



The Inferno

by Dante Alighieri

Translated by [John Ciardi](#)

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Canto I

Dante recounts that in the middle of his life, he found himself lost in a dark forest (Wood of Errors), having lost the right path while half asleep. Worried and frightened, he was comforted by the sight of a hill (Mount of Joy), the top of which was sunlit. However, when he tried to climb the hill to reach the brighter regions, he found his way blocked by three savage animals: first a leopard, then a lion, then a she-wolf. Dante was too frightened to continue, and retreated back to the forest, where fortunately he met the shade of Virgil, his literary hero. Virgil informed him that the three beasts were impossible: the she-wolf would reign until the greyhound came and slew her, and restored peace to Italy. In the meantime, Virgil would lead Dante to salvation, but first they must pass through Hell. Virgil would not be able to take Dante all the way to Paradise, since as a Pagan he had no right to enter there instead a more worthy soul would take him the final part of the way. Dante gladly accepted his offer.

Midway in our life's journey, I went astray
from the straight road and woke to find myself
alone in a dark wood. How shall I say
what wood that was! I never saw so drear,
so rank, so arduous a wilderness!
Its very memory gives a shape to fear.

Death could scarce be more bitter than that place!
But since it came to good, I will recount
all that I found revealed there by God's grace.
How I came to it I cannot rightly say,
so drugged and loose with sleep had I become
when I first wandered there from the True Way.

But at the far end of that valley of evil
whose maze had sapped my very heart with fear
I found myself before a little hill

and lifted up my eyes. Its shoulders glowed
already with the sweet rays of that planet
whose virtue leads men straight on every road,

and the shining strengthened me against the fright
whose agony had wracked the lake of my heart
through all the terrors of that piteous night.

Just as a swimmer, who with his last breath
flounders ashore from perilous seas, might turn
to memorize the wide water of his death –

so did I turn, my soul still fugitive
from death's surviving image, to stare down
that pass that none had ever left alive.

And there I lay to rest from my heart's race
till calm and breath returned to me. Then rose
and pushed up that dead slope at such a pace

each footfall rose above the last. And lo!
almost at the beginning of the rise
I faced a spotted Leopard, all tremor and flow

and gaudy pelt. And it would not pass, but stood
so blocking my every turn that time and again
I was on the verge of turning back to the wood.

This fell at the first widening of the dawn
as the sun was climbing Aries with those stars
that rode with him to light the new creation.

Thus the holy hour and the sweet season
of commemoration did much to arm my fear
of that bright murderous beast with their good omen.

Yet not so much but what I shook with dread
at sight of a great Lion that broke upon me
raging with hunger, its enormous head

held high as if to strike a mortal terror
into the very air. And down his track,
a She-Wolf drove upon me, a starved horror

ravening and wasted beyond all belief.
She seemed a rack for avarice, gaunt and craving.
Oh many the souls she has brought to endless grief!

She brought such heaviness upon my spirit
at sight of her savagery and desperation,
I died from every hope of that high summit.

And like a miser – eager in acquisition
but desperate in self-reproach when Fortune's wheel
turns to the hour of his loss – all tears and attrition

I wavered back; and still the beast pursued,
forcing herself against me bit by bit
till I slid back into the sunless wood.

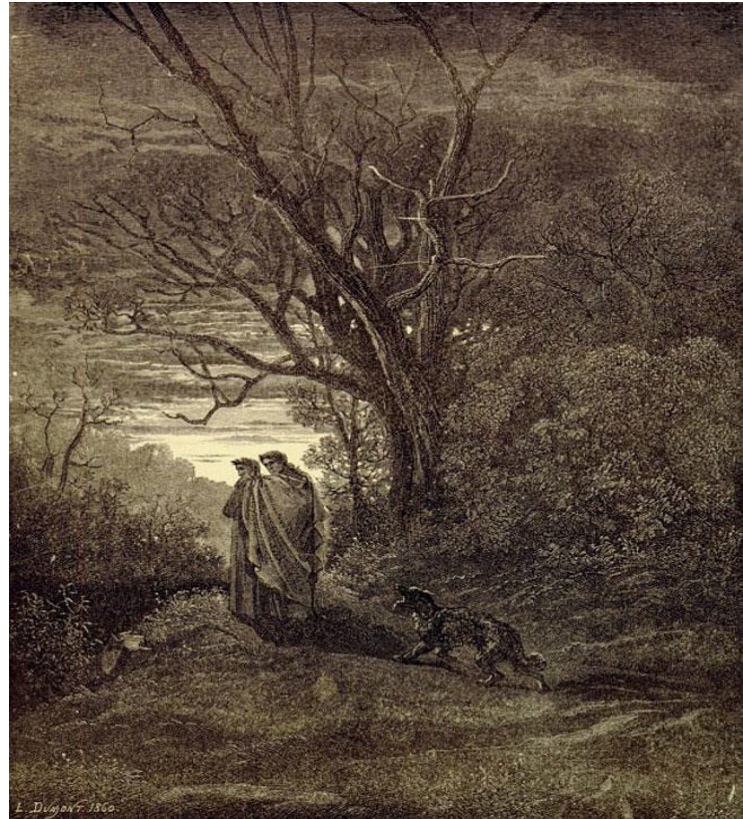
And as I fell to my soul's ruin, a presence
gathered before me in the discoloured air,
the figure of one who seemed hoarse from long silence.

At sight of him in that friendless waste I cried:
"Have pity on me, whatever thing you are,
whether shade or living man." And it replied:

"Not man, though man I once was, and my blood
was Lombard, both my parents Mantuan.
I was born, though late, sub Julio, and bred

in Rome under Augustus in the noon
of the false and lying gods. I was a poet
and sang of old Anchises' noble son

who came to Rome after the burning of Troy.
But you – why do you return to these distresses
instead of climbing that shining Mount of Joy



which is the seat and first cause of man's bliss?"
"And are you then that Virgil and that fountain
of purest speech?" My voice grew tremulous:
"Glory and light of poets! Now may that zeal
and love's apprenticeship that I poured out
in your heroic verses serve me well!

For you are my true master and first author,
the sole maker from whom I drew the breath
of that sweet style whose measures have brought me honor.

See there, immortal sage, the beast I flee.
For my soul's salvation, I beg you, guard me from her,
for she has struck a mortal tremor through me."

And he replied, seeing my soul in tears:
"He must go by another way who would escape
this wilderness, for that mad beast that fleers

before you there, suffers no man to pass.
She tracks down all, kills all, and knows no glut,
but, feeding, she grows hungrier than she was.

She mates with any beast, and will mate with more
before the Greyhound comes to hunt her down.
He will not feed on lands nor loot, but honor
and love and wisdom will make straight his way.
He will rise between Feltro and Feltro, and in him
shall be the resurrection and new day

of that sad Italy for which Nisus died,
and Turnus, and Euryalus, and the maid Camilla.
He shall hunt her through every nation of sick pride
till she is driven back forever to Hell
whence Envy first released her on the world.
Therefore, for your own good, I think it well

you follow me and I will be your guide
and lead you forth through an eternal place.
There you shall see the ancient spirits tried

in endless pain, and hear their lamentation
as each bemoans the second death of souls.
Next you shall see upon a burning mountain
souls in fire and yet content in fire,
knowing that whensoever it may be
they yet will mount into the blessed choir.

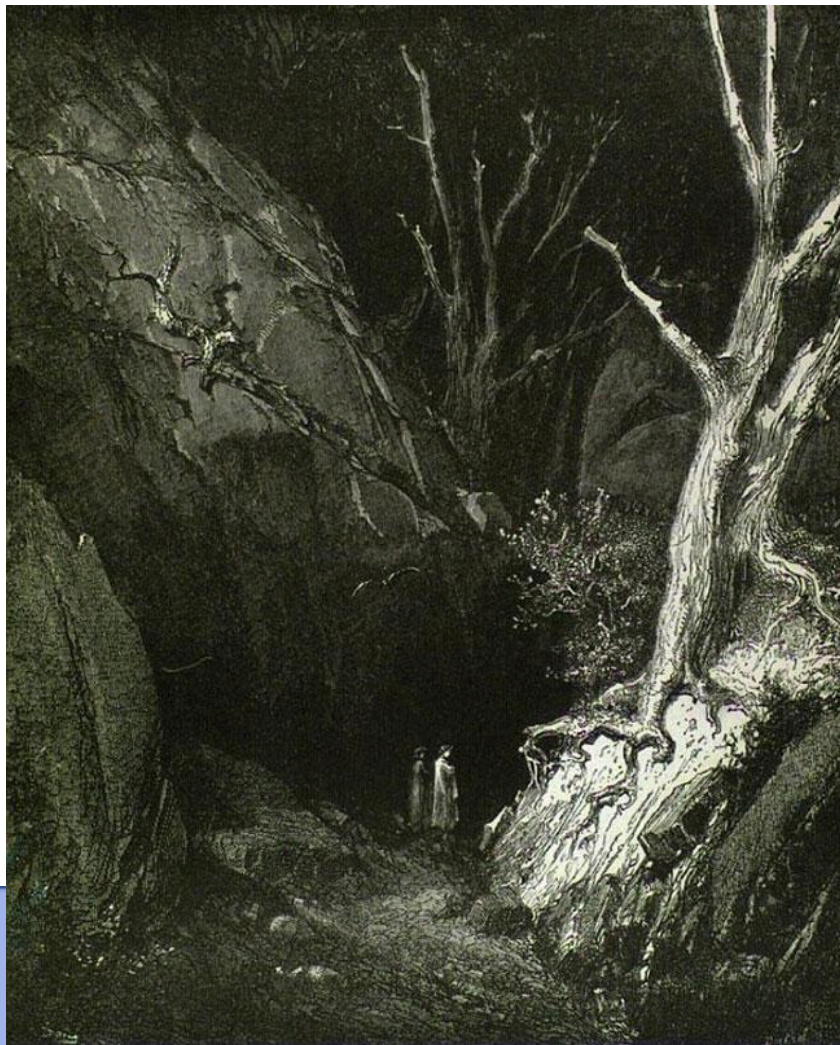
To which, if it is still your wish to climb,
a worthier spirit shall be sent to guide you.
With her shall I leave you, for the King of Time,
who reigns on high, forbids me to come there
since, living, I rebelled against his law.
He rules the waters and the land and air
and there holds court, his city and his throne.
Oh blessed are they he chooses!" And I to him:
"Poet, by that God to you unknown,
lead me this way. Beyond this present ill
and worse to dread, lead me to Peter's gate
and be my guide through the sad halls of Hell."

And he then: "Follow." And he moved ahead
in silence, and I followed where he led.

Canto 2

The Descent

It was evening. Dante invokes the Muses to help him tell his story. He began to doubt his worthiness to make the great voyage through Hell, and compared his weakness to the strength of "he who fathered Sylvius" (Aeneas) and "the Chosen Vessel," (St. Paul) who had descended to Hell and returned from there victoriously. He asked Virgil for guidance, and Virgil told him not to surrender to cowardice. In order to give him heart, Virgil said that Beatrice herself had descended from Paradise to Limbo to find him (Limbo is the place in Hell for worthy Pagans who lived before Christ). Concerned about Dante, she had asked Virgil to lead him to safety. Gallantly, Virgil had agreed. He discovered that not only Beatrice, but two other blessed ladies, Lucia and Rachel, were also concerned for Dante, having been warned by "a gentle lady" that he risks damnation. Hearing that his love had not forgotten him, Dante was much encouraged, and he resolved to unflinchingly follow Virgil wherever he would lead him.



Canto 3

The vestibule of hell: The opportunists

Dante and Virgil arrived at the gateway of Hell, whose famous inscription ends with the words: "Abandon hope, ye who enter here." The damned shall suffer eternally and Hell will endure forever, in Dante's vision. Past the gate, Dante heard voices of suffering and despair that made him weep. Virgil told him that he was hearing the laments of the morally neutral people, the "sorry souls of those who lived without disgrace and without praise," as well as the angels who sided neither with God nor with Satan in Satan's rebellion. These cowardly people were tormented by wasps, flies and worms. They are shut out of both Hell and Heaven, disdained by the forces of good and evil alike.

Dante and Virgil approached the shore of the river Acheron, which forms the boundary of true Hell. Charon, a demon in the shape of an old man, warned the waiting souls of the torments in store for them, and told Dante that he, a living man, could not cross the river. However, Virgil told him that God had willed it, and Charon could not countermand that order. The exhausted, bitter and despairing damned souls were forced by Charon across the Acheron on his boat. Even as the first group of the damned crossed the river, more crowds assembled on the bank, waiting, unable to resist their fate. The earth trembled and Dante, terrified, fell unconscious.

I AM THE WAY INTO THE CITY OF WOE.
I AM THE WAY TO A FORSAKEN PEOPLE.
I AM THE WAY INTO ETERNAL SORROW.
SACRED JUSTICE MOVED MY ARCHITECT.
I WAS RAISED HERE BY DIVINE OMNIPOTENCE,
PRIMORDIAL LOVE, AND ULTIMATE INTELLECT.
ONLY THOSE ELEMENTS TIME CANNOT WEAR
WERE MADE BEFORE ME, AND BEYOND TIME I STAND.
ABANDON ALL HOPE YE WHO ENTER HERE.

These mysteries I read cut into stone
Above a gate. And turning I sad: "Master,
What is the meaning of this harsh inscription?"
And he then as initiate to novice:
"Here must you put by all division of spirit
And gather your soul against all cowardice."

This is the place I told you to expect.
Here you shall pass among the fallen people.
Souls who have lost the good of intellect."
So saying, he put forth his hand to me,

And with a gentle and encouraging smile
He led me through the gate of mystery.

