Excerpts from *Inferno*

from *The Divine Comedy*

by Dante Alighieri

Translated by Mark Musa

“The subject of this work must first be considered according to the letter, then be considered allegorically. The subject of the whole work, then, taken in the literal sense alone, is simply “The state of souls after death, “for the movement of the whole work hinges on this. If the work be taken allegorically, the subject is “Man—as, according to his merits or demerits in the exercise of his free will, he is subject to reward or punishment by Justice…”

-Dante’s Letter to Can Grande

Canto 1: The Dark Forest

HALFWAY through his life, DANTE THE PILGRIM wakes to find himself lost in a dark wood. Terrified at being alone in so dismal a valley, he wanders until he comes to a hill bathed in sunlight, and his fear begins to leave him. But when he starts to climb the hill, his path is blocked by three fierce beasts: first a LEOPARD, then a LION, and finally a SHE-WOLF. They fill him with fear and drive him back down to the sunless wood. At that moment the figure of a man appears before him; it is the shade of VIRGIL, and the Pilgrim begs for help. Virgil tells him that he cannot overcome the beasts which obstruct his path; they must remain until a “GREYHOUND” comes who will drive them back to Hell. Rather by another path will the Pilgrim reach the sunlight, and Virgil promises to guide him on that path through Hell and Purgatory, after which another spirit, more fit than Virgil, will lead him to Paradise. The Pilgrim begs Virgil to lead on, and the Guide starts ahead. The Pilgrim follows.

Midway along the journey of our life

I woke to find myself in a dark wood, for I had wandered off from the straight path. How hard it is to tell what it was like, this wood of wilderness, savage and stubborn (the thought of it brings back all my old fears).

1 Midway along the journey of our life: In the Middle Ages life was often thought of as a journey, a pilgrimage, the goal of which was God and Heaven; and in the first line of The Divine Comedy Dante establishes the central motif of his poem—it is the story of man’s pilgrimage to God. That we are meant to think in terms not just of the Pilgrim but of Everyman is indicated by the phrase “the journey of our life” (our journey through sin to repentance and redemption). The imaginary date of the poem’s beginning is the night before Good Friday in 1300, the year of the papal jubilee proclaimed by Boniface VIII. Born in 1265, Dante was thirty-five years old, which is one half of man’s Biblical life span of seventy years.
a bitter place! Death could scarce be bitterer.
But if I would show the good that came of it
I must talk about things other than the good. 9

How I entered there I cannot truly say,
I had become so sleepy at the moment
when I first strayed, leaving the path of truth; 12
but when I found myself at the foot of a hill,
at the edge of the wood’s beginning, down in the valley,
where I first felt my heart plunged deep in fear, 15

I raised my head and saw the hilltopshawled
in morning rays of light sent from the planet3
that leads men straight ahead on every road. 18

And then only did terror start subsiding
in my heart’s lake, which rose to heights of fear
that night I spent in deepest desperation. 21

Just as a swimmer, still with panting breath,
now safe upon the shore, out of the deep,
might turn for one last look at the dangerous waters, 24

so I, although my mind was turned to flee,
turned round to gaze once more upon the pass
that never let a living soul escape. 27

I rested my tired body there awhile
and then began to climb the barren slope
(I dragged my stronger foot and limped along). 30

Beyond the point the slope begins to rise
sprang up a leopard, trim and very swift!
It was covered by a pelt of many spots. 33

And, everywhere I looked, the beast was there
blocking my way, so time and time again
I was about to turn and go back down. 36

The hour was early in the morning then,
the sun was climbing up with those same stars
that had accompanied it on the world’s first day, 39

the day Divine Love set their beauty turning;
so the hour and sweet season of creation
encouraged me to think I could get past 42

that gaudy beast, wild in its spotted pelt,
but then good hope gave way and fear returned
when the figure of a lion loomed up before me, 45

and he was coming straight toward me, it seemed,
with head raised high, and furious with hunger—
the air around him seemed to fear his presence. 48

And now a she-wolf came, that in her leanness
seemed racked with every kind of greediness
(how many people she has brought to grief!). 51

This last beast brought my spirit down so low
with fear that seized me at the sight of her,
I lost all hope of going up the hill. 54

As a man who, rejoicing in his gains,
suddenly seeing his gain turn into loss,
will grieve as he compares his then and now, 57

so she made me do, that relentless beast;
coming toward me, slowly, step by step,
she forced me back to where the sun is mute. 60

While I was rushing down to that low place,
my eyes made out a figure coming toward me
of one grown faint, perhaps from too much silence. 63

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2 The reader must be careful from the beginning to distinguish between the two uses of the first person singular in The Divine Comedy: one designating Dante the Pilgrim, and the other Dante the Poet. The first is a character in a story invented by the second. The events are represented as having taken place in the past; the writing of the poem and the memories of these events are represented as taking place in the poet’s present. We find references to both past and present, and to both pilgrim and poet, in line 10: “How I entered there I cannot truly say.”

3 planet: the sun, which was thought to be a planet in Ancient Greece.
And when I saw him standing in this wasteland,
  “Have pity on my soul,” I cried to him,
  “whichever you are, shade or living man!”

“No longer living man, though once I was,”
he said, “and my parents were from Lombardy,
both of them were Mantuans by birth.

I was born, though somewhat late, sub Julio⁴,
and lived in Rome when good Augustus reigned,
when still the false and lying gods were worshipped. 72

I was a poet and sang of that just man,
son of Anchises⁵, who sailed off from Troy
after the burning of proud Ilium. 75

But why retreat to so much misery?
  Why not climb up this blissful mountain here,
  the beginning and the source of all man’s joy?” 78

“Are you then Virgil, are you then that fount
  from which pours forth so rich a stream of words?”
I said to him, bowing my head modestly. 81

“O light and honor of the other poets,
May my long years of study, and that deep love
that made me search your verses, help me now!
You are my teacher, the first of all my authors,
and you alone the one from whom I took
the noble style that was to bring me honor. 87

You see the beast that forced me to retreat;
  save me from her, I beg you, famous sage,
  she makes me tremble, the blood throbs in my veins.” 90

“But you must journey down another road,”
  he answered, when he saw me lost in tears,
  “if ever you hope to leave this wilderness;” 93

this beast, the one you cry about in fear,
  allows no soul to succeed along her path,
  she blocks his way and puts an end to him. 96

She is by nature so perverse and vicious,
her craving belly is never satisfied,
still hungering for food the more she eats. 99

She mates with many creatures, and will go on
mating with more until the greyhound comes
and tracks her down to make her die in anguish. 102

He will not feed on either land or money:
  his wisdom, love, and virtue shall sustain him;
he will be born between Feltro and Feltrò.⁶

He comes to save that fallen Italy
  for which the maid Camilla gave her life
  and Turnus, Nisus, Euryalus⁷ died of wounds. 108

And he will hunt for her through every city
  until he drives her back to Hell once more,
  whence Envy first unleashed her on mankind. 111

And so, I think it best you follow me
  for your own good, and I shall be your guide
  and lead you out through an eternal place
  where you will hear desperate cries, and see
  tormented shades, some old as Hell itself,
  and know what second death⁸ is, from their screams.

And later you will see those who rejoice
  while they are burning, for they have hope of coming,
  whenever it may be, to join the blessèd— 120

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⁴ sub Julio: in the reign of Julius Caesar
⁵ Son of Anchises: Aeneas, hero of the Aeneid; according to legend he was the founder of Rome

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⁶ Feltro and Feltrò: Can Grande della Scala (1290-1329) was an Italian leader born in Verona, wich is situated between Feltre and Montefeltro.
⁷ Camilla...Turnus...Nisus...Euryalus: When Aneas led the Trojans into Italy, these figures were killed in a war between the Trojans and the Latins.
⁸ second death: damnation
to whom, if you too wish to make the climb,
a spirit, worthier than I, must take you;
I shall go back, leaving you in her care,
because that Emperor dwelling on high
will not let me lead any to His city,
since I in life rebelled against His law.

Everywhere He reigns, and there He rules;
there is His city, there is His high throne.
Oh, happy the one He makes His citizen!”

And I to him: “Poet, I beg of you,
in the name of God, that God you never knew,
save me from this evil place and worse,
lead me there to the place you spoke about
that I may see the gate Saint Peter guards
and those whose anguish you have told me of.”

Then he moved on, and I moved close behind him.

Canto 3: Hell’s Gate/the Neutrals

As THE TWO POETS enter the vestibule that leads to Hell itself, Dante sees the inscription above the gate, and he hears the screams of anguish from the damned souls. Rejected by God and not accepted by the powers of Hell, the first group of souls are “nowhere,” because of their cowardly refusal to make a choice in life. Their punishment is to follow a banner at a furious pace forever, and to be tormented by flies and hornets. The Pilgrim recognizes several of these shades but mentions none by name. Next they come to the River Acheron, where they are greeted by the infernal boatman, CHARON. Among those doomed souls who are to be ferried across the river, Charon sees the living man and challenges him, but Virgil lets it be known that his companion must pass. Then across the landscape rushes a howling wind, which blasts the Pilgrim out of his senses, and he falls to the ground.

I AM THE WAY INTO THE DOLEFUL CITY,
I AM THE WAY INTO ETERNAL GRIEF,
I AM THE WAY INTO A FORSAKEN RACE.9

JUSTICE IT WAS THAT MOVED MY GREAT CREATOR;
DIVINE OMNIPOTENCE CREATED ME,
AND HIGHEST WISDOM JOINED WITH PRIMAL LOVE.

