

DANTE

INFERNO

*Translated, Edited, and with an
Introduction by Anthony Esolen*

Illustrations by Gustave Doré



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CANTO ONE

Lost in a dark wood and threatened by three beasts, Dante is rescued by Virgil, who proposes a journey to the other world.

Midway upon the journey of our life
I found myself in a dark wilderness,
for I had wandered from the straight and true. 4
How hard a thing it is to tell about,
that wilderness so savage, dense, and harsh,
even to think of it renews my fear!
It is so bitter, death is hardly more— 7
but to reveal the good that came to me,
I shall relate the other things I saw.
How I had entered, I can't bring to mind, 10
I was so full of sleep just at that point
when I first left the way of truth behind.
But when I reached the foot of a high hill, 13
right where the valley opened to its end—
the valley that had pierced my heart with fear—
I raised my eyes and saw its shoulders robed 16
with the rays of that wandering light of Heaven^o
that leads all men aright on every road.
That quieted a bit the dread that stirred 19
trembling within the waters of my heart
all through that night of misery I endured.
And as a man with labored breathing drags 22
his legs out of the water and, ashore,
fixes his eyes upon the dangerous sea,

^o *that wandering light of Heaven*: Italian *pianeta*, "planet." It is the sun, considered a planet, or *wandering light*, revolving about the earth.

So too my mind, while still a fugitive, 25
 turned back to gaze again upon that pass
 which never let a man escape alive.
 When I had given my weary body rest, 28
 I struck again over the desert slope,
 ever the firmer foot the one below,
 And look! just where the steeper rise began, 31
 a leopard light of foot and quick to lunge,
 all covered in a pelt of flecks and spots,
 Who stood before my face and would not leave, 34
 but did so check me in the path I trod,
 I often turned to go the way I came.
 The hour was morning at the break of dawn; 37
 the sun was mounting higher with those stars^o
 that shone beside him when the Love Divine
 In the beginning made their beauty move, 40
 and so they were a cause of hope for me
 to get free of that beast of flashy hide—
 The waking hour and that sweet time of year; 43
 but hope was not so strong that I could stand
 bold when a lion stepped before my eyes!
 This one seemed to be coming straight for me, 46
 his head held high, his hunger hot with wrath—
 seemed to strike tremors in the very air!
 Then a she-wolf, whose scrawniness seemed stuffed 49
 with all men's cravings, sluggish with desires,
 who had made many live in wretchedness—
 So heavily she weighed my spirit down, 52
 pressing me by the terror of her glance,
 I lost all hope to gain the mountaintop.
 And as a gambler, winning with a will, 55
 happening on the time when he must lose,
 turns all his thoughts to weeping and despair,
 So I by that relentless beast, who came 58
 against me step by step, and drove me back
 to where the sun is silent evermore.

^o *those stars*: the constellation Aries. It is the springtime of the year, recalling the springtime of the universe; see notes.

Now while I stumbled to the deepest wood, before my eyes appeared the form of one who seemed hoarse, having held his words so long.	61
And when I saw him in that endless waste, “Mercy upon me, mercy!” I cried out, “whatever you are, a shade, or man in truth!”	64
He answered me: “No man; I <i>was</i> a man, and both my parents came from Lombardy, and Mantua they called their native land.	67
In the last days of Julius I was born, and lived in Rome under the good Augustus in the time of the false and cheating gods.	70
I was a poet, and I sang of how that just son of Anchises ^o came from Troy when her proud towers and walls were burnt to dust.	73
But you, why do you turn back to such pain? Why don’t you climb that hill that brings delight, the origin and cause of every joy?”	76
“Then are you—are you Virgil? And that spring swelling into so rich a stream of verse?” I answered him, my forehead full of shame.	79
“Honor and light of every poet, may my long study avail me, and the love that made me search the volume of your work.	82
You are my teacher, my authority; you alone are the one from whom I took the style whose loveliness has honored me.	85
See there the beast that makes me turn aside. Save me from her, O man renowned and wise! She sets the pulses trembling in my veins!”	88
“It is another journey you must take,” replied the poet when he saw me weep, “if you wish to escape this savage place,	91
Because this beast that makes you cry for help never lets any pass along her way, but checks his path until she takes his life.	94

^o *that just son of Anchises*: Aeneas, legendary founder of Rome. His piety and his heroic sufferings are celebrated by Virgil in his epic, the *Aeneid*.

