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The Inferno - Dante Alighieri

Translated by Robert Pinsky in the book The Inferno of Dante
Canto VII

"Pape Sat~n, pape Sat~n, aleppe!"

Plutus began in a guttural, clucking voice.
The courteous sage who knew all reassured me:

"Don't let fear harm you; whatever power he has
Cannot prevent us climbing down this rock."
Then, turning back toward that swollen face,

He answered - "Silence, accurs~d wolf! Attack
You own insides with your devouring rage:
Bound for the pit, this is no causeless trek.

It is willed above, where Michael wreaked revenge
On pride's rebellion." Just as sails swollen with wind
As soon as the mast is snapped collapse and plunge,

That savage beast fell shrinking to the ground.
So we descended to the fourth defile
To experience more of that despondent land

That sacks up all the universe's ill.
Justice of God! Who is it that heaps together
So much peculiar torture and travail?

How is it that we choose to sin and wither?
Like waves above Charybdis, each crashing apart
Against the one it rushes to meet, here gather

People who hurry forward till they must meet
And dance their round. Here I saw more souls
Than elsewhere, spreading far to the left and right:

Each pushes a weight against his chest, and howls
At his opponent each time that they clash:
"Why do you squander?" and "Why do you hoard?" Each wheels

To roll his weight back round again: they rush
Toward the circle's opposite point, collide
Painfully once more, and curse each other afresh;

And after that refrain each one must head
Through his half-circle again, to his next joust.
my own heart pained by those collisions, I said:

"Who are these, Master? - and are the shades who contest
here on our left all clergy, with tonsured head?"
He answered: "Every one of the shades here massed

In the first life had a mind so squinty-eyed
That in his spending he heeded no proportion -
A fact they bark out plainly when they collide

At the circle's facing points, that mark division
Between opposite faults. Those of bare head
Were clerics, cardinals, popes, in whom the passion

Of avarice has wrought excess." I said,
"Among these, Master, I'm sure I'll recognize
Some who were thus polluted." He replied,

"The thought you hold is in vain: just as the ways
That made these souls so foul were undiscerning,
So they are dim to discernment in this place.

Here they will keep eternally returning
To the two butting places: from the grave
These will arise fists closed; and those, pates shining.

Wrongness in how to give and how to have
Took the fair world from them and brought them this,
Their ugly brawl, which words need not retrieve.

Now you can see, my son, how ludicrous
And brief are all the goods in Fortune's ken,
Which humankind contend for: you see from this

How all the gold there is beneath the moon,
Or that there ever was, could not relieve
One of these weary souls." I: "Master, say then

What is this Fortune you mention, that it should have
The world's goods in its grip?" He: "Foolish creatures,
How great an ignorance plagues you. May you receive

My teaching: He who made all of Heaven's features
In His transcendent wisdom gave them guides
So each part shines on all the others, all nature's

Illumination apportioned. So too, for goods
of worldly splendor He assigned a guide
And minister - she, when time seems proper, spreads

Those vanities from race to race, this blood
Then that, beyond prevention of human wit.
Thus one clan languishes for another's good

According to how her judgment may dictate -
Which is invisible, like a snake in the grass.
Your wisdom cannot resist her; in her might

Fortune, like any other god, foresees,
Judges, and rules her appointed realm. No truces
Can stop her turning. Necessity decrees

That she be swift, and so men change their places
In rapid permutation. She is cursed
Too often by those who ought to sing her praises,

Wrongfully blamed and defamed. But she is blest,
And does not hear it; happy among the choir
Of other primal creatures, she too is placed

In bliss, rejoicing as she turns her sphere.
Now we descend to greater wretchedness:
Already every star that was rising higher

When I set out is sinking, and long delays
Have been forbidden us." We traveled across
To the circle's farther edge, above the place

Where a foaming spring spills over into a fosse.
The water was purple-black; we followed its current
Down a strange passage. This dismal watercourse

Descends the grayish slopes until its torrent
Discharges into the marsh whose name is Styx.
Gazing intently, I saw there were people warrenred

Within that bog, all naked and muddy - with looks
Of fury, striking each other; with a hand
But also with their heads, chests, feet, and backs,

Teeth tearing piecemeal. My kindly master explained:
"These are the souls whom anger overcame,
My son; know also, that under the water are found

Others, whose sighing makes these bubbles come
That pock the surface everywhere you look.
Lodged in the slime they say: 'Once we were grim

And sullen in the sweet air above, that took
A further gladness from the play of sun;
Inside us, we bore acedia's dismal smoke.

We have this black mire now to be sullen in.'
This canticle they gargle from the craw,
Unable to speak whole words." We traveled on

Through a great arc of swamp between that slough
And the dry bank - all the while with eyes
Turned toward those who swallow the much below;

And then at length we came to a tower's base.