

The Anachronist's Comedy: Inferno

by Branwen Cryccthegn Deorcwuda

Introduction

It started out with a rather strange visual: instead of Dante being carried up in the claws of an eagle, Dante being sailed up to Heaven in the beak of a pelican. The image amused me, and my mind began to work on other images. Somehow I decided to rewrite Dante's *Commedia* for the SCA. I had no idea what I was getting myself into. Two years later I am finally out of Hell. I hope to reach Heaven in another two years, which is possible if I write a canto a week.

I have used terza rima, Dante's rhyme scheme, which is easier to do in Italian than English, and some of my rhymes are forced, but overall I think I acquitted myself well. I, like Dante, use a lot of allusion in my text. There are several changes in the form, but overall I tried to remain true to the original. I also tried to follow the events of the original, though some changes and deviations were inevitable. I would recommend reading the original before, after, or even during your reading of this lowly work. After all, Dante is a genius. I am merely a geek trying to do homage to him.

There's a lot of C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien in here. They are my own heroes, as scholars, writers, medievalists, and Christians, so references to them permeate the text. I think every person in the SCA should at some time read Lewis' [The Discarded Image](#), but that's another story.

Early on in the writing of this piece I realized that the narrator and I are roughly the same person. The narrator is a character in her own right, and as with most narrative voices has a specific perspective and so is not necessarily the voice for all people in the SCA. The narrator is a fighter and poet, a cripple¹ walking with a cane, and a Christian woman. She is a teacher in both the SCA and the mundane world, and she hails from the Barony of Darkwood in the Principality of the Mists, in the Kingdom of the West. She and Dante mostly get along.

I want to caution the reader at this point. Very few names have been given, a noticeable deviation from the original *Inferno*, and while some people have directly inspired sections of this work, overall the figures in here are characters compiled from a number of stories. I have solicited ideas from all over the Known World. Don't try to figure out who everyone is supposed to be, and don't blame me too much if you recognize yourself. The likelihood is that I do not even know you or, if I do know you, I have

no clue as to your guilt. If you see yourself in Hell I suggest keeping quiet about it; you may reveal more than you wish by making a fuss.

As for the Western perspective, I did get a lot of input from people from around the Known World, as I said, but the experience from which I write is a Western perspective. I would like to think that this does not limit the accessibility of the work. There are many SCA archetypes in here, and Dante himself is my model. He focused directly of Florence, and yet his work is accessible to people the world over.

I hope you find the journey interesting.

Branwen Cryccthegn Deorcwuda
April 30, 2004

I used several translations in working with this piece, but the one I relied upon most is the John Ciardi translation.ⁱⁱ

The annotations to this poem have been done by Jennifer Nestojko.

¹ I like to use this word for myself for a number of reasons, some of which can be found in Nancy Mairs' article "On Being a Cripple".

ⁱⁱ Ciardi, John. [The Inferno: Dante's Immortal Drama of a Journey Through Hell](#). Penguin Books: N.Y. 1954

Hell's Levels

The Vestibule of Hell: Fringies

Circle 1: Limbo (Those who lived before the SCA)

Circle 2: The Carnal (The Man of Passion, Hat Whores)

Circle 3: Gluttony (Incautious Drinkers)

Circle 4: The Hoarders and the Wasters

Circle 5: The Wrathful and the Sullen

Circle 6: Heretics (Mundanes who Don't Want Their Spouses to Play, The City of Dis, Inflammatory List Members, Those Who Don't Understand Monty Python.)

Circle 7: The Violent (Against Their Neighbors, Against Themselves {The Apathetic and The Wood of Career Suicides} Against God, Nature, and Art {Knights, Laurels, Pelicans})

Circle 8: Fraud

Borgia 1: Seducers

Borgia 2: Flatterers

Borgia 3: Peerage Point Proponents

Borgia 4: Anonymous E-mail Senders

Borgia 5: Grafters

Borgia 6: Hypocrites

Borgia 7: Thieves and Plagiarizers

Borgia 8: Evil Counselors

Borgia 9: Sowers of Discord and Gossips

Borgia 10: Falsifiers (Those Who Don't Do Research or

Demos, Impersonators)Giants/Bad Kings

Circle 9: Compound Fraud (Treachery to Kin, Treachery to Country, Treachery to Hosts and Guests/Rapists, Treachery to Masters)

Inferno: Canto I

The Dark Wood of Error

Light was fading quickly, the failing neon sign
fizzled once, paused, and then resigned itself to night
punctuated by the rear red eyes glowing in their line.

The snarled traffic showed me that my choice was not right;
the route was wrong; I fumbled bleakly for my Page,ⁱⁱⁱ
struggling to read the words in my dashboard light.

I sought, I thought, the gloried splendours of an age
or two, or even more, when chivalry held sway,
but my dreams seemed swallowed up by roads and rage.

I did lift mine eyes up to the hills,^{iv} to check my way,
where I beheld a valiant sight, bright and grand,
wrought in the sky, where still, it seemed, 'twas day.

There appeared to be a fire burning o'er the land,
new-kindled in darkness, as with the new-year's flame:^v
that mighty conflagration first cupped in one hand,

and kindled by the light thus burning a small hope came;
I thought I spied an exit lane, hidden in gloom,
and stuck there a cardboard sign with familiar name.^{vi}

I inched on, filled with joy, though scarcely was there room,
desperate to break free from that stagnant auto trap
where other commuters sat entrenched in their doom.

Yet as the side road wound around each country lap
the glow that had heartened me faded soon from view,
and fears that I had been led astray began to sap

me of what little strength I had left, 'tis true,
and thought I that I dreamed when first that shape I spied,

but no, there stood a ghostly bird of ghastly hue.^{vii}

It filled the road before me, and each time I tried
to swerve round its squawking bulk it flew to thwart me,
more fearsome yet than aught else on this fright-filled ride.

Its beak was sagging: a loathsome horn of plenty
spilling to the ground its bounty of rotting cod;
it stared at me with eyes black, malevolent, and beady,

directing my path in a way that seemed most odd,
paying not the slightest heed to my own desires.
Then, from the side, I spied a strangely shapen rod

held by a wight with the look of one who requires
all to bow before him giving service and praise,
holding ambition and pride as sacred sires,

one who relies on strength and the sword he raises
to carry the day, with chivalry a false hope,
the field of honor being the field he razes.

Behind him stood a tree with branches like coiled rope
ready to strangle any person innocent
of the danger threatening, unable to cope

with the noose of this tree that while magnificent,
showing well-groomed leaves, is utterly malignant
in its dealings with a chance-met drab-dressed peasant.

The pool lying at its tangled roots was stagnant,
for no new stream was allowed to flow forth clear;
old leaves clung to branch, new growth to it repugnant.

To my horror I saw this living stump was near,
far too close it was, from its path I could not swerve,
within its melancholy shade my fate seemed clear.

I braced myself for impact, felt I'd lost my nerve,
crashed, then sat up, feeling dazed, when I saw a man.
I called to him from those shadows: "Whom do you serve?"

He stood there unspeaking, as if there were a ban
upon his speech, when again I cried: "Give me aid,"
and, stumbling from my car, from out that grove I ran.

I came close, he moved not, as if from granite made,
yet when I stood right next to him he heaved a sigh
and spoke: "The One to whom true homage must be paid

is the only one I serve,^{viii} who can never die,
but I have died and walk no more upon the green of earth,
yet if you should so choose, your path will with me lie.

I died, but when alive, was Florentine by birth;^{ix}
the world I claimed as mine is swallowed up in time
with all its dreams and shares of misery and mirth.

That world and worlds beyond I chronicled in rhyme,
Dante was my name, and my comedy divine
is how men know me now, with its own truths sublime.

Then Virgil was my guide, though seldom straight the line
he led me, where souls lamenting shivered,
paying each sin's recompense, left in Hell to pine,

and through sights so grim my own soul was delivered.
Your soul has foundered, and thus become estranged."
"Hell!" I cried, and at the thought my spirit quivered.

"The same," he said, "yet not the same, for much has changed,
set within a cosmos narrower in measure,
thus this threefold venture is somewhat rearranged.

Come for your own sake; we travel not at leisure,

but with purpose, to cure the sickness of your heart,
wherein you see, tarnished and dulled, all you treasure.

It is a mighty journey, treacherous to start;
you'll hear the cries of those poor sinners trapped in pain,
see punishment for wrongs in which they've taken part.

Then upon a mount which burns even in the rain
You will see souls in torment, happy to be there
if by enduring thus they come to holy gain.

If onward with your journey you then wish to fare,
seeking to see the joys of that celestial sphere,
another shall come forth for you to take you where

I can never go, for having spent my time here
on earth long before that landmark Beltane revel
the Queen who dwelleth there gives unto me no cheer."^x

"Poet of the past, with you let me be level,"
I cried to him, "I wish to take this journey now
taking you as guide; you seem more saint than devil.

I escaped that haunted tree, though I don't know how,
also the knight and bird which filled me with such dread;
to your purer heart and greater wisdom I bow

and ask you to lead me onward, as you have said,
past the very gates of Hell, though dreadful the way."
He moved on in silence; I followed where he led.

ⁱ I like to use this word for myself for a number of reasons, some of which can be found in Nancy Mairs' article "On Being a Cripple".

ⁱⁱ Ciardi, John. The Inferno: Dante's Immortal Drama of a Journey Through Hell. Penguin Books: N.Y. 1954

ⁱⁱⁱ The Page is the newsletter for the Kingdom of the West.

^{iv} Psalm 121

^v The SCA new year is Beltane and this is a reference to Beltane fires.

^{vi} The ubiquitous SCA sign

^{vii} In the original Dante is faced with three creatures: the leopard of malice, the lion of violence and ambition, and the she-wolf of incontinence. The narrator faces a malign form of each of the three Peerage councils: the Pelicans, the Knights, and the Laurels.

^{viii} Dante is, of course, Catholic.

^{ix} As Virgil was to Dante, so Dante is to the narrator.

^x Just as Virgil, having been a non-Christian, cannot go to Heaven, so Dante, having been born before the time of the SCA, cannot go to this Heaven.

Inferno: Canto II*The Descent*

The light diminished fully, the dark air calling
all living creatures to warm nests and beds to sleep
after day's toil, but I found my spirits falling

into a deeper gloom, preparing for that leap
down to the black abyss, that murky pit of sin;
the road stretched out before me, dangerous and steep.

I said to my companion, "Before we begin
tell unto me, ere I falter, how I can dare
presume myself to be a prize for grace to win.

Before the potter, Lodema,^x fires her wares,
she first inspects each fragile piece for flaws,
then tosses the unworthy. So must I beware

and check that I am worthy to brave the black maw
of hell, to receive this salvation
from those powers, in front of whom I stand in awe."

Did I see there a look of exasperation
cross my good guide's face? But no, with a gentle tone
he said, "Please understand, my participation

was solicited by a lady who is prone
to no evil: joyous Heaven is where she dwells,
yet she looked down from that height upon you alone

and saw your struggle, your deeper sorrow that quells
even the noble spirit, and so she set off
seeking a solution. Love, deepest of all wells,

a gift at which neither peasant nor king can scoff,

is what prompted her to find me, her love for you,"
his eyes misted over, he paused with a cough,

then continued, "she reminds me of one I knew,
shining Beatrice, who for my sake did the same,
both are ladies whose kindness shine forth bright and true.

And thus to me in Limbo Arianwen came
to plead to me your case and set me on my task
to give guidance to the weary, help to the lame,^x

but still I had a concern, which I could not mask.
'My lady,' asked I, 'how can you descend to Hell
and leave behind the shining light in which you bask?'

'Listen,' she said, 'and mark you, listen well,
nothing can touch me. Hell I travel without fear,
for I am protected from all things fell.

Love has sent me to aid the one who I hold dear,
and in bliss dwells a lady who heard of this plight
and so through compassion chose to send me here.

That gracious lady in Heaven went first to speak
with Ginevra, whose very smile illumines all
who chance upon her, and yet though her manner meek

she is a lamp whose light does upon all gentles fall,
despite their appearance, no matter their station.
The lady said to her, 'The reason for my call

is that thy friend below is pressed with temptation
and is lost and wandering astray; I ask aid
from you in this cause, for the sake of our nation.'

Ginevra, at whose feet many a cause is laid,

immediately agreed that there was a need
and hastened to where, right by Alexia, I stayed

and said to me; ‘Arianwen, does your heart bleed
at the state of the dear one whose steps now falter
more than usual, who is hampered in each deed,

and who, not so long ago, was an exalter
in the creativeness of our society
but for whom disillusion comes her halter.’

Alexia del Mare, in whose sweet piety
and peaceful spirit we have found for us a guide
gave support to the cause in its entirety,

and so, with such sweet blessings, I could not abide
a moment longer, but directly I made haste
to seek you out so that this saving quest be tried.’

As she spoke, I could not help but see a tear, chaste
and pure in its deep affection, so pay attention
to what I have said and make sure you do not waste

such freely given love, nor mock the intention
of these three ladies who have gifted you with grace
and sent me to guide you, as I have made mention,

and so I led you away from that loathsome place,
that stagnant pool and gnarled dark malicious tree.
So shall we now continue and pick up the pace,

or is it your intention to give up and flee?”
But no, news of Arianwen in me kindled
a new hope that I was worthy to be set free

“O gracious lady, my soul has not dwindled

to something so petty as to be forgotten,
and I will pass through that gate so sharply spindled,

my heart feels strengthened now, where before ‘twas rotten,
O Guide! O Poet! O literary Master,
whose great masterpiece has indeed been taught in

many a university class, go faster,
lead me on the way; I promise not to go back
but continue to the dwelling of disaster.”

My guide turned and walked on without looking back,
I firmly grasped my cane and set my shoulders straight
and began again my pace down that darkened track.

^x Lodema is an artisan and merchant in the Kingdom of the West.

^x The author and the narrator are essentially the same person. The narrator thus walks with a cane or more and her best friend is Arianwen o’ Aberystwyth.

Inferno: Canto III

The Vestibule of Hell: Fringies

**I am the way into the city of sorrow,
I am the way unto the people who are lost,
I am the way into night without a morrow.**

**A certain justice forged me out of fire and frost,
custom caused the construction of my walls most sheer;
'tis through love's decree that sin should pay a cost.**

**Those things only which human nature cannot sear
or warp have been ere me; captured in time I stand.
All hope and joy abandon, ye who enter here.**

These strange inscriptions burned above me like a brand,
turning to my guide I asked him "What does this mean?"
He said, "Each person in her own fate takes a hand.

If one truly seeks salvation, grace will redeem
each troubled soul; only those who hold strong to sin
are damned, and so have Hell in which to vent their spleen.

He smiled at me gently and said "Shall we begin?"
and taking me by hand he led me through those gates
where I, once through, did hear a most infernal din.

Figures swirling round me, whirling at a rapid rate
were dressed outlandishly in garish garb most strange:
a man in vampire fangs, a succubus his mate,

or so it seemed from her skin-tight vinyl dress; mange
was indicated by matted fur, synthetic
in weave, worn by a werewolf half-way through his change.

I saw brush by me a faerie most pathetic

whose brightly colored wings were crushed and soiled and torn,
her elf ears bent; things were not quite copasetic.

There was a Vulcan with demeanor most forlorn
as if the group he ran with had no logic sense;
next a Viking came with a hat of doubled horn.

An apparition before me loomed, and from whence
he came I did not know, unless from Pennsic fields,
clad in tattoos, understandably looking tense.

An iron band about his brow seemed sealed;
it sprouted dragon wings upright in hammered steel;
a skirt of leather strips his sturdy legs revealed.

As I watched souls tormented dance this strangest reel
my eyes at once were riveted to a chain mail
bikini, whose bright links did little to conceal

the generously formed voluptuous female.
Such a sight as this inspired me to wonder
what cuts and bruises such a costume would entail.

Over all the wailings was a sound of thunder
emanating from a most surly swarm of bees
who pursued fake pirates spilling plastic plunder.

It seemed these varied folk were struck by a disease
which turned out, I saw, to be the insect boils and stings
and the incessant biting of insistent fleas.

Those thus bitten ran on as if they too had wings,
and I turned to my counselor for a meaning
to be given in explanation of these things.

He seemed to guess my purpose, and o'er the keening

spoke, and said, "These souls are those who could not choose
a place and time to be; their clothes are the gleanings

of themes both fantastic and medieval, and whose
participation in life is e'er on the fringe,
and so in this metaphoric structure they lose

all hope of a true place. From conforming they cringe
and the reality they shape is quite their own,
meaning that the fires of Hell will never singe

them, for that would give them status full blown.
Instead they are stung, in everlasting nagging,
and in this placeless void they ever cry and moan.

But come; while among these folk our pace is lagging,
and 'tis time for us to hasten to the river
before we hear the barbarians start their bragging."

We traveled further down, where shades stood a-shiver,
newly sent to wait their fate in the depths below:
a fresh load for the ferryman to deliver

to the other side, 'cross the current deep and slow.
Standing there was the Constable taking down names
of those who stood to pay their fee and downward go.

He looked at me most angrily: "Not to the flames
is this one sent, for her spirit is still giving
of service and kindness, the like that never maims

another heart nor the capacity for living
in joy within this group. I cannot let her pass;
we have already done the eternal sieving

which brings down the chaff to stand in a huddled mass.

She has not been chosen for such a horrid fate,
but better off attending Collegium class."

My dear guide then said, "Your anger you need to sate
on these other folk; this one is Heaven-sent
so that her true salvation should not be too late."

The Constable agreed, though 'twas against his bent,
and so I was permitted passage unhindered,
yet ere I could but stir, down.

Inferno: Canto IV*Circle One: Limbo*

There was a sound of thunder, and echoing clap
reverberating through the dark and gloomy hills
which wakened me from out my unexpected nap.

Up I jumped, feeling rested, with a few slight chills,
examined my surroundings. I stood on a ledge
of a chasm deep. “Don’t you wish to know the ills

of those who dwell here?” snapped my guide from darkened ledge,
“where bereft of mercy stands that lovely lady,
and no birds are singing beside the withered sedge?”

“Your misquote of Keats at me seems rather shady,”
I answered, laughing at my own egregious pun.
“Sorry,” I said, “you just look a little fady.”

He stared at me and sighed: “What’s done, I guess, is done,
and I was the first to crack a joke.^x Regarding Keats,
of this region’s inhabitants, he is in fact one,

although his place is found among the poets’ seats.
Near here you’ll find the spirits of those who never
had a chance to sample varied SCA treats.

Your modern world has made an effort to sever
itself from the plagues and pestilence of the past;
the construction of flush privies is quite clever,

and so when in large groups you are so closely massed
you do not fear plague or leprosy or smallpox:
only the kinder truths have been allowed to last.

