

## CANTO 28

*Ninth bolgia: sowers of discord—Mohammed—Curio—Mosca de’  
Lamberti—Bertran de Born*

- 1           Who could ever, even with unbound words, tell in  
full of the blood and wounds that I now saw, though  
he should narrate them many times?
- 4           Every tongue would surely fail, because our  
language and our memory have little capacity to  
comprehend so much.
- 7           If one gathered together all the people who ever,  
on the travailed earth of Apulia, groaning poured  
forth their blood
- 10          on account of the Trojans, and in the long war  
that took such heaped spoils of rings, as Livy writes,  
who does not err,
- 13          and the people who suffered wounds when  
resisting Robert Guiscard, and the others whose  
bones are still being collected
- 16          at Ceperano, where every Apulian was a liar, and  
at Tagliacozzo, where old Elard won without arms,  
19          and this one showed his perforated, this one his  
truncated member, it would be nothing to equal the  
wretched mode of the ninth pocket.
- 22          Surely a barrel, losing centerpiece or half-moon, is  
not so broken as one I saw torn open from the chin  
to the farting-place.
- 25          Between his legs dangled his intestines; the pluck  
was visible, and the wretched bag that makes shit  
of what is swallowed.
- 28          While I was all absorbed in the sight of him, he,  
gazing back at me, with his hands opened up his  
breast, saying: “Now see how I spread myself!

31            See how Mohammed is torn open! Ahead of me  
Ali goes weeping, his face cloven from chin to  
forelock.

34            And all the others you see here were sowers of  
scandal and schism while they were alive, and  
therefore are they cloven in this way.

37            There is a devil back there who carves us so  
cruelly, putting the edge of his sword to each in this  
ream

40            once we have circled through the suffering road,  
for the wounds have closed before any confronts him  
again.

43            But who are you sniffing at us from up on the  
ridge, perhaps to delay going to the punishment  
decreed on your crimes?"

46            "Death has not reached him yet, nor does guilt  
lead him," replied my master, "into torment; but so  
that he may have full experience,

49            I, who am dead, must lead him through Hell  
down here from circle to circle; and this is as true as  
that I am speaking to you."

52            More than a hundred were they who, hearing  
him, stopped in the ditch to gaze up at me in  
amazement, forgetting their suffering.

55            "Now then, you who will perhaps shortly see the  
sun, tell Brother Dolcino, if he does not want to  
follow me soon down here,

58            to provide himself with enough food that the  
barrier of snow may give not the victory to the  
Novarese, which otherwise would not be easy to  
acquire."

61            Holding one foot lifted to walk away, Mohammed  
spoke this word to me; then, departing, he set it  
down.

64            Another, whose throat was bored through, his  
nose cut up to his eyebrows, and with only one ear,  
67            stopping to gaze up at me in amazement with the  
others, first of the others opened his windpipe, which  
was all covered with crimson,

- 70           and said: "O you whom guilt does not condemn,  
and whom I saw in Italy, if too close a resemblance  
does not deceive me,
- 73           remember Pier of Medicina, if you ever return to  
see the lovely plain sloping down from Vercelli to  
Marcabò.
- 76           And tell the two best men of Fano, messer Guido  
and Angiolello, that, if foresight is not empty here,  
79           they will be thrown from their vessel in a  
weighted sack and drowned near Cattolica, thanks to  
the treachery of a wicked tyrant.
- 82           Between the islands of Cyprus and Maiolica  
Neptune has never seen so great a sin done, not by  
pirates, not by Argolians.
- 85           That traitor who sees with only one eye, who  
holds the city that my fellow wishes he had still to  
see,
- 88           will have them come to parley; he will bring it  
about that they need no vows or prayers against the  
Focara wind."
- 91           And I to him: "Show me and explain, if you wish  
me to carry news back up about you, who is the one  
of the bitter sight?"
- 94           Then he put his hand to the jaw of one of his  
companions and opened his mouth for him, crying:  
"This is he, and he cannot speak.
- 97           He, an exile, drowned Caesar's doubts, affirming  
that one prepared always suffers from delay."
- 100          Oh how dismayed Curio seemed, with the tongue  
cut out of his throat, he who was so bold to speak!
- 103          And one who had both hands cut off, lifting the  
stumps in the murky air so that the blood soiled his  
face,
- 106          cried: "You will remember Mosca, too, who said,  
alas, 'A thing done is done,' the seed of evil for the  
Tuscans."

- 109           And I added: “And the death of your clan”; so that  
he, piling grief on grief, walked off like a person mad  
with sorrow.
- 112           But I remained to gaze at the host, and I saw  
something that I would fear, without more proof,  
even to retell,
- 115           except that my conscience makes me confident,  
the good companion that frees a man, if it wears the  
hauberk of knowing itself pure.
- 118           I surely saw, and it seems I still see, a torso  
without a head walking like the others of the sorry  
flock;
- 121           and his severed head he was holding up by the  
hair, dangling it from his hand like a lantern; and the  
head was gazing at us, saying: “Oh me!”
- 124           Of himself he made a lamp for himself, and they  
were two in one and one in two; how that can be, he  
knows who so disposes.
- 127           When he was directly at the foot of the bridge, he  
raised his arm far up, head and all, to bring his  
words close to us,
- 130           which were: “Now see my wretched punishment,  
you who go still breathing to view the dead: see if  
any is great as this.
- 133           And that you may take back news of me, know  
that I am Bertran de Born, he who gave the young  
king the bad encouragements.
- 136           I made father and son revolt against each other:  
Achitophel did no worse to Absalom and David with  
his evil proddings.
- 139           Because I divided persons so joined, I carry my  
brain divided, alas, from its origin which is in this  
trunk.
- 142           Thus you observe in me the counter-suffering.”

