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VOLUME B

THE MEDIEVAL ERA

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Now I repent, but cannot have remission.
 Unhappy Eve, how prompt you were to sin,
 How swiftly followed counsel from the devil!
 You brought me death; I lost the life within;
 Your sin shall be inscribed in every chronicle.
 Do you see the signs of chaos come again?
 The earth itself feels our disgraceful curse.
 We sowed our wheat; and thistles grow, not grain;
 Wearily sweated, but the harvest's worse.
 You saw the start of this our evil end—
 A heavy sorrow, yet greater is in store;
 To hell we shall be taken. Understand,
 Torment and pain we'll suffer evermore.
 O wretched Eve, what do you say now?
 These are your winnings, this your heritage.
 You'll never have a blessing to bestow—
 Unreasonable, perverse, into old age.
 All those who issue from our mutual seed
 Will share the punishment for your misdeed.
 It falls on all, although you did the wrong;
 Before the doom's reversed, it will be long.

[Then shall Eve reply to Adam:]

EVE:
 Adam, my lord, on me reproach you've bent:
 You blame me for my crime and castigate.
 If I did wrong, I feel the punishment;
 I am to blame, God is the magistrate.
 Both against God and you it was a crime;
 My wickedness men will for long recall.
 My sins are hateful to me; great is my blame.
 A sinner—there's no good in me at all.
 I've no excuse; to God how could I defend
 Myself? No grounds can clear me of this sin.
 Forgive me, since I cannot make amend:
 If I were able, I would—with offering
 Sinful, unhappy, wretched that I am
 Before God's face I'm overcome with shame.
 Death, take me now, and let me live no more!
 I am in peril, and cannot reach the shore.
 The wicked serpent, evil-hearted snake,
 Compelled me of the cursed fruit to take.
 I gave you some—to do you good, I thought;
 Sank you in sin and cannot lift you out.
 Why could I not Creation's Lord obey?
 Why did I not accept a husband's care?
 You did wrong too; but first I showed the way.
 The evil done will take an age to cure.
 My wicked deed, my fateful accident,
 Will make our offspring pay the highest price.

The fruit was sweet; but stern the punishment;
 To eat was wicked, and we were unwise.
 Nevertheless, my hope in God I place—
 For sin there will be reconciliation.
 God will bestow His favour and His grace;
 His strength from Hell will bring us to salvation.

[Then shall come the devil, and three or four other devils with him, carrying in their hands iron chains and manacles, which they shall put round the necks of Adam and Eve. And some of the devils shall drive them, and others shall drag them, to hell; yet other devils shall be near hell to meet them as they come, and they shall make a great dance amongst themselves at the damnation of Adam and Eve; and some of the devils shall point to them as they come, and shall receive them and despatch them to hell. From hell they shall make a great smoke to arise, and shall shout to each other in their joy; and they shall bang their cauldrons and kettles together so that they can be heard outside. And after a little while the devils shall emerge and run around the "place"; some, however, shall remain in hell.]



Dante Alighieri

1265–1321

In the traces of autobiography he wove throughout his writings, Dante made it clear that there were two defining tragedies in his life: the death of his beloved Beatrice in 1290 and his exile from Florence in 1302, condemned to death should he ever return. Much else must have occurred in his life of which we know next to nothing—around 1285, he was married to one Gemma Donati, who bore him four children; he wrote his epic poem the *Commedia* during his peripatetic years of exile, finishing it right around the time of his death in Ravenna in 1321—but in the world of his poetry he chose to epitomize his life by an episode of unrequited love and a moment of high political drama.

DANTE'S FLORENCE

Dante's Florence was an independent republic, and its status as a banking center had made it one of the most important cities in late medieval Europe. It was also, like much of Italy, torn by civil strife. In 1260, two coalitions of noble families had fought for control of the city: the victorious Ghibellines, allied with the Hohenstaufen ruler Manfred, and the defeated Gueffs, allied with the papacy and a group of north-central Italian cities. The Gueffs regained control of Florence seven years later, banishing the Ghibellines and confiscating their property. In 1295, Dante enrolled in one of the professional guilds that constituted the power base of the *popolo*, a popular party which sought to contain the feuding of the aristocratic families, now focused on the drive by Pope Boniface VIII to bring northern Italy under papal control. In 1300, Dante was appointed to a two-month term as one of the city's seven priors (chief magistrates). As the city was rocked with violence, the priors exiled leading members of the new clashing factions of Black and White Gueffs, including Dante's good friend, the poet Guido Cavalcanti, who would die later that year. While an emissary in Rome two years later, Dante was sentenced to death in absentia, probably as revenge for his part in the earlier decision. He spent the last two decades of his life in miserable exile, wandering from city to city and patron to patron, all over Italy and possibly as far as Paris.

DANTE'S WORKS

Dante's earliest writings include *Il Fiore* (*The Flower*), a sonnet sequence adapted from *The Romance of the Rose*, a popular allegory of courtly love, and other writings related to the Northern Italian lyric movement of the *dolce stil novo*, or "sweet new style," as he would call it in the *Commedia*. The new Italian lyric was predominantly metaphysical, using Provençal forms and imagery to explore questions of philosophy, theology, and knowledge. Love was seldom sexual and seldom even social; the poet need barely have spoken to an idealized beloved like Dante's Beatrice or Cavalcanti's Giovanna. According to his poetic autobiography, *La Vita nuova* (*The New Life*, 1292–1294), Dante first encountered the Florentine girl, Beatrice Portinari, when she was eight and he was nine years old; she died sixteen years later without Dante having ever exchanged more than a few words with her. While he suffers from her presence (and her absence) just as a courtly lover would have done, he also comes to regard his beloved as nothing less than a manifestation of Christ, descended to earth to inspire him with love in order to lead him to a deeper understanding and a better life.

Much of Dante's writing was concerned with the meaning of what he had already written. *La Vita nuova* placed a series of his most celebrated early lyrics in the context of his session with Beatrice, explaining in retrospect how each poem had come to be written and how each reflected a different stage in his love from afar and a different aspect of his divine beloved. In *Il Convivio* (*The Banquet*), written in exile between about 1304 and 1307 and left unfinished, Dante reinterpreted several long love lyrics, this time as allegories about Lady Philosophy. During the same period he wrote but didn't finish *De Vulgari Eloquentia* (*On the Vulgar Tongue*) in which he surveyed the lyric tradition as a defense for composing intellectually ambitious verse in an Italian vernacular rather than in Latin. Dante also spoke about his use of the vernacular in an important letter to his patron Can Grande della Scala, which can be found in Volume C in *The Rise of the Vernacular in Europe*. Somewhere around 1310, he wrote *De Monarchia* (*On Monarchy*), a treatise on political philosophy arguing that an emperor was necessary to provide political stability to the world. His last and greatest work, the *Commedia* or *Comedy*, widely known as *The Divine Comedy*, incorporates all of Dante's earlier themes; it documents the difficulty of fulfilling his youthful ambitions, and the many ways in which the poet may or may not actually be worthy of doing so.