Here sighs and cries and wails coiled and recoiled
On the starless air, spilling my soul to tears.
A confusion of tongues and monstrous accents toiled
In pain and anger, voices hoarse and shrill
And sounds of blows, all intermingled, raised
Tumult and pandemonium that still

Whirls on the air forever dirty with it
As if a whirlwind sucked at sand. And I,
Holding my head in horror, cried: "Sweet Spirit,
What souls are these who run through this black haze?"
And he to me: "These are the nearly soulless
Whose lives concluded neither blame nor praise.

They are mixed here with that despicable corps
Of angels who were neither for God nor Satan,
But only for themselves. The High Creator
Scourged them from Heaven for its perfect beauty,

And Hell will not receive them since the wicked
Might feel some glory over them." And I:

"Master, what gnaws at them so hideously
Their lamentation stuns the very air?"
"They have no hope of death," he answered me,
"and in their blind and unattaining state
Their miserable lives have sunk so low
That they must envy every other fate."

No word of them survives their living season.
Mercy and Justice deny them even a name.
Let us not speak of them: look, and pass on."
I saw a banner there upon the mist.
Circling and circling, it seemed to scorn all pause.
So it ran on, and still behind it pressed

A never-ending rout of souls in pain.
I had not thought death had undone so many
As passed before me in that mournful train.
And some I knew among them; last of all
I recognized the shadow of that soul
Who, in his cowardice, made the Great Denial.

At once I understood for certain: these
Were of that retrograde and faithless crew
Hateful to God and to His enemies.
These wretches never born and never dear
Ran naked in a swarm of wasps and hornets
That goaded them the more the more they fled,

And made their faces stream with bloody gouts
Of pus and tears that dribbled to their feet
To be swallowed there by loathsome worms and maggots.



Then looking onward I made out a throng
Assembled on the beach of a wide river,
Whereupon I turned to him: "Master, I long

To know what souls these are, and what strange usage
Makes them as eager to cross as they seem to be
In this infected light." At which the Sage:
"All this shall be made known to you when we stand
On the joyless beach of Acheron." And I
Cast down my eyes, sensing a reprimand

In what he said, and so walked at his side
In silence and ashamed until we came
Through the dead cavern to that sunless tide.
There, steering us in an ancient ferry
Came an old man with a white bush of hair,
Bellowing: "Woe to you depraved souls! Bury
Here and forever all hope of Paradise:
I come to lead you to the other shore,
Into eternal dark, into fire and ice.
And you who are living yet, I say begone
From these who are dead." But when he saw me stand
Against his violence he began again:

"By other windings and other steerage
Shall you cross to that other shore. Not here! Not here!
A lighter craft than mine must give passage."
And my Guide to him: "Charon, bite back your spleen:
This has been willed where what is willed must be,
And is not yours to ask what it may mean."

The steersman of that marsh of ruined souls,
Who wore a wheel of flame around each eye,
Stifled the rage that shook his woolly jowls.
But those unmanned and naked spirits there
Turned pale with fear and their teeth began to chatter
At sound of his crude bellow. In despair

They blasphemed God, their parents, their time on
earth,

The race of Adam, and the day and the hour
And the place and the seed and the womb that gave
them birth.

But all together they drew to that grim shore
Where all must come who lose the fear of God.
Weeping and cursing they come for evermore,

And demon Charon with eyes like burning coals
Herds them on, and with the whistling oar
Flails on the stragglers to his wake of souls.
As leaves in autumn loosen and stream down
Until the branch stands bare above its tatters
Spread on the rustling ground, so one by one

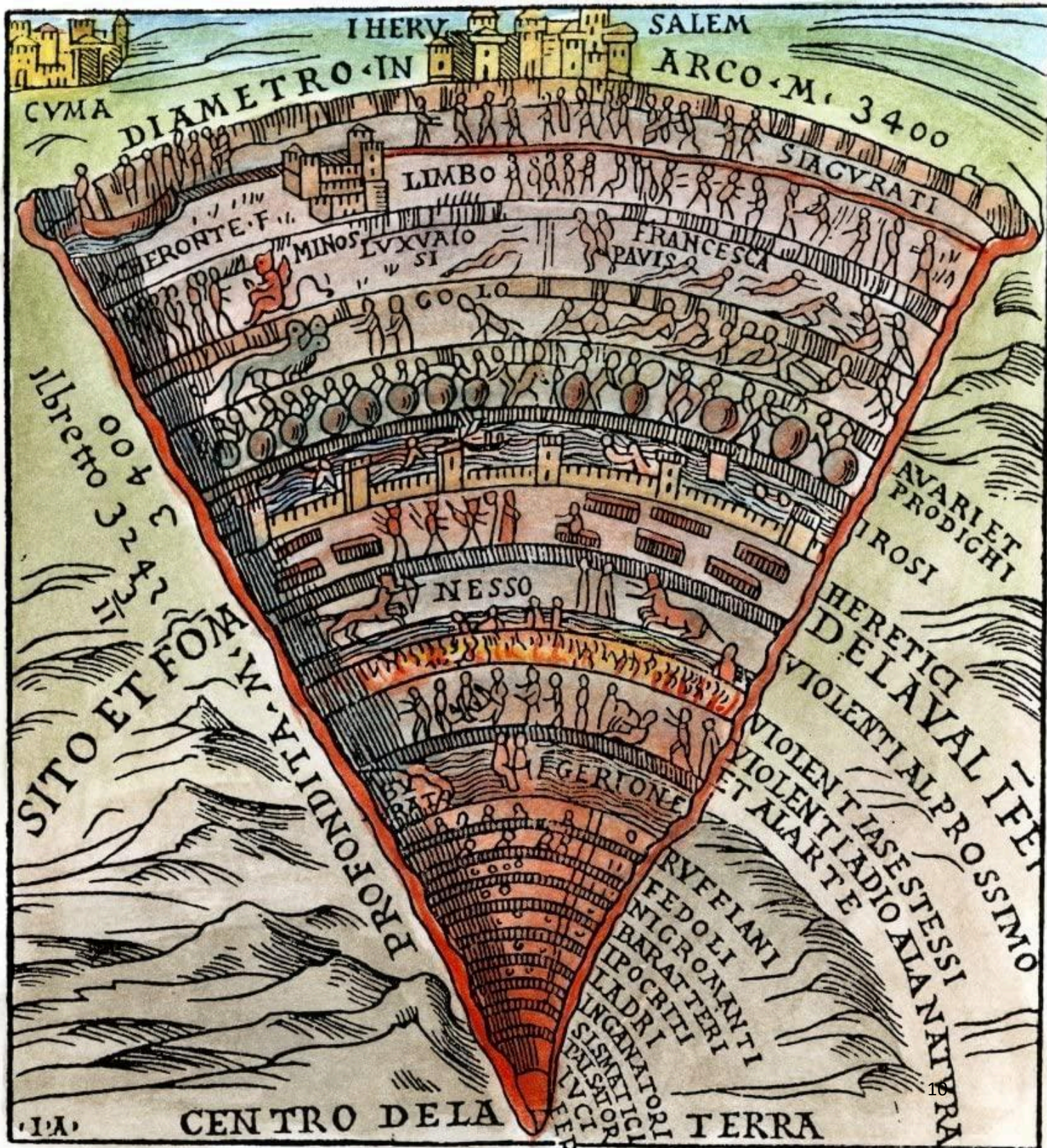
The evil seed of Adam in its Fall
Cast themselves, at his signal, from the shore
And streamed away like birds who hear their call.
So they are gone over that shadowy water,
And always before they reach the other shore
A new noise stirs on this, and new throngs gather.

"My son," the courteous Master said to me,
"all who die in the shadow of God's wrath
Converge to this from every clime and country.
And all pass over eagerly, for here
Divine Justice transforms and spurs them so
Their dread turns wish: they yearn for what they fear.

No soul in Grace comes ever to this crossing;
Therefore if Charon rages at your presence
You will understand the reason for his cursing."
When he had spoken, all the twilight country
Shook so violently, the terror of it
Bathes me with sweat even in memory:

The tear-soaked ground gave out a sigh of wind
That spewed itself in flame on a red sky,
And all my shattered senses left me. Blind,
Like one whom sleep comes over in a swoon,
I stumbled into darkness and went down.

Map of Hell



Canto 4

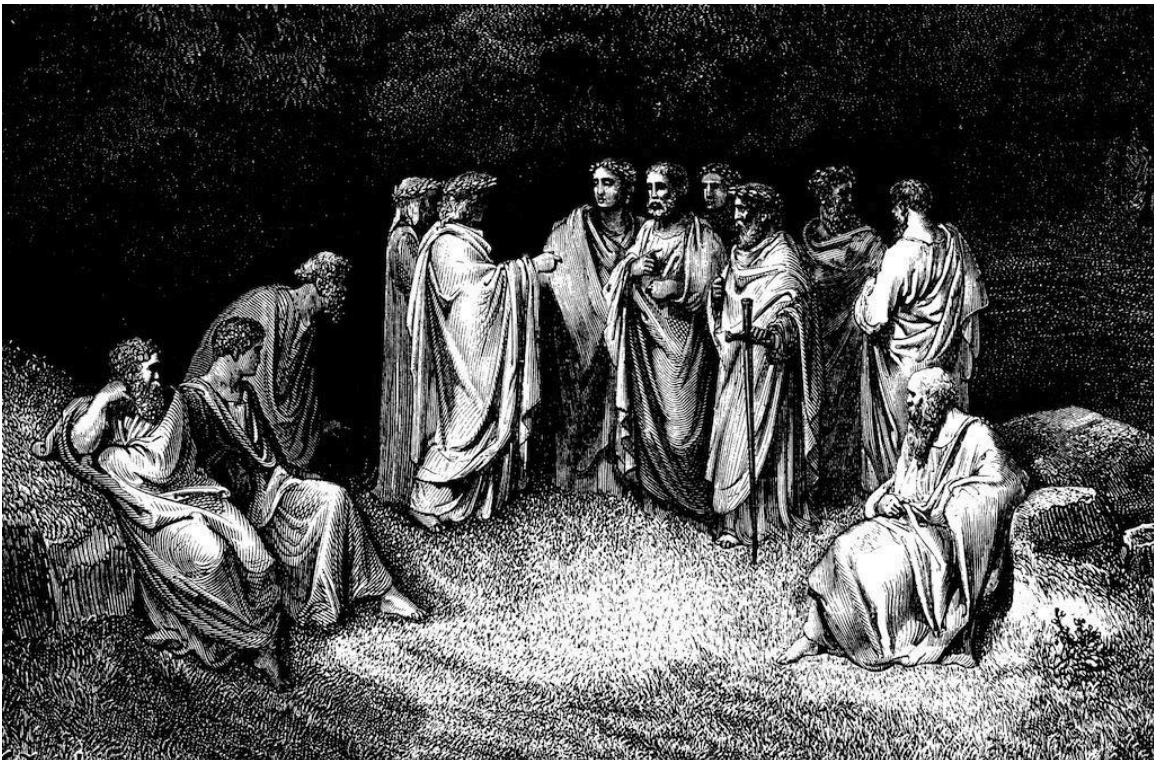
Circle one: Limbo (Virtuous pagans)

Dante awakened to find himself on the brink of an abyss. Seeing Virgil turn pale, he was afraid to go into it, but Virgil explained that his palor was the result of compassion rather than of fear: the first circle of Hell contained his people.

In the first circle, Limbo, there were sighs rather than wails: it was peaceful yet sad. Multitudes of people, infants, women, and men, stayed there. Virgil explained that these were those who were virtuous, but lacked baptism and hence could not be saved. Virgil was one of them. Dante was sorry to see these unhappy good souls, and asked if anyone had ever been able to leave Limbo. Virgil said that he had seen a Great Lord come and rescue Adam, Abel, Noah, Moses, Rachel, and other early Israelites.

They came to the place where particularly honorable shades were, and Virgil was welcomed by four giants, Homer, Ovid, Horace, and Lucan. Dante was very pleased to find himself accepted into their number as the sixth great intellect. Speaking of solemn things, they came to the castle of Limbo, surrounded by a green meadow, where the great non-Christian souls lived. Dante lists both characters of Classical literature (Electra, Hector, Aeneas...), famous Romans (Caesar, Lucretia...), philosophers, writers, scientists, doctors, and musicians. He gives particular honor to "the master of men who know" (Aristotle), and also mentions famous Arabs, Avicenna and Averroes.

Leaving these heroic souls, Dante and Virgil continued on into darkness.



Canto 5

CIRCLE TWO (THE CARNAL)

Dante and Virgil descended into the second circle of Hell, where the demon Minos, a connoisseur of sin, assigns each guilty soul its rightful place: after hearing what the soul has to say, he wraps his tail around his body, and the number of times the tail wraps around is the number of the circle where the sinner must go. Minos challenged Dante and Virgil, but is silenced when Virgil claims a divine order.

The first circle is characterized by a wind which whirls the souls about endlessly, never giving them a chance to rest. These are the lustful, including those who died for love: Semiramis, Cleopatra, Helen, Paris, Tristan, Achilles, Dido... Dante was struck by pity, and asked to speak to two souls who clung together as they were blown around. The souls floated over to him, and one of them spoke, telling how she had fallen in love while reading about Lancelot with her lover. She described the great power of love, and the deaths she and her lover suffered for it, deeply affecting Dante, who recognized her as Francesca. The other soul wept, and Dante fainted out of pity.

So we went down to the second ledge alone;
A smaller circle of so much greater pain
The voice of the damned rose in a bestial moan.
There Minos sits, grinning, grotesque, and hale.
He examines each lost soul as it arrives
And delivers his verdict with his coiling tail.

That is to say, when the ill-fates soul
Appears before him it confesses all,
And that grim sorter of the dark and foul
Decides which place in Hell shall be its end,
Then wraps his twitching tail about himself
One coil for each degree it must descent.

