

## CANTO 27

*Eighth bolgia, continued: Guido da Montefeltro, converted, but tricked  
by Pope Boniface VIII—dispute of Saint Francis and the black cherub*

1           Already the flame was erect and quiet, no longer  
speaking, and already it had left us with the  
permission of my sweet poet,  
4           when another, coming after it, made us turn our  
eyes to its peak because of a confused sound coming  
out from it.  
7           As the Sicilian bull, which first bellowed with the  
cries of him—and that was right—who had  
tempered it with his file,  
10           used to bellow with the voice of the afflicted one,  
so that, though made of brass, still it seemed  
transfixed with pain:  
13           so, not having any path or outlet from its origin  
within the fire, the anguished words were converted  
into its language.  
16           But after they had found their way up to the tip,  
imparting to it that wriggling which the tongue had  
given them in their passage,  
19           we heard it say: “O you to whom I direct my  
voice and who were just now speaking Lombard,  
saying: ‘*Istra* you may go, I incite you no further,’  
22           though I have arrived perhaps somewhat late, let  
it not grieve you to stay and speak with me; you  
see it does not grieve me, and I am burning!  
25           If you just now fell into this blind world from that  
sweet Italian earth whence I bring all my guilt,  
28           tell me if the people of Romagna have peace or  
war; for I was from the mountains there between  
Urbino and the ridge whence Tiber is unleashed.”

31 I was still bent over intent upon him when my  
leader prodded my side, saying, "You speak: this one  
is Italian."

34 And I, having my reply already prepared, without  
delay began to speak: "O soul hidden down there,  
37 your Romagna is not, and never was, without war  
in the hearts of its tyrants; but no open war did I  
leave there now.

40 Ravenna is as it has been for many years: the  
eagle of Polenta broods over it, covering Cervia with  
its pinions.

43 The city that underwent the long trial and made a  
bloody heap of the French, now finds itself beneath  
the green claws.

46 The old and young mastiffs of Verrucchio, who  
guarded Montagna ill, as they are accustomed, make drills  
of their teeth.

49 The cities of Lamone and Santerno are led by the  
lion cub in the white nest, who changes alliances  
between summer and winter.

52 And the city whose flank the Savio bathes, just as  
it lies between the plain and the mountain, so lives  
between tyranny and liberty.

55 Now who you are I beg you to tell us: do not be  
harder than others have been to you, so may your  
name hold up its brow in the world."

58 After the flame had roared a bit in its manner, it  
moved its sharp tongue here and there, and then  
gave forth this breath:

61 "If I believed that my reply were to a person who  
would ever return to the world, this flame would  
remain without further shaking;

64 but since never from this depth has any one  
returned alive, if I hear the truth, without fear of  
infamy I answer you.

67 I was a man of arms, and then I was a Franciscan,  
believing, so girt, to make amends; and surely my  
belief would have been fulfilled,

70           had it not been for the high priest, may evil take  
him! who put me back into my first sins; and how  
and *qua re*, I wish you to hear from me.

73           While I was the form of bone and flesh that my  
mother gave me, my works were not those of a lion  
but a fox.

76           The tricks and the hidden ways, I knew them all,  
and I so plied their art that the fame of it went out  
to the ends of the earth.

79           When I saw I had reached that part of my life  
where every man should lower the sails and coil the ropes,  
82           what earlier pleased me, then grieved me, and I  
gave myself up repentant and shriven; ah,  
miserable wretch that I am! and it would have worked.

85           The prince of the new Pharisees, making war near  
the Lateran, and not against Saracens or Jews,

88           for each of his enemies was a Christian, and none  
had been to take Acre nor a merchant in the Sultan's  
lands—,

91           regarded neither his highest office nor holy orders in  
himself, nor in me the rope that used to make its  
wearers thinner.

94           But, as Constantine asked Sylvester in Soracte to  
cure him of leprosy, so he asked me to teach him

97           to recover from his proud fever; he asked my  
advice, and I was silent, for his words seemed  
drunken.

100          Then he said again: 'Let not your heart fear:  
henceforth I absolve you, if you teach me how to  
raze Palestrina to the ground.

103          Heaven I can lock and unlock, as you know; for  
that reason the keys are two which my predecessor  
did not prize.'

106          Then his weighty arguments impelled me, for  
silence seemed to me the worse course, and I said:  
'Father, since you wash me

- 109           of that sin into which I now must fall, a long  
promise with a short keeping will make you triumph  
on your high throne.’
- 112           Francis came later, when I had died, for me; but  
one of the black cherubim told him: ‘Do not take him,  
do not wrong me.
- 115           He must come down among my slaves, because  
he gave the fraudulent counsel, since when, until  
now, I have been at his locks;
- 118           for he cannot be absolved who does not repent,  
nor can one repent and will together, because of the  
contradiction, which does not permit it.’
- 121           Oh wretched me! how I trembled when he seized  
me, telling me: ‘Perhaps you did not think I was a  
logician!’
- 124           He carried me to Minos; and that one twisted his  
tail eight times about his hard back, and after he had  
bitten it in his great rage,
- 127           he said: ‘This is one who deserves the thieving  
fire’; so that I am lost here where you see me, and  
thus clothed I go tormenting myself.”
- 130           When it had finished speaking thus, the grieving  
flame departed, twisting and beating about with its  
sharp horn.
- 133           We passed further, both I and my leader, up along  
the ridge as far as the next arch, which covers the  
ditch where the toll is collected
- 136           from those who gain cargo by putting apart.