So vicious is her nature, so ill-bent, 97
 she never stuffs her ravenous will enough,
 but after feeding hungers all the more.
 Many a living soul takes her to wife 100
 and many shall, until the Greyhound comes,
 he who will make her die in misery.
 Not land, not lucre will he feed upon, 103
 but wisdom, love, and strength shall be his meat,
 and by the cloth of felt he will be born.
 He will bring health to humbled Italy, 106
 the land for which the maid Camilla died,
 and Nisus, Turnus, and Euryalus.
 Through every village he will hunt her down 109
 until at last he drives her back to Hell,
 whence envy set her loose upon the world.
 And so I judge it would be best for you 112
 to follow me, and I will be your guide,
 leading you out through an eternal place,
 Where you will hear the groans of hopeless men,^o 115
 will look upon the sorrowing souls of old,
 crying in torment for the second death;
 Then you will look upon those souls content 118
 to wait in fire,^o because they hope someday
 to come among the nation of the blessed.
 Should you then wish to rise and go to them, 121
 another soul^o will come, worthier than I—
 with her I'll leave you when I go my way.
 For that great Emperor who reigns above, 124
 because I was a rebel to His law,
 will not allow me entry to his realm.
 Everywhere he commands, from there he rules, 127
 there stand his city and his lofty throne.
 Happy the man He chooses for His house!"

^o *hopeless men*: the souls in Hell, longing for a *second death* that will not come; see notes.

^o *content to wait in fire*: the souls in Purgatory, who have all been saved.

^o *another soul*: Beatrice, Dante's beloved, who will guide him through Paradise; see notes.

“Poet,” I said to him, “I beg of you, 130
by that same God you never knew, that I
may flee this evil and the worse to come,
Lead me now to the place you tell me of, 133
so I may see Saint Peter’s gate,^o and those
you say are dwelling in such misery.”
He set on, and I held my pace behind. 136

^o *Saint Peter’s gate*: the gates of Purgatory (see *Purg.* 9.121–32).

CANTO TWO

To settle Dante's doubts about his worthiness to take the journey, Virgil tells of how Beatrice came down from Heaven to beg his help.

So the day wore away, and the dark air
released the living souls that dwell on earth
from all their labors. I alone remained,
Girding myself to bear and battle through 4
the journey, and the pity of my heart—
which memory never straying shall recount.
O Muses, O high genius, help me now! 7
O memory that engraved the things I saw,
here shall your worth be manifest to all.
“Poet,” I started, “you who guide my steps, 10
see to my strength, make sure it will suffice,
before you trust me to so hard a road.
You tell of Silvius’ father,^o who went down 13
to the immortal world still in the flesh—
and with his flesh’s senses all aware.
Yet if the Adversary of all evil^o 16
showed him this grace, it does not seem unfit
to intellects that see the great result,
Both who and what was meant to spring from him; 19
for he was chosen in the Heaven of heavens
father of sacred Rome and her command,

^o *Silvius’ father*: Aeneas. In book 6 of the *Aeneid*, Aeneas goes to the underworld to learn of his own destiny and that of the city Rome, which his people are to found. Virgil’s account of that journey provided much of the inspiration for Dante’s own poetic journey to the hereafter. Appropriate selections from the *Aeneid* are provided in Appendix A.

^o *the Adversary of all evil*: God.

And these, if we would speak the truth, were set 22
 firmly in place to be the holy throne
 where the successor to great Peter^o sits.
 Upon this journey which you celebrate 25
 he learned of things which were the cause of both
 his triumph, and the mantle of the pope.
 Later, the Chosen Vessel^o also went 28
 to bring back comfort, strengthening the faith
 which is the first step on salvation's way.
 But I? Who grants my coming? And for what? 31
 I'm not Aeneas, I'm not Saint Paul! No one—
 not I myself—could think me worthy, so
 If I should enter on this quest, I fear 34
 it would be mad and foolish. But you're wise,
 you understand more than my words can say.”
 And as a man who unwill's what he will's, 37
 changing his plan for every little thought,
 till he withdraws from any kind of start,
 So did I turn my mind on that dark verge, 40
 for thinking ate away the enterprise
 so prompt in the beginning to set forth.
 “If I have understood your words aright,” 43
 replied the shade of that greathearted man,
 “your spirit has been bruised by cowardice,
 Which many a time so weighs a man's heart down 46
 it turns him from a glorious enterprise—
 as shadows fool the horse that shies away.
 That you may slip this worry and go free, 49
 I'll tell you why I came and what I heard
 when first I pitied you your misery.

^o *the successor to great Peter*: the pope, tracing his office in a direct line of descent from Saint Peter, the first head of the Church.

^o *the Chosen Vessel*: Saint Paul, whom the Lord called his “chosen vessel” for preaching to all nations (Acts 9:15). Paul had a vision of Paradise (2 Cor. 12:1–5); he mentions the vision in order to stir ardent hope and longing for the resurrection. The contents of that vision, naturally, became the subject of much pious imagination. One result, the apocryphal *Vision of Saint Paul*, was widely known, and Dante may have borrowed from it as he borrowed from the *Aeneid*. Selections are provided in Appendix B.