History’s miseries are returned to that box

of Pandora, or so you strive for such a feat.
It is these old scourges that sound out among the rocks,

for medieval history is indeed replete
with sexism and sickness, which you all eschew
and dance upon the sanitary cold concrete.

The moanings you hear are an echoed review
of these aspects of the past that you have denied
so that you may have more comfort in what you do.

Your society does not recreate the pride
of a noble made manifest in slaughter, through
the maiming of those who on his estate abide.

But come now to the Citadel, for there will you
meet the liverer’s son, that young John,
and many of those artisans whose main purview

was both antiquity and chivalry. Upon
those subjects they thought much and would have with delight
joined your society.^x The attitudes you don,

being weekend warriors, would seem to them right,
for they were enthralled by medieval aesthetics,
or strange anachronisms, or the Grail’s light.

Poets and painters here outnumber the medics:
imagination fever more on Arthur’s tale
or hallucinations of desert ascetics.

Here sits Alfred, Lord Tennyson, who did regale
us with many stories about a round table
and the most noble quest for the Holy Grail.

T.H. White and others like him were most able

to depict Arthur's life and death and time between,
and encounters with a knight in sable.

The Pre-Raphaelites painted with a pale sheen
of romance from past days, of heroines in story
and bright knights of errantry taken from French lays.

Sir Walter Scott it was who gave us the glory
of Ivanhoe, and those beauties both dark and fair:
Rebecca and Rowena. While rather gory,

the monsters of Beowulf were with the critics paired
by Tolkien, mighty Anglo-Saxon master,
who, while dressed in Viking garb, pedestrians scared.

He showed the work to be an elegy; caster
of his own tales he also was, a lord of rings
and other things. May he never know disaster

such as the form of Xenawen that movie brings.^x
No, he blissfully is spared in the true Heaven
where never sorrow comes and Donald Swan still sings.^x

The anachronistic humor that can leaven
the dullest day with rabbit or Jabberwock
is known to each child who's reached the age of seven.

This skewed perspective, and his willingness to mock
foibles of society, make Lewis Carroll
for anachronistic pleasure; he had no block

against silliness. He would have helped filk carols!
One who'd have liked the modern medieval journey
is the Earl of Edlington, who faced the peril

of the field, for so he organized a tourney

that was held in the year of 1839.
He was no poet writing of bracken ferny

and little elves; he was a predecessor fine
of Alden wars. ^xYou might just say he missed his day."
My guide stopped speaking, so I voiced a thought of mine:

"Where is C.S. Lewis; you know that I would pay
to meet him but once, 'cause I think he's just too cool."
Said Dante, "Lewis himself never came this way

even though a medieval scholar. As a rule
he disliked poor logic, and so he might have cried
on SCA-West, ^x 'What do they teach them in these schools!'^x

No, he had other fish to fry, and when he died
his apologetics were rewarded, and thus
he has gone onward and upward at Aslan's side."

Lewis had reached Heaven; I counted that a plus,
and so I went to meet the others there within,
for it was a kindly place, with light wind to muss

the hair, but no gale. They were not there due to sin
and so their home was pleasant with no storms to fight,
but soon we had to go further and deeper in

and therefore leave that Citadel of art and light.
Though no storm blew within, without a hurricane
did rage. We went into that dark and stormy night.

^x The narrator and the poet develop an interesting relationship from the start.

^x Keats is, of course, the liverer's son, and the spirits in the Citadel are the equivalent to the virtuous pagans, being those who were born before AS 1 but who would have enjoyed the SCA.

^x The author has issues with the LOTR movies, especially the way Arwen is portrayed.

^x Swann put some of Tolkien's poetry to music.

^x Alden wars have between 20 – 30 battles in a day usually.

^x SCVA-West is a list for members of the West Kingdom.

^x While Tolkien might have enjoyed aspects of the SCA, Lewis would most likely be irritated by the general lack of focus on actual medieval ideas.

Inferno: Canto V*Circle 2: The Carnal*

We journeyed down from Limbo to that second shelf:
a circle smaller in size but greater in pain,
and more intense the torment inflicted on self

by chosen sin. There sits in center of the lane
a giant monster who sends each soul to its fate,
matching sin to circle to add, not ease, the strain.

Though loathsome in appearance, its most vivid trait
is the long and coiling tail that it wraps around
its bloated body, sin and punishment to mate.

The number of coils it wraps around its squatting mound
determines the destined circle that the troubled
shade must go unto and how deep into the ground.

“Hey you,” cried the beast, “your torment may be doubled
if on you saunter without even checking in!”^x
To me he spoke in wrath; his forehead bubbled.

“Oh go ahead and pop your pride! This woman’s kin
have sent her down this path purposing redemption.
The road through Hell is free to her so she can win

her way to joy. From your coils she has exemption.
Though her way to Heaven seems a contradiction,
’tis through death that one achieves the resurrection.”

My guide moved us on despite the dark prediction
and soon we found ourselves within a whirlwind
of souls together tossed in eternal friction.

For a moment I found myself to Dante pinned,

then freed myself, and before another fierce gust
could hit me I asked, “In what manner have they sinned?”

Dante smiled sadly; “’Tis not your sin, I trust,
for you seem quite a sweet innocent Darkwood lass,^x
but this circle is held for errors such as lust

and other indulgences in passions that pass
when all-consuming, not rooted in true feeling,
which makes the joy of love change into something crass.

The fault is not the clothes skimpy and revealing,
but rather the choice to unleash all desires,
and while a passionate kiss can send you reeling

abandoning oneself without honor sets fires
that sear and burn those to whom you have plighted troth.
Setting loose your passions can bog you down in mires.

Before you call me prude and at convention scoff,
let me tell you the tale of the Man of Passion.
His interests resemble a candle-stricken moth

that burns in glory and then gives up its ration
and falls to ash. He loves and leaves and loves once more,
changing his face a thousand times in this fashion.

Marriage did not work out because it made him sore
that his wife could not comprehend his o’erflowing
feeling, and so unfairly showed him to the door.”

Off in the corner a stronger storm was blowing;
barely could we reach it, so windy and vicious
it was. “Here,” said the sage, “are those who would attain

control over another soul, so delicious

they seem, using their bodies and favors as bait,
while 'neath this ploy their intentions are malicious.

Sex is what they offer, but you'll learn far too late
that in actuality they feed on power,
more dangerous than a spider who eats her mate.

Be not surprised when your love life starts to sour
and you are spit back out onto the lonely road;
she is but luring fresher meat into her bower."

"Oh yes," I said, "I know of more than one who sowed
such poisonous seed, but if you held no high place,
nor such a rank were likely to achieve, they showed

nothing but contempt. It seems something of a race
or other competition where the man is more
a prize than love. Sadly too often is the case."

I sighed once, then asked, "What of the common hat whore
who works her wiles to worm her way from bed to crown?"
Said Dante, "They are not here, but look to yonder shore

across the way." "What?" I cried, looking up and down,
"I see so few shadows there the landscape is bare,
and less than ten shades there are, each in tattered gown."

"Right," said Dante, "so astute you are it seems there
is scarcely need for me." I glared at him, then spoke;
"And what is the reason for such sparsity, where

the rest of Hell seems filled with beings who wail and croak?"
"Tis simple," replied the poet, "it's a fable
passed around in story and traded as a joke.

The hat whore is a myth, and one that is able

to keep expanding despite the lack of models,
though many a woman gets stuck with that label."

The master gave me the look of one who coddles
the tender infant new in comprehension
that must be constantly helped as it toddles

its way into the world. The misapprehension
that I was but a child in my understanding
irritated me, and while that reprehension

pissed^x me off, still I was better not demanding
more respect. I suppressed a mighty urge to shout
and looked instead at the path to the next landing.

I swear to you my retreat was not a rout;
I was curious as to what would happen next,
when a mighty gust of wind came and knocked me out.

^x Demons and monsters tend to use coarser language.

^x Darkwood is the Barony from which the narrator hails. Of course all Darkwood lasses are sweet and innocent.

^x It seems that the narrator has been hanging out with the aforementioned demons and monsters, or just those with coarse language.

Inferno: Canto VI*Circle 3: Gluttons*

I had been knocked out by a great force of feeling,
or at least a strong gust of wind, but when I stirred
and opened my eyes the dim light was revealing

a more bitter scene of misery. It occurred
to me that I could be back home, warm in my bed,
but still I was luckier than those here interred.

The sky regurgitated snow upon my head,
the crystals of which seemed to be composed of bile.
No lovely winter wonderland this was; instead

the icy ground was churned into a mud most vile.
A fearful dog whose heads numbered no less than three
had slipped free from kingdom leash law demands; the style

in which he rampaged was a gruesome sight to see,
with his slavering mouths and strangely pointed beard.
Just one look his way and I felt the urge to flee.

From the way he barked and howled at us it appeared
that he would not let us pass, and I did wonder
what my guide would do; I confess to you I feared

the worst. But Dante, not fearing any blunder,
reached down and grabbed some fetid earth, and taking aim
he wound up his arm and let fly with his plunder.

He threw into the beast's maw; twice more the same
shot was used, until all three mouths became quiet.
I was relieved; I had no wish for it to maim

us. I was glad not to be a part of its diet,

for Cerberus unchained is indeed most frightful,
and when seen outside of Hell's Gate causes riots,^x

especially among the heralds, delightful
though its blazoning may seem. I looked at the scene
around me more closely; the weather seemed spiteful

and the bitter sky pulsed and throbbed in such a mean
that my own head throbbed in sympathy. The ground stank,
yet on it crawled figures in attitudes obscene.

"These wretches," said my guide, "habitually drank
to excess, and irresponsibly have imbibed
so many times that here they lie. Great lords of rank

and ladies sometimes gentle have each other jibed
on the subject of such habits, but too often
morning comes with shame, and so when one has bribed

a squire to fetch some aspirin and shades to soften
the harshness of day, memories begin to dawn
on him, and how, with bright green chunks, had coughed in

some sweet lady's face with a technicolor yawn
and so ruined the hopes of a more secret tryst.
Look to the gentle whose bed is a piece of lawn,

not through choice, like you^x, but because she ever missed
the road, her encampment, and finally her tent.
That gentleman over yonder cut loose and pissed

around the camps of several Laurels, and then sent
a brighter yellow onto the West pavilion
in a steady stream." Quite suddenly a scream rent

the very air, and a man with face vermilion

went frothing by, waving a broken wicker chair.
Said my guide, "He thinks he's in the Silmarillion

and he's Turin Turambar facing dragons there
where harmless trees are sleeping and the worst creature
is an irritated squirrel.^x You do not care

if the occasional shenanigan features
a drunken fool. Your society does not gripe
about all alcohol like a tight-laced preacher

and enjoys happy revels of a certain type.
The line is fine between good clean fun and excess:
in time being stumbling drunk does not match its hype."

I gingerly tried stepping clear of all the mess
on the ground, as well as avoiding those passed out,
though at the last task mentioned I had small success.

A groan alerted me to the large man whose stout
beer belly seemed to form an island of its own
in that dank muck. Seeing me, he began to pout,

and whimpered, "I sincerely heartily atone
for my lack of courtesy. I can't, just now, stand,
since the earth keeps spinning, if the truth be known."

In a gesture of chivalry he took my hand,
but I pulled it back before he could try a kiss.
He looked startled, as if it were a reprimand.

"My lady, I assure you, I am not like this
too often; I was just celebrating in fun.
Fun is the point of events; what you seem to miss

is that I've not done anything you have not done.

You have no right to preach or impose on me your views;
it's not like liquor is a pleasure that you shun."

Said I, "You're right; drink is sometimes something I choose
to indulge in at a party at an event;
it is something I enjoy, not something I abuse."

"It's not the drinking alone, but 'tis the intent,"
intoned my guide, "and the habitual contempt
of others around you that they seek to prevent."

We turned away from him and others so unkempt.
"Addiction to drink creates its own living Hell,
so this Hell seems redundant. Perhaps those who tempt

their friends with booze, though they do say they mean it well,
when those same friends have tried to on the wagon stay
should be here instead," I said. "What you try to sell,"

said he, "will not plans divine set in disarray,
for alcoholics^x are not in here residing,
and those who push them are indeed punished. Now, pray

consider that mercy is o'er all presiding
and that this circle holds but those who are careless
in the extreme, for they are the ones deriding

both themselves and your group's cherished dream, rather less
than some perhaps. They are gluttons like the hound,
and after such gluttony wake lone and friendless.

Now it's time for us to leave this putrid ground
and clamber on down for the next leg of our journey.
Come, my young friend, for the fourth circle we are bound."

^x Read the reports from the incipient barony of Hell's gate, shared by Ricola of Fenhop and Cyneburh of Catawaraburg

^x The narrator dislikes tents and usually sleeps outside.

^x J.R.R. Tolkien's The Silmarillion. Turin Turambar is a tragic dragon slayer.

^x This circle is not reserved for alcoholics but for those who are gluttonous with drink.

Inferno: Canto VII

Circle 4: The Hoarders and Wasters

Circle 5: The Wrathful and the Sullen

On my arrival in the fourth circle, after
passing the usual monstrous guard, sounds of strife
met my ears. I was torn 'twixt horror and laughter,

for here were two nations straining with all their life
in a horrendous and eternal tug of war
while sweat poured down their brows. The very air was rife

with their battlecries; as they strained their garments tore,
as well as their tendons and muscles. "You wasters!"
cried one group, "you care not what has gone on before

your time! You do not research; you are mere tasters
of the medieval flavor. Period learning
you leave to others. You are but cut and pasters

of random knowledge. You do not have the yearning
for a not-quite-forgotten age, but want pleasure
only." Some fell into the mud they were churning,

but fought on. The other side was of like measure,
but of opposite view. "You hoarders!" was their cry,
"You hold tight to knowledge as if 'twas your treasure,

but you have no room for play! You mock those who try
to be period but are only beginners,
because the bar you set for them is far too high!"

I thought on these extremes, pondering the sinners
who fought so fiercely in their mighty standstill
and realized that there were no losers or winners.

From a height they resembled an upset anthill,
from close they were a blend of chaos and order,
and their insults resounded in the air until

we passed out of reach of that circle. The border
between fourth and fifth was a sad and lonely fen:
the river Styx a-fouled in its course. Disorder

seemed here the rule. "Master, it seems beyond my ken
to know why we can't have balance, but move 'tween trends,
between being period, and not so strict, when

it seems a happy medium such strife could mend.
First one side holds a high place, the next then holds sway,
and those of us in the middle are left to fend

as best we can, and endure each as best we may."
My guide heard and answered: "Know you of Fortune's Wheel?
In its turning it does both the meek and proud dismay

as well as raise up. For Fortune takes no appeal,
but moves as pleases her. You can't foresee the turn
that will raise up some and strike some low, but feel

the truth of life's uncertainty. But you must learn
that this is not mere randomness; there is a plan
beyond your understanding. Do not spurn

the lessons taught therein, but within the Wheel's span
bear up under misfortune and cherish sweet fame
and know that if you need to weather storms you can."

I thought on this, then across the dark marsh we came,
where I saw a horde of angry shades, who were bare
and covered with slime. Everywhere I looked the same

sight met me. These spirits seemed not so much to care
about their nakedness, for though covered with muck
they were glaring and mumbling and pulling their hair.

“They claim,” said Dante, “to be wronged, and so are stuck
in the mire of their imagined persecution.”
A spirit passed by, crying “No one gives a fuck

for chivalry, pageantry, or elocution.
The society is not in my image made!”
Said the poet, “They do not seek a solution,

but prefer instead to be wrathful, so the blade
of their ire cuts only them and those they lecture.
They are bogged down here in the mire of that tirade.”

I noticed that the bog had the strangest texture,
for ‘twas lumpier than oatmeal at summer camp,
though why it were so I could only conjecture

and put my head down closer, wishing for a lamp.
I noticed bubbles oozing from the fetid mush
and when they popped I heard voices: “We are damp

and cold, and covered with mud, but we will not hush.
We are the sullen.” One bubble whispered, “No prize
to me was ever given, though I worked my tush

right off in service to a Pelican. All lies
was I told about being appreciated...”
Another moan I heard: “To me it’s no surprise

that my work and art have been depreciated;
no one has ever noticed my efforts at all.”
Still another said, “I grew emaciated

serving the high table, but still no one can call
me Lord, for no Award of Arms has been granted
to me. I will serve no longer in the great hall.”

“I shan’t fight at tourneys,” one small bubble panted.
“I was beaten once by a rhino-hided knight.”
So spoke those from below, while the wrathful ranted.

“What on earth makes you think you are in the right?”
I shouted into the deep and muddy bower:
“If you take no action you each deserve your plight!”

I would have argued long past the midnight hour,
but my impatient guide bid me hurry onward,
so I came to the base of that nameless tower.

Inferno: Canto VIII*Circle 6*

So, where was I? We came to a darkened tower
rising high above the land. It shot jets of fire
into the air, which were answered in like power

by a dimly seen, yet threatening, blackened spire.
Across Styx, which now ran as a river, there sped
a Ferryman, eager to ease his desire

for tormented souls. "Aha! One more soul," he said,
"for me to bind and keep!" "Not so," replied my guide,
"her company is yours the short time we are led

across these waters murky; only for the ride
is she yours, so save your breath and spare us your wrath."
The Ferryman raged and fumed, but his hands were tied.

We stepped onto the boat to take the wat'ry path,
and the lowered hull set off to the further shore,
when a spirit arose from out that muddy bath.

He had round shining spectacles, and what is more,
streaming long dark hair and a forehead that was broad.^x
I thought I knew him from many years before.

"Who are you?" I cried. "I am one whose grief has thawed,"
he said. "Pity me in this place of misery."
"Ha!" I shouted, "I really find myself unawed

by the sight of you weeping. I'd be judge and jury
and I would sentence you to endure greater grief
had I the choice." I was strong, but without fury,

in my condemnation. Here was a man whose chief

wrong was to judge our group swiftly and unfairly,
and doing so railed and raged against the relief

from mundane life that was taken there so rarely
by his wife. He refused even to meet her friends
outside events and feasts. His attitude barely

gave her one outing a month. I would to him tend
no aid, but with a nudge sent him splashing back.
My master turned and embraced me: "Heaven forefend

you should be an unkind friend," he said, "but no lack
of that sort is found in you. Blessed is the one
who has befriended you and sent you on this track!

She has been defended now by what you have done."
"O Master," I replied, "I wish that more than this
punishment be meted out to him and begun

before I step onto the shore." "Onward is Dis,"
pointed out the poet, "a larger town than Rome,
darker than Batman's Gotham^x, Hell's metropolis.

Yet ere we spot its red fumes, look into the gloam."
Looking down I saw that many a wrathful sprite
had grabbed that man I had wanted sunk into the loam.

What they'd done to him, I saw, much to my delight,
was pull out all his lustrous hair. He was now bald.
I turned from him to where fire lit up the night.

