

INFERNO

CANTO XXX

Once when Juno, furious with Semele,
vented her rage against the house of Thebes,
as she had done on more than one occasion, 3
Athamas went so raving mad that when he saw
his wife come near with both their children,
holding one on this arm, one on that, 6
he shouted: "Let's spread the nets so I can trap
the lioness with her cubs as they go past!"
Then he reached out and with pitiless claws 9
he seized the one who was called Learchus,
whirled him round and dashed him on a rock.
At that she drowned herself with her other burden. 12
And when Fortune had subdued the haughty,
all-daring spirit of the Trojans,
so that both king and kingdom were brought down, 15
Hecuba -- wretched, sorrowing, a captive --
when she saw Polyxena slaughtered and,
grieving woman, when she saw 18
Polydorus lying dead upon the shore,
went mad and started barking like a dog,
so greatly had her grief deranged her mind. 21
But no Theban crazed with rage --
or Trojan -- did ever seem as cruel
in rending beasts, much less human parts, 24
as did two pallid, naked shades I saw,
snapping their jaws as they rushed up
like swine charging from an opened sty. 27
The one came at Capocchio, set its tusks
into his neck, then dragged him
so his belly scraped the rock-hard ground. 30
And the Aretine, who stood there, trembling,
said to me: 'That demon's Gianni Schicchi,
and in his rabid rage he mauls the others.' 33

'Oh,' I said to him, 'so may that other not fix
 its teeth in you, be kind enough to tell me
 just who it is before it runs away.' 36

And he answered: 'That is the ancient soul
 of wicked Myrrha, who became enamored
 of her father with more than lawful love. 39

'She contrived to sin with him
 by taking on another person's shape,
 as did that other shade, eager to decamp, 42

'to gain the queen mule of the herd,
 take on the shape of Buoso Donati,
 drawing up a will and giving it due form.' 45

When those two frenzied shades, on whom
 I'd fixed my eyes, had hurried off,
 I turned to look at others born for sorrow. 48

One I saw, fashioned like a lute --
 had he been sundered at the groin
 from the joining where a man goes forked. 51

The heavy dropsy, which afflicts the body
 with its ill-digesting humor
 so that the face and belly do not match, 54

forced his lips to draw apart
 as a person parched with hectic fever curls
 one lip to his chin and twists the other up. 57

'O you who go unpunished here -- I know not why --
 through this world of misery,'
 he said, 'behold and then consider 60

'the suffering of Master Adam.
 Alive, I had in plenty all I wanted.
 And now I crave a single drop of water! 63

'The streams that, in the Casentino,
 run down along green hillsides to the Arno,
 keeping their channels cool and moist, 66

'flow before my eyes forever, and not in vain,
 because their image makes me thirst still more
 than does the malady that wastes my features. 69

'The rigid justice that torments me
 employs the landscape where I sinned
 to make my sighs come faster. 72

'In those parts lies Romena, where I forged
 the coinage stamped with John the Baptist.
 For that I left my body burned above. 75

'If I could only see down here the wretched souls
 of Guido, Alessandro, or their brother,
 I'd not give up that sight for Fonte Branda. 78

'One of them is here with us already,
 if the furious shades who move about don't lie.
 What good is that to me whose limbs are bound? 81

'If I were only light enough to budge
 a single inch each hundred years,
 I would by now have started on my way 84

'to seek him out in this pit's bloated shapes,
 even though it runs eleven miles around
 and spreads not less than half a mile across. 87

'It is their fault that I have such companions,
 for it was they who made me strike the florins
 that held three carats' worth of dross.' 90

And I to him: 'Who are these two wretches
 who steam as wet hands do in winter
 and lie so very near you on your right?' 93

'I found them when I rained into this trough,'
 he said, 'and even then they did not move about,
 nor do I think they will for all eternity. 96

'One is the woman who lied accusing Joseph,
 the other is false Sinon, the lying Greek from Troy.
 Putrid fever makes them reek with such a stench.' 99

And one of them, who took offense, perhaps
 at being named so vilely, hit him
 with a fist right on his rigid paunch. 102

It boomed out like a drum. Then Master Adam,
 whose arm seemed just as sturdy,
 used it, striking Sinon in the face, 105

saying: 'Although I cannot move about
 because my legs are heavy,
 my arm is loose enough for such a task.' 108

To which the other answered: 'When they put you
 to the fire, your arm was not so nimble,
 though it was quick enough when you were coining.' 111

And the dropsied one: 'Well, that is true,
 but you were hardly such a truthful witness
 when you were asked to tell the truth at Troy.' 114
 'If I spoke falsely, you falsified the coin,'
 said Sinon, 'and I am here for one offense alone,
 but you for more than any other devil!' 117
 'You perjurer, keep the horse in mind,'
 replied the sinner with the swollen paunch,
 'and may it pain you that the whole world knows.' 120
 'And may you suffer from the thirst,' the Greek replied,
 'that cracks your tongue, and from the fetid humor
 that turns your belly to a hedge before your eyes!' 123
 Then the forger: 'And so, as usual,
 your mouth gapes open from your fever.
 If I am thirsty, and swollen by this humor, 126
 'you have your hot spells and your aching head.
 For you to lick the mirror of Narcissus
 would not take much by way of invitation.' 129
 I was all intent in listening to them,
 when the master said: 'Go right on looking
 and it is I who'll quarrel with you.' 132
 When I heard him speak to me in anger
 I turned and faced him with a shame
 that circles in my memory even now. 135
 As a man who dreams that he is being harmed
 and, even as he dreams, hopes he is dreaming,
 longing for what is, as though it weren't -- 138
 so it was with me, deprived of speech:
 I longed to seek his pardon -- and all the while
 I did so without knowing that I did. 141
 'Less shame would cleanse a greater fault than yours,'
 my master said, 'and that is why
 you may set down the load of such remorse. 144
 'Do not forget I'm always at your side
 should it fall out again that fortune take you
 where people are in wrangles such as this. 147
 For the wish to hear such things is base.' 148