

The *Inferno* of Dante Alighieri

Translated By

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Inferno - Canto 1

Halfway along the path of this existence
I found that I was in a gloomy wood,
My right way being blotted by the distance.

How painful to depict it, if I could,
That savage wilderness, entangled, grim!
I tremble at remembering where I stood.

Though bitterer death, the difference is but slim.
But yet, to tell the advantage there I found,
What else I there discovered I will limn.

I scarce can say how I approached that ground,
So heavy was I weighted down with sleep,
What time I lost the way where rightly bound.

But coming now upon a little steep,
Which set an end to that unholy vale
That pierced my very heart with fear so deep,

I looked far up and saw its shoulders pale
And glowing, with that planet's earliest beam,
Which leadeth a man straight through every dale.

A little ebb'd, – when I beheld the gleam, –
The fear that filled the lake my heart contains
Through all that night of grievous waking dream.

And as a man who, winded with his pains
To struggle from the ocean to the shore,
Looks back to view the perilous watery plains:

Thus turned my mind, still fleeing, to explore
The dreadful forest I had struggled through,
Which never man had passed alive before.

Awhile I rested, ere I could pursue
My weary way along the waste ascent,
The fixed foot always lower of the two.

And on the rising ground up which I went,
Behold a leopard, light, exceeding spry,
Its skin with little spots all oversprent!

Instead of slinking back before mine eye,
It barred my path in so complete a way
That often on the backward way turned I.

The time was toward the breaking of the day;
The sun amid the selfsame stars arose
As when Divinest Love did first array

In His creation lovely things like those:
And so I had good cause for hopeful cheer
Toward that gay-spotted beast, seeing day unclose,

And seeing the pleasant season of the year.
But not so much that I was not afraid
When I beheld a lion now appear.

Direct for me it seemed as if he made,
With head on high and ravenous for food, –
For fear it seemed the very breeze was stayed, –

And then a female wolf, that seemed imbued
With all desires in her carcass lean;
Already many languished in her feud.

So heavy was my dread, when I had seen
Her skinny horror, I put by my hope
Of winning to the height, with her between.

Like one that makes of riches all his scope,
And when his losses come can only wail,
And finds his thoughts too much wherewith to cope:

Thus I, before the never-resting flail
Of that fell brute, did step by step retreat
To darkness where the silent sunbeams fail.

While back I dropped in tottering defeat,
Mine eyes perceived a figure, seeming faint
By reason of a silence long complete.

To him in this vast wild I made complaint:
“Pity!” I cried to him; “Be what thou may,
Or shade or man, give help in my constraint,”

He answered, “Man I was, not man today.
My parents both were of the Lombard blood,
And from the town of Mantua were they.

Sub Julio born, although not at the flood,
The Rome of good Augustus was my town,
Ere false and lying gods were crushed to mud.

A poet was I, and sang to great renown
Anchises’ son the just, who came from Troy
When haughty Ilium toppled burning down.

But thou, why back to troubles that destroy?
Why dost thou not ascend the pleasant mount,
The well-spring and occasion of all joy?”

“Art thou then Virgil’s self, art thou the fount
Whence rose a river of speech so sweetly broad?”
I answered, red of brow on shame’s account.

“O thou, of other poets the light and laud,
Long study, love immense my guarantee!
Thy book I clasp with fingers fairly awed.

My master thou, the author thou, for me.
The lovely style wherein I write, I learn,
And honour gain thereby, alone from thee.

Behold the beast because of which I turn.
Protect me from her, O illustrious Sage;
She makes my veins and pulses throb and burn.”

“Upon another route must thou engage,”
He answered, when he saw the tears I shed,
“To win beyond this wild and savage stage;

Because the beast thou weapest at in dread,
Allows no man to pass her at his will,
But so impedes him that she leaves him dead.

Her nature too is so malign and ill
That never has her eager greed been sated,
Her hunger grows when once she's had her fill.

With many another kind of beast she has mated,
And shall with more, until the Hound be freed,
Through grief procured by whom her death is fated.

On land or riches neither will he feed;
But wisdom, love, and virtue shall he crave.
And between felt and felt shall spring his breed.

That humbled Italy 'tis he shall save,
For which the maid Camilla and Turnus died,
Euryalus and Nisus found the grave.

He hunting her through every town shall ride,
Till he have put her down again in Hell,
Whence first 'twas envy brought her to abide.

I thinking on it see it will be well
Thou follow me. I'll be thy guide, assume
Thy conduct whither woes eternal dwell:

Thou'lt hear the shriek of desperation's doom,
Thou'lt see the ancient spirits wan with woe,
All mourning death prolonged beyond the tomb:

And then see those content amid the glow
And heat of flame; because they hope to wend,
When time shall be, where those redeemed go:

If thither thy desires make thee ascend,
A soul shall lead thee worthier far than I;
With her I'll leave thee, when my care shall end.

For the Emperor who reigneth in the sky
Permitteth none to approach His town through me,
Old rebel to His law. From there on high

He governs all the worlds by His decree:
His city, His exalted throne are there.
How happy those elected there must be!"

And I to him: “O Poet, be this thy care, –
For God’s dear sake whom thou didst not admit;
That I may escape this danger and despair, –

To lead me where thou say’st, away from it,
That I may come to see Saint Peter’s door,
And those that in the depth of dolour sit.”

I followed, as he moved along before.

Inferno – Canto 2

The day drew down; an air of darker tone
Released the creatures earth's broad bosom bore,
From every task: while I all sole alone

Was girding me to undertake a war,
A journey through such scenes of anguish laid
As memory unerring shall restore.

O Muses, lofty genius, give me aid:
My memory, who wast hoarding all I spied,
'Tis here thy noble worth can be displayed.

I then began: "O Poet, thou my guide,
See if I have the valour to exert
In such a lofty quest, ere it be tried.

Thou say'st the father of Sylvius, unhurt,
In flesh corruptible did penetrate
The immortal world, with senses all alert.

And if Sin's Foe was courteous to abate
His rules for him, – the high result in view
That was to spring from him, the men so great,

Make this seem just to the intellectual few:
Since he was father by the Emyrean scheme
Of bounteous Rome's imperial retinue.

Which town and realm were ordered, – thou mayst deem
It true, – to be a holy place, the chair
Of those succeeding Peter the supreme.

His journey here, whose glory thou dost air,
Disclosed things that brought victory in the fray
To him, and the great mantle pontiffs wear.

The Chosen Vessel went, to bring away
A firm assurance of that faith we see
As first foundation for salvation's way.

But why should I go there? By whose decree?
I am not Aeneas. I am not Saint Paul.
That I am unworthy I and all agree.

If I submit to go where thou dost call,
I fear the going foolish, therefore ill.
Thou'rt wise, and while I reason knowest all."

And like a man who will not what he will,
And changes his intent with each new thought,
Until his first design is rendered nil:

'Twas thus on that dark slope my mind was wrought,
Because in weighing an emprise so bold,
I loosened what I had so quickly caught.

"If well I understand the words thou hast told,"
The shade of that great-hearted one began;
"'Tis cowardice that turns thy spirit cold:

Which working upon many, sets a ban
Deterring them from honourable emprise:
Like startled beasts at things they falsely scan.

To rid thee of a fear in such disguise,
I'll tell thee why I came and what I heard
When first I took compassion on thy sighs.

With those who are in suspense I sat unstirred.
A blessed, beauteous lady called my name,
I begged her tell me her commanding word.

More bright than stars, her eyes were full of flame,
And she began in sweet and gentle way,
With voice angelic as the words that came:

'O courteous soul from Mantua, today
Thy fame endures wherever lands extend,
And will endure as long a time as they.

My friend, who is, alas, not fortune's friend,
Is so bestead within the wilderness
That he retreats before his journey's end.

By now, I fear, he is in such distress
That I have risen in his behalf too late,
On what I heard in Heaven. None the less,

Repair to him, and with thy words ornate,
And what for his escape be requisite,
Aid him, that I be not disconsolate.

I am Beatrice, who thus desire it.
My longing draws me homeward to my place.
Love led me thence and gave me language fit.

When I am back before my Master's face,
My mouth will often tell thy praise to him.'
She ceased to speak; I started: 'Lady of grace,

Through whom alone our humankind makes dim
The whole content that Heaven has in hand
Which has the circles of the smallest rim,

I am so pleased over thy command,
I would 'twere done; it irks me to abstain:
Disclose no more thy wish. I understand.

But tell me why thou needest not refrain
From coming to this centre, down so far
From that wide space thou burnest to regain.'

'Since thou wouldst see within how all things are,
I'll briefly tell,' she answered my request,
The cause my coming felt no fear as bar.

Such things should house a fear within our breast
As have the power to do another harm:
There is no cause for fear in all the rest.

God made me, His the thanks, with such a charm
Your misery cannot touch me passing by,
Yon flaming fire gives me no alarm.

There is a gentle Lady in the sky,
So grieved at this restriction thou'lt enlarge,
That a hard judgment is revoked, on high.

She spoke unto Saint Lucy in her charge,
And said: "Thy faithful servant is in need
Of thee; I lay his help to thy discharge."

Saint Lucy, hating every cruel deed,
Rose straightway from her place and came to mine,
Who sat with Rachel sprung of ancient seed,

Saying: "Beatrice, in whom God's praises shine,
Why aidest thou not him who loved thee so
He left the vulgar rabble, to be thine?"

Dost thou not hear him weep his piteous woe?
Dost thou not see how he is fighting death
On floods, where seas could boast no fiercer flow?"

No man was so intent that e'er drew breath,
To get his good and miss his evil end,
As I on having heard the thing she saith.

Swift from my holy seat did I descend:
My confidence was in thy noble speech,
Which honours thee and every listening friend.'

When she had ended all she had to teach,
She turned her eyes that she might hasten me,
I saw a tear-drop glistening in each:

And as she wished, I came to succour thee;
I saved thee from the beast that guards the track
Which mounts the lovely hill most rapidly.

What then is wrong? Why, why dost thou hold back?
Why invite fear in of thine own accord?
Why should thy boldness and thy vigour lack,

When three such lovely ladies of the Lord
From Heaven's high court keep thee in careful sight,
And so much promised good my words afford?"

As little flowers, which a frosty night
Has bent and closed, when whitened by the sun,
Stand open on their stems and straight and bright:

'Twas thus I warmed my courage late undone,
And through my heart such valiant spirit played
That I began like an undaunted one:

“How tender she who hastens to mine aid;
How gracious thou, who hesitating not,
Hast heard her truthful sentence and obeyed!

Thy words have made mine eager heart so hot
With firm desire to set upon our road,
My purpose has won back its earlier lot.

Lead on; our wills have but a single mode:
Thou art my lord, my master, and my mentor.”
I spoke; and following after where he strode,

Upon the rough and arduous path I enter.

Inferno – Canto 3

Through me the way within the grieving city,
Through me the way among eternal woe,
Through me the way to lost folk beyond pity.

My maker's perfect justice had it so:
The power divine made me, and wisdom sheer,
And the first love the world could ever know.

Before me naught created did appear,
Except eternal things, whereof am I.
Abandon all hope, ye that enter here.

These words of sombre hue I saw on high,
Written above a gateway overhead;
“Their sense seems threatening, Master, to my eye.”

And like one quick to understand, he said:
“Here must thou leave all shuddering behind;
All cowardice must here become as dead.

We've reached the place I told thee we should find,
Where thou shalt see the miserable lost folk, –
Those that have lost the treasure of the mind.”

He laid his hand on mine, the while he spoke,
And comforting me with a cheerful face,
Set me within the mysteries. Here there broke

Sighs, crying, and loud moan throughout the place,
Resounding thick upon the starless air;
Whereat I fell to weeping for a space.

Strange tongues, and speeches horrid in despair,
And words of grief, and accents wild with ire,
Strong voices, weak, and noise of hands, were there,

And made a tumult, which doth always gyre
Within that timeless air as dark as dirt,
Like sand a whirlwind blows into a spire.

And I, who had my head with horror girt,
Said, "Master, what are all the sounds I hear?
Who is this conquered people sorrows hurt?"

And he to me: "This is the payment drear
Of such sad souls as living could not boast
That infamy or praise once hovered near.

They mingle with the wicked angel host
Who did not fight to further or to stem
God's might, but only thought of self the most.

From Heaven hunted, lest they soil its hem,
They were unwelcome too in deepest Hell,
For fear the guilty glory over them."

And I: "O Master, what such heavy spell
Is laid on them that they lament so loud?"
He answered me: "Few words suffice to tell.

They cannot hope for death to bring a shroud;
And this their blind existence is so low
That envy makes each other kind seem proud.

The world will not allow their fame to blow:
Compassion, justice, hold them in disdain.
Let's speak no more of them. Look once; we go."

And as I gazed, a banner whirled amain
Went rushing by so marvellously fast,
Though it might stop, meseemed it would not deign.

And drawn along behind, a crowd ran past
So numerous, I never could suspect
That death's undoing these had been so vast.

After some few that I could recollect,
I saw and knew his phantom form, who chose
The great renouncement, being too abject.

And then I felt assured that here in those,
I looked upon the caitiff swarming hive
Displeasing both to God and to His foes.

These wretched ones, who never were alive,
Were bare, and were kept roused and driven ahead
By wasps and hornets busy still to drive.

Their faces were bestreaked with blood they bled,
Which, dripping mixed with tear-drops to their feet,
Was caught by loathsome worms, thus sweetly fed.

And then I turned my eyes away to greet
A crowd upon a mighty river's bank,
And therefore said: "O Master, tell, if meet,

Who are they; and what custom is to thank
That they appear so eager to be gone,
As I perceive, although the light is lank."

And he to me: "These matters shalt thou con
When we have brought our steady steps to rest
Upon the doleful shore of Acheron."

On hearing this, with shameful eyes depressed
For fear my speaking to him was a cark,
Until the stream my voice was in my breast.

And then behold approaching in a bark
An ancient man, whose aged hair was white,
Who cried: "Woe to you, souls depraved and dark.

Hope never to have Heaven in your sight.
I come to take you to the further brink,
To heat and freezing cold and endless night.

And thou there, still alive, I bid thee slink
And hurry thee away from those that died."
But when he was aware I did not shrink,

He said: "Through ways by other ferries plied
Thou'lt come unto a shore; but here thou'st naught.
Upon a lighter vessel thou shalt ride."

My Leader: "Charon, be not thus upwrought.
It so is willed where never a perhaps
Encumbers what is willed. Take no more thought."

Then quiet came upon his woolly chaps,
The pilot of the livid marsh's reach,
Around whose eyes were wheels of flaming flaps.

The naked, weary souls along the beach
Changed colour, gnashed their teeth, grinned without mirth,
The instant they had heard his cruel speech.

They cursed their God, and those that gave them birth,
The human race, the time, the place, the rod
Of their begetting, and their seeing earth:

Then weeping loudly all, the while they trod,
Came crowding down upon the accursed shoals,
Which wait all men that have no fear of God.

The demon Charon, with his eyes of coals,
Stood waving them, until he'd gathered all,
And beat the loiterers with his rowing poles.

As in the Autumn leaves drop off and fall
One at a time, till boughs return their clothes
Entirely to the earth: just so, at call

Do Adam's wicked seed, for each one throws
Himself down from the margin; one by one.
Like birds unto a signal, so drop those.

They go away o'er water dark and dun:
And ere they are ashore on t'other strand,
A fresh herd is collected here. "My son,"

The courteous Master said; "the entire band
Of all of those that perish in God's wrath
Assemble hither, out of every land,

Desiring to traverse the watery path;
For heavenly justice pricking each, its spur
Turns dread he had to eagerness he hath.

No virtuous soul may ship with them that err.
Thou heardest Charon bitterly complain,
And now thou knowest what his reasons were."

When he had ended thus, the gloomy plain
So fiercely shook, that horror in my mind
Bathes me in sweat to think of it again.

The tearful earth shot out a blast of wind,
Which flashed a sudden lightning's rosy glare.
I left my conquered senses all behind,

And fell like one entrapped in slumber's snare.

Inferno – Canto 4

Broken was heavy slumber in my head
By a violent thunder-clap, which made me rise
Like one by force awakened in his bed.

I glanced about me with my rested eyes;
And standing up I fixed my gaze, to know
What place it was, if I might well surmise.

I stood in truth upon the banks that go
Around the dolorous valley of the pit
That holds the thunderings of endless woe.

‘Twas dark and deep and fog encompassed it,
And when I tried to peer within, did swallow
My glances; I could not discern a whit.

“Let us descend into the sightless hollow,”
Began the Poet, who was deathly pale;
“I will go on ahead, and thou shalt follow.”

And I, on having seen his colour fail,
Said: “How shall I go, if thou feelest fright,
My wonted Comforter when fears assail?”

And he to me: “It is the anguished plight
Of those below that paints my face; and this
Is pity, which seemed fear within thy sight.

A long road bids us not to be remiss.”
He moved along, and made me enter where
The topmost Circle girdles the abyss.

And here, so far as listening was aware,
No plaint but sighs and other sighs again
Made tremulous the everlasting air.

Those punished without pain came into ken,
Divided into many crowds and great
Of infants and of women and of men.

My kindly Guide: "Thou begg'st me not to state
What souls these are thou see'st? I would indeed
Thou knew before thou goest. I'll tell thee straight.

They did not sin; but every virtuous deed
Was not enough, no Baptism being received,
A portion of the Faith that forms thy creed.

And if ere Christianity conceived,
They did not give to God the worship due.
Myself am one of those that ne'er believed.

For such defects, being else a sinless crew,
We're lost, but with no further punishment
Than hopeless living longing ever new."

Woe seized my heart, when his last word was spent,
Because I knew of people of much worth
Suspended in this Limbo where we went.

"Tell me, my Lord, my Master on the earth,"
I then began, desiring to be sure
In that belief which killeth lies at birth;

"Was any ever freed, through being pure,
Or through another's merit, and then blessed?"
And he, who understood my words obscure,

Replied: "When I was still a newer guest,
There came a puissant power; not long He stayed,
His head with a triumphal sign was dressed.

He carried hence our earliest parent's shade,
And those of Abel, Noah, and him whence springs
The law, that Moses who so well obeyed:

Of Abraham patriarch, David first of kings,
Of Israel with his father and his prole,
And Rachel, for whose love he did such things.

And many more withal, and saved the whole.
And thou shouldst know, that prior to these folk
Salvation never came to human soul."

We did not cease to walk because he spoke,
And from the forest we were not yet clear,
The forest formed of souls as thick as smoke.

We still were on a pathway fairly near
To where I slept, when I beheld a flame
That quelled the darkness of a hemisphere.

We stood a little far from whence it came,
But not too far for me to see in part
That 'twas a spot for folk of honoured fame.

“O Honour both to science and to art,
What men are these that honourably hold
A place so different and so set apart?”

And he to me: “The tales of honour told
About them, where thy daily life is led,
Moved Heaven to grace them with this chosen fold.”

Incontinent I heard a voice that said:
“Let honour be the highest poet’s pay!
His shade returns to us, which lately fled.”

And when the voice had ceased and died away,
Four mighty souls approaching did I see,
Whose mien was neither sorrowful nor gay.

My worthy Guide began to say to me:
“Mark him within whose hand a sword is fast,
Who like a leader heads the other three.

‘Tis Homer, sovereign poet, wondrous vast.
That’s Horace, moralist, who follows there.
The third is Ovid, Lucan is the last.

Because each one of them and I all share
The title that thou heardst the voice to call,
They do me honour; and the deed is fair.”

And so I saw the lovely group and small
Around that lord of song in loftiest style,
Which like an eagle soars above them all.

When they had talked together for a while
They gave me signs of greeting, and 'twas plain
That it was this which made my Master smile.

And even greater honour did they deign:
They made me of their flock, another hawk,
The sixth, amid such men of mighty brain.

Unto the light we went, and on our walk
We spoke of things more fitting not to quote,
Whereof it was most lovely then to talk.

We reached a noble castle; I could note
The seven circling walls wherewith 'twas sealed,
The pretty little stream that formed a moat.

We crossed as on dry land that does not yield:
Going in where seven gates an entrance gave,
We six now reached a fresh and verdant field.

We found there folk whose eyes were slow and grave,
Their faces of authoritative pride,
Who spoke but little and with voices suave.

We drew us to a distance on one side,
A place high, open, luminous, serene,
Whence everybody there could be espied.

There right before me on the enamelled green
Were shown me the great spirits, and I bear
Myself more proudly, thinking whom I have seen.

I saw Electra well-companioned there,
With Hector and Aeneas, whom I knew,
And Caesar armed and with his falcon stare;

Camilla and Penthesilea too;
On the other side, Latinus king by race,
And close to whom his own Lavinia drew;

Saw Brutus who drove Tarquin in disgrace;
Cornelia, Julia, Marcia, and Lucrece;
And Saladin who kept a separate place;

And looking higher up, saw him of Greece, –
The master of all men that think and know, –
Sit, 'mid his great philosophers, in peace.

To him their looks, their admiration flow:
I saw that Plato and Socrates, by right,
Stood nearer him than others dare to go:

Democritus, whose world by chance saw light,
Anaxagoras, Thales, Diogenes,
Empedocles, and Zeno, Heraclite:

Quality-classer, Dioscorides;
Saw Orpheus, Tully, Linus, worthy three,
And Seneca who wrote moralities;

Geometrician Euclid, Ptolemy,
Hippocrates, and Galen, Avicenn',
Averrhoes who made the commentary.

I cannot speak at length of all the men,
Because my lengthy subject cries halloo,
And facts are often greater than my pen.

The company of six grows less by two:
My guide in wisdom takes a different turn,
From calm to troubled air our path runs through;

I came to where no light did ever burn.

Inferno – Canto 5

Thus downward from the primal Hoop of Hell
I came into the second, less around,
But filled so full of pain, it makes them yell.

There Minos, grinning horribly, is found:
He looks into offences on the sill,
And judging, sends according as he is bound.

I mean, as soon as any soul born ill
Stands facing him and tells its wickedness,
Then he, expert in sins, has utter skill

To see how far through Hell that soul should press;
And shows, by wrapping round himself his tail,
The number of the Ring of its duress.

The crowd that stand before him never fail:
They go in turn for judgment of their sin,
They speak, they hear, and then are hurled to jail.

“O thou that comest to this dolorous inn,”
Said Minos when he saw me, and he doled
No judgments for the nonce, “take heed what gin

Thou enter, and by whom thou choose to hold.
The gate is wide, but thou mayst well be caught!”
My Leader said: “Why dost thou also scold?

Do not impede his path, by fate ‘tis wrought.
It is so willed where never a perhaps
Encumbers what is willed. Take no more thought.”

And now the notes of grief begin to lapse
Into mine ears; I came where moans combined
Now struck me like the noise of thunder-claps.

It was a place where light is dumb and blind,
Which bellows like the sea’s tempestuous whirl
When waves are swept by battling streams of wind.

Hell's hurricanes that never cease to twirl,
Drive on the spirits in their furious sweep,
And dash all those together whom they hurl.

When these arrive before the ruined steep,
What shrieking, what complaining, and lament!
Some curse the Power Divine who makes them weep.