The Ferryman pulled us soon to ground, then he called
to us to get out. We alit upon the shore,
but the scene before us left me standing, appalled

at the city's impenetrable walls, and more,

at the stern figure standing guard before the gate.
I knew him, not by sight, but through the cherished lore

of former members and rulers, passed on when late
at night around a campfire. A second look gave
me confirmation. This fallen angel of fate

was once a knight and king known as Christain du Glaive.
He looked at my guide, and me and then spoke aloud:
“Who are you who seek to pass, to foolishly save

yourselves from torments within? It is not allowed
for you twain to enter and not be made to stay.”
I felt a qualm of fear at that visage so proud

and waited for Dante to order him away.
The poet, however, did not to him reply:
“Our only chance now is Heaven’s mercy. Pray.”^x

That I was frightened by those words I won’t deny,
for Heaven seemed far away when facing that sword,
and a mumbled plea or two was all I could try.

Joining the fallen angel came a mighty Horde,
who had no use for royalty, or use for court.
I wished I were small enough to be ignored.

But overlooked I could not be, though I am short,
and I began to move in closer to my guide,
who for once had no authoritative retort.

My position seemed hopeless, with no place to hide,
when about my head there circled an albatross,
who whispered “Courage dear heart,” in a voice I tried

to place, for it was the dearest voice, past all loss

or fear.^x Somehow I felt that the darkness had cleared
just a little, and my cowardice burned like dross

leaving me with faith. At this change I could have cheered,
but prayed instead, and not just to this play Heaven,
but to the One whose name I have ever revered.

The ability to pray now seemed to leaven
the solemnity of our lonely desperate straight,
for though the Horde numbered seventy times seven

I knew that our help would not come to us too late.
My master was sure; he had never lost his faith,
and though small we stood strong before that evil gate.

^x He is the husband of a Scadian who refuses to play and actively resisted her playing.

^x Dante has kept up with his reading over the ages.

^x As Dante and the narrator are both Christian it makes sense that they would pray. This does not imply that they are forcing religion on anyone else in the SCA.

^x C.S. Lewis: [The Voyage of the Dawn Treader](#). The voice is that of Aslan.

Inferno: Canto IX*Circle 6*

We stood strong, but waiting began to wear away
our resolve, for time in that time-bound place did stretch,
much as did our nerves, which began to break and fray.

With some fondness I looked back to drunkard and leech
and their respective circles through which I had passed
without harm or holding. A most miserable wretch

appeared on the gate, like a bird on a mast,
but no bird this was. A most horrid expression
sat upon a mangled visage, which could be classed

with monstrous visages of former aggression
such as Medusa or my old eighth-grade teacher.
Two new foul beings then appeared, to my depression,

for each of the three was a most loathsome creature
with a mass of writhing serpents instead of hair.
Tongues that shot fire were their most prominent feature,

and the inflamed insults they called out scorched the air.
With voices like fingernails on chalkboards they screeched
at us, using words that most gentle folk forswear:

“We’ll sic the BOD on you, we’ll have your guide impeached!
We will rules-lawyer corpora ‘til Hell seems sweet!
We’ll read all the sermons that have ever been preached!”

Now, I am used to swearing and not scared to meet
all Mac Tir^x in full frolic, but what met my ears
coming from those Furies would affront an efreet.

This abuse continued for what seemed to be years,

and still for our Heavenly guide we awaited,
trying to ignore all of Hell’s wailings and tears.

In time the air’s pressure seemed somewhat abated,
and a gusty gale suddenly began to blow
a listless muddy rain on those who berated

us so fiercely, putting out their tongues. Now I know
the storm presaged the Heavenly messenger, but
then all I saw were spirits diving deep and low

in the manner of frogs who leap into a rut
when a larger beast approaches. The only sound
was the plopping of souls and the pattering strut

of rain on those stony walls. So wet was the ground
it glistened red in reflection of eternal
fires that burned in the city the walls circled round.

The storm was the reaction of the infernal
to the intrusion of the divine; soon we saw
the messenger looked for. Almost paternal

was the look my guide gave me, but I was in awe
at the bright glory that was surrounding the knight
who now had approached. His mighty arm upheld the law;

so strong was his research that he was a fine sight
of period armor, with a well-crafted sword:
his very presence disbanded that darkness to light.

Though the years had passed swiftly, a memory stirred
of a revel in Felton held, to which the Kates^x
had taken me, my first event, though somewhat blurred

in my mind. There I had met him, at any rate

seen him, the seneschal of his college so fair,
and one whom many a coed wished for a mate.

By his otters I knew him^x, for such he would wear
on his clothes those long years gone. An angel indeed,
of a vast companionship of angels who bear

their flagons to the feast hall, filled full of bright mead,
and their banner so gallantly into battle
where they stand in the front lines and take a bold lead.

These angels possess nerves that little can rattle,
whether in war-time or when at the Saucy Wench;^x
they drive their enemies before them like cattle,

and can drink any foeman right under his bench.
An angel aspires to the rank of a toad;
give him his sword and his shield, or a spear to clench,

and he'll take on all comers when at the Crapaud.^x
Obadiah, sweet singer, is one of this troop,
as well as Helgi, his brother, and stories are told

about their exploits. Another lord in this group
is the princely Thorfinn, whose coronet seeking
gave him rule o'er Mists and the Swan, so that the loop

of central Western thrones could be closed. The reeking
air seemed sweeter as this certain angel approached,
(if you wish to know more, play Angel: The Geeking).^x

Christian watched as his territory was encroached,
but he gave not a sign of displeasure at this,
nor by the bright messenger was Christian reproached.

Instead, they met each other as friends do who miss

the company of the other. It did appear
that there was a hearty greeting, though not a kiss,

but a great bear hug. Asked the angel, "What's this here?
Not quite the pad I pictured for you, but it suits.
So, my friend, where's the best place to go for a beer?"

The Gates' guardian nudged them with his blackened boots
so that they swung open, then he passed right on through
with his friend; the Horde followed with jeers and hoots.

We were left on our own and knew just what to do;
we walked through the portal, while the coast was still clear,
into a strange landscape with its buildings askew.

^x Mac Tir is a fun fighting group who have a colorful command of language.

^x Members of the College of St. Katherines

^x This is Wiglaf Wilfriding, a member of the Fellowship of the Argent Angels

^x A tavern often dispersing hospitality at events

^x A tourney where deeds of great valor are done

^x A very silly and amusing game made up for and about the Angels.

Inferno: Canto X*Circle 6: Inflammatory List Members*

By a secret way we came into the city,
and found ourselves wandering in a little maze.
The dwellers within looked like objects of pity.

However, they clearly set each other ablaze,
and while still smoldering fired off other shots.
I felt a strong need to comprehend this strange craze,

and so turned to my tutor. Said he “They allot
certain spaces for discussion or opinion,
and each his own theory holds forth, lucid or not.

As soon as a topic heats up, then a minion
of the list, who has waited, flames the poor speaker,
and a thousand more flames appear, so to win you

battle of words becomes a lost hope. The seeker
of logic in such a war loses her resolve,
for overwrought feelings overcome the meeker

writers to the list. The ones who desire to solve
these battles with reason are in Dis not entombed.
Only the inflammatory are so involved.”

The air over these cloth-covered walls ever boomed
with the sound of fireballs speeding overhead,
and though those in the cubicles seemed to be doomed,

they merely lit up, smoked, and returned fire instead.
These strange beings bent over their keyboards, so intent
they were on responding to whatever they read.

“Heretics, these are,” spoke on my guide, “giving vent

to their theories. Their heresies lie not in form,
which may not be flawed. The problem’s not with content,

but with execution, and messages that swarm
like bees, and covering the screen, commandeering
the list. Taking all attention they somehow worm

their way into new topics, which then start veering
away from the writers’ intended direction .
And far worse than the flaming is the snide sneering

at the tentative members who need protection
from those with more experience at being rude.
The fate of those people who voice an objection

to this vile behavior is the label of prude,
and worse. What irritates me is the defiance
of the fine art of wordplay, misshapen to crude

maneuvers and insults. Argument is science
and has long been revered, but science is lost
in such futile fire, and with no compliance

to rhetoric’s rules, clearly there must be a cost.”
I have been a part of several similar lists,^x
and in turn been derided, belittled, or bossed,

whether in far-off lands or at home in the Mists,
for this is a land with no real place on a map.
For some of these boards an average day consists

of a hundred messages, most of them mere pap,
with three or four at most on the topic or theme.
I understand that folk must have a chance to flap

their mouths; work can be boring, but in the extreme

the purpose fails and courtesies quickly vanish,
and so quickly can vanish our oft-touted Dream.

In this cubicle maze (the shade somewhat tannish)
the fire and smoke continued to rise; there was no way
to dampen the bonfires or bother to banish

the strangely constructed posts, so without delay
we hurried on further to a new neighborhood.
A gloomy figure looked at me, pausing to say,

“She looked like a witch; I just don’t get it. You would
think that was obvious, not really that funny.
Who was it who said witches are made out of wood?”

He sighed a deep sigh, wiped a nose that was runny,
and then went droning on his most somber complaint:
“The parrot is dead, so return him his money,

I don’t see why they laugh without any constraint.
A white bunny is always a most harmless beast,
not one that attacks, wreaking havoc with no restraint.”^x

I did not interrupt, but I knew that at least
there were bunnies both good and most wickedly bad.
While I reflected, his litany never ceased.

I realized that here was a fellow who’d not had
a good laugh at the Ministry of Silly Walks.
The man’s dilemma seemed to me terribly sad,

and I could not imagine being one who balks
at something completely different, for whom John Cleese
is no inspiration for imitative squawks.

He ranted about the cheese shop that sold no cheese,

but I was in no mood to listen any more,
but to get away I had to say many “Ni’s”

which sufficiently allowed me to close a door
on his fresh outburst of woe. Though it seemed unkind,
it needed to be done. We progressed as before

downward to where a spiraled circle did unwind:
the road through these unwholesome darkened city streets.
Despite the shadows, I eagerly left behind

both the ongoing flame-wars and the whining bleats
of the humor-deprived gentle. Still, I wondered
what more I needed to sample of Hell’s rank treats.

^x These are, of course, internet mailing lists, as opposed to tourney lists.

^x These references and the ones that follow are references to Monty Python. The 6th circle is for heretics, and while the flame throwers now dominate this part, it is arguable that someone who doesn’t get Monty Python is a heretic in the SCA.

Inferno: Canto XI*Circle 6: Heretics*

As we made our way through those streets more heresies
we heard, though in their intensity they varied,
and there were more than all the popes or Pharisees

could number. We met groups whose strident voices carried
past the walls, groups who whispered in tones soft and hushed,
and groups that rapidly dispersed if we tarried.

When came we across one such cell, the members blushed
and confessed they were working out a new manner
to elect officials to the crown. They were crushed

often in public when they held forth their banner,
for few were the number they could find to rally
around it. There was one who seemed quite the fanner

of controversial fires, but couldn't lead a sally
against convention's walls. The sect, however, tried
to spread the word and add members to their tally.

After many arguments, my poor brain felt fried
and I was relieved when we came unto the cliff
which led further downward. A while back there'd been a slide

of rocks, as if a quake had stirred them, or if
a giant with a club had indulged in a snit.
After so much walking my back felt rather stiff,

my clothes were grimy, and my hair was full of grit.
My guide said unto me, "We aren't out of here yet,
so don't give up. Three circles underneath here sit,

and they are more crowded, more numerous the set

of sinners sent there. The sins of incontinence
are those punished outside of this city, those met

within the walls of Dis, on this side of the fence,
are the errors of fraud, arrogance, and malice,
and the horrors of selfishness and violence.

For lovers of truth there is a lovely palace:
only the pure and righteous will find the Grail,
though any who wish to may sip from that chalice.

Those here trapped are those in whom darkness does prevail
by choice and habit, and so mercy's saving balm
gives them no comfort, because they will not avail

themselves of its fair aid. The truest sense of calm
comes when a person can surrender harmful ways;
it may not be easy, or done without a qualm,

but losing constricting habits is cause for praise.
Those who dwell here, however, that sacrifice found
too dear, and so in these nine circles spend their days."

"O teacher mine," I queried, "your words are profound,
but a question still I have. Why is it the last
four circles only are within Dis, in this ground

so deeply buried? The other circles we passed
outside the city walls seem to hold lesser pain
and punishment." My guide replied, "self-control fast

denied leads sinners there, and those who seek to gain
more satiation for their passions and pleasures
are corrupted far less. Malice, hidden or plain,

is the greater evil to the one who measures

such things. Violence is the error we'll next see,
for it is a direct attack on those treasures

of humanity, such as life and dignity.
Such violent behavior can be directed
to one's neighbors, or oneself, but can also be

an offense to God. This wrong can be reflected
in behaviors that desecrate nature or art,
in an act taken or meanings inflected.

Violence to people or ideals is a start,
but 'tis not the blackest form of sin, for deceit
is a crime found only formed in the human heart.

There are those infamous courtiers who entreat
their royalty to give out favors to their friends
and who flatter with empty words to feed conceit

in those it most pleases them to foster. The trends
they follow are not their own ideas, but are
a part of a masquerade or act that helps them blend

in with the most pleasing crowds. An ill-omened star
is that which guides practitioners of guile,
and fraud is a trait that is guaranteed to mar

any character. The worst fraud, and the most vile,
is treachery and betrayal, for it is trust
that is the base for our community, and while

there are those willing to turn on their friends, there must
be safeguards put in place. Honor is the dearest
virtue we espouse, and if reason does not fust

in you unused,^x you then will see that the clearest

violation of this virtue is betrayal.
We'll come at end of this journey to those nearest

to the center of Hell where stands the portrayal
of utter evil. This anthropomorphic beast
chews ever upon those whose honor is most frail,

and it is with these traitors that he makes his feast.
But come," my guide paused, "the road further downward falls.
We have a ways to go before we are released,

and in but a few hours the morning herald calls
out the day's announcements." I heeded my guide's words,
and we proceeded onward without further stalls.

^x Hamlet : William Shakespeare

Inferno: Canto XII*Circle 7: The Violent Against Their Neighbors*

The view that met our eyes at the edge of the pit
was bleak in its dark mountainsides and barren hills
while the valley below was fogged, and dimly lit.

The few stunted trees that grew near the stagnant rills
were twisted and warped, with blackened and oily leaves,
bearing sharp thorns and the poisons of the world's ills.

To pass through such a thicket, one must wear one's greaves,
along with other armor, for only steel plate
could keep at bay such barbs. While one of my pet peeves

involves my lack of mobility and the slow rate
with which I can climb down a hill, it was no loss
to be unable to transverse those thickets. Late

as it was, I thought it best to steer clear of moss
and thorny briar. Still, the path a peril held
for the traveler: for horns that seemed built to toss

the unwary appeared before me. I was repelled
off the path by a beastly man, or manly beast,
the product of a night when a girl was compelled

by a lover more full of bull than most. The creased
brow of this Minotaur attested to this fact,
as did the horns. On us his fury he released,

and bade us stop where we were, with a lack of tact,
but the minions of Hell seemed consistently rude,
so I overlooked that. "Foul beast, we have a pact

with Heaven to travel forward, something your crude

brain can grasp, I trust," spoke my most esteemed master.
Most horrible were the gibberings that ensued

after this speech, and his howls came on still faster,
but he moved aside to let us pass, so we went
on to where we could observe the new disaster,

the punishment for those folk who are violent
against their neighbors. These spirits were in a stream
of boiling blood, for so the choleric are sent

to a place befitting their crimes. A light did gleam
on the hundreds of arrows pointed at the souls,
arrows notched in both long and crossbows. It did seem

that a huge army of lights stood on the shoals
and banks of the river ever ready to shoot
at any shade who tried to escape those deep holes.

Each archer was in a standard light-fighter suit
and looked keen to let loose a volley of arrows,
and without anti-bounce back devices, to boot!

"Over there in that pool, where the river narrows,
stand those whose dear trade is in gossip malicious.
As with the plagues of the ancient Pharaohs,

the water here runs with blood, and so the vicious
stew in their own juices." My guide paused at this point,
then continued: "In the deeps stand the ambitious

who pulled harmful power plays so they could anoint
themselves with the oils of importance and prestige.
They are the ones who get their noses out of joint

if they are not in control, and so they lay siege

to members of the group, with plans to lay them low
and ruin reputations before peer and liege.

These attacks may be sly, but seeds of discord sow,
and these seeds can tear e'en a healthy group apart,
causing rifts within the community to grow."

I was startled by the sudden whiz of a dart
that flew by me so close it brushed against my ear,
taking off some skin, and giving me quite a start.

An archer appeared before me: "Why come you here,
and what harm unto others have you done?" he roared.
The poet spoke to me: "Be still and have no fear,"

and, turning to the light, he said: "I was implored
by ladies fair of glorious celestial bliss,
whose words and sweet petitions cannot be ignored,

to escort this crippled bard past the walls of Dis.
In the stream of boiling blood she yet has no place;
this journey is undertaken so she may miss

such torments as we see. We proceed at a pace
designed to lead us through Hell during this dark night,
and so we must hurry onward, for now the race

for time begins.^x At the moment, you see, our plight
is that we need to cross this hot bloody river,
but I am unsure as to which path would be right."

Said the archer: "To the bank we will deliver
you, so that you might safely make your way across."
A catapult rolled up to carry us thither.

So great it was, it could huge boulders lightly toss.

We climbed in. I saw bodies face downward lying
in the shallows, choking on that most gruesome sauce,

and I asked, "In what way were these people vying
to destroy the very well-being of their fellows?"
Dante replied, "Do you remember those crying

in the third circle, the gluttons o'er the bellows
of Dis by several tiers? Here lie the folk who urge
others to drink to excess, who claim it mellows

one's attitude to habitually drink and purge
the stomach of all contents. Their sin is leading
those for whom alcohol is a poison and scourge

astray. They lie in this humid river's bleeding,
drinking in its hot and burning waters to sate
a universal sense of justice. No pleading

will remove them, for were they to pass through the gate
again they would return to their former actions,
urging their alcoholic friends to a worse fate."

We crossed the river reserved for such infractions
and dismounted from that mighty weapon of war,
walking on to meet other violent factions.

^x They must be through Hell by dawn.

Inferno: Canto XIII*Circle 7: The Violent Against Themselves*

There, on the other side of the river, I saw
that the bushes were much thicker, and the gnarled trees
formed a grove. In the air a most ominous caw

sounded the call of some dire creature who could freeze
the blood with its keen haunting cry of “Nevermore!”^x
I shook my head, feeling a cold and icy breeze.

