

INFERNO
A Libretto
by
Martin Burke

© 2013 Martin Burke
All rights reserved.
©2013 Publication Scene4 Magazine

Published as formatted by the author in the August 2013 issue of *SCENE4 Magazine*
(www.scene4.com) and provided as a free PDF download.
Permission is granted to print one copy of this version for personal reading purposes.
All Rights Reserved by the Author

©2013 Martin Burke. **Inferno** is fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America and international copyright laws. All rights, including the rights of translation into foreign languages, adaptations in motion pictures, television, video, radio, various other electronic media, recitation, public reading, and any other adaptations and are strictly reserved. Performances of any kind require the payment of a royalty. You may display this book for your personal, non-commercial use. But you may not otherwise reproduce or distribute copies of this book or any part thereof in any form (including by email or other electronic means), without the prior written consent of the owner. All inquiries should be directed to Martin Burke at burkedelphicghent@mail.com

I**A:**

Hush hush, hush hush

Don't cry like the river don't cry

Paths have deceived you and wild beasts have grieved you but don't cry like the
river don't cry

Hush hush

Listen to better voices

This is where we start

Journeys are difficult but I've done it before so buckle up your heart

Downhill we'll step but don't step where you shouldn't

Listen, watch and learn

Downhill and something will have its beginning

(Something is always at its beginning)

Hold on to me, hold on, hold on

There is no going back, going back

Hush hush

II**A:**

Abandon hope

Take up your fears

Walk through this vale of tears

A street of glass

And cheap perfume

Under a cloud-savaged moon

See the promise, see the warning, see bodies in windows for sale

See your reflection, see every onlooker, hear the terrible wail

Listen, voices call

"We have abandoned hope as instructed-

To this life we are inducted

Speak kindly of us if you speak at all"

Sticky strands of a web unravelling in your hands

No thread you can follow to where you came from

Dank as a wood is

(oh swaying branches of woman in abundance)
 Groans in the offing
 (it is not the branches which are sighing)
 The women sigh to the wind

III

B:
 Oh pitiful earth I am your child
 I'd protest but the cause would get lost in the cry
 If only the river could heal their minds on behalf of the pity of heaven

Chorus:
 Uphill, downhill, uphill again
 Sisyphus trundles with his stone
 Only to end up where he began
 Uphill and downhill again

B:
 Like feeding mud to starving men
 And blocking their throats so that they can't cry
 Like caging a bird, like hounding a hare
 So that it can start up again

Chorus:
 Uphill, downhill, uphill again
 Sisyphus trundles with his stone
 Uphill, downhill, uphill again
 Nothing has been won

A:
 You're beginning to see the necessary contradiction
 In this un-human situation
 Going one way so as to get in the opposite direction

B:
 Shadows before us where nobody walks
 With gibberish posing as sensible talk
 Listen to hell's squawk, squawk

A:
 What you don't know by fact you know by reputation

History tells more of hell than of heaven
 The future falls into the present declension

Falls like a coin with nowhere to land
 This is negation's land

IV

A:

You're full of fear
 The metronome of your heart is ticking wild
 Shadows appear and you cower like a child

B:

I seem to hear funeral bells
 I understand nothing except this is hell
 Will the way in be the way out?

A:

Typical man
 Mix of meat and music
 Arrow to a target you might miss
 City defending itself against its own attack
 History is waiting for your footsteps
 You must cross and see it from the other ditch
 Abandon all to gather all -this will make the better music and the man
 So fare forward to your brothers, don't slack

Chorus:

History's an unruly beast
 Jump on jump on but don't fall off
 Ride the tiger as the Chinese say, ride the tiger all the way

Toss you from his shanks he will
 Shift you down to the pits of hell
 Hear the ringing of the bell

Tiger hardly burning bright
 Avoid the choice?
 You can't -you're playing with loaded dice

Turn a corner, face a fraud

Find the dice
Turn the card

Pull the rabbit out of the hat
Trickery, trickery
Fortune-tellers tell what the future will be

If Christ was a coin –what would be his worth?
Some things don't need to be put into words.
Deposit your coin and play the cards

Deposit your coin and play the game
Look for the ace in a deck of knaves
Or in a taro pack the knight with the greening stave

V

Chorus:

Night-town's despair infests the air
Trees groan under the sorrow of leaves
Gather ye shadows while ye may

Death undoes all to the last detail
Buyers and sellers barter and trade
Gather ye shadows while ye may

Gather ye shadows while ye may
This is sung since Cain and Able
Gather ye shadows while ye may the world is old and cunning

B:

And the sly town-councillors on 'fact-finding' visits
And the clergy-man in 'civvies' behind dark glasses
And the walkers going back and forth
And the women enthusiastic but bored
"Don't I know you? Are you not somehow familiar to me?
Where did we meet? What did we talk about? What do you want to know?"
Familiar voices, familiar tones
Recognition where no recognition should be

Know one, know them all
 Tear the calendar date from the wall
 Turn away, hide your face
 Don't recognise me in this place

See them, see them and don't turn away
 Can't turn away, mustn't turn away
 The crippled and the maimed (which am I?)
 Nothing here I want to recognise

In deeper now than I was before
 Mustn't pretend, mustn't stop at a door

Chorus:

The river of pain flows on and on
 The boatman takes a ghostly coin
 The sadness of earth is a long cry
 No one can say when this began

