

# Toronto Salutes Dante

## *Inferno* XXIII in Italian and English

### Italian

### English

Taciti, soli, senza compagnia  
n'andavam l'un dinanzi e l'altro dopo,  
come frati minor vanno per via.

Vòlt'era in su la favola d'Isopo  
lo mio pensier per la presente rissa,  
dov'el parlò de la rana e del topo;

ché più non si pareggia 'mo' e 'issa'  
che l'un con l'altro fa, se ben s'accoppia  
principio e fine con la mente fissa.

E come l'un pensier de l'altro scoppia,  
così nacque di quello un altro poi,  
che la prima paura mi fé doppia.

Io pensava così: 'Questi per noi  
sono scherniti con danno e con beffa  
sì fatta, ch'assai credo che lor nòì.

Se l'ira sovra 'l mal voler s'aggueffa,  
ei ne verranno dietro più crudeli  
che 'l cane a quella lievre ch'elli acceffa'.

Già mi sentia tutti arricciar li peli  
de la paura e stava in dietro intento,  
quand'io dissi: "Maestro, se non celi

te e me tostamente, i' ho pavento  
d'i Malebranche. Noi li avem già dietro;  
io li 'magino sì, che già li sento".

E quei: "S'i' fossi di piombato vetro,  
l'immagine di fuor tua non trarrei  
più tosto a me, che quella dentro 'mpetro.

Pur mo venieno i tuo' pensier tra ' miei,  
con simile atto e con simile faccia,  
sì che d'intrambi un sol consiglio fei.

S'elli è che sì la destra costa giaccia,  
che noi possiam ne l'altra bolgia scendere,  
noi fuggirem l'imaginata caccia".

Già non compié di tal consiglio rendere,  
ch'io li vidi venir con l'ali tese  
non molto lungi, per volerne prendere.

Lo duca mio di sùbito mi prese,  
come la madre ch'al romore è desta  
e vede presso a sé le fiamme accese,

che prende il figlio e fugge e non s'arresta,  
avendo più di lui che di sé cura,  
tanto che solo una camiscia vesta;

e giù dal collo de la ripa dura  
supin si diede a la pendente roccia,  
che l'un de' lati a l'altra bolgia tura.

Non corse mai sì tosto acqua per doccia  
a volger ruota di molin terragno,  
quand'ella più verso le pale approccia,

come 'l maestro mio per quel vivagno,  
portandosene me sovra 'l suo petto,  
come suo figlio, non come compagno.

A pena fuoro i piè suoi giunti al letto  
del fondo giù, ch'e' furon in sul colle  
sovresso noi; ma non lì era sospetto:

Silent, alone, no one escorting us,  
we made our way-one went before, one after-  
as Friars Minor when they walk together.

The present fracas made me think of Aesop-  
that fable where he tells about the mouse  
and frog; for "near" and "nigh" are not more close

than are that fable and this incident,  
if you compare attentively the end  
of one with the beginning of the second.

And even as one thought springs from another,  
so out of that was still another born,  
which made the fear I felt before redouble.

I thought: "Because of us, they have been mocked,  
and this inflicted so much hurt and scorn  
that I am sure they feel deep indignation.

If anger's to be added to their malice,  
they'll hunt us down with more ferocity  
than any hound whose teeth have trapped a hare."

I could already feel my hair curl up  
from fear, and I looked back attentively,  
while saying: "Master, if you don't conceal

yourself and me at once-they terrify me,  
those Malebranche; they are after us;  
I so imagine them, I hear them now."

And he to me: "Were I a leaded mirror,  
I could not gather in your outer image  
more quickly than I have received your inner.

For even now your thoughts have joined my own;  
in both our acts and aspects we are kin-  
with both our minds I've come to one decision.

If that right bank is not extremely steep,  
we can descend into the other moat  
and so escape from the imagined chase."

He'd hardly finished telling me his plan  
when I saw them approach with outstretched wings,  
not too far off, and keen on taking us.

My guide snatched me up instantly, just as  
the mother who is wakened by a roar  
and catches sight of blazing flames beside her,

will lift her son and run without a stop-  
she cares more for the child than for herself-  
not pausing even to throw on a shift;

and down the hard embankment's edge-his back  
lay flat along the sloping rock that closes  
one side of the adjacent moat-he slid.

No water ever ran so fast along  
a sluice to turn the wheels of a land mill,  
not even when its flow approached the paddles,

as did my master race down that embankment  
while bearing me with him upon his chest,  
just like a son, and not like a companion.

His feet had scarcely reached the bed that lies  
along the deep below, than those ten demons  
were on the edge above us; but there was

ché l'alta provedenza che lor volle  
porre ministri de la fossa quinta,  
poder di partirs'indi a tutti tolle.