We walked into that grove, where, as I said before,
the twisted trees stood amidst bushes with sharp thorns.
I searched my head for a scrap of forgotten lore

to aid me in my understanding. So forlorn
this forest was, it made me tremble and shiver.
The same bird called again, as if it meant to warn

any who reached the wood from beyond the river,
but I knew that I must enter the darkened glen
so that its woeful secrets it could deliver.

I didn’t know anything grew in Hell, but then
if I’d a-known, this is what I would have looked for.^x
In the branches I saw, sitting, a Pelican;

not the bird, but the Peer, and indeed, what is more,
I saw a Laurel perched nearby. Both had surcoats,
sans sides, each with her symbol embroidered before,

so large in scope that it covered each skirt. Like boats
in full sail they looked, but capsized, for all in white
were they dressed, with skirts full wide. Taking mental notes

as to what details I saw, I noticed them bite

off the leaves of their respective trees, which then cried
out with human voices. The Peers laughed with delight

at the sound, and went on gnawing. The cry belied
the vegetable nature of those sadly bent plants,
and I hesitated to go further inside

the grove. The biddies began a quarrel with such rants
that I grew e’en more fearfully trepidatious.
“Those women there are harpies, full of cans and can’ts,”

explained the poet. “They are not very gracious,”
I commented. He said simply, “They are wardens
of Hell, and have appetites cruel and voracious.

Their counterparts dwell in Heavenly gardens,
but these here have been sent to torment those who’ve harmed
themselves. The Peer whose heart hardens

is a perfect candidate for this place, disarmed
as these souls here are. They have no bodies at all,
but have turned into trees.” I found that midges swarmed

all around, and these small annoying pests did crawl
over the trees, and over both Dante and me.
“These trees are hunched over, and they do not stand tall;

what is their shame?” I asked of him. “As you can see,”
he answered, “They no longer have a human shape.
They are suicides, but not the world did they flee.

These aren’t self-murders literally; by the nape
of their necks they did not hang, but by words and deeds
killed their careers in your society. Like a grape

crushed underfoot on the road at noon, their juice bleeds

to no purpose, their fermenting shall not turn into wine,
while parched and withered and sadly lost are their seeds.

All of them are people who had a chance to shine,
but through thoughtless words or poor choices blew their chance,
and instead of forging onward, stagnate and whine.

Foolish behavior is like a badly learned stance:
in time it can be corrected and made better,
and so it is that one learns the steps in the great dance

of social interaction. But should one fetter
oneself in bad habits and recrimination
one cannot go forward. If you send a letter

describing angered claims of discrimination
on the part of the royals because thirteen years
passed, and still no knighthood, self-incrimination

is your forte then. Never tell the varied Peers
that they lack all forms of courtesy and caring
and then aim at becoming one of them. Your tears

will be your company 'til you find that bearing
which allows you to have pride without insolence.
Those who've never tried to learn find themselves sharing

this gloomy wood. Another form of violence
against the self here can be found; see that dog pack
chasing those people? They are folk who chose silence

over the happy sounds of revels, who did lack
the will to attend anticipated tourneys,
and though in need of company still turned their back

to those pleasures. The thought of taking more journeys

made them feel wearied and though this does make some sense,
in time their sofas became a kind of gurney

and their rooms sick wards for the infirm. So intense
and strong is the apathy they feel that they let
themselves disappoint friends and kin. In their defense,

they mean well, but with good intentions the road is set
that leads downward to this place. Yet their deepest wrong
is the violence to self, for apathy's debt

impoverishes the victim. Those running along
through these woods have been from beds and couches hounded
and made to move through the world neglected for so long.”

The bitches who fiercely pursued them sounded
terrible hunting calls and proceeded to nip
at their heels. The couch potatoes were surrounded,

and had little choice but to endure the trip
they had avoided taking, though I could not tell
if it was now beneficial. The oiled leaves did drip

a greasy dew on me, reminding me that Hell
was not any place in which I wished to tarry,
so I moved on through that forest dank and fell.

^x “The Raven” by Edgar Allan Poe

^x This is a paraphrase of Sam Gamgee’s comment in Mordor in Tolkien’s [The Lord of the Rings](#).

Inferno: Canto XIV

Circle 7: The Violent Against God^x, Nature, and Art

We moved out from the forest onto a great plain,
one marked with deep fissures and burning desert sands
where many tortured spirits writhed as if in pain,

which was no surprise, for a rain of burning brands
fell down upon them in a never-ending storm:
such fearsome hail as to lay waste to all lands.

Out of all these folk not one posture was the norm,
for some were lying stretched upon the bitter ground,
while others were standing. Some crouched, as if to form

a means of shelter from the coals hurtling all around.
I noticed, standing clear of the others, a man
who seemed more exposed and whose burns were more profound.

“Teacher,” I put forth, “who is that one who still can
stay upright and still speak amidst that brutal rain,
but whose wounds are worse than any throughout the span

of tortured earth?” “Ah yes, indeed, let me explain,”
replied the medieval master, “for ‘tis my world
we touch upon here. The tales of Abel and Cain

and the small stone that David at the giant hurled
informed our works and art, as did the life of Christ.
In biblical tapestry our lives were unfurled.

Rather like a vault rendered barren by a heist,
so is history when robbed of religion’s jewels,
but so many of your researchers are enticed

by a vision of a secular age. The rules

of your society are in place for reasons
well-founded, and I understand that there are fools

whose profane enactments would be worse treasons
than any current historical excision.
You keep religion separate, but there are seasons

for all things; therefore a complete revision
of the medieval world excluding all mention
of the faiths that were its core is a decision

most unwise. Those who seek absolute prevention
of religious themes, whether in song or writing
or research are blasphemers of the intention

of your group, and doing research without citing
all applicable texts and ideas is unjust.
Him you pointed out, on whom fires are alighting,

is one such blasphemer, who wishes to adjust
reality completely to his taste. No god
is chosen as god for your group, since you each trust

to individual conscience, and do not prod
into each others’ private faiths.” He stopped speaking,
so I ventured: “Do you expect us to trod

across that burning plain, where others are shrieking
out their pain, and somehow manage to not get burned?”
He replied, “There is a stream which we are seeking

where no fires fall. The soothing waters are tears turned
into a river that flows downward to this sphere.
These tears are shed by a giant, as I have learned,

built from out the ages, or so it would appear.

The top of him is bronze; his head is made of gold,
while his arms are formed of silver, a metal dear

to smiths throughout the ages. Plates of steel, cold
and hardened, form his torso in Gothic fluting
and the metalwork fine that encased jousters bold

upon the tourney field, so bravely saluting
their chosen ladies. The left of the two limbs splayed
is formed of industrious gears now polluting

the earth, while the other of silicon is made.
The tears and woes of each ages all but the gold mar
and run down in a channel leading to the shade

and sorrow found here, for the rivulet flows far
from its source.”^x I said, “I truly don’t get the way
these waters can shield us from the fires that bar

our safe passage. If they are sorrow’s tears, how may
they help us in this land of suffering, when sprung
from misfortune? How can the river keep at bay

the terrifying storm?” I wished I’d held my tongue,
for he gave me the look again that said it plain:
I was being dense. “On this circled ladder’s rung

are punished the violent, and on this sere plane
falls a mighty wrath. All those who err against art
and nature are subject to this wrathful rain,

but the river springs from a compassionate heart;
therefore its waters will yield to us protection,
so long as we hold fast to its banks from the start.

However, those whose errors are rejections

of the noble principles of the cosmos bright
are so deeply deserving of this correction

that to the stream’s healing powers they have no right.
If we do not stray away from our chosen path
we should escape the torments of their bitter plight.”

This made sense, and since I by far preferred a bath
to the likelihood of my flesh becoming charred,
I stuck close to him, so as not to feel the wrath

of flame upon my skin. I am already scarred
from my numerous encounters with a scalpel;^x
I had no wish to be further branded and marred.

^x The violence against God is done by those who refuse to accept any sign that the Middle Ages was anything but a secular era in our history. The suggestion for this was made by a researcher who is himself secular.

^x For the original image, the Dante is well worth reading. This figure has been adapted for SCA references, of course.

^x The narrator has undergone a number of surgeries and she healed with thick scar tissue.

Inferno: Canto XV

Circle 7: The Violent Against Nature and Art - Knights

Soon we found the rivulet hidden in the rocks
and made our way along the little path it made,
protected by the kindly influence that blocks

the fiery storm. Quickly we left the gloomy shade
of those woe-filled trees behind and were out under the sky.
We came upon a large band armed with spear and blade,

and I found myself startled when first they drew nigh,
for I recognized a member of their order.
He was one I had not expected to espy,

for never was he a fan of plain disorder.
In fact, the very opposite was e'er the case.
I called out to him to come up to the border

of the riverbank and plain. Dragging a great mace
he came to where I was and greeted me by name.
"Sir," I cried, "what misfortune brings you to this place?

Surely it is a mistake; you are of the same
noble company of knights who ever do bear
themselves with dignity." "I have been known to maim

new fighters," he replied, "and cause them oft to wear
more brightly colored bruises than needful; I broke
one newbie's arm, for I heard him in boasting dare

claim that he would surpass me. I thought it no joke,
and since I have used new fighters often as pells,
I reduced that braggart's pride with a single stroke."

"Sir Knight," I protested, "each tale of you tells

of your great chivalry and prowess. You are known
to deeply have imbibed from knighthood's sacred wells.

Often have you the mighty horn of battle blown,
and your insistence on order and tradition
has helped lay the foundation from which we have grown.

You always stamped out the stirrings of sedition,
and I thought you'd be basking in Heaven's glory,
but now I find you burning here in perdition."

"In the nature of knighthood lies the real story,
and just what that nature is we must determine,
for in history the knights are often gory.

We modern knights reach for more than cloaks of ermine,^x
and aspire to the highest and purest ideals,
so therefore have risen above the common vermin."

So said my knightly hero, in spite of the deep weals
and scores burnt on his body by the fiery lash.
"What he says," the poet interrupted, "reveals

the reason for his presence here. He is not rash,
yet still he stands there and speaks as one deluded.
He perceives that the honor bound to that white sash

he wears brings a supremacy undiluted
by the taint of common folk. Vermin he calls those
not within his sect, a sect never intruded

upon by all those he sees as rabble. A rose
is a noble flower, but it has hidden thorns,
and this is a flower of chivalry who chose

arrogance over compassion. He never mourns

over the damage he causes, but is still blind
to his won failings. Without meaning to he warns

you not to stumble into a similar bind.”
“Who is this you travel with?” asked my troubled friend,
“He appears to be no heavy fighter. You’ll find

he has his own agenda, for in the end
non-fighters have no power, and so try to turn
the tide by striving somehow in some way to mend

a perceived tear in the social fabric. He’ll learn,
soon enough, his place in time. Why are you wasting
your journey with him? ‘Tis better by far to burn

than to sit in the sidelines. You should be tasting
the sweetness of fighting, of combat’s joy sublime.
You could re-enact the great Battle of Hastings,

but instead you’re shut away, attempting to rhyme
some silly poem. Go get your sword and your shield
and crawl into your armour while still there is time,

or have you in cowardice chosen to yield?”
In truth I was deeply upset at his manner and speech
and dismayed at this side of him thusly revealed.

The knight and his bright warlike band moved out of reach
and soon in that vast maelstrom had vanished from sight.
I could not accept the text I had heard him preach;

never had he shown me dishonor in a fight,
but by his very own admission was heedless
of the weaker warrior. The deeds of a knight

are more carefully watched, and our hearts bleed less

when by an unbelt’s behavior disappointed.
This distinction, to some, may seem rather needless,

but the chivalry in a way are appointed
sacred receptacles of romantic ideals,
with the most holy oils of honor anointed.

Disillusionment in Peers is something that steals
a little away from the magic we create,
and such a wound festers, though over time it heals

if properly lanced. Disappointment can abate
when contrasted with those Peers who fit their nature
and strive for the best in the world we recreate.^x

^x This is a strong medieval image and a good rhyme. There is no reference to House
Guildemar, whose members are true knights and noble fighters.

^x The Peers here are those exceptions who are in Hell. There are many more Peers in Purgatory
and in Heaven.

Inferno: Canto XVI

Circle 7: The Violent Against Nature and Art - Pelicans

Soon we heard an immense rumbling and roaring,
the foretelling sound of a raging waterfall,
where the river we followed sent itself soaring

over the edge of that great cliff standing so tall
as a boundary between this circle and the next,
where those folk steeped in the sins of deceit are all

forced to face truth, and are considerably vexed
at having to do so. The sound reminded me
of another great cascade in a different text:

Rauros, golden Rauros, between the land and sea,
gateway into Gondor.^x This was nothing like it.
Three brisk figures met up with the poet and me,

and I recognized them, for as a loyal “pit”^x
I had made note of all those whose fine example
I should emulate. A privilege it is to sit

in the nest of a Pelican and to sample
the many joys of service. Volunteers are sought
and opportunities to pitch in are ample.

Those three standing before me were ones I had thought,
as with the knight, to find in a much better place,
for they were among those who extolled how one ought

to run events or prepare for a feast. In case
of emergency, on them one ever could call
for assistance and aid. To find them in disgrace

was a surprise. Many a time I could recall

them lecturing some slightly erring autocrat
who hadn’t met their standards for setting up a hall

or scheduling a tourney. Any bureaucrat
has knowledge of the mountainous pile of papers
it takes to run a group, just as a feast-o-crat^x

understands the effort it takes for pot scrapers,
vegetable peelers, servers, and assistant cooks
to be properly scheduled. Work never tapers

off in a large group, and if you know where to look
there endlessly are further tasks needing doing.
I wondered why the trio standing near the brook

were not in Heaven resting, but in Hell stewing.
“Greetings,” I called to them; they surely deserved
respect, despite their location and ensuing

shame, for in spite of fault, they had my kingdom served.
“Greetings,” one replied. “I am glad to find you here,
to help you out, for from convention you have swerved

in the way you have been acting. It is quite clear
that you need assistance.” I asked him, “What was wrong
with my plans and preparations; I need to hear

any useful feedback, so I can come along
in my learning.” “Technically, your work was correct,”
he replied, “ but as when you try to sing a song

you must stay in key, so must you choose to direct
the day in harmony. While participants enjoyed
themselves , the research far more than we did expect,

and the atmosphere quite medieval, you employed

none of the things we've known to be traditional
in setting up a tourney." I could see he was annoyed,

so answered, "I've brought into repetition all
the time-honored customs, and I set up the lists
in the usually way. While unconditional

praise is not expected or deserved, our fair Mists
seemed somewhat well-served that day. What further pieces
were needed to appease the traditionalists?"

"Well, while no one had knots in their chemises,
and most seemed pleased, you should have sought out my advice.
My list of qualifications never ceases,

and you should not have been left to your own device.
Next time remember that you should ask for my aid,
for too much self-confidence is a vice."

'Twas clear to me why in this circle he'd been laid,
but I held my tongue. The second peer looked more tired
than the other two, so turning to her, I bade

her tell me the reason why. She looked rather ired,
but not at me, and said, "I'm getting somewhat burnt
from running so many events." Next I inquired,

"Can't someone else take over?" "No one has yet learnt
all they need to know," was her answer, "so therefore
I must take it on. While it's not as if there weren't

willing volunteers, they'd never done it before,
and so I gave them busywork and harmless tasks
to make them happy. Of offices, I hold four,

since no one else is ready. One gentleman asks

me about becoming a voice herald for the court
every time I see him; my answer always masks

the sad fact that, with my duties, I'm far too short
on time to train him." She looked so in need of sleep
that my small line of questioning I did abort.

The third Peer merely looked at me from far too steep
a nose; for I was too plebian to address,
therefore her own sagacious counsel she did keep.

Ev'ry event she put on was such a success
that three times over she would have been made a Peer,
if possible, so therefore my chance to impress

her was small and paltry. Still, though only a mere
member of the populace, I was not stranded
in a metaphysical plain so harsh and sere

that nothing grew, and all about me were branded
with flame. I politely bid the trio adieu
and went on with the adventure I'd been handed.

^x J.R.R. Tolkien: [The Lord of the Rings](#)

^x Pelican in training. Although the narrator is a protégé to a wonderful Pelican, she is laying it
on a little thick here.

^x Head cook is the proper term, and the narrator knows this and outside of Hell hates the term
feast-o-crat.

Inferno: Canto XVII

Circle 7: The Violent Against Nature and Art - Laurels

For my adventure a most impossible steed
flew down to deliver us beyond that steep pass
to the eighth circle, where rule sins of fraud and greed

On its hide was patterned the most amazing brass
more intricate than aught a burial ship
and costly was the goldwork wrought upon its ass,

yet here and there one could see, where a ring did slip,
the rough hide of a common donkey was displayed,
at least in the latter half, for also a strip

of lizard skin did show. So strange the way t'was made
I did not wish to ponder what kind of mating
could produce such a creature: Still, each wondrous shade

of precious metal was not intimidating
but awe inspiring, producing a kind of trust
brought on by wealth and power. This monster's plating

disguised its hideous nature; I was nonplussed,
however, and not at all that eager to mount.
I looked out on the plain previously discussed

when I spied approaching two whose skills did amount
to more than that monstrous beast's hide of hammered gold
and whose talents had multiplied beyond all count:

they were the epitome of art, so I'm told:
one was in the most gorgeous Italian array,
and it was she who directly began to scold.

She grabbed my wrist before I could snatch it away,

and harrumphed to herself, turning over the seam;
your threads have already begun to break and fray,

and 'tis uneven. What mean you by this display?
Have you no pride in your appearance, no concern
for how you present yourself? Will you so portray

the noble middle ages thus? Why can't you learn
proper costuming period ways and means?"
I looked into a visage so wrathfully stern

that I quailed inside. "If you must so vent your spleens,"
spoke my guide, "pick on someone closer to your skill;
at least this one isn't wearing tunic and jeans.

