

and I recognized many there. Thus, as we followed
 along the stream of blood, its level fell
 until it cooked no more than the feet of the damned. 125
 And here we crossed the ford to deeper Hell.
 "Just as you see the boiling stream grow shallow
 along this side," the Centaur said to us
 when we stood on the other bank, "I would have you know
 that on the other, the bottom sinks anew 130
 more and more, until it comes again
 full circle to the place where the tyrants stew.
 It is there that Holy Justice spends its wrath
 on Sextus⁸ and Pyrrhus through eternity,
 and on Attila,⁹ who was a scourge on earth: 135
 and everlastingly milks out the tears
 of Rinier da Corento and Rinier Pazzo,¹
 those two assassins who for many years
 stalked the highways, bloody and abhorred."
 And with that he started back across the ford. 140

CANTO XIII

Circle Seven: Round Two The Violent Against Themselves

Nessus carries the Poets across the river of boiling blood and leaves them in the Second Round of the Seventh Circle, The Wood of the Suicides. Here are punished those who destroyed their own lives and those who destroyed their substance.

The souls of the Suicides are encased in thorny trees whose leaves are eaten by the odious Harpies, the overseers of these damned. When the Harpies feed upon them, damaging their leaves and limbs, the wound bleeds. Only as long as the blood flows are the souls of the trees able to speak. Thus, they who destroyed their own bodies are denied a human form; and just as the supreme expression of their lives was self-destruction, so they are permitted to speak only through that which tears and destroys them. Only through their own blood do they find voice. And to add one more dimension to the symbolism, it is the Harpies—defilers of all they touch—who give them their eternally recurring wounds.

The Poets pause before one tree and speak with the soul of Pier delle Vigne. In the same wood they see Giacomo da Sant' Andrea, and Lano da Siena, two famous Squanderers and Destroyers of Goods pursued by a pack of savage hounds. The hounds overtake Sant' Andrea, tear him to pieces and go off carrying his limbs in their teeth, a self-evident symbolic retribution for the violence with which these sinners destroyed their substance in the world. After this scene of horror, Dante speaks to an Unknown Florentine Suicide whose soul is inside the bush which was torn by the hound pack when it leaped upon Sant' Andrea.

8. Probably the younger son of Pompey the Great. His piracy is mentioned in Lucan (*Pharsalia* VI, 420-422). *Pyrrhus*: Pyrrhus, the son of Achilles, was especially bloodthirsty at the sack of Troy. Pyrrhus, King of Epirus (319-372 B.C.), waged relentless and bloody war against the Greeks and Romans. Either may be intended. 9. King of the Huns from 433 to 453. He was called the Scourge of God.
 1. Both were especially bloodthirsty robber-barons of the thirteenth century.

Nessus had not yet reached the other shore
 when we moved on into a pathless wood
 that twisted upward from Hell's broken floor.
 Its foliage was not verdant, but nearly black.
 The unhealthy branches, gnarled and warped and tangled, 5
 bore poison thorns instead of fruit. The track
 of those wild beasts that shun the open spaces
 men till between Cecina and Corneto
 runs through no rougher nor more tangled places.²
 Here nest the odious Harpies³ of whom my Master 10
 wrote how they drove Aeneas and his companions
 from the Strophades with prophecies of disaster.
 Their wings are wide, their feet clawed, their huge bellies
 covered with feathers, their necks and faces human.
 They croak eternally in the unnatural trees. 15
 "Before going on, I would have you understand,"
 my Guide began, "we are in the second round
 and shall be till we reach the burning sand."⁴
 Therefore look carefully and you will see
 things in this wood, which, if I told them to you 20
 would shake the confidence you have placed in me."
 I heard cries of lamentation rise and spill
 on every hand, but saw no souls in pain
 in all that waste; and, puzzled, I stood still.
 I think perhaps he thought that I was thinking⁵ 25
 those cries rose from among the twisted roots
 through which the spirits of the damned were slinking
 to hide from us. Therefore my Master said:
 "If you break off a twig, what you will learn
 will drive what you are thinking from your head." 30
 Puzzled, I raised my hand a bit and slowly
 broke off a branchlet from an enormous thorn:
 and the great trunk of it cried: "Why do you break me?"
 And after blood had darkened all the bowl
 of the wound, it cried again: "Why do you tear me?" 35
 Is there no pity left in any soul?
 Men we were, and now we are changed to sticks;
 well might your hand have been more merciful
 were we no more than souls of lice and ticks."
 As a green branch with one end all aflame 40
 will hiss and sputter sap out of the other
 as the air escapes—so from that trunk there came
 words and blood together, gout by gout.

2. The reference here is to the Maremma district of Tuscany which lies between the mountains and the sea. The river Cecina is the northern boundary of this district; Corneto is on the river Marta, which forms the southern boundary. It is a wild district of marsh and forest. 3. These hideous birds with the faces of malign women were often associated with the Erinyes (Furies). Their original function in mythology was to snatch away the souls of men at the command of the Gods. Later, they were portrayed as defilers of food, and, by extension, of everything they touched. The islands of the Strophades were their legendary abode. Aeneas and his men landed there and fought with the Harpies, who drove them back and pronounced a prophecy of unbearable famine upon them. 4. The Third Round of this Circle. 5. The original is "*Cred' io ch'ei credette ch'io credesse.*" This sort of word play was considered quite elegant by medieval rhetoricians and by the ornate Sicilian School of Poetry. Dante's style is based on a rejection of all such devices in favor of a sparse and direct diction. The best explanation of this unusual instance seems to be that Dante is anticipating his talk with Pier delle Vigne, a rhetorician who, as we shall see, delights in this sort of locution.

Startled, I dropped the branch that I was holding
 and stood transfixed by fear, half turned about
 to my Master, who replied: "O wounded soul,
 could he have believed before what he has seen
 in my verses only,⁶ you would yet be whole,
 for his hand would never have been raised against you.
 But knowing this truth could never be believed
 till it was seen, I urged him on to do
 what grieves me now; and I beg to know your name,
 that to make you some amends in the sweet world
 when he returns, he may refresh your fame."
 And the trunk: "So sweet those words to me that I
 cannot be still, and may it not annoy you
 if I seem somewhat lengthy in reply.
 I am he who held both keys to Frederick's heart,⁷
 locking, unlocking with so deft a touch
 that scarce another soul had any part
 in his most secret thoughts. Through every strife
 I was so faithful to my glorious office
 that for it I gave up both sleep and life.
 That harlot, Envy, who on Caesar's⁸ face
 keeps fixed forever her adulterous stare,
 the common plague and vice of court and palace,
 inflamed all minds against me. These inflamed
 so inflamed him that all my happy honors
 were changed to mourning. Then, unjustly blamed,
 my soul, in scorn, and thinking to be free
 of scorn in death, made me at last, though just,
 unjust to myself. By the new roots⁹ of this tree
 I swear to you that never in word or spirit
 did I break faith to my lord and emperor
 who was so worthy of honor in his merit.
 If either of you return to the world, speak for me,
 to vindicate in the memory of men
 one who lies prostrate from the blows of Envy."
 The Poet stood. Then turned. "Since he is silent,"
 he said to me, "do not you waste this hour,
 if you wish to ask about his life or torment."
 And I replied: "Question him for my part,
 on whatever you think I would do well to hear;
 I could not, such compassion chokes my heart."

6. The *Aeneid*, Book III, describes a similar bleeding plant. There, Aeneas pulls at a myrtle growing on a Thracian hillside. It bleeds where he breaks it and a voice cries out of the ground. It is the voice of Polydorus, son of Priam and friend of Aeneas. He had been treacherously murdered by the Thracian king. 7. Pier delle Vigne, 1190–1249. A famous and once-powerful minister of Emperor Frederick II. He enjoyed Frederick's whole confidence until 1247 when he was accused of treachery and was imprisoned and blinded. He committed suicide to escape further torture. (For Frederick see Canto X.) Pier delle Vigne was famous for his eloquence and for his mastery of the ornate Provençal-inspired Sicilian School of Italian Poetry, and Dante styles his speech accordingly. . . . It is worth noting, however, that the style changes abruptly in the middle of line 72. There, his courtly preamble finished, delle Vigne speaks from the heart, simply and passionately. *Who held both keys*: The phrasing unmistakably suggests the Papal keys; delle Vigne may be suggesting that he was to Frederick as the Pope is to God. 8. Frederick II was of course Caesar of the Roman Empire, but in this generalized context "Caesar" seems to be used as a generic term for any great ruler, *i.e.*, "The harlot, Envy, never turns her attention from those in power." 9. Pier delle Vigne had only been in Hell fifty-one years, a short enough time on the scale of eternity.