I learned that here I saw the punishment
Of sinners damned for lust of carnal things,
Whose appetites had kept their reason bent.

Like crowds of starlings wafted on their wings,
When Winter drives the far-stretched flocks again,
These evil ones the incessant whirlwind flings;

Here, there, above, below, it drives amain.
No hope brings comfort ever: not alone
No hope of rest, but none of lesser pain.

And as the cranes fly uttering their moan,
And form an airy line so long and straight:
Thus I beheld some shadows, giving groan,

Borne toward us on this bitter breeze of fate.
I therefore said: "O Master, tell me whose
The souls these darksome airs thus castigate."

"The first of those of whom thou askest news,
Was once an empress," he thereon replied,
"O'er realms with many languages to use.

In sensual vice was she so deeply dyed,
That law allowed for licence in her day,
To kill the blame whereby she was decried;

And that Semiramis, the book doth say,
Was Ninus' wife and his successor thus,
And held the lands now 'neath the Soldan's sway.

She next, self-slain through being amorous,
Forgot Sichaeus' ashes, broke her vow.
There's Cleopatra, too, lascivious.

See Helen, for whose love bad years enow
Dragged out: behold the great Achilles there,
Who fought at last for love. See Paris now,

And Tristram.” And above a thousand were
The shadows shown and named as in the flesh,
Whose lives were lost for love or love’s despair.

When I had heard my Teacher name afresh
So many an ancient lady, ancient knight,
Bewildering pity caught me in her mesh.

I then began: “O Poet, if I might,
I’d fain address the pair who now appear
Together on the breeze, and seem so light.”

And he to me: “When they are closer here
To us, by that dear love, ask their consent,
Which sweeps them on; and they’ll approach more near.”

On seeing that the wind toward us had bent,
I raised my voice: “O agitated pair,
Come speak with us, if Nobody prevent!”

Like doves that, when desire calls, repair
On open wings and still to their sweet nest,
Conveyed by their volition through the air:

From that array where Dido is they pressed,
Advancing toward us on the air malign,
So strong my call affectionately stressed.

“O living creature, gracious and benign,
Who com’st to visit, through this air that lowers,
Us who have made the world incarnadine:

If friendly were the king of Heaven’s powers,
That He would give thee peace, we two would pray,
Because thou pitiest this vile fate of ours.

The things it pleases thee to hear and say
We’ll hear and say to thee, in this surcease,
For now the wind, as sometimes, dies away.

The city I was born in holds the lease
Upon the strand to which the Po descends,
To find, with all its tributaries, peace.

Love, with a gentle heart so quickly friends,
Seized him, for my fair body, which was ta'en
From me, and in a way that still offends.

Love will have lovers loved, and made me fain,
So strongly of the charm he had, that ne'er,
Thou see'st, has it abandoned me again.

Love led us to a death we both should share.
Caina waits below for him that slew."
These words were carried to us from the pair.

When I had heard this deeply injured two,
I hung my head, and still I held it low
Until the Poet asked: "What thought dost brew?"

When I responded I began: "Ah, woe!
How many lovely thoughts, what passion deep,
Led these along the grievous way they go!"

I turned again to them, my words did leap:
"Francesca, this thy anguish fills mine eyes
With sorrowful and pitying tears to weep.

But tell me: at the time of sweetest sighs,
What way did Love prepare that suddenly
Your secret passion put away disguise?"

And she: "No greater grief in misery
Than calling back a happier time compels:
Thy teacher knoweth this for verity.

But since thou wouldst discern the hidden wells
From which our love sprang suddenly to light,
I will proceed like one that weeps and tells.

Upon a day we read for our delight
Of Launcelot sore wounded by Love's lance;
Alone were we, not feeling any fright.

More times than one we caught each other's glance,
From what we read, and coloured for a while,
But one thing was the conquering circumstance.

For when we read of that desired smile
By such a lover kissed, he, none e'er took
Or e'er shall take from me by force or guile,

Kissed me upon my mouth, and trembling shook.
Our Gallehaut was the tome and he that wrote.
That day we read no further in the book."

While thus one spirit spake, the other's throat
Was shaken so with sobs, at pity's call
I grew as faint as if 'twere death that smote;

And fell upon the ground as corpses fall.

Inferno – Canto 6

My mind returning, which had folded up
Through pity for that couple's circumstance,
And drunk confusion out of sorrow's cup,

New torments, new tormented sees advance,
On looking round, wherever I may strain
Mine eyes, wherever turn, wherever glance.

I'm now in the Third Circle, that of rain
Eternal, cursed, heavy, cold, and slow,
Always alike in never-ending bane.

Enormous hailstones, inky water, snow,
Keep pouring through the murky atmosphere,
And make the ground beneath a stinking dough.

Here Cerberus, a cruel beast and queer,
Barks like a dog from his three pairs of jaws
At all who suffer foul immersion here.

His greasy beard is black, his eyes red haws,
His belly broad, he scratches with his nails,
He flays and splits the spirits with his paws.

The water makes them yelp with doglike wails;
One side shall shield the other as they squirm;
The impious wretches toss: but naught avails.

When Cerberus perceived us, the great worm,
He showed the threefold fangs no pity calms;
And not a member of him rested firm.

My Leader leant, and with his outstretched palms
Took up the earth in fistfuls for our need,
And threw down eager gullets this his alms.

Like any dog, whose snarling, growling greed
Is quieted when once he bites his mess,
And then he seems to fight to bolt his feed:

So was it with those jaws of loathsomeness
Of demon Cerberus, whose din so stuns
The souls, they would be deaf, to suffer less.

We passed along on shades which heavy guns
Of rain had flattened down, and placed our feet
Upon those solid-looking empty Ones.

They lay upon the ground where they were beat,
Except that one rose sitting and so stayed,
When he beheld us passing by his seat.

“O thou, thus taken through this Hell decayed,”
He said; “now recognize me, if thou can:
For thou, before I was unmade, wast made.”

And I: “Perchance the anguish of the span
Thou spendest here, has wiped thee from my mind;
I do not now remember such a man.

But tell me who thou be that art confined
In such a doleful place, so foul a hive,
That though worse be, there’s none of nastier kind.”

And he: “Thy town, where envy so doth thrive
That it already overflows the bag,
Held me when I was in clear air, alive.

You burghers named me Ciacco for a tag.
Through damning sins of greed have I incurred
The fate forever in this rain to drag.

I am not one sad soul alone, this herd
Of other souls have all an equal fate
For equal sin.” He said no further word.

I answered: “Ciacco, thy afflicted state
Makes we bewep thy payment of thy fault.
But tell me, if thou can, what ends await

Our city’s burghers; where her ruin shall halt.
Are any righteous there? And please explain
The reasons for the discords that assault.”

And he to me: "To end a lengthy strain,
Shall blood be shed; the party of the grove
Shall drive the others out with fierce disdain.

But it shall come to pass that they who drove,
Within three suns shall fall, and the others rise,
Through one who now is tacking. They that throve

Shall then for many moons hold high their eyes,
Oppressing the others so beyond the mark
That they will weep, as men whom all despise.

Two righteous men are there, but none will hark.
Pride, envy, avariciousness, all reach
To fire men's breasts as with a triple spark."

He ended here his lamentable speech.
And I to him: "Still further heed my prayer
For gift of words: more would I have thee teach.

Farinata and Tegghiaio, worthy pair,
And Rusticucci, Arrigo, Mosca, all
The others bent on good, inform me where

They are, and make me know them, and forestall
My stinging great desire, to be sure
If Heaven gives them honey or Hell gall."

And he: "They're with the shades the most impure,
Sunk deep by other crime they suffer for:
Thou'lt see them yet, if thy descent endure.

When thou art home in that sweet world of yore,
I beg thee bring me back to people's mind.
I'll speak no further, answer nothing more."

He turned his eyes askance, looked once; declined
His chin upon his breast and fell head first
To lie submerged among the other blind.

My Leader said to me: "He'll stay immersed
Until the angelic trumpet sounds to doom.
And when the mighty Foe has hither burst,

Each one will find again his dreary tomb;
With proper flesh and former figure donned,
Will hear what to eternity shall boom.”

We thus were wading through the filthy pond
Of spirits and of rain, with footsteps slack,
Discoursing somewhat of the life beyond.

I therefore asked: “O Master, will the rack
Of torment grow, when judgment is engrossed,
Or lessen, or pursue an even track?”

And he to me: “Consider what thou knowst
Of science, how perfection in a thing
Can feel both joy and anguish to the most.

Although this cursed herd here suffering
Can never come to true perfection’s ends,
They’ll near it more, that side the reckoning.”

Still following the pathway as it bends,
We talked a great deal longer than I show;
And when we reached the point where it descends,

We came there upon Plutus, the arch-foe.

Inferno – Canto 7

“Pape Satan, Pape Satan, alepp’!”
Began the voice of Plutus, cackling, hoarse.
And he who comforted my every step,

So wise and noble, full of learning’s force,
Said: “Do not lag for fear. No might of his
Shall bar thy going down our rocky course.”

And then he turned him toward that swollen phiz,
And said: “Be silent, cursed wolf. No more!
Consume thyself with rage. Because it is

With reason we are visiting Hell’s core:
‘Tis willed above, whence that proud rebel kind
Were hurled headlong by Michael waging war.”

As sails that have been bellied by the wind,
Drop tangled, at the snapping of the mast:
So dropped the cruel beast we left behind.

Thus to the Fourth Concavity we passed,
Still deeper in the dark and doleful bin
Where all creation’s wickedness is cast.

Ah me, God’s justice, who has crowded in
Such novel means to torture and to rack?
And why are we so ruined by our sin?

As waves above Charybdis, hurtled back,
Are smashed against their followers without rest:
So here, the folk must dance around their track.

I saw them here, and far more closely pressed,
From this side and from that, with screams, essay
To roll great weights, by shoving with the breast.

Then, bumping into one another, they
Turned each around, to roll their burdens thence,
With shrieks of: “Why hold on?” – “Why throw away?”

Each pushed around the dark circumference,
From our point to the opposite, his weight,
And always shrieked his verses of offence;

Remeasured then, as fearing to be late,
His semicircle, to a fresh collision:
And, feeling, as it were, compassionate,

I said: "My Master, aid me in decision
Of who these people are, if clerics those
Upon the left, all tonsured to my vision."

And he to me: "Before their lives did close,
The mental squint of all of them was such,
They never spent in measure: well this shows

In what their voices bark, whene'er they touch
The places where they meet the opposing batch, –
Those whom contrasting vices held in clutch.

All those were priests who have no hairy thatch
Upon their heads; ay, cardinal and pope:
The avarice of such knows not its match."

And I: "O Master, maybe I might hope
To see familiar faces meet mine eyes,
In whom such dirty sins once found their scope."

And he to me: "Thou form'st a vain emprise;
Mad lives in dark ingratitude's foul rut
Now makes them quite too dark to recognize,

Eternity shall watch them meet and butt;
Their bodies shall arise whence they've reposed,
With either fingers clenched or hair close cut.

Ill-giving and ill-getting, – these have closed
The sky to them, and shoved them in this tiff;
Behold! It needs no words, cannot be glosed.

Now, Son, thou mayst discern how short a whiff
Is treasure, ruled by Fortune: off it goes
While humankind is wrangling, in a jiff.

For all the gold beneath the moon that glows,
Or ever glowed, were not enough to cause
But one of all these weary souls' repose."

"My Master," said I then; "pray do not pause:
What is this Fortune that thou mentionest,
Who holds all worldly goods within her claws?"

And he: "Oh, silly creatures at the best,
Ye whom a wall of ignorance confines!
What I shall say, now swallow and digest.

The One, in whose omniscience all combines,
Made Heavens, set conductors, who so ward
That every part to every other shines,

And equal radiance everywhere is poured:
And likewise over splendrous things mundane
He set a general minister and lord,

To shift betimes all empty worldly gain
Through every nation, family, and class,
Beyond prevention by the human brain;

To make one people rule, another pass,
According to the judgments made by her
Who's hidden, like a snake among the grass.

Your knowledge has no power to deter:
For she provides and judges, rules her state,
As the other gods do theirs, without demur.

Her permutations suffer no abate:
She's rapid by necessity's constraint,
So many lives come up to regulate.

Such she, so crucified, so oft attaint
Of those by whom her praises should be sung;
Who wrongly blame instead, with evil plaint.

But she is happy, and she hears no tongue:
And blithe among the angels free from fault,
She turns her wheel, content and ever young.

Proceed we down the ever grimmer vault,
For now the stars are setting that arose
When I made forth; and long we may not halt.”

We cut across the Circle, where it goes
Above a spring, which boils out, to disperse
Along a channel where it bubbling flows.

Its waters were by far more dark than perse.
Upon the course this livid torrent picks
We entered, going down a path still worse.

It forms a fen that bears the name of Styx,
This sorry streamlet, when it has run its path
Below the evil cliff whose foot it licks.

And I, who gazed to wonder, in this bath
Of mire saw that slimy shades exist,
All naked and with faces full of wrath.

One struck another, not alone with fist,
But also with the head, the breast, the feet:
They bit off pieces with a snarling twist.

My kindly Master: “Here, Son, thou shalt meet
The souls of them that anger conquereth;
And know, that thus thy knowledge be complete,

Below the water some with sighing breath
Thus make the water’s surface pullulate
In bubble bunches, as thine eye well saith.

Stuck in the ooze they gasp: ‘A sullen state
Was ours ‘mid air the sun makes sweetly blithe,
Because of slothful smoke in us innate:

Now sullenly in this black dirt we writhe.’
Such is the hymn they gurgle forth and swallow,
Of all its words they only form a tithé.”

We circled far, around the loathly wallow,
Between the fen and the dry shore we passed,
Still watching the mud-eaters in the hollow;

And came unto a tower's foot at last.

Inferno – Canto 8

Continuing, I say: before the stop
We came to at the lofty tower's base,
Our eyes kept travelling upward toward its top,

To watch two little lights we saw them place.
Another far away returned the sign,
Too distant almost for our eyes to embrace.

And turning to the sea of knowledge, mine,
I said: "What is the meaning? Tell me how
That other torch replies. Who make it shine?"

And he: "Across the dirty waters thou
Mayst see the quick results their signals bring,
Unless concealed by reeking of the slough."

No arrow ever yet impelled by string
More nimbly ran the air to seek its goal,
Than now there shot a boat, a tiny thing,

Across the pond toward us; her full control
One steersman, who screamed out in high disdain:
"Art thou arrived at last, O felon soul?"

"O Phlegyas, Phlegyas, now thou scream'st in vain,"
My Lord replied; "Thy hold is no more broad
On us, than while we cross the miry plain:"

Like one that learns of some terrific fraud
Imposed on him, and grows aggrieved and dark,
Thus Phlegyas showed the anger that he gnawed.

My Leader first went down into the bark,
And only when she bore my added weight
Did she ride deeper, as the eye could mark.

We being both aboard, she started straight;
Her ancient stem ploughed to a smarter tune
Than when she bore her customary freight.

While thus we ran athwart the dead lagoon,
One rose before me in a muddy heap,
And asked: "Now who art thou that com'st too soon?"

I said: "I come no lengthy stay to keep.
But who art thou, turned such an ugly thing?"
He answered: "Thou canst see, I am one that weep."

And I: "With all thy tears and sorrowing,
Accursed spirit, where thou art, abide.
I know thee, 'mid the foulness thou dost bring."

He put both hands upon the vessel's side;
My watchful Master shoved him whence he clung;
"Away among the other dogs!" he cried.

Then both his arms around my neck he flung,
And kissed my face, and said: "Disdainful soul,
How blessed is the womb from which thou'rt sprung!"

This man, on earth, was proud beyond control;
His memory there's no good deed to adorn:
And now his shade is furious in this hole.

How many hold themselves great princes born,
Who later shall be here, like hogs in mire,
With records left behind of horrid scorn!"

And I: "O Master, greatly I desire
To see the villain ducked beneath the swill
Before we issue from this lake of ire."

And he to me: "Thou'lt sooner have thy will
And pleasure, than behold the further banks:
For such a wish 'tis fitting to fulfil."

I shortly saw him soused 'mid angry pranks
Of mud-beplastered spirits fully twenty;
For which I still praise God and give Him thanks.

They all were yelling: "At Filippo Argenti!"
The spirit of which passionate Florentine
With his own teeth then tore himself a-plenty.

We left him there: of him no further line.
But now mine ears were smitten by a wail
I peered ahead intently to divine.

“Now, Son,” my worthy Master said, “our trail
Is drawing nigh a town whose name is Dis;
Whose folk sin-laden, many are in tale.”

And I: “O Master, there its mosques, I wis,
Appear within the vale; their hue I tell;
‘Tis that of metal hot enough to hiss.”

He said to me: “Eternal fires swell
To burn them inly; hence doth red abound,
As thou perceivest, through this lower Hell.”

We now arrived within the moats profound,
Which gird that town that sits disconsolate,
Whose walls I took for iron all around.

The detour we were forced upon was great,
Before we came to where the pilot cried
With violence: “Get out, for here’s the gate.”

A thousand odd of those rained down through pride
I saw about the entrance; waspishly
They said: “Now who is this that never died

And cometh through the dead men’s monarchy?”
My Master always wise made signs to them
Of wishing to confer in secrecy.

A little of their fury did they stem
And answered: “Come alone; let him go back
Who ventures in this kingdom with such phlegm.

Let him retrace alone his foolish track,
If he indeed but can: for thou shalt stay
Who showest him a countryside so black.”

Imagine, Reader, what was my dismay
On hearing these accursed words; full sore
I feared I’d never see the light of day.

“Beloved Leader, seven times and more
Hast thou insured my safety, helped me run
Through ruthless peril springing up before:

Don’t leave me now,” said I, “alone, undone;
And if our further progress is denied,
Let’s both retrace our footsteps toward the sun.”

Whereon my Lord, who’d thither been my guide,
Said: “Do not be afraid: the route we go
Can none obstruct; there’s One that doth decide.

Await me here; thy weary spirit’s woe
Refresh and feed with hoping for the best.
I’ll not forsake thee in this world below.”

He leaves me then and goes to meet the test,
My gentle Father, me with doubt bestead:
Behind my forehead yes and no contest.

I could not overhear what words he said;
The parley that he held with them was short,
Ere, racing back inside, they all were sped.

The opponents slammed the gateway of their fort
Against my Master’s breast, and left him lorn;
And back he came with slow and stately port.

His eyes were downward cast, his brow was shorn
Of boldness, and he sighed as he exclaimed:
“Who shuts me from the dwellings where they mourn?”

To me he said: “Because I am inflamed,
Be not afraid; I’ll win, howe’er they flock
With measures of defense which they have framed.

It is not new that they presume to mock;
They did at a less secret gate, of yore,
And it, we found, is still without a lock.

Thou sawest the dead inscription on that door:
And down the Circles on its hither side,
Approaching unescorted toward this shore,

Comes one to whom this town shall open wide.”

Inferno – Canto 9

My cowardice tinged me a pallid hue
On seeing my Leader back; and at my cheeks
His own new colour quicklier withdrew.

He stood intent, like one whose hearing seeks:
The dark air barred his sight, the slimy lake
Opposed the heavy fog its surface reeks.

“We have to win, there’s such a lot at stake,”
He started; “And if not... But she who bid.
Oh, what a time the other seems to take!”

I marked me well the pains wherewith he hid
His start, with other words, which coming next,
Were different from the ones that they undid.

But none the less, they served for fear’s pretext:
I guessed what his unended saying meant
As worse perhaps than would have been its text.

“To this sad hollow’s depth has e’er descent
Been made by one from that first grade aloft
Where crippled hope is all the punishment?”

I put the question then. “Not very oft
It happens one of us descends the fell
And rugged road I take,” his answer soft.

“ ‘Tis true I made a former trip to Hell,
Evoked by that Erichtho once so fierce,
Who summoned spirits back within their shell.

Scarce did my soul my naked body pierce,
Before she made me enter through you wall
To fetch a shade from, Judas’s deep tierce.

That is the lowest, darkest place of all,
Remotest from the Heaven that girds the whole.
I know the way: be sure. Let question fall.

This marsh, from which the stinking vapours roll,
Girdles the grieving city, where, instead
Of peace we must pay anger now for toll.”

And I have clean forgot what more he said,
Because mine eye-beaths drew me, in effect,
Up toward the tower whose top was flaming red.

There, in a moment suddenly erect,
Three bloody, hellish Furies held their ground;
Like females in their members and aspect.

With hydras of the greenest were they bound;
Horned snakes and little serpents formed the hair
Wherewith their savage temples were becrowned.

He knew these queen’s handmaidens from the lair
Where everlasting moaning is the lot.
“Behold,” he said, “the Furies of despair!

That’s Megara upon the leftward spot,
Alecto to the right it is who wails;
Tisiphone’s between.” More said he not.

They tore each one her bosom with her nails,
They beat themselves, they shrieked; till I was brought
To clasp the poet, as one whose courage fails.

“Medusa, come: in stone shall he be caught!”
They all were shouting, peering from the height;
“We should have punished Theseus’s onslaught.”

“Turn thee away, and cover thine eyes tight;
For should the Gorgon show her, and thou see,
‘Twere finished with returning to the light.”

My Master spoke, and then himself did he
Turn me around, and o’er my fingers’ blind
He laid his own as well, for guarantee.

O ye that have a soundly balanced mind,
Observe the teaching hidden here, and make
Through strange and veiling verse, to what’s behind.

And now there came across the turbid lake
The uproar of a tumult full of dread,
That caused the shore on either side to shake.

Not otherwise, when mighty winds are sped,
Impetuous from diverse heats, they cry,
Demolish woods, and forging full ahead,

Beat down, rend off the branches, toss them high;
With dust ahead, stalks pride that will not swerve,
And makes the wild beasts and the shepherds fly.

He freed my eyes, and said: "Lift up the nerve
Of sight across the old and clotted spray,
There where the smoke is bitterest to observe."

Like frogs that through the water dart away
Before the snake's pursuit, until the shoals
In safety hold them huddled where they stay:

A thousand odd, fled panic-stricken souls
In front of one who walked at gentle pace
Across the Stygean ferry with dry soles.

He brushed the greasy vapour from his face,
Oft lifting up his left to such an end.
Of tiring, but for this, he bore no trace.

I knew him one of those that Heaven doth send,
And turned me toward the Master; with a nod
He bade me hold my peace and humbly bend.

Ah, what contempt he showed! His little rod
Swung wide the portal, for no demon durst
Oppose; and he began, while yet he trod

The fearful threshold: "O despised, accurst,
From Heaven hunted, despicable brood,
By what is this your vast presumption nursed?"

Why kick against the pricks, and make a feud
Against that will whose end is ne'er abated,
Which oft hath made your chastisement more rude?

What boots your butting, when a thing is fated?
Perhaps your memories have let it slip
How Cerberus's throat was depilated."

He turned to start again his nasty trip,
Without a word to us; appearing brisk
Like one whom other purports pinch and nip

Than those of them upon his vision's disk.
And toward the city gate we set our feet,
For since his holy words we ran no risk.

We entered unopposed by warlike heat;
And I, informed with curious desire
Of what might be within the fortress' street,

When once inside beheld, on looking nigher,
A vast champaign on every hand, where moan
Filled all the air, and sound of torment dire.

