high point gives

A better view, and if I didn't grip
A rock I would have fallen from where I stood
Without a push. Seeing how from the top

I gazed intently down, my master said,
"Within the flames are spirits; each one here
Enfolds himself in what burns him." I replied,

"My Master, to hear you say it makes me sure,
But I already thought it; already, too,
I wanted to ask you who is in that fire

Which at its top is so split into two
It seems to surge from the pyre Eteocles
Shared with his brother?" He answered, "In it go

Tormented Ulysses and Diomedes
Enduring vengeance together, as they did wrath;
And in their flame they grieve for their device,

The horse that made the doorway through which went forth
The Romans' noble seed. Within their fire
Now they lament the guile that even in death

Makes Deidamia mourn Achilles, and there
They pay the price for the Palladium."

"Master," I said, "I earnestly implore,

If they can speak within those sparks of flame--
And pray my prayer be worth a thousand pleas--
Do not forbid my waiting here for them

Until their horned flame makes its way to us;
You see how yearningly it makes me lean."
And he to me: "Your paryer is worthy of praise,

And therefore I accept it. But restrain
Your tongue, leave speech to me--Greeks that they were,
They might treat words of yours with some disdain."

My master waited as the flame drew near
For the right place and moment to arrive,
Then spoke: "O you, who are two within one fire:

If I deserved of you while I was alive--
If I deserved anything great or small
From you when I wrote verse, then do not move;

But rather grant that one of you will tell
Whither, when lost, he went away to die."
The greater horn of flame began to flail

And murmur like fire the wind beats, and to ply
Its tip which, as it vibrated here and there
Like a tongue in speech, flung out a voice to say:

"When Circe had detained me more than a year
There near Gaeta, before it had that name
Aeneas gave it, and I parted from her,

Not fondness for my son, nor any claim
Of reverence for my father, nor love I owed
Penelope, to please her, could overcome

My longing for experience of the world,
Of human vices and virtue. But I sailed out
On the deep open seas, accompanied

By that small company that still had not
Deserted me, in a single ship. One coast

I saw, and then another, and I got

As far as Spain, Morocco, Sardinia, a host
Of other islands that the sea bathes round.
My men and I were old and slow when we passed

The narrow outlet where Hercules let stand
His markers beyond which men were not to sail.
On my left hand I had left Ceuta behind,

And on the other sailed beyond Seville.
'O brothers who have reached the west,' I began,
'Through a hundred thousand perils, surviving all:

So little is the vigil we see remain
Still for our senses, that you should not choose
To deny it the experience--behind the sun

Leading us onward--of the world which has
No people in it. Consider well your seed:
You were not born to live as a mere brute does,

But for the pursuit of knowledge and the good.'
Then all of my companions grew so keen
To journey, spurred by this little speech I'd made,

I would have found them difficult to restrain.
Turning our stern toward the morning light,
We made wings of our oars, in an insane

Flight, always gaining on the left. The night
Showed all the stars, now, of the other pole--
Our own star fallen so low, no sign of it

Rose from the sea. The moon's low face glowed full
Five times since we set course across the deep,
And as many times was quenched invisible,

When dim in the distance we saw a mountaintop:
It seemed the highest I had ever seen.
We celebrated--but soon began to weep,

For from the newfound land a storm had grown,
Rising to strike the forepart of the ship.

It whirled the vessel round, and round again

With all the waters three times, lifting up
The stern the fourth--as pleased an Other--to press
The prow beneath the surface, and did not stop

Until the sea had closed up over us."

Canto XXVII

The flame already was quiet and erect again,
Done speaking, and, as the gentle poet allowed,
Leaving us, when behind it another one

Was drawing near, the confused sound it made
Drawing our eyes toward its flickering tip.
As the Scicilian bull (which bellowed loud

For the first time when he who gave it shape
With his file's art was forced to give it his voice,
Justly) would use a victim's cries, sealed up

Inside its body, to bellow--so that, though brass,
It seemed transfixed with pain when it was heated:
So, having at first no passage or egress

From fire, the melancholy words were transmuted
Into fire's language. But after the words had found
Their passage through the tip, and it vibrated

As the tongue had in trying to form their sound,
We heard it say, "O you toward whom I guide
My voice, and who a moment ago intoned

In Lombard, 'Now continue on your road,
I do not ask you more'--though I may be
Late in my coming here, don't be annoyed

To stop and speak; you see that I am free
Of annoyance, though I burn. If you just fell
Into this viewless world from Italy,

Sweet land above, from which I carry all
My guilt, then tell me: is it peace or war
That occupies the Romagnoles?--I hail

From the hill country between Urbino and where,
High up the ridge, the Tiber has its source."
I was still crouched and intently giving ear

When my guide nudged me, saying, "You may discourse
With him: he is Italian." Already prepared

To answer, I said: "That Romagna of yours,

O soul concealed below, is not yet cleared
And never was--in her tyrants' hearts--of war:
Though when I left, no war had been declared.

Ravenna still remains as many a year,
Polenta's eagle brooding above the town
So its wings cover Cervia. The land that bore

The long siege, once, and struck the Frenchmen down
Into a bloody heap, finds itself now
Held underneath the Green Paws once again.

Both the old mastiff and new of Verrucchio,
Who treated Montagna in an evil way,
Sink their teeth in, the way they always do.

Along the Santerno and the Lamone lie
Cities the Lionet of the White Lair rules,
Who changes sides and shifts his loyalty

From summer to winter. And the town that feels
The Savio bathe its flank, just as it lies
Between a plain and mountains, also dwells

Somewhere between tyranny's and freedom's ways.
And now I pray you--tell us who you are.
Don't be more grudging than the other was

In answering you, so may your name endure,
Proudly in the world above." After the fire
Roared in its way awhile, it began to stir

Its sharp tip rapidly, first here, then there,
Then formed this breath: "If I believed I gave
My answer to one who'd ever go once more

Back to the world, this tongue of flame would have
No motion. But since, if what I hear is true,
None ever return from this abyss alive,

Not fearing infamy I will answer you.
I was a man of arms, and after that

Became a corded friar, hopeful to do

Penance by wearing the rope; indeed that thought
Might well have been fulfilled, but the High Priest--
May evil befall him!--led me to commit

Again the sins that I had practiced at first:
And how and why, now listen and I'll disclose.
My actions, when my form was still encased

In the flesh and bones my mother gave me, were those
Of the fox, not the lion. I was expert
In all the stratagems and covert ways.