BEFORE ME NOTHING BUT ETERNAL THINGS
WERE MADE, AND I SHALL LAST ETERNALLY.
ABANDON EVERY HOPE, ALL YOU WHO ENTER.10

I saw these words spelled out in somber colors
inscribed along the ledge above a gate;
“Master,” I said, “these words I see are cruel.”

He answered me, speaking with experience:
“Now here you must leave all distrust behind;
let all your cowardice die on this spot.

We are at the place where earlier I said
you could expect to see the suffering race
of souls who lost the good of intellect.”

Placing his hand on mine, smiling at me
in such a way that I was reassured,
he led me in, into those mysteries.

Here sighs and cries and shrieks of lamentation
echoed throughout the starless air of Hell;
at first these sounds resounding made me weep:
tongues confused, a language strained in anguish
with cadences of anger, shrill outcries
and raucous groans that joined with sounds of hands,
raising a whirling storm that turns itself

9 DIVINE OMNIPOTENCE …HIGHEST WISDOM…PRIMAL LOVE:
These three attributes represent, respectively, the triune God: the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit. Thus, the gate of Hell was created by the Trinity moved by Justice.
10 Lasciate ogne speranza, voi ch’entrate.
forever through that air of endless black,
like grains of sand swirling when a whirlwind blows.

And I, in the midst of all this circling horror,
began, “Teacher, what are these sounds I hear?
What souls are these so overwhelmed by grief?”

And he to me: “This wretched state of being
is the fate of those sad souls who lived a life
but lived it with no blame and with no praise.

They are mixed with that repulsive choir of angels
neither faithful nor unfaithful to their God,
who undecided stood but for themselves.

Heaven, to keep its beauty, cast them
but even Hell itself would not receive them,
for fear the damned might glory over them.”

And I, “Master, what torments do they suffer
that force them to lament so bitterly?”
He answered: “I will tell you in few words:
these wretches have no hope of truly dying,
and this blind life they lead is so abject
it makes them envy every other fate.

The world will not record their having been there;
Heaven’s mercy and its justice turn from them.
Let’s not discuss them; look and pass them by.”

And so I looked and saw a kind of banner rushing ahead, whirling with aimless speed
as though it would not ever take a stand;
behind it an interminable train
of souls pressed on, so many that I wondered
how death could have undone so great a number.

When I had recognized a few of them,
I saw the shade of the one who must have been
the coward who had made the great refusal.

At once I understood, and I was sure
this was that sect of evil souls who were hateful to God and to His enemies.

These wretches, who had never truly lived,
went naked, and were stung and stung again
by the horns and the wasps that circled them
and made their faces run with blood in streaks;
their blood, mixed with their tears, dripped to their feet,
and disgusting maggots collected in the pus.

And when I looked beyond this crowd I saw
a throng upon the shore of a wide river,
which made me ask, “Master, I would like to know:
who are these people, and what law is this
that makes those souls so eager for the crossing—as I can see, even in this dim light?”

And he: “All this will be made plain to you
as soon as we shall come to stop awhile
upon the sorrowful shore of Acheron,”

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the coward who had made the great refusal: The difficulty of identifying this figure has plagued critics and commentators for over seven hundred years. Most Critics say that it is Pope Celestine V, who renounced the papacy in 1294, five months after having been elected. Fearing his own soul would be corrupted by worldliness, he abdicated in favor of Pope Boniface VIII, who became a political enemy of Dante’s and represented the worst sort of evil secularization of the Church.

Some have also suggested that this shade is Pontius Pilate, who refused to pass sentence on Christ. His role, then, would be parallel to that of the “neutral angels”: as they stood by while Lucifer rebelled against God, so Pilate’s neutral attitude at the trial of Christ resulted in the crucifixion of Christ.

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11 I looked and saw a kind of banner: In this canto the contrapasso opposes the sin of neutrality, or inactivity: the souls who in their early lives had no banner, no leader to follow, now run forever after one.
And I, with eyes cast down in shame, for fear that I perhaps had spoken out of turn, said nothing more until we reached the river.

And suddenly, coming toward us in a boat, a man of years whose ancient hair was white shouted at us, “Woe to you, perverted souls!

Give up all hope of ever seeing Heaven: I come to lead you to the other shore, into eternal darkness, ice, and fire.

And you, the living soul, you over there, get away from all these people who are dead.” But when he saw I did not move aside,

he said, “Another way, by other ports, not here, shall you pass to reach the other shore; a lighter skiff than this must carry you.”

And my guide, “Charon, this is no time for anger! It is so willed, there where the power is for what is willed; that’s all you need to know.”

These words brought silence to the woolly cheeks of the ancient steersman of the livid marsh, whose eyes were set in glowing wheels of fire.

But all those souls there, naked, in despair, changed color and their teeth began to chatter at the sound of his announcement of their doom.

They were cursing God, cursing their own parents, the human race, the time, the place, the seed of their beginning, and their day of birth.

Then all together, weeping bitterly, they packed themselves along the wicked shore waits for every man who fears not God.

The devil, Charon, with eyes of glowing coals, summons them all together with a signal, and with an oar he strikes the laggard sinner.

As in autumn when the leaves begin to fall, one after the other (until the branch is witness to the spoils spread on the ground), so did the evil seed of Adam’s Fall drop from that shore to the boat, one at a time, at the signal, like the falcon to its lure.

Away they go across the darkened waters, and before they reach the other side to land, a new throng starts collecting on this side.

“My son,” the gentle master said to me, “all those who perish in the wrath of God assemble here from all parts of the earth; it is Divine Justice that spurs them on, turning the fear they have into desire.

A good soul never comes to make this crossing, so, if Charon grumbles at the sight of you, you see now what his words are really saying.”

He finished speaking, and the grim terrain shook violently; and the fright it gave me even now in recollection makes me sweat.

13 **Acheron**: in Greek mythology, the river of woe in the underworld; dead souls were ferried across the river to Hades.

14 **a man of years**: Charon; in Greek mythology, the ferryman who carried the dead to Hades.

15 **Another way, by other ports…carry you**: Charon, whose boat bears only the souls of the damned, recognizes the Pilgrim as a living man and refuses him passage.

16 **They want to cross the river...desire**: It is perhaps part of the punishment that the souls of the damned are eager for their punishment to begin; those who were so willing to sin on earth are in Hell damned with a willingness to go to their just retribution.
Out of the tear—drenched land a wind arose
which blasted forth into a reddish light,
knocking my senses out of me completely,
and I fell as one falls tired into sleep.

Canto 5: The Lustful

FROM LIMBO Virgil leads his ward down to the Second Circle of Hell, where for the first time he will see the damned in Hell being punished for their sins. There, barring their way, is the hideous figure of MINÒS, the bestial judge of Dante’s underworld; but after strong words from Virgil, the poets are allowed to pass into the dark space of this circle, where can be heard the wailing voices of the LUSTFUL, whose punishment consists in being forever whirled about in a dark, stormy wind. After seeing a thousand or more famous lovers—including SEMIRAMIS, DIDO, HELEN, ACHILLES, and PARIS—the Pilgrim asks to speak to two figures he sees together. They are FRANCESCA DA RIMINI and her lover, PAOLO, and the scene in which they appear is probably the most famous episode of the Inferno. At the end of the scene, the Pilgrim, who has been overcome by pity for the lovers, faints to the ground.

This way I went, descending from the first
into the second round17, that holds less space
but much more pain—stinging the soul to wailing. 3

There stands Minòs grotesquely18 and he snarls,
examining the guilty at the entrance;
he judges and dispatches, tail in coils. 6

By this I mean that when the evil soul
appears before him, it confesses all,
and he, who is the expert judge of sins, 9

knows to what place in Hell the soul belongs;
the times he wraps his tail around himself
tell just how far the sinner must go down. 12

The damned keep crowding up in front of him:
they pass along to judgment one by one;
they speak, they hear, and then are hurled below. 15

“O you who come to the place where pain is host,”
Minòs spoke out when he caught sight of me,
putting aside the duties of his office, 18

“be careful how you enter and whom you trust
it’s easy to get in, but don’t be fooled!”
And my guide said to him: “why keep on shouting?

Do not attempt to stop his fated journey;
it is so willed there where the power is
for what is willed; that’s all you need to know.” 24

And now the notes of anguish start to play
upon my ears; and now I find myself
where sounds on sounds of weeping pound at me. 27

I came to a place where no light shone at all,
bellowing like the sea racked by a tempest,
when warring winds attack it from both sides. 30

The infernal storm, eternal in its rage,
sweeps and drives the spirits with its blast:
it whirls them, lashing them with punishment.19 33

When they are swept back past their place of judgment,
then come the shrieks, laments, and anguished cries;
there they blaspheme God’s almighty power. 36

I learned that to this place of punishment
all those who sin in lust have been condemned,
those who make reason slave to appetite; 39

17 second round: Dante places the sins of the flesh on the upper circles of Hell where punishment is the mildest; the sins of anger in the middle circles; and the sins resulting from abuse of reason at the lowest circles, where the torment is the greatest.

18 There stands Minòs grotesquely: Minòs was the son of Zeus and Europa. As king of Crete, he was revered for his wisdom and judicial gifts. For these qualities he became chief magistrate of the underworld in classical literature.

