

INFERNO

CANTO XVIII

There is a place in Hell called Malebolge,
fashioned entirely of iron-colored rock,
as is the escarpment that encircles it. 3

At the very center of this malignant space
there yawns a pit, extremely wide and deep.
I will describe its plan all in due time. 6

A path that circles like a belt around the base
of that high rock runs round the pit,
its sides descending in ten ditches. 9

As where concentric moats surround a castle
to guard its walls, their patterns clear
and governed by a meaningful design, 12

in such a pattern were these ditches shaped.
And, just as narrow bridges issue from the gates
of fortresses to reach the furthest bank, 15

so ridges stretched from the escarpment
down across the banks and ditches
into the pit at which they end and join. 18

Dropped from Geryon's back, this was the place
in which we found ourselves. The poet kept
to the left and I came on behind him. 21

To our right I saw a suffering new to me,
new torments, and new scourgers,
with whom the first ditch was replete. 24

The sinners in its depth were naked,
those on our side of the center coming toward us,
the others moving with us, but with longer strides, 27

just as, because the throngs were vast the year
of Jubilee, the Romans had to find a way
to let the people pass across the bridge, 30

so that all those on one side face the castle,
heading over to Saint Peter's,
those, on the other, heading toward the mount. 33

Here and there on the dark rock above them
 I watched horned demons armed with heavy scourges
 lashing them cruelly from behind. 36

Ah, how they made them pick their heels up
 at the first stroke! You may be certain
 no one waited for a second or a third. 39

While I went on my eye was caught
 by one of them, and quickly I brought out:
 'It seems to me I've seen that man before.' 42

And so I paused to make him out.
 My gentle leader stopped with me,
 and then allowed me to retrace my steps. 45

The scourged soul thought that he could hide
 by lowering his face -- to no avail.
 I said: 'You there, with your eyes cast down, 48
 'if I'm not mistaken in your features,
 you're Venèdico Caccianemico.
 What has brought you to such stinging torture?' 51

And he replied: 'Unwillingly I tell it,
 moved only by the truth of what you've said,
 which brings to mind the world that once I knew. 54
 'It was I who urged Ghisolabella
 to do the will of that marquis,
 no matter how the foul tale goes around. 57

'I'm not the only Bolognese here lamenting.
 This place is so crammed with them
 that not so many tongues have learned to say 60
 "'sipa" between the Sàvena and the Reno.
 And if you'd like some confirmation,
 bring our greedy dispositions back to mind.' 63

While he was speaking a demon struck him
 with his lash and said: 'Away, pimp!
 there are no women here to trick.' 66

Then I rejoined my escort. A few steps farther
 and we came upon a place
 where a ridge jutted from the bank. 69

This we ascended easily and,
 turning to the right on its jagged ledge,
 we left behind their endless circling. 72

When we came to the point above the hollow
 that makes a passage for the scourged,
 my leader said: 'Stop, let them look at you, 75
 'those other ill-born souls whose faces
 you have not yet seen, since we have all
 been moving in the same direction.' 78
 From the ancient bridge we eyed the band
 advancing toward us on the other side,
 driven with whips just like the first. 81
 And the good master, without my asking, said:
 'See that imposing figure drawing near.
 He seems to shed no tears despite his pain. 84
 'What regal aspect he still bears!
 He is Jason, who by courage and by craft
 deprived the men of Colchis of the ram. 87
 'Then he ventured to the isle of Lemnos,
 after those pitiless, bold women
 put all the males among them to their death. 90
 'There with signs of love and polished words
 he deceived the young Hypsipyle,
 who had herself deceived the other women. 93
 'There he left her, pregnant and forlorn.
 Such guilt condemns him to this torment,
 and Medea too is thus avenged. 96
 'With him go all who practice such deceit.
 Let that be all we know of this first ditch
 and of the ones it clenches in its jaws.' 99
 Now we had come to where the narrow causeway
 intersects the second ridge to form
 a buttress for another arch. 102
 From here we heard the whimpering of people
 one ditch away, snuffling with their snouts
 and beating on themselves with their own palms. 105
 The banks, made slimy by a sticky vapor
 from below, were coated with a mould
 offending eyes and nose. 108
 The bottom is so deep we could see nothing
 unless we climbed to the crown of the arch,
 just where the ridge is highest. 111

We went up, and from there I could see, in a ditch below, people plunged in excrement that could have come from human privies.	114
Searching the bottom with my eyes I saw a man, his head so smeared with shit one could not tell if he were priest or layman.	117
He railed: 'What whets your appetite to stare at me more than all the others in their filth?'	
And I answered: 'The fact, if I remember right, 'that once I saw you when your hair was dry -- and you are Alessio Interminei of Lucca.	120
That's why I eye you more than all the rest.'	123
Then he, beating on his pate: 'I am immersed down here for the flattery with which my tongue was never cloyed.'	126
And then my leader said to me: 'Try to thrust your face a little farther forward, to get a better picture of the features	129
'of that foul, dishevelled wench down there, scratching herself with her filthy nails.	
Now she squats and now she's standing up.	132
'She is Thaïs, the whore who, when her lover asked: "Have I found favor with you?"	
answered, "Oh, beyond all measure!"	135
And let our eyes be satisfied with that.'	136