And practiced them with so much cunning art
The sound extended to the earth's far end.
But when I saw that I had reached that part

Of life when we should let our sails descend
And coil the ropes--then what had pleased me before
Now grieved me: penitent and confessed, I joined

An order and--woe to say!--my life as friar
Would have availed me. The Prince of new Pharisees
Nearby the Lateran was making war,

And not against the Saracens or Jews,
His enemies all being Christians: and none
Had been at Acre's conquest, nor one of those

Who went as merchants to the Sultan's domain;
And he respected neither the supreme
Office and holy orders that were his own,

Nor in me the friar's cord which at one time
Made those who wore it leaner. As Constantine
Sought out Sylvester in Soracte, his aim

To have him cure his leprosy--this man
Came seeking me as one who meant to find
A doctor to cure the fever he was in,

Of pride. He asked my counsel, and I remained
Silent, because his words seemed drunk to me.

And then he spoke again: 'Now understand,

Your heart should not respond mistrustfully,
For I absolve you in advance, henceforth:
Instruct me, so that I can find a way

To level Palestrina to the earth.
I have the power to lock and unlock Heaven,
As you know; for the keys are two, whose worth

Seemed not dear to my predecessor.' Then, driven
To where the gravity of his argument
Made silence seem worse counsel, I said: 'Given,

Father, that you are washing me of the taint
Of this sin into which I now must fall--
Large promises with fulfillments that are scant

Will bring your high throne triumph over all.'
And Francis came for me the moment I died,
But one of these black cherubim of Hell

Appeared and, 'Do not carry him off,' it said,
'Do not deprive me: he must be carried down
Among my servants because he counseled fraud,

And I have hovered near his hair since then,
Until this moment--for no one has absolution
Without repenting; nor can one will a sin

And repent at once, because the contradiction
Precludes it.' How I shuddered--O wretched me!
'Perhaps you did not think I was a logician,'

He said, and took me, and carried me away
To Minos, who coiled his tail eight times around
His scaly back, and gnawed it angrily

And then declared, 'This wicked one is bound
For the fire of thievery.' So I am lost
Where you see me wander, in this garment wound,

Bitter to myself." And as his discourse ceased
The grieving flame departed, its horn's sharp point

Tossing about and twisting as it passed.

We journeyed on, my leader and I, and went
To the next arch of the ridge: and looking under,
We saw the fosse where they pay the due amount

Who earned their burden by splitting things asunder.

Canto XXVIII

Who could find words, even in free-running prose,
For the blood and wounds I saw, in all their horror--
Telling it over as often as you choose,

It's certain no human tongue could take the measure
Of those enormities. Our speech and mind,
Straining to comprehend the, flail, and falter.

If all the Apulians who long ago mourned
Their lives cut off by Trojans could live once more,
Assembled to grieve again with all those stained

By their own blood in the long Carthaginian war--
Rings pillaged from their corpses poured by the bushel,
As Livy writes, who never was known to err--

And they who took their mortal blows in battle
With Robert Guiscard, and those whose bones were heaped
At Ceperano, killed in the Puglian betrayal,

And the soldiers massacred in the stratagem shaped
By old Alardo, who conquered without a weapon
Near Tagliacozzo when their army was trapped--

And some were showing wounds still hot and open,
Others the gashes where severed limbs had been:
It would be nothing to equal the mutilation

I saw in that Ninth Chasm. No barrle staved-in
And missing its end-piece ever gaped as wide
As the man I saw split open from his chin

Down to the farting-place, and from the splayed
Trunk the spilled entrails dangled between his thighs

I saw his organs, and the sack that make the bread

We swallow turn to shit. Seeing my eyes
Fastened upon him, he pulled open his chest
With both hands saying, "Look how Mohammend claws

And mangles himself, torn open down the breast!
Look how I tear myself! And Ali goes
Weeping before me--like me, a schismatic, and cleft:

Split open from the chin along his face
Up to the forelock. All you see here, when alive,
Taught scandal and schism, so they are cleavered like this.

A devil waits with a sword back there to carve
Each of us open afresh each time we've gone
Our circuit round this road, where while we grieve

Our wounds close up before we pass him again--
But who are you that stand here, perhaps to delay
Torments pronounced on your own false words to men?"

"Neither has death yet reached him, nor does he stay
For punishment of guilt," my master replied,
"But for experience. And for that purpose I,

Who am dead, lead him through Hell a rightful guide,
From circle to circle. Of this, you can be as sure
As that I speak to you here at his side."

More than a hundred shades were gathered there
Who hearing my master's words had halted, and came
Along the trench toward me in order to start,

Forgetting their torment in wonder for a time.
"Tell Fra Dolcino, you who may see the sun,
If he wants not to follow soon the same

Punishment, he had better store up grain
Against a winter siege and the snows' duress,
Or the Novarese will easily bring him down"--

After he had lifted his foot to resume the pace,
Mohammed spoke these words, and having spoken

He stepped away again on his painful course.

