

Inferno Canto XII:100-139 The Tyrants, Murderers and Warriors

We moved onwards with our trustworthy guide, along the margin of the crimson boiling, in which the boiled were shrieking loudly. I saw people immersed as far as the eyebrows, and the great Centaur said: 'These are tyrants who indulged in blood, and rapine. Here they lament their offences, done without mercy. Here is *Alexander* [p. 411], and fierce *Dionysius* [p. 463] of Syracuse, who gave Sicily years of pain. That head of black hair is *Azzolino* [p. 425], and the other, which is blonde, is *Obizzo da Este* [p. 470], whose life was quenched, in truth, by his stepson, up in the world.' Then I turned to the poet, and he said: 'Let him guide you first, now, and I second.'

A little further on, Nessus paused, next to people who seemed to be sunk in the boiling stream up to their throat. He showed us a shade, apart by itself, saying: 'That one, *Guy de Montfort* [p. 522], in God's church, pierced that heart that is still venerated by the Thames.'

Then I saw others, who held their heads and all their chests, likewise, free of the river: and I knew many of these. So the blood grew shallower and shallower, until it only cooked their feet, and here was our ford through the ditch.

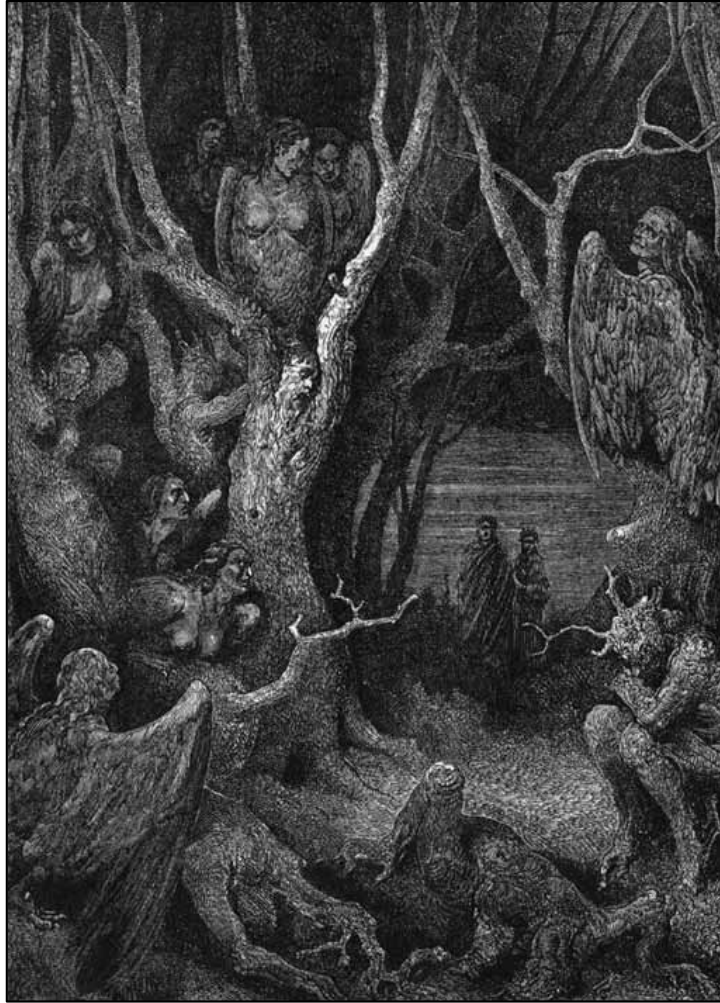
The Centaur said: 'As you see the boiling stream continually diminishing, on this side, so, on the other, it sinks more and more, till it comes again to where tyrants are doomed to grieve. Divine Justice here torments *Attila* [p. 423], the scourge of the earth; and *Pyrrhus* [p. 544], and *Sextus Pompeius* [p. 541]; and for eternity milks tears, produced by the boiling, from *Rinier da Corneto* [p. 456], and *Rinier Pazzo* [p. 532], who made war on the highways.' Then he turned back, and recrossed the ford.

Inferno Canto XIII:1-30 The Second Ring: The Harpies: The Suicides

Nessus had not yet returned to the other side, when we entered a wood, unmarked by any path. The foliage was not green, but a dusky colour: the branches were not smooth, but warped and knotted: there were no fruits there, but poisonous thorns. The wild beasts, that hate the cultivated fields,

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in the Tuscan Maremma, between Cecina and Corneto, have lairs less thick and tangled. Here the brutish *Harpies* [p. 486] make their nests, they who chased the Trojans from the Strophades, with dismal pronouncements of future tribulations.



They have broad wings, and human necks and faces, clawed feet, and large feathered bellies, and they make mournful cries in that strange wood. The kind Master said: 'Before you go further, be aware you are in the second ring, and will be until you come to the dreadful sands. So look carefully, and you will see things that might make you mistrust my words.'

Already I heard sighs on every side, and saw no one to make them, at which, I stood totally bewildered. I think that he thought that I was

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thinking that many of those voices came from among the trees, from people who hid themselves because of us. So the Master said: 'If you break a little twig from one of these branches, the thoughts you have will be seen to be in error.'