Là giù trovammo una gente dipinta  
che giva intorno assai con lenti passi,  
piangendo e nel sembiante stanca e vinta.

Elli avean cappe con cappucci bassi  
dinanzi a li occhi, fatte de la taglia  
che in Clugni per li monaci fassi.

Di fuor dorate son, sì ch'elli abbaglia;  
ma dentro tutte piombo, e gravi tanto,  
che Federigo le metteva di paglia.

Oh in eterno faticoso manto!  
Noi ci volgemmo ancor pur a man manca  
con loro insieme, intenti al tristo pianto;

ma per lo peso quella gente stanca  
venìa sì pian, che noi eravam nuovi  
di compagnia ad ogni mover d'anca.

Per ch'io al duca mio: "Fa che tu trovi  
alcun ch'al fatto o al nome si conosca,  
e li occhi, sì andando, intorno movi".

E un che 'ntese la parola tosca,  
di retro a noi gridò: "Tenete i piedi,  
voi che correte sì per l'aura fosca!

Forse ch'avrai da me quel che tu chiedi".  
Onde 'l duca si volse e disse: "Aspetta,  
e poi secondo il suo passo procedi".

Ristetti, e vidi due mostrar gran fretta  
de l'animo, col viso, d'esser meco;  
ma tardavali 'l carico e la via stretta.

Quando fuor giunti, assai con l'occhio bieco  
mi rimiraron senza far parola;  
poi si volsero in sé, e dicean seco:

"Costui par vivo a l'atto de la gola;  
e s'e' son morti, per qual privilegio  
vanno scoperti de la grave stola?"

Poi disser me: "O Tosco, ch'al collegio  
de l'ipocriti tristi se' venuto,  
dir chi tu se' non avere in dispregio".

E io a loro: "I' fui nato e cresciuto  
sopra 'l bel fiume d'Arno a la gran villa,  
e son col corpo ch'i' ho sempre avuto.

Ma voi chi siete, a cui tanto distilla  
quant'i' veggio dolor giù per le guance?  
e che pena è in voi che sì sfavilla?"

E l'un rispuose a me: "Le cappe rance  
son di piombo sì grosse, che li pesi  
fan così cigolar le lor bilance.

Fra i godenti fummo, e bolognesi;  
io Catalano e questi Loderingo  
nomati, e da tua terra insieme presi

come suole esser tolto un uom solingo,  
per conservar sua pace; e fummo tali,  
ch'ancor si pare intorno dal Gardingo".

Io cominciai: "O frati, i vostri mali...";  
ma più non dissi, ch'a l'occhio mi corse  
un, crucifisso in terra con tre pali.

Quando mi vide, tutto si distorse,  
soffiando ne la barba con sospiri;  
e 'l frate Catalan, ch'a ciò s'accorse,

nothing to fear; for that High Providence  
that willed them ministers of the fifth ditch,  
denies to all of them the power to leave it.

Below that point we found a painted people,  
who moved about with lagging steps, in circles,  
weeping, with features tired and defeated.

And they were dressed in cloaks with cowls so low  
they fell before their eyes, of that same cut  
that's used to make the clothes for Cluny's monks.

Outside, these cloaks were gilded and they dazzled;  
but inside they were all of lead, so heavy  
that Frederick's capes were straw compared to them.

A tiring mantle for eternity!  
We turned again, as always, to the left,  
along with them, intent on their sad weeping;

but with their weights that weary people paced  
so slowly that we found ourselves among  
new company each time we took a step.

At which I told my guide: "Please try to find  
someone whose name or deed I recognize;  
and while we walk, be watchful with your eyes."

And one who'd taken in my Tuscan speech  
cried out behind us: "Stay your steps, o you  
who hurry so along this darkened air!

Perhaps you'll have from me that which you seek."  
At which my guide turned to me, saying: "Wait,  
and then continue, following his pace."

I stopped, and I saw two whose faces showed  
their minds were keen to be with me; but both  
their load and the tight path forced them to slow.

When they came up, they looked askance at me  
a long while, and they uttered not a word  
until they turned to one another, saying:

"The throbbing of his throat makes this one seem  
alive; and if they're dead, what privilege  
lets them appear without the heavy mantle?"

Then they addressed me: "Tuscan, you who come  
to this assembly of sad hypocrites,  
do not disdain to tell us who you are."

I answered: "Where the lovely Arno flows,  
there I was born and raised, in the great city;  
I'm with the body I have always had.

But who are you, upon whose cheeks I see  
such tears distilled by grief? And let me know  
what punishment it is that glitters so."

