

INFERNO

CANTO XXXI

The same tongue that had stung me
so that both my cheeks turned red,
had also brought my cure, 3
just as the spear of Achilles and his father --
so I have heard it told -- would be the cause
first of a painful, then a welcome, gift. 6
We turned our backs upon that dismal valley,
first climbing up the bank that circles it,
then crossing over, while speaking not a word. 9
Here it was less than night and less than day --
I could not see too far ahead.
But I heard a horn-blast that would have made 12
the loudest thunderclap seem faint.
To find its source I turned my eyes
back to the place from which the din had come. 15
After the woeful rout when Charlemagne
had lost his holy band of knights,
Roland did not sound so terrible a blast. 18
I had not looked that way for long
when I saw what seemed a range of lofty towers,
and I said: 'Master, tell me, what city is this?' 21
And he to me: 'Because you try to pierce
the darkness from too far away,
it follows that you err in your perception. 24
'When you are nearer, you will understand
how much your eyesight is deceived by distance.
Therefore, push yourself a little harder.' 27
Then with affection he took me by the hand
and said: 'Before we travel farther,
and so the fact may seem to you less strange, 30
'you should be told: these are not towers,
but giants and, from the navel down,
each stands behind the bank that rings the pit.' 33

As, when the mist is lifting,
 little by little we discern things
 hidden in the air made thick by fog, 36
 so, when my eyes saw through the heavy dark
 and I got nearer to the brink,
 error left me and fear came in its place. 39
 For, as all around her ring of walls
 Monteriggioni is crowned with towers,
 so at the cliff-edge that surrounds the pit 42
 loomed up like towers half the body bulk
 of horrifying giants, those whom Jove
 still threatens from the heavens when he thunders. 45
 Now I could discern the face of one,
 his chest and shoulders, a portion of his paunch,
 and, hanging at his sides, his arms. 48
 Surely nature did well when she renounced
 the craft of making creatures such as these,
 depriving Mars of such practitioners. 51
 If she does not repent her elephants
 and whales, if one reviews the matter closely,
 she will be found more cautious and more just. 54
 For when the power of thought
 is coupled with ill will and naked force
 there is no refuge from it for mankind. 57
 His face appeared to me as long and broad
 as is, in Rome, the pine cone at St. Peter's,
 his other parts as large in like degree, 60
 so that the bank, which hid him like an apron
 from his middle downwards, still showed
 so much of him above that quite in vain 63
 three Frieslanders might boast of having reached
 his hair. For I saw thirty spans of him
 beneath the place where men make fast their cloaks. 66
 'Raphèl mà amècche zabì almi,'
 the savage mouth, for which no sweeter
 psalms were fit, began to shout. 69
 And, in response, my leader: 'You muddled soul,
 stick to your horn! Vent yourself with that
 when rage or other passion takes you. 72

'Search at your neck, you creature of confusion,
and you will find the rope that holds the horn
aslant your mammoth chest.' 75

Then he to me: 'He is his own accuser.
This is Nimrod, because of whose vile plan
the world no longer speaks a single tongue. 78

'Let us leave him and not waste our speech,
for every language is to him as his
to others, and his is understood by none.' 81

Then, turning to our left, we continued
with our journey. A bowshot farther on
we found the next one, bigger and more savage. 84

Now who had plied his craft to bind him so
I cannot say, but his right arm
was bound behind him, the other one in front, 87
by chains that from the neck down held him fixed.
They wound five times around his bulk
on the part of him that we could see. 90

'This prideful spirit chose to test his strength
against almighty Jove,' my leader said,
'and this is his reward. 93

'He is Ephialtes. He joined the great assault
when giants put the gods in fear.
Those arms he brandished he can move no more.' 96

And I to him: 'If it is allowed,
I'd like to see with my own eyes
Briareus and his immeasurable bulk.' 99

He replied: 'It is Antaeus you shall see.
He is close by, he speaks, he is not fettered.
And he shall set us down into the very depth of sin. 102

'The one you want to see is farther on,
in fetters also, just like this one here,
except that from his looks he'd seem more fierce.' 105

Never did mighty earthquake shake a tower
with such great speed and force
as Ephialtes shook himself at that. 108

Then more than ever I was afraid of dying:
my fear alone would have sufficed to bring it on,
had I not noted how tightly he was bound. 111

Going farther on, we came upon Antaeus.
 Without the added measure of his head,
 he stood a full five ells above the pit. 114

'O you, who -- in the fateful valley
 that made Scipio an heir to glory,
 when Hannibal with all his men displayed their backs -- 117

'you, who took as prey a thousand lions,
 and by whose strength, it seems some do believe,
 had you been at the war on Heaven with your brethren, 120

'the sons of earth would have prevailed --
 pray set us down, do not disdain to do so,
 upon Cocytus, shackled by the cold. 123

'Don't make us go to Tityus or Typhon.
 This man can give what everyone here longs for.
 Therefore bend down and do not curl your lip. 126

'He still can make you famous in the world,
 because he lives, and hopes for years of living,
 if Grace does not recall him sooner than his time.' 129

Thus spoke the master. The other was quick
 to reach out with his hands -- the mighty grip
 once felt by Hercules -- and seized my guide. 132

Virgil, when he felt himself secured, said:
 'Here, let me take hold of you!'

Then he made a single bundle of himself and me. 135

As when one sees the tower called Garisenda
 from underneath its leaning side, and then a cloud
 passes over and it seems to lean the more, 138

thus did Antaeus seem to my fixed gaze
 as I watched him bend -- that was indeed a time
 I wished that I had gone another road. 141

Even so, he set us gently on the bottom
 that swallows Lucifer with Judas.

Nor in stooping did he linger 144

but, like a ship's mast rising, so he rose. 145