Inferno Canto XIII:31-78 The Wood of Suicides: Pier delle Vigne

Then I stretched my hand out a little, and broke a small branch from a large thorn, and its trunk cried out: 'Why do you tear at me?' And when it had grown dark with blood, it began to cry out again: 'Why do you splinter me? Have you no breath of pity? We were men, and we are changed to trees: truly, your hand would be more merciful, if we were merely the souls of snakes.'



Just as a green branch, burning at one end, spits and hisses with escaping air at the other, so from that broken wood, blood and words came out together: at which I let the branch fall, and stood, like a man afraid. My wise sage replied: 'Wounded spirit, if he had only believed, before, what he

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had read *in my verse* [p. 572], he would not have lifted his hand to you, but the incredible nature of the thing made me urge him to do what grieves me. But tell him who you were, so that he might make you some amends, and renew your fame up in the world, to which he is allowed to return.

And the tree replied: 'You tempt me so, with your sweet words, that I cannot keep silent, but do not object if I am expansive in speech. I am *Pier delle Vigne* [p. 572], who held both the keys to *Frederick's* [p. 476] heart, and employed them, locking and unlocking, so quietly, that I kept almost everyone else from his secrets. I was so faithful to that glorious office that through it I lost my sleep and my life.

The whore that never turned her eyes from Caesar's household, Envy, the common disease and vice of courts, stirred all minds against me, and being stirred they stirred Augustus, so that my fine honours were changed to grievous sorrows. My spirit, in a scornful mode, thinking to escape scorn by death, made me, though I was just, unjust to myself. By the strange roots of this tree, I swear to you, I never broke faith with my lord, so worthy of honour. If either of you return to the world, raise and cherish the memory of me, that still lies low from the blow Envy gave me.'

Inferno Canto XIII:79-108 The fate of The Suicides

The poet listened for a while, then said to me: 'Since he is silent, do not lose the moment, but speak, and ask him to tell you more.' At which I aid to him: 'You ask him further, about what you think will interest me, because I could not, such pity fills my heart.' So he continued: 'That the man may do freely what your words request from him, imprisoned spirit, be pleased to tell us further how the spirits are caught in these knots: and tell us, if you can, whether any of them free themselves from these limbs.'

Then the trunk blew fiercely, and the breath was turned to words like these: 'My reply will be brief. When the savage spirit leaves the body, from which it has ripped itself, *Minos* [p. 520] sends it to the seventh gulf. It falls into this wood, and no place is set for it, but, wherever chance hurls it, there it sprouts, like a grain of German wheat, shoots up as a sapling, and then as a wild tree. The *Harpies* [p. 486] feeding then on its leaves hurt it, and give an outlet to its hurt.

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Like others we shall go to our corpses on the Day of Judgement, but not so that any of us may inhabit them again, because it would not be just to have what we took from ourselves. We shall drag them here, and our bodies will be hung through the dismal wood, each on the thorn-tree of its tormented shade.

Inferno Canto XIII:109-129 Lano Maconi and Giacomo da Sant' Andrea



We were still listening to the tree, thinking it might tell us more, when we were startled by a noise, like those who think the wild boar is nearing where they stand, and hear the animals and the crashing of branches. Behold, on the left, two naked, torn spirits, running so hard they broke every thicket of the wood. The leader, cried: 'Come Death, come now!' and the other, *Jacomo* [p. 415], who felt himself to be too slow cried: '*Lano* [p. 509], your legs were not so swift at the jousts of *Toppo* [p. 509].' And since perhaps his breath was failing him, he merged himself with a bush.

The wood behind them was filled with black bitch hounds, eager and quick as greyhounds that have slipped the leash. They clamped their teeth

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into Lano, who squatted, and tore him bit by bit, then carried off his miserable limbs.

Inferno Canto XIII:130-151 The unnamed Florentine

My guide now took me by the hand, and led me to the bush, which was grieving, in vain, through its bleeding splinters, crying: 'O Jacomo da Sant' Andrea, what have you gained by making me your screen? What blame do I have for your sinful life? When the Master had stopped next to it, he said: 'Who were you, that breathe out your mournful speech, with blood, through so many wounds?

And he to us: 'You spirits, who have come to view the dishonourable mangling that has torn my leaves from me, gather them round the foot of this sad tree. I was of Florence, that city, which changed Mars, its patron, for *St John the Baptist* [p. 497], because of which that god, through his powers, will always make it sorrowful. Were it not that some fragments of his statue remain where Ponte Vecchio crosses the Arno, those citizens, who rebuilt it on the ashes *Attila* [p. 423] left, would have worked in vain. *I made* [p. 408] a gibbet for myself, from my own roofbeam.'

Inferno Canto XIV:1-42 The Third Ring: The Violent against God

As the love of my native place stirred in me, I gathered up the scattered leaves, and gave them back to him who was already hoarse. Then we came to the edge, where the second round is divided from the third, where a fearsome form of justice is seen. To make these new things clear, I say we reached a plain, where the land repels all vegetation. The mournful wood makes a circle round it, as the ditch surrounds the wood: here we stepped close to its very rim.

The ground was dry, thick sand, no different in form than that which *Cato* [p. 444] once trod. O God's vengeance, how what was shown to my sight should be feared, by all who read! I saw many groups of naked spirits, who were all moaning bitterly: and there seemed to be diverse rules applied to