

Inferno: Canto XII

The place where to descend the bank we came  
Was alpine, and from what was there, moreover,  
Of such a kind that every eye would shun it.

Such as that ruin is which in the flank  
Smote, on this side of Trent, the Adige,  
Either by earthquake or by failing stay,

For from the mountain's top, from which it moved,  
Unto the plain the cliff is shattered so,  
Some path 'twould give to him who was above;

Even such was the descent of that ravine,  
And on the border of the broken chasm  
The infamy of Crete was stretched along,

Who was conceived in the fictitious cow;  
And when he us beheld, he bit himself,  
Even as one whom anger racks within.

My Sage towards him shouted: "Peradventure  
Thou think'st that here may be the Duke of Athens,  
Who in the world above brought death to thee?"

Get thee gone, beast, for this one cometh not  
Instructed by thy sister, but he comes  
In order to behold your punishments."

As is that bull who breaks loose at the moment  
In which he has received the mortal blow,  
Who cannot walk, but staggers here and there,

The Minotaur beheld I do the like;  
And he, the wary, cried: "Run to the passage;  
While he wroth, 'tis well thou shouldst descend."

Thus down we took our way o'er that discharge  
Of stones, which oftentimes did move themselves  
Beneath my feet, from the unwonted burden.

Thoughtful I went; and he said: "Thou art thinking  
Perhaps upon this ruin, which is guarded  
By that brute anger which just now I quenched.

Now will I have thee know, the other time  
I here descended to the nether Hell,  
This precipice had not yet fallen down.

But truly, if I well discern, a little  
Before His coming who the mighty spoil  
Bore off from Dis, in the supernal circle,

Upon all sides the deep and loathsome valley  
Trembled so, that I thought the Universe  
Was thrilled with love, by which there are who think

The world oftentimes converted into chaos;

And at that moment this primeval crag  
Both here and elsewhere made such overthrow.

But fix thine eyes below; for draweth near  
The river of blood, within which boiling is  
Whoe'er by violence doth injure others."

O blind cupidity, O wrath insane,  
That spurs us onward so in our short life,  
And in the eternal then so badly steeps us!

I saw an ample moat bent like a bow,  
As one which all the plain encompasses,  
Conformable to what my Guide had said.

And between this and the embankment's foot  
Centaur's in file were running, armed with arrows,  
As in the world they used the chase to follow.

Beholding us descend, each one stood still,  
And from the squadron three detached themselves,  
With bows and arrows in advance selected;

And from afar one cried: "Unto what torment  
Come ye, who down the hillside are descending?  
Tell us from there; if not, I draw the bow."

My Master said: "Our answer will we make  
To Chiron, near you there; in evil hour,  
That will of thine was evermore so hasty."

Then touched he me, and said: "This one is Nessus,  
Who perished for the lovely Dejanira,  
And for himself, himself did vengeance take.

And he in the midst, who at his breast is gazing,  
Is the great Chiron, who brought up Achilles;  
That other Pholus is, who was so wrathful.

Thousands and thousands go about the moat  
Shooting with shafts whatever soul emerges  
Out of the blood, more than his crime allots."

Near we approached unto those monsters fleet;  
Chiron an arrow took, and with the notch  
Backward upon his jaws he put his beard.

After he had uncovered his great mouth,  
He said to his companions: "Are you ware  
That he behind moveth whate'er he touches?"

Thus are not wont to do the feet of dead men."  
And my good Guide, who now was at his breast,  
Where the two natures are together joined,

Replied: "Indeed he lives, and thus alone  
Me it behoves to show him the dark valley;  
Necessity, and not delight, impels us.

Some one withdrew from singing Halleluja,

Who unto me committed this new office;  
No thief is he, nor I a thievish spirit.

But by that virtue through which I am moving  
My steps along this savage thoroughfare,  
Give us some one of thine, to be with us,

And who may show us where to pass the ford,  
And who may carry this one on his back;  
For 'tis no spirit that can walk the air."

Upon his right breast Chiron wheeled about,  
And said to Nessus: "Turn and do thou guide them,  
And warn aside, if other band may meet you."

We with our faithful escort onward moved  
Along the brink of the vermilion boiling,  
Wherein the boiled were uttering loud laments.

People I saw within up to the eyebrows,  
And the great Centaur said: "Tyrants are these,  
Who dealt in bloodshed and in pillaging.

Here they lament their pitiless mischiefs; here  
Is Alexander, and fierce Dionysius  
Who upon Sicily brought dolorous years.

That forehead there which has the hair so black  
Is Azzolin; and the other who is blond,  
Obizzo is of Esti, who, in truth,

Up in the world was by his stepson slain."  
Then turned I to the Poet; and he said,  
"Now he be first to thee, and second I."

A little farther on the Centaur stopped  
Above a folk, who far down as the throat  
Seemed from that boiling stream to issue forth.

A shade he showed us on one side alone,  
Saying: "He cleft asunder in God's bosom  
The heart that still upon the Thames is honoured."

Then people saw I, who from out the river  
Lifted their heads and also all the chest;  
And many among these I recognised.

Thus ever more and more grew shallower  
That blood, so that the feet alone it covered;  
And there across the moat our passage was.

"Even as thou here upon this side beholdest  
The boiling stream, that aye diminishes,"  
The Centaur said, "I wish thee to believe

That on this other more and more declines  
Its bed, until it reunites itself  
Where it behoveth tyranny to groan.

Justice divine, upon this side, is goading

That Attila, who was a scourge on earth,  
And Pyrrhus, and Sextus; and for ever milks

The tears which with the boiling it unseals  
In Rinier da Corneto and Rinier Pazzo,  
Who made upon the highways so much war."

Then back he turned, and passed again the ford.