I was among the souls in Limbo^o when 52
 so lovely and blest a lady^o called to me
 I asked her for the grace of a command.
 Her eyes were flashing brighter than the stars, 55
 and she addressed me with an angel's voice,
 sweetly and softly, in such words as these:
 'O kind and gracious soul of Mantua, 58
 whom the world still renowns and ever shall,
 whose fame will last as long as earth endures,
 The friend I love—and not a fortune-friend— 61
 has been so checked along his journey up
 the desert slope, he has turned back for dread,
 And from what I have heard of him in Heaven 64
 I fear he may have wandered so far wrong,
 my rising for his help may come too late.
 Go then, and with the beauty of your words, 67
 and any skill you have to set him free,
 help him, that I may be consoled. I am
 The blessed Beatrice who bid you go; 70
 love makes me speak, and bade me hasten from
 the place that stirs my longing to return.
 When I shall stand before my Lord, I vow 73
 often to speak to him in praise of you.'
 Then she fell silent, and I thus began:
 'O lady of that power whereby alone 76
 the human race transcends all mortal things
 dwelling below the circle of the moon,
 What you command is such a grace indeed, 79
 it would be late, had I obeyed already!
 Show me your will, for that is all you need.
 But tell me why it does not worry you 82
 to descend to this center of the world
 from that vast realm you burn to see again.'

^o *Limbo*: Literally, "among the suspended souls." Limbo, deriving from Latin *limbus*, "edge," is a state suspended between salvation and damnation. Dante describes it in Canto Four.

^o *so lovely and blest a lady*: Beatrice. Dante puns on her name, which means "the blessed woman." I have brought out the same pun in line 67 below.

- 'Because you wish to know things to the core,'
replied the lady, 'I will tell in brief
why I am not afraid to enter here. 85
- The only things that justly cause us fear 88
are those that have the power to do us harm;
the others, not at all. By the free gift
Of God I have been fashioned in such form, 91
no misery you feel can touch me now,
no flame of these hellfires can harrow me.
- A gentle Lady in Heaven^o was so moved 94
with pity for that soul whose way is barred,
she broke the rigid sentence from above.
- She called to Lucy,^o making this request: 97
"Your faithful follower now has need of you;
I give him over to your loving care."
- Lucy, the foe of every cruelty, 100
arose and hastened to the place where I
sat beside Rachel of the ancient days.
- "Beatrice, true praise of God, why do you not 103
come to the aid of him who loved you so
that for your sake he left the common crowd?
Do you not hear him weeping piteously? 106
Do you not see the death he wrestles with
upon the flood tide violent as the sea?"
- No man was ever quicker in the world 109
to seize his profit or to flee his harm
than I was, when I heard the words she spoke,
Leaving my blessed seat to come down here 112
to rest my trust upon your noble speech,
which honors you and those who heed it well.'
- When she had finished speaking to me so, 115
she turned her glistening eyes all bright with tears—
which made me all the readier to go,

^o *Lady in Heaven*: Mary. In the *Inferno* neither she nor Christ is ever named directly.

^o *Lucy*: Saint Lucy (Lucia), a Sicilian virgin martyred under the persecutions of Christians during the reign of Diocletian, in the third century. Perhaps Dante had a special devotion for her, or perhaps he is saying he had a special devotion to the Light of Truth which her name suggests. Lucy assists him in Purgatory, too (*Purg.* 9.52–63).

And so I came to you as she desired, 118
 raising you from the beast that faced you down
 and stole from you the short way up the hill.
What is it, then? Why stand here, why delay? 121
 Why let such cowardice come take your heart?
 Why are you not afire and bold and free,
Seeing that three such ladies blessed in Heaven 124
 care for your healing from their court above,
 and what I tell you holds forth so much good?"
As little flowers shut small and bowed beneath 127
 the frost of night, when the sun brightens them,
 rise open-petaled on their stems upright,
So did my weary courage surge again, 130
 and such sweet boldness rushed into my heart
 I cried out as a man at last set free,
"O lady of compassion and my help! 133
 And you most gracious who obeyed her wish
 soon as you heard the truth she spoke to you!
Your words have put my heart in order now, 136
 kindling so great a longing to set on
 you've turned me to our first intention—go!
Go, for we two now share one will alone: 139
 you are my guide, my teacher, and my lord."
 So did I say to him. Then we set forth,
Taking the deep and savage-wooded path. 142

CANTO THREE

Virgil and Dante enter the gates of Hell. There they meet the small-souled, those unnamed spirits whose cowardice relegates them to the vestibule of the lower world. Passing onward, they come to the river Acheron, whose ferryman, Charon, ushers the gathered souls to their eternal misery.

I AM THE WAY INTO THE CITY OF WOE,
I AM THE WAY INTO ETERNAL PAIN,
I AM THE WAY TO GO AMONG THE LOST.

JUSTICE CAUSED MY HIGH ARCHITECT TO MOVE: 4
DIVINE OMNIPOTENCE CREATED ME,
THE HIGHEST WISDOM, AND THE PRIMAL LOVE.

BEFORE ME THERE WERE NO CREATED THINGS 7
BUT THOSE THAT LAST FOREVER—AS DO I.
ABANDON ALL HOPE YOU WHO ENTER HERE.

I saw these words of dark and harsh intent 10
engraved upon the archway of a gate.

“Teacher,” I said, “their sense is hard for me.”