THE *COMMEDIA*

The structure of the *Commedia* is dazzlingly simple and impossibly intricate, an attempt to mirror the essential mystery of the Trinity. Everything is divided into threes and ones, their ideal permutations of nine and ten, and the perfect number seven. The single poem is composed of three parts, or canticles, *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso*, each describing one of the three distinct realms of the afterlife that compose the single universe comprehended by the divine plan. Each canticle is made up of thirty-three cantos, for a total of ninety-nine, except that *Inferno* has one extra to make a perfect hundred. Usually the first canto is considered as a prelude to the rest; this is one example of the ways in which Dante introduced dissymmetry to prevent the overall order of his poem from becoming monotonous. Cantos, for example, range in length from 115 to 160 lines. The meter Dante invented for the *Commedia*, which he called *terza rima* (third rhyme), embodies the poem's tension between order and disorder, stability and change. The eleven-syllable lines are divided into *terzinas*, or triplets, the first and third lines rhyming with each other, the second line introducing the main rhyme for the next *terzina*. So, for example, the first nine lines of the *Commedia*:

Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita
mi ritrovai per una selva oscura,

ché la diritta via era smarrita.
Ah! quanto a dir qual era è cosa dura
esta selva selvaggia e aspra e forte
che nel pensier rinova la paura!
Tant'è amara che poco è più morte:
ma per trattar del ben ch'î'vi trovai,
diro de l'altre cose ch'î' v'ho scorte.

(Ed. Petrocchi)

When I had journeyed half of our life's way,
I found myself within a shadowed forest,
for I had lost the path that does not stray.
Ah, it is hard to speak of what it was,
that savage forest, dense and difficult,
which even in recall renews my fear:
so bitter—death is hardly more severe!
But to retell the good discovered there,
I'll also tell the other things I saw.

Each *terzina* is a self-contained argument, but the overlapping rhymes link one unit to the next, providing both closure and continuity. For example in line 3, *smarrita* ("lost") brings the opening image to a frightening close, but then the next rhymes of *dura* ("hard") or *paura* ("fear") recall and expand the previous description of the *selva oscura* ("dark forest") while the new rhyme word *forte* ("difficult") looks forward to the next *terzina*, which rounds out the opening argument of all nine verses: he will tell us of the bad so that we will understand the good that came after.

STRUCTURE

The vision the poet recounts encompasses God's plan for the world, from its creation through to the Last Judgment. From the divine perspective, time doesn't exist, for in Dante's theology as in Augustine's (see Volume A), God existed before time began and will still exist after time ceases. Everything that happens in the world, every thought and action, is known by God beforehand. From the human perspective, however, seeing only at best the deeds of the past, the lessons of history, and the memories of a life, this eternal scheme can hardly be comprehended, much less put into words. The formal structure of the poem is the most fundamental of the many ways in which Dante tries to impart this dual perspective to his readers. The triad of science, variety, and fascination of human life alternate with the eternity, unity, and fixity of the afterlife. Rather than simply relate what he saw in his vision and explain what it meant, the all-knowing poet slowly reveals it through a first-person persona (referred to in the notes of the poem as "the pilgrim") who is as unfamiliar as we are with what he is seeing. For the medieval Christian, the world and everything in it was a book created by God to be read and interpreted, and this is how Dante conceived the afterlife, as an enormously complex rebus puzzle to be deciphered. Each soul the pilgrim encounters presents a mystery; it is often a puzzle in terms of strict Catholic doctrine why a certain soul has been damned to hell or another saved in purgatory. Even though the poet claims to have been there and to have understood what everything in this plan means, he wants us instead to be confused, intrigued, and outraged by what we see. The reader is to be converted, taught the way to salvation, but as an active participant.

GUIDES

There are three guides who lead the pilgrim on this journey: the classical Roman poet Virgil (70–19 B.C.E.), who takes him through Hell and Purgatory; Beatrice, who takes him through Paradise; and Saint Bernard of Clairvaux (see page 872), who prepares him for the final momentary union with the godhead. In addition to their historical character, each of these figures can be understood as a personification in an allegory about the conversion of a human soul: Virgil as the role of Reason in comprehending the rational cost of sin, either damnation or expiation; Beatrice as the role of Love and Faith in moving beyond the physical bounds of sin into the heavens; Bernard as the role of mystic vision and theology in achieving a final, perfect fusion with God. Each can be understood also as a personification of letters and study: Virgil as the preparatory ground of the classics; Beatrice as the inspirational role of love poetry; Bernard as the conclusive grasp of theology and mysticism. Further, they personify key influences in Dante's own life, the depth and emotional commitment of his attachment especially to the poetry and legend of Virgil and to the person and memory of Beatrice. For the *Commedia* is also a deeply felt spiritual autobiography, moving from suicidal despair to hope and the fulfillment of the pilgrim's innermost wishes.

GEOGRAPHY

The landscape of this autobiography is an idiosyncratic version of medieval geography and myth. Dante places Hell within the earth, an inverted cone created when Satan fell from heaven through the southern hemisphere directly opposite the future site of Jerusalem. As Satan was lodged in the center of the earth, land fleeing his presence piled up in both directions. The land escaping to the north created the inhabited world and hollowed out the cone of Hell beneath it. To the south, a passage was created leading to the surface of the southern hemisphere, where the mountain of Purgatory arose, its seven terraces analogous to the nine circles of hell. At the top of the mountain of Purgatory sits the earthly paradise, where Adam and Eve first dwelt in Eden before they were banished to the world below. Paradise is located in the fiery Elysian, beyond the planets and stars above. Dante tells us that the three realms are peopled by innumerable souls, but singles out various individuals as emblematic of each sin or quality. His selection is eclectic: men and women out of classical myth and Roman history, biblical figures, Florentines, other Italians, and Europeans, friends and enemies, poets and politicians, characters from medieval legend, and popes who hadn't even died yet in 1300 when the journey is supposed to occur. Dante chooses to persuade us of the extraordinary bliss of heaven and the intolerable torment of hell by painting them in the vivid colors we know so well from the world in which we live. He invests every one of these characters, every word they say and everything the pilgrim does with enormous significance, a significance that he makes us urgently need to know.

PRONUNCIATIONS:

<i>Beatrice</i> : BAY-ah-TREE-che	<i>Guido Cavalcanti</i> : GWEE-doh kah-vahl-
<i>Commedia</i> : koh-ME-dee-ah	KAHN-tee
<i>Contrapasso</i> : koh-n-trah-PAH-soh	<i>La Vita Nuova</i> : lah VEE-tah noo-OH-vah
<i>Dante Alighieri</i> : DAHN-tay ah-lee-ghee-	<i>Paradiso</i> : pah-rah-DEE-soh
AYR-ee	<i>Purgatorio</i> : poor-gah-TOR-ee-oh
<i>Francesca</i> : frahn-CHES-kah	<i>terza rima</i> : TAYR-tzah REE-mah
<i>Inferno</i> : een-FAYR-noh	<i>Ugolino</i> : oo-goh-LEE-noh

from La Vita Nuova¹

1

In my ~~Book of Memory~~, in the early part where there is little to be read, there comes chapter with the rubric: *Incipit vita nova*.² It is my intention to copy into this little book the words I find written under that heading—if not all of them, at least the essence of their meaning.

2

Nine times already since my birth the heaven of light had circled back to almost the same point,³ when there appeared before my eyes the now glorious lady of my mind who was called Beatrice even by those who did not know what her name was.⁴ She had been in this life long enough for the heaven of the fixed stars to be able to move twelfth of a degree to the East in her time; that is, she appeared to me at about the beginning of her ninth year, and I first saw her near the end of my ninth year. She appeared dressed in the most patrician of colors, a subdued and decorous crimson, her robe bound round and adorned in a style suitable to her years.⁵ At that very moment and I speak the truth, the vital spirit,⁶ the one that dwells in the most secret chamber of the heart, began to tremble so violently that even the most minute veins of my body were strangely affected; and trembling, it spoke these words: *Ecce deus forior in qui veniens dominabitur michi*.⁷ At that point the animal spirit, the one abiding in the high chamber to which all the senses bring their perceptions, was stricken with amazement and, speaking directly to the spirits of sight, said these words: *Apparui iam beatitudo vestra*.⁸ At that point the natural spirit, the one dwelling in that palace where our food is digested, began to weep, and weeping said these words: *Heu mise quia frequenter impeditus ero deinceps*.⁹ Let me say that, from that time on, Love governed my soul, which became immediately devoted to him, and he reigned over me with such assurance and lordship, given him by the power of my imagination, that I could only dedicate myself to fulfilling his every pleasure.¹ Often he commanded me to go and look for this youngest of angels; so, during those early years I often went in search of her, and I found her to be of such natural dignity and worthy of such admiration that the words of the poet Homer suited her perfectly: "She seemed to the daughter not of a mortal, but of a god."² And though her image, which remained constantly with me, was Love's assurance of holding me, it was of such a pure quality that it never allowed me to be ruled by Love without the faithful counsel of reason,

1. Translated by Mark Musa.

2. The phrase is Latin: "Here begins the new life." The idea that memory is like a book was a common medieval image. It reappears in Dante's *Commedia*, as well as in Chaucer's writings and elsewhere.