The soul descends and others take its place:
Each crowds in its urns to judgment, each confesses,
Each hears its doom and falls away through space.
"O you who come into this camp of woe,"
Cried Minos when he saw me turn away
Without awaiting his judgment, "watch where you go

Once you have entered here, and to whom you turn!
Do not be misled by that wide and easy passage!"
And my Guide to him: "That is not your concern;
It is his fate to enter every door.
This has been willed where what is willed must be,
And is not yours to question. Say no more."



Now the choir of anguish, like a wound,
Strikes through the tortured air. Now I have come
To Hell's full lamentation, sound beyond sound.

I came to a place stripped bare of every light
And roaring on the naked dark like seas
Wracked by a war of winds. Their hellish flight

Of storm and counterstorm through time foregone,
Sweeps the souls of the damned before its charge.
Whirling and battering it drives them on,
And when they pass the ruined gap of Hell
Through which we had come, their shrieks begin anew.
There they blaspheme the power of God eternal.

And this, I learned, was the ending flight
Of those who sinned in the flesh, the carnal and lusty
Who betrayed reason to their appetite.
As the wings of wintering starlings bear them on
In their great wheeling flight, just so the blast
Wherries these evil souls through time foregone.

Here, there, up, down, they whirl and, whirling, strain
With never a hope of hope to comfort them,
Not of release, but even of less pain.
As cranes go over sounding their harsh cry,
Leaving the long streak of their flight in air,
So come these spirits, wailing as they fly.

And watching their shadows lashed by wind, I cried:
"Master, what souls are these the very air
Lashes with its black whips from side to side?"
"The first of these whose history you would know,"
He answered me, "was Empress of many tongues.
Mad sensuality corrupted her so

That to hide the guilt of her debauchery
She licensed all depravity alike,
And lust and law were one in her decree.
She is Semiramis of whom the tale is told
How she married Ninus and succeeded him
To the throne of that wide land the Sultans hold.

The other is Dido; faithless to the ashes
Of Sichaeus, she killed herself for love.
The next whom the eternal tempest lashes
Is sense-drugged Cleopatra. See Helen there,

From whom such ill arose. And great Achilles,
Who fought at last with love in the house of prayer.

And Paris. And Tristan." As they whirled above
He pointed out more than a thousand shades
Of those torn from the mortal life by love.
I stood there while my Teacher one by one
Named the great knights and ladies of dim time;
And I was swept by pity and confusion.

At last I spoke: "Poet, I should be glad
To speak a word with those two swept together
So lightly on the wind and still so sad."
And he to me: "Watch them. When next they pass,
Call to them in the name of love that drives
And damns them here. In that name they will pause."

Thus, as soon as the wind in its wild course
Brought them around, I called: "O wearied souls!
If none forbid it, pause and speak to us."
As mating doves that love calls to their nest
Glide through the air with motionless raised wings,
Borne by the sweet desire that fills each breast –

Just so those spirits turned on the torn sky
From the band when Dido whirls across the air;
Such was the power of pity in my cry.
"O living creature, gracious, kind, and good,
Going this pilgrimage through the sick night,
Visiting us who stained the earth with blood,

Were the King of Time our friend, we would pray His
peace
On you who have pitied us. As long as the wind
Will let us pause, ask of us what you please.
The town where I was born lies by the shore
Where the Po descends into its ocean rest
With its attendant streams in one long murmur.

Love, which in gentlest hearts will soonest bloom
Seized my lover with passion for that sweet body
From which I was torn unshriven to my doom.
Love, which permits no loved one not to love,
Took me so strongly with delight in him
That we are one in Hell, as we were above.

Love led us to one death. In the depths of Hell
Caïna waits for him who took our lives."
This was the piteous tale they stopped to tell.
And when I had heard those world-offended lovers
I bowed my head. At last the Poet spoke:
"What painful thoughts are these your lowered brow
covers?"

When at length I answered, I began: "Alas!
What sweetest thoughts, what green and young desire
Led these two lovers to this sorry pass."
Then turning to those spirits once again,
I said: "Francesca, what you suffer here
Melts me to tears of pity and of pain.

But tell me: in the time of your sweet sighs
By what appearances found love the way
To lure you to his perilous paradise?"
And she: "The double grief of a lost bliss
Is to recall its happy hour in pain.
Your Guide and Teacher knows the truth to this.

But if there is indeed a soul in Hell
To ask of the beginning of our love
Out of his pity, I will weep and tell:
On a day for dalliance we read the rhyme
Of Lancelot, how love had mastered him.
We were alone with innocence and dim time.

Pause after pause that high old story drew
Our eyes together while we blushed and paled;
But it was one soft passage overthrew
Our caution and our hearts. For when we read
How her fond smile was kissed by such a lover,
He who is one with me alive and dead

Breathed on my lips the tremor of his kiss.
That book, and he who wrote it, was a pander.
That day we read no further." As she said this,
The other spirit, who stood by her, wept
So piteously, I felt my senses reel
And faint away with anguish. I was swept
By such a swoon as death is, and I fell,
As a corpse might fall, to the dead floor of Hell.



Canto 6

CIRCLE THREE (The GLUTTONS)

Summary

During his swoon, Dante has somehow been transported to the Third Circle, where cold, dirty rain mixed with hail and snow pours down forever, and the soil stinks. There three-headed Cerberus barks at and tortures the souls, who lie in the mud. Virgil is able to silence him by throwing dirt in his mouth. As Virgil and Dante pass on, one soul sits up and asks Dante if he recognizes him. He is so disfigured that Dante doesn't, but the soul tells him he lived in Dante's city, Florence, so ruined by envy, was called Ciacco (Hog); all the souls in this circle were taken over by gluttony, as he was. Dante expresses his pity for Ciacco, then wants to know what's going to happen in Florence. Ciacco tells him that the Whites will soon come to power and exile the Blacks, but not for long; the Blacks, with the help of Boniface VIII, will come back and banish the Whites, and stay in power for a long time. There are only two just men in the whole city, and no one listens to them; all the others are ruled by pride, envy, and greed. What about the good men who have held power in Florence in the past, Dante asks. Are they now in Heaven or Hell. You'll see them lower down in Hell, Ciacco answers. Then he makes his one request, that Dante should speak of him when he returns to "the sweet world" and so keep his memory alive; he sinks back into the mire with the others, to rise no more, Virgil says, till all souls are reunited with their bodies on Judgment Day. Dante wants to know what effect reuniting with their bodies will have on their suffering, and Virgil explains that it will make it worse. They continue their journey around the circle, until, at the point where the path heads down again, they encounter "Plutus, the great enemy."



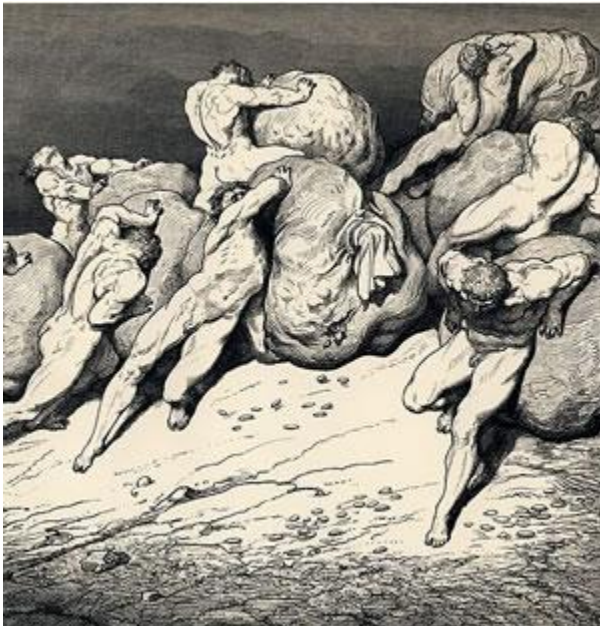
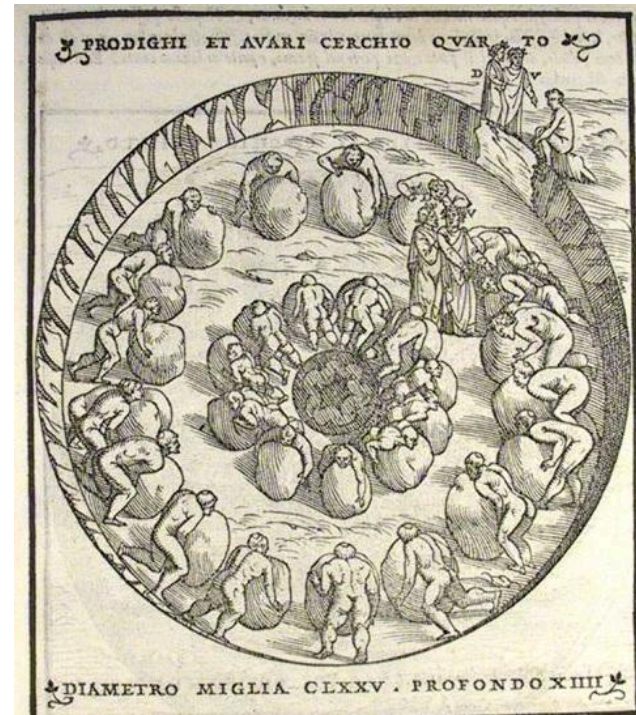
Canto 7

CIRCLE FOUR (THE HOARDERS AND THE WASTERS) CIRCLE FIVE (THE WRATHFUL AND THE SULLEN)

Summary

Plutus (in ancient mythology the god of wealth) is a demonic “cruel beast” serving Satan, and he must be a horrible sight, since Virgil has to reassure a fearful Dante that Plutus cannot stop them from descending to the next circle. As he has before,

Virgil tells Plutus that Dante’s descent into Hell is willed in Heaven, and Plutus collapses. They descend to the Fourth Circle, and Dante sees two groups of souls endlessly rolling great stones at each other and taunting each other, one group yelling, “Why do you hoard?” and the other, “Why do you squander?” Both have given their whole attention to wealth, whether keeping it for themselves or spending it recklessly. Many of the hoarders are former popes and cardinals, Virgil tells Dante, and Dante says he ought to be able to recognize some of them. No, says Virgil, in life they couldn’t distinguish what really matters, and now no one can distinguish who they are. Fortune rules who is wealthy and who is poor, but human beings waste their lives in their concern for wealth; not even the greatest wealth could bring them any rest now.



Dante wants to know who Fortune is, and Virgil pictures her as an angelic intelligence ordained by God to regulate which nations have power and wealth, and for how long. Human beings curse her, but she does not hear them-she blissfully turns her wheel.

At the edge of this circle they find a gloomy river, which flows into a marsh called Styx. There Dante sees people in rage attacking each other, hitting each other with their hands and bodies and tearing each other with their teeth. Virgil explains that these souls were completely taken over by anger against others while alive. If their anger was directed against themselves, that is, if they were sullen, they are trapped under water, where they say forever, “We were sullen in the sweet air that rejoices in the sun, carrying within ourselves a sluggish smoke; now we are sullen in the black mire” (lines 121-124). Virgil and Dante then go around the circle, beside the marsh, to the foot of a tower.

Canto 8

CIRCLE FIVE (The wrathful, phlegyas)

Circle six (the fallen angels)

Summary

When Dante and Virgil come to the foot of the tower, they see two lights shining from it, and another light in the distance flashing in reply. Dante wants to know what's going on, and Virgil points out something coming toward them across the marsh. It's a little boat, and the demon who steers it, Phlegyas, gloats, thinking Dante is an evil soul that has come into his power, then swells with held-in rage when Virgil tells him they are only going to cross. Virgil gets in the boat first, but it is only when Dante gets in that the boat sinks lower in the water.

As they cross, one of the spirits wallowing in the mire asks Dante who he is. Dante recognizes him and feels no pity: Filippo Argenti is where he belongs. Filippo reaches out toward the boat, but Virgil pushes him away, and blesses Dante for his indignation, saying that this man was utterly arrogant while he lived and is now furious because no good is remembered of him. Many now living who think they are great kings will meet the same fate. Dante wants to see Filippo thrust deeper into the mire, and his wish is fulfilled when the whole crowd of angry souls attack Filippo, and he even attacks himself.

Now Dante hears more sounds of grief and gazes intently forward. Virgil tells him that they are approaching the mighty city of Dis. Dante sees its mosques, lit by the glow of the eternal fire within. They come to the gates of Dis and get out of the boat, and above the gates they see a host of fallen angels, who say that no living man may enter here. They invite Virgil to come, and tell Dante he must go back alone, if he can. Now Dante is really scared, and he begs Virgil not to go, but Virgil says their entering can't be stopped, and promises not to forsake Dante. He goes to talk to the fallen angels, now devils; Dante can't hear what they're saying, but he sees them slam the gates shut in Virgil's face. Virgil comes back with all his self-confidence gone, but he assures Dante that even now someone is on the way down the steps of Hell to open the gates of the city.

Canto 9

Circle six (the heretics)

Summary

At the opening of Canto IX, Dante, waiting outside of the gate to the City of Dis, is afraid. The poets have a few minutes to talk, and Virgil tells Dante of the time when the sorceress Erichtho summoned out a spirit from the lowest circle of Hell. Virgil reassures Dante, again, that no one can stop their journey and asks him to remain where he is, because Virgil will not abandon him.

However, the conversation is short because the angels rush back and slam the gates shut. Virgil returns to Dante, sighing because the fallen angels bar the way. However, Virgil tells Dante that an angel from Heaven will descend to open the gates.

Virgil listens intently for the arrival of the angel because he can't see through the heavy mist. He regrets that he and Dante couldn't enter the gates by themselves, but they were promised help, though it seems long delayed. Dante is alarmed and asks his guide, in a roundabout way, if anyone from the upper circles has ever made this descent. Virgil answers that he was once sent to summon a shade from the circle of Judas, far below here, so he knows the way well.