And he to me, as one who read my thoughts: 13

“Here you must leave distrust and doubt behind,
here you must put all cowardice to death.

We have come to the place I spoke about, 16

where you would see the souls who dwell in pain,
for they have lost the good of intellect.”

And after he had laid his hand on mine 19

with cheerful countenance, strengthening my resolve,
he led me to the secret things below.

There sighs and moans and utter wailing swept 22
 resounding through the dark and starless air.
 I heard them for the first time, and I wept.
Shuddering din of strange and various tongues, 25
 sorrowful words and accents pitched with rage,
 shrill and harsh voices, blows of hands with these
Raised up a tumult ever swirling round 28
 in that dark air untinted by a dawn,
 as sand-grains whipping when the whirlwind blows.
Said I—a blind of horror held my brain— 31
 “My Teacher, what are all these cries I hear?
 Who are these people conquered by their pain?”
And he to me: “This state of misery 34
 is clutched by those sad souls whose works in life
 merited neither praise nor infamy.
Here they’re thrown in among that petty choir 37
 of angels who were for themselves alone,
 not rebels, and not faithful to the Lord.
Heaven drives them out—to keep its beauty pure, 40
 nor will the deep abyss receive their souls,
 lest they bring glory to the wicked there.”
And I: “Teacher, what weighs upon their hearts? 43
 What grief is it that makes them wail so loud?”
 And he responded, “A few words will do.
These souls, immortal, have no hope for death, 46
 and their blind lives crept groveling so low
 they leer with envy at every other lot.
The world allows no rumor of them now. 49
 Mercy and justice hold them in contempt.
 Let’s say no more about them. Look, and pass.”
And I, beholding, saw a banner fly, 52
 whirling about and racing with such speed
 it seemed that it would scorn to stand, or pause,
And all behind that flag in a long file 55
 so numerous a host of people ran,
 I had not thought death had unmade so many.

When I had recognized a few of these, 58
 I saw and knew at once the shade of him,
 the craven one,^o who made the great denial.
 Immediately I understood the truth: 61
 this was the low sect of those paltry souls
 hateful to God and to his enemies.
 These worthless wretches who had never lived 64
 were pricked to motion now perpetually
 by flies and wasps that stung their naked limbs
 And ran the blood in furrows down their faces, 67
 which, mingled with their tears, fell to their feet,
 where loathsome maggots gathered up the rot.
 When I had turned my gaze ahead, I saw 70
 a band of people gathered at the banks
 of a broad river. "Teacher, if you please,
 Let me know of those people, and what law 73
 makes them appear so eager to cross over,
 from what I make out through the feeble light."
 And he responded, "These things will be made 76
 plain to you when we fix our steps upon
 the melancholy shores of Acheron."^o
 Then with eyes fallen low and full of shame, 79
 fearing that I had burdened him with talk,
 I held my words until we reached the stream.
 And look here—coming at us in a boat, 82
 an old man, hair and lank skin white with age,
 hollering, "Woe to you, you crooked souls!
 Give up all hope to look upon the sky! 85
 I come to lead you to the other shore,
 into eternal darkness—fire and ice!
 And as for you there, you the living soul, 88
 get away from these others who are dead."
 But when he saw that I would not depart

^o *the craven one*: Some critics say it is Pontius Pilate; most agree that it is Pope Celestine V, who abdicated the papacy in 1294. See notes.

^o *Acheron*: one of the five rivers of the classical underworld. Three others, Styx, Phlegethon, and Cocytus, Dante will encounter below. All are really stages of the same river (see 14.116–38). The other one, Lethe, he will cross at the top of the Mountain of Purgatory (*Purg.* 28.130).

He said, "Another way, another port
 will bring your passage to the shore—not here.
 A lighter boat^o must carry you across."
 "Quit grumbling, Charon," said my guide. "Be still! 94
 No questions—only know that this is willed
 where power is power to do whatever it will."
 Then all at once the goatish jowls fell quiet, 97
 those of the rower of that livid swamp,
 whose furious eyes yet flashed with wheels of fire.
 But when they heard the old man's cruel words 100
 those naked and exhausted souls turned white,
 gnashing their teeth with fury for their fate—
 Hurling blasphemy at God and at their parents, 103
 at the whole human race, the place, the time,
 and the seed of their begetting and their birth.
 Then all these people, wailing bitterly, 106
 gathered upon the cursed riverbank
 that awaits each man who does not fear the Lord.
 Charon the demon, eyes of fiery coal, 109
 signals them all to get into the boat—
 smacks with his oar the soul that lags behind.
 As in the fall when leaves are lifted off, 112
 one drops—another—till the naked branch
 sees all its garment lying on the earth,
 So the bad seed of Adam one by one 115
 toss themselves from the shore at Charon's sign,
 as hawks returning to the master's call.
 They cross the murky waters, and before 118
 they disembark upon the farther side,
 another throng has gathered at the shore.
 My gracious Teacher spoke to me: "My son, 121
 all souls that die beneath the wrath of God
 from every nation here collect in one,
 And they are prompt to cross the river, for 124
 Justice Divine so goads and spurs them on,
 that what they fear turns into their desire.

