

INFERNO

CANTO XXIX

The many people and their ghastly wounds did so intoxicate my eyes that I was moved to linger there and weep.	3
But Virgil said: 'What are you staring at? Why is your gaze so fixed upon the depths that hold those mournful, mutilated shades?	6
'You have not done so at the other pits. In case you plan to count the sinners one by one, think: this hollow circles twenty-two miles round.	9
'The moon already lies beneath our feet. The time we are allotted soon expires and there is more to see than you see here.'	12
'Had you understood,' I was quick to answer, 'the reason for my close inspection, perhaps you would have let me stay there longer.'	15
All the while my guide was moving on, with me, intent on my reply, behind him. And then I added: 'Within that hole	18
'where I had fixed my gaze, I think I saw someone of my own blood lament the sin that costs so dear down there.'	21
Then the master said: 'Trouble your mind no more because of him. Turn it to other things and let him be,	24
'for I saw him there below the bridge, pointing his finger at you, fierce with threats, and I heard him called Geri del Bello.	27
'Just then you were so thoroughly engrossed in him who once was lord of Hautefort you didn't glance that way before your kinsman left.'	30
'O my leader, the violent death he died, for which no vengeance has been taken yet,' I said, 'by any person partner to his shame,	33

'made him indignant. That is why he went away
without addressing me -- or so I think --
and why he has made me pity him the more.' 36

Thus we continued talking till we reached
the first point on the ridge that could have shown
the next pit's bottom, had there been more light. 39

When we stood above the final cloister
of Malebolge and all of its lay brothers
became discernible to us, 42

strange arrows of lament, their shafts,
with pity at their tips, pierced me,
so that I pressed my hands against my ears. 45

If the contagion of every hospital
in Valdichiana, from July until September,
and in the Maremma and Sardegna, were amassed 48

in one malarial ditch, such suffering
was in that place. And from it rose
the stench of festering limbs. 51

We came down, always to our left, and reached
the last bank of the lengthy crag.
And then my eyes could have a better view 54

into the pit, there where the minister
of God on high, unerring justice, punishes
the counterfeiters whom she here records. 57

I think it could have been no greater sorrow
to see the people of Aegina stricken,
with such corruption in the very air 60

that every animal, even the smallest worm,
perished, and, later, as the poets hold for certain,
these ancient people were restored to life, 63

hatched from the eggs of ants --
no greater sorrow, than in that somber valley
to see those spirits, heaped on one another, languishing. 66

Some lay upon the bellies or the backs
of others, still others dragged themselves
on hands and knees along that gloomy path. 69

Step by step we went ahead in silence,
looking and listening to the stricken spirits,
who could not raise their bodies from the ground. 72

Two I saw seated, propped against each other
 as pans are propped to warm before the fire,
 each of them blotched with scabs from head to foot. 75
 And never did I see a stable-boy,
 with his master waiting, nor youth whose chore
 keeps him from sleep, ply his curry-comb 78
 more hurriedly than each one clawed his nails
 across his skin because of that mad itch,
 which knows no other remedy, 81
 and their nails tore off scabs
 as a knife strips scales from bream
 or other fish with even larger scales. 84
 'You there, stripping off your coat of mail,'
 began my leader, addressing one of them,
 'and sometimes making pincers of your fingers, 87
 'tell us whether, among those gathered here,
 any are Italian, so may your nails
 last you in this task for all eternity.' 90
 'We whom you see so blasted are Italian,'
 answered one of them, through his tears,
 'but who are you, that you inquire of us?' 93
 And my leader: 'I am one who makes his way
 down with this living man from ledge to ledge.
 And my intention is to show him Hell.' 96
 They stopped propping one another up
 and each one, trembling, turned in my direction,
 as others did who'd overheard those words. 99
 The good master drew up close to me,
 saying, 'Tell them what you will.'
 And I began, since this had been his wish: 102
 'So that your memory may not fade away
 from minds of men in the world above
 but live on yet for many suns to come, 105
 'tell me who you are, and where you hail from.
 Do not let your foul and sickening torment
 keep you from telling me your names.' 108
 And one of them replied: 'I was of Arezzo.
 Albero of Siena had me burned alive.
 But what I died for does not bring me here. 111

'It is true I said to him in jest:
 "I do know how to rise into the air and fly!"
 And he, who had the will but not the wit, 114
 'asked me to show him how. And just because
 I failed to make him Daedalus, he had me set
 on fire by one who took him as his son. 117
 'But Minos, incapable of error,
 damned me to the last of these ten ditches
 for the alchemy I practiced in the world.' 120
 And I said to the poet: 'Was ever a people
 quite so fatuous as the Sienese?
 Why, not even the French can match them!' 123
 Whereupon the other leper, hearing me,
 replied: 'Except, of course for Stricca --
 he knew how to moderate his spending -- 126
 'and for Niccolò -- the first one to devise
 a costly use for cloves,
 there in the garden where such seeds take root -- 129
 'and for that band in whose company
 Caccia d'Asciano squandered his vineyards
 and his fields, and Abbagliato showed his wit. 132
 'But, to let you know who's in your camp
 against the Sienese, look close at me
 so that my face itself may answer you. 135
 'You will see I am the shade of Capocchio,
 who altered metal by means of alchemy.
 And, if you are the man I take you for, 138
 you will recall how good an ape I was of nature.' 139