

The Inferno

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

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them. Some were lying face upward on the ground; some sat all crouched: and others roamed around continuously.

Those who moved were more numerous, and those that lay in torment fewer, but uttering louder cries of pain. Dilated flakes of fire, falling slowly, like snow in the windless mountains, rained down over all the vast sands. Like the flames that *Alexander* [p. 411] saw falling, in the hot zones of India, over all his army, until they reached the ground, fires that were more easily quenched while they were separate, so that his troops took care to trample the earth - like those, fell this eternal heat, kindling the sand like tinder beneath flint and steel, doubling the pain.

The dance of their tortured hands was never still, now here, now there, shaking off the fresh burning.



Inferno Canto XIV:43-72 Capaneus

I began: 'Master, you who overcome everything except the obdurate demons, that came out against us at the entrance to the gate, who is that great spirit, who seems indifferent to the fire, and lies there, scornful, contorted, so that the rain does not seem to deepen his repentance?' And

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he himself, noting that I asked my guide about him, cried: 'What I was when I was living, I am now I am dead. Though *Jupiter* [p. 501] exhausts *Vulcan* [p. 574], his blacksmith, from whom he took, in anger, the fierce lightning bolt, that I was struck down with on my last day, and though he exhausts the others, the *Cyclopes* [p. 457], one by one, at the black forge of Aetna, shouting: 'Help, help, good Vulcan', just as he did at the battle of Phlegra, between the gods and giants, and hurls his bolts at me with all his strength, he shall still not enjoy a true revenge.'

Then my guide spoke, with a force I had not heard before: 'O *Capaneus* [p. 440], you are punished more in that your pride is not quenched: no torment would produce pain fitting for your fury, except your own raving.' Then he turned to me with gentler voice, saying: 'That was one of the seven kings who laid siege to Thebes: and he held God, and seems to hold him, in disdain, and value him lightly, but as I told him, his spite is an ornament that fits his breast.'

Inferno Canto XIV:73-120 The Old Man of Crete

'Now follow me, and be careful not to place your feet yet on the burning sand, but always keep back close to the wood.' We came, in silence, to the place, where a little stream gushes from the wood, the redness of which still makes me shudder. Like the rivulet that runs sulphur-red from the Bulicame spring, near Viterbo, that the sinful women share among themselves, so this ran down over the sand. Its bed and both its sloping banks were petrified, and its nearby margins: so that I realised our way lay there.

'Among all the other things that I have shown you, since we entered though the gate, whose threshold is denied to no one, your eyes have seen nothing as noteworthy as this present stream, that quenches all the flames over it.' These were my guide's words, at which I begged him to grant me food, for which he had given me the appetite.

He then said: 'There is a deserted island in the middle of the sea, named Crete, under whose king *Saturn* [p. 552], the world was pure. There is a mountain, there, called Ida, which was once gladdened with waters and vegetation, and now is abandoned like an ancient spoil heap. *Rhea* [p. 545]

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chose it, once, as the trusted cradle of her son, and the better to hide him when he wept, caused loud shouts to echo from it.

Inside the mountain, a great *Old Man* [p. 586], stands erect, with his shoulders turned towards Egyptian Damietta, and looks at Rome as if it were his mirror. His head is formed of pure gold, his arms and his breasts are refined silver: then he is bronze as far as the thighs. Downwards from there he is all of choice iron, except that the right foot is baked clay, and more of his weight is on that one than the other. Every part, except the gold, is cleft with a fissure that sheds tears, which collect and pierce the grotto. Their course falls from rock to rock into this valley. They form Acheron, Styx and Phlegethon, then, by this narrow channel, go down to where there is no further fall, and form Cocytus: you will see what kind of lake that is: so I will not describe it to you here.'

Inferno Canto XIV:121-142 The Rivers Phlegethon and Lethe

I said to him: 'If the present stream flows down like that from our world, why does it only appear to us on this bank? And he to me: 'You know the place is circular, and though you have come far, always to the left, descending to the depths, you have not yet turned through a complete round, so that if anything new appears to us, it should not bring an expression of wonder to your face.'

And I again: 'Master, where are Phlegethon, and Lethe found, since you do not speak of the latter, and say that the former is created from these tears?' He replied: 'You please me, truly, with all your questions, but the boiling red water might well answer to one of those you ask about. You will see Lethe, but above this abyss, there, on the Mount, where the spirits go to purify themselves, when their guilt is absolved by penitence.'

Then he said: 'Now it is time to leave the wood: see that you follow me: the margins which are not burning form a path, and over them all the fire is quenched.'