She's making a stab at something she never will
be too adept at^x, but at least she is trying.
Your criticism could eventually kill

the hopes of one with more potential, whose dying
dreams could trace their mortal wounds to your bitter speech.
Instead of an attack, on which you're relying,

why don't you try to use your skill to heal the breach
'twixt those knowing the art and these without such skill?"
I suppose 'twas useless in a way to beseech

reason from those in Hell, who no matter what will
justify the wrongful actions they have chosen.
My guide ceased expostulating and became still,

while the Peer went on to criticize his hosen.
The second Laurel vented out a mighty sigh,
and stated "Compared to dinners that are frozen

three months in advance, so that they come out too dry,

and still called period when made by Sarah Lee,
that mythical cook who served tables low and high,

your costume woes seem rather trivial, petty
almost. The worst error comes when a substitute
is chosen o'er food stated in a recipe,

with a story of a farmer too destitute
to use chickens, and so he went and poached pheasant
or quail or some such bird. Why, research this astute,

based on conjecture only, is indeed pleasant
to the cook who cannot bother with the harsh task
of documentation, concocting a peasant

or other excuse for such changes. Now I ask
you, if Italian limonia is your meat,
then should you stray from capons, expecting to bask

in the exotic glories of cooking a treat
for modern tongues using game birds? Clearly it calls
for chicken; the recipe extant is complete,

so any differing choice obviously falls
into the realm of whim." The poet gently smiled,
and spoke: "I have feasted in great Florentine halls

many a time on limonia; at times wild
birds were used instead of tamer fowl in season
and when hunting was good our taste buds were beguiled

by such variations, and when done with reason
seem not to be a sin." The Laurel shook her head,
then asked, "Have you ever found recipes that show

such a change to be fact?" "No, but as I have said,

I have feasted at a Florentine's high table,
and in the actual middle ages been fed,

and with such experience should be quite able
to tell you what we ate." She did not seem appeased,
answering, "I work with research, not with fable,

and without documentation cannot be pleased.
Take your charlatan cookery away from here,"
and so she left us. Time was flying so we seized

the opportunity to leave. The coast was clear
and so we climbed atop that beast, to thus descend
another level, leaving the flames that still sear

the violent spirits. Those who ever pretend
and who cloak themselves in trickery and with guile
were next for viewing^x. We flew closer to Hell's end.

^x The narrator is not good at sewing. One would hope she is somewhat better at poetry.

^x The eighth circle, with its ten evil ditches, is dedicated to sins of fraud. This circle dominates the Inferno.

Inferno: Canto XVIII*Circle 8: Seducers*

As we rode upon that beast, the strangest of boats,
I spied deep gouges in the obsidian stone
which appeared castles' concentric moats,

the dankest of ditches where no friendly light shone^x;
and the air instead seemed a blanket to smother
each taken breath, as if those who would not atone

for their deceitful acts wished to, from another's
seeking glance, hide their wretched and woeful faces,
much as a child conceals a wrong from its mother

and so will seek out and hide in darkened places.
This woven fog of miserable pain could not block
these souls from our sight nor work to hide the spaces

where they stood shivering and bare without a sock
even to hide their loathsome flesh. We dismounted
from our monstrous gilded steed. I quickly took stock

of my bleak surroundings. Shame, perhaps, accounted
for their downcast eyes as the damned shuffled onward
in single file lines. Great devils were mounted

on gigantic goats, shaggy and horny; forward
they urged the wretched sinners, with clubs in their hands,
or so I first thought. Those clubs were pointed toward

the shivering herd, enforcing the reprimands
of the demonic tormentors, and so immense
were these maces the souls obeyed all the commands.

I'd never seen such weapons, or bludgeons so dense;

their shape seemed familiar, though grossly distorted.
Then I realized why there was no need for a fence

to keep in the tormented. Some have reported
the endowments of demons, and now I could see
that the women reputed to have cavorted

with devils had amazing capacities,
for these "clubs" were in fact phalluses so grotesque
that they beat off the sinners into miseries

too horrible to contemplate. While a Kafka-esque
vision of Hell was something I had expected,
with giant beetle transformations, a burlesque

show of the rudest kind, with sinners corrected
in such an adolescent manner left me shocked.
My land's founders were Puritans who projected

evil onto sex, and I found my senses balked
at such a literal reversal. I stood there
with my mouth agape; but then hastily I blocked

it, feigning a great yawn, while trying not to stare.
My guide watched my contortions with deep amusement,
then again took up his lecture: "These souls all share

the wiles of seduction, aiming for bemusement
on the parts of their victims, who then could not see
the poison in the honey, so to refuse meant

missing out on a pleasant opportunity
for friendship and conversation, never guessing
such could lead to the marring of their sanctity.

Even in your world innocence is a blessing

to those of tender years; your own laws look askance
at those who leer at lads and maidens. Confessing

such attraction may earn a condemning glance,
yet preferring friendship and assuming a wise
and innocent discourse, then offering to dance

not with words but with bodies and dealing in lies
that lead to loss of innocence and corruption
is a damnable offence, and the Lord of Flies

is therefore made master. You know the disruption
of daily life that comes with infatuation,
and with such wrongful romance the interruption

of ambition and studious revelation
has an impact of a young people too profound,
and so the man or woman whose fascination

with young lads or maidens^x leads them beyond the bounds
of accepted behavior, so that they deceive
and seduce, must come and tread upon these rank grounds,

besieged by vile demons and prepared to receive
their due chastisement. I asked then, "Are there other
seducers here than those folk who seem to believe

that the underage who are found away from mother
are their personal prey?" "Yes indeed," spoke my guide,
"take yon gentleman – he acted as a brother

to one vulnerable and trusting who then tried
to please him, and therefore ended up in his bed
without knowing how she got there. Although he lied

as to his intentions, she took the blame instead
of blaming him. He now stands there, covered in shit
and slime, shaking with a fearful loathing and dread.

With such a tryst you may ask, 'What is wrong with it –
they agreed,' and yet the lady was deserted
like a faded daisy in a chain who was fit

to be used and thrown away. He ne'er reverted
back to friend, for that had been a guise to woo her.
Now the sweetness of his manner has reverted

to a form that is far more fitting, and truer
garb is given to him in this pit where with dung
he is clothed. Any woman who is a doer

of such evil, who also has such sweet songs sung
to the unwary for their destruction, is here."
Indeed, those in the file, whose heads with shame were hung,

were of both sexes. While it seemed a bit severe
a punishment for such a crime, I remembered
my own romantic past, and shed a tear^x.

^x The eighth circle of Hell is comprised of ten bolgias, or evil ditches.

^x This refers to those who seduce young men and women who are underage or who are very young. This circle is not reserved for child molesters; while that may involve fraud on many levels, it is far more a crime of violence and betrayal.

^x What the narrator is imagining is left up to the reader's imagination. Try not to go overboard.

Inferno: Canto XIX*Circle 8: Flatterers*

My single tear soon dried, even in that cold air,
and we moved across a bridge to the second ditch
to observe and learn from the next form of despair.

A strange feeling hit me: my skin began to itch;
my guide muttered, "Flatterers! I ne'er could abide
their falsely honeyed chatter." The thought made me twitch

and I did not want to meet those who did reside
in that place; I saw enough of them out of Hell,
in my daily life, having been on either side

of that coin. I've had compliments that I could tell
were for effect, with no sincerity at all.
Others have snubbed me for reasons I know quite well,

considering my lack of rank. In ev'ry fall,
when one reign is over and done, like autumn leaves
courtiers drift away. The very ones who'd brawl

over the chance to hold a cup or fasten greaves
upon their lord of state suddenly disappear,
like fog in sunlight, once he has stepped down. It grieves

me to see a new viscount looking far and near
for friends he thought he had. However, if he waits
to win the throne again, they all will reappear.

In the deepened gloom I peered down at those estates.
The many shadows served to confuse me at first,
for the oddest shapes were being rolled round at rates

too fast for me to soon comprehend. In a burst

of understanding I saw that these were sinners
rolled up tightly and then spun around by the worst

of hardened demons. These were no rank beginners,
for they all wore team colors, and were competing
in a dreadful kind of game. Who were the winners,

I could not tell, nor wished I to give a greeting
and find out; I was not interested in playing.
By the ditch's side I heard some kind of bleating,

and I saw a line of fresh-caught souls displaying
no courage whatsoever. Scarcely could I blame
them; they knew that on this level they were staying,

and they seemed to have no heart for the demon's game.
No wonder, for every flattering Janus
and sycophant who borrowed from another's fame

was subjected to a process cruel and heinous:
each one was scrunched up tight and rolled into a ball,
then the tongue was inserted into the anus,

and while that was wretched enough it was not all,
for they all were with their accoutrements bound tight,
the symbols of those they'd flattered. Like a shawl

was a laurel wreath round some; the belt of a knight
was constricting more than one fellow like a snake.
Those who courted royalty had the darkest plight,

as the bright points of countless coronets did take
their toll upon the naked flesh, piercing them through
so that after their transformation they did make

a sort of whiffle ball. I watched as the line grew

even longer, swelled with fresh numbers, and wondered
at their increase. “A popular reign must be through,”

observed my guide^x, “and these folk recently plundered
the royal coffers of influence, and would tag
along still, but by their deeds they have been sundered

from whatever august presence they wished to brag
about knowing; perhaps Duke Fabian or Jade,
and now they are marooned here on this loathsome crag

awaiting their torment in this eternal shade.”
One spirit looked up at this and said, “I sought no king;
my friend was head of a court, and so I stayed

to help. I was sincere in every single thing
I said and did, and just because she took a break
from service on that level there should be no sting

in the ending of our friendship. I had a stake
in knowing the right people, and though she’s a Peer,
I met Laurels more active, so for my own sake

I befriended them. As I said, I was sincere
when I praised their art or blackwork; those Peers I chose
had to be the best at what they did; that was clear.

Since I am for value, the Ladies of the Rose
are most suitable companions, now don’t you think?
What’s the harm in praising a lord’s new girlfriend’s clothes:

faux tiger fur, after all, will not stretch or shrink.
What is wrong with pointing out only what is good
to those who matter? Why am I here on the brink

of becoming a bocci ball? Indeed, what would

you have me do – take it back? Frankness hurts feelings,
and the sensibilities of those in rank should

not be so injured. You’ve likely had no dealings
with those above you; I see no wreath or token.”
At that she turned her back, listened to the squealings

of her fellows, and shuddered. I had not spoken
once throughout her tirade, nor had the master bard.
We watched her get rolled up, in silence unbroken

but for her loud protestations, somewhat marred
by the placement of her tongue. I was quite ready
to depart down that roadway so bitter and hard.

^x Again, Dante seems to have studied up on SCA practices and subculture, or else he would not be so good a guide. The same could roughly be said for Virgil in his guidance of Dante.

Inferno: Canto XX*Circle 8: Peerage Points*

“So, my friend,” said Dante, “what think you of my work?”
“It’s magnificent, “ I started to say, then stopped
and looked nervously behind me into the murk

concealing the second ditch. Discreetly I mopped
my brow and lamely concluded, “It is just fine^x.”
As we continued a sneaking suspicion popped

into my mind that I was being teased. To whine
about such jesting would reflect upon my self,
so I ignored his sly little grin. The incline

was steep, leading us to the tertiary shelf
where figures appeared to be trying hard to swim
in brackish water. Said my guide, “Nary a Guelph

nor a Ghibelline^x to be seen; instead this grim
place holds your own people with their many factions.
These folk wanted a process neat and trim

for determining Peers, without the distractions
of applying abstract concepts, so they assigned
systems of points with additions and subtractions

based on specified behavior. This was designed
to make for civil council deliberations
as to the ways nobility can be divined

and simplify the various machinations
by which protégés and squires are turned into Peers.
Honor and chivalry are imaginations

unless regulated, according to their fears.

What they don’t understand is that ‘tis through debate
and exchange of ideas over the years

that these values are ever understood. No great
concept can be carved up into such lists and charts,
and no individual is a perfect mate

for models already shaped. A cook’s tray of tarts
shows each having what’s essential to the flavor,
yet each tart bakes a different way, although the parts

are all the same.” Said I, “Yet, in seeking favor,
is there not an ingredient list, to extend
your metaphor? You hold forth with such disfavor

on a system of peerage points, but to defend
the concept, is it not similar to a list
of cooking ingredients?” “While you comprehend

the reasoning of these sinners here, I insist
that you take this conceit further. Are all tarts made
in the same manner? Surely good cooks resist

the idea that there could be no decent trade
for fruit or spice and that one must keep to cherry
when sloe has come to season in its shady glade.

To keep back a deserving lord and to tarry
in awarding him a rank for which he is fit
due to a dearth of “peerage points” is wrong. Marry,

you cannot legislate honor or mandate wit,
and those who insist upon doing so are weighed
down in that sewage water with chains that are knit

out of the very systems and points that they made.”

“I understand,” I said, “why they in Hell must stay,
but I do not comprehend why this circle’s shade

is their particular doom. What I heard you say
is that this circle of Hell is reserved for fraud
and it seems that something else has led them astray

rather than lies and deceit. I cannot applaud
their systems, but I confess to being confused
as to the reasons they are placed here.” With a nod

the poet explained. “Ignorance may be excused,
but of these concepts these folk are not unaware
and rather have chosen to present them diffused

in form and meaning. The spirit must ever beware
those leaders in whom they trust who may misrepresent
the values they are trusted with and that they share

with those who believe in them. Great the detriment
to the soul who in such fashion is led astray
and so these shepherds are among the fraudulent.”

“Now,” said Dante, “shall we perhaps be on our way,
for time is running onward; we must not be left
behind. Past Saturday dawn’s light we cannot stay^x

unless of Heaven’s light you wish to be bereft.
On Friday, as I understand, your events start,
and on Sunday the site is closed. Through yonder cleft

at bottom of the freezing hole we must depart
to seek the lessons of Purgatory. Seven
more ditches we must explore, or have you the heart

to finish out this journey? The road to Heaven

requires a look at what you would rather hide
in yourself as well as in others. Eleven

apostles were left after our savior died:
one was undone by betrayal^x. What conviction
do you lack, what festering wound have you denied

that can lead you to a different crucifixion?
You have not been sent here to judge what others have done
but to look into your own heart’s dereliction.”

“Master,” I said, “you looked upon worse and still won
your way to Heaven’s gates; so will I persevere.”
Indeed, I would by no ancient bard be outdone!

^x Sincere praise given without ulterior motives is, of course, not flattery, but the narrator’s nerves are understandably a bit taut at the moment.

^x Ruling Florentine families.

^x This follows the timeline of the original, and the three-day pattern of a Beltane event proves to be a good model as well.

^x Betrayal is the worst of the sins in Hell and is at the bottom. Betrayal of self may also be what Dante is referring to here.

Inferno: Canto XXI

Circle 8: Anonymous E-mail Senders

“Now pride is a deceit and false pride doubly so,”
said my guide, seemingly in passing as we went
down the next steep slope. I wondered at the bright glow

that lit up the broken dirt of the embankment.
Far from being comforting in that gloomy place
the light was awful and glaring. Disappointment

welled up in me, for I’d been hoping to replace
the gloom and shadows with a more radiant light,
but I would have to wait until I’d left that space,

for Hell has no radiance. I found that my sight
was not impaired by the glare, for as we arrived
at the bottom of the trench we could see the blight

that lay upon the land. What few plants that had survived
the poisoned soil were a loathsome green and rank
in smell. Giant scaffolds had somehow been contrived

to hold their vegetable tentacles from the bank.
When I looked up I could see, wrapped within the vines,
the bodies of sinners exposed so ev’ry shank

and naked limb was seen, despite the lofty twines.
Most clear were the faces of those so held aloft,
on which were writ shame and embarrassment like signs.

Nor could any one turn a face to shadows soft,
for toward the revealing light each head was bound.
There were no shadows, kind or not, up in that loft.

Each soul showed a sense of nakedness so profound

it went beyond the skin into the spirit deep
within. I noticed that the lights were on the ground,

staring up like gigantic eyes, as if to keep
the sinners under observation. I shouted:
“You there,” to the figure closest upon that steep

leafy trellis, “what has brought you here?” He pouted,
not wanting to speak to me, but a vine lashed out
and whipped him across the face. He said, “I rerouted

a few, not many, e-mail messages^x without
giving my name so my sendings could not be traced,
telling a lord that he was fat and full of gout,

and that his sense of chivalry had been misplaced,
that he buggered young goats and his wife was a whore,
and at the feast his food with poison should be laced.”

“Goodness me,” I replied, “what did you have in store
for him? Was plotting murder by poison your crime?”
He looked rather shocked. “No indeed; he was a bore

and a pompous windbag, a political slime,
but I couldn’t kill anybody. No great sin
was mine when I sent off that message – at the time

he’d managed a lot of trouble within
our local canton. While everyone was upset,
I was the only one to do anything. In

sending off that e-mail I made more than a threat;
I struck a blow for justice! Surely you agree
that this was a challenge that needed to be met,

and so I undertook the cause.” “I do not see,”

said I, “why your name and identity were cloaked
in your message. There was no true audacity

in your action. No fires of justice were stoked,
no revolution started.” “Yes, so it would seem,”
pouted he, “and thus my list status was revoked,

although I think I upheld my part of the Dream
by speaking truth so that he would no longer play,
that pompous ass! Too righteous by far, as I deem.

He, not I, should be stuck o’er this foul bank of clay,
and I should be hearing Heaven’s sweetest singing.”
“Come along now,” said my guide, “he has had his say

and so, like all others here, succeeds in bringing
power to the very lights that shine upon him.
The hot air produced when, to his grievance clinging,

he speaks, could power all of Hell and more.” So grim
was the sinner’s face on hearing the poet’s words
I almost laughed, but in that place laughter’s a whim

not lightly given in to. I saw loathsome birds
like crows in a field of ripe corn, were swooping round
and pecking at those there bound, dropping rancid turds

upon their helpless victims. Many could be found
adorning the human fruit of these grasping plants
and later I learned that in Hell these birds abound,

in mocking rasping voices echoing the rants
of those forever angry, and imitating
the lewd acts of squires who could not keep their pants

on at late night parties. So debilitating

to the spirit were these nasty fowl that I feared
to speak my question then, and thus hesitating

I followed my guide, he with venerable beard,
down to the embankment to see the next level,
while in my own perception it seemed the birds leered

at me, waiting for a cue. No other devil
had so disturbed me. They seemed quite pleased to be there;
sinners were their feast and Hell a giant revel.

I wished to soon be done with Hell; I’d had my share
of demons to torment me. I feared to tarry,
lest I somehow get caught in that pit of despair.

^x While the sin of anonymous and nasty e-mail messaging was not a sin in Dante’s time it does seem to be a rather unwholesome product of the modern era and so has replaced one of the Dantean sin in this piece.

Inferno: Canto XXII*Circle 8: Graft*

Not speaking the fear that had risen within me,
we passed from one arch to another. From that peak
there was a clear view of the ditch, and I could see

a small pond that bubbled. A terrifying shriek
rent the air, and I took a reflexive step back,
slipping and almost falling to the pool so bleak,

yet my guide caught and steadied me. Said he, “this crack
in the circles of Hell is specially reserved
for those who used their status to full up a lack

they perceived. Their punishment is richly deserved,
and I deeply hope your fate lies not in this pool
and that your own integrity you have preserved.”

