

INFERNO XIII

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INFERNO XIII

3 Non era ancor di là Nesso arrivato,
quando noi ci mettemmo per un bosco
che da neun sentiero era segnato.

6 Non fronda verde, ma di color fosco;
non rami schietti, ma nodosi e 'nvolti;
non pomi v'eran, ma stecchi con tòsco.

9 Non han sì aspri sterpi né sì folti
quelle fiere selvagge che 'n odio hanno
tra Cecina e Corneto i luoghi còlti.

12 Quivi le brutte Arpie lor nidi fanno,
che cacciar de le Strofade i Troiani
con tristo annunzio di futuro danno.

15 Ali hanno late, e colli e visi umani,
piè con artigli, e pennuto 'l gran ventre;
fanno lamenti in su li alberi strani.

18 E 'l buon maestro "Prima che più entre,
sappi che se' nel secondo girone,"
mi cominciò a dire, "e sarai mentre

21 che tu verrai ne l'orribil sabbione.
Però riguarda ben; sì vederai
cose che torrien fede al mio sermone."

24 Io sentia d'ogne parte trarre guai
e non vedea persona che 'l facesse;
per ch'io tutto smarrito m'arrestai.

27 Cred'io ch'ei credette ch'io credesse
che tante voci uscisser, tra quei bronchi,
da gente che per noi si nascondesse.

3 Nessus had not yet reached the other side
when we made our way into a forest
not marked by any path.

6 No green leaves, but those of dusky hue—
not a straight branch, but knotted and contorted—
no fruit of any kind, but poisonous thorns.

9 No rougher, denser thickets make a refuge
for the wild beasts that hate tilled lands
between the Cècina and Corneto.

12 Here the filthy Harpies nest,
who drove the Trojans from the Strophades
with doleful prophecies of woe to come.

15 They have broad wings, human necks and faces,
taloned feet, and feathers on their bulging bellies.
Their wailing fills the eerie trees.

18 And my good master then began to speak:
'Before you go in deeper you should know,
you are, and will be, in the second ring

21 'until you reach the dreadful sand. Look well—
you will see things that, in my telling,
would seem to strip my words of truth.'

24 Lamentations I heard on every side
but I saw no one who might be crying out
so that, confused, I stopped.

27 I think he thought that I thought
all these voices in among the branches
came from people hiding there.

30 Però disse 'l maestro: "Se tu tronchi
qualche fraschetta d'una d'este piante,
li pensier c'hai sì faran tutti monchi."

33 Allor porsi la mano un poco avante
e colsi un ramicel da un gran pruno;
e 'l tronco suo gridò: "Perché mi schiante?"

36 Da che fatto fu poi di sangue bruno,
ricominciò a dir: "Perché mi scerpi?
non hai tu spinto di pietade alcuno?"

39 Uomini fummo, e or siam fatti sterpi:
ben dovreb'esser la tua man più pia,
se state fossimo anime di serpi."

42 Come d'un stizzo verde ch'arso sia
da l'un de' capi, che da l'altro geme
e cigola per vento che va via,

45 sì de la scheggia rotta usciva insieme
parole e sangue; ond' io lasciai la cima
cadere, e stetti come l'uom che teme.

48 "S'elli avesse potuto creder prima,"
rispuose 'l savio mio, "anima lesa,
ciò c'ha veduto pur con la mia rima,

51 non averebbe in te la man distesa;
ma la cosa incredibile mi fece
indurlo ad ovra ch'a me stesso pesa.

54 Ma dilli chi tu fosti, sì che 'n vece
d'alcun' ammenda tua fama rinfreschi
nel mondo sù, dove tornar li lece."

57 E 'l tronco: "Sì col dolce dir m'adeschi,
ch'i' non posso tacere; e voi non gravi
perch' io un poco a ragionar m'inveschi.

30 And so the master said: 'If you break off
a twig among these brambles,
your present thoughts will be cut short.'

33 Then I stretched out my hand
and plucked a twig from a tall thorn-bush,
and its stem cried out: 'Why do you break me?'