19 The infernal storm…punishment: The contrapasso, or punishment, suggests that lust (the “infernal storm”) is pursued without the light of reason (in the darkness).
and as the wings of starlings in the winter
bear them along in wide-spread, crowded flocks,
so does that wind propel the evil spirits:
now here, then there, and up and down, it drives them
with never any hope to comfort them—
hope not of rest but even of suffering less.
And just like cranes in flight, chanting their lays,
stretching an endless line in their formation,
I saw approaching, crying their laments,
spirits carried along by the battling winds.
And so I asked, “Teacher, tell me, what souls
are these punished in the sweep of the black wind?”

“The first of those whose story you should know,
my master wasted no time answering,
“was empress over lands of many tongues;
her vicious tastes had so corrupted her
she licensed every form of lust with laws
to cleanse the stain of scandal she had spread;
she is Semiramis, who, legend says,
was Ninus’ wife as well as his successor;
she governed all the land the Sultan rules.
The next is she who killed herself for love
and broke faith with the ashes of Sichacus,
and there is Cleopatra, who loved men’s lusting.

See Helen there, the root of evil woe
lasting long years, and see the great Achilles,
who lost his life to love, in final combat;
See Paris, then, more than a thousand
he pointed out to me, and named them all,
those shades whom love cut off from life on earth.

After I heard my teacher call the names
of all these knights and ladies of ancient times,
pity confused my senses, and I was dazed.

20 Semiramis: the legendary queen of Assyria who, although renowned for her military conquests and civic projects, fell prey to her passions and became dissolute to the extent of legalizing lust.
21 she governed all the land the Sultan rules: During the Middle Ages the Sultan controlled the area that now contains Egypt and Syria.
22 The next is she who killed herself for love: Dido, the queen of Carthage, swore faithfulness to the memory of her dead husband, Sichacus. However, when the Trojan survivors of the war arrived in port, she fell helplessly in love with their leader, Aeneas, and they lived together as man and wife until the gods reminded Aeneas of his higher destiny: the founding of Rome and the Roman Empire. Immediately he set sail for Italy, and Dido, deserted, committed suicide.
23 Cleopatra: Cleopatra was the daughter of the last king of Egypt before it came under Roman domination. She was married to her brother in conformity with the incestuous practices of the Ptolemies, but with the assistance of Julius Caesar, whose child she bore, Cleopatra disposed of her brother and became queen of Egypt. After Caesar’s death, she seduced Mark Antony, with whom she lived in debauchery until his death. Finally she attempted, unsuccessfully, to seduce Octavianus, the Roman governor of Egypt, and his refusal precipitated her suicide.
24 Helen: Helen, wife of Menelaus, king of Sparta, was presented by Aphrodite to Paris in compensation for his judgment in the beauty contest of the goddesses. Paris carried Helen off to Troy and there married her, but her enraged husband retaliated and thus began the Trojan War.
25 Achilles: Dante’s knowledge of the Trojan War came directly or indirectly from the early medieval accounts. In these versions Achilles had been transformed into an ordinary mortal who languished in the bonds of love. Enticed by the beauty of Polyxena, a daughter of the Trojan king, Achilles desired her to be his wife, but Polyxena’s mother arranged a counterplot with Paris so that when Achilles entered the temple for his presumed marriage, he was treacherously slain by Paris.
26 Paris: Paris was the son of Priam, king of Troy, whose abduction of Helen ignited the Trojan War. The classical Latin poets and the medieval redactors of the legend of Troy consistently depicted him more disposed to loving than to fighting.
27 Tristan: Tristan is the central figure of numerous medieval French, German, and Italian romances. Sent as a messenger by his uncle, King Mark of Cornwall, to obtain Isolde for him in marriage, Tristan, became enamored of her, and she of him. After Isolde’s marriage to Mark, the lovers continued their love affair, and in order to maintain its secrecy they necessarily employed many deceits and ruses. According to one version, however, Mark, growing continuously more suspicious of their attachment, finally discovered them together and ended the incestuous relationship by mortally wounding Tristan with a lance.
I began: “Poet, I would like, with all my heart, to speak to those two there who move together and seem to be so light upon the winds.”

And he: “You’ll see when they are closer to us; if you entreat them by that love of theirs that carries them along, they’ll come to you.”

When the winds bent their course in our direction I raised my voice to them, “O wearied souls, come speak with us if it be not forbidden.”

As doves, called by desire to return to their sweet nest, with wings raised high and poised, float downward through the air, guided by will, so these two left the flock where Dido is and came toward us through the malignant air, such was the tender power of my call.

“O living creature, gracious and so kind, who makes your way here through this dingy air to visit us who stained the world with blood, if we could claim as friend the King of Kings, we would beseech him that he grant you peace, you who show pity for our atrocious plight. Whatever pleases you to hear or speak we will hear and we will speak about with you as long as the wind, here where we are, is silent.

The place where I was born lies on the shore where the river Po with its attendant streams descends to seek its final resting place.

Love, quick to kindle in the gentle heart, seized this one for the beauty of my body, torn from me, (How it happened still offends me!) Love, that excuses no one loved from loving, seized me so strongly with delight in him that, as you see, he never leaves my side.

Love led us straight to sudden death together. Caïna awaits the one who quenched our lives.” These were the words that came from them to us.

When those offended souls had told their story, I bowed my head and kept it bowed until the poet said, “What are you thinking of?” When finally I spoke, I sighed, “Alas, all those sweet thoughts, and oh, how much desiring brought these two down into this agony.” And then I turned to them and tried to speak; I said, “Francesca, the torment that you suffer brings painful tears of pity to my eyes. But tell me, in that time of your sweet sighing how, and by what signs, did love allow you to recognize your dubious desires?” find she to me: “There is no greater pain than to remember, in our present grief, past happiness (as well your teacher knows)! But if your great desire is to learn the very root of such a love as ours, I shall tell you, but in words of flowing tears.

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28 those two there who move together: Francesca, daughter of Guido Vecchio da Polenta, lord of Ravenna, and Paolo Malatesta, third son of Malatesta da Verrucchio, lord of Rimini. Around 1275 the aristocratic Francesca was married for political reasons to Gianciotto, the physically deformed second son of Malatesta da Verrucchio. In time a love affair developed between Francesca and Gianciotto’s younger brother, Paolo. One day the betrayed husband discovered them in an amorous embrace and slew them both.

29 As doves...guided by will: The use of the words “desire” and “will” is particularly interesting because it suggests the nature of lust as a sin: the subjugation of the will to desire.

30 Caïna: the level of Hell reserved for murderers of kin; named for Cain, the son of Adam and Eve, who slew his brother Abel.
One day we read, to pass the time away,
of Lancelot, of how he fell in love;
we were alone, innocent of suspicion.

Time and again our eyes were brought together
by the book we read; our faces flushed and paled.
To the moment of one line alone we yielded:

it was when we read about those longed—for lips
now being kissed by such a famous lover,
that this one (who shall never leave my side)

then kissed my mouth, and trembled as he did.

Our Galehot was that book and he who wrote it.
That day we read no further.” And all the while

the one of the two spirits spoke these words,
the other wept, in such a way that pity
blurred my senses; I swooned as though to die,

and fell to Hell’s floor as a body, dead, falls.

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31 **Lancelot**: In the medieval legends of King Arthur, Lancelot fell in love with Guinevere, Arthur’s queen, and their love led to the downfall of Knights of the Round Table.

32 **Galehot**: In an old version of the romance of Lancelot, the character who urges on the secret lovers Lancelot and Guinevere is Galehot. A Galeotto is an Italian word for “pander” (someone who urges on the passions between secret lovers). The book was thus a kind of “pander” between Paolo and Francesca.
**Inner Ring: Violent against God and Nature.**

Sinners are stranded forever on the Plain of Burning Sand where it constantly rains great burning flakes of fire which vanish when they hit the ground, but not when they hit the flesh of sinners.

Sinners include:
1. Blasphemers (those who curse God’s name)
2. Sodomites (those who engage in unnatural sexual practices)
3. Usurers (Those who make loans with excessive or abusive interest rates; those who gain profit through greed, trickery, and manipulation, not labor – loan sharks)

**8th Circle The Fraudulent—those guilty of deliberate, knowing evil.**

This Circle holds those sinners condemned for simple Fraud or Malice. The 8th circle is divided into ten Bolgia, or ditches of stone, with bridges spanning the ditches.

Sinners include:
1. Panderers and Seducers (those who use the passions of others to get them to do their bidding)
2. Flatterers (those who use language to exploit other people)
3. Simonists (those who offer money in exchange for holy power)
4. Sorcerers, astrologers, and false prophets
5. Corrupt Politicians (people who commit fraud while performing duties in public office)
6. Hypocrites
7. Thieves
8. Deceivers (those who use their position to advise others to engage in fraud)
9. Schismatics (those who create discord, or division among people; those who advocate hatred, and people who start wars or refuse to end them)
10. Falsifiers (alchemists, counterfeiters, perjurers, and imposters)

**9th Circle: Treachery**

In the 9th circle, the traitors are punished. This circle is divided into 4 rings.

1st Ring: Caina (names for Cain)
Traitors to their family

2nd Ring: Antenora (named for Antenor of Troy)
Traitors to political entities (parties, cities, countries, etc.)