Just then a demon rushed by with a monstrous tool,
a hook cruelly and wickedly barbed, which he thrust
into the water. “You!” he shouted, “Who thought to fool

those around you, you filthy wallowers in lust
and in greed, take that! You try to hide in the sludge,
but I’ve caught you!” Like berries from beneath a crust

of pie yanked out by a boy, ten, so I could judge,
souls came up on his hook, all shrieking and squirming.
“I’ll admit,” said my guide, “to somewhat of a grudge

against grafters, who here are kept, thus confirming
the values I hold to be true.^x I know that graft
is common political practice affirming

the pleasures of power, yet when virtue’s placed aft

and privilege put forward there can be no moral
good.” He was interrupted when a devil laughed

as a man was dragged up on a bed of coral
so rough and so jagged that it ripped through his skin,
which he did not like, for his protests were oral,

though lacking coherence, being somewhat akin
to the scream of a Nazgul, or so I’ve been told^x,
and no wonder he howled, for attached to his skin

were glistening dots, making my blood run cold
when I saw what they were: various leeches
of differing sizes and shapes had taken hold.

Then said the poet o’er the laughing and screeching,
“The body politic is healthy only if all
of the parts work together, as St. Paul teaches

when he speaks of the church, as perhaps you recall^x.
Thus grafters are leeches on the greater body
who feed for themselves to the detriment of all.

Such a leech in your group takes work that is shoddy
and bequeaths unto it unearned recognition,
getting some favor in return, possibly bawdy

in nature but not always so. Precognition
is not needed to know where these folk will be placed,
at least if you have learned the rules of perdition.

The political body has now been replaced
by the sinner’s own body, his wrongs inverted
so the actions are reversed and never effaced.^x”

Just then a demon with a leer most perverted

roughly shoved me aside to rush up to the shore.
He held a shepherd's crook that had been converted

into a weapon of torture, with which he bore
deep into the pool, stirring as if 'twas soup stock,
then pulling up a man. "I have you now, you whore!"

the devil loudly yelled, and I stepped back in shock.
I had seen him before and had liked him quite well^x,
yet here he was, with leeches attached to his cock.

At night 'round the campfires people like to tell
tales, and not all the telling is of Robin Hood
or Thor or Arthur or a stranger at a well.

"No shit" stories from Estrella are surely good,
but some stories are not quite so well-intended
and are meant to hurt if perchance they should

be believed. I'd not held with those who contended
that this man had given awards based on favors
of a carnal nature. Now he was apprehended

and I could see 'twas true. Yet while such behaviors
may truly exist I still choose not to pay heed
to the tales. The fruits of vice have many flavors,

yet though my friend in the pool belongs there indeed
there are other ditches for gossip created
just as circles of Hell do contain wrath and greed.

I turned as the devil angrily berated
my friend; I wished not to witness his shame
nor see his flesh torn into. The noise abated

and I hastened to move along. "The truth of fame,"

said Dante mildly, "is that risk of infamy follows,
and your well-loved poet said something much the same

in describing its house^x. Names spoken in hollows
and in castles are often besmirched, as I know,
yet there is truth in some rumors. She who swallows

all that is spoken without discernment will grow
sick on such food. Still, worse by far are those who cook
up such poison, and so soon your travels will show

that there are those sinners that for whom such a hook
as was used on the miserable wretch we saw
now is insufficient. Shall we go take a look^x?"

^x Dante really disliked graft and is fairly harsh in his own Inferno.

^x At the time of writing this piece the narrator had resisted seeing the LOTR movies. That's a different form of hell in her opinion.

^x 1 Corinthians 12:12-27

^x As the sinner was a leech on the body politic, so now the leeches feed on the body of the sinner.

^x This is most likely a literary affectation, so quit trying to figure out who it is...

^x Chaucer: "The House of Fame"

^x Gossipers are in the ninth ditch with the sowers of discord.

Inferno: Canto XXIII*Circle 8: Hypocrites*

Silent, walking apart, wrapped each in our own thought^x,
we wended our way down to the eroded ledge,
and still I found myself afraid of being caught,

if not in that ditch then another. Those who dredge
the pond behind me are too fond of the work,
and I trusted them not, seeing them form a hedge

in my mind's inner eye; they were ready to jerk
me back with the sharp spikes of their hideous spears^x.
None were there, but they seemed in the shadows to lurk.

So busy was I in searching for hidden leers
that I forgot to look at there I was going;
I stepped on a pebble and slipped, right down to the shears,

sliding with the stones and the scree,^x my fear growing
ever more acute. Where in Hell was I heading?
I had lost my way and had no way of knowing

if this were a slip or a metaphoric shedding
of any hope of Heaven. What was the next ditch?
I wished to awaken, wrapped warm in my bedding

after running a tourney without any hitch
and hearing the merriment from the Saucy Wench.
Heck, to get out of Hell I would learn how to stitch

an Italian Ren. costume, or sit at a bench
and learn to craft slippers of finest soft leather
for a tentacled squid. I landed with a wrench

on ground that was nothing like sweet Scottish heather.

Indeed, I was lying on something that prickled,
and I dug all around to discover whether

I had landed on thorns. Perhaps I was pickled^x
on a homemade cordial, for I pulled out a crown,
which explained the prickles, and then I was tickled

to discover an armband that went with my gown.
I slipped it right on and rather gingerly stood
and saw the dear poet climbing carefully down.

He frowned in irritation and asked, "Is it good
to take the spoils of Hell and with them adorn
your God-given body? Far, far better you should

eschew all vain adornments than end up forlorn,
a tenant of shade in these melancholy rings.
Besides, the fabric of your memory is torn

if you remember nothing of what this action brings
in your most loved Voyage of the Treader of Dawn,
as gold can create monsters as well as crown kings.^x

I thought of Eustace, wanting that ring to be gone,
so I slipped it off and threw it into the air
where it caught on a crag and hung thereupon.^x

A pile of golden coins was heaped at my feet there;
the poet reached down and started to rub,
and soon the gold disappeared, leaving the coin bare.

"Take this as a lesson; for while an ugly grub
contains a butterfly within, sometimes beauty
is only outward, though many people will dub

that beauty as truth. It is ever our duty

to look beyond to meaning, which I hope
you try, lest what you gain be such untrue booty.”

“What bolga is this?” I asked. “What sinners here mope
and gnaw at their wrongdoings as dongs on a bone?”
“This very ditch,” said my guide, “has much greater scope

than what you can see. The souls who now dwell here once shone
as bright as that coin did, but that shine was mere guilt
that covered their natures. Hypocrites loan

out a part of themselves. Like a sword with a hilt
encrusted with gems but the steel is too brittle,
so they mislead. From the air are promises built,

but when it comes time to act they are merely spittle
and sound unless it behooves them to act. The face
that is shown is simply a mask; if you whittle

it away to find truth you may only replace
it with another mask: many faces they hold
up to the world. Ephemeral is the grace

they give unto others. Otherwise they are cold,
demanding a profit from encounters each time.”
I saw then the sinners in a circle of gold;

one that glittered dully through a dark coat of grime.
They all were clothed in heavily wrought golden robes;
like players in a solemn passion play or mime

their faces were covered with masks well past the lobes
of their ears, so their identities were well hid,
each man or woman merely a calm smiling globe.

Inexorably they circled, as they were bid

by the choleric overseers who infest Hell
at each level, and under the gold serene lid

of each mask they seethed, unable to tell
their versions of their stories to we passers-by,^x
so firmly was each encased in an ornate shell.

In a silence not broken by a single cry
I shuddered and turned from the crowns and the coins;
the narrow escape I had had made my mouth dry;^x

in a metaphoric sense I girded my loins.
Determined to be more wary in my journey
I went where that path with the next one joins.

^x In the original, Dante and Virgil are pursued at this point.

^x The narrator is not pursued in fact, but in her imagination and in her inner psyche.

^x This may be a slight allusion to a scene in C.S. Lewis's *The Silver Chair*.

^x drunk

^x In *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* by C.S. Lewis, Eustace finds himself on a bed of coins and crowns and he puts an armband he finds there on and goes to sleep thinking of treasure. He turns into a dragon.

^x This mirrors the fate of the armband in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*.

^x The sinners in Hell all seem to need to speak and tell their stories, with a few exceptions, such as the anonymous e-mailer. The hypocrites, who excel at telling their own versions of things, are forcibly mute.

^x Again, a reference to *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* where the characters have a narrow escape from the pool that turns all things into gold. There is a brief quarrel there based on greed, and hypocrisy is linked to greed throughout this canto.

Inferno: Canto XXIV

Circle 8: Thieves

The climb out of this ditch to be swallowed again
by the next one's misery was indeed daunting;
so much so that I cannot describe with my pen

the broken hateful rocks that seemed to be flaunting
their height and jagged contours. I stood there entrapped
by my weakness and the thought that had been haunting

me: that my fate was somehow hideously mapped
out so that to one of these ditches I was doomed.
Now I suppose at that time I should have been slapped

for not listening and thinking I was entombed
when I was sent on this trip as an act of grace
in order to escape the fate that o'er me loomed

but which was not yet met. Just one look at the face
of my guide gave me healing; there shone compassion,
and with gentleness he helped me climb from that place.

Slowly we made our way up, after a fashion,
and once done I sank down to the ground, gulping for air.
"Tarry not!" cried my guide. "Your strength you must ration,

'tis true, but the greater ascent cannot compare
to this paltry hill. In your vigilance cease not;
forge onward and upward,^x for only if you dare

will you see Heaven's shining gates. Now those who rot
in this place are thieves, those who have taken either goods
or ideas from merchants." I saw figures caught

by moving ropes and stood to look. There were no woods

to conceal these wretches who, as I saw, were bound
by mottled entwining reptiles flaring their hoods

and rolling with their captives on the barren ground,
in particular biting and binding their hands.
Suddenly, by my ear, I heard a hissing sound

and saw a flame shoot past and into a man whose bands
held him tight. In an instant he burned into ash,
which quickly fell and mingled with the sooty sands.

I had barely blinked my eyes, for in just a flash
of time he was hit and struck down, and yet as soon
the sands stirred; something moved and formed amidst the trash,

and then the man stood again on that shifting dune.
I know of the phoenix, not from Harry Potter
but from older myths, yet what therein is a boon

was not for this sinner, who seemed somehow tauter,
tensed up in an agony of being reshaped
into his own self as a thief and a plotter.

"Your group," mused Dante, "out of ashes has scraped
a Phoenix existence, a way of life renewed,
yet where gold is refashioned the dross is japed.

If your personas, as you do call them, are hewed
from noble matter such shaping raises the man,
yet if marble and purest metals are eschewed

in favor of mud and basest clay that he can
craft into a vile nature then he is debased
from himself, and there is great pain in such a plan.

Sadly, the ills of history can't be effaced

when people infect themselves with deadly disease.
You hope that chivalric ideals have replaced

thievery and dishonor. There are those who seize
upon any opportunity for a gain
and without thought for honor do what they please.”

I walked over to the man reenfleshed in pain
and asked him a question: “What brings you to this spot?”
He sneered, “unlike the others on this godless plain

my gains were fairly gotten; no item was hot
or lifted with sticky fingers. An honest trade
is what I ply, for a merchant I am and not

a thief. My wares were simply copied and then made
in Pakistan or Peru with cheaper wages
and then sold at Pennsic War under oaken shade.”

“So you copied,” I said, “from medieval sages
and manuscripts?” “Oh no,” he shrugged, “from current wares,
from what I have seen on modern artists’ pages;^x

for a lower price I can turn out twenty pairs
of cuisses where it takes an armorer twelve weeks
to make one pair, and after all, who really cares

where the product is made? Only rich oil sheiks
can afford some armor or Byzantine brooches;
thus I provide exactly what the buyer seeks.”

“But what of those ‘pon whose art your work encroaches?”
I asked. The man became as enflamed as the bolt
that had just burned him. “I need not your reproaches,”

he bellowed. “You putrid sanctimonious dolt,

it’s a free country still, and chivalry be damned!”
He convulsed, as if hit with an electric volt,

when by a great and scaly reptile he was rammed
and with venomous talons rendered fore and aft.
Great gleaming fangs into his tender flesh jammed,

and as we moved on we heard his screams upon the draft
of air. “Come,” said my guide, “this next you want to see;
at the center are those whose theft affects our craft.”

I followed the Master, filled with an inner glee
at being included by him as a poet,
though compared to his my work is a travesty.

^x This is a rephrasing of the direction given in Aslan’s country in *The Last Battle* by C.S. Lewis.

^x The sin here is not so much in the outsourcing, but in the stealing of designs made by his contemporaries.

Inferno: Canto XXV*Circle 8: Thieves – Plagiarism*

As we approached the center of that evil ditch
what I took at first to be a looming mountain
was a woman with more dugs than a mongrel bitch,

and from each teat there spouted forth quite a fountain
of milk. Drinking greedily from each swollen breast
was a figure. Behind stood the central mountain^x

that connected this evil hole to all the rest,
but the woman dwarfed it like a misshapen hill.
Said my guide, “Those sucking at her are on a quest

for fame and praise. By imbibing they think they will
become known as bards and poets, for through her flows
the milk on which artists feed, yet she is a mill

that taints its very waters. The poison then grows
as it is consumed by those who feed off others’
writing. At feasting board the bard who proudly shows

his prowess by merely spitting up this mother’s
milk is a base thief who has stolen the prince’s ring
given as a token. The rancid teat smothers

the freely flowing stream that makes the spirit sing.”
I looked up at those still suckling at stolen verse,
then my eye traveled down to see a gruesome thing.

While the swollen dugs were abhorrent this was worse,
for as they took food in so these charlatan bards
also let waste out. I held back a sudden curse,^x

for underneath them, like a second row of cards,

lay e’en more feeders sucking at the waste:
those who steal not the plate, who steal the broken shards

and put them together, neglecting in their haste
to document or give credit where it is due
and who merely rearrange according to taste.^x

On seeing that fountain I turned a greenish hue;
though my bowels were empty I began retching,
trying not to look at that miserable stew.

Now you may think this second level’s stretching
a point, but I have had students^x who plagiarized
plagiarism, and their work was far less fetching.

The rank ‘keg party’ left me almost paralyzed
but for the heaving of my guts. “Don’t shy away
from passing along what you have here realized,”

broke in the poet. “There are truths you must convey,
for through your journey you are witness in this place,
and you must not weaken what you have seen today.”

“Perhaps,” I replied, “I should leave out the disgrace
of the drink; I know of people who would disdain
the crudeness of the image which contains no grace.”

“Grace,” the Master told me, “in truth does not pertain
solely to beauty or style. Grace is what saves
and so can be found in the one who must remain

in the straw of a barn^x or in the earth of graves,
in the high and lower functions of the body,
or even in your rhyming, in its faulty staves.

Do not separate the sublime from the bawdy.

Pretentiousness is lost when you simply write truth.
Describing a scene, whether simple or gaudy

as it should be spoken ought to be amply couth
for those who need to hear your words. 'Tis in facing
that which concerns the body that we can find ruth

and balm for our many sins, for in replacing
that swollen corpus of false art with something nice
and pleasing we lose the sense that in defacing

poetry through apish imitation we twice
are drinking poison and slime. It is in our clay
that we live and breathe and thus that clay must suffice

as chariot for our pains and joys." "If I may,"
said I, breaking in, "Is that why Chaucer's tales
please me so much? Farting over windows^x, some say,

is base and serves no purpose and so it fails
to be much more than humor in the lowest sense,
and so this is the atmosphere that prevails

amongst those who are, perhaps, a little too tense,
and who consider themselves to be the elite,
intellectually speaking." "In the defense

of my own work^x I must say we're never complete
unless body and soul are one in death and life
both^x, as well as in our writing. Books are replete

with what is called the grotesque. Our internal strife
is made quite visible as patterns on our skins;
we are as wounded by cholera as by the knife.

Why else do you think that in Hell our very sins

are punished and acted out through our bones and flesh?
When the hounds chase the lazy they bite at their shins,^x

and thieves become tangled within the serpent's mesh.^x
Thieves of poetry thus drink tainted milk and shit;
traitors find their pain made forever real and fresh.^x

Do not veer away from images that are fit
for what they describe. Let your words come together;
do not heed the squeamish. We'll see them in a bit^x,

although that sight certainly depends on whether
we can continue forward." With these words Dante turned,
with me behind, like a hound pulled on a tether.

^x This is one of the few times a word has been used twice in creating the terza rima structure.

^x It doesn't do to curse in Hell.

^x The author did not come up with the image of the second row of plagiarizers by herself; two other bards and teachers helped her with this idea.

^x The narrator is a high school teacher in mundane life.

^x In Flannery O'Connor's "Good Country People" the main character is open to receiving grace after being stranded in a hayloft when her prosthetic limb is stolen from her.

^x Chaucer: "The Miller's Tale"

^x Dante ignores the question of Chaucer and bawdy humor and instead returns to his own ideas. Many people after Dante's time recoiled from the very physical images in Hell.

^x In Dante's Hell souls are eagerly awaiting the actual return of their physical bodies even if that should mean their pain is intensified.

^x See Canto XIII

^x See Canto XXIV

^x Traitors are in the ninth and final circle of Hell.

^x The "squeamish" are in Purgatory, not Hell.

Inferno: Canto XXVI*Circle 8: Evil Counselors*

I come from the cradle of kingdoms^x, from the West,
where the whale sings, where the bear sleeps in yonder den^x,
the land by the sea where we first began our quest,

yet I have seen these men and women, more than ten,
who have knelt before the banner of green and gold^x,
traverse these fearful rings, from the complainer's fen^x

to the sands of thieves. Is it that we are too bold,
too proud of who we are? Is hubris our deepest sin?
Do we welcome the stranger from out of the cold^x

or do we barricade our gates, looking within,
insular and feeding on our overweening pride?
If this is true, then certainly we must begin

to look past our borders and even reach outside
of our experience. "That lament is quite good,
but please don't get carried away," remarked my guide.

In comparing your kingdom with Florence you should
keep in mind that corruption in your little group
is like an apple tree set next to a deep wood.

No matter how low those of your kingdom may stoop,
my fellow Florentines have bent even lower."
With that he moved to climb to the next unholy hoop.

I followed him, my descent not that much slower,
to where, in shimmering flames, figures disappeared.
The air was hot from an invisible blower,

causing the fires to shift so that far and near

the images of those mortals who were there burned
could be seen to blink on out and then reappear.

"Those who are now consumed," spake my guide as he turned
toward the flames, "are they who through counsel misled
those who trusted in their guidance and too late learned

the true worth of who they heeded. Looking ahead
we can see that these sinners burn, for so they cause
destruction through their words and please themselves instead

of caring for the needs of those they served. Like gauze
wrapped around the eyes, causing blindness, was their rede,
yet they were trusted and heeded, oft without pause,

by barons and princes and kings who would indeed
thank these foul wretches for the false wisdom given,
not knowing themselves betrayed. The body can bleed,

never knowing whence came the knife that was driven
into the flesh; and so can a kingdom be rent
by the false counsel upon which it is riven

never knowing the cause of its bitter torment."
I noticed that one flame reared up above the rest,
its tongue split like the fork of a snake. "Who is pent

in that living fire?" I asked. "One who was a guest
of a cunning mind and so who sat in his hall
turning his king into a dotard. 'Twas his quest

to so weaken his liege lord, who had once stood so tall
despite his old age, that he would bow to his doom
and helplessly watch his son and his kingdom fall."^x

I crowded closer to see, though scarce was there room,

crying out, "O Master, I know of whom you speak,
though I cannot see him clear through the haze and gloom.