And as at Arles, beside the stagnant Rhone,
And as at Pola, near Quarnaro Sound,
Which bathes the utmost land Italians own,

The sepulchres make white the uneven ground:
So here in every part they did the same;
Except that here a bitterer sort was found;

Because within the tombs was scattered flame,
Which made them hot as ever iron bar
Required to fulfil a craftsman's aim.

On every one the cover was ajar,
And forth there issued lamentable cries,
Like those of misery abused too far.

"Master," I asked, "what sort of person lies
Hidden away inside of all these arks,
Whom we hear utter such distressful sighs?"

And he to me: "These are heresiarchs,
With sectaries; and more are here confined
Than anyone would think, e'en when he harks.

Here every kind is buried with his kind:
And hotter or less hot each monument.”
He took the rightward turn, and I behind.

‘Twixt tortures and the bastion now we went.

Inferno – Canto 10

We now proceeded by a secret track
Between the tortures and the city wall,
My Master first and I behind his back.

“O great and good, who steerest me through all
The impious Rings,” I started, “pray confer
Thy speech, disperse the doubts that hold me thrall.

The people here that lie in sepulchre,
Can they be seen? Already every lid
Is lifted; there’s no sentry to demur.” And he:

“They shall be sealed, no cover slid,
On their returning from Jehosaphat
In bodies left above and now well hid.

The grave-yard’s over here of them that sat
With Epicurus, who made body and
Soul too both mortal: he is there for that.

However, to thy question, from the band
In here thy satisfaction soon shall flow,
And also to thine unexpressed demand.”

And I: “Good Guide, whene’er I fail to show
My heart to thee ‘tis but to save us breath:
‘Tis thou, not here alone, hast trained me so.”

“O Tuscan, who dost walk, exempt from death,
This fiery town, and speak with modesty,
Halt now, unless thy pleasure gainsayeth.

Thy dialect shows thy nativity,
As one that noble mother-city bred,
Which, it may be, I damaged overly.”

All unexpected were these phrases, said
From out a tomb: and thereupon I placed
Me nearer to my Guide, because of dread.

He said to me: "What's this? Turn back in haste.
Behold where Farinata doth arise:
Thou'lt see the whole of him above the waist."

Already I was staring in his eyes;
He held his chest and forehead high in air,
As deeming Hell but something to despise.

My Leader, with his hands alert to dare,
Impelled me toward the tomb where he was penned,
And said to me: "Select thy words with care."

As soon as I was at his coffin's end,
He eyed me, and then rather in the way
Of scorn, he asked: "From whom dost thou descend?"

I, who was anxious only to obey,
Concealed no thing, but brought them plainly out.
He raised his brows, deciding then to say,

But pausing: "They were enemies, and stout,
To me, my fathers, all who took my side:
Twice running, therefore, put we them to rout."

"If they were driven forth, still," I replied;
"They crowded back, and not one time but two;
An art your party never well applied."

In the uncovered grave now rose to view
Down to his chin, a spirit next the first;
I think he knelt where he had lain perdu.

He peered about me; seemingly he nursed
A wish to see if somebody was by:
Then, being disappointed in his thirst,

Said weeping: "If because of genius high
Thou comest through this prison blind, forlorn,
Where is my son? And if not with thee, why?"

And I: "Not by myself I'm hither borne:
He, waiting there, was sent to guide my feet,
Perhaps to one your Guido held in scorn."

The words he spoke, the punishment so meet,
Had read to me the spirit's name aright.
And therefore was my answer so complete.

He shouted, starting up to his full height:
"How say'st? He held? Is he not living then?
Do not his eyes still welcome the sweet light?"

He, being aware I paused a moment, when
I framed an answer, as at stroke of doom
Fell supine, and did not appear again.

The other one, magnanimous, for whom
I'd halted, changed no feature, and his head
Moved not, he kept his posture in the tomb.

"And if," resuming now our talk, he said,
"They have not well applied that art in turn,
It gives me greater torment than this bed.

The lady reigning in this realm, will burn
Not fifty times on high, with lighted face,
Ere thou shalt know that art is hard to learn:

And by thy thriving in a sweeter place,
Inform me why our people spitefully
Make all their laws oppressive to my race."

And I: "The havoc and the butchery
Which dyed the Arbia red, are reason why
Such prayers are offered in our consistory."

When he had shaken his head and heaved a sigh,
"I was not there alone," he said; "And note
I joined the rest for reason; later I

Was quite alone: when each cast in his vote
To root our Florence up from earth's fair breast,
I fought for her with open face and throat."

"Ah, by your offspring's hope of finding rest,"
I begged of him; "undo a knot, and steer
My judgment straight, now crooked and distressed.

It seems that ye foresee, if right I hear,
The things that time to come will make secure;
But things that are, ye cannot see so clear.”

“We see, like one whose sight is only poor,
The distant things,” he said; “To such effect,
The lights the High Commander gives, endure.

What’s near, or is, escapes our intellect.
Except through news, our knowledge never spies
Your human state, and only can suspect.

So thou mayst understand, our knowledge dies,
When once the future’s door is closed ahead,
For there alone it looks and prophecies.”

Then, sorry for my injury, I said:
“Oh, tell that shadow fallen in his rut,
His offspring is not yet among the dead.

And if, just now, my answering mouth was shut,
Tell him perplexity already gave
My mind the hemming doubt, which you have cut.”

And now my Master’s calling made me crave
More rapid information to my plea
To know who lay beside him in the grave.

“Over a thousand others lie with me,”
He said; “Inside here there are Frederick Second,
The Cardinal; and for the rest, let be.”

He disappeared: the ancient Poet beckoned,
I turned my steps, and in my mind I rolled
Those words, which were unfriendly, as I reckoned.

He started forward; then, as on we strolled,
He said: “What apprehension dost thou brood?”
In answer to his questioning, I told.

“Thy memory shall hold the words imbued
With danger,” so I heard that wise one say;
“Now look!” a lifted finger marked his mood;

“When thou shalt stand within her dulcet ray,
Whose lovely eyes see all, it cannot fail,
From her thou’lt learn, for thy whole life, the way.”

Thereon he turned upon the leftward trail:
We quit the wall, and toward the centre tended,
Along a path that strikes into a vale

Whose nasty smell even up there offended.

Inferno – Canto 11

The outer end of an exalted ramp
Formed of huge broken boulders circlewise,
Disclosed a jail of yet more cruel stamp.

And there, because the horrid stench rises
So thick from the profoundest pits of wrath,
We crouched behind a tomb of monster size,

Whose lid bears an inscription: and it hath
The sense: “Pope Anastasius I keep:
Photinus lured him from the rightful path.”

“’Twere better to go slowly down more deep,
To get our senses used a little bit
To bear the smell; until they seem asleep,”

My Master thus; and I: “Some offset fit
Then find, to recompense the time we spare.”
And he: “Thou’lt see that I had thought of it.

My Son, within the rocks thou seest there,
Three Circles are,” he started to expound,
“Arranged, like those thou leavest, as a stair.

Full up of damned spirits are they found:
But that thy gazing afterward suffice,
Mark how and why they are in durance bound.

Whate’er Heaven holdeth hateful, as a vice,
Hath injury for end; of each such end,
By force or fraud, another pays the price.

But fraud, as a peculiar human trend,
Displeases God the most; so deeper sink
The fraudulent, where greater pains attend.

The violent fill the topmost Circle’s brink:
But seeing that force to threefold aim is bent,
This holds three separate Circuits in its link.

At God, oneself, one's neighbour, may be spent
A deed of force; at them or theirs, I'll say,
As thou shalt hear in fullest argument.

By force are murder, wounds that do not slay,
Both done one's neighbour: and to what he owns,
Destruction, arson, and extorting pay.

Hence homicides, those wrongly breaking bones,
Despoilers, robbers, each in his proper band,
Torments the Circuit next beneath these stones.

Against himself a man may turn his hand,
Or his own goods: he then is worthy of
The Second; and to vain remorse is banned

Who did himself from out your world above,
Or played away the riches he abused,
Then wept, where one should smile with joy and love.

Against the Deity can force be used,
By curses, by denial hearts conceal,
By Nature scorned, and by His gifts refused:

And so the smallest Circuit sets its seal
On Sodom and Cahors, on all hearts flawed
By hate for God, which inward words reveal.

By flame man's consciences are gnawed:
And man may turn, to harming those that trust
Or those not bound to him, this power of fraud.

And even in the second case discussed,
He kills that chain of love that Nature forged:
Whence, in the Second Circle there are thrust

Hypocrisy and flattery, he who forged,
Theft, witchcraft, simony, and all the spawn
Of pimps and jobbers; with such filth it's gorged.

The first case shows the bond by Nature drawn
Destroyed, and then the further love forgot
Through which especial faith is held in pawn.

Hence, in the least Ring, where, upon the spot
Central to all the universe, is Dis,
Whoe'er betrays, eternally must rot."

And I: "My Master, clear enough, I wis,
Thy summary; I distinguish well enough
The plan and population of the abyss:

But tell me, those the winds did pull and puff,
Those of the mucky swamp, the beating rain,
And those encountering with tongues so rough;

Why do not they all undergo their pain
Within this ruddy town, if God be vexed?
If not, why do they suffer any bane?"

And he: "Why not this furrow, but the next
Plough'st thou, with wits more wont to do their chores?
Or doth thy mind look elsewhere than the text?

Doth not thy memory cherish in its stores
The very words wherein thy *Ethics* clad
The dispositions, three, that God abhors:

Incontinence and malice and a mad
Stupidity? and how incontinence
Offends God least and is less blamed as bad?

If thou consider this and what flows hence,
Recalling to thy mind what folk they are
That there above, outside, find punishments;

Thou'lt see why they are separated far
From felons; why, although in angry wise,
God's vengeance hammers them with lighter bar."

"O Sun, who always healest clouded eyes,
Thou dost content me so with plainer view,
That doubt as well as knowledge bears a prize.

I beg thee to go back a bit anew,
To where thou say'st that usury offends
God's goodness," said I, "and that knot undo."

“Philosophy,” said he, “if one perpend,
Takes note, and not in but a single part,
How Nature holds the course to seek her ends,

From the divine intelligence and art.
Thy *Physics* teach, if one take pains to plod
Not many pages onward from the start,

Your art has followed her, where'er she trod,
Disciplewise, as it has found the chance:
Your art is like a grand-daughter to God.

If, turning from these twain, thou giv'st a glance
At Genesis, thou'lt find it early shown
That man must make his living and advance.

But usurers take a pathway of their own,
Despising Nature and her art's behest,
Because their hope is placed elsewhere, alone.

Now, follow me, for moving will be best;
Above the horizon now the Fishes swim,
The Wain is lying over the Northwest;

And far from here must we descend the brim.”

Inferno – Canto 12

We found the place for going down the brink,
Was alpine; which, and what was there, still more,
Were reason for whatever eye to blink.

Like that fallen rock that wounds the Adige's shore,
On this side Trent, which earthquake came to lop,
Or which fell off through weakness at the core;

And now from where the summit saw it drop,
Until the plain, the shattered cliff's so rough,
'Twould give some foothold to a man on top:

Such was the steep descent along this bluff.
And there we saw the infamy of Crete
Stretched out upon the headland of the dough:

The calf of the false cow by lust's deceit.
On marking us, he bit into his flesh,
Like one consumed within by anger's heat.

My Sage cried out to him: "Perhaps, afresh,
Thou thinkest this is Athens' duke thou see'st,
Who caught thee, up above, within the mesh

Of sudden death. Away from here, thou beast!
No pupil of thy sister's, this one here;
He comes to see you punished." When he ceased,

Just like a bull, which, tearing himself clear,
When once he has received the fatal blow,
Can't run, but only bound about and rear:

I saw the Minotaur do even so.
My prudent Master cried: "Now hurry, slip
While he is frenzied. To the outlet go."

And so we started on our downward trip
Among the rubble. Oft the stones being wrenched
Beneath the unaccustomed weight, would tip.

I went in thought. He said: "Thy thoughts have trenched,
Perhaps, upon these ruins, in the keep
Of yonder bestial anger, which I quenched.

I'd have thee know, when I descended deep,
The other time, to this profoundest Hell,
That precipice still stood, erect and steep.

But certainly, if I divine it well,
Soon ere He came, who took from Dis great prey
Of those that in the upmost Round did dwell,

This whole vile valley trembled in a way
That made me think the universe then burned
With love; for whose sake some there are who say

That many a time the world has all returned
To Chaos: then the cliff, in this turmoil,
Both here and elsewhere, thus was overturned.

But look below, thou'lt see with little toil
The stream of blood, where he that bringeth bane
Through violence, to others, comes to boil."

Cupidity, blind, guilty, and insane,
In man's brief life thou spurr'st to such an itch,
And in the eternal, steep him thus in pain!

Curved like a bow I saw an ample ditch
Which circles all the plain in its extent;
So had my escort said: outside of which

Along the headland's foot, at gallop went
A file of Centaurs, rapid, armed with bows;
As once, o'erhead, they hurried on the scent.

Seeing us come down, each fell into repose,
And from the herd there then withdrew three steeds,
With arrows, which they previously chose.

And one cried out from far: "What torture needs
Your presence, ye that now descend the hill?
Reply from there, or else an arrow speeds."

My Master said: “We’ll not reply, until
We speak to Chiron’s self: do not distress us;
Unhappy oft thine ever-rapid will.”

Thereon he nudged me, saying: “That is Nessus,
For beauteous Dejanira dead, who dressed
His own revenge, – the one that tried to press us.

That middle one, who gazes at his chest,
Is mighty Chiron, nurse to Thetis’ son.
There’s Pholus, higher-tempered than the rest.

By thousands and by thousands do they run
To shoot what souls within the bloody creek
Rise higher than the depth their sin has won.”

We neared the agile beasts. About to speak,
Great Chiron took an arrow, and he spread,
Using its notch, his beard to either cheek:

And having his big mouth uncovered, said
To the others: “Have ye noticed that the feet
Of him behind move things whereon they tread?

That happens not when dead men walk our street.”
My worthy Guide, now near his breast, the height
Whereat the two contrasting natures meet,

Said: “Yes, he’s living still; and if, poor wight,
I’m sent to show him through this gloomy glade,
Necessity conducts him, not delight.

One, who left chanting hallelujah, laid
The novel task on me, to bring him here.
No robber he, nor I a thievish shade.

But by that Power helping me to steer
Along this savage path where we are bound,
Give one of thine, to keep us safely near,

And show us where the fording-place is found,
And lend his crupper for this person’s seat;
No spirit he, to walk the air like ground.”

And Chiron, wheeling toward his right-hand teat,
To Nessus said: "Return; conduct them thus,
And keep off any other herd ye meet."

We moved; he faithfully escorted us
Along beside the crimson boiling flood,
Where they that boiled cried out lugubrious.

Up to their brows were some in gory mud;
Of whom our Centaur said: "All tyrants these,
Who set their claws on property and blood.

Here they can rue what heartless crimes they please.
There's Alexander; Dionysius that,
Who racked Sicilia with long cruelties.

The brow with hair as black as any hat
Is Ezzelino; and that other, blond,
Obizzo d'Este, killed, I tell you flat,

By his unnatural son, up there beyond."
I turned me toward the Poet, who replied:
"He now is first, I second." In the pond,

A little further on, the Centaur eyed
A people whose whole heads, as it appeared,
Stuck out above the bubbling bloody tide.

One shade withdrawn he showed us, as we neared,
And said: "That's he, who in God's bosom slew
The heart till now upon the Thames revered."

I then saw folk whose head and shoulders too
Protruded from the surface of the gore:
And of them there were many that I knew.

And thus the blood grew shallow more and more,
Till only feet were cooking in its flow;
And there we gained the ditch's other shore.

"As thou canst see, the bubbling spring below
Is gradually always getting shoal,"
The Centaur said; "But I would have thee know

That over there an ever-deepening hole
Runs downward constantly until it nears
And joins the place where tyrants mourn their dole.

And over here the Heavenly justice spears
Attila, who on earth was such a scourge,
Sextus and Pyrrhus too; and both Riniers,

Pazzo and the Cornetan, by the urge
Of boiling, milks of eye-drops, who with sword
Gave highways so much bloody war for purge.”

With that he wheeled, and again crossed the ford.

Inferno – Canto 13

Not yet had Nessus reached the other side
Ere we were in a wood: no track was worn,
There wasn't any path to be descried.

Not green, but dusky leaves of hue forlorn,
Not smooth, but gnarly boughs that interlace,
Not fruit there was, but only poison thorn.

No holts so rough and dense, in any place
That lies 'twixt Cecina and Corneto, know
The savage beasts that hate a fertile space.

Here the ugly Harpies nest, which long ago
Chased out the Trojans from the Strophades,
With dismal prophecy of future woe.

Wide wings and human heads and necks have these,
Huge feathered bellies, and their feet bear claws.
They wail lamenting on the uncanny trees.

And the good Master: "First, a little pause:
Thou'rt in the Second Circuit; there wilt be,"
He thus began to speak, "until it draws

To the awful sand, which thou shalt come to see.
Look well, for here is many a wondrous thing
Thou mightst not credit from my telling thee."

I heard all round us lamentation ring,
Nor any soul to utter it perceived;
And so stood still, bewildered, pondering.

I believe that he believed that I believed
These voices came from hidden persons, stuck
Among the tangled, thickets, who there grieved.

My Master therefore said: "If thou wilt pluck
A trifling twig from any plant thou'lt plunder,
Thy surmise will be crippled." I was struck,

And stretched a hand discreetly forth in wonder,
And tore a tiny branch from a great brier;
Whose trunk cried out: "Why rendest me asunder?"

Some murky blood then started to transpire,
And now it cried: "Why tear me from the roots?
Hast thou no pity left, to be so dire?"

We once were men, who now are trees and shoots.
Compassion should have led thy hand to stay,
Though we had been the souls of crawling brutes."

As with a greenish log, which, burnt and grey
At one end, from the other slowly oozes,
And hisses with the wind that blows away:

So, mingled, out of this torn branch's bruises,
Came words and blood: the twig escaped my hold;
I stood there like a man that fear bemuses.

"If he could have believed the things I've told,"
My Sage responded, "poor, offended shade,
Which he hath seen but in my verse of old,

On thee his hand would never have been laid:
But things incredible made me make him do
An act for which my heart with pity's weighed.

But tell him who thou wast: that he, in lieu
Of some amends, being back where memory herds
The fame of men, may freshen thine anew."

The bole: "Sweet talking spread like lime for birds,
Allures me from my silence: may it please
You both, if I am caught and utter words.

I am the man that guarded both the keys
To Frederick's heart; and clever as a smith,
I opened and I locked so much to his ease,

That he'd but me to share his secrets with.
So faithfully my high position's wants
I followed, that I lost both sleep and pith.

The harlot, who in Cesar's palace haunts,
And never turns away her eyes untamed, –
That common death of courts, that vice each flaunts, –

Turned every courtier's mind toward me inflamed:
And they inflamed, inflamed Augustus so
That crape bedecked the joyful wreaths I claimed.

My mind, with high disdain it longed to show,
Thought death the way of refuge from disdain:
Unjustly I my own just self laid low.

Now, by the roots that nourish this new pain,
I swear to you, the faith was never slack
I bore my lord, so honoured and so deign.

If one of you retread the earthward track,
Give comfort to my memory, which still
Lies stretched where envy stabbed her in the back.”

He waited; then: “Since now his voice is still,”
The Poet said to me; “before we start,
Speak, ask him whatsoever more thou will.”

And I to him: “Nay, question on thy part;
What thou dost think will satisfy my mind.
I cannot: too much pity fills my heart.”

So he began again: “As one shall find
The gracious will to do what thou dost plead,
Imprisoned spirit, be again so kind,

And tell us how the human soul is freed
Within these knots. Were ever any men,
Tell if thou canst, from such gnarled members freed?”

Thereon the trunk wheezed hard awhile, and then
The windy stream of voice began to roll:
“More briefly will I answer you again.

When there arrives here a ferocious soul,
Which leaves the corpse by means itself has dealt,
Then Minos dooms it to the Seventh Hole.

It falleth here within this forest belt,
In no fixed spot, where fortune flings amain,
And there it sprouteth like a grain of spelt:

A sapling, then a tree of wildest strain.
Upon its leaves the Harpies come to browse,
And paining it, make windows for its pain.

To fetch our bodies, with the rest we'll rouse;
But justice robs a man of what he had
And threw away: therein we shall not house;

But drag them here, and through the forest sad
Hang each upon the bush wherein is bound
The shade whose treatment of it was so bad."

Intent beside the trunk we held our ground,
Believing it would tell us something more;
And then we caught a most surprising sound:

As when one hears the coming of the boar
And all the hurrying hunt that harries him,
With branches breaking and the hounds' uproar.

Lo, from the left, a couple, naked, grim,
And scratched, and running violently away,
And smashing down the forest's every limb!

The one ahead: "Come, Death, come now and slay."
The other one, who found himself too slow,
Cried: "Lano, thy two legs were not so gay,

Jousting beside the Toppo with the foe."
And then, his wind perhaps not being strong,
He mingled with a bush he crouched below.

The woods behind were crowded with a throng
Of bitches black and fleet and hungry-eyed,
Like greyhounds that are loosened from the thong.

They set their teeth in him who stooped to hide,
They worried him, and limb from limb they tore
The wretch, and strewed his aching members wide.

My Escort took me by the hand once more,
And led me to the bush that wept nearby,
In vain, through every broken, bleeding sore.

‘O Jacomo da Sant’ Andrea,” its cry,
“What good hast thou from making me thy shield?
In thy pernicious life what blame bore I?”

My Master halted near this voice concealed,
And said: “Who wast thou that such words alive
With sorrow, blow’st with blood from wounds unhealed?”

And he to us: “O souls that now arrive
To see the cruel outrage done to me,
Which thus has torn away my leaves, contrive

To gather them beneath this doleful tree.
The town was mine which chose to put Saint John
In place of her first patron; wherefore he

Will harm her with his art, while time goes on.
And but that remnants of him, which remain
Upon the Arno bridge, are not yet gone,

When citizens built up the town again
On ashes left by Attila the callous,
He would have rendered all their labour vain.

Of my own house I made myself a gallows.”

Inferno – Canto 14

By fondness for my native city fired,
I gathered in my hands the scattered leaves,
Restoring them to him who now was tired.

We came to the division, where one leaves
The Second Circuit for the Third, and where
One sees the horrors justice now conceives.

To show with clearness what the methods were,
I'll say: an open country here is found,
Which suffereth no plant to flourish there.

The doleful woodland garlands it around,
As the sad moat around the wood is arched:
We stayed our steps upon the outer bound.

The surface was of sand, compact and parched,
Not different, in the nature of the sand,
From that where once the feet of Cato marched.

God's vengeance, in great awe of thee should stand
Whoever readeth here the written words
That tell of things my very eyes have scanned!

I looked on naked souls in many herds,
All weeping in a miserable way;
But seeming under divers rules, by thirds.

Upon the ground a portion supine lay,
A portion sat, each huddled in a heap,
And others hurried without stop or stay.