The Poet began again: "That this man may
 with all his heart do for you what your words
 entreat him to, imprisoned spirit, I pray,
 tell us how the soul is bound and bent
 into these knots, and whether any ever
 frees itself from such imprisonment."
 At that the trunk blew powerfully, and then
 the wind became a voice that spoke these words:
 "Briefly is the answer given: when
 out of the flesh from which it tore itself,
 the violent spirit comes to punishment,
 Minos assigns it to the seventh shelf.
 It falls into the wood, and landing there,
 wherever fortune flings it,¹ it strikes root,
 and there it sprouts, lusty as any tare,
 shoots up a sapling, and becomes a tree.
 The Harpies, feeding on its leaves then, give it
 pain and pain's outlet simultaneously.²
 Like the rest, we shall go for our husks on Judgment Day,
 but not that we may wear them, for it is not just
 that a man be given what he throws away.
 Here shall we drag them and in this mournful glade
 our bodies will dangle to the end of time,
 each on the thorns of its tormented shade."
 We waited by the trunk, but it said no more;
 and waiting, we were startled by a noise
 that grew through all the wood. Just such a roar
 and trembling as one feels when the boar and chase
 approach his stand, the beasts and branches crashing
 and clashing in the heat of the fierce race.
 And there on the left, running so violently
 they broke off every twig in the dark wood,
 two torn and naked wraiths went plunging by me.
 The leader cried, "Come now, O Death! Come now!"
 And the other, seeing that he was outrun,
 cried out: "Your legs were not so ready, Lano,³
 in the jousts at the Toppo." And suddenly in his rush,
 perhaps because his breath was failing him,
 he hid himself inside a thorny bush
 and cowered among its leaves. Then at his back,
 the wood leaped with black bitches, swift as greyhounds
 escaping from their leash, and all the pack
 sprang on him; with their fangs they opened him
 and tore him savagely, and then withdrew,
 carrying his body with them, limb by limb.
 Then, taking me by the hand across the wood,
 my Master led me toward the bush. Lamenting,
 all its fractures blew out words and blood:

1. Just as the soul of the suicide refused to accept divine regulation of its mortal life span, so eternal justice takes no special heed of where the soul falls. 2. Suicide also gives pain and its outlet simultaneously. 3. Lano da Siena, a famous squanderer. He died at the ford of the river Toppo near Arezzo in 1287 in a battle against the Aretines. Boccaccio writes that he deliberately courted death having squandered all his great wealth and being unwilling to live on in poverty. Thus his companion's jeer probably means: "You were not so ready to run then, Lano: why are you running now?"

"O Jacomo da Sant' Andrea!"⁴ it said,
 "what have you gained in making me your screen?
 What part had I in the foul life you led?" 135
 And when my Master had drawn up to it
 he said: "Who were you, who through all your wounds
 blow out your blood with your lament, sad spirit?"
 And he to us: "You who have come to see
 how the outrageous mangling of these hounds 140
 has torn my boughs and stripped my leaves from me,
 O heap them round my ruin! I was born
 in the city that tore down Mars and raised the Baptist.⁵
 On that account the God of War has sworn
 her sorrow shall not end. And were it not 145
 that something of his image still survives
 on the bridge across the Arno, some have thought
 those citizens who of their love and pain
 afterwards rebuilt it from the ashes
 left by Attila,⁶ would have worked in vain. 150
 I am one who has no tale to tell:
 I made myself a gibbet of my own lintel."

CANTO XIV

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

Dante, in pity, restores the torn leaves to the soul of his countryman and the Poets move on to the next round, a great Plain of Burning Sand upon which there descends an eternal slow Rain of Fire. Here, scorched by fire from above and below, are three classes of sinners suffering differing degrees of exposure to the fire. The Blasphemers (The Violent against God) are stretched supine upon the sand, the Sodomites (The Violent against Nature) run in endless circles, and the Usurers (The Violent against Art, which is the Grandchild of God) huddle on the sands.

The Poets find Capaneus stretched out on the sands, the chief sinner of that place. He is still blaspheming God. They continue along the edge of the Wood of the Suicides and come to a blood-red rill which flows boiling from the Wood and crosses the burning plain. Virgil explains the miraculous power of its waters and discourses on the Old Man of Crete and the origin of all the rivers of Hell.

The symbolism of the burning plain is obviously centered in sterility (the desert image) and wrath (the fire image). Blasphemy, sodomy, and usury are all unnatural and sterile actions: thus the unbearing desert is the

4. A Paduan with an infamous lust for laying waste his own goods and those of his neighbors. Arson was his favorite prank. On one occasion, to celebrate the arrival of certain noble guests, he set fire to all the workers' huts and outbuildings of his estate. He was murdered in 1239, probably by assassins hired by Ezzolino (for whom see Canto XII). 5. Florence. Mars was the first patron of the city and when the Florentines were converted to Christianity they pulled down his equestrian statue and built a church on the site of his temple. The statue of Mars was placed on a tower beside the Arno. When Totila (see note to line 150) destroyed Florence, the tower fell into the Arno and the statue with it. Legend has it that Florence could never have been rebuilt had not the mutilated statue been rescued. It was placed on the Ponte Vecchio but was carried away in the flood of 1333. 6. Dante confuses Attila with Totila, King of the Ostrogoths (died 552). He destroyed Florence in 542. Attila (died 453), King of the Huns, destroyed many cities of northern Italy, but not Florence.

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

Love of that land that was our common source
 moved me to tears; I gathered up the leaves
 and gave them back. He was already hoarse.
 We came to the edge of the forest where one goes
 from the second round to the third, and there we saw 5
 what fearful arts the hand of Justice knows.
 To make these new things wholly clear, I say
 we came to a plain whose soil repels all roots.
 The wood of misery rings it the same way
 the wood itself is ringed by the red fosse. 10
 We paused at its edge: the ground was burning sand,
 just such a waste as Cato marched across.⁷
 O endless wrath of God: how utterly
 thou shouldst become a terror to all men
 who read the frightful truths revealed to me! 15
 Enormous herds of naked souls I saw,
 lamenting till their eyes were burned of tears;
 they seemed condemned by an unequal law,
 for some were stretched supine upon the ground,
 some squatted with their arms about themselves, 20
 and others without pause roamed round and round.
 Most numerous were those that roamed the plain.
 Far fewer were the souls stretched on the sand,
 but moved to louder cries by greater pain.
 And over all that sand on which they lay 25
 or crouched or roamed, great flakes of flame fell slowly
 as snow falls in the Alps on a windless day.
 Like those Alexander met in the hot regions
 of India, flames raining from the sky
 to fall still unextinguished on his legions: 30
 whereat he formed his ranks, and at their head
 set the example, trampling the hot ground
 for fear the tongues of fire might join and spread⁸—
 just so in Hell descended the long rain
 upon the damned, kindling the sand like tinder 35
 under a flint and steel, doubling the pain.
 In a never-ending fit upon those sands,
 the arms of the damned twitched all about their bodies,
 now here, now there, brushing away the brands.
 "Poet," I said, "master of every dread 40
 we have encountered, other than those fiends
 who sallied from the last gate of the dead—
 who is that wraith who lies along the rim

7. In 47 B.C., Cato of Utica led an army across the Libyan desert. Lucan described the march in *Pharsalia* IX, 587 ff. 8. This incident of Alexander the Great's campaign in India is described in *De Meteoris* of Albertus Magnus and was taken by him with considerable alteration from a letter reputedly sent to Aristotle by Alexander.

Phaeton⁷ let loose the reins and burned the sky
 along the great scar of the Milky Way,
 nor when Icarus, too close to the sun's track
 felt the wax melt, unfeathering his loins,
 and heard his father cry "Turn back! Turn back!"⁸ — 105
 than I felt when I found myself in air,
 afloat in space with nothing visible
 but the enormous beast that bore me there.
 Slowly, slowly, he swims on through space,
 wheels and descends, but I can sense it only 110
 by the way the wind blows upward past my face.
 Already on the right I heard the swell
 and thunder of the whirlpool. Looking down
 I leaned my head out and stared into Hell.
 I trembled again at the prospect of dismounting 115
 and cowered in on myself, for I saw fires
 on every hand, and I heard a long lamenting.
 And then I saw—till then I had but felt it—
 the course of our down-spiral to the horrors
 that rose to us from all sides of the pit. 120
 As a flight-worn falcon sinks down wearily
 though neither bird nor lure has signalled it,⁹
 the falconer crying out: "What! spent already!" —
 then turns and in a hundred spinning gyres
 sulks from her master's call, sullen and proud— 125
 so to that bottom lit by endless fires
 the monster Geryon circled and fell,
 setting us down at the foot of the precipice
 of ragged rock on the eighth shelf of Hell.
 And once freed of our weight, he shot from there 130
 into the dark like an arrow into air.

