

INFERNO

CANTO XXVI

Take joy, O Florence, for you are so great
your wings beat over land and sea,
your fame resounds through Hell! 3

Among the thieves, I found five citizens of yours
who make me feel ashamed, and you
are raised by them to no great praise. 6

But if as morning nears we dream the truth,
it won't be long before you feel the pain
that Prato, to name but one, desires for you. 9

Were it already come, it would not be too soon.
But let it come, since come indeed it must,
and it will weigh the more on me the more I age. 12

We left that place and, on those stairs
that turned us pale when we came down,
my leader now climbed back and drew me up. 15

As we took our solitary way
among the juts and crags of the escarpment,
our feet could not advance without our hands. 18

I grieved then and now I grieve again
as my thoughts turn to what I saw,
and more than is my way, I curb my powers 21

lest they run on where virtue fails to guide them,
so that, if friendly star or something better still
has granted me its boon, I don't refuse the gift. 24

As when a peasant, resting on a hillside --
in the season when he who lights the world
least hides his face from us, 27

at the hour when the fly gives way to the mosquito --
sees fireflies that glimmer in the valley
where he perhaps ploughs fields and harvests grapes, 30

with just so many flames the eighth crevasse
was everywhere aglow, as I became aware
once I arrived where I could see the bottom. 33

And as the one who was avenged by bears
could see Elijah's chariot taking flight,
when the horses reared and rose to Heaven, 36
but made out nothing with his eyes
except the flame alone
ascending like a cloud into the sky, 39
so each flame moves along the gullet
of the trench and -- though none reveals the theft --
each flame conceals a sinner. 42

Rising to my feet to look, I stood up
on the bridge. Had I not grasped a jutting crag,
I would have fallen in without a shove. 45

My leader, when he saw me so intent, said:
'The spirits stand within the flames.
Each one is wrapped in that in which he burns.' 48

'Master,' I replied, 'I am the more convinced
to hear you say it. That is what I thought,
and had it in my mind to ask you this: 51

'Who is in the flame so riven at the tip
it could be rising from the pyre
on which Etèocles was laid out with his brother?' 54

He replied: 'Within this flame find torment
Ulysses and Diomed. They are paired
in God's revenge as once they earned his wrath. 57

'In their flame they mourn the stratagem
of the horse that made a gateway
through which the noble seed of Rome came forth. 60

'There they lament the wiles for which, in death,
Deidamia mourns Achilles still,
and there they make amends for the Palladium.' 63

'If they can speak within those flames,'
I said, 'I pray you, master, and I pray again --
and may my prayer be a thousand strong -- 66

'do not forbid my lingering awhile
until the twin-forked flame arrives.
You see how eagerly I lean in its direction.' 69

And he to me: 'Your prayer deserves
much praise. Therefore, I grant it,
but on condition that you hold your tongue. 72

'Leave speech to me, for I have understood
just what you want. And, since they were Greeks,
they might disdain your words.' 75

Once the flame had neared, when he thought
the time and moment right,
I heard my leader speaking in this way: 78

'O you who are twinned within a single fire,
if I have earned your favor while I lived,
if I have earned your favor -- in whatever measure -- 81

'when, in the world, I wrote my lofty verses,
then do not move away. Let one of you relate
just where, having lost his way, he went to die.' 84

And the larger horn of that ancient flame
began to murmur and to tremble,
like a flame that is worried by the wind. 87

Then, brandishing its tip this way and that,
as if it were the tongue of fire that spoke,
it brought forth a voice and said: 'When I 90

'took leave of Circe, who for a year and more
beguiled me there, not far from Gaëta,
before Aeneas gave that name to it, 93

'not tenderness for a son, nor filial duty
toward my agèd father, nor the love I owed
Penelope that would have made her glad, 96

'could overcome the fervor that was mine
to gain experience of the world
and learn about man's vices, and his worth. 99

'And so I set forth on the open deep
with but a single ship, with that handful
of shipmates who had not deserted me. 102

'One shore and the other I saw as far as Spain,
Morocco -- the island of Sardegna,
and other islands set into that sea. 105

'I and my shipmates had grown old and slow
by the time we reached the narrow strait
where Hercules marked off the limits, 108

'warning all men to go no farther.
On the right-hand side I left Seville behind,
on the other I had left Ceüta. 111

"O brothers," I said, "who, in the course
of a hundred thousand perils, at last
have reached the west, to such brief wakefulness 114
"of our senses as remains to us,
do not deny yourselves the chance to know --
following the sun -- the world where no one lives. 117
"Consider how your souls were sown:
you were not made to live like brutes or beasts,
but to pursue virtue and knowledge." 120
'With this brief speech I had my companions
so eager for the journey
I could scarce have held them back. 123
'And, having set our stern to the sunrise,
in our mad flight we turned our oars to wings,
always gaining on the left. 126
'Now night was gazing on the stars that light
the other pole, the stars of our own so low
they did not rise above the ocean floor. 129
'Five times the light beneath the moon
had been rekindled and as often been put out
since we began our voyage on the deep, 132
'when we could see a mountain, distant,
dark and dim. In my sight it seemed
higher than any I had ever seen. 135
'We rejoiced, but joy soon turned to grief:
for from that unknown land there came
a whirlwind that struck the ship head-on. 138
'Three times it turned her and all the waters
with her. At the fourth our stern reared up,
the prow went down -- as pleased Another -- 141
until the sea again closed over us.' 142