3. Ancient and medieval astronomers believed the sun ("the heaven of light") circled the earth once a year, rather than vice versa; hence, Dante was nine years old.

4. Beatrice Portinari (see introduction to Dante, page 894). Her name in Latin means "she who blesses."

5. In addition to being a "noble" color, crimson was the color of the Christian virtue of *caritas*, charity or love, as well as, more generally, the color of passion.

6. According to medieval medicine, three "spirits" or

fluids permeated the blood vessels and organs of the human body: the natural originated in the liver, the vital the heart, and the animal in the brain. Love seizes him all three.

7. Latin: "Here is a god stronger than I, who is coming to rule over me."

8. Now your bliss (*beatitudo*) has appeared (Latin).

9. Alas, wretch that I am, from now on I shall be hindered often (Latin).

1. It was common to personify the power of love in a G of Love adapted from the classical Eros or Cupid, who ruled over the Lover.

2. The quotation alludes to Priam's description of his son the hero Hector in *Iliad* 24.258–59.

The new sonnet I wrote begins: *Beyond the sphere*, and contains five parts. In the first I tell where my thought is going, naming it after one of its effects. In the second I tell why it goes up there, that is, who causes it to go. In the third I tell what it saw, that is, a lady being honored up there, and I call it a "pilgrim spirit" because it makes the journey upward spiritually and, once there, is like a pilgrim far from home. In the fourth I tell how it sees her to be such, that is, of such a nature, that I cannot understand it: that is to say that my thought ascends into the nature of this lady to such a degree that my mind cannot grasp it, for our minds function in relation to those blessed souls as the weak eye does in relation to the sun, and this the Philosopher tells us in the second book of the *Metaphysics*.⁴ In the fifth part I say that, even though I cannot understand what my thought has taken me to see, that is her miraculous nature, at least I understand this much: this thought of mine is entirely about my lady, for many times when it comes to my mind, I hear her name. At the end of this fifth part I say: "dear ladies," so that it be understood that it is to ladies that I speak. The second part begins: *a new intelligence*, the third: *Once arrived*, the fourth: *But when it tries*, the fifth: *This much*. It could be divided and explained more subtly, but since it can pass with this analysis, I do not concern myself with further division.

Beyond the sphere that makes the widest round,⁵
 passes the sigh arisen from my heart;
 a new intelligence that Love in tears
 endowed it with is urging it on high.
 Once arrived at the place of its desiring
 it sees a lady held in reverence,
 splendid in light; and through her radiance
 the pilgrim spirit looks upon her being.
 But when it tries to tell me what it saw,
 I cannot understand the subtle words
 it speaks to the sad heart that makes it speak.
 I know it tells of that most gracious one,
 for I often hear the name of Beatrice.
 This much, at least, is clear to me, dear ladies.

42

After I wrote this sonnet there came to me a miraculous vision in which I saw things that made me resolve to say no more about this blessed one until I would be capable of writing about her in a nobler way. To achieve this I am striving as hard as I can, and this she truly knows. Accordingly, if it be the pleasure of Him through whom all things live that my life continue for a few more years, I hope to write of her that which has never been written of any other woman. And then may it please the One who is the Lord of graciousness that my soul ascend to behold the glory of its lady, that is, of that blessed Beatrice, who in glory contemplates the countenance of the One *qui est per omnia secula benedictus*.⁶

4. The "Philosopher" is Aristotle. Dante knew Aristotle's *Metaphysics* from its translation and commentary by Thomas Aquinas, from which the image of the sun is drawn.

5. This sphere, the Empyrean, is the fiery realm beyond the ninth heaven, the Primum Mobile; it is the realm of God, the angels, and the blessed.

