

## CANTO 25

*Seventh bolgia, continued: Cacus—more metamorphoses—Agnello,  
Pucci Sciancato*

- 1           At the end of his words the thief raised his hands  
with both the figs, crying: “Take them, God, I’m  
aiming at you!”
- 4           From then on snakes have been my friends,  
because one of them wrapped itself around his neck,  
as if to say “I won’t let him say more,”
- 7           and another around his arms, and bound them up,  
tying itself so tight in front that he could not budge.
- 10          Ah, Pistoia, Pistoia, why do you not decree your  
incineration, so that you may not endure, since you  
surpass your sowers in doing ill?
- 13          Through all the dark circles of Hell I saw no spirit  
so proud against God, not him who fell from the wall  
at Thebes.
- 16          He fled without saying another word; and I saw a  
centaur, full of rage, come crying: “Where is he,  
where is he, the unripe one?”
- 19          I do not think Maremma has as many water  
snakes as he had on his back from the rump to  
where our shape begins.
- 22          On his shoulders, behind his nape, lay a dragon  
spreading its wings; it sets fire to any they meet.
- 25          My master said: “That is Cacus, who beneath the  
rocks of Mount Aventine many times made a lake of  
blood.
- 28          He does not follow the same path as his brothers,  
because he fraudulently stole the great herd he found  
close by;

- 31           therefore his cross-eyed deeds ended under  
Hercules' club, which perhaps gave him a hundred,  
but he did not feel ten of them."
- 34           As he was speaking, the centaur went by and  
three spirits came below us, whom neither I nor my  
leader perceived
- 37           until they cried: "Who are you?" For this reason  
our talk ceased, and they alone claimed our attention.
- 40           I did not know them; but it happened, as it often  
does by some chance, that one of them had to name  
another,
- 43           saying: "Where has Cianfa stayed?" Therefore I, so  
that my leader should pay attention, stretched my  
finger from chin to nose.
- 46           If now, reader, you are slow to believe what I say,  
that will be no marvel, for I, who saw it, hardly allow  
it.
- 49           As I was raising my brows toward them, a serpent  
with six feet threw itself on one of them and  
embraced him closely.
- 52           Its middle feet it wrapped around his waist, with  
its forefeet it seized his arms; then it pierced both his  
cheeks with its fangs;
- 55           its hind feet it spread along his thighs, and put its  
tail between them, extending it up along his loins:
- 58           ivy never took root on a tree so tightly as the  
horrible beast grew vinelike around the other's limbs.
- 61           After they had adhered to each other like hot wax  
and had mixed their colors, neither seemed what it  
had been:
- 64           as, when paper burns, a dark color moves up it  
preceding the flame; it is not yet black, but the white  
is dying.
- 67           The other two were staring at him, and each cried:  
"Oh me, Agnel, how you are changing! See, already  
you are neither two nor one."

- 70           Already the two heads had become one, so that  
two sets of features seemed mingled in one face,  
where two heads were lost.
- 73           The arms became two strips from four; the thighs  
and the legs and the belly and the chest became  
members never before seen.
- 76           Every former appearance there was shattered; two  
and none the perverse image seemed, and off it  
moved with slow steps.
- 79           As the lizard, changing hedges under the great  
scourge of the dog days, seems lightning as it crosses  
the road:
- 82           so seemed an inflamed little serpent, livid and black  
like a grain of pepper, coming toward the bellies of  
the other two;
- 85           and one of them it pierced in the place where our  
first nourishment is taken; then it fell stretched out  
before him.
- 88           The one transfixed gazed at it but said nothing;  
rather, standing still, he yawned as if sleep or fever  
assailed him.
- 91           He was gazing at the serpent, and the serpent at  
him; one through his wound and the other through  
its mouth was sending forth smoke, and the smoke  
met.
- 94           Let Lucan now be silent, where he touches on  
miserable Sabellus and Nasidius, and let him listen to  
what the bow now looses.
- 97           About Cadmus and Arethusa let Ovid be silent,  
for if in his poetry he converts him into a serpent and  
her into a fountain, I do not envy him,
- 100          for never two natures face to face did he  
transmute so that both forms were ready to exchange  
their matter.
- 103          They answered each other according to this  
rule: that the serpent split its tail in two, and the  
wounded one drew his soles together.
- 106          His legs and thighs so adhered that soon the  
joining left no mark that could be seen.

- 109           The cleft tail took the shape the other was losing,  
and its skin softened, but over there it hardened.
- 112           I saw both his arms withdraw into the armpits,  
and the beast's two feet, which were short, lengthen  
as much as the other's were shortening.
- 115           Then the hind feet, twisted together, became the  
member which a man hides, and the other wrench out  
of his had extended two feet.
- 118           While the smoke veils both of them with a new  
color, generating hair on one side, and peeling it off  
on the other,
- 121           one stood up and the other fell down, but they  
did not turn aside their pitiless lanterns, under whose  
gaze each was changing his snout.
- 124           He who was erect drew his in toward the temples,  
and of the excess matter made ears that came out  
over narrow cheeks;
- 127           what of that excess did not go to the rear became  
a nose for the face and filled out the cheeks as much  
as was fitting.
- 130           He who was lying down, extends his snout  
forward and withdraws his ears into his head as the  
snail does its horns;
- 133           and his tongue, which had previously been whole  
and ready to speak, is split, and the other's forked  
one is joined; and the smoke stops.
- 136           The soul who had become a beast fled hissing  
through the valley, and the other spits as he speaks  
after him.
- 139           Then he turned his new back on him and said to  
the other: "I want Buoso to run, as I have, on all sixes  
along this path."
- 142           Thus I saw the seventh cargo change and change  
again; and here let the novelty excuse me if my pen  
ever falters.
- 145           And although my eyes were somewhat confused  
and my spirit robbed of power, the souls could not  
flee so secretly

148           that I did not see clearly Puccio Sciancato; and he  
          alone, of the three companions who had arrived  
          earlier, had not been changed;  
151           the other was the one that makes you, Gaville,  
          weep.