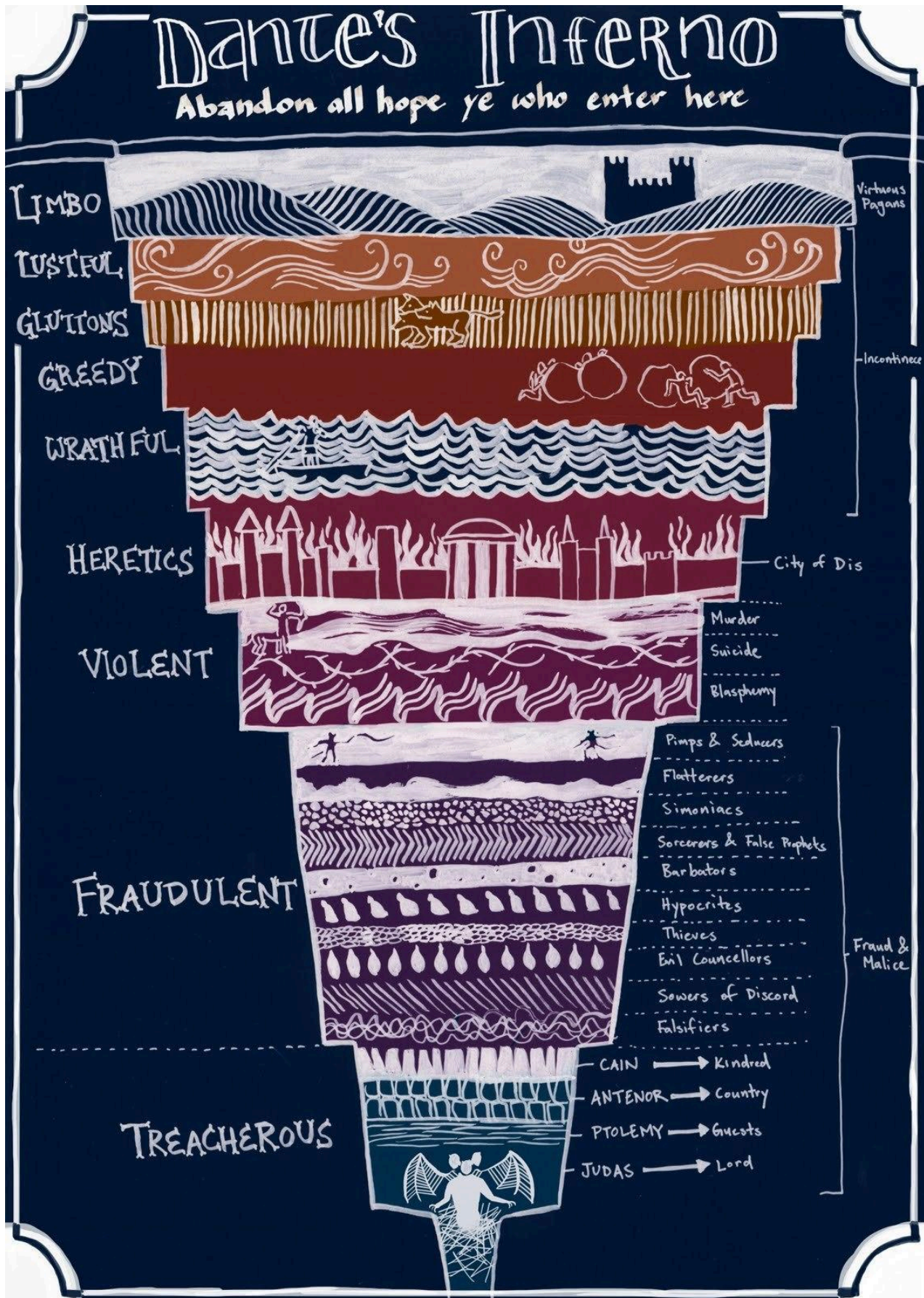
Three Furies spring into view, saying that they should summon Medusa to turn Dante to stone. Virgil cautions Dante to hide his eyes against the beast, placing his own hands over Dante's eyes.

A noise like a hurricane causes the poets to look toward Styx, and they see a figure crossing without touching the marsh. Spirits rush away from him, and he moves his left hand before him to dispel the fog of the marsh.

Dante recognizes the heavenly messenger, and Virgil asks him to remain quiet and bow down. The angry messenger reaches the gate, which opens at the touch of his wand. He then reproves the insolent angels for trying to stop what is willed in Heaven and reminds them of the injuries suffered by Cerberus when he was dragged to the upper world.

The poets enter the gate into the sixth circle, and Dante is eager to learn about the inhabitants of the city. Dante sees a countryside of sorrow, a huge graveyard with uneven tombs covering the plain. The tombs are raised to a red heat by flames outside of every wall. Moaning and sounds of torment come from the open tombs. Dante asks Virgil what sinners reside in the tombs, and Virgil answers that they are the arch-heretics of all cults and their followers. The poets then turn right.

Map of Hell



Canto IO

Circle Six (The Heretics)

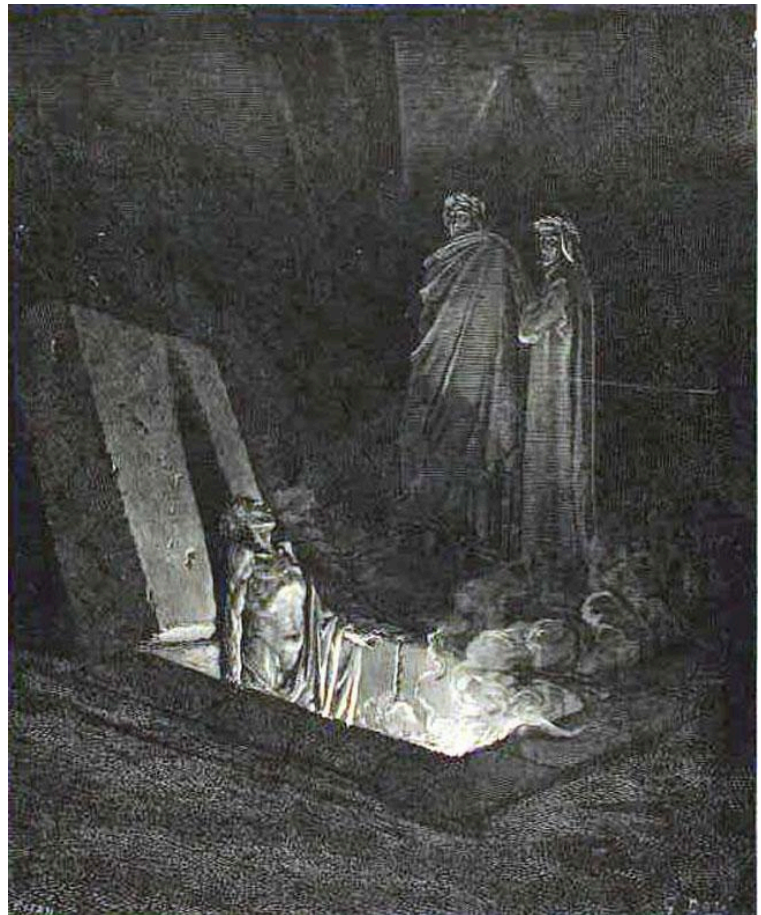
Summary

The poets begin their journey down a secret path in Circle VI, the circle containing the Heretics. Dante tells Virgil that he wants to speak with some of the shades in this circle, and Virgil answers that Dante's wish will soon be granted, as well as a wish Dante was hiding from Virgil. Dante replies that he had not been hiding any wish.

A shade rises from a tomb and recognizes Dante's Tuscan accent. Dante is at once surprised and afraid, but Virgil urges him to speak to the shade. Dante approaches the tomb and learns that the shade is Farinata, Dante's political enemy. Dante and Farinata exchange a dialogue that is simultaneously hostile and respectful. In the middle of their dialogue, another shade rises from the tomb that also recognizes Dante. This shade asks why his son is not with Dante, and Dante replies that it is because the shade's son held Dante's guide in scorn. Dante uses the past tense, "held," and the shade asks Dante if his son is dead. Dante hesitates, and the shade, believing that his son is dead, swoons back into the burning tomb.

Farinata, still standing in the tomb, continues his argument as if no interruption occurred. Farinata prophesizes that, "the face of her who reigns in Hell shall not/be fifty times rekindled in its course/before you learn what griefs attend that art." The two discuss the reasons for the split between the White and Black Guelph parties. Dante asks Farinata why shades can predict the future and Farinata answers that shades can know the past and see into the future, but have no awareness of what happens in the present. Farinata says that the ability to know the past and see the future is the light that the King of All (God) grants the shades.

Dante regrets that he didn't get to tell the other shade that his son is not dead, and asks Farinata to give word to him. Dante returns to Virgil looking downtrodden due to Farinata's prophesy, and Virgil tells him that the Sweet Lady (Beatrice) will make the situation clearer for Dante later. The poets bear left, passing deeper into the city with the flaming walls.



Canto II

Circle six (The heretics)

Summary

The poets descend further and come to a group of broken boulders, behind which they rest a bit so that they can become accustomed to the foul stink that rises from the lower circles. Dante sees a headstone with an inscription, "I guard Anastasius, once Pope, he whom Photinus led from the straight road."

While resting for a moment, Virgil begins explaining the structure of Hell, especially that of lower Hell. Virgil explains that there are other, smaller circles, which comprise the last three circles beyond the wall that begins the sixth circle.

Circle VII, the next circle, is comprised of three smaller circles: one circle for Violence against Persons and their goods, another circle for Violence against Themselves (suicides), and the final circle for Violence against God, Art, and Nature. Virgil goes into detail about who resides in which circle and for what sins. It is growing late and they must leave for the descent into the next circle.

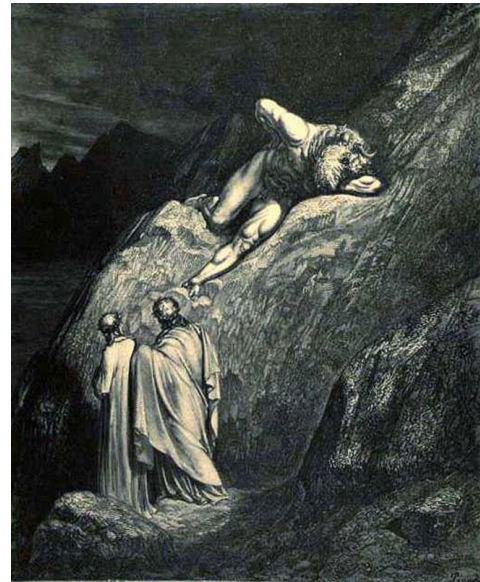
Canto 12

Circle Seven: Round One

(The Violent Against Neighbors)

Summary

The poets enter round one of Circle VII and must navigate a steep passage of broken rocks. They come upon the Minotaur, and Virgil taunts it into a fury, so that the two may pass unharmed.



Virgil tells Dante to turn his eyes to the valley where he will see souls boiling in blood. Dante sees a group of armed Centaurs galloping toward them. Virgil names them and tells a bit of their individual histories. One of the Centaurs, Chiron, moves his beard aside with an arrow and notes that Dante must be alive since he moves things that he

touches, such as rocks when he walks. Virgil gives Chiron an explanation about their journey and asks that one of the Centaurs guide them to a shallow place in the river of blood where Dante can cross, riding on the Centaur's back. Chiron volunteers Nessus, another of the Centaurs. Nessus explains that the souls boiling in the river of blood were people that were kings of bloodshed and despoilment. Dante turns to Virgil for guidance, but Virgil says that he will let Nessus guide at this point. Nessus goes on to point out the names of some of the souls in the river. Nessus explains that the river grows deep again on the other side of the ford, and he names some of the other souls punished there. Nessus leaves the poets at the other side of the bank and goes back the way he came.

Canto 13

Circle seven: round two (The Violent against themselves)

Summary

Virgil and Dante now enter into a pathless wood. This is a dismal wood of strange black leaves, misshapen branches, and poisonous branches barren of fruit. The Harpies nest here, feeding on the branches of the gnarled trees.

Virgil explains that this is the second round of the seventh circle, where Dante will see things that will cause him to doubt Virgil's words. Dante has already heard cries, but he cannot find where they come from and in confusion stops where he is. He believes that Virgil knows his thoughts: The spirits making such an outcry are hiding among the trees. Virgil tells him only to break off any branch, and he will see that he is mistaken in his thought.

Dante pulls a small branch off from a large thorn tree, and a voice asks Dante: "Why dost thou break and tear me?" Blood comes from the tree, and with it the voice, which asks if Dante has no pity. The voice continues, saying that all of these trees were once men and that Dante should have mercy upon them. Dante drops the branch, and Virgil tells the tree-spirit that if Dante had believed what Virgil had once written, this would not have happened. Since Dante could not believe, Virgil had asked him to pull off the branch, though it grieved Virgil to wound the spirit.

In compensation for this wound, Virgil asks the spirit to tell Dante his story so that he may repeat it when he returns to Earth. The spirit, moved by his words, tells his story.

He, as minister to Frederick II, was absolutely faithful and honest to him, but the envy of the court (they could not bribe him) turned Frederick against him. Because he could not bear to lose this trust, in sorrow he killed himself. He swears that he was faithful to the end and asks Dante to tell his true story when he returns to the upper world.

Virgil tells Dante to question the spirit if he wishes, but Dante is too sorrowful and asks Virgil to say the things Dante wishes to know. Virgil, therefore, asks how the souls are bound into these gnarled trees and if any ever regains freedom.

The imprisoned spirit replies that when the soul is torn from the body by suicide, it is sent by Minos to the seventh circle, where it falls to the ground, sprouts, and grows. The Harpies eat its leaves, giving it great pain. The spirits will all be called to the Last Judgment and will reclaim the mortal bodies forsaken by them. However, they will never regain their immortal souls that they took from themselves and will remain forever trapped in this strange wood.