36 When it ran dark with blood
it cried again: 'Why do you tear me?
Are you completely without pity?'

39 'We once were men and now are turned to thorns.
Your hand might well have been more merciful
had we been souls of snakes.'

42 As from a green log, burning at one end,
that blisters and hisses at the other
with the rush of sap and air,

45 so from the broken splinter oozed
blood and words together, and I let drop
the twig and stood like one afraid.

48 'Could he have believed it otherwise,
O wounded soul,' my sage spoke up,
'what he has seen only in my verses,

51 'he would not have raised his hand against you.
But your plight, being incredible, made me
goad him to this deed that weighs on me.

54 'Now tell him who you were, so that, by way
of recompense, he may revive your fame
up in the world, where he's permitted to return.'

57 And the stem said: 'With your pleasing words
you so allure me I cannot keep silent.
May it not offend if I am now enticed to speak.

Io son colui che tenni ambo le chiavi
del cor di Federigo, e che le volsi,
60 serrando e diserrando, sì soavi,

che dal secreto suo quasi ogn' uom tolsi;
fede portai al glorioso officio,
63 tanto ch' i' ne perde' li sonni e ' polsi.

La meretrice che mai da l'ospizio
di Cesare non torse li occhi putti,
66 morte comune e de le corti vizio,

infiammò contra me li animi tutti;
e li 'nfiammati infiammar sì Augusto,
69 che 'lieti onor tornaro in tristi lutti.

L'animo mio, per disdegnoso gusto,
credendo col morir fuggir disdegno,
72 ingiusto fece me contra me giusto.

Per le nove radici d'esto legno
vi giuro che già mai non ruppi fede
75 al mio signor, che fu d'onor sì degno.

E se di voi alcun nel mondo riede,
conforti la memoria mia, che giace
78 ancor del colpo che 'nvidia le diede."

Un poco attese, e poi "Da ch'el si tace,"
disse 'l poeta a me, "non perder l'ora;
81 ma parla, e chiedi a lui, se più ti piace."

Ond' io a lui: "Domandal tu ancora
di quel che credi ch'a me satisfaccia;
84 ch' i' non potrei, tanta pietà m'accora."

Perciò ricominciò: "Se l'om ti faccia
liberamente ciò che 'l tuo dir priega,
87 spirito incarcerato, ancor ti piaccia

'I am the one who held both keys
to Frederick's heart, and I could turn them,
60 locking and unlocking, so discreetly

'I kept his secrets safe from almost everyone.
So faithful was I to that glorious office
63 that first I lost my sleep and then my life.

"The slut who never took her whoring eyes
from Caesar's household, the common bane
66 and special vice of courts,

'inflamed all minds against me.
And they, inflamed, did so inflame Augustus
69 that welcome honors turned to dismal woe.

'My mind, in scornful temper,
hoping by dying to escape from scorn,
72 made me, though just, against myself unjust.

'By this tree's new-sprung roots I give my oath:
not once did I break faith
75 with my true lord, a man so worthy of honor.

'If one of you goes back into the world,
let him restore my reputation, which, helpless,
78 lies beneath the blow that envy dealt it.'

The poet waited, then he said to me:
'Since he is silent now do not waste time
81 but speak if you would ask him more.'

And I replied: 'Please question him
about the things you think I need to know.
84 For I cannot, such pity fills my heart.'

Thus he began again: 'So that this man may,
with ready will, do as your words entreat,
87 may it please you, imprisoned spirit,

di dirne come l'anima si lega
in questi nocchi; e dinne, se tu puoi,
90 s'alcuna mai di tai membra si spiega."

Allor soffìò il tronco forte, e poi
si convertì quel vento in cotal voce:
93 "Brevemente sarà risposto a voi.

Quando si parte l'anima feroce
dal corpo ond' ella stessa s'è disvelta,
96 Minòs la manda a la settima foce.

Cade in la selva, e non l'è parte scelta;
ma là dove fortuna la balestra,
99 quivi germoglia come gran di spelta.

Surge in vermena e in pianta silvestra:
l'Arpie, pascendo poi de le sue foglie,
102 fanno dolore, e al dolor fenestra.

