

CANTO 17

*Geryon, the "filthy image of fraud"—the usurers—descent on
Geryon's back*

- 1 “Behold the beast with the pointed tail, that passes
through mountains and pierces walls and armor!
Behold the one that makes the whole world stink!”
- 4 So my leader began speaking to me; and he
gestured to it to come ashore near the end of our
marble pathway.
- 7 And that filthy image of fraud came over and
beached its head and chest, but did not draw up its
tail as far as the bank.
- 10 Its face was that of a just man, so kindly seemed
its outer skin, and the rest of its torso was that of a
serpent;
- 13 it had two paws, hairy to the armpits; it had back
and breast and both sides painted with knots and
little wheels:
- 16 with more colors, in weave and embroidery, did
never Tartars nor Turks make cloths, nor did
Arachne string the loom for such tapestries.
- 19 As skiffs lie on the shore at times, partly in water
and partly on land, and as there among the drunken
Germans
- 22 the beaver positions itself to wage its war: so the
wicked beast rested on the rim of stone that encloses
the sand.
- 25 In the emptiness all its tail was wriggling, twisting
upward the poisoned fork that armed its tip like a
scorpion's.
- 28 My leader said: “Now our path must bend a little
toward the evil beast that lies over there.”

31 Therefore we descended toward the right breast
and made ten paces to the edge, to be well beyond
the sand and the flames.

34 And when we had reached it, a little further, on
the sand, I see people sitting near the empty place.

37 There my master said to me: “That you may carry
away full experience of this subcircle, go, and see
their behavior.

40 Let your speech there be brief; until you return, I
will speak with this beast, that it may grant us its
strong shoulders.”

43 So once more along the outer edge of that seventh
circle I walked all alone, where the mournful people
were sitting.

46 Through their eyes burst forth their pain; here,
there, they sought remedy with their hands at times
against the fire, at times against the hot ground;

49 not otherwise do the dogs behave in the summer,
now with muzzle, now with foot, when they are
bitten by fleas or gnats or horseflies.

52 When I turned my eyes to their faces, on which
the painful fire falls down, I recognized none; but I
perceived

55 that from the neck of each hung a bag of a special
color, with a special emblem, and their eyes seem to
feed there.

58 And as I come gazing among them, on a yellow
purse I saw blue that had the shape and bearing of a
lion.

61 Then, proceeding further with my scrutiny, I saw
another, red as blood, displaying a goose whiter than
butter.

64 And one who had his little white sack signed with
a fat blue sow, said to me: “What are you doing in
this ditch?

67 Now go away; and since you are alive, too, know
that my neighbor Vitaliano will sit here at my left
flank.

70 With these Florentines I am a Paduan: often they
thunder in my ears shouting, 'Let the reigning knight
come down,
73 who will bring the bag with the three goats.'" Here
he twisted his mouth and stuck out his tongue, like an
ox licking its snout.

76 And I, fearing lest a longer stay might displease
him who had warned me to be brief, turned back,
away from those weary souls.

79 I found my leader had climbed already onto the
fierce animal's rump, and he told me: "Now be strong
and bold:

82 henceforth we descend by stairs like these. Mount
in front, for I wish to be between, so that its tail
can do no harm."

85 Like one whose fit of the quartan fever is so close
that his nails are already pale and he trembles all
over merely looking at the shade:

88 so I became at the words I heard; but shame made
its threats, that makes a servant bold in the presence
of a good lord.

91 I positioned myself on those monstrous shoulders;
"Yes," I wanted to say, but my voice did not come as I
expected: "Be sure to hold me."

94 But he, who had supported me at other times, in
other dangers, as soon as I mounted clasped and
braced me with his arms;

97 and he said: "Geryon, now move; make your
wheelings large, your descent slow: consider the new
weight you carry."

100 As a little boat moves from its place backward,
backward, so he moved thence; and when he felt
himself entirely free,

103 he turned his tail where his breast had been, and,
extending it, he moved it like an eel's, and gathered
the air to himself with his paws.

106 I believe there was no greater fear when Phaëthon
abandoned the reins, so that the sky was scorched, as
still appears,

- 109 nor when the wretched Icarus felt his loins
 unfeathering because of the heated wax, as his father
 shouted to him, “You’re on a bad course!”
- 112 than was mine, when I saw that I was in the air
 on every side, and every sight put out save that of
 the beast.
- 115 It goes along swimming slowly, slowly; it wheels
 and descends, but I perceive its motion only by the
 wind on my face from below.
- 118 I could already hear at my right hand the torrent
 making a horrible roar beneath us, and so I lean out
 my head, looking down.
- 121 Then I became more afraid of falling, for I saw
 fires and heard weeping; so that all trembling I
 huddled back.
- 124 And then I saw what I had not seen before, our
 descending and turning against the great evils that
 came closer on every side.
- 127 As when a falcon has been long on the wing and,
 without seeing lure or prey, makes the falconer say,
 “*Oh me, you are coming down!*”
- 130 descending weary to the place it swiftly left, with
 a hundred circlings, and lands far from its master,
 full of disdain and spite:
- 133 so Geryon placed us on the bottom, at the very
 foot of the vertical rock, and, our persons unloaded,
136 disappeared like the notch from the bowstring.