The two poets now hear a noise like a hunt crashing through a forest, and two spirits appear. The second flings himself into a bush, but is quickly caught and torn apart by the pursuing hounds that carry him off.

Dante and Virgil approach the bush, which is complaining loudly that the fleeing spirit gained nothing by choosing it for a hiding place. Virgil asks this spirit who he was, but in answering, it first asks that they

gather up all the leaves which have been torn off in the hunt and then says only that he was a citizen of Florence who hanged himself on his own door transom.



Canto 14

Circle Seven: Round Three The Violent Against God, Nature, and Art

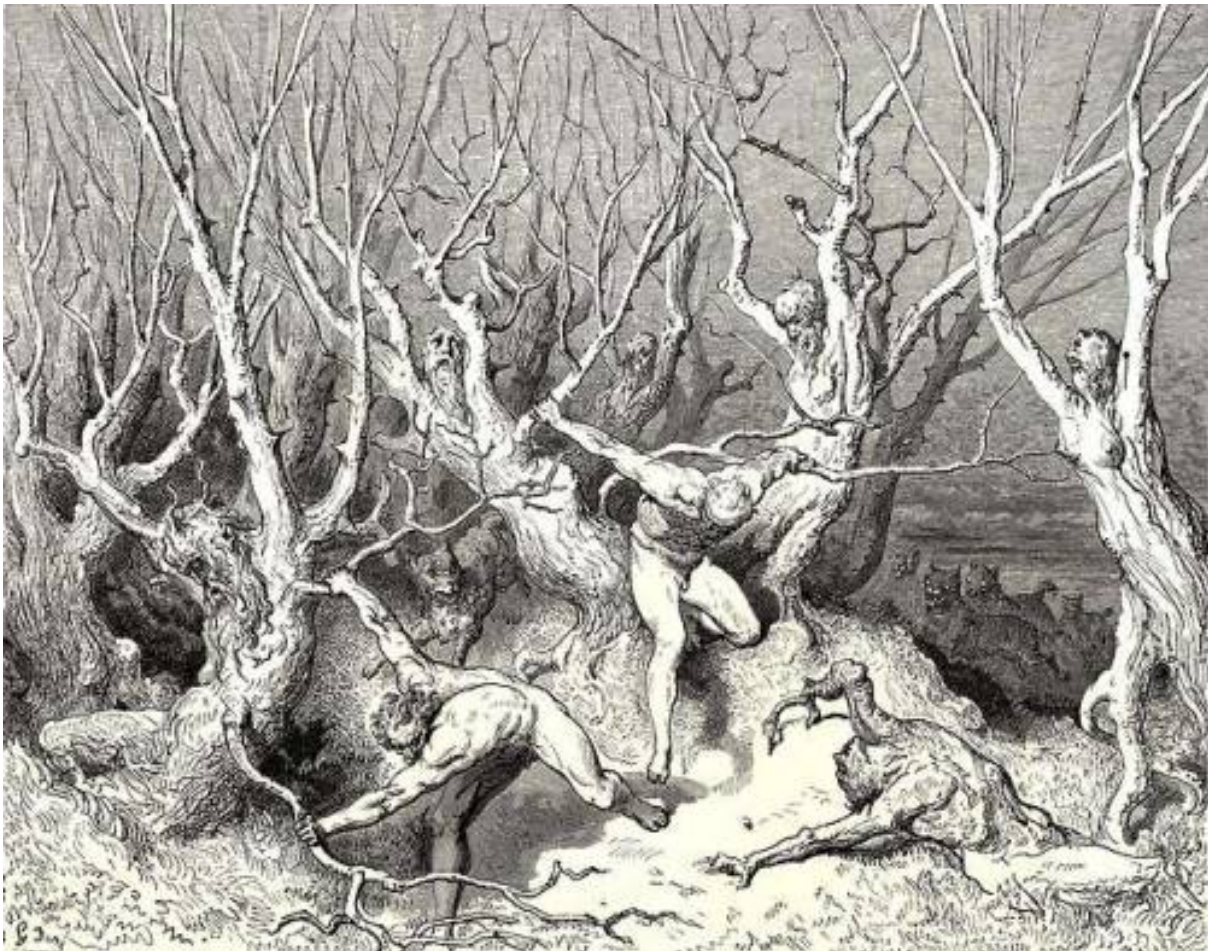
Dante, in pity, restores the torn leaves to the soul of his coun-tryman and the Poets move on to the next round, a great PLAIN OF BURNING SAND upon which there descends an eternal slow RAIN OF FIRE. Here, scorched by fire from above and below, are three classes of sinners suffering differ-ing degrees of exposure to the fire. The BLASPHEMERS (The Violent against God) are stretched supine upon the sand, the SODOMITES (The Violent against Nature) run in endless circles, and the USURERS (The Violent against Art, which is the Grandchild of God) huddle on the sands. The Poets find CAPANEUS stretched out on the sands, the chief sinner of that place. He is still blaspheming God. They continue along the edge of the Wood of the Suicides and come to a blood-red rill which flows boiling from the Wood and crosses the burning plain. Virgil explains the miraculous power of its waters and discourses on the OLD MAN OF CRETE and the origin of all the rivers of Hell. The symbolism of the burning plain is obviously centered in sterility (the desert image) and wrath (the fire image).

Blasphemy, sodomy, and usury are all unnatural and sterile actions: thus the unbearing desert is the eternity of these sinners; and thus the rain, which in nature should be fertile and cool, descends as fire. Capaneus, moreover, is subjected not only to the wrath of nature (the sands below) and the wrath of God (the fire from above), but is tortured most by his own inner violence, which is the root of blasphemy.

Canto 15

CIRCLE SEVEN: ROUND THREE The Violent Against Nature

Protected by the marvelous powers of the boiling rill, the Poets walk along its banks across the burning plain. The WOOD OF THE SUICIDES is behind them; the GREAT CLIFF at whose foot lies the EIGHTH CIRCLE is before them. They pass one of the roving bands of SODOMITES. One of the sinners stops Dante, and with great difficulty the Poet recognizes him under his back features as SER BRUNETTO LATINO. This is a reunion with a dearly-loved man and writer one who had considerably influenced Dante 's own development, and Dante addresses him with great and sorrowful affection, paying him the highest tribute offered to any sinner in the Inferno. BRUNETTO prophesies Dante 's suffer-ings at the hands of the Florentines, gives an account of the souls that move with him through the fire, and finally, under Divine Compulsion, races off across the plain.



Canto 16

Circle Seven: Round Three The Violent Against Nature and Art

The Poets arrive within hearing of the waterfall that plunges over the GREAT CLIFF into the EIGHTH CIRCLE. The sound is still a distant throbbing when three wraiths, recognizing Dante's Florentine dress', detach themselves from their band and come running toward him. They are JACOPORUSTICUCCI, GUIDO GUERRA, and TEGGHIAIOALDOBRANDI, all of them Florentines whose policies and personalities Dante admired. Rusticucci and Tegghiaio have already been mentioned in a highly complementary way in Dante's talk with Ciaccio (Canto VI). The sinners ask for news of Florence, and Dante replies with a passionate lament for her present degradation. The three wraiths return to their band and the Poets continue to the top of the falls. Here, at Virgil's command, Dante removes a CORD from about his waist and Virgil drops it over the edge of the abyss. As if in answer to a signal, a great distorted shape comes swimming up through the dirty air of the pit.

Canto 17

Circle Seven: Round Three The Violent Against Art Geryon

The monstrous shape lands on the brink and Virgil salutes it ironically. It is GERYON, the MONSTER OF FRAUD. Virgil announces that they must fly down from the cliff on the back of this monster. While Virgil negotiates for their passage, Dante is sent to examine the USURERS (The Violent against Art). These sinners sit in a crouch along the edge of the burning plain that approaches the cliff. Each of them has a leather purse around his neck, and each purse is blazoned with a coat of arms. Their eyes, gushing with tears, are forever fixed on these purses. Dante recognizes none of these sinners, but their coats of arms are unmistakably those of well-known Florentine families. Having understood who they are and the reason for their present condition, Dante cuts short his excursion and returns to find Virgil mounted on the back of Geryon. Dante joins his Master and they fly down from the great cliff. Their flight carries them from the Hell of the VIOLENT AND THE BESTIAL (The Sins of the Lion) into the Hell of the FRAUDULENT AND MALICIOUS (The Sins of the Leopard).

Canto I8

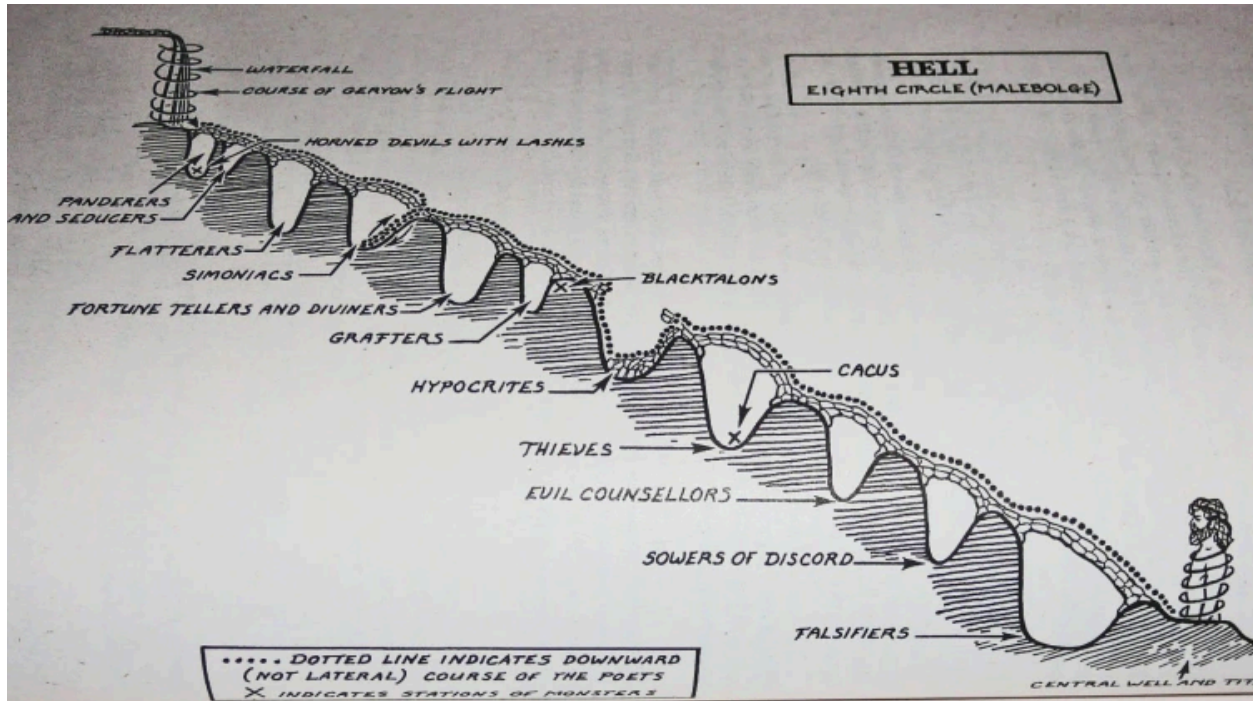
Circle Eight (Malebolge)

The Fraudulent and Malicious

Bolgia One: The Panderers and Seducers

Bolgia Two: The Flatterers

Dismounted from Geryon, the Poets find themselves in the EIGHTH CIRCLE, called MALEBOLGE (The Evil Ditches). This is the upper half of the HELL OF THE FRAUDULENT AND MALICIOUS. Malebolge is a great circle of stone that slopes like an amphitheater. The slopes are divided into ten concentric ditches; and within these ditches, each with his own kind, are punished those guilty of SIMPLE FRAUD. A series of stone dikes runs like spokes from the edge of the great cliff face to the center of the place, and these serve as bridges. The Poets bear left toward the first ditch, and Dante observes below him and to his right the sinners of the first bolgia, The PANDERERS and SEDUCERS. These make two files, one along either bank of the ditch, and are driven at an endless fast walk by horned demons who hurry them along with great lashes. In life these sinners goaded others on to serve their own foul purposes; so in Hell are they driven in their turn. The horned demons who drive them symbolize the sinners' own vicious natures, embodiments of their own guilty consciences. Dante may or may not have intended the horns of the demons to symbolize cuckoldry and adultery. The Poets see VENEDICO CACCIANEMICO and JASON in the first pit, and pass on to the second, where they find the souls of the FLATTERERS sunk in excrement, the true equivalent of their false flatteries on earth. They observe ALESSIO INTERMINELLI and THAIS, and pass on.



There is in Hell a vast and sloping ground
called Malebolge, a lost place of stone
as black as the great cliff that seals it round.

Precisely in the center of that space
there yawns a well extremely wide and deep. 5
I shall discuss it in its proper place.

The border that remains between the well-pit
and the great cliff forms an enormous circle,
and ten descending troughs are cut in it,

offering a general prospect like the ground 10
that lies around one of those ancient castles
whose walls are girded many times around

by concentric moats. And just as, from the portal,
the castle's bridges run from moat to moat
to the last bank; so from the great rock wall 15

across the embankments and the ditches, high
and narrow cliffs run to the central well,
which cuts and gathers them like radii.

Here, shaken from the back of Geryon,
we found ourselves. My Guide kept to the left 20
and I walked after him. So we moved on.

Below, on my right, and filling the first ditch
along both banks, new souls in pain appeared,
new torments, and new devils black as pitch.

All oi' these sinners were naked; on our side 25
of the middle they walked toward us; on the other,
in our direction, but with swifter stride.

Just so the Romans, because of the great throng
in the year of the Jubilee, divide the bridge
in order that the crowds may pass along, 30

so that all face the Castle as they go
on one side toward St. Peter's, while on the other,
all move along facing toward Mount Giordano.

