

INFERNO

CANTO XX

Of strange new pain I now must make my verse,
giving matter to the canto numbered twenty
of this first canzone, which tells of those submerged. 3

By now I was all eagerness to see
what sights the chasm, bathed in tears
of anguish, would disclose. 6

I saw people come along that curving canyon
in silence, weeping, their pace the pace of slow
processions chanting litanies in the world. 9

As my gaze moved down along their shapes,
I saw into what strange contortions
their chins and chests were twisted. 12

Their faces were reversed upon their shoulders
so that they came on walking backward,
since seeing forward was denied them. 15

Perhaps some time by stroke of palsy
a person could be twisted in that way,
but I've not seen it nor do I think it likely. 18

Reader, so may God let you gather fruit
from reading this, imagine, if you can,
how I could have kept from weeping 21

when I saw, up close, our human likeness
so contorted that tears from their eyes
ran down their buttocks, down into the cleft. 24

Yes, I wept, leaning against a spur
of the rough crag, so that my escort said:
'Are you still witless as the rest? 27

'Here piety lives when pity is quite dead.
Who is more impious than one who thinks
that God brings passion to His judgment? 30

'Raise your head! Raise it and look on him
under whose feet the earth gaped open
in sight of all the shouting Thebans: 33

"Where are you rushing, Amphiaraus? Why
do you leave the war?" Nor did he stop his plunge
until he fell to Minos, who lays hold on all. 36

'See how his shoulder-blades are now his chest.
Because he aspired to see too far ahead
he looks behind and treads a backward path. 39

'See Tiresias, who changed his likeness
when he was turned from male to female,
transformed in every member. 42

'Later on he had to touch once more
the two twined serpents with his rod
before he could regain his manly plumes. 45

'He who puts his back to that one's belly is Aruns.
In the hills of Luni -- where the Carraresi,
who shelter in the valley, work the earth -- 48

'he lived inside a cave in that white marble,
from which he could observe the sea and stars
in a wide and boundless prospect. 51

'And that female whose backward-flowing tresses
fall upon her breasts so they are hidden,
and has her hairy parts on that same side, 54

'was Manto, who searched through many lands
before she settled in the place where I was born --
for just a moment hear me out on this. 57

'After her father had parted from this life
and the city of Bacchus was enslaved,
she wandered for a time about the world. 60

'High in fair Italy, at the foot of the alps
that form a border with Germany near Tyrol,
lies a lake they call Benàco. 63

'By a thousand springs and more, I think,
the region between Garda, Val Camonica, and Pennino
is bathed by waters settling in that lake. 66

'There is an island in its middle
that the pastors of Trent, Brescia, and Verona,
should they pass that way, would bless. 69

'Peschiera, a strong and splendid fortress against the Brescians and the Bergamese, sits on the lowest point of land around.	72
'There all the water Benàco's bosom cannot hold flows over and descends into a river running through green pastures.	75
'This river, as it leaves the lake and all the way to Govérnolo, is called the Mincio until it falls into the Po.	78
'Before that, after but the briefest run, it levels off and spreads to make a swamp sometimes scarce of water in the summer.	81
'Passing that way, the cruel virgin saw dry land in the middle of the marsh where no one lived and no one tilled the soil.	84
'There, to avoid all company, she stopped with only servants, to ply her magic arts. There she lived and left her empty body.	87
'Later on, the people scattered round about collected there because it was protected by the marsh on every side.	90
'They built the city over those dead bones and, after her who first had claimed the spot, named it Mantua, with no spells or incantations.	93
'Once, its population was more plentiful, before the foolishness of Casalodi bore the brunt of Pinamonte's guile.	96
'I charge you, therefore, should you ever hear my city's origin described another way, allow no lie to falsify the truth.'	99
And I: 'Master, to me your explanation is so convincing and so takes my trust that any other tale would seem spent embers.	102
'But tell me, among these people who are passing, if you see any worthy of my notice, for my thoughts keep going back to them alone.'	105
Then he replied: 'The one whose beard falls from his jowls onto his swarthy shoulders was -- when Greece was so deprived of males	108

'that scarcely one was left, even in the cradle -- a soothsayer. At Aulis, along with Calchas, he told the favoring time for setting sail.	111
'Eurypylus was his name, and thus he is sung in certain verses of my lofty tragedy, as you know very well, who know it all.	114
'That other, with the skinny shanks, was Michael Scot, who truly understood the way to play the game of magic tricks.	117
'See Guido Bonatti. See Asdente, who now regrets not having worked his leather and his thread -- but he repents too late.	120
'See the wretched women who gave up needle, spool, and spindle to take up fortune-telling, casting spells with images and herbs.	123
'But come now, for Cain, with his thorns, already stands above the border of both hemispheres and touches the waves below Seville,	126
'and last night was the moon already round. Surely you recall it did not harm you the other night in the deep wood.'	129
These were his words while we were moving on.	130