And one of them replied: "The yellow cloaks  
are of a lead so thick, their heaviness  
makes us, the balances beneath them, creak.

We both were jovial Friars, and Bolognese;  
my name was Catalano, Loderingo  
was his, and we were chosen by your city

together, for the post that's usually  
one man's, to keep the peace; and what we were  
is still to be observed around Gardingo."

I then began, "O Friars, your misdeeds . . ."  
but said no more, because my eyes had caught  
one crucified by three stakes on the ground.

When he saw me, that sinner writhed all over,  
and he breathed hard into his beard with sighs;  
observing that, Fra Catalan said

mi disse: "Quel confitto che tu miri,  
consigliò i Farisei che convenia  
porre un uom per lo popolo a' martiri.

Attraversato è, nudo, ne la via,  
come tu vedi, ed è mestier ch'el senta  
qualunque passa, come pesa, pria.

E a tal modo il socero si stenta  
in questa fossa, e li altri dal concilio  
che fu per li Giudei mala sementa".

Allor vid'io maravigliar Virgilio  
sovra colui ch'era disteso in croce  
tanto vilmente ne l'eterno essilio.

Poscia drizzò al frate cotal voce:  
"Non vi dispiaccia, se vi lece, dirci  
s'a la man destra giace alcuna foce

onde noi amendue possiamo uscirci,  
senza costringer de li angeli neri  
che vegnan d'esto fondo a dipartirci".

Rispuose adunque: "Più che tu non speri  
s'appressa un sasso che da la gran cerchia  
si move e varca tutt'i vallon feri,

salvo che 'n questo è rotto e nol coperchia;  
montar potrete su per la ruina,  
che giace in costa e nel fondo soperchia".

Lo duca stette un poco a testa china;  
poi disse: "Mal contava la bisogna  
colui che i peccator di qua uncina".

E 'l frate: "Io udi' già dire a Bologna  
del diavol vizi assai, tra ' quali udi'  
ch'elli è bugiardo e padre di menzogna".

Appresso il duca a gran passi sen gì,  
turbato un poco d'ira nel sembiante;  
ond'io da li 'ncarcati mi parti'

dietro a le poste de le care piante.

to me: "That one impaled there, whom you see,  
counseled the Pharisees that it was prudent  
to let one man-and not one nation-suffer.

Naked, he has been stretched across the path,  
as you can see, and he must feel the weight  
of anyone who passes over him.

Like torment, in this ditch, afflicts both his  
father-in-law and others in that council,  
which for the Jews has seeded so much evil."

Then I saw Virgil stand amazed above  
that one who lay stretched out upon a cross  
so squalidly in his eternal exile.

And he addressed the friar in this way:  
"If it does not displease you-if you may-  
tell us if there's some passage on the right

that would allow the two of us to leave  
without our having to compel black angels  
to travel to this deep, to get us out."

He answered: "Closer than you hope, you'll find  
a rocky ridge that stretches from the great  
round wall and crosses all the savage valleys,

except that here it's broken-not a bridge.  
But where its ruins slope along the bank  
and heap up at the bottom, you can climb."

My leader stood awhile with his head bent,  
then said: "He who hooks sinners over there  
gave us a false account of this affair."

At which the Friar: "In Bologna, I  
once heard about the devil's many vices-  
they said he was a liar and father of lies."

And then my guide moved on with giant strides,  
somewhat disturbed, with anger in his eyes;  
at this I left those overburdened spirits,

while following the prints of his dear feet.

## Credits

Italian: D. Alighieri, *La Commedia secondo l'antica vulgata*, ed. by G. Petrocchi (Florence, 1994) from the website [www.danteonline.it](http://www.danteonline.it) by the Società dantesca italiana.

English: D. Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, ed. by Allen Mandelbaum (Berkeley, 1980) from the website [www.danteonline.it](http://www.danteonline.it) by the Società dantesca italiana.

Commemorating the 700th anniversary of the death of Dante Alighieri, **Toronto Salutes Dante** features more than thirty Canada-based guests who read Dante's *Inferno* in various languages, several for the first time. In addition to ten different Italian dialects, there are represented Anishinaabemowin, Arabic, Bulgarian, English, Farsi, French, German, Latin, Mandarin, Portuguese, Québécois, Russian, Sanskrit, Slovak, Spanish, Stoney Nakoda, Swedish, Thai, and Ukrainian. In 15-minute clips, well-known personalities of Canadian public and cultural life, professors, and students at the University of Toronto, and members of the Italo-Canadian community share their voices and fresh memories of the most important Italian author in world literature. Listen to Dante's *Inferno* as you have never heard it before on the [Department of Italian Studies' Youtube channel](#) from March 25th to June 2021.

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