And everywhere along that hideous track
I saw horned demons with enormous lashes 35
move through those souls, scourging them on the back.

Ah, how the stragglers of that long rout stirred
their legs quick-march at the first crack of the lash!
Certainly no one waited for a second, or third!

As we went on, one face in that procession 40
caught my eye and I said: "That sinner there:
It is certainly not the first time I've seen that one."

I stopped, therefore, to study him, and my Guide
out of his kindness waited, and even allowed me
to walk back a few steps at the sinner's side. 45

And that flayed spirit, seeing me turn around,
thought to hide his face, but I called to him:
"You there, that walk along with your eyes on the ground

if those are not false features, then I know you
as Venedico Caccianemico of Bologna: 50
what brings you here among this pretty crew?"

And he replied: "I speak unwillingly,
but something in your living voice, in which
I hear the world again, stirs and compels me.

It was I who brought the fair Ghisola 'round 55
to serve the will and lust of the Marquis,
however sordid that old tale may sound.

There are many more from Bologna who weep away
eternity in this ditch; we fill it so
there are not as many tongues that are taught to say

'sipa' in all the land that lies between
the Reno and the Saveno, as you must know
from the many tales of our avarice and spleen."

And as he spoke, one of those lashes fell
across his back, and a demon cried, "Move on, 65
you pimp, there are no women here to sell."

Turning away then, I rejoined my Guide.
We came in a few steps to a raised ridge
that made a passage to the other side.

This we climbed easily, and turning right 70
along the jagged crest, we left behind
the eternal circling of those souls in flight.

And when we reached the part at which the stone
was tunneled for the passage of the scourged,
my Guide said, "Stop a minute and look down 75

on these other misbegotten wraiths of sin.
You have not seen their faces, for they moved
in the same direction we were headed in."

So from that bridge we looked down on the throng
that hurried toward us on the other side. 80
Here, too, the whiplash hurried them along.

And the good Master, studying that train,
said: "Look there, at that great soul that approaches
and seems to shed no tears for all his pain

what kingliness moves with him even in Hell 85
It is Jason, who by courage and good advice
made off with the Colchian Ram. Later it fell

that he passed Lemnos, where the women of wrath,
enraged by Venus' curse that drove their lovers
out of their arms, put all their males to death. 90

There with his honeyed tongue and his dishonest
lover's wiles, he gulled Hypsipyle,
who, in the slaughter, had gulled all the rest.

And there he left her, pregnant and forsaken.
Such guilt condemns him to such punishment; 95
and also for Medea is vengeance taken.

All seducers march here to the whip.
And let us say no more about this valley
and those it closes in its stony grip."

We had already come to where the walk 100
crosses the second bank, from which it lifts
another arch, spanning from rock to rock.

Here we heard people whine in the next chasm,
and knock and thump themselves with open
palms, and blubber through their snouts as if in a spasm.

Steaming from that pit, a vapor rose
over the banks, crusting them with a slime
that sickened my eyes and hammered at my nose.

That chasm sinks so deep we could not sight
its bottom anywhere until we climbed 110
along the rock arch to its greatest height.

Once there, I peered down; and I saw long lines
of people in a river of excrement
that seemed the overflow of the world's latrines.

I saw among the felons of that pit 115
one wraith who might or might not have been tonsured
one could not tell, he was so smeared with shit.

He bellowed: "You there, why do you stare at me
more than at all the others in this stew?"
And I to him: "Because if memory 120

serves me, I knew you when your hair was dry.
You are Alessio Interminelli da Lucca.
That's why I pick you from this filthy fry."

And he then, beating himself on his clown's head:
"Down to this have the flatteries I sold 125
the living sunk me here among the dead."

And my Guide prompted then: "Lean forward a bit
and look beyond him, there—do you see that one
scratching herself with dungy nails, the strumpet

who fidgets to her feet, then to a crouch? 130
It is the whore Thais who told her lover
when he sent to ask her, 'Do you thank me much?'

'Much? Nay, past all believing!' And with this
let us turn from the sight of this abyss."

Canto 19

Circle Eight: Bolgia Three

The Simoniacs

Dante comes upon the SIMONIACS (sellers of ecclesiastic favors and offices) and his heart overflows with the wrath he feels against those who corrupt the things of God. This bolgia is lined with round tube-like holes and the sinners are placed in them upside down with the soles of their feet ablaze. The heat of the blaze is proportioned to their guilt.

The holes in which these sinners are placed are debased equivalents of the baptismal fonts common in the cities of Northern Italy and the sinners' confinement in them is temporary: as new sinners arrive, the souls drop through the bottoms of their holes and disappear eternally into the crevices of the rock. As always, the punishment is a symbolic retribution. Just as the Simoniacs made a mock of holy office, so are they turned upside down in a mockery of the baptismal font. Just as they made a mockery of the holy water of baptism, so is their hellish baptism by fire, after which they are wholly immersed in the crevices below. The oily fire that licks at their soles may also suggest a travesty on the oil used in Extreme Unction (last rites for the dying).

Virgil carries Dante down an almost sheer ledge and lets him speak to one who is the chief sinner of that place, POPE NICHOLAS III. Dante delivers himself of another stirring denunciation of those who have corrupted church office, and Virgil carries him back up the steep ledge toward the FOURTH BOLGIA.

There will be a quiz on the summaries of Canto 20 - Canto 25

Canto 20

Circle Eight: Bolgia Four

The Fortune Tellers and Diviners

Dante stands in the middle of the bridge over the FOURTH BOLGIA and looks down at the souls of the FORTUNE TELLERS and DIVINERS. Here are the souls of all those who attempted by forbidden arts to look into the future. Among these damned are AMPHIAREUS, TIRESIAS, ARUNS, MANTO, EURYPYLUS, MICHAEL SCOTT, GUIDO BONATTI, and ASDENTE.

Characteristically, the sin of these wretches is reversed upon them: their punishment is to have their heads turned backwards on their bodies and to be compelled to walk back-wards through all eternity, their eyes blinded with tears. Thus, those who sought to penetrate the future cannot even see in front of themselves; they attempted to move themselves forward in time, so must they go backwards through all eternity; and as the arts of sorcery are a distortion of God's law, so are their bodies distorted in Hell. No more need be said of them: Dante names them, and passes on to fill the Canto with a lengthy account of the founding of Virgil's native city of Mantua.

Canto 21

Circle Eight: Bolgia Five

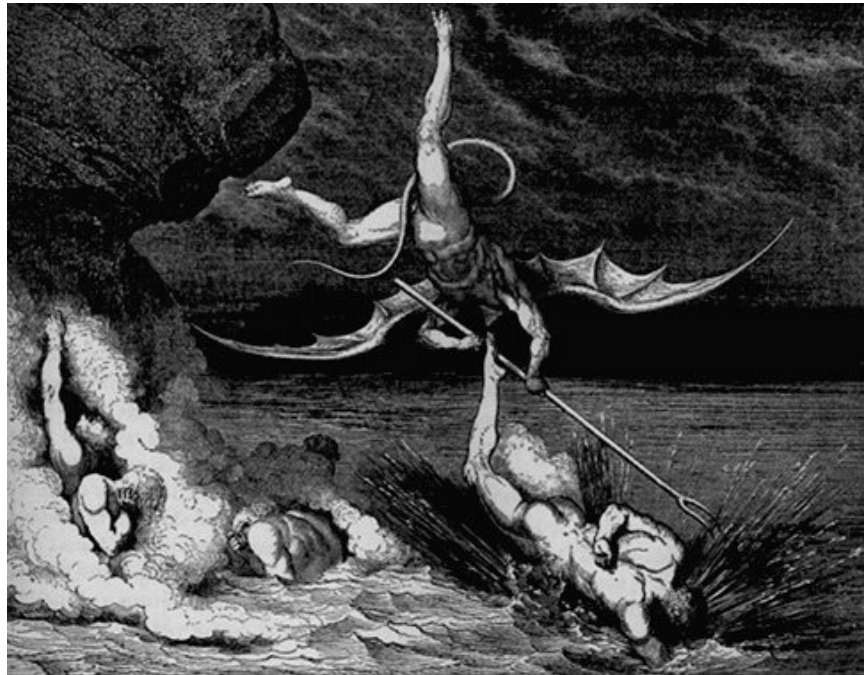
The Grafters

The Poets move on, talking as they go, and arrive at the FIFTH BOLGIA. Here the GRAFTERS are sunk in boiling pitch and guarded by DEMONS, who tear them to pieces with claws and grappling hooks if they catch them above the surface of the pitch.

The sticky pitch is symbolic of the sticky fingers of the Grafters. It serves also to hide them from sight, as their sinful dealings on earth were hidden from men's eyes. The demons, too, suggest symbolic possibilities, for they are armed with grappling hooks and are forever ready to rend and tear all they can get their hands on.

The Poets watch a demon arrive with a grafting SENATOR of LUCCA and fling him into the pitch where the demons setup on him.

To protect Dante from their wrath, Virgil hides him behind some jagged rocks and goes ahead alone to negotiate with the demons. They set upon him like a pack of mastiffs, but Virgil secures a safe-conduct from their leader, MALACODA. Thereupon Virgil calls Dante from hiding, and they are about to set off when they discover that the BRIDGE ACROSS THE SIXTH BOLGIA lies shattered. Malacoda tells them there's another further on and sends a squad of demons to escort them. Their adventures with the demons continue through the next Canto.



These two Cantos may conveniently be remembered as the GARGOYLE CANTOS. If the total Commedia is built like a cathedral (as so many critics have suggested), it is here certainly that Dante attaches his grotesqueries. At no other point in the Commedia does Dante give such free rein to his coarsest style.

Canto 22

Circle Eight: Bolgia Five

The Grafters

The Poets set off with their escorts of demons. Dante sees the GRAFTERS lying in the pitch like frogs in water with only their muzzles out. They disappear as soon as they sight the demons and only a ripple on the surface betrays their presence.

One of the Grafters, AN UNIDENTIFIED NAVARRESE, ducks too late and is seized by the demons who are about to claw him, but CURLY BEARD holds them back while Virgil questions him. The wretch speaks of his fellow sinners, FRIAR GOMITA and MICHEL ZANCHE, while the uncontrollable demons rake him from time to time with their hooks.

The Navarrese offers to lure some of his fellow sufferers into the hands of the demons, and when his plan is accepted he plunges into the pitch and escapes. HELLKEN and GRIZZLY fly after him, but too late. They start a brawl in mid-air and fall into the pitch themselves. Curlybeard immediately organizes a rescue party and the Poets, fearing the bad temper of the frustrated demons, take advantage of the confusion to slip away.

Canto 23

Circle Eight: Bolgia Six

The Hypocrites

The Poets are pursued by the Fiends and escape them by slid-ing down the sloping bank of the next pit. They are now in the SIXTH BOLGIA. Here the HYPOCRITES, weighted down by great leaden robes, walk eternally round and round a narrow track. The robes are brilliantly gilded on the outside and are shaped like a monk's habit, for the hypocrite's outwardap-pearance shines brightly and passes for holiness, but under that show lies the terrible weight of his deceit which the soul must bear through all eternity.



The Poets talk to TWO JOVIAL FRIARS and come upon CAIAPHAS, the chief sinner of that place. Caiaphas was the High Priest of the Jews who counseled the Pharisees to crucify Jesus in the name of public expedience. He is punished by being himself crucified to the floor of Hell by three great stakes, and in such a position that every passing sinner must

walk upon him. Thus he must suffer upon his own body the weight of all the world's hypocrisy, as Christ suffered upon His body the pain of all the world's sins.

The Jovial Friars tell Virgil how he may climb from the pit, and Virgil discovers that Malacoda lied to him about the bridges over the Sixth Bolgia.

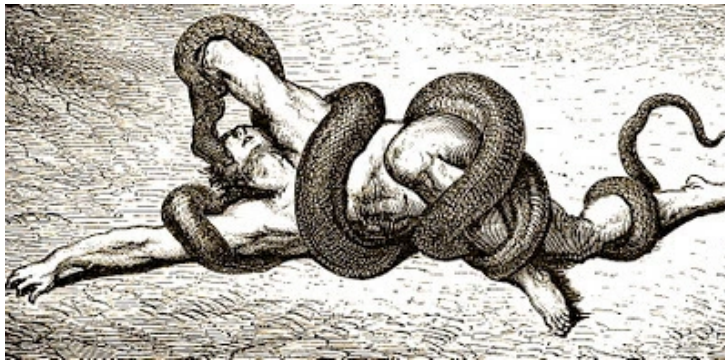
Canto 24

Circle Eight: Bolgia Seven

The Thieves

The Poets climb the right bank laboriously, cross the bridge of the SEVENTH BOLGIA and descend the far bank to observe the THIEVES. They find the pit full of monstrous reptiles who curl themselves about the sinners like living coils of rope, binding each sinner's hands behind his back, and knotting themselves through the loins. Other reptiles dart about the place, and the Poets see one of them fly through the air and pierce the jugular vein of one sinner who immediately bursts into flames until only ashes remain. From the ashes the sinner re-forms painfully.

These are Dante's first observations of the Thieves and will be carried further in the next Canto, but the first allegorical retribution is immediately apparent. Thievery is reptilian in its secrecy; therefore it is punished by reptiles. The hands of the thieves are the agents of their crimes; therefore they are bound forever. And as the thief destroys his fellow men by making their substance disappear, so is he painfully destroyed and made to disappear, not once but over and over again. The sinner who has risen from his own ashes reluctantly identifies himself as VANNI FUCCI. He tells his story, and to revenge himself for having been forced to reveal his identity he utters a dark prophecy against Dante.