Do you think it is possible somehow to peek
into those frightful flames and entice him to tell
his story?" Said my guide, "The story that you seek

is easy to find^x, and yet I doubt I can quell
your eagerness to hear, as close to the cliff's edge
as you are in your attempt to see. Very well,

I will call him forth." Dante spoke into that hedge
of shadow and flame, saying, "Son of Galmod come
and tell to us how it passed that you drove a wedge

in your lord's senses, causing him to become numb,
believing himself too old and inform to fight."
The fork of the flames became more pronounced: "While some

have reviled me and trapped me in this bitter light,
I know better whom to blame.^xWhen come the dark crows
before the blackest storm^x and hopeless seems your plight

so he also comes, to warn you of friends now foes,
but who is he to say that he himself is not an ill
and he is not forcing you on a path he chose

far more dangerous than the one you were on? Still,
was I listened to when I warned of his deceits?
My lord, at the very first, heeded me until

he was overcome with wizardry and conceit
and sent me, his most faithful servant, from his side.
Poor me, I never earned such sending forth, the receipt

of which I still resent, for I cannot abide

such injustice. Yea, faithful as I am, I blame
not my lord, who was aged and yet full of pride;

no, I blame the stormcrow and those who with him came
to lead my king to foolish acts and to his fate,
struck down in a foreign land, filled with pain and shame.

Why should any man deem it so noisome and great
a fault to look upon my lord's niece with favor;
it was not because of me that she came to hate

her household and that her food had lost its flavor.
Who are you to look upon me with such disdain –
is it my downfall and my woe that you savor?

^x "Fair Mistlands" by Linda-Muireall von Katzenbrasse

^x "To the West" by Siobhan ni hEodhusa

^x The colors of the banner of the Kingdom of the West

^x This lament mirror's Dante's own lament for Florence in Canto XXVI

^x Reference to "Welcome Stranger" by Frederick of Holland

^x This is Wormtongue from J.R.R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings. Wormtongue was counselor to Theoden of Rohan but was also under the influence of Sauruman at Orthanc. One translation of Orthanc is "cunning mind".

^x The Lord of the Rings is easily found.

^x As with his compatriots in Hell, Wormtongue refuses to take the blame for his deeds.

^x Wormtongue named Gandalf Stormcrow and blamed him for the problems of Rohan.

Inferno: Canto XXVII*Circle 8: Evil Counselors*

At that Dante roared: “Down snake, down on your belly!^x
Too much of my time you have wasted already!”
At the sound of his voice my knees turned to jelly;

he was quite good at quoting, and so unsteady
was the unquiet shade that it seemed to be time
to go. The draught of allusion was too heady

for me; I almost slipped as I mused on the crime
of evil counsel.^x That Dante knew Tolkien’s work
amused me, and I wondered if in Heaven’s^x clime

they spoke together. “While in shadow oft may lurk
those who sin,” spoke the poet, bringing my mind back
from literary bliss to this Hell with a jerk,

“these sinners are the light that misguides. In yon crack
is a trusted advisor who gave to his queen
advice on a lady Peer whose deeds were so black

they broke mundane law. He claimed she was so obscene
that she sullied her order and they should revoke
her rank so that the Peerages should be made clean.”

I looked at the shimmering flame, which seemed quite baroque
in its form and also, instead of red, was blue,
and I asked, “In what dreadful way did she provoke

such wrath? I’m curious as to what she could do
to get her rank rescinded.” “Please pay attention
to what I have spoken and the bolgia that you

are standing within. His focus of contention

is innocent of such crimes. He wanted to sway
the royalty to his viewpoint. The retention

of her rank is due to the queen’s sense and her way
of checking out the facts, and so she did that night,
presenting the truth, to her counselor’s dismay,

in council next morning, thus that flame burning bright
over yonder was discredited.” So ended
the poet, and still I had a question. “That light,”

I said, “is blue, yet in all the hearths I’ve tended
I have never seen flames that hue. Tell me what made
them that way?” “In this ditch heat and cold are blended,”

said Dante, “and those flames burn through freezing; the shade
is simply a reflection of that bitter chill.
As we make our journey we’ll find our road is laid

through ice and snow, and you will find that the greatest ill
in all of Hell is treachery, and deep in rime
are traitors blocked, and the greatest one serves to fill

the hole through which we must go. You will find the clime
of this deep and sin-carved void grow ever more cold.
We must forge our way downward, because we’ve no time

for tarrying along the way. More than one fold
in this circle is left and too soon comes the dawn
by which we must have traversed the entire hold

of sinners.” We came to a clearing like a lawn
where burned a number of flames, all at the same height.
“Ah,” said Dante, “here are counselors who fawn

over their patrons, telling them that the fair light

in the sky is the sun, or rather 'tis the moon,^x
as the patron pleases. These folk would tell a knight

who beats his wife that he is kind to women, a boon
to the helpless, and of chivalry a flower,
if that is what he wishes to hear. They croon

the most pleasing anthems and create a bower
in which their own sworn liege lords can peacefully sleep,
and they are those attendants who ever shower

those in power with honeyed words so that they keep
their positions and proximity to the throne
and for themselves a most pleasant harvest reap.”

I looked at those sinners, who through their torment shone
expectantly, and I shouted at them: “Now jump!”
and they jumped. “Sing,” I said, and a soft tune was blown

through the air. “Hey!” yelled a shade just over a bump
in the ground. “Who is she that you there should obey
her bidding?” At that the flames seemed to slump,

and they fell silent. The voice continued: “She may
have rank or influence, but I see no token;
I’ll bet she only has a single!^x She should play

the game with more skill. What brings her to this broken
place anyway?” With this admonishment the flames
stayed quiet, while I looked to see who had spoken.

“Ignore him,” said my guide. “What need have you of names
in this shadowed land? ‘Tis enough that you take heed
to the warning implicit in hearing the claims

of those who speak here. It can be hoped that a seed

of wisdom will be planted in you, or else why
make the journey? It was because you were in need

that I was sent to guide you.” I made no reply
at first, thinking that he asked for names many times
in his own adventure, yet I could not deny

the truth of what he had said. “As to colder climes
we descend,” I asked, “who is it that we will see?
We have seen so many sinners; what are the crimes

of those in the next ditch?” Said he, “The penalty
we shall soon see enforced is reserved for gossip
and sowing of discord. Come now and walk with me.”

^x Dante is quoting Gandalf.

^x The evidence points to the narrator musing on something other than the sin she should be focusing on.

^x The Christian Heaven, not the SCA Heaven, from which both authors are excluded.

^x Taming of the Shrew by Shakespeare

^x “My Awards Go Jingle Jangle Jingle...” Gerhardt von Norflammen

Inferno: Canto XXVIII

Circle 8: Sowers of Discord^x

Never have I been in an actual battle
and so seen the carnage of war,
nor have I been in a slaughterhouse for cattle,

so the sight that now met me was one that before
that dreadful journey I had never seen. I weep
almost at the memory; I've no heart for gore,

and bloody are the sands of that ninth ditch, and steep
is the price for sowing discord. If the forces
at every Pennsic and every War for the Sheep,^x

or if tourney fighters and those who've won torses,
were to feel their flesh rent asunder with true steel,
sending their blood out from its accustomed courses,

it still would not rival what the light did reveal
there on that plain. A demon with a mighty sword
stood at the center and as sharp rocks rend a keel

of a ship in a storm, though I hate to record
such an awful scene, he cut through the bones and flesh
of each sinner. One, his guts like a tangled cord

hanging from his body, his wounds a second fresh,
looked straight at me before he circled in the dirt.
His guts reweave themselves into their normal mesh,

his gaping wounds soon closed, and his blood ceased to spurt
by the time he returned to the demon, again
to be split asunder and receive the same hurt

over. It was just the same with each of those men

and women, though the site of the wound was varied;
one sinner had her hands and feet chopped off, and then

the next was relieved of his head, which he carried
with him around that circuit of dread. I was sure
that each felt the blow that could never be parried

anew each revolution. "A powerful lure,"
said my guide, "is a morsel of gossip, and yet
gossip destroys more than that devil's sword. No cure

is there wholly for the damage done by a net
of lies and innuendo, or even the truth
needlessly spoken. An idle tongue should regret

the mortal wounds it inflicts. Gossip is uncouth,
yet it thrives and 'tis worse to fight misconceptions
than a foe more solid in nature. Far more ruth

has this demon than one who shapes the perceptions
of others through the reckless use of foul slander,
thus slander is placed below other deceptions

in this circle of lies and fraud. Those who pander
to an unwholesome curiosity in others
are certainly worse than any who philander

and then try to cover it up, or those brothers
of deceit, flattery and hypocrisy, or
those who have drunk from that defecated mother's

milk, for gossips take the wrongs committed before
and feed upon them, e'er magnifying the sin.
A malicious gossip is something of a whore

who spreads disease." Just then a woman with a grin

dangling from her hand, which is where she held her head,
came rushing up to us, her lips brushing my shin

in her eagerness to speak. I listened with dread,
afraid to find her gossiping lore enthralling,
but my guide pushed her back into the line. Instead

of that shade I was faced next with an appalling
apparition, for the face was torn and the skull
made visible. The skin was peeled back and falling

onto his chest. Before I had a chance to mull
over his possible sin he spoke thus to me:
“You know me well and perhaps you think I am dull

and conventional, and yet my duplicity
has caused you some pain. I have worn many faces
in my pursuit of my political games. The fee,

as you can see, is high, as fresh skin replaces
what was torn. However, outside of this circle I stir^x
up many a pot in many different places

with few seeing the stick that I hold. I’m the burr
causing the itch, hidden away, doing my work,
for everyone trusts me as a friend. They concur

with my opinions and if I point out a quirk
and look at it awry then others will follow
and agree when they hear me say “That guy’s a jerk”

or “She would not heed your request.” Hollow
are my claims, for I am a master at brewing
up stories and am like a migrating swallow,

going from town to town and sometimes renewing

old quarrels. I do not know why I have this gift
of manipulating folk, but in reviewing

my deeds you will see I have caused many a rift
‘tween people and groups, and this is my truest art.”
He continued forward, and I started to sift

through those folk I knew, and suddenly, with a start,
I knew who had spoken. I watched him get his blow,
realizing that he had taken a crucial part

in some trouble I had encountered.^x Now I know
what his role was, but I hesitate to gossip.
I won’t share his name, but where I next was to go.

^x Dante divided these sinners into three types, but the author of this Inferno does not.

^x The War for the Sheep is a local war between Darkwood and Tarn Mist.

^x While the past tense is used by many of those in this SCA Hell, the people are not, for the most part, actually dead, so they are conceivably still doing what they normally do in the world outside of the literary conceit.

^x Again, don’t pry too deeply into the author’s life and connections. This is most likely a literary conceit.

Canto XXIX

Circle 8: Falsifiers

That endless parade of mutilated souls
made me want to cry out in grief, yet I held back,
peering into the gloom. "Come," cried Dante, "time rolls

on and the moon must soon surrender and give back
to the sun her borrowed realm. Why do you tarry
in this hateful place? It is time to leave this crack,

this evil ditch for the next, where spirits harry
those who are false." "Master," I said, "I wish to see
one with whom I was close and for whom I carry

some affection yet,^x and while she may want to flee
my presence, not wanting me to witness her shame,
I cannot help but seek her out. "You may be free

from seeking, then," said the poet. "I saw her shade
while you were speaking with the man whose skull shone white.
She was watching you intently and then she made

a gesture rather rude. Heavily lies the blight
of her sin upon her and so her friendship fails."
"Even so," I replied, "when I observe her plight

I am moved to compassion. She earned her travails,
I know full well, yet I can pity her this fate."
The poet replied, "Striving for Heaven entails

such compassion and a heart that ever grows great
in its capacity for love. Those in Hell move
you, and your pity is a good sign. While you wait

for the end of Hell, or e'en the end of this groove,
foster that feeling." At that moment a chilling
shriek sounded, and in that desolate place did prove

all the more horrible.^x I was none too willing
to climb to the ultimate ditch, but I did steel
myself to do just that. Not a soul was milling

about on that darkened heath. The scene was surreal;
figures lay on the mucky ground writhing in heaps,
and the bit I could see of them held no appeal.

Like a hound dog that needs a cone because he keeps
scratching at his fleas was a young woman who clawed
at her skin, gouging her torn and bruised flesh. The deeps

of Hell, where languish the worst of sinners outlawed
from Heaven's golden light, are filled with slime and shit
and dirty ragged snow. Poisonous is the sod

of that wretched place, and yet she rolled in the grit
like an animal maddened by horrible pain.
Horrified by what I saw I asked, "What is it

that causes her to act in this way? It is plain
that she is afflicted; in what way did she sin?"
Dante answered, "A falsifier seeks to gain

unearned privilege through masquerade. If you begin
to ignore the inherent educational
nature of your group then you possibly will win

a place in this bolgia. While recreational
in a large portion, from taxes you are exempt
because you research and teach. Quite sensational

is work done by some of your members, but contempt
for study and a desire for sweet pleasure
only is what brings this woman here. To preempt

such a disaster you study, in some measure,
and you pass on what you have learned. You go to schools,
teaching and bringing pleasure,

fulfilling your duties and increasing the pools
from which you draw new members. This soul here refused
to be a part of such demonstrations; she rules

herself according to whim, and so lies contused.
Of the non-profit status she's a proponent,
yet in no way does she earn that standing. Confused

is not her state of mind; she is an opponent
of the pursuits of the higher mind, yet she tells
all she meets that the status is a component

essential to the nature of the group. She sells
what for her never is true, a counterfeit coin,
and that's what brings her here to this lower of hells."

"Master," I said, "in our group amusement does join
with study; indeed that is where much of the fun
is derived from, and a good event must conjoin

the knowledge of the way medieval things were done
with an attempt at truly practicing such arts."
"Yes," said the poet, "for you and many a one

learning and then teaching are imperative parts
of your journey. The double-headed falcon^x shows
the wonders of swordplay every year, and he starts

students on a path of discovery that grows
broader the further they go. Alden's artifacts^x
give schoolchildren joy, while those of Darkwood trade blows

at seventh grade renaissance fairs. In trading facts
about practices of my time your many guilds
have produced many wonderful things. You make pacts

amongst yourselves, so that the one researcher builds
a trebuchet while another constructs the moat,
or a cook prepares a soteltie and then gilds

it with gold leaf and then seeks how to roast a stoat,
using ancient manuscripts, so both war and feast,
with all details, even down to the Prince's coat,

are as authentic as possible, or at least
as close as can be done in this, your modern age.
By you alone, within the group, are policed,

so have a care and keep at your books." Thus the sage
concluded his lecture. Suddenly a figure
rushed up and began howling and frothing with rage.

^x This mirrors Dante's wish to see his kinsman.

^x This is an echo of the way the Nazgul sound in then Eryn Muir in Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings.

^x Wilhelm Zweikopfig Falke, who is a high school teacher and who holds yearly demos at his school.

^x Alden of Wolverton brings artifacts to schools, educating children about the ancient Egyptians and the Middle Ages, as his career.

Canto XXX*Circle 8: Stealers of Identity*

That raging figure leapt upon the woman there
lying and began to tear at her with his teeth.
With violence he pulled her, yanking out her hair,

and then, the spit about his mouth a frothing wreath,
he jumped to his feet and with a spine-chilling cry
he bounded off across that dark and lonely heath.

Filled with a bewilderment I cannot deny
I stood still, staring after that one who seemed mad.
“That,” said the master, “is one who lived out a lie,

telling new neighbors of awards that he had
been given in another kingdom. A fair knight
is what he claimed to be, and he took a young lad

as squire. His behavior, however, was not right,
and he chastised his pupil in public venue,
causing a Duke to look on him in a new light.

To a lord from the stranger’s realm he said, ‘Men you
knight in your land do not in such a way behave;
he would not have been on the chivalry menu

of those ready for elevation.’ The lord gave
him a strange look and said, ‘I have ne’er heard his name,
nor do I believe that he is a knight. I crave

knowledge of his past. Why has he no knightly fame?
Who is it who touched him with the Great Sword of State
and gave him a buffet of strength that did not maim

him but taught him wisdom? I doubt he can relate

a full and true account of such a solemn rite.’
When those twain looked into the story ‘twas no great

surprise tot hem that this gentle was a false knight.”
In the distance I saw other ravening shapes
who preyed on their fellow sinners, the ones whose plight

was such that they could not escape. “The one who japes
the identity and stature of his neighbor
is a predator indeed,” said Dante. “He apes

the customs of a rank that he did no labor
for or earn and causes deep and abiding pain
in those close to him. Lest you think that I belabor

the point observe now two fighting on the plain.”
Indeed, I saw two figures locked in such a dark
struggle that they seemed all blood and teeth and claws. Fain

would each have the other conquered, to lie there stark
and forlorn midst the dirty ice and barren sludge,
but they were too evenly matched. That lonely park

echoed with their cries. “Master,” I began, “what grudge
has brought these two adversaries to this state?”
Said the bard, “Neither of the opponents will budge

from his claim to an imaginary throne. Great
and mighty is each in his conscious delusion,^x
though the reality is open to debate.

The one clad in red was the source of confusion
when he bestowed the honor of Master at Arms
on a young soldier stationed midst the profusion

of greenery in the coastal South. A king charms

those around him with his royal majestic air,
but when that charisma is falsely based it harms

those who are drawn in like moths to a flame. Beware
such a one; this man was at no time made a king,
and the young man he fooled was hurt beyond compare.”

“What a horrible story! Who’d do such a thing?”
I cried, adding, “Who is the other, dressed in black,
who grapples fiercely with him in that boxing ring?”

“That fellow is Steingrim, the faux king, whose blows wrack
the body of his opponent,” remarked my guide.
“He knighted three who were on the chivalric track,

but when he said he was king, ‘tis certain he lied.
So you see how these two are so perfectly matched,^x
and yet when together they just cannot abide

the sight of each other. They are bitten and scratched
in their conflict, and their very flesh is rendered
so that their blood waters the ground. Their hair is snatched

from their heads, yet with all the violence tendered
they will not cease their fighting. This ongoing feud
won’t be stopped ‘til each his false pride has surrendered.”

As I stood there in that desolate place and viewed
them I found myself quite fascinated and drawn
in to the spectacle of the wounds that renewed

themselves with fresh blood at each bitter pass. The brawn
of the twain impressed me and I was mesmerized.
“Come,” said the bard. “It is past time to be gone.