By far the most thus wandered like lost sheep;
And those that took their torment lying, small
In number, were most quick to wail and weep.

A falling fire rained down upon them all,
Monotonously slow, in heavy flakes,
Like Alpine snow what time the breezes fall.

As Alexander saw, where India bakes
Beneath the sun, flames drop upon his men,
Drop steadily, like rain that never breaks,

And bade each phalanx tread the soil, for then
One flame, without another near to touch,
More easily could be put out again:

The eternal heat descending here was such.
From it the sand took fire too, like tinder
'Neath steel, and made the suffering twice as much.

Unresting danced the piteous hands to hinder,
Now here, now there, with sudden start and dash,
To brush away each newly heated cinder.

I started: "Master, thou that couldst abash
All things, save demons of that stubborn type
That held the city gate and sought a clash;

Who's he so huge, the fire seems not to gripe,
Who, doubled up in anger, lies ahead,
As if this rain could never make him ripe?"

And he himself, who heard what I had said,
When I informed my Leader where to look,
Cried: "What I was alive, I am being dead.

Though Jove wore out his smith, from whom he took,
Insane with rage, the pointed thunderbolt
Wherewith that final morning I was strook;

Or though he wore out all in turn, who molt
At Mongibello's forge, the crew complete,
And called: 'Good Vulcan, help!' – the senile dolt, –

As on the day of Phlegra's great defeat;
And shot me with the might of all his quiver:
His vengeance upon me would not be sweet."

The force of anger made my Leader shiver,
He spoke more loudly than I'd heard before:
"O Capaneus, because thy pride won't quiver,

The punishment thou bearest is the more.
No suffering, except this rage so blind,
Would fit the fury of thine inward war.”

Then turning unto me, with face more kind,
Said: “This was one among the seven kings
That leaguered Thebes. He had, and has, I find,

Contempt for God: within his words it rings.
But as I said to him, his monstrous spite
Adorneth well the bosom whence it springs.

Now, come behind me. Set thy feet aright;
The scorching sands will burn whate’er they brush:
Thy steps must hold the forest border tight.”

Going on, we found a tiny streamlet gush
From out the grove; in silence stayed to look.
I still feel horror at its bloody blush.

As, from the Bulicame flows the brook
Which then the prostitutes do sharewise own:
Such was the downward sandy way this took.

Its bed, its shelving banks, were turned to stone,
And both the margins running alongside;
And thus I here perceived our route was shown.

“Of all I’ve pointed out and thou hast eyed,
Since when we entered hither, by the gate
Whose threshold is to nobody denied,

Thy sight hath never rested on so great
A marvel as the present little creek,
Which makes the flames above it suffocate.”

These are the words I heard my Leader speak.
So then I begged him humbly, if he would,
To give the food he’d made my hunger seek.

“Amidst the sea an island long hath stood
Quite desolate,” he said, “whose name is Crete.
Beneath her ancient king the world was good.

A mountain's there, that formerly was sweet
With rills and foliage; Ida is its name.
An old thing now, it's left for waves to beat.

Once Rhea made a cradle of the same,
To hide her son; whenever he began
To cry, loud noise of shouts secured her aim.

Within the mountain stands a large old man,
Behind whose back lies Damietta spurned,
While Rome's the mirror that he tries to scan.

His head is fashioned out of gold twice burned;
Of purest silver are his arms and chest;
He's brass unto the crotch; and then he's turned

To chosen iron downward,—all the rest,
Except that his right foot is baked of clay;
And that's the one whereon more weight is pressed.

Each part, except the gold, is in decay,
And through the subtle fissures tears are shed,
Which gathered, eat the cavern stone away.

From rock to rock, into this vale they're led,
From Acheron, and Styx and Phlegethon:
Then further fall, through this constricted bed,

To where the chance of more descent is gone,
And from Cocytus; thou shalt witness yet
What that pool is: I'll therefore not go on."

And I: "But if the present rivulet
Comes flowing from our world above the ground,
Why, but at this wood's selvage is it met?"

And he to me: "Thou knowest the place is round.
And though the distance thou art come's immense,
Descending leftward, still thou hast not bound

The circle in its whole circumference.
If then we meet with novelties, I deem
Thy face should not show wonder too intense."

And I then: "Master, where within the scheme,
Are Phlegethon and Lethe? Of one thou say'st
No word, the other bringest from that stream."

"In all thy questionings I like thee best,"
He answered; "But the bloody ditch that boiled
Might certainly put one of these, to rest.

Lethe thou'lt see, but after thou hast toiled
Beyond this Pit: there, souls wash free from blot,
When once their sin repented is assoiled."

Then added: "It is time to leave this spot
Beside the wood. Come, follow me; our route
Lies now upon the margins, they're not hot,

And every flame, when over them, goes out."

Inferno – Canto 15

Our pavement now is on the hardened ledges,
And thick above our heads, the streamlet's smoke
Protects from fire the water and its edges.

And as from Bruges to Wissant Flemish folk,
Who fear the pounding ocean on their beaches,
Build dykes to keep the dangerous tides in yoke;

And Paduans do, along the Brenta's breaches,
To keep the villages and castles clear,
Before warm weather to Carinthia reaches:

In similar wise builded were those here,
Excepting that less high and broad were these,
Whoever was the master-engineer.

We'd left the wood behind, by such degrees
I could not have perceived where it did stand,
If I had turned to look, like one that flees,

When we encountered spirits in a band,
Who travelled near the dyke; as each went by,
He eyed us, just as one has often scanned

A passer, when a new moon's in the sky.
They screwed their brows together, and peered under,
Like an old tailor at his needle's eye.

And while their looks were taking us for plunder,
One spirit recognized me, and he clutched
My garment's hem, and cried out: "What a wonder!"

And I, whom his extended arm had touched,
Gazed hard upon that countenance cooked through;
So keenly, that the visage burned and smutched

Prevented not but that my memory knew.
Leaning, I reached a hand to touch his face,
And answered: "Ser Brunetto, is it you?"

And he: "My Son, if thou confer the grace,
Latini will walk back with thee a bit,
And let his band press onward in the race."

I said: "I beg you heartily for it;
Or let us sit together, if you choose:
So he, whom I am going with, permit."

"O Son," he said, "if one, among our crews,
An instant stops, a century inert
He lies, not fanning off the fire's bruise.

So walk ahead, I'll come beside thy skirt;
And later join my pack, wherein I'm sent
To run, lamenting our eternal hurt."

I durst not leave the pathway where I went,
To walk by him, but leaning moved along,
Like one whose head is reverently bent.

And he: "What fate or fortune is so strong,
Before the final day to bring thee here?
Who's he that shows the road where horrors throng?"

"Up there above where life is bright and clear,"
I answered him, "I lost me in a valley,
Before I had attained my ripest year.

But yesterday, at morn, I thence did sally:
And he appeared when I was turning back.
He guides me toward my home, along this alley."

And he: "By following thy planet's track,
Thou canst not fail to make the glorious port;
If well I judged in beauteous life. Mack,

Were I not dead in this untimely sort,
On seeing Heaven so to thee incline,
I would have been aid, comfort, and resort.

But that ungrateful people and malign,
Who came down from Fiesole of yore,
And of the rock and mountain still show sign,

For thy good deeds will hate thee very sore.
With reason; 'tis unfit sweet fig should find
Its fruitage where tart sorb-trees grow galore.

The world, by old report, reutes them blind;
A miserly and proud and envious mass.
Cleanse thee from them, put all their ways behind.

Thy honours shall accrue to such a pass,
Both parties will be hungry, insecure
Of thee; but it is far from beak to grass.

Let cattle from Fiesole procure
Their fodder in themselves, and never feed
On any flower that springs from their manure

To bring again to light the holy seed
Of those few noble Romans that remained
Within the nest of that malicious breed.”

“If my complete desire could be obtained,”
I answered him, “you would not be as yet
So far from living human men detained.

For in my mind is surely, sadly set
Your image, kind, beloved, and paternal:
As you, from time to time, I'll not forget,

Instructed me how man may grow eternal.
And all my gratitude, while I'm alive,
Shall be discerned in all my speech diurnal.

What you narrate of my career, I strive
To keep to show my lady, who can glose
That text and others, if my hope arrive.

I want so much to have you well suppose
That, if my conscience have no cause to upbraid,
I'm ready for whatever Fortune shows.

My ears know well how earnest-money's paid;
Let Fortune drive her wheel, and never seek
For others' pleasure, and the hind his spade.”

My Master, thereupon, toward his right cheek
Turned back to us, and looking at me, said:
“He listens well who notes what others speak.”

And still, not talking less, I make ahead
With Ser Brunetto, begging him to tell
What mates he has renowned and highly-bred.

And he to me: “To learn of some is well;
The others it were better to keep dark,
Since naming all would take too long a spell.

But know, in brief, that every one was clerk
Or author, and their fame was wide and loud:
All branded with the selfsame sinful mark.

There’s Priscian, moving in that wretched crowd;
Francesco of Accorso; thou couldst sate
Thine eyes on him, so scurvy, once so proud,

Whom the Lord’s Servants’ Servant did translate
From Arno to Bacchiglione, where
He left his sin-strained muscles to their fate.

I’d speak of more, if I had time to spare.
Our walk and talk must terminate.
I see Fresh vapours now arising in the air.

With those that come I’m not allowed to be.
Think well of my *Tesoro*, where I still
Am living; nothing more I ask of thee.”

He turned, I saw him running with a will,
Like those who, at Verona, on the plain,
Run for green cloth. He ran with speed to kill,

And not like those who lose, – like those who gain.

Inferno – Canto 16

We now were come where I perceived the boom
Of water falling into the next Ring,
Like rumbling from within a bee-hive's gloom;

When three shades separated, hurrying
To leave a troop that scoured the plain, hot-paved
Beneath the fiery rain's incessant sting.

They came toward us; each shouted, as he waved:
“Hold, thou, who seemest, judging by thy clothes,
A citizen of our town so depraved.”

Ay me, what wounds their members did expose,
Both fresh and old, which flames had dropped to sear!
It grieves me still when I remember those.

Upon their cries, my Teacher bent his ear.
He turned his face toward me, and: “Now await,”
He said; “And courtesy is called for here.

And were there not the fire without abate
The nature of this place shoots down, I'd say
‘Twere fitter thou than they should mend thy gait.”

Directly we had stopped to meet them, they
Resumed their previous pace: when they had toiled
To us, they formed into a wheel, those troy.

As champions were wont to, naked, oiled,
Watching to get a vantage and a grip,
Before they came to blows and were embroiled:

Thus wheeling, every face toward me would tip,
While round they went; and so their necks and feet
Kept making an inverse continuous trip.

“If this unstable place of wretched sleet
Breed scorning of our prayers and us as well,”
One started, “and our nudeness, scorched with heat;

Let our repute incline thy mind to tell
Who thou mayst be that thus with hardiness
On living feet in safety goest through Hell.

He here whose foot-prints thou behold'st me press,
Although he now is naked, flayed, and scored,
Was of a higher rank than thou dost guess:

A grandson of Gualdrada, whom accord
Calls good, he Guido Guerra, ere death's hand
Had smitten, did great deeds with brain and sword.

The other, who behind me treads the sand,
Tegghiaio Aldobrandi is, whose word
Would better have been heeded in our land.

And I who here am crucified the third,
Jacopo Rusticucci was; no doubt
My worst woe through my savage wife's incurred."

Had I been covered from the flames without,
I would have thrown me down to where they turned;
And think my Teacher would have borne it out.

But seeing that I should be baked and burned,
My fear o'ercame my wish of tenderness,
To go down and embrace them, as I yearned.

Then I began: "Not scorn, but deep distress,
Is generated in me by your lot;
So deep, it will be long in growing less.

It came when this my Lord had told me what
Ye were, in words whose import did avail
To show the kind of men that neared the spot.

Your fellow-townsmen, never did I fail
To trace your honoured names, in fond pursuit,
And listen to your honoured actions' tale.

I leave the gall and seek delicious fruit,
As promised me by this veracious
Guide: But to the centre first descends my route."

“So may thy soul long years remain inside
Thy body,” answered he, “and may thy fame
Endure resplendent after thou hast died, –

Are courtesy and valour still aflame
Within our city, say, as was their wont?
Or are they cast without, to do her shame?

Guglielmo Borsiere, come to hunt
In wretchedness but lately, there he strains, –
Has deeply tortured us with phrases blunt.”

“New people, sudden monetary gains,
Beget excess and pride within thy race,
O Florence, till thy tears are like the rains!”

Thus did I cry aloud with lifted face:
And all the three, who took it for reply,
Changed glances, now being certain of the case.

“If thou expend no more to satisfy,”
They answered, “any person whatsoever,
O happy thou, whose words do not belie

Thy will! So, if thou leave this dismal air,
And go back to behold the lovely stars;
When with delight thou sayest: ‘I was there!’

Then speak of us whose record nothing mars.”
Thereon they broke their wheel; and as they sped,
Their nimble legs seemed wings, though sore with scars.

Amen could never be so quickly said
As they had disappeared. And then the word,
My Master thought, was we should get ahead.

I followed; small the distance we had stirred,
When nearby noise of water had such force
That had we spoken, we had scarce been heard.

As that first stream to run its proper course, –
From Monte Viso going toward the
East On the Apennines’ left slope, which from its source

Is called the Acquacheta, or at least
Until into a lower bed it glides,
For at Forli 'tis from that name released, –

Above San Benedetto thundering slides
Down from the mount in single cataract,
Where it should form a thousand more besides:

Thus found we that red water in the act
Of booming down a precipice; it roared
So loud, our ears would shortly have been cracked.

For belt around my waist I had a cord,
Wherewith I once had thought to hold my ground
And come to be the painted leopard's lord.

When I had got the whole of it unbound,
According as my Guide commanded this,
I handed it to him, thus coiled and wound.

Then turning toward the right, into the abyss
Some distance from the edge he let it fly,
To vanish o'er the rugged precipice.

“And surely now some novel thing is nigh,”
I inly said; “The signal's new indeed,
Which now my Master seconds with his eye.”

Ah, men should very cautiously proceed
With those that see not deeds alone, but send
Their minds within, where thoughts are found to read.

He said to me: “‘Twill presently ascend;
What I await, and what thy dreams surmise,
Will soon transpire where thy glances tend.”

Phenomena that have the look of lies
Should make men hold their counsel, short of crime,
Lest innocence be shamed in others' eyes.

But here I can't be mute, and by the rhyme
Of this my *Comedy*, I, Reader, swear, –
As it may gather grace for lengthening time, –

I saw swim up that thick and murky air,
A shape astounding, which had well deprived
The boldest person of the will to dare.

It came like one returning, who has dived
Beneath a ship to set an anchor free,
Which some chance rock has fouled, and, this contrived,

Extends his arms and pushes from the knee.

Inferno – Canto 17

“Behold the beast whose pointed tail can sink
Through mountains, and rive arms and masonry:
Behold the thing that makes creation stink!”

My Leader thus began to speak to me:
And beckoned it to land from out the pit,
Close to our pathway on the marble quay.

The animal, Fraud’s filthy counterfeit,
Brought up its head and shoulders into line,
But did not drag the tail up after it.

Its face was like a just man’s face, benign,
The outside was so gracious and so fair;
And then the trunk was wholly colubrine.

Two paws it had, both covered thick with hair
To the armpits. Back and breast and either side,
Bore little whorls and bunches painted there.

More colour, in the fabric or applied,
Had never cloth of Turk or Tartar brand;
Nor were Arachne’s webs more brightly dyed.

As sometimes little skiffs along the strand
Lie half within the water, half ashore;
And as in Germany, the gluttons’ land,

The beaver sets himself to wage his war:
Thus hung the wicked monster, like a ship,
Along the stone that edged the sand before.

Within the void his tail would rise and dip,
And bend above his back the poisoned prong
That armed it, like a scorpion’s, at the tip.

My Leader said: “We now must walk along
And turn a little, thus to bring our feet
Where quiet lies the beast so foul with wrong.”

So we descended, toward the right-hand teat,
And went ten paces on along the levee,
Our refuge from the sand and falling heat.

And when we came where he was lying heavy,
There, sitting on the sand beside the dyke,
I saw another wretched, sinful bevy.

And here my Master: "That thou mayest strike
A full impression of this Circuit's ways,"
He said, "go thither; see what they are like.

And let thy parley be in briefest phrase.
And meanwhile I will beg the beast to lend
His sturdy shoulders to us." So he stays;

And on the Seventh Circle's final end,
And all alone, toward those in grievous coil
There sitting, once again my way I wend.

Out of their eyes I saw their sorrow boil.
Here, there, they moved their hands, procuring ease
An instant, from the flames, the scorching soil.

In Summertime the dogs behave like these,
When paws and noses dart, now here, now there,
As they are stung by flies or gnats or fleas.

When I had scanned some faces by the glare
Shot from the falling flames that burned them black,
I recollected none; but grew aware

That hanging from each neck there was a sack
Which bore a certain colour and device;
And there their eyes seemed feeding. On the track

I went along nearby, and looking twice
Upon a yellow purse picked out in blue,
I saw a lion, face and pose precise.

The wagon of my eyes ran on to view,
And saw one bloody-red, in whose design
There showed a goose, more white than butter's hue.

And one, who bore a pregnant azure swine
Upon his bag of white, with accent chill
Addressed me: "What doest thou within this mine?"

Get out; and seeing thou art living still,
I'll tell thee, friend Vitalian shall appear
And sit upon my left; and soon he will.

A Paduan 'mid Florentines, mine ear
Is often deafened with the noise of those
That shout: 'Bring on the Sovereign Cavalier,

Who'll bear the pouch that has three beaks in rows.'"'
He twisted up his mouth, stuck out his tongue,
And used it like an ox that licks his nose.

And I, lest longer staying might have stung
Him who had bidden little stay, to scold,
Deserted those tired souls I stood among.

When I returned to where he was, behold
My Leader mounted on the monster's croup!
He said to me: "Now be thou strong and bold.

To stairs like this hereafter must we stoop.
Get up in front; I wish to guard thy back,
For fear this evil tail might make a swoop."

Like one that is so close to the attack
Of quartan, that his finger-nails are wan,
And shadows make him shiver: thus, alack,

Was I on hearing this, my courage gone.
But his reproofs brought on my shame apace,
Which makes brave masters' servants hurry on.

Upon that horrid back I sat in place.
I meant to say, if I had not been short
Of voice: "Oh, clasp me now in thine embrace."

But he, who once before had been my fort
Against another hap that brought dismay,
Put both his arms around me for support.

And: "Geryon," he said, "now start away.
And make the circling wide, the sinking slow;
Remember thou'st unusual freight today."

Like little ships in port, which start to go,
And back and back: thus at the first he went;
Till, feeling himself free both to and fro,

To where his breast had been before he bent
His tail, and moved it, stretching like an eel;
His paws pulled in the air whereon he leant.

I cannot think there was more fear to feel,
When Phaeton dropped the reins and dealt the sky
A burning blow, whereof we see the seal;

Or wretched Icarus felt the feathers fly,
As heated wax was making his loins bare,
His father shrieking: "Not that way!" than I

Did feel, on seeing all around but air,
And finding only darkness as a cloak
To every sight, except the monster there.

He swam along with dilatory stroke;
Wheeled, sank: I knew it not, save that from under,
The breeze came up, and on my face it broke.

Then, on the right, I heard a noise like thunder,
From whirlpools where the torrent fell at last;
And thrusting forth my head, peered down in wonder.

New fear was roused of falling in that vast,
Because I saw there fire, and heard there moan:
Then, trembling I drew back and held on fast:

And saw what I had not before well known, –
The turning and the sinking, – by the plight
Of wretches all around, now nearer shown.

In manner of a falcon long in flight,
Which sees nor bird nor lure, and heareth, curt
From falconer: "Must thou now, alas, alight!"

Which weary drops, where he arose alert,
And with a hundred wheelings, lights, to sit
At distance from his master, scornful, hurt:

Thus Geryon disposed us in the pit,
Close to the rugged cliff as he could go;
And once his freight was off, we saw him flit

As fast as ever arrow from a bow.

Inferno – Canto 18

A place called Evil Wallets is in Hell,
Of stone throughout, and of an iron shade,
And its encircling zone of cliffs as well.

In this dread region's very centre laid,
There yawns a shaft right broad and right profound;
And *suo loco* I'll say how it is made.

The belt spread out enclosing it, is round,
'Twixt shaft and the forbidding cliff so tall,
And holds ten several valleys in its bound.

And like the figure formed around a wall,
When every fosse enfolds another fosse,
To guard the castle shielded by them all:

So, here, the plan; and as slim bridges cross
From thresholds of such fortresses, to top
The moats to the outer bank: so here across

The ramparts and the fosses, causeways drop
From underneath the cliff, and hold their line
Until the shaft, to which they lead, and stop.

In this place, shaken off from Geryon's spine,
We found ourselves. And now my Poet's feet
Still held the left, and after them went mine.

Upon the right-hand side new miseries meet
My vision; and new torments, scourgers new:
They filled the outer wallet till replete.

The sinners there were naked: half the crew
This side the middle, moved toward us; and thence
With us, but stepping swifter than we two:

As when at Rome the crowd was so immense
Across the bridge, the year of jubilee,
That need was to erect a sort of fence,

And on one side all eyes were set to see
The castle as they went to Peter's church,
While toward the hill the other half moved free.

Here, there, on livid boulders for their perch,
I saw horned demons armed with lengthy whips;
And viciously they gave bare backs the birch.

Ah, how they made the wretches shake their hips,
And with a single whack! And not a limb
Awaits the next, or third, but quickly skips.

I walked along with eyes alert to skim
The crowd; mine eyes were met, and in a trice
I said: "I'm sure I've formerly seen him."

I therefore paused to look upon him twice:
My gentle Leader halted at my side,
Consenting I turn back at my device.

Through downbent face, the whipped one strove to hide;
But slight was his success in that design,
For I said: "Thou, who glancest down and wide,

Unless thou hast false features over thine,
Venedico Caccianemico art thou:
What brought thee into such a stinging brine?"

And he to me: "Unwilling I avow;
Being forced thereto by thy remarks o'er-clear,
Which bring the former world before me now.

'Twas I made Ghisolabella lend her ear
And do whate'er the Marquis chanced to please;
No matter what foul story you may hear.

I weep here, not the only Bolognese;
For this place holds of us so great excess,
That there are not so many tongues as these

From Savena to Reno lispings yes.
And wilt thou have a proof of what I say,
Recall to mind our avariciousness."

While still he spoke, a fiend began to lay
A thong across his back, saying: "Move about,
Thou pimp; no women here to coin today."

I then rejoined my Escort; the redoubt
We paced a few steps farther, till we came
To where there was a causeway jutting out.

With nimbleness enough we climbed the same:
And rightward, on its surface rock-bestrewed,
We left those cliffs of never-changing frame.

When we arrived at where the bridge is hewed
Below, to give a passage to the scourged,
My Guide said: "Now take hold, and be thou viewed

By all the rest whose sins shall ne'er be purged.
By them we have not hitherto been faced.
Because the ways we went have not diverged."