6. Who is through all ages blessed (Latin).

THE DIVINE COMEDY¹

from Inferno

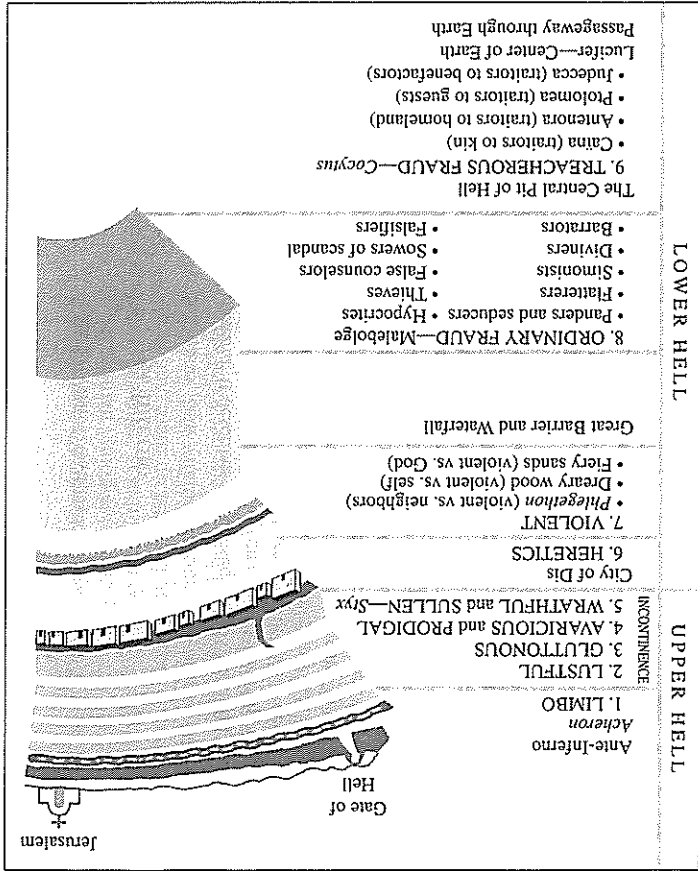
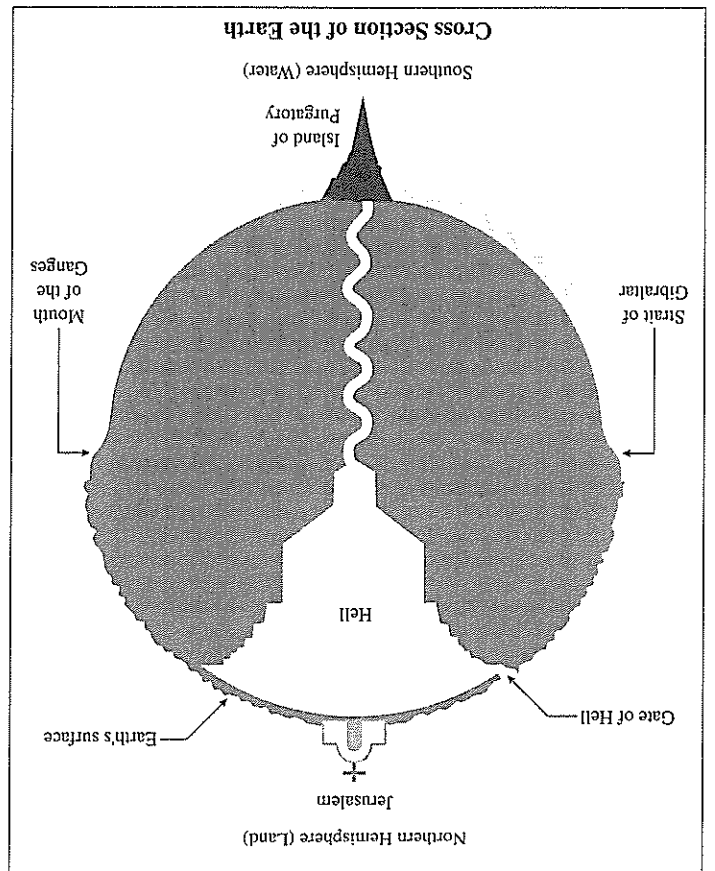
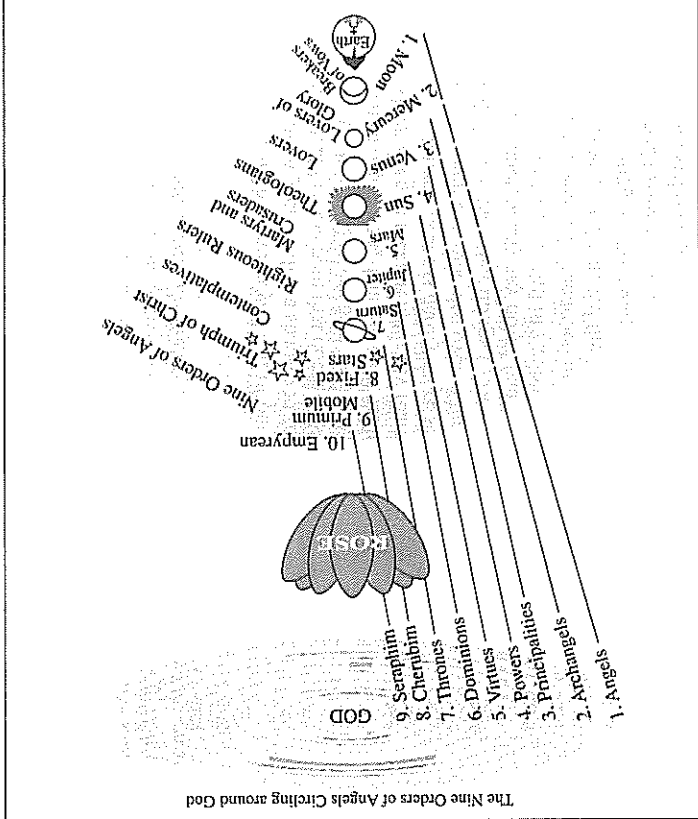
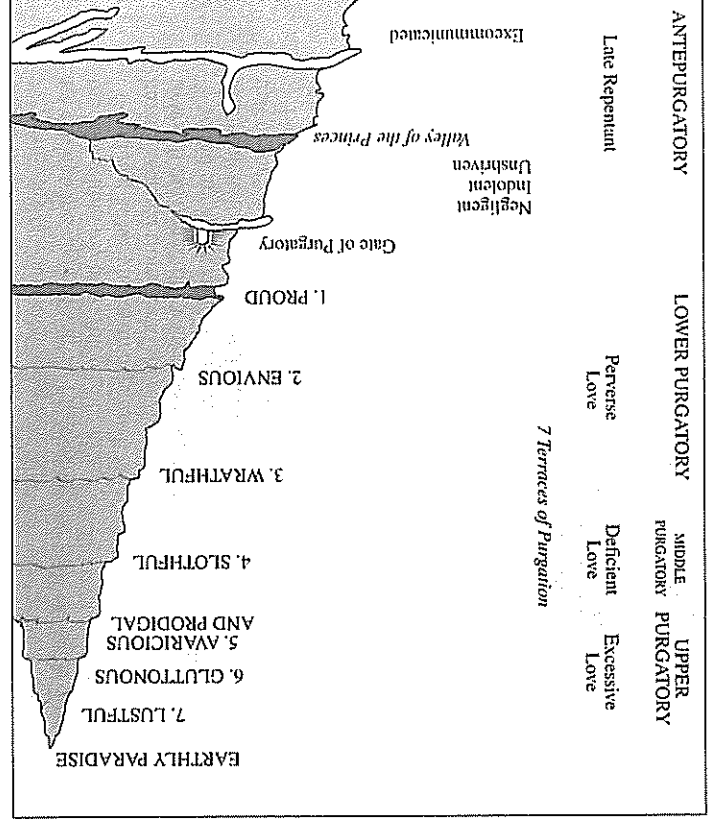
INFERNO

Hell serves double duty in the *Commedia*: it describes the consequences of a sinful life and it teaches the reader how to read the poem. Although from early on critics began mapping its nine circles (plus the vestibule, or ante-hell) and arguing about who did or didn't deserve to be where, Dante actually reveals the structure of Hell gradually, sometimes only partially, and often in ways a medieval reader would never have expected. This begins with Virgil, the most complex character in the poem. He was renowned for his virtue and considered a prophet of Christianity, and there was no pressing reason to condemn him to Hell at all. As with many of the souls encountered, however, Virgil's fate serves to define his place (Limbo) as a series of debates and dilemmas rather than a simple equation. In God's eyes, sin may be a simple and well-ordered business, but from the human perspective, it is not so easy to judge. Sin can be seductive, like Francesca da Rimini in the circle of the Lustful; it can inspire pity and fear, like Ugolino at the very bottom of Hell. Seldom, however, is it exactly what it seems, for Dante expects his readers to move back and forth through the poem, to compare what he says about a shade to what was known or written about him or her: he challenges his readers to be like himself, so immersed in the classics, the Bible, myth, history and thirteenth-century art and politics that they become emotional, life-and-death concerns. The portraits are striking in their own right, but the more we know about their models the more profound and far-reaching are the moral and ethical dilemmas they embody.

We unravel the meaning of each circle of Hell through the souls we are told it contains, by the dramatic encounters the two pilgrims have with certain of these souls, by the particular guardian (usually a mythological monster) assigned to each, by the particular landscape, by the style of the language, which ranges from the sublimity of epic to the simplicity of lyric to the earthiness of the folk tale, and by the nature of the torment. One soul terms Hell's torments the *contrapasso*, or counter-punishment. The principle of *contrapasso* is poetic justice: each soul receives what he or she most desired or did on earth, but in a perverse and unwanted form—the flatterers drown in excrement; the sowers of discord are split asunder. There is a tension throughout *Inferno* between the moral lessons we are to learn from the damned characters, and the fascination many of them exert on us, both positive and negative, in their quality as stubbornly alive and suffering individuals.

Many of the damned serve to demonstrate that there is a danger in knowing Hell too well. The underworld offers great temptation for rage and revenge, and it contains much of apparent pleasure and beauty as well: the worthies of Limbo, Francesca's love, Dante's mentor Brunetto Latini, the doating father of his friend and fellow poet Cavalcanti. This will also be a dilemma in *Purgatorio*, where the souls, although saved, must suffer much in weaning themselves from their ties to the world they loved, but in the *Inferno* the dilemma takes a starker form. The stakes are very high, not just for individuals but for society, and Dante is also careful to indicate which parts of Hell cause particular trouble, either to him or to his society: sins of desire, which are so close to the love and longing that can lead one to God; the complex and subdivided sins of fraud in the eighth circle, which attack the very bonds of sociability on which community relies. Dante doesn't want us to submit meekly to the journey through Hell; he expects us to go through it kicking and screaming, arguing and cursing, although he also expects that in the end he will win us over, as in the end he has won over himself.