Why do you stand there like one who is hypnotized?

Are your tastes so low; do you like Jerry Springer,
or is it simply that you’ve become paralyzed

and can walk worse than usual and so linger
in this evil ditch?” With a strong effort to wrench
my eyes away I turned my head. “Oh, sweet singer,”

I implored, “be not angry with me. While I blench
at the sight I find to my horror and my shame
that I am drawn in.” Shame is lacking in this trench,”

said Dante, “and yet there is more than enough blame.
Your shame would go far in mending a greater fault.”
His voice and face were kindly as he made this claim.

^x They are conscious of what they are doing, not insane, or else they would not be in Hell.

^x Since they are false kings, neither can win the battle as neither has actually won a crown tournament.

Inferno: Canto XXXI*The Kings^x*

I bit my tongue, feeling my cheeks burn red with shame,
lest I in gossip's mire be thought an explorer;
without looking back to the place from whence we came

I went forth into that last circle of horror.
While I had seen sights to make the blood run cold,
and met stubborn souls whose sins made them much poorer,

still, I found reason to fear. 'Tis known that I am bold,
and indeed there are folk who say I am rash
in my undertakings,^x yet my courage was bowled

over by the sights before me. There's a brash
knight who tilted at windmills,^x yet those mills were minute
when compared to the towers there, whipped by the lash

of thunder and lightning. Words are empty and moot
for telling of their bulk. "Whence came these strongholds?" asked I.
" 'Tis dark," my guide answered, "or you'd be more astute

in your quick observation. These structures so high
are fashioned not from hard granite or any strong wood.
They are living, reaching mightily to the sky,

seeking to rule the heavens. Many ages have they stood,
striving to impose upon all others their wills,
holding only to their own ideas of good.

Know you that something happens to the one who fills
the kingly office of any realm, for the throne
is a seat whose responsibility distills

the essence of a man. There are many who shone

in their duties, and their memories remain bright,
yet there are despots 'neath whose reign their people groan

and for whom the greatest persuasion is their might.
The great kings chose to be mightier in spirit,
and 'tis with honor and compassion that they fight.

Their folk's peace is so important they revere it,
and they bend their strength of will to that very aim.
Their word is law to those who stand forth to hear it,

though not through fear, for never would such a sovereign maim
the body or spirit of one of his subjects,
but through love and true reverence. No lasting blame

is on a brand new king, and Heaven ne'er rejects
the ruler who stumbles and yet is still trying.
People endure enthusiasm for projects

that is oft the trait of royals, e'en supplying
the tools and artisans needed if requested.
'Tis true that reigning is a strange form of dying,

for their living is to their subjects bequested,
and not in self-interest may a king strike or spare;
they're bound by the oaths through which they are invested."

"Dear poet and guide, it is in your tender care
that I am placed for this journey, yet in the past
you were more than a bard's lowly nursemaid. Please share

your thoughts on royalty who through the ages last
in reputation and renown. They reigned for years,
not months, and their rule was in different manner passed.

Surely these great lords did not care for peasant tears,

nor by their people's belief and faith did they reign.^x
Those legendary kings were not subject to fears

such as those shared by our monarchs whose lives are plain
when not in our Society ensconced." "Smaller
may the model be," said my guide, "yet the doge and thane

and e'en mighty emperor with golden collar
needs must be true to his calling and holy trust.
On history's pedestal they stand full taller

than even these giants here, whose flaw was their lust
for power. No man who his own self cannot rule
can rule others, and a monarch must be just.

This plain is not limited to those who did duel
in one of your tourneys. There stands Roman Nero,
of whose repugnant deeds I'm sure you learned in school.

King Henry the Eighth thought himself a fine hero,
yet his brutality to his people and wives^x
left his soul bereft and his male heirs numbered zero.

Tyrranus the Greek, whom each just king strives
to efface through example, in legacy lent
a name to injustice, and bad kingship derives

its model from him. Of a more incautious bent
was one of your own, who with bad judgment pawned
the jewels of the crown of the Midrealm meant

as an heirloom for the far ages. History dawned
in your Known World rather late in the span of time,
and Midrealm kingdom only recently was spawned

when this happened. Thus Michael of Boarshaven's crime

was one of ignorance, yet he just didn't care,
thinking himself a perpetual king sublime."

"Poet," I cried, "one I know is standing there,
although I remember him as somewhat shorter.
However, I'm sure I recognize his long dark hair

straggling over his vest, covering a quarter
perhaps of his quite bare, skinny, and hairless chest."
"Indeed," said Dante, "like gold is to mortar

is a true king to this man. The King of the West
robbed a plot of his of all its vitality
when he with squire's belts board members did invest.

On what you call film a rite of fertility
he caught, with poor taste." "Yep," said I, "that's Aveloc,
with his arrogant pose of false virility.

He fits with these giants; I suppose it's no shock
to find him here."^x No longer that cold pull of fear
did I feel. We walked along on the bitter rock

to the final bridge across a sharp cliff so shear
that I quailed as I peered at the final circle.
With anguish at the center, now Hell's end was near.

^x In the original this canto contains the giants. In this version are contained kings of the SCA and antiquity.

^x Such as rewriting Dante's Comedy?

^x Don Quixote

^x The Caid crown has inscribed within it "You rule because they believe."

^x Not to mention the destruction of manuscripts and art under his rule.

^x This is one of the few spots where the narrator names individual Scadians. However, royalty are public people and history makers, so by ruling they put themselves and their deeds directly into the spotlight.

Canto XXXII*Circle 9: Compound Fraud – Treachery to Kin and Treachery to Country*

Words failed the master bard at this level of Hell,
and my wordsmithing has at no point been as strong;
I find that words for this rhyme have failed me as well.

If I speak from my heart perhaps I won't go wrong,
though in that bottom circle my heart overflowed
with both pain and compassion, and these shape my song.

This poem I write is simply what is owed
for my spirit's education and salvation
and the gentle patience with which the poet showed

me the infernal regions. In our creation
of an anachronistic society we
sought a new world, and the devastation

represented by Hell's deep circles is merely
the product of human fault. Vaster is Heaven
by far, and Purgatory is where we mostly

dwell. As poetry, and all the arts, is leaven
for our daily lives, may this poem serve to raise
the misery found far below circle seven,

or any of the circles of Hell. Just three days
was I allotted for my journey; the first day
was almost completed. Each sinning soul who stays

in Hell does so of choice and stubbornness; I pray
that my eyes have been opened and that I will strive
always for Heaven's grace. All about me there lay

a giant sea of frozen waters that derive

their source from the copious tears shed through sorrow
and sin. What appeared to be rocks were in fact live

sinner frozen fast in that flood. Now to borrow
a phrase, they were put on ice,^x left out in the cold,
encased deep in rime^x with no hope for the morrow,

for there the sun ne'er shines. "If I may be so bold,"
I began, "who are those frozen thus and what sin
keeps them here bound?" Said Dante, "The world will grow old

before this sin is cleansed from it, but their own kin
and country have those near to us been traitors to.
Treachery is the vile deed that holds them within

this center of guilt and suffering, and those who
have betrayed a trust are rightly bound here in ice."
I began to walk, not knowing what else to do,

and by sheer accident my cane hit one whose vice
kept him there. With the foulest words he began to curse
and yell out, though when I had apologized twice

he called out, "Light!"^x "Well," I said, "I cannot reverse
that action, but who are you and what led you here?"
"I refuse to be placed in your stumbling verse,"

he responded. "Tell me," I said, "else you'll pay dear,"
and when he remained closed-mouthed I hit him once more
with my cane, only harder this time. A loud jeer

echoed across the ice; "What a terrible bore
you are," yelled a voice. "Just tell her how you lost
us a site through your temper and pride." "Why, you whore!"

he cried out. "It was never my fault. I was tossed

out of Heaven unfairly; I had the power,
and asserting my rank and rights should not have cost

me my place there.^x A lowly autocrat's glower
is not enough to sway me from any action."
I had heard enough; I left him in his bower,

giving him one long last look, for my reaction
was that of a lowly autocrat. On I walked,
and quite soon we came upon a new distraction;

two men were with each other in the cold ice locked,
and one on the other's nape did angrily gnaw,
and so hideous was this feast that I was shocked.

"Here," said Dante, "in this cold that will never thaw
and Father Christmas^x will never come are these twain
who are joined in grief and shame. The unspoken law

that governs the actions of friends holds as its main
tenet the idea that one will never poach
the dear love of the other. They both are in pain,

but he in front was first to betray and encroach
upon the other's rights and broke the bond of knight
and squire by going beyond his oath to coach

the young man and stealing his lady, so his plight
as food for the never ceasing pain and ire
of his former bondman is duly earned and right."

"What," I then asked him, "is the sin of the squire
that brings him here?" My guide replied, "When they were one
in purpose and deed they were lit by the fire

of battle and desire for glory. They'd run

out beyond the lines in war hoping to engage
in single combat with the foe; when the war was won

their army was defeated. The field was their stage,
and by acting out their own berserker visions
they betrayed their kingdom. Your recreated age

spans centuries and peoples, crossing divisions
of time and space, yet some things remain ever true:
hubris is a seed, despite any revisions

to society made, that can sprout. What you do
when overgrown with this weed is what leads you here;
your soul is a garden, its tilling lies with you."

^x Dante uses a similar play on words at this point in his work.

^x This is a pun, since the sinners are encased both in the ice and in the rhyme of the poem.

^x This is a fighting reference, what you might say if a blow is not strong enough.

^x He is much more concerned with losing his place in Heaven than with losing the site.

^x C.S. Lewis: The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe

Canto XXXIII

Circle 9: Compound Fraud: Treachery to Guests and Hosts - Rapists^x

A polar opposite^x to Eden, no garden
could grow in the bitter waste^x of that forsaken
sea. As we progressed, the surface seemed to harden.

As I observed the souls held there I was shaken,
for they were more deeply submerged into the rime
so that only their faces were free. I'd taken

a good look around me when I asked, "Deep in grime
are these sinners buried. What treachery did they
commit and who are the victims of such foul crime?"

"Here," said the poet, "are those men who lured their prey
with kind words or sweet deeds and then violated
their trust and their bodies. They are held in this grey

plain where they can never move. Have I orated
too much on men in my own poetic writing?
Perhaps, and indeed, rape has annihilated

the spirits of many women.^x In reciting
your epic I know that you will not overlook
this sin." I replied, "For eons we've been fighting^x

against this act of violence, and in my book
I will record what I see. Still, some will wonder
if this is a plague found in the SCA." "Brook

no such opposition," said my guide. "No blunder
is this, no error. Silence keeps this crime well hid.
Nor should rape be placed midst the lightning and the thunder

of the violent, for 'tis betrayal.^xI bid

you think on the levels of treachery involved
against humankind and God." "We'd do well to rid

ourselves of the thinking that allows it. Unsolved
are these problems," I said, "but these deeds violate
all individuals through the ideas evolved

round honor and chivalry thus left desolate
and broken by this act." Said Dante, "So in Hell
there is held a circle for those who fornicate

wrongly; rapists are not there sent.^xI needn't tell
you that rape is a sin of power and not lust
and so seven full circles lie between this fell

ground and the higher ring of the carnal. 'Tis just,
certainly, when you realize that at your revels
this is a deed undertaken by those who must

have met as acquaintances if not friends. Devils
do not treat each other thus. Do you wish to speak
to those who've earned their confinement on this level?"

"Not at all!" I exclaimed. "Their victims are so meek^x
and ashamed after the fact that they do not tell
what happened. They were silenced, so I do not seek

to give voice to their tormenters. Here in this well
they can lie, and I hope they cause no further pain,
but I will not speak with them. I cannot foretell

what traitors come next or how long until we gain
the bottom of this fetid hole. I long for stars
and sweet air and to be rid of this endless plain."

"Fear not," said Dante. "While sin and violence mars

the joyful plan of creation, our path does end,
and soon freedom from this darkened place will be ours.”

“Master,” I ventured, hesitating, “what can mend
the wrongs we have here encountered and heal the breach
caused by sin? Are we doomed by our acts?” “Heaven forefend!”

he relied. “We are given choice and so beseech
forgiveness from our neighbors and mercy from God.^x
We must be open to grace in order to reach

those kinder climes, but the true shepherd with his rod
will seek you out, leaving behind his other sheep.^x
If you are penitent at heart it would be odd,

nay, impossible to make this descent so steep
to meet your final fate. Trust instead that the one
who harrowed Hell for you^x will ever keep

you in sight.” Then my esteemed companion was done
with his papist musings. I felt a cold wind chill
me to the very bone, and yet I could not run

to shorten my journey, for I knew that I still
had sights to learn from, and besides, I was too lame
to run. In that frozen land was no little rill,

no sweet song of flowing water. So locked in shame
were the traitors we came upon no friendly voice
could be heard. All was silent, the landscape the same

dirty grey, and ne’er would I have come there by choice
had I known the horror of loneliness that’s found
in that pit. No fine mansion, no golden Rolls Royce,

no hope for laurel leaf^x could lead to such profound

misery; any small temptation in that vein
left me as I trod upon the unhallowed ground.

I placed my feet with care, making sure to remain
close to the bard. The gentle presence of my guide
gave me comfort as I traversed that lonely plain;

that he’d made a far worse journey can’t be denied,
and his deep resolution and fierce compassion
renewed my hope and faith as I walked at his side.

The very dregs of Hell are devoid of passion,
no matter what strong fires inspired the sin.
All in that circle were entombed in like fashion.

^x Date rape may not happen often in the SCA but it does happen. The author sees this crime as a betrayal to both guests and hosts. The victim can be seen as a guest who has been betrayed, and the rape also betrays the Society which is in the place of host for events.

^x Pun intended

^x Waste is a word used frequently for the 9th circle, and as well as being a good word to describe the barren plain of ice it is a good word for the waste of people and talent caused by adherence to wrongdoing.

^x Men can also be victims of this crime.

^x It is only within the recent past that rape has officially been considered a war crime.

^x There are several other possible circles for sexual sins, but circle 2, for the carnal, deals with passion and lust, and circle 8 has a ditch for seduction, and both sins are different from rape.

^x Canto V

^x This is, of course, not always true.

^x What follows is a bit of Dante’s own theology. It can be stretched into an SCA metaphor, but that is not his intent.

^x Luke 15: 1-7

^x This is a reference to Dante’s Inferno where Christ’s harrowing of Hell left a strong mark on the geography of the place.

^x Possible temptations that could lead a person to treachery

Canto XXXIV*Circle 9: Compound Fraud – Treachery Towards Masters^x*

“There’s she^x who bears the burden of the crown^x of Hell;
look through the haze. Her form’s plain if you just look about,”
said my master, and though it still pains me to tell,

I could see the foul form of a woman, not stout,
sallow and pale, with the drooping dugs of a hound,
and three hideous heads. I will never work out

the words with which to tell how the sight did confound
me and make me tremble, although we were still far
from where she jutted out from that torn poisoned ground.

The ice at this point was smooth, with hardly a scar,
and like the corpses in the pools of the dead
in the marshes close to Mordor, but with no star

or werelight to shine with ghastly hue^x on that bed,
they were submerged deep in the ice, lost in the cold.
Steadily we came upon that focus of dread,

the queen of air and darkness,^xand when I was bold
enough to look at her visage I saw there feet
protruding from each of her mouths. Dante then told

their names and misdeeds. Their names I will not repeat;
I’ll leave them there in Hell’s depth and simply explain
the reasons for their presence. I will be discreet,

for the first two are seneschals who served their spite
instead of their people. In personal ire
each barred an office to the particular wight

thus disliked. The gentle who wished to aspire

to that position was qualified, quite able
in all of the aspects the job did require,

but was refused for a grudge that served to label
the aspirant and block her service. To place first
your private reparation upon that table

when you hold a position of trust is the worst
abuse of power that can be done in our group,
so these stewards are ground up by the accursed
doppelganger of the queen of our merry troop,
who in Heaven reigns, the Queen of Love and Beauty.
The third victim of anguish, so low did he stoop,

was a Board member who did betray his duty
by leaving the Society, keeping his post,
and ne’er seeing a discrepancy. No booty

did he get by this; rather, at the very most,
force of influence was gained by his adhesion
to his position. While other members could roast

or freeze through his decisions there lacked cohesion
due to the fact that he remained unaffected.
On the governing body he was a lesion

and in the bowels of Hell is unprotected.
After I had watched these three traitors long enough,
the poet said, “We are near to the projected

time for leaving this pit. The hellqueen’s braid is tough
and long, and by grasping it we can clamber down
through the hole in the world and come out on the bluff

that overlooks the climbing road^xto that dear town
on the green.”^xWe’d come to the point where he could grab

hold of the hair that trailed down the back of her gown,

and this he did. Despite my fear that she would nab
me, and despite my overwhelming revulsion,
I did the same. There was no way down that great slab

of rock but that path, and through a compulsion
to abandon my hope^xI held on to the stair.
“Hold fast despite any internal convulsion,”

cried Dante to me. “To rise above this evil there
is no other way but this.” When I looked about
I saw that the braid pointed up into the air,

where before I thought it had hung down. Put to rout
was the noisome breath of Hell; I felt on my face
the cool touch of clean air. At my wondering shout

my guide said, “It is just dawn; we have won the race
and now may proceed on that steep and rocky path
where sinners struggle and toil in hope to efface

the effect of their sins and escape the fierce wrath
of Hell.” We released the braid and stood on a downy hill,
while within my mind I struggled to do the math.

It was no use, so I asked, “Why are we not still
facing the same direction? How is it we turned
about?” My master smiled and said, “It was until

I turned you round that you were to the lands that burned
and chilled you in your journey, those desolate lands
of evil, still faced, but by now you should have learned

that Hell’s the inverse of the universe and stands
in direct opposition to all creation.

Look you now at that hole, the mere width of two hands;

Hell is small and petty. ‘Tis joy and elation
that conquers, and more often than pain and despair,
and joy we will meet if we work for salvation.

Work you must, for on yon road that you can see there
are the pilgrims who toil, but honest work ne’er mars
the laboring spirit. When on that path take care

not to give up, for on the mountain’s jagged spars
you will test your resolve.” Without rest we went forward
to where we could walk beneath the beautiful stars.

^x Those described here were leaders (seneschals and a board member) yet in their roles they were truly servant of the people and as such betrayed their trust.

^x She is the opposite of the Queen of Love and Beauty who reigns in Heaven.

^x Dante plays off a familiar song at this point in his *Inferno*, and this is a play off of an SCA song: “The Burden of the Crown” by Baldwin of Erebor.

^x J.R.R. Tolkien: [The Lord of the Rings](#)

^x Emma Bull: [War for the Oaks](#)

^x Purgatory

^x The Paradiso for the SCA is set at a Beltane event.

^x See the inscription above the gates of Hell in Canto III.