3rd Ring: Ptolomaea (named for Ptolemy)
Traitors to their guests

4th Ring: Judecca (names for Judas Iscariot)
Traitors to their lords and benefactors

**Canto 13: The Wood of the Suicides**

NO SOONER are the poets across the Phlegethon than they encounter a dense forest, from which come wails and moans, and which is presided over by the hideous harpies—half-woman, half-beast, birdlike creatures. Virgil tells his ward to break off a branch of one of the trees; when he does, the tree weeps blood and speaks. In life he was Pier delle Vigne, chief counselor of Frederick II of Sicily; but he fell out of favor, was accused unjustly of treachery, and was imprisoned, whereupon he killed himself. The Pilgrim is overwhelmed by pity. The sinner also explains how the souls of the suicides come to this punishment and what will happen to them after the Last Judgment. Suddenly they are interrupted by the wild sounds of the hunt, and two naked figures, Lanio of Siena and Giaomo da Sant’ Andrea, dash across the landscape, shouting at each other, until one of them hides himself in a thorny bush; immediately a pack of fierce, black dogs rush in, pounce on the hidden sinner, and rip his body, carrying away mouthfuls of flesh. The bush, which has been torn in the process, begins to lament. The two learn that the cries are those of a Florentine who had hanged himself in his own home.
Not yet had Nessus reached the other side
when we were on our way into a forest
that was not marked by any path at all. 3

No green leaves, but rather black in color,
o no smooth branches, but twisted and entangled,
o no fruit, but thorns of poison bloomed instead.33 6

No thick, rough, scrubby home like this exists—
not even between Cecina and Corneto34—
for those wild beasts that hate the run of farmlands. 9

Here the repulsive Harpies35 twine their nests,
who drove the Trojans from the Strophades
with filthy forecasts of their close disaster. 12

Wide-winged they are, with human necks and faces,
their feet are clawed, their bellies fat and feathered;
perched in the trees they shriek their strange laments

“Before we go on farther,” my guide began,
“remember, you are in the second round
and shall be till we reach the dreadful sand;
now look around you carefully and see
with your own eyes what I will not describe,
for if I did, you wouldn’t believe my words.” 21

Around me wails of grief were echoing,
and I saw no one there to make those sounds;
bewildered by all this, I had to stop. 24

I think perhaps he thought I might be thinking
that all the voices coming from those stumps
belonged to people hiding there from us,
and so my teacher said, “If you break off
a little branch of any of these plants,
what you are thinking now will break off too.’ 30

Then slowly raising up my hand a bit
I snapped the tiny branch of a great thornbush,
and its trunk cried: “Why are you tearing me?” 33

And when its blood turned dark around the wound,
it started saying more: “Why do you rip me?
Have you no sense of pity whatsoever? 36

Men were we once, now we are changed to scrub;
but even if we had been souls of serpents,
your hand should have shown more pity than it did.” 39

Like a green log burning at one end only,
sputtering at the other, oozing sap,
and hissing with the air it forces out,

so from that splintered trunk a mixture poured
of words and blood. I let the branch I held
fall from my hand and stood there stiff with fear. 45

“Oh wounded soul,” my sage replied to him,
“if he had only let himself believe
what he had read in verses I once wrote,
he never would have raised his hand against you,
but the truth itself was so incredible,
I urged him on to do the thing that grieves me. 51

But tell him who you were; he can make amends,
and will, by making bloom again your fame
in the world above, where his return is sure.” 54

And the trunk: “So appealing are your lovely words,
I must reply. Be not displeased if I
am lured into a little conversation. 57

33 The Wood of the Suicides is described in a series of negatives (“No green leaves…no smooth branches…no fruit”), and in fact the first three tercets begin with a negative. This device anticipates the negation inherent in suicide and suggests the atmosphere in which the action of this canto will move: mistrust and incredulity.

34 not even between Cecina and Corneto: The vast swamp—land known as the “Maremma toscana” lies between the towns of Cecina and Corneto.

35 Harpies: The Harpies were the daughters of Thaumas and Electra. Because of their malicious deeds they were banished to the Strophades Islands, where, having encountered Aeneas and his followers from Troy, they defiled their table and forecast future hardships for them.
I am that one who held both of the keys that fitted Frederick’s heart; I turned them both, locking and unlocking, with such finesse that I let few into his confidence.

I was so faithful to my glorious office, I lost not only sleep but life itself.

That courtesan who constantly surveyed Caesar’s household with her adulterous eyes, mankind’s undoing, the special vice of courts, inflamed the hearts of everyone against me, and these, inflamed, inflamed in turn Augustus, and my happy honors turned to sad laments.

My mind, moved by scornful satisfaction, believing death would free me from all scorn, made me unjust to me, who was all just.

By these strange roots of my own tree I swear to you that never once did I break faith with my lord, who was so worthy of all honor.

If one of you should go back to the world, restore the memory of me, who here remain cut down by the blow that Envy gave.”

My poet paused awhile, then said to me, “Since he is silent now, don’t lose your chance, ask him, if there is more you wish to know.”

“Why don’t you keep on questioning,” I said, “and ask him, for my part, what I would ask, for I cannot, such pity chokes my heart.”

He began again: “That this man may fulfill generously what your words cry out for, imprisoned soul, may it please you to continue by telling us just how a soul gets bound into these knots, and tell us, if you know, whether any soul might someday leave his branches.”

At that the trunk breathed heavily, and then the breath changed to a voice that spoke these words: “Your question will be answered very briefly. The moment that the violent soul departs the body it has torn itself away from, Minòs sends it down to the seventh hole; it drops to the wood, not in a place allotted, but anywhere that fortune tosses it. There, like a grain of spelt, it germinates, soon springs into a sapling, then a wild tree; at last the Harpies, feasting on its leaves, create its pain, and for the pain an outlet. Like the rest, we shall return to claim our bodies, but never again to wear them—wrong it is for a man to have again what he once cast off. We shall drag them here and, all along the mournful forest, our bodies shall hang forever more, each one on a thorn of its own alien shade.”

We were standing still attentive to the trunk, thinking perhaps it might have more to say, when we were startled by a rushing sound, such as the hunter hears from where he stands: first the boar, then all the chase approaching, the crash of hunting dogs and branches smashing.

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36 I am that one…heart: Pier Delle Vigne, who eas accused unjustly of treachery and imprisoned, whereupon he killed himself.

37 Harpies, feasting on its leaves…outlet: Part of the contrapasso inflicted on these sinners is the physical torment caused by the Harpies, who rend the branches of the trees, causing “pain, and for the pain an outlet.” It is only when part of the tree or bush is torn or broken that the shade can make sounds—thus the necessity for Dante to break a branch before Pier can speak.
then, to the left of us appeared two shapes\textsuperscript{38}
  naked and gashed, fleeing with such rough speed
  they tore away with them the bushes’ branches. \hfill 117

The one ahead: “Come on, come quickly, Death!”
The other, who could not keep up the pace,
screamed, “Lano, your legs were not so nimble
when you jousted in the tournament of Toppo!\textsuperscript{39}"
And then, from lack of breath perhaps, he slipped
into a bush and wrapped himself in thorns. \hfill 120

Behind these two the wood was overrun
by packs of black bitches ravenous and ready,
like hunting dogs just broken from their chains;
they sank their fangs in that poor wretch who hid,
they ripped him open piece by piece, and then
ran off with mouthfuls of his wretched limbs. \hfill 123

Quickly my escort took me by the hand
and led me over to the bush that wept
its vain laments from every bleeding sore: \hfill 132

“O Giacomo da Sant’ Andrea,” it said,
“What fault have I if you led an evil life?” \hfill 135

My master, standing over it, inquired:
“Who were you once that now through many wounds
breathes a grieving sermon with your blood?” \hfill 138

\textsuperscript{38} \textbf{two shapes}: the Profligates are represented by two people: Lano, probably a member of the wealthy Maconi family of Siena, and by Giacomo da Sant’ Andrea from Padua. Both had the dubious honor of being incorrigible self-vandalizers who squandered most of their wealth and property.

\textsuperscript{39} \textbf{tournament of Toppo}: the disastrous defeat of the Sienese troops at the hands of the Aretines in 1287 at a river ford near Arezzo. Lano went into this battle to die because he had squandered his fortune; as legend has it, he remained to fight rather than escape on foot (hence Giacomo’s reference to his “legs,”), and was killed.

He answered us: “O souls who have just come
in time to see this unjust mutilation
that has separated me from all my leaves,
gather them round the foot of this sad bush.
I was from the city that took the Baptist
in exchange for her first patron,\textsuperscript{40} who, for this,
swears by his art she will have endless sorrow;\textsuperscript{41}
and were it not that on the Arno’s bridge
some vestige of his image still remains,
those citizens who built anew the city
on the ashes that Attila left behind\textsuperscript{42}
would have accomplished such a task in vain;
I turned my home into my hanging place.”\textsuperscript{43}

\textbf{Canto 19: The Simonists}

\textit{FROM THE BRIDGE} above the Third Bolgia can be seen a rocky landscape below filled with holes, from each of which protrude a sinner’s legs and feet; flames dance across their soles. When the Pilgrim expresses curiosity about a particular pair of twitching legs, Virgil

\textsuperscript{40} \textbf{in exchange for her first patron}: The second patron of the city was John the Baptist, whose image appeared on the florin, the principal monetary unit of the time. It has been suggested that Florence’s change of patron indicates its transformation from a stronghold of martial excellence (under Mars) to one of servile moneymaking (under the Baptist).

