

Returning to our trek through the second ring,
My cautious guide found a course, and I followed,
Careful to avoid those hunting beasts who fling

Aside the locks which seal away the sorrowed
Cries of those whose selves, which in life turned against
Themselves, are locked in limbs forever borrowed.

Before seeing what new pains this ring dispensed,
My senses were dampened as I took to grieve
For those that by their hands are forever fenced

In wooden shackles, and shall never receive
Their flesh, when, just as one, reading without thought,
Will find himself confused once his mind's reprieve

Ends, and his place is at once discerned yet fraught
And unfamiliar, I found my grief had gone,
Vanquished by my pause at seeing this new spot.

All the trees around us had their limbs withdrawn,
In leu of leaven branches, just deep-scored bark,
Which bled a viscous sap from which wailings spawn.

As the wooden vessels grew up from their mark
Their girth would expand till their gnarled apex
Whose 'twined tendrils sprout tendrils which droop in arc.

And my guide, sensing that I'd been made perplexed,
Then asked: "Have you just now perceived this last fate,
But which sin makes these bindings still leaves you vexed?"

"They share with the last this woeful wood-bound trait,
Yet they bear none of the fruits which harpies tear,
And grow no branches to hold their bodies weight."

And my master to me: "These shades which now wear
Wooden garb are those who forged for their own soul
Perversions which all who mourn in these woods share.

I should think you are confounded by the role
Of this ring, as before I had claimed that two
Crimes fill this place, so let me make that truth whole;

Self-violence is the result of souls that grew
In accord with designs which lack divine love,
And the errors of growth, as poisons, accrue,

Which so warp enformed self against form thereof

As is clear if you note where that wise one wrote
How man is as such verses his form above.

It is those souls, who when with anguish they bloat,
Did not move to pious tidings, but sat still
And nurtured by their own wants the Cyprus coat

By making stags of their souls, which they did kill,
But without nurturing Loxias' care
Their roots so invert, and wailings all they will."

His true speech having cured my bewildered stare,
My master again set on the path with me,
The branches absence giving us room to spare.

Walking down our path I decided to see
If I might discern content from the damned wails
Without doing harm to set their voices free.

I tuned my ears to the nearest prison's ails,
But Alas! I could hear naught but vague dismay,
And again, the next had grief without details.

As those naïve citizens, watching the way
That cursed prize from Priam pronounced the dread plan
Of the king's faithless wife, in hopes that she may

Find comfort and rescue before her walk's span,
But her words were confounded, without meaning
Aside from some fear that harm came to some man,

Focus as I might, as if by some screening,
I sensed no words to their wailings and no sign
That poor acuity harmed this convening.

Since to these sounds I could no better align,
And since no stray harpy was troubling my course,
I asked once more for help untangling this twine.

"You note rightly your deafness, and ask what source
Leaves their intentions clear but content obscure,
Yet the cause is contained in our last discourse.

As in growing their flesh they took to abjure
The native organization of their soul,
And in so growing have made their tongues impure,

So in this grove, their upside-down speech's hole
Is these twisted roots which wither in foul air

And speak mere intent, without content left whole."

And as seamen pull sails so that they don't tear
Before the harsh winds have yet come upon them,
As they've studied the weather's patterns with care,

So did my guide set to speech the answer from
Which no question had as of yet been proposed
But nonetheless he knew was surely to come.

"New mouths for these voices lie forever closed,
as you may note if you look down to the ground
And see no dirt from dog's steps has been transposed.

The earth around these inverted trees is bound
By decree to hold still, and when its disturbed
To fast level out even the smallest mound.

Come judgement, when this pit's order is perturbed,
These souls will ascend to attend to their flesh,
But efforts to hang from branches will be curbed.

It will be their station to burrow and thresh
For their buried limbs so they may hang their weight,
But this task is prevented by earth's refresh.

As he who twice tricked Pluto pushes his freight,
These shades will perform this work forever more,
Though fail not through lapse or err, but from their hate."

But before I could understand the full store
Of truths about this lot my guide provided,
Foul stench reached our senses through windy uproar.

From roosts since passed, on thought-ending winds glided
A full flock of harpies, sharp talons outstretched,
Moving towards our spot, so we decided

To hurry off with haste, before they make rest
In nearby trees to perch and screech grim insight
as their grips wring wailing blood which coats their nest.

We made our way onward, away from their blight.