Another there, whose face was cruelly broken,
The throat pierced through, the nose cut off at the brow,
One ear remaining, stopped and gazed at me, stricken

With recognition as well as wonder. "Ah, you,"
His bleeding throat spoke, "you here, yet not eternally
Doomed here by guilt--unless I'm deceived, I knew

Your face when I still walked above in Italy.
If you return to the sweet plain I knew well
That slopes toward Marcabñ from Vercelli,

Remember Pier da Medicina. And tell
Ser Guido and Angiolello, the two best men
Of Fano: if we have foresight here in Hell

Then by a tyrant's treachery they will drown
Off La Cattolica--bound and thrown in the sea
From their ships. Neptune has never seen, between

Cyprus and Majorca, whether committed by
Pirates or Argives, such a crime. The betrayer
Who sees from one eye only (he holds a city

Found bitter by another who's with me here)
Will lure them to set sail for truce-talks: then,
When he has dealt with them, they'll need no prayer

For safe winds near Focara--not ever again."
Then I to him: "If you'd have me be the bearer
Of news from you to those above, explain--

What man do you mean, who found a city bitter?"
Then he grasped one shade near him by the jaw,
And opened the mouth, and said, "This is the creature,

He does not speak, who once, in exile, knew
Words to persuade Caesar at the Rubicon--
Affirming, to help him thrust his doubt below,

'Delaying when he's ready hurts a man.' "
I saw how helpless Curio's tongue was cut

To a stub in his throat, whose speech had been so keen.

One with both hands lopped off came forward to shout,
Stumps raised in the murk to spatter his cheeks with blood,
"Also remember Mosca! I too gave out

A slogan uging bloodshed, when I said
'Once done it's done with': words which were seeds of pain
For the Tuscan people." Then, when he heard me add,

"--and death to your family line," utterly undone
By sorrow heaped upon his sorrow, the soul
Went away like one whom grief has made insane.

I stayed to see more, one sight so incredible
As I should fear to describe, except that conscience,
Being pure in this, encourages me to tell:

I saw--and writing it now, my brain still envisions--
A headless trunk that walked, in sad promenade
Shuffling the dolorous track with its companions,

And the trunk was carrying the severed head,
Gripping its hair like a lantern, letting it swing,
And the head looked up at us: "Oh me!" it cried.

He was himself and his lamp as he strode along,
Two in one, and one it two--and how it can be,
Only He knows, so ordained the thing.

Reaching the bridge, the trunk held the head up high
So we could hear his words, which were "Look well,
You who come breathing to view the dead, and say

If there is punishment harder than mine in Hell.
Carry the word, and know me: Bertran de Born,
Who made the father and the son rebel

The one against the other, by the evil turn
I did the young king, counseling him to ill.
David and Absalom had nothing worse to learn

From the wickedness contrived by Achitophel.
Because I parted their union, I carry my brain

Parted from this, its pitiful stem: Mark well

This retribution that you see is mine."

Canto XXIX

That mass of people wounded so curiously
Had made my eyes so drunk they had a passion
To stay and weep. But Virgil said to me,

"What are you staring at? Why let your vision
Linger there down among the disconsolate
And mutilated shades? You found no reason

To delay like this at any other pit.
Consider, if counting them is what you plan:
This valley extends along a circular route

For twenty-two miles. And already the moon
Is under our feet: the time we are allowed
Has now grown short, and more is to be seen

Than you see here." "If you had given heed
To what my reason is for looking, perhaps
You would have granted a longer stay," I said.

Meanwhile my guide went on, and in his steps
I followed while I answered--but told him, too,
"Inside that hollow, where for a little lapse

Of time I gazed so steadily just now,
I think a spirit of my own blood laments
The guilt that brings so great a cost below."

The master answered, "Let your intelligence
Distract itself with thoughts of him no more.
Attend to other things, while he remains

Down where he is, below the bridge--for there
I saw him with his finger point you out
And fiercely threaten you. And I could hear

Them call him Geri del Bello. So complete
Was your preoccupation with the one
Who once held Altaforte, you never set

Your eyes his direction till he was gone."
And "O my guide," I said, "his violent death,

For which as yet no vengeance has been done

By any of those he shares dishonor with,
Is what has made him full of indignation--
And that is why he continued on his path

Without addressing me, and with this action
He makes my pity for him greater yet."
So we continued in our conversation,

Walking the ridge until we reached the spot
Where the next valley could first be seen below--
Down to the bottom, had there been more light.

Up above Malebolge's last cloister now
Where we could see its lay-brothers under us,
Their strange laments beset me, each an arrow

Whose shaft was barbed with pity--and at this,
I lifted up my hands and blocked my ears.
The suffering was such, if one could place

All of the sick who endure disease's course
In Val di Chiana's hospital from July
All through Septemeber, and all the sufferers

In Maremma and Sardinia, to lie
All in one ditch together, so was this place;
From it a stench, like that which usually

Is given off by festering limbs, arose.
Keeping as ever to the left, on down
We came, to the ridge's final bank. The fosse

Grew clearer to my sight, in which the one
Who serves as minister of the Lord on high,
Unerring Justice, lets her punishments rain

Upon the shades whose sin is to falsify;
She has recorded them upon her scroll.
I think it could not have been sadder to see

Aegina's whole population fallen ill
When such corruption crowded through the air

That, down to the small worms, every animal

Succumbed (and afterward, the poets aver
As certain, the ancients populace was restored
Out of the seed of ants) than to see there,

All through that murky valley, bow a horde
Of shades lay languishing in scattered heaps:
One lay upon his belly, another poured

Across his neighbor's shoulders, or perhaps
Moved on all fours along the dismal track.
In silence, walking with deliberate steps,

We went on, watching and listening to the sick,
Who could not raise their bodies. I could see
Two who were sitting propped up back to back,

As pan is leaned against pan to warm them dry,
Each of them spotted with scabs from head to foot.
And I have never seen a stableboy

Who knows that he is making his master wait,
Or one unhappy to be still awake,
Work with a currycomb at such a rate

As each of these was laboring to rake
His nails all over himself--scratching and digging
For the great fury of the itch they tried to slake,

Which has no other relief: their nails were snagging
Scabs from the skin as a knifeblade might remove
Scales from a carp, or as if the knife were dragging

Still larger scales some other fish might have.
"O you who with your fingers scrape the mail
From your own flesh, and sometimes make them serve

As pincers: say if any of these who dwell
Below here with you is from Italy,
So may your nails suffice you in this toil

That you perform throughout eternity--"
My leader said, addressing one of the two.