1. Translated by Allen Mandelbaum.



Canto I

The voyager-narrator astray by night in a dark forest. Morning and the sunlit hill. Three beasts that impede his ascent. The encounter with Virgil, who offers his guidance and an alternative path through two of the three realms the voyager must visit.

When I had journeyed half of our life's way,²

I found myself within a shadowed forest,
for I had lost the path that does not stray.³

Ah, it is hard to speak of what it was,
that savage forest, dense and difficult,
which even in recall renews my fear:

so bitter—death is hardly more severe!
But to retell the good discovered there,
I'll also tell the other things I saw.

I cannot clearly say how I had entered
the wood; I was so full of sleep just at
the point where I abandoned the true path.⁴

But when I'd reached the bottom of a hill—
it rose along the boundary of the valley
that had harassed my heart with so much fear—

I looked on high and saw its shoulders clothed
already by the rays of that same planet⁵
which serves to lead men straight along all roads.

At this my fear was somewhat quieted;
for through the night of sorrow I had spent,
the lake within my heart felt terror present.⁶

And just as he who, with exhausted breath,
having escaped from sea to shore, turns back
to watch the dangerous waters he has quit,

so did my spirit, still a fugitive,
turn back to look intently at the pass
that never has let any man survive.⁶

I let my tired body rest awhile.
Moving again, I tried the lonely slope—
my firm foot always was the one below.⁷

the sun

2. Canto 21.112-14 establishes the date of the journey as Easter weekend of 1300, the entry into the dark wood on the night of Maundy Thursday, the day before Good Friday. Born in 1265, Dante would have been 35, precisely midway in the biblical life span of 70 years. The plural possessive "our" expands the individual journey to one that involves the reader in an allegory of every person's life.

3. The dark wood and the straight path were traditional Christian metaphors for the sinful and righteous lives, respectively. In the Middle Ages, they were also common structural elements of the romance narrative: by straying into the dark wood, the wandering knight would find adventure.

4. Sleep is a traditional Christian metaphor for the sinful

life; it also alludes here to the customary introduction of the medieval dream vision.

5. The "lake of the heart" was understood to be the inner chamber of the heart; this was the location of fear in the body.

6. The first of the poem's many similes: the image of the sea alludes to the shipwreck that begins Virgil's *Aeneid* and to the landfall that precedes Aeneas's descent to the underworld in Book 6, as well as to the crossing of the Red Sea in Exodus.

7. Most likely, this is a Christian allegory of the "two feet" of the soul. The left, or "firmer," dragging foot was that of the will, weighed down by original sin and the appetites, while the right was that of the intellect.

And almost where the hillside starts to rise—
look there!—a leopard, very quick and lithe,
a leopard covered with a spotted hide.⁸

He did not disappear from sight, but stayed;
indeed, he so impeded my ascent
that I had often to turn back again.

The time was the beginning of the morning;
the sun was rising now in fellowship
with the same stars that had escorted it

when Divine Love first moved those things of beauty;⁹
so that the hour and the gentle season
gave me good cause for hopefulness on seeing

that beast before me with his speckled skin;
but hope was hardly able to prevent
the fear I felt when I beheld a lion.

His head held high and ravenous with hunger—
even the air around him seemed to shudder—
this lion seemed to make his way against me.

And then a she-wolf showed herself; she seemed
to carry every craving in her leanness;
she had already brought despair to many.

The very sight of her so weighted me
with fearfulness that I abandoned hope
of ever climbing up that mountain slope.

Even as he who glories while he gains
will, when the time has come to tally loss,
lament with every thought and turn despondent,
so was I when I faced that restless beast,

which, even as she stalked me, step by step
had thrust me back to where the sun is speechless.

While I retreated down to lower ground,
before my eyes there suddenly appeared
one who seemed faint because of the long silence.

When I saw him in that vast wilderness,
"Have pity on me," were the words I cried,
"whatever you may be—a shade, a man."

He answered me: "Not man; I once was man.
Both of my parents came from Lombardy,
and both claimed Mantua as native city.

And I was born, though late, *sub Julio*,
and lived in Rome under the good Augustus—
the season of the false and lying gods.

I was a poet, and I sang the righteous
son of Anchises who had come from Troy

8. Medieval commentaries of the *Inferno* quickly identified the leopard with lust, the lion with pride, and the wolf with avarice, or cupidity. They paralleled the later threefold division of the sins of hell between those of incontinence, violence, and fraud in Canto 11.

9. The world was believed to have been created in spring when the sun was in the constellation of Ares; Dante journey takes place in the same season and under the same stars.

75

when flames destroyed the pride of Ilium.¹

But why do you return to wretchedness?
Why not climb up the mountain of delight,
the origin and cause of every joy?"

"And are you then that Virgil, you the fountain
that freely pours so rich a stream of speech?"

I answered him with shame upon my brow.

"O light and honor of all other poets,
may my long study and the intense love
that made me search your volume serve me now.

You are my master and my author, you—
the only one from whom my writing drew
the noble style for which I have been honored.

You see the beast that made me turn aside;
help me, o famous sage, to stand against her,
for she has made my blood and pulses shudder."

"It is another path that you must take,"
he answered when he saw my tearfulness,
"if you would leave this savage wilderness;

the beast that is the cause of your outcry
allows no man to pass along her track,
but blocks him even to the point of death;

her nature is so squalid, so malicious
that she can never sate her greedy will;
when she has fed, she's hungrier than ever.

She mates with many living souls and shall
yet mate with many more, until the Greyhound
arrives, inflicting painful death on her.

That Hound will never feed on land or pewter,
but find his fare in wisdom, love, and virtue;
his place of birth shall be between two felts.²

He will restore low-lying Italy
for which the maid Camilla died of wounds,
and Nisus, Turnus, and Euryalus.³

And he will hunt that beast through every city
until he thrusts her back again to Hell,
from which she was first sent above by envy.⁴

110

1. Virgil (70–19 B.C.E.) was born during the lifetime of Julius Caesar, who was assassinated in 44, too soon to have known the poet's writing. Virgil's patron was Caesar's adopted son, the emperor Augustus. Virgil identifies himself with his final work, the mythical epic of Aeneas, the "righteous son of Anchises," who journeyed from the destruction of Troy ("Ilium") to Italy to found the city of Rome.

2. Virgil explains the she-wolf's sway by means of the first of the poem's many prophecies. The poetical aptness of a Greyhound (*veltro*) to hunt down and kill the she-wolf is clear; possible identities are many and not mutually exclusive. There is some reference to the redemptive powers of Christ, but also to the desired coming of a

secular leader who would be above corruption, seeking neither land nor money ("pewter"), and who would reestablish temporal authority in Christendom: perhaps Dante's benefactor Can Grande della Scala of Verona, whose domain was roughly limited by the two "felts" (*Feltrina*) of Feltria and Montefeltro, perhaps a Holy Roman Emperor, elected by the casting of ballots in the felled urns used at the time.

3. Virgil refers to Italy in terms of his own epic of the founding of the classical Roman empire, alluding to four characters who died in the civil war for the possession of Italy related in the second half of the *Aeneid*.

4. "But by the envy of the devil, death entered the world" (Wisdom 2:24).