\textsuperscript{41} \textbf{first patron…endless sorrow}: The first patron of Florence was Mars, the god of war, thus, his “art” is warfare.

\textsuperscript{42} \textbf{the ashes that Attila left behind}: The reference to Attila, king of the Huns, is erroneous; Dante must have intended Totila, king of the Ostrogoths, who razed Florence in the sixth century. The confusion of Attila with Totila was common in the Middle Ages.

\textsuperscript{43} \textbf{I turned my home into my hanging place}: The Florentine’s anonymity corroborates his symbolic value as a representative of his city. Like the suicides condemned to this round, the city of Florence was killing itself, in Dante’s opinion, through its internecine struggles (the revenge of Mars for having been abandoned as patron): she is making of herself a hanging place.
carries him down into the bolgia so that the Pilgrim himself may question
the sinner. The legs belong to POPE NICHOLAS III, who astounds the
Pilgrim by mistaking him for BONIFACE VIII, the next pope, who, as
soon as he dies, will fall to the same hole, thereby pushing Nicholas
farther down. He predicts that soon after Boniface, POPE CLEMENT V
will come, stuffing both himself and Boniface still deeper. To Nicholas’s
rather rhetoric-filled speech, the Pilgrim responds with equally high
language, inveighing against the SIMONISTS, the evil churchmen who
are punished here. Virgil is much pleased with his pupil and, lifting him
in an affectionate embrace, he carries him to the top of the arch above
the next bolgia.

O Simon Magus! O scum that followed him! Those things of God that rightly should be wed
to holiness, you, rapacious creatures,
for the price of gold and silver, prostitute.
Now, in your honor, I must sound my trumpet
for here in the third pouch is where you dwell.

We had already climbed to see this tomb,
and were standing high above it on the bridge,
exactly at the mid-point of the ditch.

O Highest Wisdom, how you demonstrate
your art in Heaven, on earth, and here in Hell!
How justly does your power make awards!

I saw along the sides and on the bottom
the livid-colored rock all full of holes;
all were the same in size, and each was round.

To me they seemed no wider and no deeper
than those inside my lovely San Giovanni,
in which the priest would stand or baptize from;
and one of these, not many years ago,
I smashed for someone who was drowning in it:
let this be mankind’s picture of the truth!

From the mouth of every hole were sticking out
a single sinner’s feet, and then the legs
up to the calf—the rest was stuffed inside.
The soles of every sinner’s feet were flaming;
their naked legs were twitching frenziedly—
they would have broken any chain or rope.

Just as a flame will only move along
an object’s oily outer peel, so here
the fire slid from heel to toe and back.

“Who is that one, Master, that angry wretch,
who is writhing more than any of his comrades,”
I asked, “the one licked by a redder flame?”
And he to me, “If you want to be carried down
along that lower bank to where he is,
you can ask him who he is and why he’s here.”
And I, “My pleasure is what pleases you:
you are my lord, you know that from your will
I would not swerve. You even know my thoughts.”

When we reached the fourth bank, we began to turn
and, keeping to the left, made our way down
to the bottom of the holed and narrow ditch,
The good guide did not drop me from his side
until he brought me to the broken rock
of that one who was fretting with his shanks.

“Whatever you are, holding your upside down,
O wretched soul, stuck like a stake in ground,
make a sound or something,” I said, “if you can.”
I stood there like a priest who is confessing
some vile assassin who, fixed in his ditch,
has called him back again to put off dying.

44 Simon Magnus: As related in Acts (viii: 9-24), Simon the magician, having observed the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles John and Peter,
desired to purchase this power for himself. Whereupon Peter harshly
admonished him for even thinking that the gift of God might be bought. Derived
from this sorcerer’s name, the word “simony” refers to those offenses involving
the sale or fraudulent possession of ecclesiastical offices.
He cried: “Is that you, here, already, upright? Is that you here already upright, Boniface?”

By many years the book has lied to me!

Are you fed up so soon with all that wealth for which you did not fear to take by guile the Lovely Lady, then tear her asunder?"

I stood there like a person just made fun of, dumbfounded by a question for an answer, not knowing how to answer the reply.

Then Virgil said: “Quick, hurry up and tell him: ‘I’m not the one, I’m not the one you think!’” And I answered just the way he told me to.

The spirit heard, and twisted both his feet, then, sighing with a grieving, tearful voice, he said: “Well then, what do you want of me? If it concerns you so to learn my name that for this reason you came down the bank, know that I once was dressed in the great mantle.

But actually I was the she-bear’s son, so greedy to advance my cubs, that wealth I pocketed in life, and here, myself.

Beneath my head are pushed down all the others who came, sinning in simony, before me, squeezed tightly in the fissures of the rock.

I, in my turn, shall join the rest below as soon as he comes, the one I thought you were when, all too quick, I put my question to you.

But already my feet have baked a longer time (and I have been stuck upside-down like this) than he will stay here planted with feet aflame: soon after him shall come one from the West, a lawless shepherd, one whose fouler deeds make him a fitting cover for us both.

\[47\] the she-bear’s son: Gian Gaetano degli Orsini (literally, “of the little bears,” hence the designation “she-bear’s son,” and the reference to “my cubs”) became Pope Nicholas III in 1277. As a cardinal he won renown for his integrity; however, in the short three years between ascent to the papal throne and his death he became notorious for his simoniacal practices. He furthered his dynastic aspirations by the ecclesiastical advancement of many relatives, the acquisition of lands, the channeling of public power into the hands of his kinsmen, and the arrangement of political marriages with other ruling families of Europe.

\[48\] I pocketed in life, and here, myself: The famous pun in line signifies Nicholas’s contrapasso: as he “pocketed” wealth in life, in Hell he himself is in a “pocket.”

\[49\] one from the West: Pope Clement V of Gascony, upon his death in 1314, will join Nicholas and Boniface in eternal torment. In exchange for his election to the papacy, Clement promised to engage in numerous secret intrigues with Philip the Fair, King of France. In Philip’s hands he was no more than a puppet, constrained by his pledges to carry out the king’s devious plans, among them the suppression and plunder of the Templars. During Clement’s rule the Holy See was transferred from Rome to Avignon.
He shall be another Jason,\(^5^0\) like the one
in Maccabees: just as his king was pliant,
so France’s king shall soften to this priest.” \(^9^0\)

I do not know, perhaps I was too bold here,
but I answered him in tune with his own words:
“Well, tell me now: what was the sum of money
that holy Peter had to pay our Lord
before He gave the keys into his keeping?
Certainly He asked no more than ‘Follow me.’ \(^9^6\)

Nor did Peter or the rest extort gold coins
or silver from Matthias when he was picked
to fill the place the evil one had lost.\(^5^1\)

So stay stuck there, for you are rightly punished,
and guard with care the money wrongly gained
that made you stand courageous against Charles.\(^5^2\)

And were it not for the reverence I have
for those highest of all keys that you once held
in the happy life—if this did not restrain me, \(^1^0^5\)

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\(^5^0\) **Jason**: [The reference to Jason is used metaphorically.] Having obtained the high priesthood of the Jews by bribing King Antiochus of Syria, Jason neglected the sacrifices and sanctuary of the Temple and introduced Greek modes of life into his community. As Jason had fraudulently acquired his position, so had Menelaus, who offered more money to the king, supplanted Jason. As Jason obtained his office from King Antiochus fraudulently, so shall Clement acquire his from Philip.

\(^5^1\) **Nor did Peter...lost**: After the treachery and subsequent expulsion of Judas, the apostles cast lots in order to replenish their number. Thus, by the will of God, not through monetary payment, was Matthias elected to the vacated post (Acts 1:15-26).

\(^5^2\) **and guard with care...Charles**: The thirteenth-century Florentine chronicler Giovanni Villani alludes to a plot against Charles d’Anjou, King of Naples and Sicily, promoted by Nicholas III and supported by the “money wrongly gained” of Michael Palacologus, Emperor of Greece. The pope transferred his aid and influence to Giovanni da Procida in Sicily, who, it is supposed, was a motive force behind the Sicilian Vespers, a bloody insurrection in which the Sicilian people liberated themselves from French domination.

I would use even harsher words than these,
for your avarice brings grief upon the world,
crushing the good, exalting the depraved. \(^1^0^8\)

You shepherds it was the Evangelist\(^5^3\) had in mind
when the vision came to him of her who sits
upon the waters playing whore with kings:
that one who with the seven heads was born
and from her ten horns managed to draw strength
so long as virtue was her bridegroom’s joy. \(^1^1^4\)

You have built yourselves a God of gold and silver!
How do you differ from the idolator,
except he worships one, you worship hundreds? \(^1^1^7\)

O Constantine,\(^5^4\) what evil did you sire,
not by your conversion, but by the dower
that the first wealthy Father got from you!” \(^1^2^0\)

And while I sang these very notes to him,
his big flat feet kicked fiercely out of anger,
—or perhaps it was his conscience gnawing him. \(^1^2^3\)

I think my master liked what I was saying,
for all the while he smiled and was intent
on hearing the ring of truly spoken words. \(^1^2^6\)

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\(^5^3\) **the Evangelist**: St. John the Evangelist

\(^5^4\) **Constantine**: Constantine the Great, Emperor of Rome (306—337), was converted to Christianity in the year 312. Having conquered the eastern Mediterranean lands, he transferred the capital of the Roman Empire to Constantinople (330). This move, according to tradition, stemmed from Constantine’s decision to place the western part of the empire under the jurisdiction of the Church in order to repay Pope Sylvester (“the first wealthy Father”) for healing him of leprosy. The so-called “Donation of Constantine,” though it was proved in the fifteenth century to be a complete fabrication on the part of the clergy, was universally accepted as the truth in the Middle Ages. Dante the Pilgrim reflects this tradition in his sad apostrophe to the individual who first would have introduced wealth to the Church and who, unknowingly, would be ultimately responsible for its present corruption.
Then he took hold of me with both his arms,
and when he had me firm against his breast,
he climbed back up the path he had come down. 129
He did not tire of the weight clasped tight to him,
but brought me to the top of the bridge’s arch,
the one that joins the fourth bank to the fifth. 132
And here he gently set his burden—
gently, for the ridge, so steep and rugged,
would have been hard even for goats to cross. 135
From there another valley opened to me.

