

INFERNO

CANTO XXXII

If I had verses harsh enough and rasping
as would befit this dismal hole
upon which all the other rocks weigh down, 3
I would press out more fully the juice
of my conception. But, since I lack them,
with misgiving do I bring myself to speak. 6
It is no enterprise undertaken lightly --
describing the center of the universe --
nor for a tongue that cries 'mommy' and 'daddy.' 9
But may those ladies who aided Amphion
to build the walls of Thebes now aid my verse,
that the telling be no different from the fact. 12
O you misgotten rabble, worse than all the rest,
who fill that place so hard to speak of,
better had you here been sheep or goats! 15
When we were down in that ditch's darkness,
below the ridge where the giants set their feet,
my gaze still drawn by the wall above us, 18
I heard a voice say: 'Watch where you walk.
Step so as not to tread upon our heads,
the heads of wretched, weary brothers.' 21
At that I turned to look about.
Under my feet I saw a lake
so frozen that it seemed more glass than water. 24
Never in winter did the Austrian Danube
nor the far-off Don, under its frigid sky,
cover their currents with so thick a veil 27
as I saw there. For had Tambernica fallen on it,
or Pietrapana, the ice would not
have creaked, not even at the edge. 30
And as frogs squat and croak,
their snouts out of the water, in the season
when peasant women often dream of gleaning, 33

so shades, ashen with cold, were grieving, trapped
 in ice up to the place the hue of shame appears,
 their teeth a-clatter like the bills of storks. 36

Downturned were all their faces, their mouths
 gave witness to the cold, while from their eyes
 came testimony of their woeful hearts. 39

I gazed around a while; then I looked down
 and saw two shades so shackled to each other
 their two heads' hair made but a single skein. 42

'Tell me, you with chests pressed close,' I said,
 'who are you?' They strained their necks,
 and, when they had raised their faces, 45

their eyes, till then moist only to the rims,
 dripped tears down to their lips, and icy air
 then froze those tears -- and them to one another. 48

Clamp never gripped together board to board
 so tight, at which such anger overcame them
 they butted at each other like two rams. 51

And one of the other shades, who'd lost both ears
 to the cold, and kept his face averted, said:
 'Why do you reflect yourself so long in us? 54

'If you would like to know who these two are,
 the valley out of which Bisenzio flows
 belonged once to their father, Albert, and to them. 57

'From a single womb they sprang, and though you seek
 throughout Caïna, you will find no shade
 more fit to be fixed in aspic, 60

'not him whose breast and shadow were pierced
 by a single blow from Arthur's hand,
 nor Focaccia, nor the one whose head so blocks 63

'my view that I cannot see past him
 and whose name was Sassol Mascheroni --
 if you are Tuscan you know well who he was. 66

'And, so you coax no further words from me,
 know that I was Camiscion de' Pazzi,
 and I await Carlino for my exculpation.' 69

After that I saw a thousand faces purple
 with the cold, so that I shudder still --
 and always will -- when I come to a frozen ford. 72

Then, while we made our way toward the center,
 where all things that have weight converge,
 and I was shivering in the eternal chill, 75
 if it was will or fate or chance
 I do not know, but, walking among the heads,
 I struck my foot hard in the face of one. 78
 Wailing, he cried out: 'Why trample me?
 Unless you come to add to the revenge
 for Montaperti, why pick on me?' 81
 And I: 'Master, would you wait for just a moment,
 so that I may resolve a doubt about this person.
 And then I'll make what haste you like.' 84
 My leader stopped, and I said to the shade,
 who was still shouting bitter curses:
 'And who are you, so to reproach another?' 87
 'No, who are you to go through Antenora,'
 he answered, 'buffeting another's cheeks?
 Were I alive, this still would be an outrage.' 90
 'Well, I'm alive,' I said, 'and if it's fame you seek,
 it might turn out to your advantage
 if I put your name among the others I have noted.' 93
 And he: 'I long for just the opposite.
 Take yourself off and trouble me no more --
 you ill know how to flatter at this depth.' 96
 Then I grabbed him by the scruff of the neck
 and said: 'Either you name yourself
 or I'll leave you without a single hair.' 99
 And he: 'You can peel me bald and I
 won't tell you who I am, nor lift my face,
 even if you jump upon my head a thousand times.' 102
 I now had his hair twisted in my hand
 and had already plucked a tuft or two,
 while he howled on, keeping his eyes cast down, 105
 when another cried: 'What ails you, Bocca?
 Isn't it enough, making noise with your jaws,
 without that howling too? What devil's at you?' 108
 'Now you no longer need to say a word,
 vile traitor,' said I, 'to your shame
 shall I bring back true news of you.' 111

'Be off,' he answered, 'and tell what tale you will.
 But don't be silent, if you escape from here,
 about the one whose tongue was now so nimble. 114
 'Here he laments the Frenchmen's silver.
 "I saw him of Duera," you can say,
 "there where they set the sinners out to cool." 117
 'And if someone were to ask you: "Who else was there?"
 beside you is the one from Beccheria --
 Florence sawed his throat in two. 120
 'I think Gianni de' Soldanier is farther on,
 with Ganelon and Tebaldello,
 who opened up Faenza while it slept.' 123
 We had left him behind when I took note
 of two souls so frozen in a single hole
 the head of one served as the other's hat. 126
 As a famished man will bite into his bread,
 the one above had set his teeth into the other
 just where the brain's stem leaves the spinal cord. 129
 Tydeus gnawed the temples of Melanippus
 with bitter hatred just as he was doing
 to the skull and to the other parts. 132
 'O you, who by so bestial a sign
 show loathing for the one whom you devour,
 tell me why,' I said, 'and let the pact be this: 135
 'if you can give just cause for your complaint,
 then I, knowing who you are and what his sin is,
 may yet requite you in the world above, 138
 if that with which I speak does not go dry.' 139