Oh sadness of woman and of man
 Here love has turned to lust
 It is a bitter desolation
 The coin falls in unwholesome dust

Don't slip upon the slim-wet stones
 Don't fall into cold exile
 Oh sadness of woman and of man
 The boatman's clutch is vile

VI

A:

Hush, hush, hush
 There is no going back, back
 You are not deceived and will return to the light to the streaming light of day
 Hush hush
 Listen to better voices
 Buckle up your heart
 Journeys are difficult and none more so than this so buckle up your heart
 Downhill we'll step but don't step where you shouldn't
 Watch the watchman's light

Don't hill is where everything is beginning
 Hold on to your heart, hold on, hold on
 There is no going back, there is no going back, going back

B:

History unravels like thread from a spool
 It brings the hanged man and the fool
 This is its unchanging rule
 there is no going back, going back

It brings the novice to its school
 It soaks him in its whirling pool
 This is the unchanging rule
 there is no going back, going back

Read the book up-side down
 Watch the king become the clown
 Watch the tall grass be cut down
 there is no going back, going back

See it cover every town
 Change the smile into a frown
 The hanged man he is up-side down
 there is no going back, going back

A:

Hush hush, hush hush
 Don't cry like the river don't cry
 The river turns beyond the bend the river it will never end, don't cry, don't cry
 Watch and learn from the shadows but don't go where they go
 Learn what they know
 See the wound from the other side don't cry, don't cry

Fare forward to your brothers and don't slack
 There is no going back, there is no going back

VII

B:

Too many contradictions

A:

But a contradiction is the only way forward when logic will get you nowhere.
Haven't you realised that yet?

B:

It's not what I realise it's what I can understand. I expected clarity

A:

It's here but you have to squint like a tailor through his needle's eye to see it

B:

Close my eyes so as to open them?

A:

You're beginning to understand

B:

Understand

Stand under

Hold your ground

Your ground?

It is while you stand on it

Stand

Advance

A little or a lot

Move forward

A little

A lot

Both the same perhaps

No perhaps

Stand

Move

Do both at once

Move don't move

See by not seeing

Where you are is where you were not

Where will you be next?

Chorus:

Passion's flame or despair's flame?

Nothing fraudulent about a flame

It speaks a purging word

Burning at eye-level to burn the eye

If you will live first you must die

And death's cry is unheard

A:

What do you think –deformity or reality?

B:

I'm beginning to think this deformity is its own reality

Chorus:

Weird shapes appear in gaudy light

Bits and pieces, nothing whole

True light is granted no parole

Weird shapes of shadows and of shades

All mangled up, nothing well made

It seemed a shaded and shadowed plight

B:

Understand

Stand under

Nothing whole, all turn asunder

Lights flashing Athena's Den, Cleopatra's Cave

Deceit

Sell and buy it

Or merely gape

From which you could not escape

Buy the broken wings of Icarus

A reversed alchemy

This is the pit of misery

VIII

B:

A headless man

A broken form

Who walked by lantern light

His head his lamp

From which light shone

To guide him through the night

Who see such sights 's forever changed

Is broken in his core of bones

Who sees such sights cannot remain

Among the beauty he has known

A headless man
He passed me by
He chilled my heart my soul and bones

That headless man
Was exile's child
Was there reviled

That headless man
Is broken bone
He lives in exile's zone

Then moans in the night dark
More like a dog's bark than a human voice
Saying everything not once but twice:

Chorus:

I wronged, I wronged
I condemned, condemned and now am condemned, condemned
None deserve their fate in this place
But I deserve my fate in this place, my fate is to be in this place

B:

It was a voice from out that swarm
A single voice with the force of a choir
No thread would unwind from that maze
Whose eyes had seen hell's blaze

A:

You think that's the worst?
That's not the worst-
What's worse: the wailing or the silence given in reply?

B:

I think the silence is the worst
Though I doubt that it could be worse
Than his despairing sigh

Because if one wailed all wailed
And the river rose in flood with that cry
The swollen waters gushing
The maddened men rushing
To see what they might buy

A sore sickness that spread
Talking against itself until nothing else could be heard
And only squawk and squawk given in reply

And two men like a horse and its jockey
With one mounted on the other
As if they were brother and brother

The jockey eating the flesh of the horse
And doing so without remorse
As if his hunger could not be appeased

And all seemed one ravenous whole
Deformed and maimed in a hideous mass
Beyond which I had to pass

Where it was cold as if I'd found
The devil's home ground

IX

A:

Hush hush, hush hush
There is no going back
Let you mind find ease in the morning's breeze there is no going back
The river lulls you home and cleans your bones
The morning sun is rising high
It cleans the sky
The world's under its dome
Hush hush don't cry, the night has passed, all is revealed
Hush hush don't cry, the shadows fade, all is repealed, all is repealed
Now dawn is yours to walk in
And see bright clouds they flock to tell you everything is clean
Hush hush don't cry, the night's no more, here is day's open door
Hush hush don't cry, walk in the sun, and sorrow is no more

You can walk clean in morning sunshine
You can walk to the river's edge
You can walk to your true awakening
And keep yourself to love's true pledge
Hush hush don't cry, let tears subside, let love abide
Hush hush don't cry, let tears subside, let love abide
Abide
Abide
Abide