

CANTO 31

The giants—Nimrod—Ephialtes—Antaeus lowers them to Cocytus

- 1 One and the same tongue first stung me so that
both my cheeks were stained, and then held out the
medicine to me:
- 4 so I hear that the spear of Achilles and his father
was the cause first of ill and then of good reward.
- 7 We turned our backs on the wretched valley, up
along the bank that girds it round, crossing over
without further speech.
- 10 Here it was less than night and less than day, so
that my sight did not pierce far ahead; but I heard
the sound of a horn so loud
- 13 that it would make any thunder feeble, which
drew my eyes straight to one place, following its
path backward.
- 16 After the dolorous rout, when Charlemagne lost
the holy company, Roland did not sound his horn so
terribly.
- 19 I had not long held my head turned there, when I
seemed to see many high towers; therefore I: “Master,
say, what city is this?”
- 22 And he to me: “Because your sight traverses the
shadows from too far away, your imagining is
blurred.
- 25 You will see clearly, when you reach it, how sense
is deceived by distance; therefore drive yourself a
little further.”
- 28 Then he took me affectionately by the hand and
said: “Before we are any closer, so that the fact may
seem less frightening to you,

31 know that they are not towers, but giants, and
they are in the pit, around its rim, from the navel
downward, all of them.”

34 As, when mist dissolves, the gaze little by little
makes out the shape of what the vapor-thickened air
had hidden,

37 so, boring through the thick dark atmosphere,
drawing closer and closer to the edge, my error fled
and my fear grew;

40 for, as above its circling walls Montereccione is
crowned by towers, so there above the bank that
circles the pit

43 towered with half their persons the horrible
giants, whom Jove still threatens from the sky when
he thunders.

46 And I already discerned the face of one, his
shoulders and breast, and a large part of his belly,
and down his sides both his arms.

49 Nature surely, when she left off the crafting of
animals like those, did well to deprive Mars of such
instruments.

52 And if she has not repented of elephants and
whales, whoever considers subtly will hold her more
just and more discreet;

55 for where sharpness of mind is joined to evil will
and power, there is no defence people can make
against them.

58 His face seemed as long and broad as the pine
cone of Saint Peter in Rome, and to that proportion
were his other bones;

61 so that the bank, which was his apron from the
waist down, left so much of him exposed above it
that to reach his mane

64 three Frisians would have boasted idly, for I saw
thirty great spans down from the place where the
mantle is clasped.

67 “*Raphèl mà amècche zabì almì,*” the fierce mouth
began to shout, for no gentler psalms befitted it.

- 70 And my leader toward him: “Foolish soul, be
content with your horn, give vent with that, when
anger or some other passion touches you!
- 73 Feel at your neck, and you will find the thong that
holds it, o befuddled soul, and there it is, curving
across your breast like a bow.”
- 76 Then he said to me: “Himself accuses himself; that
is Nimrod, because of whose evil thought the world
no longer speaks one language.
- 79 Let us leave him alone and not waste speech, for
to him every language is like his to others,
unknown.”
- 82 Therefore we took a longer path, turning to the
left; at the distance of a cross-bow shot we found the
next, much fiercer and larger.
- 85 Who was the master to bind him I cannot say, but
one arm was held in front and the right arm behind
him,
- 88 by a chain wrapped about him from the neck
down, so that on what we saw of him it made five
full turns.
- 91 “This proud one wished to prove his power
against highest Jove,” said my leader, “and thus is he
rewarded.
- 94 His name is Ephialtes, and he performed great
deeds when the giants made the gods afraid; the arm
he struck with then, he never moves.”
- 97 And I to him: “If it can be, I would wish my eyes
to have experience of the immense Briareus.”
- 100 And he replied: “You will see Antaeus near here,
who speaks and is unbound; he will place us at the
bottom of all wickedness.
- 103 He whom you wish to see is much further over
there, and he is bound and shaped like this one,
except that his face seems fiercer.”
- 106 Never could rough earthquake so violently shake
a tower as Ephialtes suddenly shook himself.

109 Then more than ever I feared death, and the fright
alone would have sufficed, had I not seen his bonds.

112 We walked further then, and we came to Antaeus,
who rose a good five ells, not counting his head, out
of the pit.

115 “O you who once—in the fortunate valley that
made Scipio the heir of glory when Hannibal and his
men turned tail—

118 brought in a thousand lions as your catch, and, if
you had been present at your brothers’ great war, it
seems some still believe

121 the sons of earth would have been victorious: set
us down, and do not disdain to do so, where the
cold locks in Cocytus.

124 Do not make us go to Tityos or to Typhon: this
man can give what here is desired; therefore bend
down and do not twist your snout.

127 He can still repay you with fame in the world, for
he is alive and expects long life still, if grace does not
call him before his time.”

130 So spoke my master; and he in haste stretched out
his hands, whose powerful grip Hercules once felt,
and grasped my leader.

133 Virgil, when he felt himself gripped, said to me:
“Come here, that I may hold you.” Then he made
one bundle of himself and me.

136 As Garisenda appears from below the leaning side
when a cloud passes above it so that it seems to fall:

139 so Antaeus appeared as I stood waiting to see him
bend over, and that was a time when I would have
wished to go by another road.

142 But lightly he set us down on the bottom that
devours Lucifer with Judas; nor did he remain bent
over,

145 but like the mast of a ship he raised himself.

