



Making their way through the various parts of the *Inferno*, Dante and Virgil come to the "Ninth Circle of Hell." There they see a gigantic figure trapped in ice. It is Satan.

Seeing the Devil trapped in ice, unable to move, was not something Dante had expected. We track what happens in the story, which we find in Canto 34 (using, here, the Henry Cary translation):

*"THE banners of Hell's Monarch do come forth
Towards us; therefore look," so spake my guide,
"If thou discern him." As, when breathes a cloud
Heavy and dense, or when the shades of night
Fall on our hemisphere, seems view'd from far
A windmill, which the blast stirs briskly round,
Such was the fabric then methought I saw,*

*To shield me from the wind, forthwith I drew
Behind my guide: no covert else was there.*

*Now came I (and with fear I bid my strain
Record the marvel) where the souls were all
Whelm'd underneath, transparent, as through glass
Pellucid the frail stem. Some prone were laid,
Others stood upright, this upon the soles,
That on his head, a third with face to feet
Arch'd like a bow. When to the point we came,
Whereat my guide was pleas'd that I should see
The creature eminent in beauty once,
He from before me stepp'd and made me pause.*

*"Lo!" he exclaim'd, "lo Dis! and lo the place,
Where thou hast need to arm thy heart with strength."*

*How frozen and how faint I then became,
Ask me not, reader! for I write it not,
Since words would fail to tell thee of my state.
I was not dead nor living. Think thyself
If quick conception work in thee at all,
How I did feel. That emperor, who sways
The realm of sorrow, at mid breast from th' ice
Stood forth; and I in stature am more like
A giant, than the giants are in his arms.
Mark now how great that whole must be, which suits
With such a part. If he were beautiful
As he is hideous now, and yet did dare
To scowl upon his Maker, well from him
May all our mis'ry flow.*

Gustave Dore's engraving, shown here, illustrates lines 20 and 21:

*"Lo!" he exclaim'd, "lo Dis! and lo the place,
Where thou hast need to arm thy heart with strength."*

Using a translation more understandable to modern English readers, let's see how John Ciardi renders this

same passage:

*"On march the banners of the King of Hell,"
My Master said. "Toward us. Look straight Ahead:
Can you make him out at the core of the frozen Shell?"*

*Like a whirling windmill seen afar at twilight,
or when a mist has risen from the ground-
just such an engine rose upon my sight*

*stirring up such a wild and bitter wind
I cowered for shelter at my Master's back,
there being no other windbreak I could find.*

*I stood now where the souls of the last class
(with fear my verses tell it) were covered wholly;
they shone below the ice like straws in glass.*

*Some lie stretched out; others are fixed in place
upright, some on their heads, some on their soles;
another, like a bow, bends foot to face.*

*When we had gone so far across the ice
that it pleased my Guide to show me the foul creature
which once had worn the grace of Paradise,*

*he made me stop, and, stepping aside, he said:
"Now see the face of Dis! This is the place
Where you must arm your soul against all Dread."*

*Do not ask, Reader, how my blood ran cold
and my voice choked up with fear. I cannot write it; this is a terror that cannot be told.*

*I did not die, and yet I lost life's breath:
imagine for yourself what I became,
deprived at once of both my life and death.*

*The Emperor of the Universe of Pain
jutting his upper chest above the ice;
and I am closer in size to the great mountain*

*the Titans' make around the central pit,
than they to his arms. Now, starting from this part,
imagine the whole that corresponds to it!*

*If he was once as beautiful as now
he is hideous, and still turned on his Maker,
well may he be the source of every woe!*

The words from this passage, which fit the Dore drawing, are:

*"Now see the face of Dis! This is the place
Where you must arm your soul against all Dread."*

In other words, Dante and Virgil are now viewing the face of the Ninth Circle ... that is ... Satan.

Click on the image for a better view.

Credits:

Gustave Dore created this engraving to be included in a version of the "Divine Comedy" which was published in 1890. It is from "Dante Alighieri's Inferno from the Original by Dante Alighieri and Illustrated with the Designs of Gustave Doré" (New York: Cassell Publishing Company, 1890).

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