

Extract from Dante, *Inferno*, Canto 7, 115-130,  
translated by Robin Kirkpatrick.

'You witness now,' my gentle teacher said,  
'the souls of those whom anger overthrew.  
And this I'd also have you know: be sure,  
    beneath the surface of this slick are some  
whose sighs - as you can see at every turn -  
now aerate that pullulating film.

    So, stuck there fast in slime, they hum: "Mournful  
we were. Sunlight rejoices the balmy air.  
We, though, within ourselves nursed sullen fumes,  
    and come to misery in this black ooze."  
That is the hymn each gurgles in his gorge,  
unable to articulate a single phrase.'

    So, on around this sour, revolting pit,  
between the sludge and arid rock, we swung  
our arc, eyes bent on those who gulped that slop.  
    We reached, in fine, the bottom of a tower.

Dante, *The Divine Comedy I: Inferno*, translated by Robin Kirkpatrick (2006) London:  
Penguin Books.

Extract from Dante, *Inferno*, Canto 8, 82-99,  
translated by Robin Kirkpatrick.

I saw there, on that threshold - framed - more than  
a thousand who had rained from Heaven. Spitting  
in wrath. 'Who's that,' they hissed, 'who, yet undead,  
travels the kingdom of the truly dead?'

He gave a sign, my teacher in all wisdom,  
saying he sought some secret word with them.

At which they somewhat hid their fierce disdain.  
'You come, but on your own!' they said. 'Let him,  
so brazen entering our realm, walk by.

He may retrace his foolish path alone -  
or try it, if he can - while you'll stay here.  
You've been his escort through this dark terrain.'

Reader, imagine! I grew faint at heart,  
to hear these cursed phrases ringing out.  
I truly thought I'd never make it back.

'My guide, my dearest master. Seven times -  
or more by now - you've brought me safely through.  
You've drawn me from the face of towering doom.

Dante, *The Divine Comedy I: Inferno*, translated by Robin Kirkpatrick (2006) London:  
Penguin Books.

Extract from Dante, *Inferno*, Canto 9, 35-63,  
translated by Robin Kirkpatrick.

My eyes in all attention now were drawn  
towards the blazing summit of that gate,  
where suddenly, at one point, there had sprung  
three blood-stained Furies from the depths of Hell.  
In pose and body they were, all three, women,  
wound round about with water snakes, bright green.  
Fringing their vicious brows they bore, as hair,  
entwining snakes. Their curls were sharp-horned vipers.  
And he - who knew quite well that these were slaves  
who served the empress of unending tears -  
said to me: 'Look! The cruel Eumenides!  
That one's Megaera, on the left-hand side.  
Weeping there stands Alecto, on the right.  
Tisiphone's between these two.' He paused.  
Each rent her breast with her own fingernails.  
With slapping palm, each beat herself and screamed -  
so loud I strained, all doubt, against the poet.  
'Come now, Medusa! Turn him - quick! - to stone!  
Staring hard down they spoke in unison.'  
The Theseus raid went unavenged! We're wrong!  
'Turn round! Your back to them! Your eyes tight shut!  
For if the Gorgon shows and you catch sight,  
there'll be no way of ever getting out.'  
He spoke and then, himself, he made me turn  
and, not relying on my hands alone,  
to shield my eyes he closed his own on mine.  
Look hard, all you whose minds are sound and sane,  
and wonder at the meaning lying veiled  
beyond the curtain of this alien verse.

Dante, *The Divine Comedy I: Inferno*, translated by Robin Kirkpatrick (2006) London:  
Penguin Books.