

The Silence

The dead we know are gone except
when dreams return them. So it was
Frank Sargeson took me aside

in Hell and said, 'You know, my friend,
how well the wind among the reeds
is used by shaman and guru,

rabbi and priest.' He had the face
of Dante's much-loved preceptor
Brunetto Latini among

the sodomites, as we ambled
down the avenues of the damned;
and he, brushing ash from his sleeve

went on, 'Those with a patch of earth
and running water lack vision,
preferring to leave such mysteries

'to desert-and mountain-dwellers
and the poor of Varanasi.
Where little is lacking listen

'always to the silence until
you hear it whisper its name.' So
he faded into fire, and I,

half-waking, wrote to remember
all that he'd said—and listened for
the silence, and could not hear it.

C.K. STEAD