From the old bridge we watched the troop that raced,
Now toward us, as we eyed another spot,
And whom like whipping goaded on to haste.

My kindly Master, though I questioned not,
Said: "Look, observe that great one onward sweep,
Who seems devoid of tears to mourn his lot.

What regal aspect still 'tis his to keep!
That's Jason, who by love-making and crime,
Deprived the Colchians of their golden sheep.

He passed the isle of Lemnos at the time
Those wild and wanton women, sore distressed,
Had murdered all the men; and there with lime

Of lover's looks and speeches sweetly dressed,
Betrayed Hypsipyle scarce woman grown,
"Who, innocent, had first betrayed the rest.

He left her there with child and all alone.
For such a guilt such penalty is paid;
And for Medea too must he atone.

With him are those that similarly played.
Of this the outmost Valley it is meet
To know thus much, and of the shadows flayed.”

We now were come to where the narrow street
Cuts overthwart the second ledge, and throws
Another arch, to cross the Second Beat,

And here we heard the whimpering made by those
The other Valley held: their muzzles snuff,
And with their hands they strike themselves hard blows.

The banks within were crusted and made rough
With mould blown up mephitic from below,
With which both eye and nostril were in huff.

The bottom was too dark for eye to go,
Until we climbed the arch’s top, and leant
To look from off the bridge’s highest throw.

So there we came, and down our glances went
To where, immersed in dung, the people lay,
Bemired in what seemed human excrement.

Downward I let my searching glances stray,
And saw a head besmirched with filth so thick,
I could not tell if tonsured ‘twas or lay.

It bellowed at me: “Why do thine eyes stick
To me, when other nasty ones are by?”
And I: “Because, if memory play no trick,

I’ve seen thee up at Lucca with hair dry,
Alessio Interminei, ere this smut
Had: got thee; that’s what made thee catch mine eye.”

And he thereon, with punches of his nut:
“My flatteries immersed me in this place,
Whereof my tongue could never get a glut.”

And next my Leader said: “Protrude thy face
A little farther over from the crest,
And let thy vision manage to embrace

That dirty and dishevelled household pest,
Whose scratching gives her stercoral nails employ,
Who squats and then stands up to get a rest.

That's Thais, whore, who when her fancy-boy
Inquired: 'Have I then great thanks from thee?'
Said: Nay, stupendous!' Let's no more annoy

Our eyes with such things. Let them sated be."

Inferno – Canto 19

O Simon Magus, and thy miscreant breed,
Who take the things of God,—which rightfully
Should be espoused in virtue, through your greed

For gold and silver, – in adultery:
For you in turn the trumpet now must sound;
The Wallet next is your eternity.

We now had mounted to the loftiest ground
The causeway here affords, a rocky knoll
Which overhangs the middle of that Round.

O Highest Wisdom, artist of the whole
We see, on earth, in Heaven, or in Hell,
How justly doth thy goodness give its dole!

The livid sides and bottom of that dell
Were pierced with holes, appearing to mine eyes
Of equal width, and rounded like a well:

Appearing not more large or small in size
Than those my beautiful Saint John's can show, –
The places made for them that there baptize:

And one of which not many years ago
I broke, and one near death inside was saved:
Whereby I seal a truth all men may know.

Out of the mouth of every one there waved
A sinner's feet and legs, left free to writhe
To where the trunk was totally encaved.

Along each sole small dancing flames were lithe,
Because of which they jerked about their joints
Too hard to have been held by cord or withe.

As fire upon what objects grease anoints,
Runs flickering along the mere outside:
So here, from heel to toes' extremest points.

“O Master, who is that by anger plied
And jerking more than his companions there?”
I asked; “with rosier flame to suck his hide?”

And he to me: “At thy desire, I’ll bear
Thee down the bank that’s lower from the height;
And thou shalt learn from him what crimes his were.”

And I: “Whatever pleases thee is right:
Thou’rt Lord and knowest thy will decrees my fate;
Thou knowest things no words have brought to light.”

So when the Fourth Division held our weight,
We turned upon the tired hand, to dip
Down to the bottom honeycombed and strait.

My kindly Master bore me on his hip,
Until we had arrived beside the hole
Of him, whose legs almost with tears did drip.

“Who’er thou be, thus upside-down, sad soul,
Implanted like a stake,” I ‘gan to say;
“If thou art able, answer my parole.”

I leaned, like a confessor o’er the clay
Wherein a murderer’s fixed, who turns to cry
Him back, thus holding death awhile at bay.

He shrieked: “Art thou already there, head high?
Already there, head upward, Boniface?
By several years the writing told a lie.

Art thou so quickly cloyed with that rich place,
For which thou didst not fear to dupe and wed
The Beauteous One, and then to grind her face?”

I stood like those who grasp not what is said
Responsive, with an almost blushing cheek,
A dolt with no response inside his head.

Then Virgil bade me: “Do not wait, but speak;
Say; ‘I am not he thou thinkest, I am not he.’”
And as I had been bid I answered, meek.

Then violently he writhed with foot and knee,
And sighing, in a plaintive voice he spoke,
And said: "Well then, what askest thou of me?"

If such desire to know of me awoke
Thy mind that thou hast clambered down the shelf;
Then know that I was clothed with the Great Cloak.

True son of Orsa, I, such greed for pelf
Impelled me to advance the cubs that lacked,
I pocketed gold there, and here myself.

Below my head are all the others packed
Who were my forerunners in simony:
Within the crannies of the rock they're stacked.

There I shall also fall, immediately
He comes, of whom I put thee in the stead;
And that explains my blunt inquiry.

But since my feet have cooked, more years are sped,
And I have been inverted longer thus
Than he shall wave his feet with bottoms red:

For, following him, with deeds more hideous,
From West a lawless shepherd shall advance;
And he at last shall cover both of us.

Another Jason he, of whom perchance
Thou'st read in Maccabees: as that one's king
Was soft for him, soli be the king of France."

I know not if it was a foolish thing
To answer as I did, and in this metre:
"Now tell me, how much treasure must he bring,

Before our Saviour handed to Saint Peter
The keys, that he maintain them in his keep?
He asked him only: 'Follow me.' Nor fleeter

Did he and the others run that they might reap
Gold, silver from Matthias, who by lot
Was chosen to succeed the one lost sheep.

Stay here: thou well deservest what thou'st got;
And hold on tight to all that ill-earned pay
That set thee against Charles, so bold and hot.

And only that the reverence bars my way,
Which I acknowledge for the Highest Keys,
Which rested in thy hands while life was gay,

I'd muster words e'en heavier than these,
Because your avarice fouls our earthly springs,
Abasing worth and bringing up the lees.

Of you, O Shepherds, Revelation sings: –
Where she upon the many waters bedded,
Is seen committing whoredom with the kings.

That she, who by her birth is seven-headed,
Through her ten horns was vigorous and bold,
So long as virtue pleased the men she wedded.

Ye have made God of silver and of gold.
How differ ye from all idolaters,
Except their God is one, yours hundredfold?

Ah, Constantine, what harm the Church incurs,
From thy conversion, no, but from the gift
The first rich Pope received from thee as hers!”

While I in such a strain my voice did lift,
I know not whether wrath or conscience bit,
But both his soles kept kicking hard and swift.

And well I think my Leader relished it,
He listened with a visage so content
To all my words so veritably fit.

Then lifting me in both his arms, he leant
My weight to take it wholly on his chest,
And mounted by the path of his descent:

Nor wearied he of me thus closely pressed,
Till to the arch's apex up he strode,
'Twixt margins Four and Five: there to divest

Himself most gently of his gentle load,
Because the rock was now so rough and steep,
That goats themselves would find it a hard road.

And thence mine eyes beheld the next great Deep.

Inferno – Canto 20

Of a new kind of chastisement, the verses
That in this Twentieth Canto I must write,
Of this First Part, on those whom sin submerses.

Already I was keen to have a sight
Of those within the Deep disclosed below,
Well watered with the tears of anguished plight.

I saw, along the Valley's bended bow,
Come persons weeping softly, at the pace
Processions follow in the world we know.

And as mine eyes moved downward from the face,
Astounding the reversal each one shows,
Halfway between the chin and the neck's base.

Their visages turned backward from their toes,
And retrograde they walked, or else they missed
The view of where the track they followed goes.

Perhaps some paralytic has a twist
Thus total; that I cannot well dispute,
But never saw, nor think it doth exist.

So God permit thee, Reader, to take fruit
From what thou readest, – how to keep my tears
From bathing all my face, do thou compute,

When, close at hand, our human form appears
Contorted so, that all the grief expressed
From out their eyes ran down between their rears.

Indeed I wept, and leaned against a breast
Of that hard cliff; until my Escort said:
“Art thou become a fool among the rest?”

Here piety's alive when pity's dead.
Who's more perversely wicked than the man
Afflicted by the judgments overhead?

Lift, lift thine eyes, behold for whom the span
Of earth did yawn before the Thebans' eyes;
And: 'Whither fall'st?' the cries of all began;

'Amphiaraus, he leaves the fight, he flies!
And down and down his falling knew no slack,
Until he came to Minos, him who tries.

Behold, he wears his visage on his back,
Because he looked ahead by lawless art;
He looks behind now, takes a rearward track.

And see Tiresias, changed in face and heart,
When he became a woman and did scale
And shift his looks and limbs and every part:

And had to wait until he could assail
The two entangled serpents with his wand,
Ere reassuming plumage of a male.

Behind his belly, walking next beyond,
Is Aruns: in the Luni mountains, hewn
Among the marble excellently blond,

Where from Carrara, peasants come to prune
Their vines, he had his cavern; from within
He saw the sea and heaven with stars bestrewn.

And she who hides her bosom with a linn
Of tresses long and loose that cover it,
And has on that side all her hairy skin,

Was Manto: searching many lands she hit
And settled in the place that gave me birth;
And therefore please give ear to me a bit.

When once her father went below the earth,
And Bacchus's own town became a slave,
Long while this woman measured the world's girth.

Fair Italy has a lake, whose waters lave
The Alps toward Germany, above Tyrol;
Benacus, – 'tis a name my fathers gave.

A thousand springs and more I take it, roll
'Twixt Garda and Val Camonica, all sent
From the Apennine to this same lake's control.

The Shepherds of Verona, Brescia, Trent,
Upon a central spot could make the sign
Of blessing, if that road were where they went.

Peschiera stands, a fortress firm and fine,
To front the Brescian and the Bergamask,
Where the surrounding margins most decline.

Here all the water you could hardly ask
The lake to hold embosomed, leaves; and so
A river runs where verdent meadows bask.

Immediately when it begins to flow,
Its name is changed to Mincio, to remain
Till Governolo sees it feed the Po.

Not flowing far it finds a sunken plain
Whereon it broadens out into a fen;
Where sometimes in the heat the waters wane.

On passing here, this maid who hated men,
Saw solid ground that lay in the morass,
Unpeopled and uncultivated then.

And there, to let all human consort pass,
She stayed, among her slaves, to work her arts;
And left her empty body in the grass.

And then the people scattered in those parts,
Resorted to that spot, because its force
Was in the marsh, a buckler to all darts.

They built a city there above her corse:
And honouring her who chose the place the first,
'Twas Mantua, without auguries' recourse.

More thickly was it populated erst,
Ere Pinamonte hoodwinked, to the eyes,
Poor Casalodi, by his madness cursed.

I warn thee, if thou hear in other wise
The history of how my town was built,
Let not the truth be stultified by lies.”

And I: “My Master, all thou’st said, and wilt,
Is article of faith, and no remark
That others make is aught but ashes spilt.

But tell me, are there any souls of mark
In this procession, worthy that thou speak?
To them alone my mind doth ever hark.”

And then he said: “The oldster from whose cheek
A beard hangs down his swarthy shoulder-blade,
What time in Greece a male was far to seek,

And scarce were babies left, – at Aulis played
The augur, and with Calchas told the dot
Of time for ropes being cut and anchors weighed.

Eurypylus his name, a certain spot
Of my high Tragedy contains him placed:
As well thou know’st, who knowest it every jot.

That other one, so spare about the waist,
Was Michael Scot, who deeply as can be
Pursued the game of magic double-faced.

And see Guido Bonatti, Asdente see,
Who would he had attended to his cord
And leather, but a late repentor he.

And see the wretched women, who abhorred
The needle, spindle, loom, foretelling fate,
And working spells with dolls and bits of sward.

Now come, for Cain ties faggots at the gate
Between the hemispheres, and touches, right
Below Seville, the waters of the Strait.

The moon was at the full but yesternight,
As thou’lt remember, for her light was strong
And sometimes made the dismal forest bright.”

While he was talking thus we moved along.

Inferno – Canto 21

We talked, as we repaired from bridge to bridge,
Of things that don't concern my Comedy,
And paused when we were on the highest ridge

O'er Evil Wallets' next profundity,
To see the vain lamenting of that ditch;
And found that it was dark amazingly.

As in the Venice arsenal, the pitch
Boils viscous in the Wintertime, to calk
The boats which are unseaworthy and which

Must be careened; and while the seasons balk,
Here's one that lays his next-year vessel's crib,
One paying seams with oakum; others walk

To hammer at a bow, a stern, a rib;
One fashions oars, one pulls old rope apart,
And others patch a mainsail or a jib:

So here, – but not by fire, by heavenly art, –
A thick and viscid pitch incessant boils
And smears the Valley's walls in every part.

But all the eye can see is bursting boils
And bubbles, by the ebullition raised,
Whene'er it heaves and hisses and recoils.

While I stood fixed on this and downward gazed,
My Leader crying out: "Take care, take care!"
Pulled me to him: and suddenly amazed,

I turned like one who wondering what is there,
Is anxious to behold what he must flee,
And yet so filled with terror's quick despair,

He will not wait, while looking back to see.
I saw a devil, black, who close behind
Came running up the causeway from the quay.

Ah me, how his appearance was unkind,
And how his ways looked bitter to mine eye,
With wings outspread and feet as light as wind!

He bore upon his shoulder sharp and high
A sinner's hips, whose feet were in the strain
Of talons. From our bridge we heard him cry:

“O Wicked Talons, look what I have ta'en,
Another of the Ancients of Saint Zita.
Just pop him in. I'll go back there again

Where – leaving out Bonturo – you will meet a
Grafter in every single man you meet.
For money every no will turn to ita.”

He throws him in, and turns his rapid feet
Back o'er the bridge; and never a mastiff reared
Was loose upon a robber's track more fleet.

The victim sank; rose, doubled and besmeared;
The fiends beneath the bridge cried out to him:
“Down here the Holy Face is not revered!

The Serchio is a different place to swim!
If thou art shy of scratches, 'ware the cooks,
Keep down below, and don't come up and skim.”

They grappled him with over a hundred hooks,
And said: “The dancing here is forced to plumb;
The filching's underhand, befitting crooks.”

Not otherwise the scullions' rule of thumb,
Which makes them fork the meat inside the pot
To hinder it from floating with the scum.

My kindly Master: “That it seemeth not
Thou'rt present, get thee in behind a crag,
Obtaining thus protection, if thou squat.

No matter what their insults or their brag,
I know how things will go; so feel no dread;
I've had a hand before in such a rag.”

Thereon he passed beyond the bridge's head,
And when he came to the Sixth Valley's rand,
His role was a serene and haughty tread.

As when a furiously storming band
Of dogs rush toward a pauper, who at first
Makes halt, and then extends a begging hand:

From underneath the bridge the demons burst,
And turned their pitchforks all against his breast.
He cried: "Let one attack me, if he durst!

Before your fatal hooks be further pressed,
Let one of you step forth and lend his ear,
Then all decide if spearing me be best."

The lot cried out: "Hey, Draggglecaudal, here!"
Then one stood forth and all the others back,
And: "What's the use?" he said, on drawing near.

"Believ'st thou, Draggglecaudal, that my track
Had led me here," I heard my Master say,
"Still safe from any similar attack,

Unless Heaven's will and friendly fate said yea?
Let us advance; in Heaven it is willed
That I lead someone down this fearful way."

His arrogance was so completely spilled,
That from his humbled hands the pitchfork slid;
He told the rest: "Not now may he be killed."

And then my Guide to me: "O thou, who'rt hid,
Asquat among the crags, like squatting bird,
Now cant thou safely come to me." I did.

I went to him as quickly as I heard;
And all the fiends pressed forward in their rows,
So that I feared they'd not observe their word.

Thus frightened did I formerly see those
That issued from Caprona's gate, paroled,
And found they were among as many foes.

I pressed myself against my Guide, to hold
Tight to him, and I never turned my glance
From faces so ill-boding and so bold.

Their forks presented: "Shall I make him dance?"
They said to one another. "Prick his rump,"
They answered; "Make him lively with a lance."

But then the fiend that should have held the stump,
Wheeled round and said, in manner rather starch:
"Here, Rufflebristle, drop it, drop it plump."

And then he said to us: "Ye cannot march
Along this causeway further: it has cracked
And lies in pieces under the Sixth Arch.

But if ye still are anxious to protract
Your journey, take this margin for a bit;
Nearby another causeway is intact.

Twelve hundred years and sixty-six, when it
Was five hours later yesterday, had been
And ended since the roadway here was split.

I'm sending men of mine that way, all keen
To see if any sinner airs his nod.
Go on with them, they will not misdemean.

Hellrider, Treadthehoarfrost, take thy prod,"
He started; "Thou Dogawful; and I tell
Thee, Frizzlewhiskers, thou shalt lead the squad.

Here Libidevil, Dragondag as well,
And Curlytush and Puppscratcher too,
And Scurvyfellow, crazy Robthehell.

Look carefully about the boiling glue:
And set this pair in safety on the quay
Where the next Causeway starts, as good as new."

"O me, my Master, what is that I see?"
I said; "Without a guard let's bear the brunt,
If thou canst lead; for I ask none for me.

If thou art as observant as thy wont,
See'st not their dreadful teeth, and how they gnash?
And how they eye us with a threatening front?"

And he: "Be not afraid, I am not rash.
And let them grind their teeth; it suits a warder
Of such boiled sinners as they would abash."

They turned upon their left along the border;
But first they all had stuck their tongues out, thinned
Between their teeth, to wait their leader's order:

And he had blown the bugle, breaking wind.

Inferno – Canto 22

I've witnessed cavalry when striking camp,
And setting out to storm, and on review,
And sometimes taking safety as their lamp.

I've seen a vanguard which through your land flew,
O Aretines, and I've seen parties raid,
And many tourneys fought and jousts run through,

Where trumpets sounded or where bells were played
Or drums, as castles signalled from afar,
With methods used by us, or foreign-made;

But never to so strange a pipe did car
Or rider move, or foot soldier I saw,
Or vessel steering by the coast or star.

We went with those ten demons. What a raw,
Rough company! But, with the saints in church;
At inns with those who idolize their maw!

I watched the pitch alone, with eager search
For all contained within it, and to note
What people that dark burning might besmirch.

Like dolphins signalling to men afloat
With bow-bent spines, who make the sailors fain
To stand by and preserve themselves and boat:

So here, in hope to alleviate his pain,
Some sinner showed his back, in longing fond,
And quicker than a flash, dived down again.

And as along the edges of a pond
The frogs will lie, with nothing out but nose,
Their feet concealed and all the rest beyond:

So here on every side, the sinners' pose.
But down they dive among the boiling lumps,
As soon as ever Frizzlewhiskers shows.

I saw, and still my heart with horror thumps,
One wait, as it Both happen there will sit
A frog, while that one closest to him jumps.

And Puppyscratcher, nearest opposite,
Harpooned him by his pitch-entangled hair,
And held him like an otter on a spit.

I knew by now the names of all those there,
From noticing as they at first were sent,
And when they called, remarking who they were.

“O Robthehell, now let thy claws be bent
To fit his back and strip him of his skin,”
The damned demons cried with one consent.

And I: “O Master, see if thou canst win
Some knowledge of this wretch who cannot spar
Against such foes as catch him in their gin.”

My Leader stood beside him black with tar,
And asked him whence he was, and he replied:
“My birthplace was the kingdom of Navarre.

I served a lord my mother’s wit supplied;
She bore me to a scoundrel, who destroyed
Himself and everything to him allied.

By good king Thibaut then was I employed;
Where I began the grafter’s game, a slip
I pay for in this heat here.” Much annoyed

Was Curlytush, who had below his lip
A pair, like boars in forest or on farms,
And proved to him how either one could rip.

The cats have got their mouse; but its alarms
Are hid in Frizzlewhiskers’ close embrace,
Who says: “Stand back while he is in my arms.”

And turning to my Master then his face,
Said: “Ask; if thou desire him to convey
More news, before they tear his limbs from place.”

My Guide: "Well, of the other culprits, say
Are there Italians, as thou knowest, here
Beneath the pitch?" And he: "I came away

Just now from one that comes from very near.
Would I were safe below with him! Not twice
Should I be caught, with claw or hook to fear."

And Libidevil: "That will well suffice."
He said, and caught the victim with his gaff,
And pulling at his arm, took off a slice.

And Dragondag too, aiming at the calf,
Would have his share: so their decurion wheeled
And wheeled again, with frowns at his riff-raff.

When once a little order was revealed,
My Guide turned straight to him whose only aim
Seemed eyeing still his wound, and thus appealed:

"Who was the one, from whom thou wast to blame
To come away and land?" "An arrant cheat,"
He answered; "Fra Gomita was his name,

Gallura-born, a vessel of deceit,
Who had his master's enemies in hand
And won their praises by his conduct neat.

Cash paid, they slid: he says, you understand.
And in his other jobs, his sly intrigue,
His swindling, was not picayune but grand.

With him Don Michel Zanche is in league,
From Logodoro; on Sardinian blab
Their tongues keep wagging on without fatigue.

Oh me, look there; he grinds his teeth! He'll stab!
I've more to say, but fear a friend like that
Is ripening his plans to scratch my scab."

The provost turned on Scurvyfellow: cat
Ne'er stretched her eyes more eagerly to spring:
And said: "Get over there, thou wicked bat!"

“If ye are keen for sight or questioning,”
The frightened one resumed, “of them: to wit,
Of Tuscan or of Lombard, both I’ll bring;

But Wicked Talons must withdraw a bit,
That those may not be fearful of their clutch;
And I, from this same spot whereon I’ll sit,

For one of me will bring you seven such,
By whistling, like the signals we begin
When some one pokes his head above the smutch.”

On hearing this Dogawful raised his chin
And shook his head and said: “I smell a trick;
He’s planned to get a chance for diving in.”

And he, who had devices at his pick,
Replied: “A pretty trickster, am I not,
To make my comrades sufferings more thick?”

Hellrider, rash, not siding_ with the lot,
Cried out: “If now thou lettest thyself fall,
I shall not be behind thee at a trot,

But with my wings I’ll skim your pitchy pall.
Let’s leave the height and make the bank our shield,
To see if thou be cleverer than we all.”

O Thou that redest, new the sport revealed!
To the other side they all turned back their eyes,
The fierce one first to whom it least appealed.

In choice of time the Navarrese is wise;
He plants his fo’oting firm, and in a thought
Out of their provost’s arms he jumps, and flies.

They all were full of shame, but heaviest fraught
Was he that caused the loss: with wings aversed,
He started after, shouting: “Thou art caught!”