CANTO XVIII

Circle Eight (Malebolge) The Fraudulent and Malicious
Bolgia One The Panderers and Seducers
Bolgia Two The Flatterers

Dismounted from Geryon, the Poets find themselves in the Eighth Circle, called Malebolge (The Evil Ditches). This is the upper half of the Hell of the Fraudulent and Malicious. Malebolge is a great circle of stone that slopes like an amphitheater. The slopes are divided into ten concentric ditches; and within these ditches, each with his own kind, are punished those guilty of Simple Fraud.

7. Son of Apollo who drove the chariot of the sun. Phaeton begged his father for a chance to drive the chariot himself but he lost control of the horses and Zeus killed him with a thunderbolt for fear the whole earth would catch fire. The scar left in the sky by the runaway horses is marked by the Milky Way. 8. Daedalus, the father of Icarus, made wings for himself and his son and they flew into the sky, but Icarus, ignoring his father's commands, flew too close to the sun. The heat melted the wax with which the wings were fastened and Icarus fell into the Aegean and was drowned. 9. Falcons, when sent aloft, were trained to circle until sighting a bird, or until signaled back by the lure (a stuffed bird). Flight-weary, Dante's metaphoric falcon sinks bit by bit, rebelling against his training and sulking away from his master in wide slow circles.

A series of stone dikes runs like spokes from the edge of the great cliff face to the center of the place, and these serve as bridges.

The Poets bear left toward the first ditch, and Dante observes below him and to his right the sinners of the first bolgia, the Panderers and Seducers. These make two files, one along either bank of the ditch, and are driven at an endless fast walk by horned demons who hurry them along with great lashes. In life these sinners goaded others on to serve their own foul purposes; so in Hell are they driven in their turn. The horned demons who drive them symbolize the sinners' own vicious natures, embodiments of their own guilty consciences. Dante may or may not have intended the horns of the demons to symbolize cuckoldry and adultery.

The Poets see Venedico Caccianemico and Jason in the first pit, and pass on to the second, where they find the souls of the Flatterers sunk in excrement, the true equivalent of their false flatteries on earth. They observe Alessio Interminelli and Thais, and pass on.

There is in Hell a vast and sloping ground
 called Malebolge,¹ a lost place of stone
 as black as the great cliff that seals it round.
 Precisely in the center of that space
 there yawns a well extremely wide and deep.² 5
 I shall discuss it in its proper place.
 The border that remains between the well-pit
 and the great cliff forms an enormous circle,
 and ten descending troughs are cut in it,
 offering a general prospect like the ground 10
 that lies around one of those ancient castles
 whose walls are girded many times around
 by concentric moats. And just as, from the portal,
 the castle's bridges run from moat to moat
 to the last bank; so from the great rock wall 15
 across the embankments and the ditches, high
 and narrow cliffs run to the central well,
 which cuts and gathers them like radii.
 Here, shaken from the back of Geryon,
 we found ourselves. My Guide kept to the left 20
 and I walked after him. So we moved on.
 Below, on my right, and filling the first ditch
 along both banks, new souls in pain appeared,
 new torments, and new devils black as pitch.
 All of these sinners were naked; on our side 25
 of the middle they walked toward us; on the other,
 in our direction, but with swifter stride.
 Just so the Romans, because of the great throng
 in the year of the Jubilee, divide the bridge³

1. *Bolgia* in Italian equals "ditch" or "pouch." That combination of meanings is not possible in a single English word, but it is well to bear in mind that Dante intended both meanings: not only a ditch of evil, but a pouch full of it, a filthy treasure of ill-gotten souls. 2. This is the final pit of Hell, and in it are punished the Treacherous (those Guilty of Compound Fraud). Cantos XXIX-XXXIV will deal with this part of Hell. 3. Boniface VIII had proclaimed 1300 a Jubilee Year, and consequently throngs of pilgrims had come to Rome. Since the date of the vision is also 1300, the Roman throngs are moving back and forth across the Tiber via Ponte Castello Sant' Angelo at the very time Dante is watching the sinners in Hell.

in order that the crowds may pass along, 30
 so that all face the Castle as they go
 on one side toward St. Peter's, while on the other,
 all move along facing toward Mount Giordano.
 And everywhere along that hideous track
 I saw horned demons with enormous lashes 35
 move through those souls, scourging them on the back.
 Ah, how the stragglers of that long rout stirred
 their legs quick-march at the first crack of the lash!
 Certainly no one waited a second, or third!
 As we went on, one face in that procession 40
 caught my eye and I said: "That sinner there:
 It is certainly not the first time I've seen that one."
 I stopped, therefore, to study him, and my Guide
 out of his kindness waited, and even allowed me
 to walk back a few steps at the sinner's side. 45
 And that flayed spirit, seeing me turn around,
 thought to hide his face, but I called to him:
 "You there, that walk along with your eyes on the ground—
 if those are not false features, then I know you
 as Venedico Caccianemico of Bologna:⁴
 what brings you here among this pretty crew?" 50
 And he replied: "I speak unwillingly,
 but something in your living voice, in which
 I hear the world again, stirs and compels me.
 It was I who brought the fair Ghisola 'round 55
 to serve the will and lust of the Marquis,
 however sordid that old tale may sound.
 There are many more from Bologna who weep away
 eternity in this ditch; we fill it so
 there are not as many tongues that are taught to say 60
 'sipa'⁵ in all the land that lies between
 the Reno and the Saveno, as you must know
 from the many tales of our avarice and spleen."
 And as he spoke, one of those lashes fell
 across his back, and a demon cried, "Move on, 65
 you pimp, there are no women here to sell."
 Turning away then, I rejoined my Guide.
 We came in a few steps to a raised ridge
 that made a passage to the other side.
 This we climbed easily, and turning right 70
 along the jagged crest, we left behind
 the eternal circling of those souls in flight.
 And when we reached the part at which the stone
 was tunneled for the passage of the scourged,
 my Guide said, "Stop a minute and look down 75
 on these other misbegotten wraiths of sin.
 You have not seen their faces, for they moved
 in the same direction we were headed in."

4. To win the favor of the Marquis Obizzo da Este of Ferrara, Caccianemico acted as the procurer of his own sister Ghisola, called "la bella" or "Ghisolabella." 5. Bolognese dialect for *si*, i.e., "yes." Bologna lies between the Savena and the Reno. This is a master taunt at Bologna as a city of panderers and seducers, for it clearly means that the Bolognese then living on earth were fewer in number than the Bolognese dead who had been assigned to this *bolgia*.

So from that bridge we looked down on the throng
 that hurried toward us on the other side. 80
 Here, too, the whiplash hurried them along.
 And the good Master, studying that train,
 said: "Look there, at that great soul that approaches
 and seems to shed no tears for all his pain—
 what kingliness moves with him even in Hell! 85
 It is Jason,⁶ who by courage and good advice
 made off with the Colchian Ram. Later it fell
 that he passed Lemnos, where the women of wrath,
 enraged by Venus' curse that drove their lovers
 out of their arms, put all their males to death. 90
 There with his honeyed tongue and his dishonest
 lover's wiles, he gulled Hypsipyle,
 who, in the slaughter, had gulled all the rest.
 And there he left her, pregnant and forsaken.
 Such guilt condemns him to such punishment; 95
 and also for Medea is vengeance taken.
 All seducers march here to the whip.
 And let us say no more about this valley
 and those it closes in its stony grip."
 We had already come to where the walk 100
 crosses the second bank, from which it lifts
 another arch, spanning from rock to rock.
 Here we heard people whine in the next chasm,
 and knock and thump themselves with open palms,
 and blubber through their snouts as if in a spasm. 105
 Steaming from that pit, a vapour rose
 over the banks, crusting them with a slime
 that sickened my eyes and hammered at my nose.
 That chasm sinks so deep we could not sight
 its bottom anywhere until we climbed 110
 along the rock arch to its greatest height.
 Once there, I peered down; and I saw long lines
 of people in a river of excrement
 that seemed the overflow of the world's latrines.
 I saw among the felons of that pit 115
 one wraith who might or might not have been tonsured—
 one could not tell, he was so smeared with shit.
 He bellowed: "You there, why do you stare at me
 more than at all the others in this stew?"
 And I to him: "Because if memory 120
 serves me, I knew you when your hair was dry.
 You are Alessio Interminelli da Lucca.⁷
 That's why I pick you from this filthy fry."