Come l'altre verrem per nostre spoglie,
ma non però ch'alcuna sen rivesta,
105 ché non è giusto aver ciò ch'om si toglie.

Qui le strascineremo, e per la mesta
selva saranno i nostri corpi appesi,
108 ciascuno al prun de l'ombra sua molesta."

Noi eravamo ancora al tronco attesi,
credendo ch'altro ne volesse dire,
111 quando noi fummo d'un romor sorpresi,

similmente a colui che venire
sente 'l porco e la caccia a la sua posta,
114 ch'ode le bestie, e le frasche stormire.

Ed ecco due da la sinistra costa,
nudi e graffiati, fuggendo sì forte,
117 che de la selva rompieno ogni rosta.

'to tell us further how the souls are bound
inside such gnarled wood, and tell us, if you can,
90 if from such limbs one ever is set free.'

Then the tree forced out harsh breath, and soon
that wind was turned into a voice:
93 'My answer shall be brief.

'When the ferocious soul deserts the body
after it has wrenched up its own roots,
96 Minos condemns it to the seventh gulch.

'It falls into the forest, in a spot not chosen,
but flung by fortune, helter-skelter,
99 it fastens like a seed.

'It spreads into a shoot, then a wild thicket.
The Harpies, feeding on its leaves,
102 give pain and to that pain a mouth.

'We will come to claim our cast-off bodies
like the others. But it would not be just if we again
105 put on the flesh we robbed from our own souls.

'Here shall we drag it, and in this dismal wood
our bodies will be hung, each one
108 upon the thorn-bush of its painful shade.'

Our attention was still fixed upon the tree,
thinking it had more to tell us,
111 when we were startled by a noise,

as a man, when he hears
the dogs, and branches snapping,
114 knows the boar and hunters near.

Now, from the left, two souls came running,
naked and torn, and so intent on flight
117 they broke straight through the tangled thicket.

Quel dinanzi: "Or accorri, accorri, morte!"
 E l'altro, cui pareva tardar troppo,
 120 gridava: "Lano, sì non furo accorte

le gambe tue a le giostre dal Toppo!"
 E poi che forse li fallia la lena,
 123 di sé e d'un cespuglio fece un groppo.

Di dietro a loro era la selva piena
 di nere cagne, bramose e correnti
 126 come veltri ch'uscisser di catena.

In quel che s'appiattò miser li denti,
 e quel dilaceraro a brano a brano;
 129 poi sen portar quelle membra dolenti.

Presemi allor la mia scorta per mano,
 e menommi al cespuglio che piangea
 132 per le rotture sanguinenti in vano.

"O Iacopo," dicea, "da Santo Andrea,
 che t'è giovato di me fare schermo?
 135 che colpa ho io de la tua vita rea?"

Quando 'l maestro fu sovr' esso fermo,
 disse: "Chi fosti, che per tante punte
 138 soffi con sangue doloroso sermo?"

Ed elli a noi: "O anime che giunte
 siete a veder lo strazio disonesto
 141 c'ha le mie fronde sì da me disgiunte,

raccoglietele al piè del tristo cesto.
 I' fui de la città che nel Batista
 144 mutò 'l primo padrone; ond' ei per questo

sempre con l'arte sua la farà trista;
 e se non fosse che 'n sul passo d'Arno
 147 rimane ancor di lui alcuna vista,

The one in front cried: 'Come, come quickly, death!'
 And the other, who thought his own pace slow:
 120 'Lano, your legs were not so nimble

'at the tournament near the Toppo.'
 Then, almost out of breath, he pressed himself
 123 into a single tangle with a bush.

Behind them now the woods were thick
 with bitches, black and ravenous and swift
 126 as hounds loosed from the leash.

On him who had hidden in the tangle
 they set their teeth, tore him to pieces,
 129 and carried off those miserable limbs.

And then my leader took me by the hand.
 He led me to the bush,
 132 which wept in vain lament from bleeding wounds.

'O Jacopo da Sant' Andrea,' it said,
 'what use was it to make a screen of me?
 135 Why must I suffer for your guilty life?'