But small the gain, for wings are at their worst
When matched with fear: one dived below the muck,
One skimmed it and flew upward, bosom first:

Not otherwise you see a flashing duck
Dive down when threatened by a falcon's quest,
And him return, wings ruffled, out of luck.

And Treadthehoarfrost, furious at the jest,
Spreads out his wings, and after them he slips
In hope that, hunting over, now the test.

The instant that the grafter downward dips,
He turns to use his talons on his mate,
And comes with him, above the pool, to grips.

But the other was a hawk of adult weight
To grapple with his foe. The couple fell,
And in the burning cauldron found their fate.

Ungrappled quickly by the heat of Hell,
They struggled to arise, but all in vain,
Their wings were stuck with viscous tar too well.

The rest, and Frizzlewhiskers, felt their pain
And sent four flying toward the other side,
With all the hooks, to fish them up again.

From here, from there, all flew below, and tried
To fix their pitchforks in the pair embroiled,
Who now were cooked to underneath their hide.

We came away and left them where they toiled.

Inferno – Canto 23

In silence, without company, we strode
Alone, and one ahead, and one behind,
Like Minor Friars travelling a road.

The present combat brought into my mind
The fable out of Aesop, where we get
The frog and mouse; 'tis of the selfsame kind.

And no more similar are still and yet,
Than these two pairs of cases, contemplate
The starting-point of each, the end they met.

And as from one thought others germinate:
So now from this there sprouted forth a leaf
Which brought my first fear back, but twice as great.

For thus I thought: "The devils came to grief
Because of us; and their absurd mistakes,
Their hurts, will rouse them up, 'tis my belief.

If in their evil nature anger wakes,
They'll follow after us, more fierce and fell
Than hound that has a rabbit which he shakes."

I felt my hair on end beneath the spell
Of fright; looked back to see the fiends appear; said:
"Master, now thou must conceal us well,

Both thee and me, at once, or else I fear
The Wicked Talons; they are close behind.
I so imagine them, that I can hear."

And he: "Were I a glass with metal lined,
I'd not reflect thine outward figure shown,
More quick than I take impress from thy mind.

Just now thy thoughts came in among mine own,
Alike in face and attitude and scope.
From both of them has one intention grown.

Now, if so be the right-hand bulwark slope,
The fosse beyond will offer a descent
To flee the imagined hunt, and have our hope.”

He had not finished telling his intent,
Ere close at hand I saw the demons chase,
Their pinions spread, and we the prey they scent.

My Leader swept me up in his embrace:
As when a mother, waked by noises, sees
A mass of burning flame that fills the place,

And snatches up her little son and flees,
So careless of herself in care for him,
She does not stay for even her chemise.

Then downward from the rocks’ unyielding brim
He slid, supine along the surface cast,
Which forms the neighboring Wallet’s outer rim.

No water through a race e’er slid so fast,
To turn a mill-wheel set upon the run,
E’en when it reached the very blades at last,

As down the slope my Master: and ‘twas done
With me upon his bosom, who instead
Of his companion, seemed to be his son.

His feet were scarce established on the bed
Of that next Vale when they were on the hill
Above us; but no longer cause for dread:

For they, by highest Providence’s will
Set guards to the Fifth Trench, were not possessed
Of power to depart beyond its sill.

We found this moat a painted people’s nest,
Who circled round with very languid strut,
In tears, with faces weary and depressed.

They had on habits by that pattern cut, –
With hoods that barred the vision by their tilt, –
In which the Cluny brothers’ forms are shut.

The outside of them dazzles with its gilt;
The inside's lined with lead, so heavily
That all those robes seem straw, which Frederick built.

Oh, wearying mantle for eternity!
We turned again, once more upon the left,
With them; we watched their grievous ecstasy.

But this tired folk, because of that huge heft,
Moved on so slowly, that our every pace
Was of our previous company bereft.

I, therefore, to my Guide: "Try now to trace
Some one that's notable in name or deed;
Keep watching as we go along the place."

And one who heard my Tuscan speech, gave heed
And cried behind us: "Hold your feet, O ye
That hurry through the gloom at such a speed!

Perhaps thou'lt find what thou dost ask, of me."
My Guide turned back, and said: "Await; then go
According as thou find'st his rate to be."

I halted, and I saw two cloaked ones show
Great haste of spirit in the countenance:
Their load, the crowded pathway made them slow.

When near enough, they gazed at me askance
Some while, before their voices struck a note.
At last they said to each other, with a glance:

"He seems alive, to see his moving throat;
If dead, by what exemption are they shorn
Of being covered with the heavy coat?"

And then they said to me: "O Tuscan born,
Who seek'st our college of sad hypocrites,
Say who thou art, and hold us not in scorn."

And I to them: "In the great town that sits
Upon fair Arno river, born and bred,—
I wear my usual body; life permits.

But who are ye whose grief so great is spread,
As I perceive, and on your cheeks escapes?
What pain is yours that's glittering so red?"

And one replied to me: "Our orange capes
Are lead so thick they make the balance creak
That weighs them, our most miserable shapes.

We're Jolly Friars, Bolognese, who speak,
He Loderingo and I Catalan;
For both of us thy native town did seek, –

Though generally towns choose a single man, –
To guard her peace; and what we were, who takes
The trouble, sees within Gardinga's span."

And I: "O Friars, your misdoing makes ..."
I said no more, for to my eyes there came
One crucified on earth, and with three stakes.

On seeing me, he twisted all his frame,
And blew upon his beard with heavy sighs:
And Brother Catalan, who marked the same.

Said: "That one there, impaled before thine eyes,
Gave counsel to the Pharisees: "Tis more
Expedient for the people one man dies."

There naked and athwart the highway's floor
Thou seest him; and he must feel the bruise
And judge the weight of each who passes o'er.

His father-in-law, all they that shared his views,
Here bear like pain; and all his council pays,
Who sowed so bad a harvest for the Jews."

I then marked Virgil standing in amaze
O'er him that was extended in a cross
So vilely, thus being exiled endless days.

Then he addressed the friar, at a loss:
"Now, if you please and are permitted, say
If, toward the right, some opening from the fosse

Will lead us two along upon our way,
Not forcing the black angels to appear
Within this Vale, to set us under weigh.”

He answered: “There’s a bridge of rock more near
Than thou mayst think, which leaves the outer bound
To arch each cruel ditch, except that, here

In this one, it is fallen to the ground:
But ye can climb its ruinous ascent,
Which rises sloping over all around.”

My Leader stood a little with head bent,
Then said: “He told us falsely, he who flies
To hook the sinners yonder.” In assent

The friar: “In Bologna I heard the wise
Report the devil vicious; heard them say
That he’s a liar, father of all lies.”

Whereon my Guide strode hastily away,
His face a little marked with anger’s heat;
And I left those whose sins so heavy weigh,

And followed in the steps of his dear feet.

Inferno – Canto 24

Within the year's first youth, when
Sol his locks Doth temper, in Aquarius's prime;
When nights diminish toward the equinox;

When earth is white with pictures which the rime
Has drawn to represent her sister snow,
Although her brush wears out in little time:

The peasant, who has seen his fodder low,
Arises and looks out, beholds the ground
All whitened, and he smites his thigh a blow;

And goes back to the house and stamps around,
Poor puzzled wretch, and scolds, and never stays;
But goes outside again, and hope is found

Because the earth is different to his gaze
In such a little while; he takes his crook
And forth he drives his flock of sheep to graze:

Thus I, dismayed to see the Master's look,
With such disturbance shown upon his face;
And such the rapid medicine I took.

For, coming to the blasted bridge apace,
My Guide turned toward me, wearing now the smile
That first I witnessed at the mountain's base.

When he had taken counsel for awhile,
Examining the ruin keenly first,
He held his arms to help me up the pile.

Like one that judges while in work immersed,
And always seems provided, never lags:
Thus, lifting me along one boulder burst

In two, he marked another of the crags,
And said: "Thou now canst cling unto this strut;
But try first if it holds thee up, or sags."

To leaden capes it was a pathway shut;
For me with help, and him so light of feet,
'Twas difficult to climb from jut to jut.

Had not the bank on this side of the street
Been lower than the other, for his hopes
I will not answer, – I had met defeat.

But as the whole of Evil Wallets slopes
To meet the lowest shaft, which midmost lies,
The Valleys all become concentric copes,

Whose one bank has to fall, the other rise.
But meanwhile we were mounted to the crest
Where the last fallen boulder met our eyes.

My breathing was so squeezed from out my chest,
When I was up my energy was dead;
I sank upon the nearest rock to rest.

“Now is the time new vigour must be bred,”
My Master said; “Not sitting at one’s ease,
Is fame to be achieved, nor prone in bed.

Who ends his life without it, when he flees
Leaves vestiges on earth of such a kind
As smoke in air and spindrift on the seas.

So now standup, and conquer with thy mind
Thy windedness, for spirit wins a war,
Unless enfeebled through too thick a rind.

And even longer climbing lies before;
'Tis not enough we’ve left their lying fold.
If thou hast marked my words, now let them score.”

So up I rose, and proved that I could hold
More breath than I felt able to contain,
And said: “Lead on, for I am strong and bold.”

Up on the bridge we took our path again;
'Twas rocky, narrow, very gravelling,
Steeper than that before, an arduous lane.

Not to seem weak, I talked while travelling;
Whereon a voice came out of the next ditch,
In words whose import was beyond unravelling:

I know not what it said though on the pitch
Of the arch that crossed, I was, though ears did strive;
But he that spoke seemed moved to angry pitch.

I leaned to look; mine eyes could not contrive,
Though straining hard, to pierce the murky pall:
So I: "O Master, hasten to arrive

On the other bank; let us dismount the wall:
For as I hear and do not understand,
So do I look and nothing see at all."

He said: "I've no reply to thy demand
Save doing; for a reasonable request
Should be fulfilled by works, not phrases bland."

We went down where the bridgehead comes to rest
Upon the Eighth partition. From the track
The Valley now at last was manifest.

Within it I could see a gruesome pack
Of serpents, and of such astounding mien
That thinking of them makes my blood flow back.

In sandy Libya more cannot be seen:
For though she breed asp, mocassin, and dart,
And adder, double-ended amphisbene,

So many noxious monsters every part
Of her ne'er showed, – and add all Ethiope
And every Red Sea coast upon the chart.

Amid this mass of cruel, writhing rope
Ran naked shapes, fear-stricken to the core,
Without a hole to hide, or heliotrope.

Fastened behind with snakes their hands they bore,
Snakes' heads and tails came creeping round their loins,
And then were twisted into knots before.

On one whom we looked down at near our quoins
A serpent darted suddenly, and bit
Below the neck, just where the shoulder joins.

Ne'er i or o so rapidly was writ,
As he took fire and burned and was reduced
To white and falling ashes, every whit.

And then along the ground these ashes, loosed
And scattered, crawled together of themselves;
And his first form was quickly reproduced.

And thus, we learn from sages on our shelves,
The phoenix dies and resurrects, to greet
Her half-millennial year. He learns, who delves,

That she bath neither grass nor grain to eat,
But incense-tears and balsam are her fare;
And spikenard and myrrh her winding-sheet.

And like the man that falls quite unaware,
When force demoniac hurls him to the ground, –
Or other oppilation men must bear, –

Who, when he rises, glances all around,
Quite dazed from the great anguish of the throes
He's just endured, and stares till sighs are found:

Thus was the sinner after he arose.
O power of God, thy stringency is seen
When crashing down in vengeance like those!

My Leader asked him then who he had been;
And he: "I rained from Tuscany, since when
It is not long, – into this hole obscene.

I liked a bestial life, not that of men,
The bastard mule I was! Vanni Fucci I;
A beast. Pistoia was my worthy den."

I said: "Direct him not to slip us by;
And ask him what his crime, so deeply spurned.
A furious man of blood, he met my eye."

The sinner hearing, did not feign, but turned
Toward me, with both his countenance and mind.
And suddenly with doleful shame he burned.

Then said: "I've greater grief that thou shouldst find
Me in the wretched horror of this hole,
Than when I left my former life behind.

I can't refuse what thou dost ask: this goal
Was mine, so deep, because, to win my doom,
In the Fair Treasures' sacristy I stole.

Another was tried wrongly in my room.
But lest this meeting cause thee to rejoice,
If thou shalt ever leave the realms of gloom,

Make wide thine ears to my prophetic voice:
Pistoia first of all is thinned of Blacks;
Then Florence gets new men and ways, by choice.

From Val di Magra Mars makes lightning wax,
All smothered up in turbid clouds; and then
With e'en more bitter and impetuous racks,

The rage of battle fills Campo Picen';
Where suddenly the lightning rends apart
The clouds, and strikes the whole of the White men.

And this I tell that thou with sorrow smart."

Inferno – Canto 25

The robber, when his words were at an end,
Raised both his hands and made the figs, and flung
This taunt: “For thee, God, this do I intend.”

Snakes are since then my friends, for one now clung
Upon him, and encircled round his neck,
As if to say: “I’ll make thee hold thy tongue;”

And one rebound his arms, and set a check
By rivetting herself in front, so taut
That now they could not move a single speck.

Pistoia, ah Pistoia, why not take thought
To burn thyself away, who dost excel
In evil deeds what thy foul founders wrought?

In all the gloomy tenements of Hell
I saw no soul so God-defying: meek
By contrast he who from Thebes’ walls once fell.

He fled away, unable now to speak.
And then a Centaur full of rage, behold,
Came shouting: “Where’s the callous wretch I seek?”

I do not think Maremma’s marshes hold
So many snakes as writhed upon his rump
To where the human part begins to unfold.

Upon his shoulders, seated like a hump,
With outspread wings a dreadful dragon rode,
Which sets aflame whatever it may bump.

My Master said: “That’s Cacus, whose abode
Was in the boulders of Mount Aventine,
Where oft from blood he spilt a lake has flowed.

He does not go with his compeers in line,
Because he dragged by stealth into his den,
From the great herd nearby, both bulls and kine.

His crooked work was put an end to then
By Hercules's club; perhaps, indeed,
It struck a hundred blows; he felt not ten."

While he was talking thus, the human steed
Passed, and a tierce of spirits came, and we
Did neither one look down or give them heed,

Until we heard them shouting: "Who are ye?"
So our recountal ended at the word,
And then we paid attention to the three.

I did not know them, but it so occurred,
As it will oft occur, that one of those
Pronounced another's name; and thus we heard:

"Where now has Cianfa stopped, dost thou suppose?"
Then I, that my Guide's interest should not sink,
Applied a finger to my chin and nose.

And now, my Reader, if thy credence blink
At what I say, I feel thy situation;
For what I saw I scarce consent to think.

As I was fixed on them, with trepidation
I saw a snake six-footed rise and spring
On one, and hold with closest application.

His middle legs around the belly cling,
His fore-legs grip the victim's arms in prize,
Both cheeks are sucked in his mouth's opening,

He stretches hind-legs out around the thighs,
And pokes his tail between, and for a hasp
He takes the loins above in firmest wise.

No ivy ever clutched a tree in clasp
So tight, as was this spirit by the form,
Entwined with his, of that atrocious asp.

They melted and they mixed, like wax when warm;
Their shapes and colours started to unite,
Till neither corresponded to his norm:

As, when a piece of paper is alight,
Before the flame we see brown edges run,
Which, not yet black, are still no longer white.

The other two looked on while this was done,
And screamed: "Oh me, Agnel, not so thou wast!
For now thou art not either two nor one."

The two heads now were one, and there were crossed
Two faces in the countenance it wore,
Which held together both of those now lost.

The arms flowed into two, which once were four;
The thighs and legs, the belly and the bust,
Turned all to members never seen before.

In place of what both looked like first, was thrust
A double nothing, monstrously complete,
Which left us, stepping slowly in the dust.

Then, as a lizard, in the sodden heat
Of dog-days, flashes out from hedge of thorn
And makes a streak of lightning in the street:

A little fiery snake, which did not warn
By hiss, shot at the bellies of the two,
Part livid and part black as pepper-corn,

And in the spot our nourishment goes through
Ere birth, it pierced through one (while one escaped),
And fell before him stiff. The victim's view

Dwelt on the rigid form; no word he shaped;
But planted on his feet, as though a fit
Of sleep or fever mastered him, he gaped.

The serpent gazed at him and he at it:
From its mouth and his wound smoke issued hot,
And mingled, from the biter and the bit.

Let Lucan now be silent, in the spot
Where poor Sabellus and Nasidius die,
And listen well while I discharge my shot:

Let Ovid lay his Arethusa by,
His Cadmus, changed to fountain and to snake,
Poetically: I have no envy, I:

Two beings, front to front, he'll never take,
Transmuting them till both the forms they wear
Exchange their matter, and each the other make.

The barter was reciprocally fair:
The serpent split its tail, the man was seen
To join his feet in one, which were a pair.

From hip to heel the length of leg between
So quickly coalesced, it was not scarred
To show where any opening had been.

What shape we saw the other's limbs discard
The forked tail assumed; and all its skin
Grew softer, while the other's skin grew hard.

The arms sank in their pits, becoming thin;
The fore-paws, which were short and small about,
Grew out as quickly as the arms went in.

The hind-paws, twisted tightly like a clout,
Resolved into the member each man hides,
While from the wretch's own, two paws sprang out.

And meanwhile, smoke was painting, on both sides,
In colours new; and making hair to grow
And stopping hair from growing on their hides.

The one arose, the other sank down low:
But neither turned away his evil lamps,
While both their countenances changed below.

Out toward the temples of the one that ramps
The excess was drawn, and forth as ears was thrust
On cheeks before not fitted with such stamps:

And what was not drawn backward and yet must
Be utilized, became a nose; the pout
Of lips was rendered thicker, as is just.

The groveller thrust forth a pointed snout,
And drew his ears within his head suppressed:
As snails their horns, when suddenly in doubt.

His tongue, united once and quick at jest,
Now splits, the other's, forked before that,
Now coalesces. The smoke comes to rest.

The soul turned snake and forced to travel flat,
Fled on its belly, hissing, down the Vale;
The other talking, looked at it, and spat:

And turning his new back, devoid of tail,
Addressed his mate: "Let Buoso run the wold
Face down, as I have done along this dale."

The ballast in the Seventh Valley's hold
I thus beheld transmuted: my excuse
The strangeness, if I've botched what I have told.

And though my eyes were dazzled, and my use
Of mind a trifle overcome, yet this
Did not prevent my seeing through the ruse

They made to slink away: I know the abyss
Contains Puccio the Hobbler. Sole of three
He did not suffer metamorphosis.

The man Gaville mourns, the last was he.

Inferno – Canto 26

Rejoice, O Florence, that thy mighty name
Doth spread its pinions over land and sea,
And all the bounds of Hell repeat thy fame!

Among the thieves were five of high degree
Thy citizens: with shame was I shot through,
And no huge honour comes of it for thee.

But if toward morning what one dreams is true,
Thou'lt feel, and not have very long to wait,
What Prato wishes thee, and others too.

If now arrived, it still would be too late.
Would that the things had come which fates prepare.
The older I, my grieving the more great.

Departing thence, we mounted by the stair
The scaurs had offered downward toward the Vale,
My Master first, dragging me with him there.

And following along the lonesome trail,
Among the bridge's crags and stubble stone,
Our hands helped out whene'er our feet did fail.

It grieved me then, and still with grief I groan,
Remembering what I saw; more tight I rein
My intellect, lest it run on alone

Without the hand of virtue to restrain:
If happy star or Something better still
Dowered me, let me not make its influence vain.

Thick, as the peasant resting on a hill, –
In months when he that gives the world its light
Hides his face least from us; when flies grow still

And yield to the mosquitoes for the night, –
Sees fireflies below him in the valley,
Making perhaps his field, his vineyard bright:

The flames of the Eighth Trench gleamed thick to tally;
And I could well perceive how bright it flares,
On coming where I looked upon that alley.

As he that wreaked his sweet revenge through bears,
Beheld Elijah's chariot arise
With horses aiming heavenward like prayers,

And followed in its flight until his eyes
Saw nothing but a flame, which grew more pale
Till 'twas a shred of cloud that upward flies:

Thus flames o'erspread the bottom of this jail.
Each moved, not showing what 'twas robber of,
Each covering a sinner in its veil.

I stood so straight upon the bridge above
That, only for a crag whereon I leant,
I should have fallen off without a shove.

My Leader, when he saw me so intent,
Said: "In the fires are spirits hid away,
Each wrapped within the flame wherewith he is brent."

"My Master," I replied; "thy words convey
A fuller certainty; but I was deft
And reasoned this, and was about to say:

Who's in the flame we see so doubly cleft
Above, that it might issue from the pyre
Where, with his brother, Eteocles was left?"

He answered me: "There suffer in that fire
Ulysses, Diomede, not one alone,
Because the two at once roused Heaven's ire.

And there inside their burning flame they moan
The ambush of the horse, which made the gate
Where fled the noble seed whence Rome is grown.

They weep inside there Deidamia's fate,
Who mourns Achilles yet, although she's dead;
The high Palladium's theft they expiate."

“If they can speak among those sparks so red,”
I said; “I pray thee, Master, as one prays
Repraying till a thousand prayers are said,

Thou’lt not refuse to linger till that blaze,
Two-horned along the summit of it, come:
See how desire bends me.” “Fit for praise.

Thy prayer,” he said; “Objection must be dumb;
And I accept the meeting thou dost seek.
But thou must see that thine own tongue be mum.

I guess what thou desirest; let me speak:
Perhaps they would be shy of giving ear
To anything thou saidst, since they were Greek.”

The moment that the flame approached so near
That my Conductor deemed the time was due,
I heard him speak to them, as follows here:

“O ye, that in a single flame are two,
If I alive deserved of you, if I
Great things or even small deserved of you,

When, in the world, I wrote in verses high:
Move not away ere one of you have told
Where he, so long lost sight of, went to die.”

The larger horn that crowned that flame so old
Began to move itself about and dip,
And murmur like a fire when winds are bold;

Then, waving back and forward at the tip,
As if it might have been a tongue that spoke,
It raised a voice, which said: “On taking ship

From Circe, when a year beneath her yoke
There near Gaeta, where I had been wrecked,
Before Aeneas christened it with smoke;

No longing for my son, and no respect
I bore my father, and no love I owed
Penelope, no joy she might expect,

Could down the vast desire wherewith I glowed
To make myself an expert in the world,
Of human vice and virtue's every mode.

Forth on the open deep with sail unfurled
I started, with that little faithful train
Whose loyalty had ever been unburl'd.

I coasted both the shores as far as Spain,
Morocco; saw Sardinia; I was borne
Among the other isles those seas contain.

Both I and all my mates were old and worn
Before we came upon the narrow bourn
Where Hercules set pillars up to warn

All men to go no further, but return.
Upon the right I left behind Seville,
Upon the left Ceuta was astern.

'A hundred thousand perils, brothers, thrill
Our memories,' I said; 'And here's the West:
To that brief vigil of our senses, still

Remaining to us ere we find our rest,
Do not deny the knowledge of the earth
Behind the sun, unpeopled and unguessed.