"Both of us are Italians, whom you see

Disfigured here," he answered, weeping. "But who
Are you, who ask us?" My guide said, "I am one
Who accompanies this living man; we go

Downward from level to level, and I mean
To show him Hell." Their mutual support
Was broken at his words; they turned to lean

Closer to me, both trembling and alert,
With others who overheard what he had said.
Drawing near to me, my good master said, "Now start:

Speak to them as you choose." So I complied,
Beginning thus: "So that your memory
In men's minds in the former world won't fade

But live on under many suns, tell me
Who you are and your people are; your punished state,
Loathsome and hideous although it be,

Should not discourage you from speaking out."
"I was of Arezzo," one answered, "and died by fire
At Albergo of Siena's orders, and yet

That which I died for is not what brought me here.
The truth is that I told him, speaking in jest,
That I knew how to lift myself through air,

In flight: he, curious, but not much blessed
With wit, asked me to train him in that skill;
I failed to make him Daedalus--which sufficed

For him to have me burned: the sentence fell
On me from one who held him as a son.
But alchemy, which I plied in the world so well,

Is why I was doomed to this last ditch of ten
By Minos, who cannot err in his decrees."
I asked the poet, "Has there ever been

Another people as vain as the Sienese?
Certainly not the French themselves, by far."

The other lerpous one, at hearing this,

Responded, "Some, you'll grant exceptions for:
Stricca, who knew how to spend in moderation,
And Niccolñ, who was progenitor

Of the costly cult of cloves--a fine tradition
For the rich garden where such seeds take root.
And let that company also be an exception

Where Caccia d'Asciano freely spent out
His vineyard and his forest, and where the one
They nicknamed Muddlehead displayed his wit.

But so you know who seconds you in this vein
Against the Sienese, come sharpen your gaze
In my direction, where you may well discern

The answer given to you by my face:
I am Capocchio's shade--the counterfeiter
Of metals by alchemy; if I trust my eyes,

You recall how good I was at aping nature."

Canto XXX

Once, in the time when Juno was furious
With the Theban blood because of Semele--
As more than once she showed them--Athamas

Grew so insane that, seeing his wife walk by
Carrying their children one on either hand,
He cried: "Come, let us spread the nets and try

To take the lioness with the cubs she spawned,
As they pass by!" And reaching out to strike
With pitiless claws, he took the one they named

Learchus, and whirled him, and dashed him on a rock;
She drowned herself and the other child she held.
And when Fortune brought down the Trojans, who took

Risks proudly once, all-daring--their kingdom quelled
And blotted out entirely with their kind--
Hecuba, wretched, a captive, after they killed

Polyxena with her there witnessing,
Saw her Polydorus washed ashore: the weight
Of sorrow drove her mad, her soul so wrung

She began barking like a dog. And yet,
No fury of Thebes or Troy was ever seen
So cruel--not any rending of beasts, and not

Tearing of human limbs--as I saw shown
By two pale, naked shades who now ran up
Biting, the way a pig does loosed from the pen.

One charged Capocchio and bit his nape,
And sank his tusks in deep, and dragged him along
On the hard bottom, letting his belly scrape.

The spirit from Arezzo, shivering
Where he was left told me, "That monstrosity
Is Gianni Schicchi; he runs rabid among

The others here, and graces them like this."
"Oh," I responded, "so may that other one

Not fix its teeth on you, disclose to us

What shade it is--before it bolts again."

He answered, "That one is the ancient soul
Of Myrrha the infamous, whose love was drawn

Toward her father beyond what's honorable.
She engaged in sin with him by falsifying
Herself as someone else; and Schicchi as well,

Who runs off yonder, counterfeited: when trying
To acquire the finest lady of the herd,
He pretended he was Buoso Donati dying

And willed himself a legacy, each word
In proper form." When both of the raging pair
On whom I kept my eyes had disappeared,

I turned to see the ill-born others there:
One would be shaped exactly like a lute
Had he been cut off at the groin, from where

A man is forked. The heavy dropsical state,
Which makes the body's members so ill sorted
With undigested humors the face seems not

To answer to the swollen belly, had parted
His lips--the way the hectic being spurred
By thirst curls on lip up, the other distorted

Toward the chin. He said, "You who have fared
To this unhappy world, and yet arrive
Unpunished--I know not why--think, and regard

The misery of Master Adam. Alive,
I had in abundance all I wanted; now,
Alas! one drop of water is what I crave.

The rivulets that down to the Arno flow
From the green hills of Casentino, and make
Their channels cool and spongy as they go,

Are constantly before me--nor do they lack
Effect: their image parches me far worse

Than the face-wasting blight with which I'm sick.

The unbending Justice that wracks me thus makes use,
Fittingly, of the same place where I sinned,
To speed my sighs the quicker on their course:

There is Romena, where I falsely coined
The currency that bears the Baptist's face,
For which, on earth, I left my body burned--

But if I could behold, here in this place,
The miserable soul of Guido, or that
Of Alessandro, or set my eyes on his

Who is their brother, I would not trade the sight
For Fonte Branda! One is already inside--
If the raging shades who course the circle about

Have spoken truly. But since my limbs are tied,
What use is that to me? Were I still light
Enough to move even one inch ahead

Every hundred years, I would have set out
Upon the road already, trying to find
Him in this mutilated people--despite

The circuit being elven miles around
And at least half a mile across its track.
It's because of them that I am in this kind

Of family: they persuaded me to make
Those florins that contained three carats of dross."
I asked him, "Who are that pair of wretches who smoke

As wet hands do in winter, lying close
Next to your body on the right-hand side?"
"I found them here--they have not changed their place--

When I first fell like rain to this steep grade,
And I believe that neither will turn over
For all eternity. This false one made

Her accusation defaming Joseph; the other
Is the false Sinon, Trojan Greek," he responded.

"They reek so badly because of raging fever."

One of the pair--perhaps because offended
By such dark naming--made a fist and struck
Him on his rigid belly, which resounded

Just like a drum. And Master Adam paid back
That blow by striking his neighbor in the face
With an arm that was just as hard, and spoke:

"Though I am kept from moving by the mass
Of my too-heavy limbs, you can be sure
I have an arm kept free for such a case."