Canto 25

Circle Eight: Bolgia Seven

The Thieves

Vanni's rage mounts to the point where he hurls an ultimate obscenity at God, and the serpents immediately swarm over him, driving him off in great pain. The Centaur, CACUS, his back covered with serpents and a fire-eating dragon, also gives chase to punish the wretch.

Dante then meets FIVE NOBLE THIEVES OF FLORENCE and sees the further retribution visited upon the sinners. Some of the thieves appear first in human form, others as reptiles. All but one of them suffer a painful transformation before Dante's eyes. AGNELLO appears in human form and is merged with CIANFA, who appears as a six-legged lizard. BUOSO appears as a man and changes form with FRANCESCO, who first appears as a tiny reptile. Only PUCCIO SCIANCATO remains unchanged, though we are made to understand that his turn will come.

For endless and painful transformation is the final state of the thieves. In life they took the substance of others, trans-forming it into their own. So in Hell their very bodies are constantly being taken from them, and they are left to steal back a human form from some other sinner. Thus they wave constantly between man and reptile, and no sinner knows what to call his own.

Canto 26

Circle Eight: Bolgia Eight

The Evil Counselors



Dante turns from the Thieves toward the EVIL COUNSELORS of the next Bolgia, and between the two he addresses a passionate lament to Florence prophesying the griefs that will befall her from these two sins. At the purported time of the Vision, it will be recalled, Dante was a Chief Magistrate of Florence and was forced into exile by men he had reason to consider both thieves and evil counselors. He seems prompted, in fact, to say much more on this score, but he restrains himself when he comes in sight of the sinners of the next Bolgia, for they are a moral symbolism, all men of gift who abused their genius, perverting it to wiles and stratagems. Seeing them in Hell he knows his must be another road: his way shall not be by deception. So the Poets move on and Dante observes the EIGHTH BOLGIA in detail. Here the EVIL COUNSELORS move about endlessly, hidden from view inside great flames. Their sin was to abuse the gifts of the Almighty, to steal HIS virtues for low purposes. And as they stole from God in their lives and worked by hidden ways, so are they stolen from sight and hidden in the great flames which are their own

guilty consciences. And as, in most instances at least, they sinned by glibness of tongue, so are the flames made into a fiery travesty of tongues. Among the others, the Poets see a great double headed flame, and discover that ULYSSES and DIOMEDE are punished together within it. Virgil addresses the flame, and through its wavering tongue Ulysses narrates an unforgettable tale of his last voyage and death.

Canto 27

Circle Eight: Bolgia Eight

The Evil Counselors

The double flame departs at a word from Virgil and behind it appears another which contains the soul of COUNT GUIDO DE MONTEFELTRO, a Lord of Romagna. He had overheard Virgil speaking Italian, and the entire flame in which his soul is wrapped quivers with his eagerness to hear recent news of his wartorn country. (As Farinata has already explained, the spirits of the damned have prophetic powers, but lose all track of events as they approach.)

Dante replies with a stately and tragic summary of how things stand in the cities of Romagna. When he has finished, he asks Guido for his story, and Guido recounts his life, and how Boniface VIII persuaded him to sin.

Canto 28

Circle Eight: Bolgia Nine

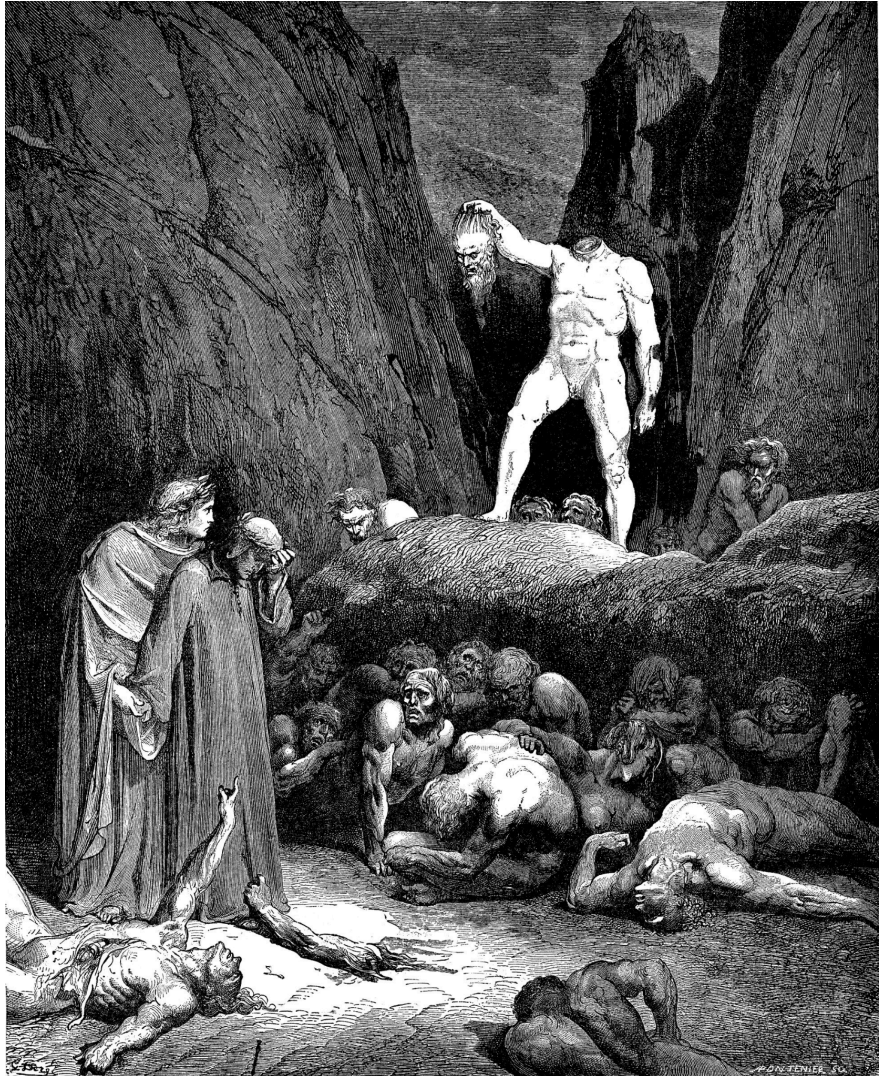
The Sowers of Discord

The Poets come to the edge of the NINTH BOLGIA and look down at a parade of hideously mutilated souls. These are the SOWERS OF DISCORD, and just as their sin was to rend asunder what God had meant to be united, so are they hacked and torn through all eternity by a great demon with a bloody sword. After each mutilation the souls are compelled to drag their broken bodies around the pit and to return to the demon, for in the course of the circuit their wounds knit in time to be inflicted anew. Thus is the law of

retribution observed, each sinner suffering according to his degree. Among them Dante distinguishes three classes with varying degrees of guilt within each class. First come

the SOWERS OF RELIGIOUS DISCORD. Mahomet is chief among them, and appears first, cleft from crotch to chin, with his internal organs dangling between his legs. His son-in-law, Ali, drags on ahead of him, cleft from topknot to chin. These reciprocal wounds symbolize Dante's judgment that, between them, these two sum up the total schism between Christianity and Mohammedanism. The revolting details of Mahomet's condition clearly imply Dante's opinion of that doctrine. Mahomet issues an ironic warning to another schismatic, FRA DOLCINO. Next come the SOWERS OF POLITICAL DISCORD, among them PIER DA MEDICINA, the Tribune CURIO, and MOSCA DEI LAMBERTI, each mutilated according to the nature of his sin. Last of all is BERTRAND DE BORN, SOWER OF DISCORD BETWEEN KINSMEN. He separated father

from son, and for that offense carries his head separated from his body, holding it with one hand by the hair, and swinging it as if it were a lantern to light his dark and endless way. The image of Bertrand raising his head at arm's length in order that it might speak more clearly to the Poets on the ridge is one of the most memorable in the Inferno. For some reason that cannot be ascertained, Dante makes these sinners quite eager to be remembered in the world, despite the fact that many who lie above them in Hell were unwilling to be recognized.



Canto 29

Circle Eight: Bolgia Ten The Falsifiers (Class I, Alchemists)

Dante lingers on the edge of the Ninth Bolgia expecting to see one of his kinsmen, GERI DEL BELLO, among the Sowers of Discord. Virgil, however, hurries him on, since time is short, and as they cross the bridge over the TENTH BOLGIA, Virgil explains that he had a glimpse of Geri among the crowd near the bridge and that he had been making threatening gestures at Dante. The Poets now look into the last bolgia of the Eighth Circle and see THE FALSIFIERS. They are punished by afflictions of every sense: by darkness, stench, thirst, filth, loathsome diseases, and a shrieking din. Some of them, moreover, run ravaging through the pit, tearing others to pieces. Just as in life they corrupted society by their falsifications, so in death these sinners are subjected to a sum of corruptions. In one sense they figure forth what society would be if all falsifiers succeeded—a place where the senses are an affliction (since falsification deceives the senses) rather than a guide, where even the body has no honesty, and wheresome lie prostrate while others run ravaging to prey upon them. Not all of these details are made clear until the next Canto, for Dante distinguishes four classes of Falsifiers, and in the present Canto we meet only the first class, THE ALCHEMISTS, the Falsifiers of Things. Of this class are GRIFFOLINO D'AREZZO and CAPOCCHIO, with both of whom Dante speaks.

Canto 30

Circle Eight: Bolgia Ten The Falsifiers

(The Remaining Three Classes: Evil Impersonators, Counterfeiters, False Witnesses)

Just as Capocchio finishes speaking, two ravenous spirit come racing through the pit; and one of them, sinking his tusks into Capocchio's neck, drags him away like prey. Capocchio's companion, Griffolino, identifies the two as GIANNI SCHICCHI and MYRRHA, who run ravaging through the pit through all eternity, snatching at other souls and rending them. These are the EVIL IMPERSONATORS, Falsifiers of Persons. In life they seized upon the appearance of others, and in death they must run with never a pause, seizing upon the infernal apparition of these souls, while they in turn are preyed upon by their own furies.

Next the Poets encounter MASTER ADAM, a sinner of the third class, a Falsifier of Money, i.e., a COUNTERFEITER. Like the alchemists, he is punished by a loathsome disease and he cannot move from where he lies, but his disease is compounded by other afflictions, including an eternity of unbearable thirst. Master Adam identifies two spirits lying beside him as POTIPHAR'S WIFE and SINON THE GREEK, sinners of the fourth class, THE FALSE WITNESS, i.e., Falsifiers of Words. Sinon, angered by Master Adam's identification of him, strikes him across the belly with the one arm he is able to move. Master Adam replies in kind, and Dante, fascinated by their continuing exchange of abuse, stands staring at them until Virgil turns on him in great anger, for "The wish to hear such baseness is degrading." Dante burns with shame, and Virgil immediately forgives him because of his great and genuine repentance.

Canto 31

Separating Circle 8 and Circle 9 is a large cliff. There are also six famous giants standing here, one of whom will, upon being asked by Virgil, lower them down to the final level of hell.

You will not read this canto or its summary. Instead, you will complete this [Giants Assignment](#).



Canto 32

Circle Nine: Cocytus

Compound Fraud

Round One: Cain

The Treacherous to Kin

Round Two: Antenora

The Treacherous to Country

At the bottom of the well Dante finds himself on a huge frozen lake. This is COCYTUS, the NINTH CIRCLE, the fourth and last great water of Hell, and here, fixed in the ice, each according to his guilt, are punished sinners guilty of TREACHERY AGAINST THOSE TO WHOM THEY WERE BOUND BY SPECIAL TIES. The ice is divided into four concentric rings marked only by the different positions of the damned within the ice.

This is Dante's symbolic equivalent of the final guilt. The Treacheries of these souls were denials of love (which is God) and of all human warmth. Only the remorseless dead center of the ice will serve to express their natures. As they denied God's love, so are they furthest removed from the light and warmth of His Sun. As they denied all human ties, so are they bound only by the unyielding ice.

The first round is CAINA, named for Cain. Here lie those who were treacherous against blood ties. They have their necks and heads out of the ice and are permitted to bow their heads—a double boon since it allows them some protection from the freezing gale and, further, allows their tears to fall without freezing their eyes shut. Here Dante sees ALESSANDRO and NAPOLEONE DEGLI ALBERTI, and he speaks to CAMICION, who identifies other sinners of this round.

The second round is ANTENORA, named for Antenor, the Trojan who was believed to have betrayed his city to the Greeks. Here lie those guilty of TREACHERY TO COUNTRY. They, too, have their heads above the ice, but they cannot bend their necks, which are gripped by the ice. Here Dante accidentally kicks the head of BOCCA DEGLI ABRATJ and then proceeds to treat him with a savagery he has shown to another soul in Hell. Bocca names some of his fellow traitors, and the Poets pass on to discover two heads frozen together in one hole. One of them is gnawing the nape of the other's neck.

If I had rhymes as harsh and horrible
as the hard fact of that final dismal hole
which bears the weight of all the steeps of Hell,

I might more fully press the sap and substance
from my conception; but since I must do 5
without them, I begin with some reluctance.

For it is no easy undertaking, I say,
to describe the bottom of the Universe;
nor is it for tongues that only babble child's play.

But may those Ladies of the Heavenly Spring 10
who helped Amphion wall Thebes, assist my verse,
that the word may be the mirror of the thing.

most miscreant rabble, you who keep
the stations of that place whose name is pain,
better had you been born as goats or sheep!

We stood now in the dark pit of the well,
far down the slope below the Giant's feet,
and while I still stared up at the great wall,

I heard a voice cry: "Watch which way you turn:
take care you do not trample on the heads 20
of the forworn and miserable brethren."

