

INFERNO

CANTO VI

With my returning senses that had failed
before the piteous state of those two kinfolk,
which had confounded me with grief, 3
new torments and new souls in torment
I see about me, wherever I may move,
or turn, or set my gaze. 6
I am in the third circle, of eternal,
hateful rain, cold and leaden,
changeless in its monotony. 9
Heavy hailstones, filthy water, and snow
pour down through gloomy air.
The ground it falls on reeks. 12
Cerberus, fierce and monstrous beast,
barks from three gullets like a dog
over the people underneath that muck. 15
His eyes are red, his beard a greasy black,
his belly swollen. With his taloned hands
he claws the spirits, flays and quarters them. 18
The rain makes them howl like dogs.
The unholy wretches often turn their bodies,
making of one side a shield for the other. 21
When Cerberus -- that great worm -- noticed us,
he opened up his jaws and showed his fangs.
There was no part of him he held in check. 24
But then my leader opened up his hands,
picked up some earth, and with full fists
tossed soil into the ravenous gullets. 27
As the dog that yelps with craving
grows quiet while it chews its food,
absorbed in trying to devour it, 30
the foul heads of that demon Cerberus were stilled,
who otherwise assaults the ears of souls
so heavily they would as soon be deaf. 33

We were passing over shades sprawled
under heavy rain, setting our soles
upon their emptiness, which seems real bodies. 36

All of them were lying on the ground,
except for one who sat bolt upright
when he saw us pass before him. 39

'O you who come escorted through this Hell,'
he said, 'if you can, bring me back to mind.
You were made before I was undone.' 42

And I to him: 'The punishment you suffer
may be blotting you from memory:
it does not seem to me I've ever seen you. 45

'But tell me who you are to have been put
into this misery with such a penalty
that none, though harsher, is more loathsome.' 48

And he to me: 'Your city, so full of envy
that now the sack spills over,
held me in its confines in the sunlit life. 51

'You my townsmen called me Ciacco.
For the pernicious fault of gluttony,
as you can see, I'm prostrate in this rain. 54

'And in my misery I am not alone.
All those here share a single penalty
for the same fault.' He said no more. 57

I answered him: 'Ciacco, your distress so weighs
on me it bids me weep. But tell me,
if you can, what shall be the fate 60

'of the citizens within the riven city.
Are any in it just? And tell me why
such discord has assailed it.' 63

And he to me: 'After long feuding
they shall come to blood. The rustic faction,
having done great harm, will drive the others out. 66

'But it in turn shall fall to them,
within three years, by power of him
who now just plays for time. 69

'These in their arrogance will long subject
the other faction to their heavy yoke,
despite its weeping and its shame. 72

'Two men are just and are not heeded there.
Pride, envy and avarice are the sparks
that have set the hearts of all on fire.' 75

With that he ended his distressing words.
And I to him: 'I wish you would instruct me more,
granting me the gift of further speech. 78

'Farinata and Tegghiaio, who were so worthy,
Jacopo Rusticucci, Arrigo, and Mosca,
and the rest whose minds were bent on doing good, 81
'tell me where they are and how they fare.
For great desire presses me to learn
whether Heaven sweetens or Hell embitters them.' 84

And he: 'They are among the blacker souls.
Different vices weigh them toward the bottom,
as you shall see if you descend that far. 87

'But when you have returned to the sweet world
I pray you bring me to men's memory.
I say no more nor answer you again.' 90

With that his clear eyes lost their focus.
He gazed at me until his head drooped down.
Then he fell back among his blind companions. 93

And my leader said to me: 'He wakes no more
until angelic trumpets sound
the advent of the hostile Power. 96

'Then each shall find again his miserable tomb,
shall take again his flesh and form,
and hear the judgment that eternally resounds.' 99

So we passed on through the foul mix
of shades and rain with lagging steps,
touching a little on the life to come. 102

'Master,' I asked, 'after the great Judgment
will these torments be greater, less,
or will they stay as harsh as they are now?' 105

And he replied: 'Return to your science,
which has it that, in measure of a thing's perfection,
it feels both more of pleasure and of pain. 108

'Although these accursèd people
will never come to true perfection,
they will be nearer it than they are now.' 111

We went along that curving road,
with much more talk than I repeat,
and reached the point of our descent. 114
And there we came on Plutus, our great foe. 115