The other answered, "When you went to the fire
Your arm was not so ready--though indeed
For counterfeiting, it was ready, and more."

"Here you speak truth," the dropsied one replied.
"However, at Troy, when truth was their demand,
Your witness was not so true." "I falsified

In speech: you made false coinage," Sinon returned,
"And I am in this place for a single sin--
And you, for more than any other fiend."

"You perjurer, remember the horse again,"
The one who had the swollen paunch came back.
"And may the fact torment you: your role is known

By the whole world." "And torment," answered the Greek,
"To you--from thirst's tongue-cracking agonies,
And the foul waters that swell your belly to make

It rise up like a hedgerow blocking your eyes."
And then the counterfeiter answered, "Thus
Disease, as usual, spreads your gaping jaws;

For if I suffer thirst or feel distress
Engorged with humors, you burn, your head aches hard--
And you would lick Narcissus's looking glass

Without delaying for too many a word
Of invitation, if you only could."

I listened to them intently--then I heard

My master: "Stare a little longer," he said,
"And I will quarrel with you!" When I heard him
Speaking to me in anger as he had,

I turned to him with such a feeling of shame
That it still circles through my memory.
As one who dreams he is harmed may in the dream

Wish that it were a dream--and therefore he
Longs for the thing that is, as if it were not:
So I, unable to speak, was yearning to say

Something to excuse myself-and by doing that
I did excuse myself, at the same time
As I was failing to do it in my thought.

"A greater fault would be cleansed by lesser shame
Than yours a moment ago," the master said.
"So let your sadness be disburdened: come--

Do not forget I am always at your side,
Should fortune bring you again to where you hear
People who are arguing as those two did:

Wanting to hear them is a low desire."

Canto XXXI

One and the same tongue made me feel its sting,
Tinting one cheek and the other, then supplied
Balm: so I've heard Achilles' lance could bring

(The one his father gave him) first harm, then good.
We turned our backs upon that valley of woes
And climbed its girding bank to the other side,

Crossing in silence. Here it was something less
Than night and less than day, so that my vision
Reached only a little way ahead of us;

But I could hear a horn blast--its concussion
So loud it would make a thunderclap seem faint;
And the sound guided my eyes in its direction

Back to one place, where all my attention went.
After the dolorous rout, when Charlemagne
Had lost his holy army and Roland sent

The signal from his horn, it must have been
Less terrible a sound. Before my head
Was turned that way for long, I saw a line

Of what seemed lofty towers. Then I said,
"Master, what city is this?" "Because you peer
Into the darkness from far off," he replied,

"Your imagination goes astray. Once there,
You will sense plainly how distance can deceive
The senses--so spur yourself a little more."

And then he took me by the hand, with love,
Saying, "Before we go much farther along,
Learn now, in order that the fact may prove

Less strange: these are not towers but a ring
Of giants--each one standing in the pit
Up to the navel." As mist is vanishing,

Little by little vision starts picking out
Shapes that were hidden in the misty air:

Just so, as I began to penetrate

Into that thick and murky atmosphere,
Fear gathered in me as my error fled--
For, as on Monteregione's wall appear

Towers that crown its circle, here, arrayed
All round the bank encompassing the pit
With half their bulk like towers above it, stood

Horrible giants, whom Jove still rumbles at
With menace when he thunders. I descried
The face of one already, and the set

Of his great chest and shoulders, and a wide
Stretch of his belly above the abyss's walls,
And the arms along his sides. (Nature indeed,

When she abandoned making these animals
Did well to keep such instruments from Mars;
Though she does not repent of making whales

Or elephants, a person who subtly inquires
Into her ways will find her both discreet
And just, in her decision: if one confers

The power of the mind, along with that
Of immense strength, upon an evil will
Then people will have no defense from it.)

To me his face appeared as long and full
As the bronze pinecone of St. Peter's at Rome,
With all his other bones proportional,

So that the bank, which was an apron for him
Down from his middle, showed above it such height
Three men of Friesland could not boast to come

Up to his hair. Extending down from the spot
Where one would buckle a mantle I could see
Thirty spans of him. The fierce mouth started to shout,

"Raphèl mai amècche zabi almi"--
Sweeter psalms would not fit it--and then my guide

Addressed him: "Soul, in your stupidity

Keep to your horn, and when you have the need
Use that to vent your rage or other passion;
Search at your neck the strap where it is tied,

And try to see it, O spirit in confusion,
Aslant your own great chest." Having said that,
He told me, "This is Nimrod: his accusation

He himself makes; for through his evil thought
There is no common language the world can use:
Leave him alone then, rather than speak for naught--

For every language is to him as his
Is to all others: no one fathoms it."
So, turning left, we quit that giant's place,

And at the distance of a crossbow's shot
Another, fiercer and greater, is what we found:
What matters could have fettered him like that

I do not know, but his right arm was chained
Behind him and the other arm before,
Clasped by a chain that also held him bound

From the neck down, so that it was wound as far
As the fifth coil on the part of him that showed.
"This proud one had a wish to test his power

Against supreme Jove: this is how he paid,"
My guide said. "Ephialtes is his name;
And when the giants made the gods afraid

Awesome endeavors were put forth by him.
He cannot move these arms he strove with once."
I said, "If it's possible for me to come

To where my eyes might have experience
Of immense Briareus, I wish I could."
"Antaeus, whom you'll see some distance hence,

Can speak, and is unchained as well," he said;
"He will convey us to sin's profoundest abyss.

The one you wish to see is farther ahead,

And he is bound and fashioned as this one is,
Though somewhat more ferocious in his look."
No tower was ever shaken by the throes

Of a great earthquake as Ephialtes shook
Himself at hearing this. As never before
I was afraid of dying, and wouldn't lack

A cause of death beyond that very fear,
Had I not seen his fetters. Then we went on
And reached Antaeus--who rose five ells or more,

Not reckoning his head, above the stone.
"O you, who--in that fateful valley that made
Scipio inheritor of glory when

Hannibal along with all his followers fled
Showing his back--once garnered as your prey
A thousand lions: you through whom, it is said

By some, your brothers might have carried the day
In their high war, if you had been there then
Among the sons of earth in battle: pray,

Now set us down below--do not disdain
To do so--where Cocytus is locked in cold.
Do not compel us to seek some other one

Like Typhon or Tityus. This man can yield
The thing that's longed for here; therefore bend down
And do not curl your lip. He can rebuild

Your fame on earth--he lives, and living on
Longer is his expectation, if grace does not
Summon him to itself untimely soon."