Whereat I turned and saw beneath my feet
and stretching out ahead, a lake so frozen
it seemed to be made of glass. So thick a sheet

never yet hid the Danube's winter course, 25
nor, far away beneath the frigid sky,
locked the Don up in its frozen source:

for were Tanbernick and the enormous peak
of Pietrapana to crash down on it,
not even the edges would so much as creak. 30

The way frogs sit to croak, their muzzles leaning
out of the water, at the time and season when
the peasant woman dreams of her day's gleaning

Just so the livid dead are sealed in place
up to the part at which they blushed for shame,
and they beat their teeth like storks. Each holds his face

bowed toward the ice, each of them testifies
to the cold with his chattering mouth, to his heart's grief
with tears that flood forever from his eyes.

When I had stared about me, I looked down 40
and at my feet I saw two clamped together
so tightly that the hair of their heads had grown

together. "Who are you," I said, "who lie
so tightly breast to breast?" They strained their necks,
and when they had raised their heads as if to reply,

the tears their eyes had managed to contain
up to that time gushed out, and the cold froze them
between the lids, sealing them shut again

tighter than any clamp grips wood to wood,
and mad with pain, they fell to butting heads 50
like billy-goats in a sudden savage mood.

And a wraith who lay to one side and below,
and who had lost both ears to frostbite, said,
his head still bowed: "Why do you watch us so?"

If you wish to know who they are who share one doom,
they owned the Bisenzio's valley with their father,
whose name was Albert. They sprang from one womb,

and you may search through all Caina's crew
without discovering in all this waste
a squab more fit for the aspic than these two;

not him whose breast and shadow a single blow
of the great lance of King Arthur pierced with light;
nor yet Focaccia; nor this one fastened so

into the ice that his head is all I see,
and whom, if you are Tuscan, you know well 65
his name on the earth was Sassol Mascheroni.

And I—to tell you all and so be through
was Camicion de' Pazzi. I wait for Carlin
beside whose guilt my sins will shine like virtue."

And leaving him, I saw a thousand faces 70
discolored so by cold, I shudder yet
and always will when I think of those frozen places.

As we approached the center of all weight,
where I went shivering in eternal shade,
whether it was my will, or chance, or fate, 75

I cannot say, but as I trailed my Guide
among those heads, my foot struck violently
against the face of one. Weeping, it cried:

"Why do you kick me? If you were not sent
to wreak a further vengeance for Montaperti,
why do you add this to my other torment?"

"Master," I said, "grant me a moment's pause
to rid myself of a doubt concerning this one;
then you may hurry me at your own pace."

The Master stopped at once, and through the volley
of foul abuse the wretch poured out, I said:
"Who are you who curse others so?" And he:

"And who are you who go through the dead larder
of Antenora kicking the cheeks of others
so hard, that were you alive, you could not kick harder?"

"I am alive," I said, "and if you seek fame,
it may be precious to you above all else
that my notes on this descent include your name."

"Exactly the opposite is my wish and hope,"
he answered. "Let me be; for it's little you know
of how to flatter on this icy slope."

I grabbed the hair of his dog's-ruff and I said:
"Either you tell me truly who you are,
or you won't have a hair left on your head."

And he: "Not though you snatch me bald. I swear
I will not tell my name nor show my face.
Not though you rip until my brain lies bare."

I had a good grip on his hair; already
I had yanked out more than one fistful of it,
while the wretch yelped, but kept his face turned from me;

when another said: "Bocca, what is it ails you?
What the Hell's wrong? Isn't it bad enough
to hear you bang your jaws? Must you bark too?"

"Now filthy traitor, say no more!" I cried,
"for to your shame, be sure I shall bear back 110
a true report of you." The wretch replied:

"Say anything you please but go away.
And if you do get back, don't overlook
that pretty one who had so much to say

just now. Here he laments the Frenchman's price.
I saw Buoso da Duera,' you can report,
'where the bad salad is kept crisp on ice.'

And if you're asked who else was wintering here,
Beccheria, whose throat was slit by Florence,
is there beside you. Gianni de' Soldanier 120

is further down, I think, with Ganelon,
and Tebaldello, who opened the gates of Faenza
and let Bologna steal in with the dawn."

Leaving him then, I saw two souls together
in a single hole, and so pinched in by the ice
that one head made a helmet for the other.

As a famished man chews crusts—so the one sinner
sank his teeth into the other's nape
at the base of the skull, gnawing his loathsome
dinner.

Tydeus in his final raging hour 130
gnawed Menalippus' head with no more fury
than this one gnawed at skull and dripping gore.

"You there," I said, "who show so odiously
your hatred for that other, tell me why
on this condition: that if in what you tell me 135

you seem to have a reasonable complaint
against him you devour with such foul relish,
I, knowing who you are, and his soul's taint,

may speak your cause to living memory,
God willing the power of speech be left to me."

Canto 33

Circle Nine: Cocytus

Compound Fraud

Round Two: Antenora The Treacherous to Country

Round Three: Ptolomea The Treacherous to Guests and Hosts

In reply to Dante's exhortation, the sinner who is gnawing his companion's head looks up, wipes his bloody mouth on his victim's hair, and tells his harrowing story. He is COUNT UGOLINO and the wretch he gnaws is ARCHBISHOP RUGGIERI. Both are in Antenora for treason. In life they had once plotted together. Then Ruggieri betrayed his fellow-plotter and caused his death, by starvation, along with his four "sons". In the most pathetic and dramatic passage of the Inferno, Ugolino details how their prison was sealed and how his "sons" dropped dead before him one by one, weeping for food. His terrible tale serves only to renew his grief and hatred, and he has hardly finished it before he begins to gnaw Ruggieri again with renewed fury. In the immutable Law of Hell, the killer-by- starvation becomes the food of his victim.

The Poets leave Ugolino and enter PTOLOMEA, so named for the Ptolemaeus of Maccabees, who murdered his father-in-law at a banquet. Here are punished those who were TREACHEROUS AGAINST THE TIES OF HOSPITALITY. They lie with only half their faces above the ice and their tears freeze in their eye sockets, sealing them with little crystal visors. Thus even the comfort of tears is denied them. Here Dante finds FRIAR ALBERIGO and BRANCA D'ORIA, and discovers the terrible power of Ptolomea: so great is its that the souls of the guilty fall to its torments even before they die, leaving their bodies still on earth, inhabited by Demons.



The sinner raised his mouth from his grim repast
and wiped it on the hair of the bloody head
whose nape he had all but eaten away. At last

he began to speak: "You ask me to renew
a grief so desperate that the very thought 5
of speaking of it tears my heart in two.

But if my words may be a seed that bears
the fruit of infamy for him I gnaw,
I shall weep, but tell my story through my tears.

Who you may be, and by what powers you reach 10
into this underworld, I cannot guess,
but you seem to me a Florentine by your speech.

I was Count Ugolino, I must explain;
this reverend grace is the Archbishop Ruggieri:
now I will tell you why I gnaw his brain. 15

That I, who trusted him, had to undergo
imprisonment and death through his treachery,
you will know already. What you cannot know

that is, the lingering inhumanity
of the death I suffered—you shall hear in full: 20
then judge for yourself if he has injured me.

A narrow window in that coop of stone
now called the Tower of Hunger for my sake
(within which others yet must pace alone)

had shown me several waning moons already 25
between its bars, when I slept the evil sleep
in which the veil of the future parted for me.

This beast appeared as master of a hunt
chasing the wolf and his whelps across the mountain
that hides Lucca from Pisa. Out in front 30

of the starved and shrewd and avid pack he had placed
Gualandi and Sismondi and Lanfranchi
to point his prey. The father and sons had raced

a brief course only when they failed of breath
and seemed to weaken; then I thought I saw 35
their flanks ripped open by the hounds' fierce teeth.

Before the dawn, the dream still in my head,
I woke and heard my sons, who were there with me,
cry from their troubled sleep, asking for bread.

You are cruelty itself if you can keep 40
your tears back at the thought of what foreboding
stirred in my heart; and if you do not weep,

at what are you used to weeping?—The hour when food
used to be brought, drew near. They were now awake,
and each was anxious from his dream's dark mood.

And from the base of that horrible tower I heard
the sound of hammers nailing up the gates:
I stared at my sons' faces without a word.



I did not weep: I had turned stone inside.
They wept. 'What ails you, Father, you look so strange,'
my little Anselm, youngest of them, cried.

But I did not speak a word nor shed a tear:
not all that day nor all that endless night,
until I saw another sun appear.

When a tiny ray leaked into that dark prison 55
and I saw staring back from their four faces
the terror and the wasting of my own,

I bit my hands in helpless grief. And they,
thinking I chewed myself for hunger, rose
suddenly together. I heard them say: 60

'Father, it would give us much less pain
if you ate us: it was you who put upon us
this sorry flesh; now strip it off again.'

I calmed myself to spare them. Ah! hard earth,
why did you not yawn open? All that day 65
and the next we sat in silence. On the fourth,

Gaddo, the eldest, fell before me and cried,
stretched at my feet upon that prison floor:
'Father, why don't you help me?' There he died.

And just as you see me, I saw them fall 70
one by one on the fifth day and the sixth.
Then, already blind, I began to crawl

from body to body shaking them frantically.
Two days I called their names, and they were dead.
Then fasting overcame my grief and me." 75

His eyes narrowed to slits when he was done,
and he seized the skull again between his teeth
grinding it as a mastiff grinds a bone.

Ah, Pisa! foulest blemish on the land
where "si" sounds sweet and clear, since those nearby you
are slow to blast the ground on which you stand,

may Caprara and Gorgona drift from place
and dam the flooding Arno at its mouth
until it drowns the last of your foul race!

For if to Ugolino falls the censure 85
for having betrayed your castles, you for your part
should not have put his sons to such a torture:

you modern Thebes! those tender lives you spilt
Brigata, Uguccione, and the others
I mentioned earlier—were too young for guilt! 90

We passed on further, where the frozen mine
entombs another crew in greater pain;
these wraiths are not bent over, but lie supine.

Their very weeping closes up their eyes;
and the grief that finds no outlet for its tears 95
turns inward to increase their agonies:

for the first tears that they shed knot instantly
in their eye-sockets, and as they freeze they form
a crystal visor above the cavity.

And despite the fact that standing in that place 100
I had become as numb as any callus,
and all sensation had faded from my face,

somehow I felt a wind begin to blow,
whereat I said: "Master, what stirs this wind?
Is not all heat extinguished here below?" 105

And the Master said to me: "Soon you will be
where your own eyes will see the source and cause
and give you their own answer to the mystery."

And one of those locked in that icy mall
cried out to us as we passed: "O souls so cruel 110
that you are sent to the last post of all,

relieve me for a little from the pain
of this hard veil; let my heart weep a while
before the weeping freeze my eyes again."

And I to him: "If you would have my service, 115
tell me your name; then if I do not help you
may I descend to the last rim of the ice."

"I am Friar Alberigo," he answered therefore,
"the same who called for the fruits from the bad garden.
Here I am given dates for figs full store." 120

"What! Are you dead already?" I said to him.
And he then: "How my body stands in the world
I do not know. So privileged is this rim

of Ptolomea, that often souls fall to it
before dark Atropos has cut their thread. 125
And that you may more willingly free my spirit

of this glaze of frozen tears that shrouds my face,
I will tell you this: when a soul betrays as I did,
it falls from flesh, and a demon takes its place,

ruling the body till its time is spent. 130
The ruined soul rains down into this cistern.
So, I believe, there is still evident

in the world above, all that is fair and mortal
of this black shade who winters here behind me.
If you have only recently crossed the portal 135

from that sweet world, you surely must have known
his body: Branca d'Oria is its name,
and many years have passed since he rained down."

"I think you are trying to take me in," I said,
"Ser Branca d'Oria is a living man; 140
he eats, he drinks, he fills his clothes and his bed."

"Michel Zanche had not yet reached the ditch
of the Black Talons," the frozen wraith replied,
"there where the sinners thicken in hot pitch,

when this one left his body to a devil, 145
as did his nephew and second in treachery,
and plumbed like lead through space to this dead level.

But now reach out your hand, and let me cry."
And I did not keep the promise I had made,
for to be rude to him was courtesy. 150

Ah, men of Genoa! souls of little worth,
corrupted from all custom of righteousness,
why have you not been driven from the earth?

For there beside the blackest soul of all
Romagna's evil plain, lies one of yours 155
bathing his filthy soul in the eternal

glacier of Cocytus for his foul crime,
while he seems yet alive in world and time!

Canto 34

Circle Nine: Cocytus Compound fraud

Round Four: Judecca The Treacherous to Their Masters

The Center Satan

"On march the banners of the King," Virgil begins as the Poets face the last depth. He is quoting a medieval hymn, and to it he adds the distortion and perversion of all that lies about him. "On march the banners of the King—of Hell." And there before them, in an infernal parody of Godhead, they see Satan in the distance, his great wings beating like a windmill. It is their beating that is the source of the icy wind of Cocytus, the exhalation of all evil.

All about him in the ice are strewn the sinners of the last round, JUDECCA, named for Judas Iscariot. These are TREACHEROUS TO THEIR MASTERS. They lie completely sealed in the ice, twisted and distorted into every conceivable posture. It is impossible to speak to them, and the Poets move on to observe So-tan. He is fixed into the ice at the center to which flow all the rivers of guilt; and as he beats his great wings as if to escape, their icy wind only freezes him more surely into the polluted ice. In a grotesque parody of the Trinity, he has three faces, each a different color, and in each mouth he clamps a sinner whom he rips eternally with his teeth. JUDAS ISCARIOT is in the central mouth: BRUTUS and CASSIUS in the mouths on either side.

Having seen all, the Poets now climb through the center, grappling hand over hand down the hairy flank of Satan himself—a last supremely symbolic action—and at last, when they have passed the center of all gravity, they emerge from Hell. A long climb from the earth's center to the Mount of Purgatory awaits them, and they push on without rest, ascending along the sides of the river Lethe, till they emerge once more to see the stars of Heaven, just before dawn on Easter Sunday.

