

Inferno: Canto VIII

I say, continuing, that long before
We to the foot of that high tower had come,
Our eyes went upward to the summit of it,

By reason of two flamelets we saw placed there,
And from afar another answer them,
So far, that hardly could the eye attain it.

And, to the sea of all discernment turned,
I said: "What sayeth this, and what respondeth
That other fire? and who are they that made it?"

And he to me: "Across the turbid waves
What is expected thou canst now discern,
If reek of the morass conceal it not."

Cord never shot an arrow from itself
That sped away athwart the air so swift,
As I beheld a very little boat

Come o'er the water tow'rds us at that moment,
Under the guidance of a single pilot,
Who shouted, "Now art thou arrived, fell soul?"

"Phlegyas, Phlegyas, thou criest out in vain
For this once," said my Lord; "thou shalt not have us
Longer than in the passing of the slough."

As he who listens to some great deceit
That has been done to him, and then resents it,
Such became Phlegyas, in his gathered wrath.

My Guide descended down into the boat,
And then he made me enter after him,
And only when I entered seemed it laden.

Soon as the Guide and I were in the boat,
The antique prow goes on its way, dividing
More of the water than 'tis wont with others.

While we were running through the dead canal,
Uprose in front of me one full of mire,
And said, "Who 'rt thou that comest ere the hour?"

And I to him: "Although I come, I stay not;
But who art thou that hast become so squalid?"
"Thou seest that I am one who weeps," he answered.

And I to him: "With weeping and with wailing,
Thou spirit maledict, do thou remain;
For thee I know, though thou art all defiled."

Then stretched he both his hands unto the boat;
Whereat my wary Master thrust him back,
Saying, "Away there with the other dogs!"

Thereafter with his arms he clasped my neck;

He kissed my face, and said: "Disdainful soul,
Blessed be she who bore thee in her bosom.

That was an arrogant person in the world;
Goodness is none, that decks his memory;
So likewise here his shade is furious.

How many are esteemed great kings up there,
Who here shall be like unto swine in mire,
Leaving behind them horrible dispraises!"

And I: "My Master, much should I be pleased,
If I could see him soused into this broth,
Before we issue forth out of the lake."

And he to me: "Ere unto thee the shore
Reveal itself, thou shalt be satisfied;
Such a desire 'tis meet thou shouldst enjoy."

A little after that, I saw such havoc
Made of him by the people of the mire,
That still I praise and thank my God for it.

They all were shouting, "At Filippo Argenti!"
And that exasperate spirit Florentine
Turned round upon himself with his own teeth.

We left him there, and more of him I tell not;
But on mine ears there smote a lamentation,
Whence forward I intent unbar mine eyes.

And the good Master said: "Even now, my Son,
The city draweth near whose name is Dis,
With the grave citizens, with the great throng."

And I: "Its mosques already, Master, clearly
Within there in the valley I discern
Vermilion, as if issuing from the fire

They were." And he to me: "The fire eternal
That kindles them within makes them look red,
As thou beholdest in this nether Hell."

Then we arrived within the moats profound,
That circumvallate that disconsolate city;
The walls appeared to me to be of iron.

Not without making first a circuit wide,
We came unto a place where loud the pilot
Cried out to us, "Debark, here is the entrance."

More than a thousand at the gates I saw
Out of the Heavens rained down, who angrily
Were saying, "Who is this that without death

Goes through the kingdom of the people dead?"
And my sagacious Master made a sign
Of wishing secretly to speak with them.

A little then they quelled their great disdain,

And said: "Come thou alone, and he begone
Who has so boldly entered these dominions.

Let him return alone by his mad road;
Try, if he can; for thou shalt here remain,
Who hast escorted him through such dark regions."

Think, Reader, if I was discomforted
At utterance of the accursed words;
For never to return here I believed.

"O my dear Guide, who more than seven times
Hast rendered me security, and drawn me
From imminent peril that before me stood,

Do not desert me," said I, "thus undone;
And if the going farther be denied us,
Let us retrace our steps together swiftly."

And that Lord, who had led me thitherward,
Said unto me: "Fear not; because our passage
None can take from us, it by Such is given.

But here await me, and thy weary spirit
Comfort and nourish with a better hope;
For in this nether world I will not leave thee."

So onward goes and there abandons me
My Father sweet, and I remain in doubt,
For No and Yes within my head contend.

I could not hear what he proposed to them;
But with them there he did not linger long,
Ere each within in rivalry ran back.

They closed the portals, those our adversaries,
On my Lord's breast, who had remained without
And turned to me with footsteps far between.

His eyes cast down, his forehead shorn had he
Of all its boldness, and he said, with sighs,
"Who has denied to me the dolesome houses?"

And unto me: "Thou, because I am angry,
Fear not, for I will conquer in the trial,
Whatever for defence within be planned.

This arrogance of theirs is nothing new;
For once they used it at less secret gate,
Which finds itself without a fastening still.

O'er it didst thou behold the dead inscription;
And now this side of it descends the steep,
Passing across the circles without escort,

One by whose means the city shall be opened."