^o a *lighter boat*: the ferry from the Tiber's shores to the Mountain of Purgatory (*Purg.* 2.100–5).

No good soul ever passes by these ways,
and so, if Charon rails about you, well—
you know how to interpret what he says.”
He finished, and the gloomy plains of Hell
shook with such might that though the terror’s past
it bathes me in a sweat to think of it.
That tear-drenched land heaved forth a sudden blast,
flashing a lightning bolt as red as fire
that vanquished all my senses, and I fell
As a man falls whom sleep has overcome.

127
130
133
136

CANTO FOUR

Dante and Virgil descend into the abyss. They enter the first of the concentric rings of Hell, that of Limbo, the Rim, where dwell, neither in joy nor in suffering, all unbaptized infants and those men and women who lived virtuously but who lacked the true faith. There they meet Homer and the great poets of old, and Aristotle and the great philosophers.

Thunder! a great boom broke into the deep
sleep in my head and made me shake myself
as one who is awakened by main force—
Then I stood up and turned my rested eyes 4
about me, peering steadily, to see
what kind of place it was where I awoke.
Indeed I found myself upon the brink 7
of the valley of the sorrowful abyss
thundering with the roar of endless woe.
So dark it was and deep and bleared with mist, 10
that though I fixed my gaze upon the bottom
I still could not discern a single thing.
“Into the blind world let us now descend,” 13
began the poet, his face as pale as death.
“I will go first, and you will follow me.”
And I—for I had seen his color turn— 16
replied, “How should I go, when you’re afraid,
you who have been my courage when I doubt?”
“The anguish of the souls who dwell down here,” 19
he answered me, “has painted in my face
the pity you have taken to be fear.
We must be moving on. The road is long.” 22
So he set forth, and so he made me enter
into the first belt circling the abyss.

As far as I could tell from listening, here 25
 there were no wails, but only sighs, that made
 a trembling in the everlasting air.
 They rose from sorrow, without punishment, 28
 the sorrow of vast throngs of people there,
 of men and women and of infants too.
 “You don’t ask,” my good Teacher said to me, 31
 “who are these souls you look upon? Before
 you go on in your journey, you must know
 They did not sin. If they had merits, these 34
 were not enough—baptism they did not have,
 the one gate to the faith which *you* believe.
 And if they lived before the Christian faith, 37
 they did not give God homage as they ought,
 and of these people I myself am one.
 For such a falling short, and for no crime, 40
 we all are lost, and suffer only this:
 hopeless, we live forever in desire.”
 When I heard this, great sorrow seized my heart, 43
 for I saw men of great distinction there
 hovering in Limbo at the edge of Hell.
 “Tell me, my Teacher, tell me, my good lord,” 46
 I started—for I wanted to confirm
 the faith that conquers every path that strays,
 “Has anyone ever left here by his own 49
 or by another’s merits, to be blessed?”
 He heard the meaning mantled by my words
 And said, “I had just entered in this state 52
 when I saw coming One^o of power and might,
 crowned with the glorious sign of victory.
 From us he took the shade of our first father,^o 55
 the shades of his son Abel and of Noah,
 of Moses who, obedient, gave the Law,

^o *One of power and might*: Christ, in the harrowing of Hell between his death and resurrection. The *sign of victory* is the haloed cross.

^o *our first father*: Adam.

Of patriarch Abraham, David the king, 58
 of Israel with his father and his sons
 and Rachel,^o whom so long he labored for,
 And many others, and he made them blessed. 61
 And I want you to know that, before these,
 salvation came for not one human soul.”
 We did not leave off walking while he spoke 64
 but went on through the forest all the way—
 I mean the forest thicketed with souls.
 We hadn't ventured far from where I'd slept 67
 when there before us blazed a ring of light
 quelling the darkness that surrounded it.
 We were still quite a little length away 70
 but close enough for me to see in part
 that people to be honored held that place.
 “O you who honor knowledge and all art, 73
 who are these here so favored that they dwell
 distinguished from the manner of the rest?”
 And he: “The honored name that still resounds 76
 their glory in your life above has won
 the grace from Heaven that now exalts them here.”
 And suddenly I heard a voice call out: 79
 “Honor the highest prince of poetry!
 His shade which had departed has returned.”
 And when the voice had ceased, and all was still, 82
 I saw four mighty shades approaching us
 with neither joy nor sadness in their eyes.
 “Behold that shade whose right hand wields the sword,” 85
 my worthy Teacher thus began to say,
 “who comes before the others as their lord.
 Homer the sovereign poet is that soul. 88
 Horace the satirist comes after him,
 Ovid comes third, and Lucan is the last.

^o *Rachel* Jacob (*Israel*) worked for Laban for seven years to win his daughter Rachel. But on the wedding night, Laban sent to Jacob's tent Rachel's sister, Leah, instead. The next day Laban agreed to give Rachel to Jacob also, on the condition that he work for him another seven years (Gen. 29:9–30).