6. Leader of the Argonauts. He carried off the Colchian Ram (i.e., The Golden Fleece). "The good advice" that helped him win the fleece was given by Medea, daughter of the King of Colchis, whom Jason took with him and later abandoned for Creusa ("Also for Medea is vengeance taken.") In the course of his very Grecian life, Jason had previously seduced Hypsipyle and deserted her to continue his voyage after the fleece. She was one of the women of Lemnos whom Aphrodite, because they no longer worshiped her, cursed with a foul smell which made them unbearable to their husbands and lovers. The women took their epic revenge by banding together to kill all their males, but Hypsipyle managed to save her father, King Thoas, by pretending to the women that she had already killed him.
7. One of the noble family of the Interminelli or Interminei, a prominent White family of Lucca. About all that is known of Alessio is the fact that he was still alive in 1295.

And he then, beating himself on his clown's head:

"Down to this have the flatteries I sold
the living sunk me here among the dead." 125

And my Guide prompted then: "Lean forward a bit
and look beyond him, there—do you see that one
scratching herself with dungy nails, the strumpet
who fidgets to her feet, then to a crouch? 130

It is the whore Thais⁸ who told her lover
when he sent to ask her, 'Do you thank me much?'
'Much? Nay, past all believing!' And with this

CANTO XIX

Circle Eight: Bolgia Three The Simoniacs

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

The holes in which these sinners are placed are debased equivalents of the baptismal fonts common in the cities of Northern Italy and the sinners' confinement in them is temporary: as new sinners arrive, the souls drop through the bottom of their holes and disappear eternally into the crevices of the rock.

As always, the punishment is a symbolic retribution. Just as the Simoniacs made a mock of holy office, so are they turned upside down in a mockery of the baptismal font. Just as they made a mockery of the holy water of baptism, so is their hellish baptism by fire, after which they are wholly immersed in the crevices below. The oily fire that licks at their soles may also suggest a travesty on the oil used in Extreme Unction (last rites for the dying).

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

O Simon Magus!⁹ O you wretched crew
who follow him, pandering for silver and gold
the things of God which should be wedded to
love and righteousness! O thieves for hire,
now must the trump of judgment sound your doom
here in the third fosse of the rim of fire! 5

8. The flattery uttered by Thais is put into her mouth by Terence in his *Eumuchus* (Act III, 1:1-2). Thais' lover had sent her a slave, and later sent a servant to ask if she thanked him much. *Magnas vero agere gratias Thais mihi?* The servant reported her as answering *Ingentes!* Cicero later commented on the passage as an example of immoderate flattery, and Dante's conception of Thais probably springs from this source. (*De Amicitia*, 26.) 9. Simon the Samaritan magician (see Acts viii, 9-24) from whom the word "Simony" derives. Upon his conversion to Christianity he offered to buy the power to administer the Holy Ghost and was severely rebuked by Peter.

We had already made our way across
to the next grave, and to that part of the bridge¹
which hangs above the mid-point of the fosse.
O Sovereign Wisdom, how Thine art doth shine 10
in Heaven, on Earth, and in the Evil World!²
How justly doth Thy power judge and assign!
I saw along the walls and on the ground
long rows of holes cut in the livid stone;
all were cut to a size, and all were round. 15
They seemed to be exactly the same size
as those in the font of my beautiful San Giovanni,
built to protect the priests who come to baptize;³
(one of which, not so long since, I broke open
to rescue a boy who was wedged and drowning in it. 20
Be this enough to undeceive all men.)⁴
From every mouth a sinner's legs stuck out
as far as the calf. The soles were all ablaze
and the joints of the legs quivered and writhed about.
Withes and tethers would have snapped in their throes. 25
As oiled things blaze upon the surface only,
so did they burn from the heels to the points of their toes.
"Master," I said, "who is that one in the fire
who writhes and quivers more than all the others?⁵
From him the ruddy flames seem to leap higher." 30
And he to me: "If you wish me to carry you down
along that lower bank, you may learn from him
who he is, and the evil he has done."
And I: "What you will, I will. You are my lord
and know I depart in nothing from your wish; 35
and you know my mind beyond my spoken word."
We moved to the fourth ridge, and turning left
my Guide descended by a jagged path
into the strait and perforated cleft.
Thus the good Master bore me down the dim 40
and rocky slope, and did not put me down
till we reached the one whose legs did penance for him.
"Whoever you are, sad spirit," I began,
"who lie here with your head below your heels
and planted like a stake—speak if you can." 45
I stood like a friar who gives the sacrament
to a hired assassin, who, fixed in the hole,
recalls him, and delays his death a moment.⁶

1. The center point . . . obviously the best observation point. *The next grave*: the next *bolgia*. 2. Hell. 3. It was the custom in Dante's time to baptize only on Holy Saturday and on Pentecost. These occasions were naturally thronged, therefore, and to protect the priests a special font was built in the Baptistery of San Giovanni with marble stands for the priests, who were thus protected from both the crowds and the water in which they immersed those to be baptized. The Baptistery is still standing, but the font is no longer in it. A similar font still exists, however, in the Baptistery at Pisa. 4. In these lines Dante is replying to a charge of sacrilege that had been rumored against him. One day a boy playing in the baptismal font became jammed in the marble tube and could not be extricated. To save the boy from drowning, Dante took it upon himself to smash the tube. 5. The fire is proportioned to the guilt of the sinner. These are obviously the feet of the chief sinner of this *bolgia*. In a moment we shall discover that he is Pope Nicholas III. 6. Persons convicted of murdering for hire were sometimes executed by being buried alive upside down. If the friar were called back at the last moment, he should have to bend over the hole in which the man is fixed upside down awaiting the first shovelful of earth.

and the giant without delay reached out the hands
 which Hercules had felt, and raised my Guide.
 Virgil, when he felt himself so grasped,
 called to me: "Come, and I will hold you safe."
 And he took me in his arms and held me clasped. 135
 The way the Carisenda⁹ seems to one
 who looks up from the leaning side when clouds
 are going over it from that direction,
 making the whole tower seem to topple—so
 Antaeus seemed to me in the fraught moment 140
 when I stood clinging, watching from below
 as he bent down; while I with heart and soul
 wished we had gone some other way, but gently
 he set us down inside the final hole
 whose ice holds Judas and Lucifer in its grip. 145
 Then straightened like a mast above a ship.

CANTO XXXII

Circle Nine: Cocytus Compound Fraud
Round One: Caïna The Treacherous to Kin
Round Two: Antenora The Treacherous to Country

At the bottom of the well Dante finds himself on a huge frozen lake. This is Cocytus, the Ninth Circle, the fourth and last great water of Hell, and here, fixed in the ice, each according to his guilt, are punished sinners guilty of Treachery Against Those to Whom They Were Bound by Special Ties. The ice is divided into four concentric rings marked only by the different positions of the damned within the ice.

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

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

The second round is Antenora, named for Antenor, the Trojan who was believed to have betrayed his city to the Greeks. Here lie those guilty of Treachery to Country. They, too, have their heads above the ice, but they cannot bend their necks, which are gripped by the ice. Here Dante accidentally kicks the head of Bocca Degli Abbati and then proceeds to treat him with a savagery he had shown to no other soul in Hell. Bocca names some of his fellow traitors, and the Poets pass on to discover two heads

9. A leaning tower of Bologna.

frozen together in one hole. One of them is gnawing the nape of the other's neck.