So spoke my master; and the giant stretched out
In haste those hands whose grip clasped Hercules,
And took my leader. Virgil, when he felt that,

Said to me, "Now come here, that I may seize
Good hold of you," and of himself and me

He made one bundle. As seems to one who sees

The leaning tower at Garisenda, when he
Is under the leaning side, and when a cloud
Is passing over going the other way

From how the tower inclines, so in my dread
Antaeus seemed to me as I watched him lean--
That moment, I would have wished for another road!

But having stooped he set us gently upon
That bottom Lucifer is swallowed in
Along with Judas; nor did he stay bent down,

But like a ship's mast raised himself again.

Canto XXXII

If I had harsh and grating rhymes, to befit
That melancholy hole which is the place
All the other rocks converge and thrust their weight,

Then I could more completely press the juice
From my conception. But since I lack such lines,
I feel afraid as I come to speak of this:

It is not jokingly that one begins
To describe the bottom of the universe--
Not a task suited for a tongue that whines

Mamma and Dadda. May the muses help my verse
As when they helped Amphion wall Thebes, so that
Word not diverge from fact as it takes its course.

O horde, beyond all others ill-begot,
Who dwell in that place so hard to speak about:
Better for you to be born a sheep or a goat!

When we were deep in the darkness of the pit
Beneath the giant's feet, much farther down,
And I still gazed back up the high wall of it:

"Watch how you step," I heard a voice intone,
"Be careful that you do not set your feet
On the weary, wretched brothers' heads." Whereon

I turned and saw before me and underfoot
A lake that ice made less like water than glass;
In Austria, never has the Danube set

So thick a veil above its current as this,
Nor, under its cold sky, has the far-off Don:
Had Mount Tambernic fallen to strike that ice,

Or Pietrapana, it would not even then
Creak, even at its edge. As the frog lies
Snout above water to croak in the season when

The peasant woman often has reveries
Of gleaning, spirits--livid to where the cheeks

Turn color with shame--were locked inside the ice,

Teeth chattering the note a stork's beak makes.
Each held his face turned down; they testified
Cold by their mouths, and misery by the looks

Their eyes bore. After a time while I surveyed
The scene around me, I glanced down at my feet,
And saw two shades there packed in head to head

So tightly that their hair was interknit.
"O you whose breasts are pressed together," I said,
"Who are you?" They bent back their necks at that,

And having raised their faces to me, they shed
Tears, welling now from eyes already moist
To flow down over their lips, where the frost glued

Each to the other, ever more tightly fused:
Iron clamps never held beam to beam so fast--
And like two goats, each butted the one he faced

In a helpless rage. Another, who had lost
Both ears to frost, spoke with his face still down:
"Why stare at us so long? If you insist

On knowing who these two are, the valley wherein
Bisenzio's stream begins its long descent
Once was their father Albert's and their own.

They issued from one body, and if you went
All over Caina you could not find a shade
Worthier to be frozen in punishment:

Not him whose breast and shadow the impaling blade
In Arthur's hand pierced with one stroke; nor him
They called Focaccia; nor this other whose head

So blocks me I can see no farther: his name,
Sassol Mascheroni, is one you recognize
If you are Tuscan. And--so you need not claim

Any more speech of me--my own name was
Camisicon de' Pazzi and this is where I await

Carlino's coming to make my sin seem less."

I saw a thousand faces after that,
All purple as a dog's lips from the frost:
I still shiver, and always will, at the sight

Of a frozen pond. All through the time we progressed
Toward the core where all gravity convenes,
I quaked in that eternal chill; and next--

I don't know whether by will or fate or chance--
Walking among the heads I struck my foot
Hard in the face of one, with violence

That set him weeping as he shouted out,
"Why trample me? And if you have not come
To add more vengeance for Montaperti's defeat,

Then why do you molest me?" I turned from him;
"Master," I said, "I pray you: wait for me here
While I resolve a doubt concerning his name;

Then you shall hurry me on as you desire."
My leader stopped, and I addressed the shade
Who was still cursing as bitterly as before:

"And who are you who reviles another?" I said.
"Nay, who are you," he answered, "who thus contrive
To go through Antenora striking the head

And cheeks of others--which even were you alive
Would be too much." "Alive is what I am,"
I told him, "and if fame is what you crave,

Then you might value having me note your name
Among the others." He answered, "What I desire
Is quite the opposite--get you gone, and come

To trouble me no more, inept as you are,
Not knowing how to flatter at this great depth."
Then I reached out and seized him by the hair

And shook his scruff. "Now name yourself forthwith--
Or not a hair will remain." I threatened him.

He answered, "Though you pluck me bald in your wrath,

I will not tell you nor show you who I am,
Not if you fall a thousand times on my pate."
Already I had twisted round my palm

A length of hair, and pulling some clumps right out,
And he was barking, with his eyes held down,
When a new voice called: "Bocca, what is it--

What ails you? Are you so weary of the tune
Your jaws create that now you are barking, too?
What devil is at you?" "Now," said I, "I am done:

I have no further need to speak with you,
Accursed traitor, for now, to your disgrace,
I will report about you what is true."

"Then go away," he answered, "tell what you choose--
But don't be silent, if you do get out,
About that one so quick just now to use

His tongue. Here he laments the silver he got
From Frenchmen's hands. 'I saw him,' you can declare,
'The man of Duera, down where the sinners are put

To cool.' And if they ask who else was there,
The man of Beccheria is at your side,
Whose gullet was slit by Florence. Also here,

A little farther along your way, reside
Gianni de' Soldanieri with Ganelon
And Tebaldello who opened Faenza wide

While it was asleep." We had left him, moving on,
When I saw two shades frozen in a single hole--
Packed so close, one head hooded the other one;

The way the starving devour their bread, the soul
Above had clenched the other with his teeth
Where the brain meets the nape. And at the skull

And other parts, as Tydeus berserk with wrath
Gnawed at the head of Menalippus, he chewed.

