
FROM THE DARK WOOD TO THE BEATIFIC VISION: JOURNEYING THROUGH LENT WITH DANTE

Part 2: “Souls who lost the good of the intellect”



St Columba's, Culloden
Wednesday 28 February 2018

Lustful – Paolo and Francesca (Canto 5)

“The infernal storm, eternal in its rage,
sweeps and drives the spirits with its blast:
it whirls them, lashing them with punishment.” (*Inferno* 5: 30-32)

“Love, quick to kindle in the gentle heart,
seized this one for the beauty of my body,
torn from me. (How it happened still offends me!)
Love, that excuses no one loved from loving,
seized me so strongly with delight in him that,
as you see, he never leaves my side.” (*Inferno* 5: 99-105)

“One day we read, to pass the time away,
Of Lancelot, of how he fell in love;
We were alone, innocent of suspicion.” (*Inferno* 5: 126-128)

“That day we read no further.” (*Inferno* 5: 127)

Heretics – Farinata (Canto 10)

“I already had my eyes fixed on his face,
and he stood out tall, with his chest and brow
proclaiming his disdain for all this Hell..

And when I reached the margin of his tomb
he looked at me, and half-contemptuously he asked,
“And *who* would *your* ancestors be?” ” (*Inferno* 10: 33-35; 39-41)

The Wood of the Suicides – Pier delle Vigne (Canto 13)

“I am the one who held both of the keys
that fitted Frederick’s heart; I turned them both,
locking and unlocking, with such finesse
that I let few into his confidence.
I was so faithful to my glorious office,
I lost not only sleep but life itself.” (*Inferno* 13: 57-62)

Simoniacs: Pope Nicholas III (Canto 19)

He cried: "Is that *you*, here, already, upright?
Is that you here already upright, Boniface?
By many years the book has lied to me!

Are you fed up so soon with all that wealth
for which you did not fear to take by guile
the Lovely Lady, then tear her asunder?"
(*Inferno* 19: 52-57)

Fraudulent Counsellors: Guido da Montefeltro (Canto 27)

"I was a man of arms and then a friar,
believing with the cord to make amends;
and surely my belief would have come true
were it not for that High Priest (his soul be damned!),
who put me back among my early sins;
I want to tell you why and how it happened. (*Inferno* 27: 67-72)

"Saint Francis came to get me when I died,
but one of the black Cherubim cried out:
'Don't touch him, don't cheat me of what is mine!

He must come down to join my other servants
for the false counsel he gave. From then to now
I have been ready at his hair, because

one cannot be absolved unless repentant,
nor can one both repent and will a thing at once –
the one is cancelled by the other!' " (*Inferno* 27: 112-120)

Betrayers: Count Ugolino (Canto 33)

"Lifting his mouth from his horrendous meal,
this sinner first wiped off his messy lips
in the hair remaining on the chewed-up skull,

..

That I, trusting in him, was put in prison
through his evil machinations, where I died" (*Inferno* 33: 1-3; 16-17)

“And I, by then gone blind, groped over their dead bodies.
Though they were dead, two days I called their names.
Then hunger proved more powerful than grief.”

He spoke these words; then, glaring down in rage,
attacked again the wretched skull with his teeth sharp as a dog’s,
and as fit for grinding bones.” (*Inferno* 33: 73-78)

The Deepest Pit of Hell: Lucifer (Canto 34)

“The king of the vast kingdom
of all grief stuck out with half
his chest above the ice;” (*Inferno* 34: 28-29)

“Oh, how amazed I was when I looked up
and saw a head—one head wearing three faces!” (*Inferno* 34: 37-38)

“Beneath each face two mighty wings stretched out,
the size you might expect of this huge bird
(I never saw a ship with larger sails):

not feathered wings but rather like the ones a bat
would have. He flapped them constantly, keeping
three winds continuously in motion

to lock Cocytus eternally in ice. He wept from his six
eyes, and down three chins were dripping tears all
mixed with bloody slaver.

In each of his three mouths he crunched a sinner,
with teeth like those that rake the hemp and flax,
keeping three sinners constantly in pain; (*Inferno* 34: 46-57)

Questions for Discussion

1. Why does Dante the poet begin with the story of Paolo and Francesca?
2. What is Dante’s attitude to the souls in Hell? How does it change?
3. How do *you* react to these condemned souls?