If I had rhymes as harsh and horrible
 as the hard fact of that final dismal hole
 which bears the weight of all the steeps of Hell,
 I might more fully press the sap and substance
 from my conception; but since I must do 5
 without them, I begin with some reluctance.
 For it is no easy undertaking, I say,
 to describe the bottom of the Universe;
 nor is it for tongues that only babble child's play.
 But may those Ladies of the Heavenly Spring¹ 10
 who helped Amphion wall Thebes, assist my verse,
 that the word may be the mirror of the thing.
 O most miscreant rabble, you who keep
 the stations of that place whose name is pain,
 better had you been born as goats or sheep! 15
 We stood now in the dark pit of the well,
 far down the slope below the Giant's feet,
 and while I still stared up at the great wall,
 I heard a voice cry: "Watch which way you turn:
 take care you do not trample on the heads 20
 of the forworn and miserable brethren."
 Whereat I turned and saw beneath my feet
 and stretching out ahead, a lake so frozen
 it seemed to be made of glass. So thick a sheet
 never yet hid the Danube's winter course, 25
 nor, far away beneath the frigid sky,
 locked the Don up in its frozen source:
 for were Tanbernick and the enormous peak
 of Pietrapana² to crash down on it,
 not even the edges would so much as creak. 30
 The way frogs sit to croak, their muzzles leaning
 out of the water, at the time and season
 when the peasant woman dreams of her day's gleanings³—
 Just so the livid dead are sealed in place
 up to the part at which they blushed for shame, 35
 and they beat their teeth like storks. Each holds his face
 bowed toward the ice, each of them testifies
 to the cold with his chattering mouth, to his heart's grief
 with tears that flood forever from his eyes.
 When I had stared about me, I looked down 40
 and at my feet I saw two clamped together
 so tightly that the hair of their heads had grown
 together. "Who are you," I said, "who lie
 so tightly breast to breast?" They strained their necks,
 and when they had raised their heads as if to reply, 45
 the tears their eyes had managed to contain

1. The Muses. They so inspired Amphion's hand upon the lyre that the music charmed blocks of stone out of Mount Cithaeron, and the blocks formed themselves into the walls of Thebes. 2. There is no agreement on the location of the mountain Dante called Tanbernick. Pietrapana, today known as *Pania*, is in Tuscany. 3. The summer.

up to that time gushed out, and the cold froze them
 between the lids, sealing them shut again
 tighter than any clamp grips wood to wood,
 and mad with pain, they fell to butting heads
 like billy-goats in a sudden savage mood. 50
 And a wraith who lay to one side and below,
 and who had lost both ears to frostbite, said,
 his head still bowed: "Why do you watch us so?
 If you wish to know who they are⁴ who share one doom, 55
 they owned the Bisenzio's valley with their father,
 whose name was Albert. They spring from one womb,
 and you may search through all Caïna's crew
 without discovering in all this waste
 a squab more fit for the aspic than these two; 60
 not him whose breast and shadow a single blow
 of the great lance of King Arthur pierced with light;⁵
 nor yet Focaccia⁶ nor this one fastened so
 into the ice that his head is all I see,
 and whom, if you are Tuscan, you know well — 65
 his name on the earth was Sassol Mascheroni.⁷
 And I—to tell you all and so be through —
 was Camicion de' Pazzi.⁸ I wait for Carlin
 beside whose guilt my sins will shine like virtue."
 And leaving him,⁹ I saw a thousand faces 70
 discolored so by cold, I shudder yet
 and always will when I think of those frozen places.
 As we approached the center of all weight,
 where I went shivering in eternal shade,
 whether it was my will, or chance, or fate, 75
 I cannot say, but as I trailed my Guide
 among those heads, my foot struck violently
 against the face of one.¹ Weeping, it cried:
 "Why do you kick me? If you were not sent
 to wreak a further vengeance for Montaperti, 80
 why do you add this to my other torment?"
 "Master," I said, "grant me a moment's pause
 to rid myself of a doubt concerning this one;
 then you may hurry me at your own pace."
 The Master stopped at once, and through the volley 85
 of foul abuse the wretch poured out, I said:
 "Who are you who curse others so?" And he:

4. Alessandro and Napoleone, Counts of Mangona. Among other holdings, they inherited a castle in the Val di Bisenzio. They seemed to have been at odds on all things and finally killed one another in a squabble over their inheritance and their politics (Alessandro was a Guelph and Napoleone a Ghibelline). 5. Mordred, King Arthur's traitorous nephew. He tried to kill Arthur, but the king struck him a single blow of his lance, and when it was withdrawn, a shaft of light passed through the gaping wound and split the shadow of the falling traitor. 6. Of the Cancellieri of Pistoia. He murdered his cousin (among others) and may have been the principal cause of a great feud that divided the Cancellieri, and split the Guelphs into the White and Black parties. 7. Of the Toschi of Florence. He was appointed guardian of one of his nephews and murdered him to get the inheritance for himself. 8. Alberto Camicion de' Pazzi of Valdarno. He murdered a kinsman. *Carlin*: Carlino de' Pazzi, relative of Alberto. He was charged with defending for the Whites the castle of Piantavigne in Valdarno but surrendered it for a bribe. He belongs therefore in the next lower circle, Antenora, as a traitor to his country, and when he arrives there his greater sin will make Alberto seem almost virtuous by comparison. 9. These words mark the departure from Caïna to Antenora. 1. Bocca degli Abbati, a traitorous Florentine. At the battle of Montaperti (cf. Farinata, Canto X) he hacked off the hand of the Florentine standard bearer. The cavalry, lacking a standard around which it could rally, was soon routed.

"And who are *you* who go through the dead larder
 of Antenora kicking the cheeks of others
 so hard, that were you alive, you could not kick harder?" 90
 "I *am* alive," I said, "and if you seek fame,
 it may be precious to you above all else
 that my notes on this descent include your name."
 "Exactly the opposite is my wish and hope,"
 he answered. "Let me be; for it's little you know 95
 of how to flatter on this icy slope."
 I grabbed the hair of his dog's-ruff and I said:
 "Either you tell me truly who you are,
 or you won't have a hair left on your head."
 And he: "Not though you snatch me bald. I swear 100
 I will not tell my name nor show my face.
 Not though you rip until my brain lies bare."
 I had a good grip on his hair; already
 I had yanked out more than one fistful of it,
 while the wretch yelped, but kept his face turned from me; 105
 when another said: "Bocca, what is it ails you?
 What the Hell's wrong?² Isn't it bad enough
 to hear you bang your jaws? Must you bark too?"
 "Now filthy traitor, say no more!" I cried,
 "for to your shame, be sure I shall bear back 110
 a true report of you." The wretch replied:
 "Say anything you please but go away.
 And if you *do* get back, don't overlook
 that pretty one who had so much to say
 just now. Here he laments the Frenchman's price. 115
 'I saw Buoso da Duera,³ you can report,
 'where the bad salad is kept crisp on ice.'
 And if you're asked who else was wintering here,
 Beccheria,⁴ whose throat was slit by Florence,
 is there beside you. Gianni de' Soldanier⁵ 120
 is further down, I think, with Ganelon,⁶
 and Tebaldello,⁷ who opened the gates of Faenza
 and let Bologna steal in with the dawn."
 Leaving him then, I saw two souls together
 in a single hole, and so pinched in by the ice 125
 that one head made a helmet for the other.
 As a famished man chews crusts—so the one sinner
 sank his teeth into the other's nape

2. In the circumstances, a monstrous pun. The original is "*qual diavolo ti tocca?*" (what devil touches, or molests, you?), a standard colloquialism for "what's the matter with you?" A similar pun occurs in line 117: "kept crisp (cool) on ice." Colloquially "*stare fresco*" (to be or to remain cool) equals "to be left out in the cold," i.e., to be out of luck. 3. Of Cremona. In 1265 Charles of Anjou marched against Manfred and Naples (see Canto XIX), and Buoso da Duera was sent out in charge of a Ghibelline army to oppose the passage of one of Charles's armies, but accepted a bribe and let the French pass unopposed. The event took place near Parma. 4. Tesaurus dei Beccheria of Pavia, Abbot of Vallombrosa and Papal Legate (of Alexander IV) in Tuscany. The Florentine Guelphs cut off his head in 1258 for plotting with the expelled Ghibellines. 5. A Florentine Ghibelline of ancient and noble family. In 1265, however, during the riots that occurred under the Two Jovial Friars, he deserted his party and became a leader of the commoners (Guelphs). In placing him in Antenora, Dante makes no distinction between turning on one's country and turning on one's political party, not at least if the end is simply for power. 6. It was Ganelon who betrayed Roland to the Saracens. (See Canto XXXI.) 7. Tebaldello de' Zambrasi of Faenza. At dawn on November 13, 1280, he opened the city gates and delivered Faenza to the Bolognese Guelphs in order to revenge himself on the Ghibelline family of the Lambertazzi, who, in 1274, had fled from Bologna to take refuge in Faenza.

at the base of the skull, gnawing his loathsome dinner.
 Tydeus in his final raging hour
 gnawed Menalippus' head⁸ with no more fury
 than this one gnawed at skull and dripping gore.
 "You there," I said, "who show so odiously
 your hatred for that other, tell me why
 on this condition: that if in what you tell me
 you seem to have a reasonable complaint
 against him you devour with such foul relish,
 I, knowing who you are, and his soul's taint,
 may speak your cause to living memory,
 God willing the power of speech be left to me."
 130
 135
 140

CANTO XXXIII

Circle Nine: Cocytus Compound Fraud
Round Two: Antenora The Treacherous to Country
Round Three: Ptolomea The Treacherous to Guests and Hosts

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

The Poets leave Ugolino and enter Ptolomea, so named for the Ptolomeus of Maccabees, who murdered his father-in-law at a banquet. Here are punished those who were Treacherous Against the Ties of Hospitality. They lie with only half their faces above the ice and their tears freeze in their eye sockets, sealing them with little crystal visors. Thus even the comfort of tears is denied them. Here Dante finds Friar Alberigo and Branca D'Oria, and discovers the terrible power of Ptolomea: so great is its sin that the souls of the guilty fall to its torments even before they die, leaving their bodies still on earth, inhabited by Demons.