Because we come together in that name of 'poet' which the one soul spoke alone, they do me honor—and in this do well."	91
So did I see united that sweet school of the lord of the most exalted song that like an eagle soars above the rest.	94
When they had talked together for a while they turned to me, and beckoned me to come, bringing a smile unto my Teacher's lips, And greeted me, and honored me so well	97
that they included me among their band, and made me sixth in that academy.	100
So we proceeded till we reached the light, speaking of things best kept in silence here, as in that place to speak of them was right.	103
Before a noble castle then we came. Seven times it was ringed with lofty walls, defended all around by a lovely stream.	106
Over this stream we passed as on dry land; then with those sages through the seven gates I entered, and we reached a fresh green field,	109
Where I saw souls whose eyes were grave and slow, whose looks were marked with great authority. Seldom they spoke, and held their voices low.	112
We drew away to one side of the plain to a place high and free and filled with light, that we might see them all. And there before me	115
On meadows bright as fine-enameled green, the spirits of the great were shown to me— glory it is, to see what I have seen!	118
I saw Electra with a numerous train— among them I knew Hector and Aeneas, and, in arms, Caesar with his falcon eye.	121
I saw Penthesilea and Camilla there on the other side, and King Latinus, who sat beside his child Lavinia.	124

I saw that Brutus who drove Tarquin out, Lucretia, Julia, Martia, and Cornelia; and sitting by himself, the Saladin.	127
And when I raised the lashes of my eye I saw the master of all those who know ^o among his wisdom-seeking family.	130
All look upon him there, all honor him; I saw the souls of Socrates and Plato where they stood nearer to him than the rest;	133
Democritus, who posits that the world is ruled by chance; Thales, Empedocles, Zeno, Diogenes, and Heraclitus,	136
And Anaxagoras, and the good collector of herbals Dioscorides, and Orpheus, Cicero, Livy, moral Seneca,	139
Geometrician Euclid, Ptolemy, Hippocrates and Galen, Avicenna, and the great Commenter, Averroes.	142
I give no reckoning of them all—the length of what I have to do so drives me on, often my words fall short of the event.	145
The company of six is cut by two, and my wise guide leads me another way, out of the quiet, into the trembling air—	148
Into a place where nothing ever shines.	151

^o *the Master of all those who know*: Aristotle, whom Dante considered the greatest of philosophers.

CANTO FIVE

Now the poets descend into the realm of the damned. After they meet and defy Minos, the monstrous judge over all of the entering souls, they enter the second circle, that of the lustful. Here they listen to the tale of Paolo and Francesca, noble young people murdered in the act of adulterous love.

So I descended from the outer ring
down to the next, which belts less space about
but stings the souls to greater agony.
Horrible Minos grunts there like a bull, 4
weighs all the sins and sends the wicked down
according to how far he winds his tail.
I mean that when one born in evil hour 7
appears before him, he confesses all,
and then judge Minos, the sin-connoisseur,
Discerns what place in Hell is fit for him: 10
belts himself with his tail as many times
as there are grades the sinner must descend.
Ever before him stand a crowd of souls. 13
They step up one by one to testify,
they speak and hear and then are flung below.
"You who come to this sanctuary of pain," 16
said Minos when he saw me, leaving off
the duties of so great a role, "beware!
"Watch how you enter and in whom you trust! 19
Don't be fooled by the broad and easy gate."
My guide to him: "Enough! Why must you shout?
You shall not bar him, for he comes by fate. 22
No questions—only know that this is willed
where power is power to do whatever it will."

I now begin to hear arising wails 25
 of sorrow; I have come where the great cries
 batter me like a wave pounding the shore.
 It is a place where all light is struck dumb, 28
 moaning as when high winds from east and west
 wrestle upon the sea in a fierce storm.
 That hellish cyclone that can never rest 31
 snatches the spirits up in its driving whirl,
 whisks them about and beats and buffets them,
 And when they fall before the ruined slope,^o 34
 ah then the shrieking, the laments, the cries!
 then they hurl curses at the power of God.
 I learned that such a torment was designed 37
 for the damned who were wicked in the flesh,
 who made their reason subject to desire.
 And as a flock of starlings winter-beaten 40
 founder upon their wings in widening turns,
 so did that whirlwind whip those evil souls,
 Flinging them here and there and up and down; 43
 nor were they ever comforted by hope—
 no hope for rest, or even lesser pain.
 And as the cranes go cawing out their songs, 46
 forming a long streak in the air, I saw
 approaching us and trailing cries of woe
 Shades blown our way by the great battling winds, 49
 so I said, “Teacher, tell me, who are those
 spirits so lashed and scourged in the black air?”
 “The first among those souls whose history 52
 you wish to hear,” he then responded, “was
 empress of men of many languages.

^o *the ruined slope*: possibly the gap in the ring through which they once entered into their eternal loss. When they are blown past it, they are reminded of the dreadful first experience of the pain they have chosen. The ruins of Hell are the result of the earthquake that accompanied Christ's death and the harrowing of Hell that followed: “The earth quaked, and the rocks were rent, and the tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep arose” (Matt. 27:51–52).