Therefore, I think and judge it best for you
to follow me, and I shall guide you, taking
you from this place through an eternal place,

where you shall hear the howls of desperation
and see the ancient spirits in their pain,
as each of them laments his second death;⁵
and you shall see those souls who are content

within the fire,⁶ for they hope to reach—
whenever that may be—the blessed people.
If you would then ascend as high as these,

a soul more worthy than I am will guide you;
I'll leave you in her care when I depart,
because that Emperor who reigns above,

since I have been rebellious to His law,
will not allow me entry to His city.
He governs everywhere, but rules from there;

there is His city, His high capital:
o happy those He chooses to be there!⁷
And I replied: "O poet—by that God

whom you had never come to know—I beg you,
that I may flee this evil and worse evils,
to lead me to the place of which you spoke,

that I may see the gateway of Saint Peter⁸
and those whom you describe as sorrowful."
Then he set out, and I moved on behind him.

135

Canto 2

The following evening. Invocation to the Muses. The narrator's questioning of his worthiness to visit the deathless world. Virgil's comforting explanation that he has been sent to help Dante by three Ladies of Heaven. The voyager heartened. Their setting out.

The day was now departing; the dark air
released the living beings of the earth
from work and weariness; and I myself

alone prepared to undergo the battle
both of the journeying and of the pity,
which memory, mistaking not, shall show.

O Muses, o high genius, help me now;
o memory that set down what I saw,
here shall your excellence reveal itself!¹

I started: "Poet, you who are my guide,
see if the force in me is strong enough
before you let me face that rugged pass.

10

5. Either the condemnation of the soul to hell after death, or the final condemnation to hell and reunion with the body that will occur during the Last Judgment.

6. Either the gate of Purgatory or the entry to Paradise.

1. Echoes of the *Aeneid* continue: the invocation of the classical muses was a staple of the epic style. Dante adds the stress on the poet's memory of what he has seen.

You say that he who fathered Sylvius,
 while he was still corruptible, had journeyed
 into the deathless world with his live body.²
 For, if the Enemy of every evil
 was courteous to him, considering
 all he would cause and who and what he was,
 that does not seem incomprehensible,
 since in the empyrean heaven he was chosen
 to father honored Rome and her empire;
 and if the truth be told, Rome and her realm
 were destined to become the sacred place,
 the seat of the successor^o of great Peter.
 And through the journey you ascribe to him,
 he came to learn of things that were to bring
 his victory and, too, the papal mantle.³
 Later the Chosen Vessel travelled there,
 to bring us back assurance of that faith
 with which the way to our salvation starts.⁴
 But why should I go there? Who sanctions it?
 For I am not Aeneas, am not Paul;
 nor I nor others think myself so worthy.
 Therefore, if I consent to start this journey,
 I fear my venture may be wild and empty.
 You're wise; you know far more than what I say."
 And just as he who unwill what he wills
 and shifts what he intends to seek new ends
 so that he's drawn from what he had begun,
 so was I in the midst of that dark land,
 because, with all my thinking, I annulled
 the task I had so quickly undertaken.
 "If I have understood what you have said,"
 replied the shade of that great-hearted one,
 "your soul has been assailed by cowardice,
 which often weighs so heavily on a man—
 distracting him from honorable trials—
 as phantoms frighten beasts when shadows fall.
 That you may be delivered from this fear,
 I'll tell you why I came and what I heard
 when I first felt compassion for your pain.⁵
 I was among those souls who are suspended;^o

in Limbo

2. In lines 13–27, Dante retells the story of *Aeneid* 6 (see Volume A) in a Christian context. While still alive, Aeneas (father of Sylvius, ancestor of the founder of Rome) descended to the underworld, which included both a place of punishment and a paradise, in order to meet his father and learn the fate of his descendants.

3. Aeneas's father gave him advice on the upcoming war and showed his son a procession of souls of future Romans that forecast the empire of Augustus; in Dante's version it also forecasts papal Rome.

4. The apostle Paul ("the Chosen Vessel") described in his second Epistle to the Corinthians (12:2–4) how he was "caught up into Paradise"; the apocryphal *Vision of St. Paul* narrates a descent into hell as well.

5. Virgil explains how he came to appear before Dante and provides a "divine" authorization for the journey (and the poem) that follows. The language of the account is less that of the high style of the *Aeneid* than of the lyric of courtly love.

a lady called to me, so blessed, so lovely
 that I implored to serve at her command.
 Her eyes surpassed the splendor of the star's;
 and she began to speak to me—so gently
 and softly—with angelic voice. She said:
 'O spirit of the courteous Mantuan,
 whose fame is still a presence in the world
 and shall endure as long as the world lasts,
 my friend, who has not been the friend of fortune,
 is hindered in his path along that lonely
 hillside; he has been turned aside by terror.
 From all that I have heard of him in Heaven,
 he is, I fear, already so astray
 that I have come to help him much too late.
 Go now; with your persuasive word, with
 all that is required to see that he escapes,
 bring help to him, that I may be consoled.
 For I am Beatrice who send you on;
 I come from where I most long to return;
 Love prompted me, that Love which makes me speak.
 When once again I stand before my Lord,
 then I shall often let Him hear your praises.'
 Now Beatrice was silent. I began:
 'O Lady of virtue, the sole reason why
 the human race surpasses all that lies
 beneath the heaven with the smallest spheres,
 so welcome is your wish, that even if
 it were already done, it would seem tardy;
 all you need do is let me know your will.
 But tell me why you have not been more prudent—
 descending to this center, moving from
 that spacious place where you long to return?'
 'Because you want to fathom things so deeply,
 I now shall tell you promptly,' she replied,
 'why I am not afraid to enter here.
 One ought to be afraid of nothing other
 than things possessed of power to do us harm,
 but things innocuous need not be feared.
 God, in His graciousness, has made me so
 that this, your misery, cannot touch me;
 I can withstand the fires flaming here.⁶
 In Heaven there's a gentle lady—one
 who weeps for the distress toward which I send you,
 so that stern judgment up above is shattered.
 And it was she who called upon Lucia,⁷

6. Neither the fires of hell nor the damned have the power physically to harm any of the blessed, nor do their sufferings deserve any compassion—a cornerstone of Catholic doctrine that Dante sorely tests in the *Inferno*.

7. St. Lucy of Syracuse, a late-3rd-century virgin martyr who is patron saint of sight, and a symbol of illuminating grace.

requesting of her: "Now your faithful one has need of you, and I commend him to you."

Lucia, enemy of every cruelty,
arose and made her way to where I was,
sitting beside the venerable Rachel.⁸

She said: "You, Beatrice, true praise of God,
why have you not helped him who loves you so
that—for your sake—he's left the vulgar crowd?
Do you not hear the anguish in his cry?
Do you not see the death he wars against
upon that river ruthless as the sea?"

No one within this world has ever been
so quick to seek his good or flee his harm
as I—when she had finished speaking thus—
to come below, down from my blessed station;
I trusted in your honest utterance,

which honors you and those who've listened to you.⁹
When she had finished with her words to me,
she turned aside her gleaming, tearful eyes,
which only made me hurry all the more.

And, just as she had wished, I came to you:
I snatched you from the path of the fierce beast
that barred the shortest way up the fair mountain.

What is it then? Why, why do you resist?
Why does your heart host so much cowardice?
Where are your daring and your openness

as long as there are three such blessed women
concerned for you within the court of Heaven
and my words promise you so great a good?"

As little flowers, which the chill of night
has bent and huddled, when the white sun strikes,
grow straight and open fully on their stems,
so did I, too, with my exhausted force;
and such warm daring rushed into my heart
that I—as one who has been freed—began:

"O she, compassionate, who has helped me!
And you who, courteous, obeyed so quickly
the true words that she had addressed to you!

You, with your words, have so disposed my heart
to longing for this journey—I return
to what I was at first prepared to do.