Consider, it was men procured your birth:
Not one of you was born to be a brute,
But keen on virtue's quest, with minds of worth.'

I made my mates' desire grow so acute
By this short speech, to hurry on the way,
That I could not have held them from pursuit.

And with the stern presented to the day,
We winged our foolish flight with steady oar;
And ever upon the left our progress lay.

The stars of the other pole now shone before,
By night; and ours soon lay upon the rim,
And then did not arise from Ocean's floor.

Five times rekindled and as many dim,
The light beneath the moon, since when we flew
On lofty quest, and lo! there seemed to swim

A mountain into sight, of murky hue
Because of distance; and whose towering head
Seemed higher than had ever met my view.

The joy we felt soon turned to fear instead:
A whirlwind issued from the novel ground,
And smote our tiny vessel full ahead.

Three times it whirled us and the waters round;
The fourth it lifted up our stern amain,
The stem went down, for so was Someone bound, –

And then the sea closed over us again.”

Inferno – Canto 27

Once more the flame was in the erect position
Of silence, and had just begun to make
Away, with my most precious Poet's permission,

When one of those that followed in its wake,
Drew our attention to its tip of yellow,
From where it caused a muffled sound to break.

Like the Sicilian bull, whose earliest bellow
Expressed the pain of him, and justly so,
Whose file had formed it; when the wretched fellow –

Low'd loudly with the deep accent of woe,
The bull, although of shining copper blent,
Appeared from its poor stricken heart to low:

Thus here, for lack of issuance or vent,
At first the sorry words were forced to ape
The languages of the flame where they were pent;

But having found their passage of escape
At the apex, which they moved to form a phrase, –
With movements of the tongue where they took shape, –

We heard them say: "O thou to whom I raise
My voice, who spokest now with Lombard turn,
In saying: 'More I ask not; go thy ways;'

Although I may be late to seek my turn,
Be not upset to talk with me and halt:
Thou see'st I'm not upset, and yet I burn.

If thou art fallen but now in this blind vault
From that sweet Latin land, from where I bore
Down here with me the total of my fault:

Say, have the Romagnoli peace or war?
My mountain-peaks between Urbino lie
And those whence Tiber's unlocked waters pour."

Still leaning over, all intent was I,
And then my Leader touched me on the side
And said: "This one's Italian; thou reply."

And I who knew the answer well, replied
Without awaiting: "O thou soul, whose screen
Of fire does not let thee be descried,

Thy dear Romagna's not, has never been,
Devoid of war, in tyrants' hearts inbred:
But when I left, none openly was seen.

Ravenna stays the same while years are sped:
The eagle from Polenta broods its nest
With wings that cover Cervia in their spread.

The town so long submitted to the test,
Where Frenchmen on a bloody heap were flung,
Is ever at the verdant paws' behest.

The mastiffs from Verruchio, old and young,
Whose foul care of Montagna all men quote,
Bore with their teeth where they so long have clung.

The cities where Santern', Lamone float,
Are 'neath the lion-cub, whose lair is white,
Who with the changing seasons casts his coat.

The town the Savio bathes and clasps so tight,
Which sits between the prairie and the mount,
Sits too 'twixt tyranny and freedom's right.

Now, who thou art I prithee to recount:
Let not thyself be specially implored,
That, in the world above, thy name may count."

A little while at first the fire roared
As it was wont, the pointed apex stirred
Here, there, and finally these words were poured:

"If I believed my answer should be heard
By one who'd ere return above the ground,
All movement of this flame should be deferred.

But since no soul returned from this profound
Ever, alive, if it be truth I hear,
I'll say, nor fear that infamy redound:

A man of arms was I, then Cordelier;
I thought I could, thus girt, amend the worst;
And what I thought, had followed, – this is clear, –

Except for the High Priest, I wish him cursed!
Who drove me back into my former sin;
And how and quare thou shalt hear rehearsed.

While I was still the form of bones and skin
My mother gave to me, my works and days
Were rather of the fox than leonine.

The wily strategies and covert ways,
I knew them all; and handled so their scopes
That all the earth resounded with the blaze.

When I had reached the age whereat our hopes
Are put aside, and every person ought
To lower sail and coil away the ropes;

What once I'd loved now seemed most dearly bought.
Assoiled, I took the habit; but to lose,
Ah, hapless me! the prize I might have caught.

The prince of modern Pharisees, – whose views,
Though near the Lateran still, were set on war,
And not with any Saracens or Jews;

For they were Christian names his foemen bore,
And none had been in Acre's conquering host
Or sold supplies to enlarge the Soldan's store, –

Regarded not his holy vows, his post
So lofty, or that sacred cord of mine,
“Whose wearers' thinness was its ancient boast,

But, – like Sylvester fetched to Constantine
To cure him leprous, from Soracte's side, –
He had me fetched as doctor, with design

That I should cure the fever of his pride.
He asked my counsel and I rested mute,
Because his words seemed drunk. Then, to decide,

He said: 'Let not thy heart misgive thee. Do't,
For I absolve thee now; resolve my doubt
How to raze Pal estrina to the root.

I can admit to Heaven, and shut out:
Thou knowest it well: two therefore are the keys
My predecessor did not care about.'

When with such weighty arguments as these
He'd forced me to where silence was unmeet,
I said: 'Then, seeing, Father, thou dost please

To wash that sin I near with slipping feet;
Long promise, short fulfilment of the same,
Will make thee triumph in the lofty seat.'

As soon as I was dead, Saint Francis came
For me; but one of those black cherubim
Said: 'Do not take him. Play an honest game.

Among my slaves below's the place for him,
Because the advice he gave was fraudulent;
Since when my hands are on his tonsure's rim:

For none can be absolved and not repent;
Nor can one both repent and wish the crime,
For there the contradiction's evident.'

O me unhappy! how I woke, what time
He seized upon me, saying: 'Thou perhaps
Thought not my logic could be so sublime!'

He took me down to Minos, who enwraps
His tail eight times around his stubborn frame,
Then bites it with his anger-frenzied chaps,

And says: 'He's of the sinners cloaked in flame.'
So here, as thou canst see, I'm lost for aye;
'And clothed like this, I mourn my hideous shame.'

When he had ended all he had to say,
The flame passed on, lamenting, not to the ear,
But twisting, shaking hard, its pointed ray.

I and my Leader climbed along the drear
And rocky bridge, to where the next arch rode
The trench wherein those wicked souls pay dear,

Who, separating, add unto their load.

Inferno – Canto 28

Who ever could, and even free from rhymes,
Recount in full the wounds I now saw bleed,
E'en though they should explain repeated times?

Whatever tongue would surely fail. Indeed,
The language to express it, and the mind
To grasp it, cannot cope with such a need.

If one could gather all the dead that lined
The stormland of Apulia, all the throng
That grieved the blood they spilt there, thus consigned

By Trojans, or by warfare waged so long,
Which gathered such a splendid store of rings,
As Livy tells us, who is never wrong;

And those that felt the battling blow that stings,
When Robert Guiscard drove them to a stand;
And those whose bones yet light the fame that clings

About Cepran', where all from Puglian land
Were traitors, or by Tagliacozzo bleach,
Where Erard won without a sword in hand:

Their stumps and mutilations, all and each,
Would not suggest in very smallest part
What bloody filth this inmost fosse could reach.

Was never cask with spile-board split apart,
So disembowelled as one we chanced to meet,
Laid open from the chin to where we fart.

His guts were hanging nearly to his feet;
We saw his midriff and the wretched sack
That renders excrement of what we eat.

And while I gazed with vision keen to attack,
He saw, and opening with his hands his breast,
Said: "See, I rend me even to the back.

See how Mahomet's maimed. Among the rest
Ahead of me walks Ali, in a fit
Of weeping; he is cleft from chin to crest.

And those thou seest gathered in this pit
Were sowers all of schism and dissension
'When living; and they therefore thus are split.

A devil stands behind there, to the intention
Of hacking us with his unfeeling sword,
Restoring us to this estate I mention,

Each time we come to tread this doleful sward;
Because our wounds are healed again and whole
Before we come again for our reward.

But who art thou, thus gazing from the mole,
As shunning to go meet the punishment
Allotted to thy self-accused soul?"

"Death hath not touched-him yet, nor is he sent,"
My Master answered, "to his torture led;
But that he see Hell's ultimate content

He's sent here in my leading, who am dead;
To go on down from Ring to hideous Ring:
And true as that I speak, is what I've said."

Above a hundred heard, and wondering
They halted in the ditch, and I was eyed
By 'spirits who forgot their torment's sting.

"Then say to Fra Dolcin that he provide
Enough of victuals, – thou that soon mayst go
To see the sun, – unless his hopes are tied

To following me here soon; lest blocked by snow,
He let those from Novara win the day,
Who otherwise have a hard row to hoe."

With one foot lifted up to go his way,
Mahomet paused to speak the words I quote;
Then put it down when he had said his say.

Another, who was wounded through the throat,
Whose nose was cut away to 'neath the brow,
Who had a single ear, who in the moat

Had halted with the others, staring, – now
Before the others could, struck up his pipe,
All red outside from bleeding like a sow,

And said: “O thou whom sinning doth not gripe,
Whose features I have seen in Latin air,
Unless deceived by too resembling type;

Remember Pier da Medicina, if e'er
Thou see'st again the lovely plain between
Vercelli and MarcabO. And tell the pair

Of worthiest men in Fano, and I mean
Ser Guido and Angiolello, to expect, –
If all be not in vain that's here foreseen, –

To be thrown from their vessel and be wrecked,
And drowned; close by Cattolica the place.
And this a ruthless tyrant shall effect.

From Cyprus isle to far Majorca's base,
No other outrage such could Neptune find,
Not e'en by pirates or the Argolic race.

The traitor with a single eye not blind,
Who rules the town whose memory brings despair
To one among us when 'tis called to mind,

Will make them come to parley with him there;
Then fix things so that when Focara blows,
They'll need no help of any vow or prayer.”

And I to him: “Now tell, – or I'll disclose
No news of thee above, – where's he to seek
Whose memory of that town so bitter flows?”

Thereon he put his hand upon the cheek
Of one beside him, stretching his mouth wide,
And shouted: “This is he; he cannot speak.

In banishment he washed away, with tide
Of speech, the doubts of Cesar, whom he told
That waiting always harms a man supplied.”

Oh, how aghast and wretched to behold,
With tongue gouged out to where his larynx lay,
Seemed Curio now, whose words had been so bold!

And one that had his hands both lopped away,
Now raised their stumps to fan the turbid air,
And fouled his face with blood, and screamed to say:

“And Mosca thou’lt recall, who, ah despair!
Said: ‘Once a thing is done, it ends;’ my plan
Was seed of ill for Tuscan folk, a tare.”

I added: “Yea, and death for all thy clan!”
And he with sorrow heaped on sorrow’s back,
Went of in likeness of a grief-mad man.

But I remained to gaze upon his pack,
And saw a thing that I should fear for sure
To tell, since any proof of it must lack,

If conscience did not render me secure; –
Good comrade, making man feel bold and free
Because she wears the breastplate that she’s pure.

I really saw, and still appear to see,
A trunk that walked along without a head.
Among the miserable herd walked he.

Suspended by the hair, his hand, instead
Of lantern, bore his cut-off head held tight.
When it beheld us: “Woe is me!” it said.

With his own self he gave his own self light;
And they were two in one and one in two.
How’t could be, He’s aware that caused the sight.

When close beside the bridge’s foot he drew,
He raised his arm and very head on high,
To bring more close the words he had in view,

Which were: "Behold a fate to horrify,
O visitor of death while yet alive:
Behold if any suffer thus, save I!

That thou mayst spread the news of how I thrive,
Bertran de Born am I, the man that chose
To advise the Young King badly, to contrive

To make the son and father bitter foes:
With Absalom and David, Achitophel
Did no more through his wicked hints and shows.

For separating persons meant to dwell
In harmony, my brain goes separate
From its beginning in this stump. So well

In me thou seest God retaliate."

Inferno – Canto 29

The crowds, their divers wounds so strange and dire,
Had made my staring eyes inebriated,
Till now, to stop and weep was their desire.

But Virgil asked me: “Art thou not yet sated?
Why does thy vision haunt this crowded ground
And fix itself upon the mutilated?”

No other ditch before thus held thee bound.
And think, if thou wouldst take their tale complete,
This trench is two-and-twenty miles around.

Already is the moon beneath our feet.
The time that’s still allowed us runs away,
And there is more to see, if thou wilt see’t.”

“If thou hadst waited,” I was quick to say,
“The reason for the searching looks I gave,
Perchance thou hadst permitted me to stay.”

My Guide had gone, I following like a slave
And making my reply the while we went,
And adding: “There below us in that cave,

Where I gazed down with such profound intent,
I think my kinsman weeps in vain despair
The sin for which so great a price is spent.”

My Master answered: “Waste no thought in care
For him, while yet the moon remaineth yellow:
But think of other things and leave him there;

For at the causeway’s foot I saw the fellow,
Who pointed with his finger threatening thee,
And heard them calling him Geri del Bello;

But thou wast then enwrapped to that degree
In Hautefort’s former lord, thou didst not set
Thine eyes on t’other, and away went he.”

“O Leader mine, the violent death he met,
Quite unavenged by any one,” said I,
“Who’s partner in the shame of it, as yet,

Made him indignant. Therefore he went by
Without a word, as I suppose: for which
My pity and remorse both amplify.”

Thus talking we went onward to the pitch
Upon the bridge, where if the light were more,
One’s eyes Would grasp the whole of the next ditch.

And when we reached the final cloistered shore
Of Evil Wallets, whence its convert friars
Were patent to our view, a horrid roar

Of lamentation, barbed with iron wires
Of pity, shot its arrows sharp as swords;
I shut my ears from those heart-rending choirs.

If all the sick in Valdichiana’s wards,
From July to September, in a lot, –
Maremma’s and Sardinia’s ailing hordes,

Were in a moat together, more were not
The misery than here: and such a stink
Arose, as when putrescent members rot.

Below, we came upon the utmost brink,
Down from the lengthy bridge, and leftward veer;
And then my sight more easily could sink

To where the unerring punishments appear
Of Justice, the High Sire’s ministress,
Who pays the falsifiers marked for here.

I do believe one’s sorrow had been less
At witnessing Aegina’s sickly term,
When the air was fatal in such foul caress,

That beasts down to the very smallest worm,
Fell down and died; and so the ancient race, –
If that be true which several poets affirm, –

Gave way, and ants turned human took their place:
Than when one saw this vale of dismal black,
With heaps of languid spirits. On the face

Of one another, and upon the back
They sprawl, and only now and then one tries
To follow on all fours some doleful track.

Not speaking, step by step we moved, our eyes
Were watching, our ears listening to the sick,
Who had not strength of limb enough to rise.

I saw two propped together, as we stick
Two baking-pans to dry, and they were furry
With scurvy scabs, from head to ankle, thick.

I never saw a boy so fiercely curly,
Awaited by his master, or a wight
Who pushed the comb his lack of sleep made hurry:

As these two wielded constantly the bite
Of finger-nails, by frenzied itching gnawed,
Which they were wanting other means to fight.

Their nails pulled off the cruel crusts they clawed,
Like kitchen knives removing a rudd's scales,
Or other fish that has them still more broad.

“O thou that tearest thine armour with thy nails,”
My Leader then began, “and dost not shirk
To turn them into tweezers, if all fails;

Inform us if Italian spirits lurk
Down there; so may thy hands be vigorous
Eternally, to serve thee in thy work.”

“We're both Italians whom thou seest thus,
So ravaged,” one of them replied and wept;
“But who art thou inquiring this of us?”

My Leader told him: “I am one who have crept
Down hither, with this live man, Round by Round;
I'm busy showing him how Hell is kept.”

The mutual prop was broken at the sound,
And trembling all their eyes on me were dressed,
And others' too, who heard the words rebound.

My kindly Master close against me pressed,
Saying: "Say whatever thou wouldst have them hear;"
And I began to speak at his request:

"So may your memories not disappear
Out of the upper world, the human mind,
But live for many and many a coming year,

Now tell me who ye are, and of what kind.
Let not your horrible and horrid woe
Make you less open; leave all fear behind."

"An Aretine, – Siena's Albero
Condemned me to the stake," the one replies;
"But not for what adjudged me here below.

'Tis true I said to him in joking wise:
'I know the way to make a man a flier;'
And he, who was more curious than wise,

Was set on learning. Balked in his desire
To be a Daedalus, he sent me then
By one he called his father, to the pyre.

But to this inmost Valley of the ten,
Because on earth I was an alchemist
Unerring Minos sent me, as my pen."

I said unto the Poet: "Who ever wist
A folk so foolish as the Sieneese?
The French are surely higher on the list."

The other leper, hearing words like these,
Replied to what I said: "Pray, no abuse
Of Stricca, who spent strictly, if you please;

And Niccolò, who found the costly use
Whereto we, in our garden, put the clove;
And spread the custom, once the secret loose.

And do except the Spendthrift Band that hove
Caccia d'Ascian's vines, forests, in the sea,
Wherein our Abbagliato's wisdom throve.

But that thou mayest know who seconds thee
Against Siena, let thine eyes be keen
So that my visage answer who I be.

Thou'lt see I am Capocchio's shade; the sheen
Of gold, by alchemy I falsified.
And thou shouldst recollect, from what I've seen,

How good an ape by nature in me died.”

Inferno – Canto 30

Upon the time when Juno was enraged,
Through Semele's fault, with all the Theban strain,
As instanced more than once; while unassuaged

Her wrath, she drove King Athamas insane,
Who seeing his own wife with her infant sons, –
Her two arms being burdened with the twain, –

“Let's spread the nets,” he shrieked, in voice that stuns;
“I'll catch the lioness and cubs, where found.”
And then with ruthless talons stretched, he runs

And seizes one, Learchus, whirls him round,
And dashes him to pieces on a rock;
And with the other one she dived and drowned:

When Fortune downed the haughty Trojan stock,
Which formerly was all too boldly brave,
And broke both king and kingdom in the shock;

Queen Hecuba, sad, penniless, a slave,
Had scarcely seen Polyxena was dead,
Ere looking out, poor creature, on the wave,

She found it Polidorus's last bed,
And raved, and like a dog began to bark;
So crookedly her mind by grief was led.

But never Theban fury was so stark,
Or Trojan either, was so stark and crude
In taking beasts and persons for its mark,

As now a pair of spirits, wan and nude,
Ran biting, and were like, in human shape,
A hog the pig-sty door opens to exclude.

One jumped upon Capocchio; on the nape.
He fixed himself and gored him through the chine,
And gave his belly the hard floor to scrape.

And trembling with affright, the Aretine
Said: "That is Gianni Schicchi; rabid gnome
Who's set on branding people with his sign."

I said: "So may the other's teeth ne'er home
Upon thy back, say prithee, who's the maid.
I beg thee tell me ere she further roam."

And he to me: "That's ancient Myrrha's shade,
Abominable woman, who became
Her father's mistress. Burned by lust, the jade, –

That she might sin with him to lasting shame, –
Did falsify her form, which longing spurred.
And he who there departs, dared take the name, –

Through coveting the lady of the herd, –
And falsely for Buoso Donati passed,
And made his will in due and legal word."

And when the rabid pair were by at last,
On whom I'd kept my eyes with gaze acute,
I turned to see the other souls miscast.

I saw one shaped in fashion of a lute,
If he had been cut off above the haunch
Just where a person's legs begin to shoot.

That terrible hydropsy that can launch
The malconverted humours, swell a limb,
And make the face immensurate to the paunch,

Had given a pair of open lips to him
Like those the hectic hold apart from thirst,
When one essays to fly and one to swim.

"O ye who go unpunished through the worst
Of worlds, – and why, I have no knowledge, – stop,"
He said to us; "Behold and hear rehearsed

The miseries in Master Adam's crop!
Alive I had things mostly to my will;
And now, alas, I crave a water-drop.

The Casentine's green slopes, with many a rill
That trickles toward the Arno in the plain,
Making its little channel moist and chill,

Are ever in mine eyes, and not in vain,
Because their image makes me far more dry
Than this disease wherewith my features wane.

The rigid justice probing me doth ply
My longings with the place where 'I committed
My sin, to make my sighing further fly.

And there's Romena, where I counterfeited
The coin that bears the Baptist on its head:
For which they burned the body I have quitted.

But might I see the soul of Guido tread
This moat, or Alessandro, or the third,
You could not give me Branda's fount instead.

There's one of them here now, if truth I've heard
Mad spirits speak, who roam about the place:
What's that to me, whose legs will not be stirred?

If I were still but light enough to pace
One inch in every century, I have vowed
That I would start at once upon his trace,

To hunt for him among this nasty crowd,
Although the Vale's eleven miles around,
And half a mile of width must be allowed.

Through them in such a family am I found.
They made me coin the florins, which were right
Excepting for three carats' weight unsound."

And I: "Who are the pair in wretched plight
That reek like hands in winter when they're wet,
Who lie so close together on thy right?"

"I found them there; – they've never stirred as yet, – "
He said, "when in this precipice I fell:
I think they're for eternity fast set.

The one is she that had false tales to tell
Of Joseph: Sinon's one, false Greek of Troy.
Their fever's high, and hence the greasy smell."

And one of them, whom it appeared to annoy
To be so darkly nominated, sparred
And thumped the hardened belly: to his joy

It sounded like a drum. Upon his guard
Now, Master Adam punched him in the jaw:
His arm, as it appeared, was also hard:

And said: "Although my forces fail to draw
My heavy legs, which cannot ever sprint,
For such a game I have an agile paw."

He answered: "It showed very little hint
Of movement, when thou wentest to the fire:
But more, when thou wast busy at the mint."

The dropsical: "That's true, though from a liar,
For thou no truthful witness didst appear,
When truth was all the Trojans did require."

"I lied: thou mad'st false money; it is clear,"
Said Sinon, "I did one sin: thou, of course,
Committedst more than any devil here."

"Remember, perjured one, the wooden horse,"
Responded he whose belly was his pledge;
"The whole world knows it. There's for thy remorse!"

"Remorse to thee, to set thy tongue on edge,
Thy thirst!" the Greek replied; "the spring of pus
That makes thy belly bulgy as a hedge!"

"Thy mouth is gaping there," the coiner thus,
"As usual, to thine ill. If I would slake
My thirst, if I am swoln and humorous,

Well, thou art burning and thy head doth ache.
To make thee lick Narcissus' mirror, few
And feeble are the words I think 'twould take."

While I was fixed, all ears, on their ado,
The Master said: "Stare on; not far it hath
To run ere I'll be quarrelling with thee, too."

On hearing him speak thus to me in wrath,
I turned to him, consumed with shame so hot
That still my memory can feel its path.

Like one that dreams his own unhappy lot,
And dreaming wishes that he dreamed, and so
Is longing for what is, as if 'twere not:

Was I, unable to make phrases flow,
Who wished to pray excuse, and all the time
Excused myself, although I did not know.

"Less shame would wash away a graver crime,"
My Master said, "than this of thine has been:
So put off all distress. Imagine I'm

Forever at thy side, if fortune's teen
Should drag thee e'er again where men in ire
Begin to start a corresponding scene;

Desire of hearing which is base desire."