She had so rotted with the lecher's vice	55
she altered 'lust' to 'just' by her decree,	
to bleach the scandal that she brought herself.	
Semiramis is she, of whom we read	58
that she was Ninus' heir, his whorish wife;	
she held the land where now the Sultan rules.	
Next is that amorous soul ^o who slew herself	61
and to Sychaeus' ashes broke her vow;	
then Cleopatra, steeped in lechery.	
Helen of Troy then see, for whom ten years	64
of ill revolved; and see the great Achilles,	
who fell in his last combat, all for love.	
See Paris, Tristan . . ." And he pointed out	67
innumerable shades and named them all,	
whom love had severed from our life on earth.	
When I had heard my learned Teacher name	70
the courtly ladies and the knights of old,	
a whelm of pity left me at a loss,	
And "Poet," I began, "I greatly long	73
to speak to those two shades who fly as one	
and seem so lightly carried on the wind."	
And he responded: "You shall see them when	76
they sail nearer to us; then beg them by	
the love that drives them on, and they will come."	
Soon as the wind had swerved their flight our way,	79
I cried, "O weary spirits, if Another ^o	
does not forbid it, come and speak with us!"	
As turtledoves who heed the loving call—	82
with firm and lifted wings they shear the air	
and fly to the sweet dovecote, swift of will—	
So did they veer away from Dido's flock	85
and come to us through that malignant air,	
such force had the affection of my cry.	

^o *that amorous soul*: Dido, queen of Carthage, who fell in love with Aeneas and committed suicide when, at the command of the gods, he left her to journey to Italy. She had vowed to remain loyal to the memory of her murdered husband, *Sychaeus*. Her tragedy is told by Virgil in *Aeneid* 4.

^o *Another*: God.

“O living spirit, courteous and good, 88
 traveling the black night to visit us
 who left the world dyed purple with our blood,
 Were He who rules the universe our friend, 91
 we would entreat him, praying for your peace,
 for you have pitied us our twisted fate.
 All that you please to hear and speak about 94
 we two will hear and speak with you, as long
 as the wind falls in silence. Where the Po
 Rushes with all its tributaries down 97
 to its sea harbor, that it may have peace,
 in that place lies the town where I was born.
 Love that flames soonest in the gentle heart 100
 seized him for that sweet body which was snatched
 from me—and how it happened hurts me still.
 Love, which allows no loved one not to love, 103
 seized me with such a strong delight in him
 that, as you see, it will not leave me yet.
 Love led us to one death. The realm of Cain^o 106
 waits for the man who quenched us of our lives.”
 Such were the words they offered. And I bowed
 My head to hear the story of those souls 109
 and what they suffered, bowed so low, at last
 the poet said, “What are you thinking of?”
 When I could speak I thus began, “Alas, 112
 what great desire, what sweet and tender thoughts
 have led these lovers to this woeful pass!”
 Turning to them once more, I spoke again. 115
 “Francesca,” I began, “your torments move
 my heart to weep in pity for your pain.
 But tell me, in the season of sweet sighs, 118
 how did it happen, what made Love give way
 that you should know the truth of your desires?”

^o *Cain*: Cain, who slew his brother Abel (Gen. 4:1–16), lends his name to Caina, a region near the bottom of Hell where those who betrayed their kinsmen are punished (Canto Thirty-two, below).

And she to me: "There is no greater grief
 than to recall a time of happiness
 while plunged in misery—as your Teacher knows. 121
 But if so great a longing urges you 124
 to know about the first root of our love,
 then I will tell you, speaking through my tears.
 One day we two were reading for delight 127
 about how love had mastered Lancelot;
 we were alone and innocent and felt
 No cause to fear. And as we read, at times 130
 we went pale, as we caught each other's glance,
 but we were conquered by one point alone.
 For when we read that the much-longed-for smile^o 133
 accepted such a gentle lover's kiss,
 this man, whom nothing will divide from me,
 Trembled to place his lips upon my mouth. 136
 A pander was that author, and his book!
 That day we did not read another page."
 And all the while one spirit told their tale, 139
 the other wept so sadly that I fell
 for pity of it to a deathlike faint—
 and I dropped like a body stricken dead. 142

^o *smile* that of Guinevere, wife of King Arthur.

CANTO SIX

After eluding Cerberus, the triple-headed beast of Hell, the poets enter the third ring, where the gluttonous are punished in a storm of cold rain. There Dante speaks with Ciaccio, a fellow Florentine, who foretells strife for a city divided by injustice and greed.

