

INFERNO

CANTO XXXIV

'The banners of the King of Hell advance
on us. Look straight before you
and see if you can make him out,' my master said. 3

As when a thick mist rises, or when our hemisphere
darkens to night, one may discern
a distant windmill by its turning sails, 6

it seemed to me I saw such a contrivance.
And, to avoid the wind, I drew in close
behind my leader: there was nowhere else to hide. 9

Now -- and I shudder as I write it out in verse --
I was where the shades were wholly covered,
showing through like bits of straw in glass. 12

Some are lying down, still others stand erect:
some with heads, some with footsoles up,
some bent like bows, their faces to their toes. 15

When we had gotten far enough along
that my master was pleased to let me see
the creature who was once so fair of face, 18

he took a step aside, then brought me to a halt:
'Look there at Dis! And see the place
where you must arm yourself with fortitude.' 21

Then how faint and frozen I became,
reader, do not ask, for I do not write it,
since any words would fail to be enough. 24

I did not die, nor did I stay alive.
Imagine, if you have the wit,
what I became, deprived of both. 27

The emperor of the woeful kingdom
rose from the ice below his breast,
and I in size am closer to a giant 30

than giants are when measured to his arms.
Judge, then, what the whole must be
that is proportional to such a part. 33

If he was fair as he is hideous now,
 and raised his brow in scorn of his creator,
 he is fit to be the source of every sorrow. 36

Oh, what a wonder it appeared to me
 when I perceived three faces on his head.
 The first, in front, was red in color. 39

Another two he had, each joined with this,
 above the midpoint of each shoulder,
 and all the three united at the crest. 42

The one on the right was a whitish yellow,
 while the left-hand one was tinted like the people
 living at the sources of the Nile. 45

Beneath each face two mighty wings emerged,
 such as befit so vast a bird:
 I never saw such massive sails at sea. 48

They were featherless and fashioned
 like a bat's wings. When he flapped them,
 he sent forth three separate winds, 51

the sources of the ice upon Cocytus.
 Out of six eyes he wept and his three chins
 dripped tears and drooled blood-red saliva. 54

With his teeth, just like a hackle
 pounding flax, he champed a sinner
 in each mouth, tormenting three at once. 57

For the one in front the gnawing was a trifle
 to the clawing, for from time to time
 his back was left with not a shred of skin. 60

'That soul up there who bears the greatest pain,'
 said the master, 'is Judas Iscariot, who has
 his head within and outside flails his legs. 63

'As for the other two, whose heads are dangling down,
 Brutus is hanging from the swarthy snout --
 see how he writhes and utters not a word! -- 66

'and from the other, Cassius, so large of limb.
 But night is rising in the sky. It is time
 for us to leave, for we have seen it all.' 69

At his request I clasped him round the neck.
 When the wings had opened wide enough
 he chose the proper time and place 72

and took a handhold on those hairy flanks.
 Then from hank to hank he clambered down
 between the thick pelt and the crusted ice. 75
 When we had come to where the thighbone
 swivels, at the broad part of the hips,
 my leader, with much strain of limb and breath, 78
 turned his head where Satan had his shanks
 and clung to the hair like a man climbing upward,
 so that I thought we were heading back to Hell. 81
 'Hold on tight, for by such rungs as these,'
 said my master, panting like a man exhausted,
 'must we depart from so much evil.' 84
 Then out through an opening in the rock he went,
 setting me down upon its edge to rest.
 And then, with quick and cautious steps, he joined me. 87
 I raised my eyes, thinking I would see
 Lucifer still the same as I had left him,
 but saw him with his legs held upward. 90
 And if I became confused, let those dull minds
 who fail to see what point I'd passed
 comprehend what I felt then. 93
 The master said to me: 'Get to your feet,
 for the way is long and the road not easy,
 and the sun returns to middle tierce.' 96
 It was not the great hall of a palace,
 where we were, but a natural dungeon,
 rough underfoot and wanting light. 99
 'Master, before I tear myself from the abyss,'
 I said once I had risen,
 'say a few words to rid me of my doubt. 102
 'Where is the ice? Why is this one fixed now
 upside down? And how in so few hours
 has the sun moved from evening into morning?' 105
 And he to me: 'You imagine you are still
 beyond the center, where I grasped the hair
 of the guilty worm by whom the world is pierced. 108
 'So you were, as long as I descended,
 but, when I turned around, you passed the point
 to which all weights are drawn from every side. 111

'You are now beneath the hemisphere opposite the one that canopies the landmass -- and underneath its zenith that Man was slain	114
'who without sin was born and sinless lived. You have your feet upon a little sphere that forms Judecca's other face.	117
'Here it is morning when it is evening there, and the one whose hair provided us a ladder is fixed exactly as he was before.	120
'It was on this side that he fell from Heaven. And the dry land that used to stand, above, in fear of him immersed itself in water	123
'and fled into our hemisphere. And perhaps to escape from him the land we'll find above created this lacuna when it rushed back up.'	126
As far as one can get from Beelzebub, in the remotest corner of this cavern, there is a place one cannot find by sight,	129
but by the sound of a narrow stream that trickles through a channel it has cut into the rock in its meanderings, making a gentle slope.	132
Into that hidden passage my guide and I entered, to find again the world of light, and, without thinking of a moment's rest,	135
we climbed up, he first and I behind him, far enough to see, through a round opening, a few of those fair things the heavens bear.	138
Then we came forth, to see again the stars.	139