"You, showing such bestial hatred for him beneath,

Whom you devour: tell me your reason," I cried,

"And, on condition that your grievance is right,

Knowing both who you are and what wrong deed

This one committed against you, I may yet

Repay you for whatever you may say,

Up in the world above--by telling it,

If that with which I speak does not go dry."

Canto XXXIII

Pausing in his savage meal, the sinner raised
His mouth and wiped it clean along the hair
Left on the head whose back he had laid waste.

Then he began: "You ask me to endure
Reliving a grief so desperate, the thought
Torments my heart even as I prepare

To tell it. But if my words are seeds, with fruit
Of infamy for this traitor that I gnaw,
I will both speak and weep within your sight.

I don't know who you are that come here, or how,
But you are surely Florentine to my ear.
I was Count Ugolino, you must know:

This is Archbishop Ruggieri. You will hear
Why I am such a neighbor to him as this:
How, through my trust and his devices, I bore

First being taken, then killed, no need to trace;
But things which you cannot have heard about--
The manner of my death, how cruel it was--

I shall describe, and you can tell from that
If he has wronged me. A slit in the Tower Mew
(Called Hunger's Tower after me, where yet

Others will be closed up) had let me view
Several moons already, when my bad dream
Came to me, piercing the future's veil right through:

This man appeared as lord of the hunt; he came
Chasing a wolf and whelps, on that high slope
That blocks the Pisans' view of Lucca. With him

His lean hounds ran, well trained and eager; his troop--
Gualandi, Sismondi, Lanfranchi--had been sent
To ride in front of him. With no escape,

After a short run, father and sons seemed spent;
I saw their flanks, that sharp fangs seemed to tear.

I woke before dawn, hearing the complaint

Of my own children, who were with me there,
Whimpering in their sleep and asking for bread.
You grieve already, or truly cruel you are,

As you think of what my heart began to dread--
And if not now, then when do you shed a tear?
They were awake now, with the hour when food

Was usually brought us drawing near,
And each one apprehensive from his dream.
And then I heard them nailing shut the door

Into that fearful tower--a pounding that came
From far below. Hearing that noise, I stared
Into my children's faces, not speaking to them.

Inside me I was turned to stone, so hard
I could not weep; the children wept. And my
Little Anselmo, peering at me, inquired:

'Father, what ails you?' And still I did not cry,
Nor did I answer, all that day and night
Until the next sun dawned. When one small ray

Found its way into our prison, and I made out
In their four faces the image of my own,
I bit my hands for grief; when they saw that,

They thought I did it from my hunger's pain,
And suddenly rose. 'Father: our pain,' they said,
'Will lessen if you eat us--you are the one

Who clothed us in this wretched flesh: we plead
For you to be the one who strips it away.'
I calmed myself to grieve them less. We stayed

Silent through that and then the following day.
O you hard earth, why didn't you open then?
When we had reached the fourth day, Gaddo lay

Stretched at my feet where he had fallen down:
'Father, why don't you help me?' he said, and died.

And surely as you see me, one by one

I watched the others fall till all were dead.
Between the fifth day and the sixth. And I,
Already going blind, groped over my brood--

Calling to them, though I had watched them die,
For two long days. And then the hunger had more
Power than even sorrow had over me."

When he had finished, with a sideways stare
He gripped the skull again in his teeth, which ground
Strong as a dog's against the bone he tore.

Ah, Pisa! You shame the peoples of the fair land
Where si is spoken: slow as your neighbors are
To punish you, may Gorgona shift its ground,

And Capraia, till those islands make a bar
To dam the Arno, and drown your populace--
Every soul in you! Though Ugolino bore

The fame of having betrayed your fortresses,
Still it was wrong in you to so torment
His helpless children. You Thebes of latter days,

Their youthful ages made them innocent!--
Uguccione, Brigata, and the two
My song has named already. On we went,

To where frost roughly swathes a people who,
Instead of downward, turn their faces up.
There, weeping keeps them from weeping--for as they do,

Grief finds a barrier where the eyes would weep
But forced back inward, adds to their agonies:
A crystal visor of prior tears fills the cup

Below the eyebrow with a knot of ice.
And though, as when a callus has grown numb,
The cold had sucked all feeling from my face

I sensed a wind, and wondered from where it came:
"Master, who moves this? Is it not the case

All vapors are extinguished in this realm?"

"Soon," he responded, "you will reach a place
Where your own eyes--beholding what source this blast
Is poured by from above--will answer this."

And then one wretch encased in the frozen crust
Cried out to us, "O souls so cruel that here,
Of all the stations, you're assigned the last--

Lift the hard veils away from my face, I implore,
So that before the weeping freezes again
I can release a little of this despair

And misery that swell my heart." Whereon
I said, "If you would have me help you disclose
To me who you are: if I don't help you then,

May I be sent to the bottom of the ice."
He answered, "I am Fra Alberigo, the man
Of fruit from the evil garden; in this place

I get my payment, date for fig." "Oh then,"
I said to him, "you are already dead?"
"I do not know what state my body is in,

Nor how it fares in the world above," he said,
"For Ptolomea's privelage is this:
Down to this place a soul is often conveyed

Before it is sent forth by Atropos.
So that you may more willingly scrape the cowl
Of tears made hard as glass that coats my face,

Know that as soon as a soul commits betrayal
The way I did, a devil displaces it
And governs inside the body until its toll

Of years elapses. Meanwhile, down to this vat
The soul falls headlong--so it could be true
That this shade, wintering here behind me, yet

Appears above on earth too: you must know,
If you were sent down only a short time past.

He is Ser Branca d'Oria; it's years ago

He first arrived here to be thus encased."