When the master stopped beside it, he said:
 'Who were you, that through so many wounds
 138 pour out with blood your doleful words?'

And he to us: 'O souls who have arrived
 to see the shameless carnage
 141 that has torn from me my leaves,

'gather them here at the foot of this wretched bush.
 I was of the city that traded patrons—
 144 Mars for John the Baptist. On that account

'Mars with his craft will make her grieve forever.
 And were it not that at the crossing of the Arno
 147 some vestige of him still remains,

que' cittadin che poi la rifondarno
 sovra 'l cener che d'Attila rimase,
 avrebber fatto lavorare indarno.

151 Io fei gibetto a me de le mie case."

'those citizens who afterwards rebuilt it
 upon the ashes that Attila left behind
 would have done their work in vain.

151 I made my house into my gallows.'

1-3. Ettore Paratore (Para. 1965.1, pp. 281-82) has studied the phenomenon of the "connected canti" of the *Comedy*, those, like XII and XIII, in which the action flows from one into the other, in which a canto is not "end-stopped." He counts 16 such in *Inferno*; 10 in *Purgatorio*; 8 in *Paradiso*. That one third of the borders of Dante's cantos are so fluid helps us to understand that he has a strong sense of delineation of the units of the whole and, at the same time, a desire not to be restrained by these borders.

4-9. Dante refers to the wilds of the Maremma, here between the river Cecina to the north and the town of Corneto to the south, a wild part of Tuscany.

10-15. The Harpies, heavy birds with the faces of women and clawed hands, the demonic monsters who preside over this canto (once again, like the Minotaur and the Centaurs, part human, part beast), derive from Virgil (*Aen.* III.210-212; 216-217; 253-257). Having twice befouled the food of the Trojan refugees, one of them (Celaeno) then attempts to convince Aeneas and his followers that they, in their voyage to Italy, are doomed to starvation and failure.

20-21. Virgil's words offer the occasion for a certain ingenuity on the part of some commentators, who believe that Virgil here refers to the text of the *Aeneid*. Literally, what they mean is clear enough: "were I only to tell you what you are about to see, you would not believe me" (i.e., Dante has to hear the vegetation speak in order to accept its ability to do so). But see note to vv. 46-51.

24. Dante, lost in a dark wood, as he was at the beginning of the poem, is *smarrito* (bewildered), as his path was lost (*smarrita*) in that wood. The repetition of the word here seems deliberate, and perhaps invites us to consider the possibility that the lost soul whom we met in *Inferno* I was in some way himself suicidal.

25. This is perhaps the most self-consciously "literary" line in a canto filled with "literariness." See the elegant essay by Leo Spitzer (Spit. 1942.1) for a close analysis of *Inferno* XIII.

31-39. Dante's hesitant gesture and the sinner's horrified response reflect closely a scene in the *Aeneid* in which Aeneas similarly tears pieces of vegetation from the grave of murdered Polydorus, who finally cries out in words that are echoed in this sinner's complaints (*Aen.* III.22-48). Just before the Greeks overran Troy, Priam sent his son Polydorus to be raised by the Thracian king Polymnestor, and with him the treasure of Troy. Once the city fell, Polymnestor killed Polydorus, stole the treasure, and had the youth's body cast into the sea.

The speaker, we will later learn from the historical details to which he refers (he is never named), is Pier delle Vigne, the chancellor of Frederick II of Sicily and Naples (see note to vv. 58-61). Here he is represented as a "gran pruno" (tall thorn-bush), and while the modifying adjective grants him a certain dignity, it also reduces him to the least pleasant of plants. The forest of the suicides resembles a dense thicket of briar, the only "vegetation" found in hell after the green meadow of Limbo (*Inf.* IV.111).

40-44. Dante's simile, which sounds like the sounds it describes, reduces Pier's natural dignity by giving him so distorted a voice.

46-51. Virgil's apology to Pier for encouraging Dante to pluck a piece of him now clearly evokes the text of the *Aeneid*, thus adding a dimension to the words he had uttered at vv. 20-21.