Inferno – Canto 31

It was the selfsame tongue that first had bitten,
And painted both my cheeks from ear to ear,
And then applied the unguent where it had smitten.

And thus, I've heard it said, Achilles' spear,
Which used to be his father's once, conferred
First sorrowful and then benignant cheer.

We turned our shoulders on the wretched herd,
And up the bank that girds that Vale forlorn,
We went ahead, and neither spoke a word.

Here it was less than midnight, less than morn.
Not very far ahead my eyes could peek:
But I could hear high winding of a horn

That would have made a thunder-clap seem weak,
And drew my gaze, which followed it in doubt
Back on its way, the hidden source to seek.

Not Roland, to announce the dolorous rout,
When Charlemagne's blest company lay dead,
So terribly as this his heart blew out.

Not long had I revolved my wandering head,
Ere, thinking I saw many lofty towers,
I asked: "O Master, say, what town's ahead?"

And he to me: "Because the darkness lowers,
And thou dost try to peer ahead too far,
Thou judgest wrong through straining of thy powers.

Thou'lt see full well on coming where they are,
How unexactly distant senses guess:
So spur thy speed to somewhat over par."

He took me by the hand with tenderness
And said: "Before we cover all the space,
I'll tell thee, that the strangeness may be less:

They are not towers, but men of giant race;
And in the Pit, around the border there,
Up from the navel each is in his place.”

As when pervading fog becomes more rare,
By slow degrees the objects we have eyed
Grow clearer through the mist that crowds the air:

Thus, piercing through an atmosphere deep-dyed,
And drawing near and nearer to the shore,
My error ebbed, my fear was magnified;

For, like Monteregion’, whose towers soar
To crown the mighty walls that circle under:
Thus, high above the Pit’s round rampart’s floor

There towered in the air the horrid wonder
Of giants, from their waists; and Jove sends down
Even today, to threaten them, his thunder.

Already I discerned of one the frown,
The shoulders, chest, the belly in great part,
And both his arms, which o’er his ribs hung down.

Sure, Nature has wisely laid aside the art
Of animals produced on such a scale,
And warriors so dear to Mars’s heart.

And if she keeps the elephant and whale,
She shows hers’elf more just and more discreet,
As subtle judgment sees, and cannot fail;

For where an intellectual force can meet
With ill designs and power of doing wrong,
Then no one has a weapon to compete.

His face appeared to me as large and long
As is the pine-cone at Saint Peter’s Rome;
And all his bones in ratio big and strong:

So that the bank, which formed a perizome
Below his waist, left still enough exposed
That, boasting they could reach his forehead’s dome,

Three Frisians would have failed, though superposed:
Because I reckoned fully thirty palms
Beneath the place where a man's mantle is closed.

"Rafel mai alech zabi almi!" O what qualms
Assailed me, as the furious creature bawled
With mouth unsuitable for gentler psalms.

"O silly soul," thereon my Leader called,
"Assuage thee with thy trumpet, if by hap
Thy wrath or other passion get thee galled.

By feeling at thy neck thou'lt find the strap
Whence it securely hangs, O soul confused:
Against thy monstrous chest thou'lt see it slap."

And then to me: "Himself hath he accused;
For this is Nimrod, through whose wicked thought
Not one sole earthly dialect now is used.

Let's let him be, not squander words for naught.
No other tongue is known to him at all,
Whereas from his there's none can gather aught."

We made a longer stage along the wall,
Still leftward, and at shot of arbalest
We found a second, far more fierce and tall.

I've no idea whatever who possessed
The strength to fasten him, but he was tied,
His right behind, his left arm on his breast,

And with a single strand of chain, applied
From underneath his neck: five turns were scored
Around the part of him that could be spied.

"This haughty one desired to try his sword
On highest Jove: more strong he was than clever,"
My Leader said; "And this is his reward.

He, Ephialtes, made the great endeavour
What time the giants caused alarm to strike
The gods: his arms that tried it, now move never."

And I to him: "If possible, I'd like
To see the immensurable Briareus,
That I may know myself what he is like."

Then he responded: "Thou shalt see Antaeus
Not far beyond, who speaks, whose hands are free:
To sin's extremest depth I hope he'll see us.

Much further on's the one thou'rt fain to see.
He's tied, resembles this one here in make,
Except he has a fiercer face than he."

So violently the earth did never quake
To set a tower trembling in the air,
As Ephialtes suddenly did shake.

And then I dreaded death far more than e'er,
Which naught had been required beyond my dread
To deal, had I not seen the withes they wear.

We then proceeded on our way ahead,
And found Antaus; full five ells in scale
What issued from the cave, besides his head.

"O thou who once,—within the fateful vale
That made of Scipio glory's legatee,
When Hannibal and all his host turned tail, —

Didst catch a thousand lions wandering free;
And who, hadst thou been partner in the war
Thy brothers waged, it seems they all agree

The sons of earth had reigned forevermore:
Assist us down, without contempt for us,
To where Cocytus with the cold is froze.

Don't make us ask Typhon or Tityus.
This man confers what ye here hold of worth;
So bend, curl not thy lip at acting thus.

He's able to increase thy fame on earth:
He's living, with still longer life he's faced,
If grace untimely give him not new birth."

'Twas thus the Master spoke: and he in haste
Took up my Leader in the outstretched hand
That Hercules felt tight about his waist.

And Virgil, when he found himself so spanned,
Did bid me: "Closer, that my arms have play."
Then took me, so we formed a single strand.

And as the Carisenda seems to sway,
Seen from the leaning side, when clouds confute
One's eyes, and make it move the other way:

'Twas thus Antxus looked, my gaze acute
Being fixed to watch him lean. At such-like hours
I should have wished to choose another route.

But lightly to the bottom, which devours
Both Lucifer and Judas, we were passed:
Nor stayed he stooped beyond this flight of ours,

But straightened back, as doth a vessel's mast.

Inferno – Canto 32

If I had any rhymes as harsh and hoarse
As were befitting to the dolorous hole
Whereon are based the rocks of every course,

I'd press my theme of juice, collect the whole.
But being quite without them at the best,
I set myself to speak with shrinking soul.

'Tis not an enterprise to take in jest,
Painting the base of all the universe;
'Tis not to be in childish words expressed.

But may those ladies help me with my verse,
Who helped Amphion make Thebes' rampart leap,
That thus the word and fact be not diverse.

O folk most ill-begotten, ye that keep
The purlieus for the which no words are fit,
'Twere better had ye here been goats or sheep!

When we were down inside the gloomy Pit
Beneath the giants' feet, and far below,
And I still eyed the walls that compass it,

I heard a voice say: "Watch where thou dost go.
Step carefully for fear thy soles should tread
The heads of brothers wretched in their woe."

Whereon I turned around and saw ahead
A frozen lake, which now I walked upon,
Which did not seem like water, glass instead.

The Danube, in the Austrian Winter wan,
Veils not its course with covering so thick;
Nor 'neath its frigid heaven does the Don:

As this was here: for if Mount Tambernic
Or Pietrapana fell upon its sheen,
Not even would the edge of it go "cric!"

And like the croaking frog that's often seen
With nose above the water, when the flame
Of August makes the dreaming farm-girl glean:

Here, livid, to the part that showeth shame,
The suffering shades were frozen in the ice.
Their teeth were clattering like storks. The aim

Of every face was down, that paid this price.
Of bitter cold their mouths, of hearts accursed
And sad their helpless eyes, gave full advice.

When I had glanced about a little first,
Beside my feet were two so closely placed
That all the hair of both was interspersed.

"Inform me, ye so narrowly embraced,"
Said I; "Who are ye?" Then their necks they bent,
And when the heads of both were upward faced,

Their eyes, which still were soft inside, gave vent
To moisture 'twixt their lids, and frozen damp
Of tears relocked them tight as with cement.

No board was ever held to board with clamp
So firm. Then like a pair of goats that butt,
They clashed together, moved by anger's cramp.

And one, – away from whom both ears were cut
By cold, – with face still downward: "Why remain,"
He said, "reflecting upon us with glut?"

If thou desire to know these other twain,
The vale Bisenzio flows from, once had been
Their father Albert's, then was their domain.

One body bore them both: thou'lt search within
Caina and not find another soul
More worthy to be fixed in gelatine:

Not that one through whose breast and shadow a hole
Was pierced, when Arthur's hand avenging slew;
Focaccia not; nor this one here, whose poll

Is in my way and intercepts my view.
He's Sassol Mascheroni: little use,
If thou art Tuscan, of a further clue.

And that thou mayest allow my tongue a truce,
I'm Camicion de' Pazzi. His reward
Awaits Carlino here, that's my excuse."

Upon a thousand faces then I pored,
Turned dog-like by the cold; whence I am made,
And shall be, chilly, by a frozen ford.

While toward that central spot our path was laid,
To which all heavy objects gravitate,
And I was shivering in the eternal shade:

Whether 'twas will, or destiny or fate,
I know not; but 'mid many heads we brushed
I tripped upon one face with all my weight.

"Why kick me?" it yelled out, with tears that gushed;
"Unless thou com'st to increase my punishment
For Montaperti, wherefore am I crushed?"

And I: "Now, Master, wait for me. I'm bent
To lay a doubt this caitiff can unsnarl:
Then hasten as thou wilt and I'll consent."

My Leader halted. I addressed the carl,
Who still continued furiously swearing:
"Who art thou, thus to reprimand and snarl?"

"And who art thou, through Antenora faring
And stamping," he replied, "on others' throats
Too hard, as if 'twere living flesh thou'rt wearing?"

"I am alive," said I; "And he who dotes
On fame, can find me serve him in a platter:
I'll put thy name among my other notes."

And he to me: "I want a different matter.
Get out. Don't bore me. Thou art ill aware
How one in this low-lying place should flatter."

I took him by the scalp. I said: "Beware!
It's requisite thou tell me how thou'rt called,
Or I will leave thee not a single hair."

Then he to me: "Although thou pluck me bald,
I'll neither tell nor show thee at the last,
Though yet a thousand times my head be mauled."

His hair was in my hand and twisted fast,
More locks than one were rooted out, and he
Was yelping, with his stubborn eyes downcast;

When one beside us cried: "What can it be
To make thy teeth leave chattering, make thee choose
To yelp, O Bocca? What fiend's biting thee?"

"Well now," I said, "no harm if thou refuse
To answer, wicked traitor. To thy shame
I'll bear away and spread the authentic news."

"Go; tell," he said, "what suits thee. Add the name, –
If ever thou return to see the day, –
Of him loose-tongued, who weeps about the claim

He thinks he had upon argent francais.
'Duera,' thou canst say, 'I also saw,
Down there below where sinners are frappes.'

Shouldst thou be asked who else was in this maw,
There's Beccheria near thee, of the number,
Whose gorget Florence severed with a saw;

Gianni de' Soldanier I think doth cumber
The ice near Ganelon and Tebaldello,
Who opened up Faenza in its slumber."

We moved away while still the wretch did bellow.
I saw two closely frozen, in such shape
That one head formed a bonnet for its fellow.

Like hunger bolting bread that might escape,
The one above chewed at the one beneath,
Just where the cerebellum meets the nape.

Not otherwise did Tydeus fix his teeth
In Menalippus' temples, filled with rage,
Than this one gnawed the head's hard bony sheath.

“O thou who dost so bestially give gauge
Of hate for him thou eatest without ruth,
Tell why it is,” I said, “and. I'll engage

That if thy cause of grief is good forsooth,
I, knowing who ye are and what the cup
He poured, will make the world discern the truth,

Unless the tongue I'm speaking with dry up.”

Inferno – Canto 33

From his fell meal he raised his mouth unsated,
That sinner, and he wiped it on the hair
Upon the head his teeth had devastated;

Then started: “Thou wouldst have me wring despair
A second time from grief, whereof the thought
Weighs down my heart before I lay it bare.

But if indeed my words with seed are fraught
To infamize the traitor whom I gnaw,
Thou’lt have, with tears, the answer thou hast sought.

I know not who thou be, or by what flaw
Thou’rt blown down here; thine accent doth imply
That thou art Florentine, and this I saw.

Thou then must know, Count Ugolino am I,
And this Ruggieri the archbishop, here:
And now thou’lt learn the reason we are so nigh.

That, through his wicked schemes, which I with sheer
And utter trust believed, my recompense
Was prison and then death, thou need’st not hear.

But what thou hast not heard is, how immense
The cruelty wherewith my death went through.
Hear now, and know how huge was his offense.

A little chink of window, in the mew
Which bears the name of Hunger from my tale,
And which must still hold prisoners anew,

Had shown me, through its hole, the faces pale
Of several moons, when nightmare broke the bounds
Of time and ripped away the future’s veil.

This man, I dreamed, was master of the hounds,
And hunted wolf and wolflings toward the hill
That cuts off Lucca’s view from Pisan grounds,

With bitches skinny, eager, full of skill:
Gualandi, with Sismondi, with Lanfranchi,
Was leading in the van, with evil will.

The sire and the cubs, soon weary, sank
Before the chase was long; with fangs that bled
I seemed to see the braches tear each flank.

When I awoke before the morn was red,
I heard my children crying in their sleep, –
For they were with me there, – and begging bread.

Thy heart is hardened if it does not weep,
With what my heart foresaw, to think about.
Or, tears for what occasion dost thou keep?

They then awoke, the hour was nearly out
At which our food was brought us; no one stirred,
Because our dreams induced us all to doubt.

And then the horrid tower's door I heard
Being nailed, below; and then I moved to eye
The faces of my sons, without a word.

I turned to stone within, my tears were dry.
They wept; my darling little Anselm cried:
'O Father, what is wrong? Thou starest. Why?'

Even at that I wept not, nor replied
That livelong day, nor till the night was gone
And yet another sun arose outside.

When one poor little ray had thinly shone
To light our wretched dungeon, and disclose
Four faces with the aspect I'd put on,

I bit my two hands to assuage my woes.
And they, who thought I did it in distress
Of hunger, all four suddenly arose

And said: 'O Father, we should suffer less
If thou wouldst feed on us. Let thee, who'st clad
Us woefully in flesh, remove that dress!'

I calmed myself, lest they become more sad.
Both that day and the next we all sat dumb.
Hard earth, why didst not open? Would thou had!

When finally the fourth long day was come,
My Gaddo fell before my feet, and lay
Saying: 'Father, why not help me? Just a crumb!'

He died there. As thou see'st me, I must stay,
To watch the three fall lifeless, one by one,
The fifth long night. I fumbled out the way,

Though blind, to find and cherish each dead son.
And two whole days I called them, they being dead:
Then fasting did what sorrow had not done."

He ended with eyes rolling in his head.
With teeth as strong as dog's to tear a bone,
He fell upon the wretched skull and fed.

Ah, Pisa, what a scandal thou art grown
To that fair region that replies with *si*!
Thy neighbours being slow to make thee atone,

Now let Capraia and Gorgona be
Moved up to dam the Arno's issuing tide,
Till everyone is drowned that lives in thee:

For though Count Ugolino, as implied,
Betrayed thee, ceding castles that were strong,
His children thou shouldst not have crucified.

Brigata, Uguccion', were free from wrong,
O modern Thebes, – their youth gives that advice, –
And those two named already in my song.

We passed along where, frozen in the ice
Another tribe of battered souls appears,
Not prone but supine, paying thus the price.

Their flow of tears is baffled by their tears,
And grief that finds no outlet where it flows,
Turns in, and turns to pent-up grief, which sears:

For when a tiny pool of weeping froze,
It formed a vizor as of glass or horn,
And filled the cup the brows and cheeks enclose.

My face of all sensation had been shorn,
Because the cold was powerful to freeze;
And now, although 'twas callous as a corn,

Meseemed as if I felt a little breeze.
Then I: "My Master, whence this draught I find?
Is not all vapour dead in depths like these?"

And he to me: "Directly shall thy mind
Behold with eyes, nor need to take on trust
The reason that is raining down this wind."

A wretch embedded in the gelid crust
Cried out to us: "O cruel souls, now kneel,
Ye who into the utmost Pit are thrust,

And rip away the scum as hard as steel
Which binds my visage; let me vent my grief
An instant, ere my tears again congeal."

So I to him: "If I afford relief,
Say who thou art: I'll pull away this rig,
Or may I go below this frozen reef."

And then: "I am the Brother Alberig',
He of the fruit, – poor picking," he replied;
"Since here a date is given me for a fig."

"Oh," I exclaimed; "hast thou already died?"
And he to me: "What fate on earth above
My body has found, my knowledge can't decide.

Ptolomea has this advantage, which we love,
That hitherwards a soul oft comes its ways
Ere Atropos has given it a shove.

That thou more voluntarily mayst raze
The glassy tears wherewith mine eyes are screened,
Then learn that, instantly a soul betrays,

Like me, its body is taken by a fiend
Who then rules over it, until the dank
And heavy hard of death has come and gleaned:

The soul comes tumbling downward to this tank.
Perhaps till now the body has endured
Of him who winters there behind my flank.

Thou'lt know, as thou'rt but recently immured.
He's called Ser Branca d'Oria, and the rows
Of years are many since he's thus secured."

"I think that thou deceiv'st with words like those,"
I answered, "Branca d'Oria is not dead,
But eats and drinks and sleeps and wears his clothes."

And he: "To Wicked Talons' moat o'erhead
Was Michel Zanche not yet come, to swim
In that tenacious pitch that boils him red,

When this man left a devil, fierce and grim,
Within his body; one was also, mewed
Within a kinsman who betrayed with him.

Now stretch thy hand and be mine eyes unglued."
But not by me his painful state was changed:
For courtesy to him was being rude.

Alas, ye men of Genoa, estranged
From every decent custom, full of vice,
I'd hunt you from a world by you deranged.

For with Romagna's soul of worst device,
I came on one of you whose soul was hurled
For his misdeeds among Cocytus' ice,

While yet his body seems to walk the world.

Inferno – Canto 34

“Vexilla regis prodeunt Inferni

Toward us: so look ahead, if thou canst see,”
My Master said to me, when once they were nigh.

Like what a distant windmill seems to be
When heaven above is lost at set of sun,
Or fog is rising dense; thus looked to me

The structure now I saw. And then to shun
The wind now blowing hard, I had to pass
Behind my Leader; other shield was none.

I stood, – with fear I versify, alas! –
Where all the shades were thick in ice bedecked,
But visible like bits of straw in glass:

And some were lying down and some erect;
The head of one above, of one the feet;
Some faces bent back, bow-like in effect.

When far enough along to make it meet,
My Master thought, that creature should be viewed
Whose semblance once was very fair and sweet,

He stopped my footsteps; from in front he slewed,
And: “Look at Dis,” he said; “Behold the place
Where thou must arm thyself with fortitude.”

How frozen and how faint was then my case
Ask not, O Reader; it were vain to scrive,
Because I know no fitting words to trace.

I did not die nor yet remain alive;
And how both life and death at once could go,
If thou hast any wit, now let it strive.

The Emperor of all the realm of woe
Was buried in the ice up to his heart.
‘Twixt me and giants more the ratio

Than giants bear his arm. With such a start,
Thou'lt see how great a stature to allow,
To hold a fair proportion with the part.

Were he as lovely once as ugly now,
I well believe all grief to him is due,
If he against his Maker raised his brow.

And oh, how very vast my wonder grew
On seeing the three visages he wore!
The forward one bright crimson in its hue,

Had joined to it upon the sides two more,
Above each shoulder one; and after while
All met above, beneath the crest he bore.

The right appeared to me 'twixt white and bile;
The left the colour of a man that springs
From the upper regions watered by the Nile.

Beneath each face extended two huge wings,
As big as suited such a bird as that:
Compared with them all sails are tiny things.

They were devoid of feathers; like a bat
Their fashion was; and as they flapped a bit,
Three winds were wafted forth, which they begat.

Hence is Cocytus frozen, every whit.
His six eyes wept, and down three chins beneath
His tears were falling mixed with bloody spit.

His every mouth was crushing in its teeth
A sinner: three thus suffered for their sin.
He crunched them, as a brake the flax's sheath.

The midmost thought it naught when teeth sank in,
Compared to flaying nails which left his spine
Clawed clean, at times, of any shred of skin.

“The soul up there whose pain is most malign
Is Jude Iscariot,” my Master said,
“With head inside, and kicking like a swine.

And of the two there, hanging with the head
Below, that's Brutus in the negro snout:
He says no word, but only squirms instead.

The other's Cassius, who appears so stout.
But night again arises; time to start.
We've looked at everything; so let us out."

He bade me clasp his neck, and then with art
Sought time and place, and when he had espied
That all the wings were far enough apart,

He took his hold upon the shaggy side:
And down from tuft to tuft began to let
Himself, 'twixt icy crust and hairy hide.

When we were come to where the thigh is set,
Exactly at the widest of the hip,
My Leader, breathed, fatigued, contrived to get

His head to where his legs had been, and grip
The bristling hair, like one intent to climb.
I thought we'd make another Hellward trip.

"Hold fast; it is by stairways thus sublime,"
The Master told me, gasping as if beat,
"That we are to depart from such a clime."

He issued by a riven rock: a seat
On the edge he found me, having brought me by
That passage wisely found by careful feet.

I thought to see, on lifting up mine eye,
A Lucifer precisely as before:
And now, behold, he had two legs on high!

And if I then was puzzled passing sore,
Let those dull people judge, who have no clue
To what point I had passed in earth's deep core.

"Stand up," the Master said; "There's effort due.
The way is long, the road is rough to crawl,
And now the sun's in tierce, near halfway through."

'Twas no palatial state reception-hall
Where now we stood: a natural dungeon this,
Ill-paved, with scarcely any light at all.

“Before I have departed from the Abyss,
My Master,” answered I, with haste to obey,
“Please straighten some ideas that run amiss.

Where is the ice? And now explain the way
The Fiend is upside-down? What mad career
Was followed by the sun from eve till day?”

And he to me: “Thou fanciest that here
Thou still art t’other side the centre, where
I seized the fell worm’s wool, who pierced our sphere.

While I was climbing downward, thou wast there.
But when I turned, thou then wast passing by
The spot toward which all heavy bodies bear.

And now thou’rt standing underneath the sky
That’s opposite that lofty rounded space
Above dry land, beneath whose height did die

The Man that lived and died beyond sin’s trace.
Upon the little sphere thy feet press tight,
Which has Judecca for its other face.

‘Tis morning here when over there ‘tis night.
And he whose every hair made one degree
For us, is fixed as first, in time’s despite.

On this side where we are, from Heaven fell he:
And all the previous land there situate,
For fear of him took refuge in the sea,

And came into our hemisphere. From hate
Of him, perhaps, there rose from here, to float,
The earth that filled this hollow where we wait.”

There is a place down there, as far remote
From Beelzebub as all the tomb is deep,
And not perceived by eyes, but by the note

A streamlet sings, which takes a sudden leap
Down through a rocky hole its drops corrode;
And there it winds a course not very steep.

My Guide and I now took this hidden road,
To make our journey to the land of light;
And caring not to rest, we onward strode,

Still up, he first; until upon the right
I saw ahead, and shining over the scaurs,
Some lovely things of Heaven, through a bight:

And thence we issued to behold the stars.