Now go; a single will fills both of us:
you are my guide, my governor, my master."
These were my words to him; when he advanced,
I entered on the steep and savage path.

8. Beatrice has her seat in heaven next to Rachel, younger sister of Leah in Genesis, and beloved of Jacob.

Canto 3

The inscription above the Gate of Hell. The Ante-Inferno, where the shades of those who lived without praise and without blame now intermingle with the neutral angels. He who made the great refusal. The River Acheron. Charon. Dante's loss of his senses as the earth trembles.

THROUGH ME THE WAY INTO THE SUFFERING CITY,
THROUGH ME THE WAY TO THE ETERNAL PAIN,
THROUGH ME THE WAY THAT RUNS AMONG THE LOST.

5 JUSTICE URGED ON MY HIGH ARTIFICER;
MY MAKER WAS DIVINE AUTHORITY,
THE HIGHEST WISDOM, AND THE PRIMAL LOVE.

BEFORE ME NOTHING BUT ETERNAL THINGS
WERE MADE, AND I ENDURE ETERNALLY.
ABANDON EVERY HOPE, WHO ENTER HERE.¹

10 These words—their aspect was obscure—I read
inscribed above a gateway, and I said:
"Master, their meaning is difficult for me."

And he to me, as one who comprehends:
"Here one must leave behind all hesitation;
here every cowardice must meet its death.

For we have reached the place of which I spoke,
where you will see the miserable people,
those who have lost the good of the intellect."²

20 And when, with gladness in his face, he placed
his hand upon my own, to comfort me,
he drew me in among the hidden things.

Here sighs and lamentations and loud cries
were echoing across the starless air,
so that, as soon as I set out, I wept.

25 Strange utterances, horrible pronouncements,
accents of anger, words of suffering,
and voices shrill and faint, and beating hands—
all went to make a tumult that will whirl
forever through that turbid, timeless air,

30 like sand that eddies when a whirlwind swirls.
And I—my head oppressed by horror—said:
"Master, what is it that I hear? Who are
those people so defeated by their pain?"

35 And he to me: "This miserable way
is taken by the sorry souls of those
who lived without disgrace and without praise.
They now commingle with the coward angels,

1. The famous inscription on the Gate of Hell announces several key laws of the realm: it is the negative counterpart to the city of God, but also created by divine order, subject to the Lord's authority, and ruled by justice and love. Evil is not independent from, but somehow part of the divine scheme since it was first created by Satan's

rebellion at the beginning of time.

2. The rules may be clear, but their meaning is not. Virgil gives a first definition of the state of damnation: those ruled by their appetites rather than their reason. Truth, following Aristotle, is the good of the intellect; for Dante the highest good is God.

the company of those who were not rebels
nor faithful to their God, but stood apart.

40 The heavens, that their beauty not be lessened,
have cast them out, nor will deep Hell receive them—
even the wicked cannot glory in them.”³

And I: “What is it, master, that oppresses
these souls, compelling them to wait so loud?”

45 He answered: “I shall tell you in few words.
Those who are here can place no hope in death,
and their blind life is so abject that they
are envious of every other fate.

The world will let no fame of theirs endure;
both justice and compassion must disdain them;
let us not talk of them, but look and pass.”⁴

And I, looking more closely, saw a banner
that, as it wheeled about, raced on—so quick
that any respite seemed unsuited to it.

55 Behind that banner trailed so long a file
of people—I should never have believed
that death could have undone so many souls.

After I had identified a few,

60 I saw and recognized the shade of him
who made, through cowardice, the great refusal.⁵
At once I understood with certainty:
this company contained the cowardly,
hateful to God and to His enemies.

These wretched ones, who never were alive,
went naked and were stung again, again
by horseflies and by wasps that circled them.

The insects streaked their faces with their blood,
which, mingled with their tears, fell at their feet,
where it was gathered up by sickening worms.

70 And then, looking beyond them, I could see
a crowd along the bank of a great river;
at which I said: “Allow me now to know
who are these people—master—and what law

has made them seem so eager for the crossing,
as I can see despite the feeble light.”

75 And he to me: “When we have stopped along
the melancholy shore of Acheron,⁶
then all these matters will be plain to you.”

At that, with eyes ashamed, downcast, and fearing

a river of Hell

3. Dante invented a category of souls who belong neither in Heaven nor in Hell properly speaking: the “lukewarm,” grouped with the neutral angels, those who neither rebelled with Satan nor sided with God.

4. Here the poetically apt punishment consists of the complete lack of fame for those who made no choices in life, and of goading insects and speeding banners, since they

would not be goaded and chose no banners.

5. The one soul singled out among the lukewarm, fittingly, is not named. Early commentators mostly agreed he was Pope Celestine V, who abdicated (“the great refusal”) only five months after his election as pope in 1294, allowing the election of Boniface VIII, pope from 1294 to 1303, one of the arch-villains of the *Commedia*.

80 that what I said had given him offense,
I did not speak until we reached the river.

And here, advancing toward us, in a boat,
an aged man—his hair was white with years⁶—
was shouting: “Woe to you, corrupted souls!

85 Forget your hope of ever seeing Heaven:
I come to lead you to the other shore,
to the eternal dark, to fire and frost.

And you approaching there, you living soul,
keep well away from these—they are the dead.”

80 But when he saw I made no move to go,
he said: “Another way and other harbors—
not here—will bring you passage to your shore:
a lighter craft will have to carry you.”

My guide then: “Charon, don’t torment yourself:
our passage has been willed above, where One⁷
can do what He has willed; and ask no more.”

Now silence fell upon the woolly cheeks
of Charon, pilot of the livid marsh,
whose eyes were ringed about with wheels of flame.

100 But all those spirits, naked and exhausted,
had lost their color, and they gnashed their teeth
as soon as they heard Charon’s cruel words;
they execrated God and their own parents

and humankind, and then the place and time
of their conception’s seed and of their birth.

105 Then they forgathered, huddled in one throng,
weeping aloud along that wretched shore
which waits for all who have no fear of God.

110 The demon Charon, with his eyes like embers,
by signaling to them, has all embark;
his oar strikes anyone who stretches out.

As, in the autumn, leaves detach themselves,
first one and then the other, till the bough
sees all its fallen garments on the ground,⁸

115 similarly, the evil seed of Adam
descended from the shoreline one by one,
when signaled, as a falcon—called—will come.⁹

So do they move across the darkened waters;
even before they reach the farther shore,
new ranks already gather on this bank.

120 “My son,” the gracious master said to me,
“those who have died beneath the wrath of God,
all these assemble here from every country;

6. The first figure out of pagan mythology encountered in Hell, the ferryman Charon was the son of Erebus and Night.

7. God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit are never named in Hell directly.

8. The simile of autumn leaves to describe dead souls reworks that of *Aeneid* 6.309–12.

9. A simile from medieval falconry: the moment when the falcon is lured down by the hunter.

and they are eager for the river crossing
because celestial justice spurs them on,
so that their fear is turned into desire.

No good soul ever takes its passage here;
therefore, if Charon has complained of you,
by now you can be sure what his words mean."
And after this was said, the darkened plain
quaked so tremendously—the memory
of terror then, bathes me in sweat again.

A whirlwind burst out of the tear-drenched earth,
a wind that crackled with a bloodred light,
a light that overcame all of my senses;
and like a man whom sleep has seized, I fell.

Canto 4

Dante's awakening to the First Circle, or Limbo, inhabited by those who were worthy but lived before Christianity and/or without baptism. The welcoming of Virgil and Dante by Homer, Horace, Ovid, Lucan. The catalogue of other great-hearted spirits in the noble castle of Limbo.

