Contrapasso

The relation between the sin and punishment rendered the sinner in Dante’s hell as heretofore relied mostly on physical metaphors:

“so, through the gullet of that ditch, each flame

must make its way; no flame displays its prey,

though every flame has carried off a sinner.”

(26.40-42)

Dante attempts to present his endeavors as humbly as possible, informing the reader that he recognizes his power to convey the scenes he saw, and implicitly, is able to imagine. But how arrogant this point he floats in the beginning of canto 26! For however beautiful his lines are that follow, the lines which will introduce a man who was talented himself and whose desire to explore came at the cost of his family, as well as his wife.

“Consider well the seed that gave you birth;

you were not made to live your lives as brutes,

but to be followers of worth and knowledge”