52-54. Virgil's invitation to Pier to speak so that Dante may "revive his fame" in the world above has a positive result. As we move down through hell, we will find that some sinners look upon their "interview" with this "reporter" as a wonderful opportunity to attempt to clear their name, while others shun any "publicity" at all.

55-57. The beginning of Pier's speech is an Italian version of Pier's noted "chancery style" of Latin oratory turned to document-writing. Pier was known not only for his Latin writings on behalf of Frederick's exercise of imperial power, but for his vernacular poems, which are similarly florid.

His speech to Dante, in its entirety, forms an Italian version of a classical oration, with its parts measured as follows: (1) capturing of the goodwill of the audience (55-57); (2) narrative of events at issue (58-72); (3) peroration, making the climactic point (73-75); (4) petition, seeking the consent of the audience (76-78). (For a more detailed consideration of the rhetorical construction of the speech see Higgins [Higg. 1975.1], pp. 63-64.)

58–61. The speaker identifies himself, if by circumlocution, as Pier della Vigna (or “delle Vigne”): “Petrus de Vineia, minister of the Emperor Frederick II, born at Capua ca. 1190; after studying at Bologna, he received an appointment at the court of Frederick II as notary, and thenceforward he rapidly rose to distinction. He was made judge and protonotary, and for more than twenty years he was the trusted minister and confidant of the Emperor. He was at the height of his power in 1247, but two years later he was accused of treachery, and was thrown into prison and blinded; and soon after he committed suicide (April, 1249)” (T). For the Emperor Frederick II see note to *Inferno* X.119.

Holding the keys to the emperor’s heart, the “promised land” of any self-seeking courtier, this Peter is a parodic version of St. Peter, who, in the Christian tradition, holds the keys (one for mercy, one for judgment) that unlock or lock the kingdom of heaven. For the original biblical image of the two keys see Isaiah 22:22.

64. This “slut” is commonly recognized as envy, the sin of hoping that one’s happy neighbor will be made unhappy.

Pier is trying to establish his innocence of the charges that he betrayed his lord by stealing from his treasury. We now know that he was in fact guilty of that fault; however, it is far from clear that Dante knew what we know. See Cassell’s gathering of evidence for the case against Pier’s barratry (Cass. 1984.1, pp. 38–42).

68. “Augustus,” the emperor *par excellence*, is Pier’s title for his emperor, Frederick.

70. Pier’s *disdegnoso gusto*, whether pleasure in self-hatred (see Vazzana [Vazz. 1998.1] for this reading) or pleasure in imagining his vengeance upon his enemies (see Higgins [Higg. 1975.1], p. 72), is presented as the motive for his suicide.

73–75. How are we to respond to this unquestionably imposing figure? Here is Attilio Momigliano, in his commentary to this passage: “[Pier’s] way of speaking, with its lofty sense of fidelity, with its steady clear-sightedness, with its manly rebellion against the injustice of fate, with that indestructible sense of his honor and the desire to redeem it, even in death—all of these dressed in the folds of an austere embellished eloquence—dwells in our memory like a solemn portrait of a courtier and

makes us forget the fault of the suicide, as the words of Francesca, Brunetto, or Ugolino make us forget adultery, sodomy, betrayal. These virtues or passions that redeem, even in hell, a great sin are among the most noble and suggestive inventions of the *Comedy*.” Such a view of the “great sinners” of the *Inferno* is attractive, no doubt, in part because it makes Dante a much less “judgmental” poet than in fact he is. However, it is probably better to see that, in the case of Pier (as well as in that of the others mentioned by Momigliano), the sinner speaks of himself in such a way as to condemn himself in his own words, at least if we learn to read him from the ironic angle of vision that the split between the consciousness of the slowly evolving protagonist and that of the knowledgeable poet surely seems to call for.