"Now you deceive me, for I am one who knows
That Branca d'Oria is not deceased:

He eats and drinks and sleeps and puts on clothes,"
I told him. And he answered, "In the ditch
Ruled by the Malebranche above, that seethes

And bubbles with the lake of clinging pitch,
The shade of Michel Zanche had not arrived
When this, his killer, had a devil encroach

His body (as did his kinsman, when they contrived
Together to perform their treachery)
And take his place in it. Now, as I craved,

Reach out your hand and open my eyes for me."
I did not open them--for to be rude
To such a one as him was courtesy.

Ah Genoese!--to every accustomed good,
Strangers; with every corruption, amply crowned:
Why hasn't the world expunged you as it should?

For with Romagna's worst spirit I have found
One of you--already, for deeds he was guilty of,
Bathed in Cocytus: in soul now underground

Who in body still appears alive, above.

Canto XXXIV

"And now, Vexilla regis prodeunt
Inferni--therefore, look," my master said
As we continued on the long descent,

"And see if you can make him out, ahead."
As though, in the exhalation of heavy mist
Or while night darkened our hemisphere, one spied

A mill--blades turning in the wind, half-lost
Off in the distance--some structure of that kind
I seemed to make out now. But at a gust

Of wind, there being no other shelter at hand,
I drew behind my leader's back again.
By now (and putting it in verse I find

Fear in myself still) I had journeyed down
To where the shades were covered wholly by ice,
Showing like straw in glass--some lying prone,

And some erect, some with the head toward us,
And others with the bottoms of the feet;
Another like a bow, bent feet to face.

When we had traveled forward to the spot
From which it pleased my master to have me see
That creature whose beauty once had been so great,

He made me stop, and moved from in front of me.
"Look: here is Dis," he said, "and here is the place
Where you must arm yourself with the quality

Of fortitude." How chilled and faint I was
On hearing that, you must not ask me, reader--
I do not write it; words would not suffice:

I neither died, nor kept alive--consider
With your own wits what I, alike denuded
Of death and life, became as I heard my leader.

The emperor of the realm of grief protruded
From mid-breast up above the surrounding ice.

A giant's height, and mine, would have provided

Closer comparison than would the size
Of his arm and a giant. Envision the whole
That is proportionate to parts like these.

If he was truly once as beautiful
As he is ugly now, and raised his brows
Against his Maker--then all sorrow may well

Come out of him. How great a marvel it was
For me to see three faces on his head:
In front there was a red one; joined to this,

Each over the midpoint of a shoulder, he had
Two others--all three joining at the crown.
Two wings spread forth from under each faces's chin,

Strong, and befitting such a bird, immense--
I have never seen at sea so broad a sail--
Unfeathered, batlike, and issuing three winds

That went forth as he beat them, to freeze the whole
Realm of Cocytus, that surrounded him.
He wept with all six eyes, and the tears fell

Over his three chins mingled with bloody foam.
The teeth of each mouth held a sinner, kept
As by a flax rake: thus he held three of them

In agony. For the one the front mouth gripped,
The teeth were as nothing to the claws, which sliced
And tore the skin until his back was stripped

"That soul," my master said, "who suffers most,
Is Judas Iscariot; head locked inside,
He flails his legs. Of the other two, who twist

With their heads down, the black mouth holds the shade
Of Brutus: writhing, but not a word will he scream;
Cassius is the sinewy one on the other side.

But night is rising again, and it is time
That we depart, for we have seen the whole."

As he requested, I put my arms round him,

And waiting until the wings were opened full
He took advantage of the time and place
And grasped the shaggy flank, and gripping still,

From tuft to tuft descended through the mass
Of matted hair and crusts of ice. And then,
When we had reached the pivot of the thighs,

Just where the haunch is at its thickest, with strain
And effort my master brought around his head
To where he'd had his legs: and from there on

He grappled the hair as someone climbing would--
So I supposed we were heading back to Hell.
"Cling tight, for it is stairs like these," he sighed

Like one who is exhausted, "which we must scale
To part from so much evil." Then he came up
Through a split stone, and placed me on its sill,

And climbed up toward me with his cautious step.
I raised my eyes, expecting I would see
Lucifer as I left him--and saw his shape

Inverted, with his legs held upward. May they
Who are too dull to see what point I had passed
Judge whether it perplexed me. "Come--the way

Is long, the road remaining to be crossed
Is hard: rise to your feet," the master said,
"The sun is at mid-tierce." We had come to rest

In nothing like a palace hall; instead
A kind of natural dungeon enveloped us,
With barely any light, the floor ill made.

"Before I free myself from the abyss,
My master," I said when I was on my feet,
"Speak, and dispel my error: where is the ice?

And how can he be fixed head-down like that?
And in so short a time, how can it be

Possible for the sun to make its transit

From evening to morning?" He answered me,
"You imagine you are still on the other side,
Across the center of the earth, where I

Grappled the hair on the evil serpent's hide
Who pierces the world. And all through my descent,
You were on that side; when I turned my head

And legs about, you passed the central point
To which is drawn, from every side, all weight.
Now you are on the opposite continent

Beneath the opposite hemisphere to that
Which canopies the great dry land therein:
Under the zenith of that one is the site

Whereon the Man was slain who without sin
Was born and lived; your feet this minute press
Upon a little sphere whose rounded skin

Forms the Judecca's other, outward face.
Here it is morning when it is evening there;
The one whose hair was like a ladder for us

Is still positioned as he was before.
On this side fell down from Heaven; the earth,
Which till then stood out here, impelled by fear

Veiled itself in the sea and issued forth
In our own hemisphere. And possibly,
What now appears on this side fled its berth

And rushing upward left a cavity:
This hollow where we stand." There is below,
As far from Beelzebubb as one can be

Within his tomb, a place one cannot know
By sight, but by the sound a little runnel
Makes as it wends the hollow rock its flow

Has worn, descending through its winding channel:
To get back up to the shining world from there

My guide and I went into that hidden tunnel;

And following its path, we took no care
To rest, but climbed: he first, then I--so far,
Through a round aperture I saw appear

Some of the beautiful things that Heaven bears,
Where we came forth, and once more saw the stars.