The sinner raised his mouth from his grim repast
 and wiped it on the hair of the bloody head
 whose nape he had all but eaten away. At last
 he began to speak: "You ask me to renew
 a grief so desperate that the very thought
 of speaking of it tears my heart in two."
 5

8. Statius recounts in the *Thebaid* that Tydeus killed Menalippus in battle but fell himself mortally wounded. As he lay dying he had Menalippus's head brought to him and fell to gnawing it in his dying rage.

But if my words may be a seed that bears
 the fruit of infamy for him I gnaw,
 I shall weep, but tell my story through my tears.
 Who you may be, and by what powers you reach
 into this underworld, I cannot guess,
 but you seem to me a Florentine by your speech.
 I was Count Ugolino,⁹ I must explain;
 this reverend grace is the Archbishop Ruggieri:
 now I will tell you why I gnaw his brain.
 That I, who trusted him, had to undergo
 imprisonment and death through his treachery,
 you will know already.¹ What you cannot know—
 that is, the lingering inhumanity
 of the death I suffered—you shall hear in full:
 then judge for yourself if he has injured me.
 A narrow window in that coop² of stone
 now called the Tower of Hunger for my sake
 (within which others yet must pace alone)
 had shown me several waning moons already³
 between its bars, when I slept the evil sleep
 in which the veil of the future parted for me.
 This beast⁴ appeared as master of a hunt
 chasing the wolf and his whelps across the mountain
 that hides Lucca from Pisa.⁵ Out in front
 of the starved and shrewd and avid pack he had placed
 Gualandi and Sismondi and Lanfranchi⁶
 to point his prey. The father and sons had raced
 a brief course only when they failed of breath
 and seemed to weaken; then I thought I saw
 their flanks ripped open by the hounds' fierce teeth.
 Before the dawn, the dream still in my head,
 I woke and heard my sons,⁷ who were there with me,
 cry from their troubled sleep, asking for bread.
 You are cruelty itself if you can keep
 your tears back at the thought of what foreboding
 stirred in my heart; and if you do not weep,
 at what are you used to weeping?—The hour when food
 used to be brought, drew near. They were now awake,
 and each was anxious from his dream's dark mood.
 And from the base of that horrible tower I heard
 the sound of hammers nailing up the gates:
 10
 15
 20
 25
 30
 35
 40
 45

9. Count of Donoratico and a member of the Guelph family della Gherardesca. He and his nephew, Nino de' Visconti, led the two Guelph factions of Pisa. In 1288 Ugolino intrigued with Archbishop Ruggieri degli Ubaldini, leader of the Ghibellines, to get rid of Visconti and to take over the command of all the Pisan Guelphs. The plan worked, but in the consequent weakening of the Guelphs, Ruggieri saw his chance and betrayed Ugolino, throwing him into prison with his sons and his grandsons. In the following year the prison was sealed up and they were left to starve to death. 1. News of Ugolino's imprisonment and death would certainly have reached Florence. *What you cannot know*: No living man could know what happened after Ugolino and his sons were sealed in the prison and abandoned.

2. Dante uses the word *muda*, in Italian signifying a stone tower in which falcons were kept in the dark to moult. From the time of Ugolino's death it became known as The Tower of Hunger. 3. Ugolino was jailed late in 1288. He was sealed in to starve early in 1289. 4. Ruggieri. 5. These two cities would be in view of one another were it not for Monte San Giuliano. 6. Three Pisan nobles, Ghibellines and friends of the Archbishop. 7. Actually two of the boys were grandsons and all were considerably older than one would gather from Dante's account. Anselm, the younger grandson, was fifteen. The others were really young men and were certainly old enough for guilt despite Dante's charge in line 90.

I stared at my sons' faces without a word.
 I did not weep: I had turned stone inside.
 They wept. 'What ails you, Father, you look so strange,'
 my little Anselm, youngest of them, cried.
 But I did not speak a word nor shed a tear:
 not all that day nor all that endless night,
 until I saw another sun appear.
 When a tiny ray leaked into that dark prison
 and I saw staring back from their four faces
 the terror and the wasting of my own,
 I bit my hands in helpless grief. And they,
 thinking I chewed myself for hunger, rose
 suddenly together. I heard them say:
 'Father, it would give us much less pain
 if you ate us: it was you who put upon us
 this sorry flesh; now strip it off again.'
 I calmed myself to spare them. Ah! hard earth,
 why did you not yawn open? All that day
 and the next we sat in silence. On the fourth,
 Gaddo, the eldest, fell before me and cried,
 stretched at my feet upon that prison floor:
 'Father, why don't you help me?' There he died.
 And just as you see me, I saw them fall
 one by one on the fifth day and the sixth.
 Then, already blind, I began to crawl
 from body to body shaking them frantically.
 Two days I called their names, and they were dead.
 Then fasting overcame my grief and me."⁸
 His eyes narrowed to slits when he was done,
 and he seized the skull again between his teeth
 grinding it as a mastiff grinds a bone.
 Ah, Pisa! foulest blemish on the land
 where "si" sounds sweet and clear,⁹ since those nearby you
 are slow to blast the ground on which you stand,
 may Caprara and Gorgona¹ drift from place
 and dam the flooding Arno at its mouth
 until it drowns the last of your foul race!
 For if to Ugolino falls the censure
 for having betrayed your castles,² you for your part
 should not have put his sons to such a torture:
 you modern Thebes!³ those tender lives you spilt—
 Brigata, Ugucione, and the others
 I mentioned earlier—were too young for guilt!

8. I.e., he died. Some interpret the line to mean that Ugolino's hunger drove him to cannibalism. Ugolino's present occupation in Hell would certainly support that interpretation but the fact is that cannibalism is the one major sin Dante does not assign a place to in Hell. So monstrous would it have seemed to him that he must certainly have established a special punishment for it. Certainly he could hardly have relegated it to an ambiguity. Moreover, it would be a sin of bestiality rather than of fraud, and as such it would be punished in the Seventh Circle. 9. Italy. 1. These two islands near the mouth of the Arno were Pisan possessions in 1300. 2. In 1284, Ugolino gave up certain castles to Lucca and Florence. He was at war with Genoa at the time and it is quite likely that he ceded the castles to buy the neutrality of these two cities, for they were technically allied with Genoa. Dante, however, must certainly consider the action as treasonable, for otherwise Ugolino would be in Caïna for his treachery to Visconti. 3. Thebes, as a number of the foregoing notes will already have made clear, was the site of some of the most hideous crimes of antiquity.