Canto 28: The Schismatics

IN THE NINTH Bolgia the Pilgrim is overwhelmed by the sight of mutilated, bloody shades, many of whom are ripped open, with entrails spilling out. They are the Sowers of Scandal and Schism, and among them are Mahomet, Ali, Pier da Medicina, Gaius Scribonius Curio, Mosca de’ Lambertti, and Bertran de Born. All bemoan their painful lot, and Mahomet and Pier da Medicina relay warnings through the Pilgrim to certain living Italians who are soon to meet terrible ends. Bertran de Born, who comes carrying his head in his hand like a lantern, is a particularly arresting example of a Dantean contrapasso.

Who could, even in the simplest kind of prose describe in full the scene of blood and wounds that I saw now—no matter how he tried! 3
Certainly any tongue would have to fail:
man’s memory and man’s vocabulary are not enough to comprehend such pain. 6
If one could bring together all the wounded who once upon the fateful soil of Puglia grieved for their life’s blood spilled by the Romans, and spilled again in the long years of the war that ended in great spoils of golden rings (as Livy’s history tells, that does not err), 12
and pile them with the ones who felt the blows when they stood up against great Robert Guiscard, 55 and with those whose bones are still in heaps 15
at Ceprano (there where every Puglian turned traitor), and add those from Tagliacozzo, where old Alardo conquered, weaponless— 18
if all these maimed with limbs lopped off or pierced were brought together, the scene would be nothing to compare with the foul ninth bolgia’s bloody sight.

No wine cask with its stave or cant-bar sprung was ever split the way I saw someone ripped open from his chin to where we fart. 24
Between his legs his guts spilled out, with the heart and other vital parts, and the dirty sack that turns to shit whatever the mouth gulps down. 27
While I stood staring into his misery, he looked at me and with both hands he opened his chest and said: “See how I tear myself” 30
See how Mahomet 56 is deformed and torn! In front of me, and weeping, Ali 57 walks, his face cleft from his chin up to the crown. 33

55 Robert Guiscard: In the eleventh century Robert Guiscard, a noble Norman adventurer, gained control of most of southern Italy and became duke of Apulia and Calabria, as well as Gonfalonier of the Church. For the next 20 years he battled the schismatic Greeks and the Saracens for the Church. Later he raised a siege against Pope Gregory VII, and died at the age of seventy, still engaged in warfare. Dante places him with the warriors for the Faith in the Heaven of Mars.
56 Mahomet: Archaic spelling for Muhammad, the prophet of Islam. People in the Middle Ages would have viewed the founding of Islam as “ripping people away from Christianity.”
57 Ali: Ali was the first of Mahomet’s followers. After Mahomet’s death in 632, Ali became his successor, creating the division between Sunni and Shiite branches of Islam.
The souls that you see passing in this ditch were all sowers of scandal and schism in life, and so in death you see them torn asunder.

A devil stands back there who trims us all in this cruel way, and each one of this mob receives anew the blade of the devil’s sword each time we make one round of this sad road, because the wounds have all healed up again by the time each one presents himself once more.

But who are you there, gawking from the bridge and trying to put off, perhaps, fulfillment of the sentence passed on you when you confessed?"

“Death does not have him yet, he is not here to suffer for his guilt,” my master answered; “but that he may have full experience, I, who am dead, must lead him through this Hell from round to round, down to the very bottom, and this is as true as my presence speaking here.”

More than a hundred in that ditch stopped short to look at me when they had heard his words, forgetting in their stupor what they suffered.

“And you, who will behold the sun, perhaps quite soon, tell Fra Dolcino that unless he wants to follow me here quick, he’d better stock up on food, or else the binding snows will give the Novarese their victory, a conquest not won easily otherwise.”

With the heel of one foot raised to take a step, Mahomet said these words to me, and then stretched out and down his foot and moved away.

Another, with his throat slit, and his nose cut off as far as where the eyebrows start (and he only had a single ear to show), who had stopped like all the rest to stare in wonder, stepped out from the group and opened up his throat, which ran with red from all sides of his wound, and spoke: “O you whom guilt does not condemn, whom I have seen in Italy up there, unless I am deceived by similarity, recall to mind Pier da Medicina, should you return to see the gentle plain declining from Vercelli to Marcabò, and inform the two best citizens of Fano—tell Messer Guido and tell Angiolello that, if our foresight here is no deception, from their ship they shall be hurled bound in a sack to drown in the water near Cattolica, the victims of a tyrant’s treachery;”

58 Fra Dolcino: Fra Dolcino (d. 1307), though not a monk, as his name would seem to indicate, was the leader of a religious sect banned as heretical by Pope Clement V in 1305. Dolcino’s sect, the Apostolic Brothers, preached the return of religion to the simplicity of apostolic times, and among their tenets were community of property and sharing of women. When Clement V ordered the eradication of the Brothers, Dolcino and his followers retreated to the hills near Novara, where they withstood the papal forces for over a year until starvation conquered them.

59 Pier da Medicina: the instigator of strife between the Polenta and Malatesta families.

60 Messer Guido and Angiolello: Guido del Cassero and Angiolello di Carignano were leading citizens of Fano, a small town on the Adriatic, south of Rimini, were invited by Malatestino (the “traitor, who sees only with one eye,”) to meet on a ship off the coastal city of Cattolica, which lies between Rimini and Fano. There Malatestino ordered them thrown overboard in order that he might gain control of Fano.
between the isles of Cyprus and Mallorca
so great a crime Neptune never witnessed
among the deeds of pirates or the Achaean. 84

That traitor, who sees only with one eye
and rules the land that someone with me here
wishes he’d never fed his eyes upon, 87

will have them come to join him in a parley,
then see to it they do not waste their breath
on vows or prayers to escape Focara’s wind. 61

And I to him: “If you want me to bring back
to those on earth your message—who is the one
sated with the bitter sight? Show him to me.” 93

At once he grabbed the jaws of a companion
standing near by, and squeezed his mouth half open,
announcing, “Here he is, and he is mute. 96

This man, in exile, 62 drowned all Caesar’s doubts
and helped him cast the die, when he insisted:
‘A man prepared, who hesitates, is lost.’ 99

How helpless and bewildered he appeared,
his tongue hacked off as far down as the throat,
this Curio, once so bold and quick to speak! 102

And one who had both arms but had no hands,
raising the gory stumps in the filthy air
so that the blood dripped down and smeared his face,
cried: “You, no doubt, also remember Mosca, 63
who said, alas, ‘What’s done is over with,’
and sowed the seed of discord for the Tuscans.” 108

“And of death for all your clan,” I quickly said,
and he, this fresh wound added to his wound,
turned and went off like one gone mad from pain. 111

But I remained to watch the multitude,
and saw a thing that I would be afraid
to tell about without more evidence, 114

were I not reassured by my own conscience—
that good companion enheartening a man
beneath the breastplate of its purity. 117

I saw it, I’m sure, and I seem to see it still:
a body with no head that moved along,
moving no differently from all the rest; 120

he held his severed head up by its hair,
swinging it in one hand just like a lantern,
and as it looked at us it said: “Alas!” 123

Of his own self he made himself a light
and they were two in one and one in two.
How could this be? He who ordained it knows. 126

And when he had arrived below our bridge,
he raised the arm that held the head up high
to let it speak to us at closer range. 129

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61 Focara’s wind: the terribly destructive gale that preyed on vessels passing by the promontory of Focara near Cattolica.
62 This man, in exile: Caius Scribonius Curio wishes he had never seen Rimini. Once a Roman tribune under Pompey, Curio defected to Caesar’s side, and, when the Roman general hesitated to cross the Rubicon, Curio convinced him to cross and march on Rome. At that time the Rubicon formed the boundary between Gaul and the Roman Republic; Caesar’s decision to cross it caused the Roman civil war.

63 Mosca: a member of the Lamberti family of Florence. His counsel was the cause of the division of Florence into the feuding Guelph and Ghibelline parties. As tradition has it, Buondelmonte de’ Buondelmonti was engaged to the daughter of Lambertuccio degli Amidei; however, Aldruda, of the Donati family, offered him her daughter and promised to pay the penalty for the broken engagement. Buondelmonte accepted, thus enraged Oderigo, who demanded revenge. The powerful Uberti family, at the instigation of Mosca, declared that Buondelmonte should be killed (and he was), because a milder form of revenge (a simple beating, for example) would incur as much hatred as the most severe form (murder).
It spoke: “Now see the monstrous punishment, you there still breathing, looking at the dead, see if you find suffering to equal mine!

