

CANTO 29

*Ninth bolgia, continued: Virgil's rebuke—Geri del Bello—
tenth bolgia, falsifiers: alchemists: the Aretine—vanity of the
Sieneze—Capocchio*

- 1 The multitude of people and their strange wounds
had so inebriated my eyes that they longed to stay
and weep.
- 4 But Virgil said to me: “Why do you still stare? Why
does your sight still dwell on those wretched
mutilated shades down there?”
- 7 You did not act thus at the other pockets; think, if
you believe you could number them, that the valley
turns for twenty-two miles.
- 10 And already the moon is beneath our feet; little
remains of the time granted us, and there are other
things to see that you do not see.”
- 13 “If you had attended,” I then answered him, “to
the cause for which I was staring, perhaps you would
have permitted me to stay longer.”
- 16 Meanwhile my leader walked on, with me behind
him already replying, and adding: “Within that
hollow
- 19 where just now I was fixing my eyes, I think a
spirit of my blood is weeping for the guilt that costs
so much down there.”
- 22 Then said my master: “Let not your thought break
over him from now on. Attend to other things, and
let him stay there;
- 25 for I saw him at the foot of the bridge, pointing at
you and threatening fiercely with his finger, and I
heard him called Geri del Bello.
- 28 You were then so caught by him who held
Hautefort that you did not look there, and he went
off.”

31 “O my leader, his violent death, as yet
unavenged,” I said, “by anyone who shares the shame
of it,

34 has made him full of scorn; therefore he walked
away without speaking to me, as I judge, and that
has made me more compassionate toward him.”

37 Thus we talked as far as the first place on the
ridge to show the next valley, if there were more
light there, down to its bed.

40 When we were above the last cloister of
Malebolge, so that its converts could appear to our
sight,

43 strange lamentings struck me, arrows whose iron
heads were made of pity, so that I covered my ears
with my hands.

46 What the suffering would be, if the sick from the
hospitals of Valdichiana between July and September,
and from Maremma and Sardinia,

49 were all in one ditch together: such was it there,
and a stench came from it like that from rotting
limbs.

52 We climbed down to the last bank from the long
ridge, still to the left; and then my sight was livelier
55 down toward the bottom, where the minister of
the Lord, infallible justice, punishes the falsifiers that
it registers here.

58 I do not believe it was a greater sadness to see
in Aegina the whole people sick, when the air
was so full of malice

61 that the animals, down to the little worm, all fell—
and then the ancient people, according to what the
poets firmly believe,

64 were restored from the seed of ants—than it was to
see, along that dark valley, the spirits languishing in
different heaps.

67 This one lay over another’s stomach, that one over
another’s shoulders, and this one crawling transmuted
himself down the evil road.

70 Step by step we walked without speech, seeing
and hearing the sick, who could not lift their bodies.

73 I saw two sitting propped against each other, as
one props pan against pan to cool, both from head to
foot all spotted with scabs;

76 and I have never seen a currycomb so plied by a
boy awaited by his master, or by one who unwilling
stayed awake,

79 as each one of them plied the bite of his
fingernails on himself, for the great rage of the itch,
which no longer has any remedy;

82 their nails tore off the scabs like knives
scaling bream or some other fish with larger scales.

85 “O you who dismail yourself with your fingers,”
began my leader to one of them, “and at times make
pincers of them,

88 tell us if any Italian is among those in here, so
may your nail suffice eternally for this work.”

91 “We are Italians, whom you see so ruined here,
both of us,” one replied weeping; “but who are you
who have asked about us?”

94 And my leader said: “I am one descending with
this living man from ledge to ledge, and I intend to
show him Hell.”

97 Then the mutual support was broken, and
trembling each of them turned to me, along with
others who heard the words as if by echo.

100 My good master drew near to me, saying: “Say to
them what you wish”; and I began, since he wished
it:

103 “So may your memory not be stolen from human
minds in the first world, so may it live for many
suns,

106 tell me who you are and of what people; let not your
filthy and disgusting punishment make you fear
to reveal yourselves to me.”

109 “I was from Arezzo, and Albero of Siena,” replied
one, “sent me to the fire; but what I died for is not
what leads me here.

112 It is true that I told him, joking: ‘I could raise
myself through the air in flight’; and he, who had
eagerness but little sense,

115 wanted me to show him the art; and only because
I did not make him Daedalus, he had me burned by
one who loved him as a son.

118 But to the last pocket of the ten, for alchemy,
which I practiced in the world, Minos damned me,
who may not err.”

121 And I said to my poet: “Now was there ever a
people so foolish as the Sienese? Certainly not the
French, by far!”

124 And the other leper, who heard me, replied to my
word: “Except for Stricca, he knew how to spend
moderately,

127 and Nicholas, who first discovered the rich
custom of cloves, in the garden where that seed takes
root,

130 and except for the crew for whom Caccia
d’Asciano used up his vineyard and his great
farmlands, and to whom Bedazzled displayed his
wisdom.

133 But so that you may know who seconds you
against the Sienese, sharpen your eye toward me, that
my face may answer to you:

136 then you will see that I am the shade of
Capocchio, who falsified metals with alchemy; and
you must remember, if I eye you well,

139 how good an ape I was of nature.”