We passed on further,⁴ where the frozen mine
 entombs another crew in greater pain;
 these wraiths are not bent over, but lie supine.
 Their very weeping closes up their eyes;
 and the grief that finds no outlet for its tears
 turns inward to increase their agonies:
 for the first tears that they shed knot instantly
 in their eye-sockets, and as they freeze they form
 a crystal visor above the cavity.
 And despite the fact that standing in that place
 I had become as numb as any callus,
 and all sensation had faded from my face,
 somehow I felt a wind begin to blow,
 whereat I said: "Master, what stirs this wind?
 Is not all heat extinguished here below?"⁵
 And the Master said to me: "Soon you will be
 where your own eyes will see the source and cause
 and give you their own answer to the mystery."
 And one of those locked in that icy mall
 cried out to us as we passed: "O souls so cruel
 that you are sent to the last post of all,
 relieve me for a little from the pain
 of this hard veil; let my heart weep a while
 before the weeping freeze my eyes again."
 And I to him: "If you would have my service,
 tell me your name; then if I do not help you
 may I descend to the last rim of the ice."⁶
 "I am Friar Alberigo,"⁷ he answered therefore,
 "the same who called for the fruits from the bad garden.
 Here I am given dates for figs full store."
 "What! Are you dead already?" I said to him.
 And he then: "How my body stands in the world
 I do not know. So privileged is this rim
 of Ptolomea, that often souls fall to it
 before dark Atropos⁸ has cut their thread.
 And that you may more willingly free my spirit
 of this glaze of frozen tears that shrouds my face,
 I will tell you this: when a soul betrays as I did,
 it falls from flesh, and a demon takes its place,
 ruling the body till its time is spent.
 The ruined soul rains down into this cistern.
 So, I believe, there is still evident
 in the world above, all that is fair and mortal
 of this black shade who winters here behind me.
 If you have only recently crossed the portall

4. Marks the passage into Ptolomea. 5. Dante believed (rather accurately, by chance) that all winds resulted from "exhalations of heat." Cocytus, however, is conceived as wholly devoid of heat, a metaphysical absolute zero. The source of the wind, as we discover in the next Canto, is Satan himself. 6. Dante is not taking any chances; he has to go on to the last rim in any case. The sinner, however, believes him to be another damned soul and would interpret the oath quite otherwise than as Dante meant it. 7. Of the Manfredi of Faenza. He was another Jovial Friar. In 1284 his brother Manfred struck him in the course of an argument. Alberigo pretended to let it pass, but in 1285 he invited Manfred and his son to a banquet and had them murdered. The signal to the assassins was the words: "Bring in the fruit." "Friar Alberigo's bad fruit" became a proverbial saying. 8. The Fate who cuts the thread of life.

from that sweet world, you surely must have known
 his body: Branca D'Oria⁹ is its name,
 and many years have passed since he rained down."
 "I think you are trying to take me in," I said,
 "Ser Branca D'Oria is a living man; 140
 he eats, he drinks, he fills his clothes and his bed."
 "Michel Zanche had not yet reached the ditch
 of the Black Talons," the frozen wraith replied,
 "there where the sinners thicken in hot pitch,
 when this one left his body to a devil, 145
 as did his nephew and second in treachery,
 and plumbed like lead through space to this dead level.
 But now reach out your hand, and let me cry."
 And I did not keep the promise I had made,
 for to be rude to him was courtesy. 150
 Ah, men of Genoa! souls of little worth,
 corrupted from all custom of righteousness,
 why have you not been driven from the earth?
 For there beside the blackest soul of all
 Romagna's evil plain, lies one of yours 155
 bathing his filthy soul in the eternal
 glacier of Cocytus for his foul crime,
 while he seems yet alive in world and time!

CANTO XXXIV

Ninth Circle: Cocytus Compound Fraud
Round Four: Judecca The Treacherous to Their Masters
The Center: Satan

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

All about him in the ice are strewn the sinners of the last round, Judecca, named for Judas Iscariot. These are the Treacherous to Their Masters. They lie completely sealed in the ice, twisted and distorted into every conceivable posture. It is impossible to speak to them, and the Poets move on to observe Satan.

He is fixed into the ice at the center to which flow all the rivers of guilt; and as he beats his great wings as if to escape, their icy wind only freezes him more surely into the polluted ice. In a grotesque parody of the Trinity, he has three faces, each a different color, and in each mouth he clamps a sinner whom he rips eternally with his teeth. Judas Iscariot is in the central mouth: Brutus and Cassius in the mouths on either side.

Having seen all, the Poets now climb through the center, grappling

9. A Genoese Ghibelline. His sin is identical in kind to that of Friar Alberigo. In 1275 he invited his father-in-law, Michel Zanche (see Canto XXII), to a banquet and had him and his companions cut to pieces. He was assisted in the butchery by his nephew.

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

"On march the banners of the King of Hell,"¹
 my Master said. "Toward us. Look straight ahead:
 can you make him out at the core of the frozen shell?"
 Like a whirling windmill seen afar at twilight,
 or when a mist has risen from the ground— 5
 just such an engine rose upon my sight
 stirring up such a wild and bitter wind
 I cowered for shelter at my Master's back,
 there being no other windbreak I could find.
 I stood now where the souls of the last class 10
 (with fear my verses tell it) were covered wholly;
 they shone below the ice like straws in glass.
 Some lie stretched out; others are fixed in place
 upright, some on their heads, some on their soles;
 another, like a bow, bends foot to face. 15
 When we had gone so far across the ice
 that it pleased my Guide to show me the foul creature²
 which once had worn the grace of Paradise,
 he made me stop, and, stepping aside, he said:
 "Now see the face of Dis! This is the place 20
 where you must arm your soul against all dread."
 Do not ask, Reader, how my blood ran cold
 and my voice choked up with fear. I cannot write it:
 this is a terror that cannot be told.
 I did not die, and yet I lost life's breath: 25
 imagine for yourself what I became,
 deprived at once of both my life and death.
 The Emperor of the Universe of Pain
 jutted his upper chest above the ice;
 and I am closer in size to the great mountain 30
 the Titans make around the central pit,
 than they to his arms. Now, starting from this part,
 imagine the whole that corresponds to it!
 If he was once as beautiful as now
 he is hideous, and still turned on his Maker, 35
 well may he be the source of every woe!
 With what a sense of awe I saw his head
 towering above me! for it had three faces:
 one was in front, and it was fiery red;
 the other two, as weirdly wonderful, 40
 merged with it from the middle of each shoulder
 to the point where all converged at the top of the skull;

1. The hymn (*Vexilla regis prodeunt*) was written in the sixth century by Venantius Fortunatus, Bishop of Poitiers. The original celebrates the Holy Cross, and is part of the service for Good Friday to be sung at the moment of uncovering the Cross. 2. Satan.

the right was something between white and bile;
 the left was about the color that one finds
 on those who live along the banks of the Nile.
 Under each head two wings rose terribly,
 their span proportioned to so gross a bird:
 I never saw such sails upon the sea.

They were not feathers—their texture and their form
 were like a bat's wings—and he beat them so
 that three winds blew from him in one great storm:
 it is these winds that freeze all Cocytus.

He wept from his six eyes, and down three chins
 the tears ran mixed with bloody froth and pus.³
 In every mouth he worked a broken sinner
 between his rake-like teeth. Thus he kept three
 in eternal pain at his eternal dinner.

For the one in front the biting seemed to play
 no part at all compared to the ripping: at times
 the whole skin of his back was flayed away.

"That soul that suffers most," explained my Guide,
 "is Judas Iscariot, he who kicks his legs
 on the fiery chin and has his head inside.

Of the other two, who have their heads thrust forward,
 the one who dangles down from the black face
 is Brutus: note how he writhes without a word.

And there, with the huge and sinewy arms,⁴ is the soul
 of Cassius.—But the night is coming on⁵
 and we must go, for we have seen the whole."

Then, as he bade, I clasped his neck, and he,
 watching for a moment when the wings
 were opened wide, reached over dexterously
 and seized the shaggy coat of the king demon;
 then grappling matted hair and frozen crusts
 from one tuft to another, clambered down.

When we had reached the joint where the great thigh
 merges into the swelling of the haunch,
 my Guide and Master, straining terribly,
 turned his head to where his feet had been
 and began to grip the hair as if he were climbing;
 so that I thought we moved toward Hell again.

"Hold fast!" my Guide said, and his breath came shrill⁶
 with labor and exhaustion. "There is no way
 but by such stairs to rise above such evil."

At last he climbed out through an opening
 in the central rock, and he seated me on the rim;
 then joined me with a nimble backward spring.

I looked up, thinking to see Lucifer
 as I had left him, and I saw instead
 his legs projecting high into the air.

3. The gore of the sinners he chews, which is mixed with his slaver. 4. The Cassius who betrayed Caesar was more generally described in terms of Shakespeare's "lean and hungry look." Another Cassius is described by Cicero (*Catiline* III) as huge and sinewy. Dante probably confused the two. 5. It is now Saturday evening. 6. Cf. Canto XXIII, 85, where the fact that Dante breathes indicates to the Hypocrites that he is alive. Virgil's breathing is certainly a contradiction.

Now let all those whose dull minds are still vexed
 by failure to understand what point it was
 I had passed through, judge if I was perplexed.