And that you may report on me up there, know that I am Bertran de Born, the one who evilly encouraged the young king.

Father and son I set against each other: Achitophel with his wicked instigations did not do more with Absalom and David.

Because I cut the bonds of those so joined, I bear my head cut off from its life-source, which is back there, alas, within its trunk.

In me you see the perfect contrapasso!”

Canto 33: The Fraudulent

COUNT UGOLINO is the shade gnawing at the brain of his onetime associate ARCHBISHOP RUGGIERI, and Ugolino interrupts his gruesome meal long enough to tell the story of his imprisonment and cruel death, which his innocent offspring shared with him. Moving farther into the area of Cocytus known as TOLOMEA, where those who betrayed their guests and associates are condemned, the Pilgrim sees sinners with their faces raised high above the ice, whose tears freeze and lock their eyes. One of the shades agrees to identify himself on condition that the ice be removed from his eyes. The Pilgrim agrees, and learns that this sinner is FRIAR ALBERIGO and that his soul is dead and damned even though his body is still alive on earth, inhabited by a devil. Alberigo also names a fellow sinner with him in the ice, BRANCA D’ORLA, whose body is still functioning up on earth. But the Pilgrim does not honor his promise to break the ice from Alberigo’s eyes.

Lifting his mouth from his horrendous meal, this sinner first wiped off his messy lips in the hair remaining on the chewed-up skull, then spoke: “You want me to renew a grief so desperate that just the thought of it, much less the telling, grips my heart with pain; but if my words can be the seed to bear the fruit of infamy for this betrayer, who feeds my hunger, then I shall speak—in tears.

I do not know your name, nor do I know how you have come down here, but Florentine you surely seem to be, to hear you speak.

First you should know I was Count Ugolino and my neighbor here, Ruggieri the Archbishop; now I’ll tell you why I’m so unneighborly.

That I, trusting in him, was put in prison through his evil machinations, where I died, this much I surely do not have to tell you.

What you could not have known, however, is the inhuman circumstances of my death. Now listen, then decide if he has wronged me!

Through a narrow slit of window high in that mew (which is called the tower of hunger, after me, and I’ll not be the last to know that place)

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64 Bertran de Born: One of the greatest of the Provençal troubadours, Bertran de Born lived in the second half of the twelfth century. His involvement in the politics of the time is reflected in his poetry, which is almost entirely of a political character. He suffers here in Hell for having caused the rebellion of Prince Henry against his father, Henry II, King of England.

65 Achitophel: Dante compares Bertran de Born’s evil counsel with that of Achitophel. Once the aide of David, Achitophel the Gilonite provoked Absalom’s rebellion against David, his father and king (see II Samuel, 15-17).

66 Count Ugolino and Archbishop Ruggieri: Originally allies in political factions jockeying for power in the city of Pisa. In 1288, Ruggieri betrayed Ugolino and imprisoned him and his sons. The next year, Ruggieri had the dungeon sealed and starved the prisoners to death.
I had watched moon after moon after moon go by, when finally I dreamed the evil dream which ripped away the veil that hid my future. 27

I dreamed of this one here as lord and huntsman, pursuing the wolf and the wolf cubs up the mountain (which blocks the sight of Lucca from the Pisans) 30

with skinny bitches, well trained and obedient; he had out front as leaders of the pack Gualandi with Sismondi and Lanfranchi. 67 33

A short run, and the father with his sons seemed to grow tired, and then I thought I saw long fangs sunk deep into their sides, ripped open. 36

When I awoke before the light of dawn, I heard my children sobbing in their sleep (you see they, too, were there), asking for bread. 39

If the thought of what my heart was telling me does not fill you with grief, how cruel you are! If you are not weeping now—do you ever weep? 42

And then they awoke. It was around the time they usually brought our food to us. But now each one of us was full of dread from dreaming; 45

then from below I heard them driving nails into the dreadful tower’s door; with that, I stared in silence at my flesh and blood. 48

I did not weep, I turned to stone inside; they wept, and my little Anselmuccio spoke: ‘What is it, father? Why do you look that way?’ 51

For them I held my tears back, saying nothing, all of that day, and then all of that night, until another sun shone on the world. 54

A meager ray of sunlight found its way to the misery of our cell, and I could see myself reflected four times in their faces; 57

I bit my hands in anguish. And my children, who thought that hunger made me bite my hands, were quick to draw up closer to me, saying: ‘O father, you would make us suffer less, if you would feed on us: you were the one who gave us this sad flesh; you take it from us!’ 63

I calmed myself to make them less unhappy. That day we sat in silence, and the next day. O pitiless earth! You should have swallowed us! 66

The fourth day came, and it was on that day my Gaddo69 fell prostrate before my feet, crying: ‘Why don’t you help me? Why, my father?’ 69

There he died. Just as you see me here, I saw the other three fall one by one, as the fifth day and the sixth day passed. And I, by then gone blind, groped over their dead bodies. Though they were dead, two days I called their names. Then hunger proved more powerful than grief.” 75

He spoke these words; then, glaring down in rage, attacked again the wretched skull with his teeth sharp as a dog’s, arid as fit for grinding bones. 78

O Pisa, blot of shame upon the people of that fair land where the sound of “si” is heard! Since your neighbors hesitate to punish you, 81

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67 Gualandi, Sismondi, and Lanfranchi: Three nobles of Pisa; also friends of Ruggieri
68 Anselmuccio: the younger of Ugolino’s grandsons; according to official documents, he must have been fifteen at the time.

69 Gaddo: one of Ugolino’s sons.
let Capraia and Gorgona move and join,
damming up the River Arno at its mouth,
and let every Pisan perish in its flood!

For if Count Ugolino was accused
of turning traitor, trading—in your castles,
you had no right to make his children suffer.

Their newborn years (O newborn Thebes!) made them all innocents: Brigata, Uguiccione,
and the other two soft names my canto sings.

We moved ahead to where the frozen water wraps in harsh wrinkles another sinful race,
with faces not turned down but looking up.

Here, the weeping puts an end to weeping,
and the grief that finds no outlet from the eyes turns inward to intensify the anguish:

for the tears they first wept knotted in a cluster
and like a visor made for them in crystal,
filled all the hollow part around their eyes.

Although the bitter coldness of the dark
had driven all sensation from my face,
as though it were not tender skin but callous,

I thought I felt the air begin to blow,
and I: “What causes such a wind, my master?
I thought no heat could reach into these depths.”

And he to me: “Before long you will be where your own eyes can answer for themselves,
when they will see what keeps this wind in motion.”

And one of the wretches with the frozen crust screamed out at us: “O wicked souls, so wicked
that you have been assigned the ultimate post,
break off these hard veils covering my eyes
and give relief from the pain that swells my heart—at least until the new tears freeze again.”

I answered him: “If this is what you want,
tell me your name; and if I do not help you,
may I he forced to drop beneath this ice!”

He answered then: “I am Friar Alberigo.
I am he who offered fruit from the evil orchard: here dates are served me for the figs I gave.”

“Oh, then!” I said. “Are you already dead?”
And he to me: “Just how my body is in the world above, I have no way of knowing.

This zone of Tolomea is very special, for it often happens that a soul falls here before the time that Atropos should send it.

70 Capraia and Gorgona: Two islands near the mouth of the Arno River.
71 Brigata, Uguiccione, and the other two: Brigata was Ugolino’s second grandson and Uguiccione his fifth son. The other two are Anselmuccio and Gaddo.
72 We moved ahead: Virgil and the Pilgrim have now entered the third division of Cocytus, called Tolomea after Ptolemy, the captain of Jericho who had Simon, his father-in-law, and two of his Sons killed while dining. Or possibly this zone of Cocytus is named after Ptolemy XII, the Egyptian king who, having welcomed Pompey to his realm, slew him. In Tolomea are punished those who have betrayed their guests.
73 I thought no heat could reach into these depths: Wind, according to the science of Dante’s time, is produced by varying degrees of heat; thus, Cocytus, being completely icebound, lacks all heat, and should be free of winds. The source of the wind is revealed in the next canto.
74 Friar Alberigo: Alberigo di Ugolino dei Manfredi was a native of Faenza. In 1285, in the midst of a family feud, Alberigo invited his principal opponents, Manfred (close relative) and Alberghetto (Manfred’s son), to dinner as a gesture of good will. During the course of the meal, Alberigo, using a prearranged signal, called for fruit, at which his men murdered the dinner guests. Continuing the “fruit” imagery, Alberigo laments his present anguish by saying ironically that “here dates are served me for the figs I gave,” which is to say that he is suffering more than his share (since a date is more valuable than a fig).
And that you may more willingly scrape off
my cluster of glass tears, let me tell you:
whenever a soul betrays the way I did,
a demon takes possession of the body,
controlling its maneuvers from then on,
for all the years it has to live up there,
while the soul falls straight into this cistern here;
and the shade in winter quarters just behind me
may well have left his body up on earth.

But you should know, if you’ve just come from there:
he is Ser Branca D’Oria; and many years
have passed since he first joined us here, icebound.”

“I think you’re telling me a lie,” I said,
“for Branca D’Oria is not dead at all;
he eats and drinks, he sleeps and wears out clothes.”

“The ditch the Malebranche watch above,”
he said, “the ditch of clinging, boiling pitch,
had not yet caught the soul of Michel Zanche,
when Branca left a devil in his body
to take his place, and so did his close kinsman,
his accomplice in this act of treachery.