In coming to—my mind had shut its door,
pitying those two kinsmen and their tale,
confounding me and covering me with sadness—
I see new forms of torment all about 4
and new tormented souls wherever I move,
wherever I turn, wherever I set my gaze.
At the third ring am I, where the rain falls 7
eternally, accursed, ponderous, cold—
changeless in rhythm, changeless in quality.
Thick knobs of hail, snow, water foul as ink 10
pour down forever through the gloomy air
and soak into the ground to make it stink.
Cerberus the bizarre and cruel beast 13
with his three gullets barks like a great dog
over the spirits drowning in that paste.
His eyes are bloody, his scruff is slick and black, 16
his paunch is huge, his paw-hands clawed like hooks
to snatch and skin and shred the souls to bits.
The downpour makes the spirits yowl like dogs. 19
They roll upon one side to shield the other—
those desecrating wretches turn and turn!
When Cerberus that great worm caught sight of us 22
he bared his fangs and opened his maws wide,
his muscles taut and not one holding still.

My guide spread out his palms and shoveled up 25
 two big fistfuls of mud and chucked them down
 the monster's ravenous funnels. As a dog
 Yammering in an agony of greed, 28
 straining to eat and nothing else, shuts up
 soon as he sinks his fangs into his feed,
 So did those greasy mugs of Cerberus 31
 the demon, who so thunders at the souls
 they wish they could go deaf. We took our way,
 Passing above the shadows in the press 34
 of that thick rain; and fixed our soles upon
 what seemed their persons, but was emptiness.
 Each one of them, flat on the earth, lay prone, 37
 until one jerked himself up to a sit
 as soon as he perceived us passing by.
 "O you, led through this low world," said the shade, 40
 "look at me well! You may know who I am—
 for you were made before I was unmade."
 And I: "Perhaps the anguish you endure 43
 has cast you from my memory, for it seems
 I've never looked upon your face before.
 But tell me who you are, sent to a place 46
 so painful, and with such a punishment—
 though some are harsher, none is so unpleasant."
 And he to me: "Your city,^o so stuffed full 49
 with envy that the sack's mouth spews it up,
 once held me in the calm and sunlit life.
 You fellow citizens called me Ciaccio—"Hog." 52
 For that sin of the throat that damns the soul,
 as you can see, I'm flattened by the rain.
 And I am not the only sad soul here, 55
 for all these others suffer the same pain
 for the same fault." And he spoke nothing more.
 And I responded: "Ciaccio, your distress 58
 weighs on my heart and summons me to tears.
 But tell me, if you know, where they will end,

^o *Your city*: Florence. Here follows the first of Dante's many invectives against that city.

Our party-riven city and its people. 61
 Have we a single man of justice there?
 Say why such discord has assailed the town.”
 And he: “After a struggle long and tense 64
 they’ll come to bloodshed, and the backwoods side
 will chase the other out with great offense.
 Then by his force^o who waits his chance to strike, 67
 that party will collapse within three years.
 The other one then climbs to power again,
 And long they hold their foreheads high for pride, 70
 and despite all the cries and accusations,
 they heap great burdens on the other side.
 Two men are just, but no one heeds their words. 73
 Avarice, pride, and envy are the three
 principal flames that set their hearts afire.”
 He put an end here to his grievous speech. 76
 And I to him: “I wish to learn yet—please,
 do me the favor, speak a little more.
 Those worthy men Teggghiaio, Farinata, 79
 Jacopo Rusticucci, Arrigo, Mosca,
 the rest who set their minds to merit well,
 Say where they are and let me know their state, 82
 for a great longing presses me to know
 if Heaven sweetens or Hell poisons them.”
 “They dwell among the blackest souls below,” 85
 said he, “weighed to the pit by different faults.
 Go far enough and you will find them all.
 But when you have returned to the sweet world, 88
 I beg, remember me to someone there.
 I say no more, and no more will respond.”
 His eyes that held me rolled a-squint—he stared 91
 at me a moment, hung his head, and fell
 flat with the other sinners, blind as they.

^o *by his force*: that of Pope Boniface VIII, lurking in the background, interfering in Florentine politics. See notes for line 65 above.

And my guide said to me: "He wakes no more 94
 till roused by the angelic trump of doom
 when he will go to face the hostile Power.^o
 Each man shall see again his woeful tomb, 97
 shall reassume his flesh and form, and hear
 his sentence thundering through eternity."
 So we passed on through that polluted mix 100
 of soul and slush, with slow and thoughtful steps,
 touching awhile upon the life to come,
 And I said, "Teacher, for these torments here— 103
 after the final sentence will they grow,
 or ease a bit, or stew as sharp as now?"
 He: "Turn to your philosophy again, 106
 which shows that when a thing at last is whole
 it feels more pleasure—so it feels more pain.
 For all that these accursed folk cannot 109
 come to their true perfection and man's end,
 they look to be more 'perfect' than than now."
 Down that wide-bending road we took our way, 112
 saying a great deal more than I repeat,
 until we reached the edge of the descent.
 There we found Plutus,^o the great enemy. 115

^o *hostile Power*: Christ, as judge, given authority by the Father (John 5:27).

^o *Plutus*: God of wealth, confused even in ancient times with Pluto, king of the underworld. *Enemy* (Italian *nemico*) translates the Hebrew *satan*, "adversary."