It was centuries ago that a reader first thought of Judas when he read of Pier. Pietro di Dante, in the second redaction of his commentary to vv. 16–51 of this canto, cites St. Jerome’s comment on Psalm 8: “Judas offended God more greatly by hanging himself than by betraying Him.” Dante’s son, however, never developed the importance of Judas as the quintessential suicide in the controlling image of this canto. In our own time perhaps the first to do so was Giovanni Resta (Rest. 1977.1); a fuller expression of this insight was developed by Anthony Cassell (Cass. 1984.1, pp. 46–56). While Cassell’s reading mainly involves Pier’s betrayal of Frederick, the perhaps better understanding is to allow Pier his proclaimed fealty to his emperor, but to realize that his very words reveal that, if his temporal allegiances were respected, they had displaced his only truly significant loyalty, that owed to his only meaningful Lord, Jesus Christ (see Loon. 1992.1, p. 39). Like Judas, he did betray his Lord, as Stephany has shown, precisely in his loyalty to the emperor, whom he treats, in his eulogy of Frederick, as in his own kingly person being all the Christ one needed. And thus, in imitation of Judas, he will have his body hanging on a tree for eternity. (For two articles about Frederick, Pier, and the court life that they shaped and shared, see Feng. 1981.1 and Step. 1982.1).

Pier, as many have noted, has important attributes in common with Dante. Both were political figures who ended up losing the goals of their highly energized activity; both were poets. Yet it seems clear that, for all the fellow-feeling that Dante must have felt for the ruined chancellor, he is more interested in the crucial errors he made in directing his political life to the sharing and taking of power and to that alone. For Dante, the political life can only be lived justly under the sign of the true “emperor,” God.

82–84. The protagonist, like many readers, has been won over by Pier's oratory. As was the case in his meeting with Farinata and Cavalcante in *Inferno* X, he began in fear, then turned to pity. Neither is an attitude recommended by the moral setting of the poem that contains this currently piteous protagonist.

109–126. This self-contained unit of twenty-seven verses is devoted to a second class of those violent against themselves. These wastrels were "prodigal" in so thoroughly intentional a way that they did not casually toss away their possessions, but willfully destroyed them in a sort of "material suicide." Once again we note the line that Dante has drawn between the incontinent form of a sin (prodigality, punished in *Inferno* VII) and its "malicious" version.

Paget Toynbee describes the two sinners found here as follows: "Lano [Arcolano Maconi], gentleman of Siena, placed by Dante, together with Jacomo da sant' Andrea, among those who have squandered their substance . . . Lano is said to have been a member of the 'Spendthrift Brigade' of Siena, and to have squandered all his property in riotous living. He took part in an expedition of the Florentines and Sienese against Arezzo in 1288, which ended in the Sienese force falling into an ambush and being cut to pieces by the Aretines under Buonconte da Montefeltro at . . . Pieve al Toppo. Lano, being ruined and desperate, chose to fight and be killed, rather than run away and make his escape; hence the allusion of Jacomo in the text . . . Jacomo [and not Dante's "Jacopo"] della Cappella di sant' Andrea of Padua, the son of Odorico Fontana da Monselice and Speronella Delesmanini, a very wealthy lady, whose fortune Jacomo inherited, and squandered in the most senseless acts of prodigality. He is supposed to have been put to death by order of Ezzolino da Romano [see *Inf.* XII.102] in 1239" (T).

130–135. The relatively minor figure we now encounter, a *cespuglio* (bush) and not the *gran pruno* (tall thorn-bush—v. 32) that holds the soul of Pier delle Vigne, complains against the unintentional despoiling of his leaves by the exhausted Jacomo, who had huddled up against him in order to escape the pursuing hounds. Various of the early commentators identify him as either Lotto degli Agli or Rocco de' Mozzi, yet some of these commentators also suggest that Dante left the name "open" because so many Florentines committed suicide by hanging themselves that he wanted to suggest the frequency of the phenomenon in his native city.

139–151. The nameless suicide, now more careful of his "body" than he had been when he took his own life, asks to have his torn-off leaves returned to him. He identifies himself as Florentine by referring to the city's first patron, Mars, the god of war, whose replacement by John the Baptist in Christian times had weakened her, according to his not very reliable view. (Dante's sources seem to have confused Attila with Totila, who had in fact besieged the city in 542.)