"Get up. Up on your feet," my Master said.
 "The sun already mounts to middle tierce,⁷
 and a long road and hard climbing lie ahead."

It was no hall of state we had found there,
 but a natural animal pit hollowed from rock
 with a broken floor and a close and sunless air.
 "Before I tear myself from the Abyss,"

I said when I had risen, "O my Master,
 explain to me my error in all this:
 where is the ice? and Lucifer—how has he
 been turned from top to bottom: and how can the sun
 have gone from night to day so suddenly?"

And he to me: "You imagine you are still
 on the other side of the center where I grasped
 the shaggy flank of the Great Worm of Evil
 which bores through the world—you *were* while I climbed down,
 but when I turned myself about, you passed
 the point to which all gravities are drawn.

You are under the other hemisphere where you stand;
 the sky above us is the half opposed
 to that which canopies the great dry land.

Under the mid-point of that other sky
 the Man who was born sinless and who lived
 beyond all blemish, came to suffer and die.

You have your feet upon a little sphere
 which forms the other face of the Judecca.

There it is evening when it is morning here.
 And this gross Fiend and Image of all Evil
 who made a stairway for us with his hide
 is pinched and prisoned in the ice-pack still.

On this side he plunged down from heaven's height,
 and the land that spread here once hid in the sea
 and fled North to our hemisphere for fright;

and it may be that moved by that same fear,
 the one peak⁸ that still rises on this side
 fled upward leaving this great cavern here.

Down there, beginning at the further bound
 of Beelzebub's dim tomb, there is a space
 not known by sight, but only by the sound
 of a little stream⁹ descending through the hollow
 it has eroded from the massive stone
 in its endlessly entwining lazy flow.

My Guide and I crossed over and began
 to mount that little known and lightless road
 to ascend into the shining world again.

7. In the canonical day tierce is the period from about six to nine A.M. Middle tierce, therefore, is seven-thirty. In going through the center point, they have gone from night to day. They have moved ahead twelve hours. 8. The Mount of Purgatory. 9. Lethe. In classical mythology, the river of forgetfulness, from which souls drank before being born. In Dante's symbolism it flows down from Purgatory, where it has washed away the memory of sin from the souls who are undergoing purification. That memory it delivers to Hell, which draws all sin to itself.

He first, I second, without thought of rest
 we climbed the dark until we reached the point
 where a round opening brought in sight the blest
 and beauteous shining of the Heavenly cars.
 And we walked out once more beneath the Stars.¹

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1. Dante ends each of the three divisions of the *Commedia* with this word. Every conclusion of the upward soul is toward the stars, God's shining symbols of hope and virtue. It is just before dawn of Easter Sunday that the Poets emerge.

GIOVANNI BOCCACCIO

1313–1375

The tales of Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron* (completed about 1353) constitute the greatest achievement of prose fiction in a vernacular language of southern Europe during the medieval period. In his hundred stories the Italian author presents a great variety of people and situations, aptly and often acutely characterized, and abundant dialogue of great liveliness and realism.

Born in 1313 in Paris, Boccaccio was the son of a Florentine businessman and a Frenchwoman. He was apparently taken to Italy in infancy, and in 1328 was sent to Naples to learn commerce in the office of his father's partner; but after six years, bored with business, he turned to the study of canon law. In 1336 Boccaccio saw Maria d'Aquino in a church at Naples; she is represented as Fiammetta in several of his works, including the *Decameron*. A romantic affair ended in Maria's desertion of her lover and finally in her death in the plague of 1348. In 1341 Boccaccio returned to Florence. After 1351 he was greatly influenced by Petrarch, and turned in his writing from Italian poetry and prose fiction to Latin works of a scholarly nature. He sheltered Leon Pilatus, inducing him to make the first translation of Homer from Greek. Unlike Petrarch, Boccaccio was devoted to the study of Dante, of whom he wrote a biography; in 1373 he was appointed to a Dante chair or lectureship in Florence.

Like Chaucer, who wrote his *Canterbury Tales* several decades later, Boccaccio provides a dramatic framework for his narrations. But his storytellers are not miscellaneous pilgrims traveling to a famous shrine; they are seven young ladies and three young gentlemen who have withdrawn from Florence to the countryside, to escape the Black Death, or plague, of 1348.* They engage in gay banter and good-natured raillery, but as they are all refined and cultivated young people with no occupational bias or ingrained prejudices, their relationships are polite rather than boisterous and lack the force and depth and vitality of those portrayed in *The Canterbury Tales*. They agree on a plan of storytelling—and adhere to it (with slight changes). Here there is no drunken miller, such as interrupts Chaucer's pilgrims, to upset the seemingly orderliness acceptable to gentlefolk, for there are no other folk present. Each member of the company is to tell a tale each day; on some days a general topic is assigned, on others each narrator follows his or her own taste and judgment.

The story about Brother Alberto and his impersonation of the angel Gabriel, a bawdy tale of amorous intrigue and deception, exemplifies what most modern

*The exact nature of the Black Plague is not known, but an epidemic swept over western Europe about this time. Perhaps a fourth of the population died from it. Other epidemics are known from other centuries as well, notably the 17th century. In its deadly effect it might be compared with the epidemic of influenza in Europe, America, and elsewhere in 1918–19.

readers regard as typical of the *Decameron*. Like Chaucer's *Miller's Tale*, it presents a (moderately) clever person successfully deceiving a very foolish one, but eventually punished for his trickery. In the present story, the man is the trickster and the woman is the foolish dupe, but these roles are often reversed in other stories of the *Decameron*; indeed, Boccaccio digresses during the introduction to the fourth day to assert his devotion to women—the Muses, after all, were women—and, indeed, the women storytellers outnumber the men. He nonetheless knew that some women are foolish, just as he knew, though he was a devout Christian, that some priests and friars fall short of their vocation. Like other authors of his time, he saw nothing wrong in acknowledging these facts and turning them to artistic use.

If reduced to the bare essentials of its plot, this tale could be told far more briefly, as a mere anecdote, a joke. Indeed, it may well have been in circulation as an anecdote both before and after Boccaccio. But he gives it literary value by the way he handles it. He makes the reader see the successive scenes in vivid detail, he creates memorable and amusing characters, and he relates the incidents of the narrative closely to the personalities of those characters. Lisetta is not only credulous but also inordinately vain—her credulity derives from her vanity—and it is because of these qualities that she can be taken in by Brother Alberto's preposterous account of the angel's interest in her. The reader also notices the tacit perception of Lisetta's woman friend, who at once sees through the friar's scheme but, instead of disabusing her foolish friend, leads her on and then gleefully reveals the whole story to the outside world. And Alberto, though clever, is not as cautious as he should be. Otherwise, once warned, he would not have exposed himself to discovery and disgrace.

The story of Federigo and his falcon is told on a day devoted to accounts of love that turns out happily after difficulties on the way. It presents the courtly love relationship—or one of the possible relationships—in a remarkable combination of realism and nobility. Federigo's conduct perfectly fulfills the code; he devotes himself completely to Monna Giovanna, and his failure to receive anything in return in no way disturbs the pattern of that devotion. He never repines or complains; his lady's married or widowed condition is all one to him; and, having spent his fortune in the futile effort to attract her, he lives with resignation on his tiny estate. But Federigo is genuinely high-minded and noble; he has absorbed the ideals and not merely the etiquette of courtly love. His declaration, when Giovanna comes to call, that he has gained and not lost by his service to her, might be politeness learned out of a book—a romance, for example. But his sacrifice of the falcon to provide her with a good meal is a splendid and magnificent folly that could come only from an almost unbelievably generous heart. His grief at the outcome is probably sharper than Giovanna's, despite the painful disappointment that it produces for her.

Giovanna's dignity and charm and sensitivity are as clear to us as they evidently are to Federigo. Unwilling, whether as wife or widow, to have a romance with Federigo, she does not encourage him. Yet she knows that he loves her and that he has squandered his wealth on her account. We see her distress at having to ask him for anything, let alone the falcon, his most cherished possession. But when love for her young son, mortally ill, forces her to it, she acts with grace and decorum. And with something more; for she has discerned the nobleness of temper in Federigo through his consistently courteous behavior. It is that to which she appeals, not to any obligation of a courtly lover to please his lady. Later, when her brothers convince her that she should remarry, she also shows both generosity and independence of character. She gives Federigo his reward by marrying him—and seeing that his new fortune is not wasted! The happy ending is agreeable; but the notable achievement of the story is the brief but complete and poignant depiction