But now, at last, give me the hand you promised.
Open my eyes.” I did not open them.
To be mean to him was a generous reward.

75 This zone of Tolomea...send it: According to church doctrine, under certain circumstances a living person may, through acts of treachery, lose possession of his souls before he dies.

76 Ser Branca D’Oria: A prominent resident of Genoa, Branca D’Oria murdered his father-in-law, Michel Zanche, after having invited him to dine with him. Although this treacherous act occurred in 1275, Branca (or at least his earthly body) did not die until 1325. Alberigo tells Dante that the soul of Branca, together with that of a close relative who helped him carry out his acts of treachery, fell here, to Tolomea, even before Michel Zanche’s soul reached the bolgia of the Barrators.

O all you Genovese, you men estranged
from every good, at home with every vice,
why can’t the world be wiped clean of your race?

For in company with Romagna’s rankest soul
I found one of your men, whose deeds were such
that his soul bathes already in Cocytus
but his body seems alive and walks among you.

Canto 34: The Traitors

FAR ACROSS the frozen ice can be seen the gigantic figure of LUCIFER, who appears from this distance like a windmill seen through fog; and as the two travelers walk on toward that terrifying sight, they see the shades of sinners totally buried in the frozen water. At the center of the earth Lucifer stands frozen from the chest downward, and his horrible ugliness is made more fearful by the fact that in each of his three mouths he chews on one of the three worst sinners of all mankind, the worst of those who betrayed their benefactors: JUDAS ISCARION, BRUTUS, and CASSIUS. Virgil, with the Pilgrim on his back, begins the descent down the body of Lucifer. They climb down through a crack in the ice, and when they reach the Evil One’s thighs, Virgil turns and begins to struggle upward (because they have passed the center of the earth), still holding on to the hairy body of Lucifer, until they reach a cavern, where they stop for a rest. Then a winding path brings them to the earth’s surface, where they see the stars.

“Vexilla regis prodeunt Inferni,” my master said, “closer to us, so now look ahead and see if you can make him out.”

77 “Vexilla regis prodeunt Inferni”: The opening lines of the hymn “Vexilla regis prodeunt” — “The banners of the King advance” — is here parodied by the addition of the word Inferni (“of Hell”) to the word regis (“of the King”). Sung on Good Friday, the hymn anticipates the unveiling of the Cross. The ironic nature of the parodied line and its effect are evident: with the first three words the reader is prepared to think in terms of the Cross, the symbol of man’s redemption through Christ; but with the fourth he is abruptly recalled to the present reality of Hell and, moreover, to the immediate presence of Lucifer, the personification of Evil and the antithesis of Christian Love.
A far-off windmill turning its huge sails\textsuperscript{78}
when a thick fog begins to settle in,
or when the light of day begins to fade,\textsuperscript{6}
that is what I thought I saw appearing.
And the gusts of wind it stirred made me shrink back
behind my guide, my only means of cover.\textsuperscript{9}

Down here, I stood on souls fixed under ice
(I tremble as I put this into verse);
to me they looked like straws worked into glass.\textsuperscript{12}

Some lying flat, some perpendicular,
either with their heads up or their feet,
and some bent head to foot, shaped like a bow.\textsuperscript{15}

When we had moved far enough along the way
that my master thought the time had come to show me
the creature who was once so beautiful,\textsuperscript{79}
he stepped aside, and stopping me, announced:
“This is he, this is Dis; this is the place
that calls for all the courage you have in you.”\textsuperscript{18}

How chilled and nerveless, Reader, I felt then;
do not ask me—I cannot write about it—
there are no words to tell you how I felt.\textsuperscript{21}

I did not die—I was not living either!
Try to imagine, if you can imagine,
me there, deprived of life and death at once.\textsuperscript{24}

The king of the vast kingdom of all grief
stuck out with half his chest above the ice;
my height is closer to the height of giants\textsuperscript{30}
than theirs is to the length of his great arms;
consider now how large all of him was:
this body in proportion to his arms.\textsuperscript{33}

If once he was as fair as now he’s foul
and dared to raise his brows against his Maker,
it is fitting that all grief should spring from him.\textsuperscript{36}

Oh, how amazed I was when I looked up
and saw a head—one head wearing three faces!
One was in front (and that was a bright red),\textsuperscript{39}
the other two attached themselves to this one
just above the middle of each shoulder,
and at the crown all three were joined in one:\textsuperscript{42}

The right face was a blend of white and yellow,
the left the color of those people’s skin
who live along the river Nile’s descent.\textsuperscript{45}

Beneath each face two mighty wings stretched out,
the size you might expect of this huge bird
(I never saw a ship with larger sails):\textsuperscript{48}
not feathered wings but rather like the ones
a bat would have. He flapped them constantly,
keeping three winds continuously in motion\textsuperscript{51}
to lock Cocytus eternally in ice.
He wept from his six eyes, and down three chins
were dripping tears all mixed with bloody slaver.\textsuperscript{54}

In each of his three mouths he crunched a sinner,
with teeth like those that rake the hemp and flax,
keeping three sinners constantly in pain;\textsuperscript{57}
the one in front—the biting he endured
was nothing like the clawing that he took:
sometimes his back was raked clean of its skin.\textsuperscript{60}

\textsuperscript{78} The sails referred to are Lucifer’s wings.
\textsuperscript{79} **the creature who was once so beautiful**: Before his fall Lucifer was held by God to be the fairest of the angels. Pride caused Lucifer’s rebellion against his Maker and precipitated his expulsion from Heaven. The arch-traitor is, like the other sinners, fixed and suffering in the ice. He weeps.
"That soul up there who suffers most of all," my guide explained, "is Judas Iscariot: the one with head inside and legs out kicking. As for the other two whose heads stick out, the one who hangs from that black face is Brutus—see how he squirms in silent desperation; the other one is Cassius, he still looks sturdy. But soon it will be night. Now is the time to leave this place, for we have seen it all."

I held on to his neck, as he told me to, while he watched and waited for the time and place, and when the wings were stretched out just enough, he grabbed on to the shaggy sides of Satan; then downward, tuft by tuft, he made his way between the tangled hair and frozen crust. When we had reached the point exactly where the thigh begins, right at the haunch’s curve, my guide, with strain and force of every muscle, turned his head toward the shaggy shanks of Dis and grabbed the hair as if about to climb—I thought that we were heading back to Hell. "Hold tight, there is no other way," he said, panting, exhausted, "only by these stairs can we leave behind the evil we have seen."

When he had got me through the rocky crevice, he raised me to its edge and set me down, then carefully he climbed and joined me there. I raised my eyes, expecting I would see the half of Lucifer I saw before, Instead I saw his two legs stretching upward. If at that sight I found myself confused, so will those simple-minded folk who still don’t see what point it was I must have passed. "Get up," my master said, "get to your feet, the way is long, the road a rough climb up, already the sun approaches middle tierce!"

It was no palace promenade we came to, but rather like some dungeon Nature built: it was paved with broken stone and poorly lit. "Before we start to struggle out of here O master," I said when I was on my feet, "I wish you would explain some things to me. Where is the ice? And how can he be lodged upside-down? And how, in so little time, could the sun go all the way from night to day?"

"You think you’re still on the center’s other side," he said, "where I first grabbed the hairy worm of rottenness that pierces the earth’s core; and you were there as long as I moved downward but, when I turned myself, you passed the point to which all weight from every part is drawn."

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80 That soul up there who suffers most of all: Having betrayed Christ for thirty pieces of silver, Judas endures greater punishment than the other two souls. His position in Lucifer’s mouth recalls that of the Simonists in Canto XIX.

81 the one who hangs from that black face is Brutus: Marcus Brutus, who was deceitfully persuaded by Cassius to join the conspiracy, aided in the assassination of Julius Caesar.

82 the other one is Cassius: Caius Cassius Longinus was another member of the conspiracy against Caesar. By describing Cassius as "still looking sturdy," Dante shows he has evidently confused him with Lucius Cassius, whom Cicero calls "corpulent."

83 already the sun approaches middle tierce!: The time is approximately halfway between the canonical hours of Prime and Tierce, i.e., 7:30 a.m. The rapid change from night to day is the result of the travelers’ having passed the earth’s center, thus moving into the Southern Hemisphere, which is twelve hours ahead of the Northern.
Now you are standing beneath the hemisphere which is opposite the side covered by land, where at the central point was sacrificed

the Man whose birth and life were free of sin. You have both feet upon a little sphere whose other side Judecca occupies;

when it is morning here, there it is evening. And he whose hairs were stairs for our descent has not changed his position since his fall.

When he fell from the heavens on this side, all of the land that once was spread out here, alarmed by his plunge, took cover beneath the sea and moved to our hemisphere; with equal fear the mountain-land, piled up on this side, fled and made this cavern here when it rushed upward.

Below somewhere there is a space, as far from Beelzebub as the limit of his tomb, known not by sight but only by the sound of a little stream that makes its way down here through the hollow of a rock that it has worn, gently winding in gradual descent.”

My guide and I entered that hidden road to make our way back up to the bright world. We never thought of resting while we climbed.

We climbed, he first and I behind, until, through a small round opening ahead of us I saw the lovely things the heavens hold, and we came out to see once more the stars.  

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84 **and we came out to see once more the stars**: The Pilgrim now looks up and sees the stars again. The direction his journey will now take is upward, toward god and that Divine Realm of which the stars are the signal for us on earth