

CANTO 34

*Judecca: traitors to lords and benefactors—Satan—Brutus, Cassius,
and Judas—descent past the center—climb to Purgatory*

- 1 *“Vexilla regis prodeunt inferni* toward us;
therefore look ahead,” said my master, “to see if you
discern him.”
- 4 As, when a thick mist breathes, or, when our
hemisphere is all night, a mill appears from afar that
the wind is turning:
- 7 so I seemed to see such an edifice there; then,
because of the wind, I shrank behind my leader, for
there was no other shelter.
- 10 I was already—and fearfully I set it in meter—
where the shades were all covered, and they
appeared like straws in glass.
- 13 Some are lying; others are vertical, this with head
above, that with feet; some, like bows, turn their
faces toward their feet.
- 16 When we had moved so far ahead that it pleased
my master to show me the creature who had once
been beautiful,
- 19 he removed himself from in front of me and made
me stop, saying: “Behold Dis, and behold the place
where you must arm yourself with courage.”
- 22 How then I became frozen and feeble, do not ask,
reader, for I do not write it, and all speech would be
insufficient.
- 25 I did not die and I did not remain alive: think
now for yourself, if you have wit at all, what I
became, deprived of both.
- 28 The emperor of the dolorous kingdom issued from
the ice at the mid-point of his breast; and I am more
to be compared with a giant

- 31 than the giants with his arms: see now how great
must be the whole that fits with such a part.
- 34 If he was as beautiful then as now he is ugly,
when he lifted his brow against his Maker, well must
all grieving proceed from him.
- 37 Oh how great a marvel did it seem to me, when I
saw three faces on his head! One was in front, and
that was crimson;
- 40 the others were two, and they were joined to the
first above the midpoint of each shoulder, and came
together at the crest:
- 43 and the right one seemed between white and
yellow; the left was such to see as those who come
from beyond the cataracts of the Nile.
- 46 Beneath each one came out two great wings, such
as befitted so great a bird: sea-going sails I never saw
so large.
- 49 They did not have feathers; their mode was like a
bat's; and he was fanning them, so that three winds
went out from him:
- 52 by them Cocytus was frozen. With six eyes he
was weeping, and down three chins dripped the
tears and the bloody slobber.
- 55 In each of his mouths he was breaking a sinner
with his teeth in the manner of a scutch, so that he
made three suffer at once.
- 58 To the one in front the biting was nothing next to
the clawing, for at times the spine remained all
naked of skin.
- 61 “That soul up there who has the greatest
punishment,” said my master, “is Judas Iscariot, with
his head inside, waving his legs outside.
- 64 Of the other two whose heads are below, he who
hangs from the black muzzle is Brutus—see how he is
convulsed, but does not say a word—
- 67 and the other is Cassius, who seems so powerfully
built. But the night is rising again, and now we must
depart, for we have seen everything.”

70 As it pleased him, I clung to his neck; and he
watched for time and place, and when the wings
were fully open
73 he took hold of the furry sides; from tuft to tuft
then he descended between the thick hair and the
frozen crust.
76 When we came to where the thigh is hinged,
exactly at the widest of the hips, my leader, with
labor and difficulty,
79 turned his head to where he had his shanks, and
clung to the pelt like one who climbs, so that I
supposed we were returning into Hell again.
82 “Hold fast, for by such stairs,” said my master,
panting like one weary, “must we depart from so
much evil.”
85 Next he went forth through the hole in the rock,
and placed me sitting on the rim; then he extended
his careful step to me.
88 I raised my eyes, thinking to see Lucifer as I had
left him, and I saw that he extended his legs upward;
91 and if I labored in thought then, let the gross
people ponder it who do not see what point it was
that I had passed.
94 “Rise up,” said my master, “on your feet; the way
is long and the path is difficult, and already the sun
has reached mid-tierce.”
97 That was no walk through a palace where we
were, but a natural cavern that had uneven ground
and lacked light.
100 “Before I am uprooted from the abyss, my master,”
said I, when I was erect, “speak to me a little to help
me out of error.
103 Where is the ice? and he, how is he fixed so
upside down? and how, in so little time, has the sun
made the passage from evening to morning?”
106 And he to me: “You imagine that you are still on
the other side of the center, where I laid hold on the
fur of this evil worm that gnaws the world.

109 You were on that side while I descended; when I
turned, you passed the point toward which the
weights all move from every direction.

112 And now you are beneath the hemisphere
opposite the one covered by the dry land, and under
whose high point died

115 the man who was born and lived without sin; you
have your feet on a little sphere that makes the other
face of the Judecca.

118 Here it is morning, when there it is evening; and
this one, who gave us a ladder with his fur, is still
fixed as he was earlier.

121 On this side he fell down from Heaven; and the
dry land, which previously extended over here, for
fear of him took the sea as a veil,

124 and came to our hemisphere; and perhaps what
does appear on this side left this empty space in
order to escape from him, and fled upward.”

127 There is a place down there, removed from
Beelzebub as far as the width of his tomb, known not
by sight, but by the sound

130 of a little stream that descends through a hole in a
rock eroded by its winding course, and it is not
steep.

133 My leader and I entered on that hidden path to
return to the bright world; and, without taking
care for rest at all,

136 up we climbed, he first and I second, until I saw
the beautiful things the heavens carry, through a
round opening.

139 And thence we came forth to look again at the
stars.