The heavy sleep within my head was smashed
by an enormous thunderclap, so that
I started up as one whom force awakens;
I stood erect and turned my rested eyes
from side to side, and I stared steadily
to learn what place it was surrounding me.

In truth I found myself upon the brink
of an abyss, the melancholy valley
containing thundering, unending wailings.

That valley, dark and deep and filled with mist,
is such that, though I gazed into its pit,
I was unable to discern a thing.¹

"Let us descend into the blind world now,"²
the poet, who was deathly pale, began;
"I shall go first and you will follow me."

But I, who'd seen the change in his complexion,
said: "How shall I go on if you are frightened,
you who have always helped dispel my doubts?"

And he to me: "The anguish of the people
whose place is here below, has touched my face
with the compassion you mistake for fear."

Let us go on, the way that waits is long."

So he set out, and so he had me enter

1. The first glimpse of the geography of Hell proper. The pit was a standard component of medieval hell; the cone-like valley the pilgrim will encounter was not.

2. Blind because bereft of sun and stars, and blind because bereft of spiritual clarity.

on that first circle girdling the abyss.³

Here, for as much as hearing could discover,
there was no outcry louder than the sighs
that caused the everlasting air to tremble.

The sighs arose from sorrow without torments,
out of the crowds—the many multitudes—
of infants and of women and of men.

The kindly master said: "Do you not ask
who are these spirits whom you see before you?
I'd have you know, before you go ahead,

they did not sin; and yet, though they have merits,
that's not enough, because they lacked baptism,
the portal of the faith that you embrace.

And if they lived before Christianity,
they did not worship God in fitting ways;
and of such spirits I myself am one.

For these defects, and for no other evil,
we now are lost and punished just with this:
we have no hope and yet we live in longing."

Great sorrow seized my heart on hearing him,
for I had seen some estimable men
among the souls suspended in that limbo.

"Tell me, my master, tell me, lord," I then
began because I wanted to be certain
of that belief which vanquishes all errors,

"did any ever go—by his own merit
or others'—from this place toward blessedness?"
And he, who understood my covert speech,⁴

replied: "I was new-entered on this state
when I beheld a Great Lord enter here;
the crown he wore, a sign of victory.⁵

He carried off the shade of our first father,⁶
of his son Abel, and the shade of Noah,
of Moses, the obedient legislator,

of father Abraham, David the king,
of Israel,⁷ his father, and his sons,
and Rachel, she for whom he worked so long,

and many others—and He made them blessed;
and I should have you know that, before them,
there were no human souls that had been saved."

We did not stay our steps although he spoke;

3. The first circle of Hell is Limbo, according to doctrine the place of children who died before baptism and of righteous Old Testament figures who lived before the coming of Christ. Dante took the liberty of adding a new category: the virtuous pagans, whose number includes Virgil.

4. The pilgrim wants to ask whether Virgil, his guide, can be saved. He doesn't receive the answer he desires.

5. The apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus tells that between his crucifixion on Good Friday and his resurrection on Easter Sunday, Christ descended into Limbo and took his Old Testament figures with him up to Heaven. The Harrowing of Hell was proclaimed as dogma during the 13th century. Virgil died in 19 B.C.E.; hence he was newly arrived when Christ descended in 33 C.E.

65 we still continued onward through the wood—
the wood, I say, where many spirits thronged.
Our path had not gone far beyond the point
where I had slept, when I beheld a fire
win out against a hemisphere of shadows.
70 We still were at a little distance from it,
but not so far I could not see in part
that honorable men possessed that place.
“O you who honor art and science both,
who are these souls whose dignity has kept
75 their way of being, separate from the rest?”
And he to me: “The honor of their name,
which echoes up above within your life,
gains Heaven’s grace, and that advances them.”
Meanwhile there was a voice that I could hear:
80 “Pay honor to the estimable poet;
his shadow, which had left us, now returns.”
After that voice was done, when there was silence,
I saw four giant shades approaching us;
in aspect, they were neither sad nor joyous.
85 My kindly master then began by saying:
“Look well at him who holds that sword in hand,
who moves before the other three as lord.
That shade is Homer, the consummate poet;
the other one is Horace, satirist;
90 the third is Ovid, and the last is Lucan.⁶
Because each of these spirits shares with me
the name called out before by the lone voice,
they welcome me—and, doing that, do well.”
And so I saw that splendid school assembled,
95 led by the lord of song incomparable,⁹
who like an eagle soars above the rest.
Soon after they had talked a while together,
they turned to me, saluting cordially;
and having witnessed this, my master smiled;
and even greater honor then was mine,
100 for they invited me to join their ranks—
I was the sixth among such intellects.
So did we move along and toward the light,
talking of things about which silence here
is just as seemly as our speech was there.
105 We reached the base of an exalted castle,
encircled seven times by towering walls,

6. Dante produces a pantheon of classical poets. Homer was known only by reputation in Dante’s time. Virgil’s friend and contemporary, Horace (65–8 B.C.E.), is remembered here for his *Satires* and *Epistles*. Ovid (43 B.C.E.–17 C.E.) and Lucan (39–65 C.E.) are the two classical poets Dante cites most frequently after Virgil, from Ovid primarily his epic compilation of myth, the *Metamorphoses*, and from Lucan his violent epic on the civil war between Caesar and Pompey, *De bello civili*, or *Pharsalia*.

Homer

110 defended all around by a fair stream.⁷
We forded this as if upon hard ground;
I entered seven portals with these sages;
we reached a meadow of green flowering plants.
The people here had eyes both grave and slow;
their features carried great authority;
they spoke infrequently, with gentle voices.
115 We drew aside to one part of the meadow,
an open place both high and filled with light,
and we could see all those who were assembled.⁸
Facing me there, on the enameled green,
great-hearted souls were shown to me and I
still glory in my having witnessed them.
I saw Electra with her many comrades,
among whom I knew Hector and Aeneas,
and Caesar, in his armor, falcon-eyed.⁹
120 I saw Camilla and Penthesilea
and, on the other side, saw King Latinus,
who sat beside Lavinia, his daughter.¹
I saw that Brutus who drove Tarquin out,
Lucretia, Julia, Marcia, and Cornelia,
and, solitary, set apart, Saladin.²
125 When I had raised my eyes a little higher,
I saw the master of the men who know,
seated in philosophic family.³
There all look up to him, all do him honor:
there I beheld both Socrates and Plato,
closest to him, in front of all the rest;
135 Democritus, who ascribes the world to chance,
Diogenes, Empedocles, and Zeno,
and Thales, Anaxagoras, Heraclitus;
I saw the good collector of medicinals,
I mean Dioscorides; and I saw Orpheus,
140 and Tully, Linus, moral Seneca;⁴

7. The castle’s form is allegorically related to the seven liberal arts and the tradition of the House of Fame, suitable for a group distinguished by their achievements in the arts, in heroism, in proper living but not in the faith required by Christian doctrine.

8. The description of the meadow enclosed by the castle walls is reminiscent of the Elysian Fields of Virgil’s underworld, as well as of the *locus amoenus*, or “pleasing place” of courtly romances such as *The Romance of the Rose*. The list of “great-hearted souls” he meets blends mythical and historical, classical and medieval personages.

9. The origins and apogee of Rome: Electra was mother of Dardanius, founder of Troy. Hector was the leader of the Trojan forces, the survivors of which Aeneas led to Italy. Caesar founded the imperial line of Rome.

1. Camilla and Penthesilea were female warriors. Latinus was king of Latium; the betrothal of his daughter Lavinia to Aeneas caused Turnus to begin the civil war.

2. Lucius Junius Brutus drove out Tarquin, the last of the legendary Roman kings, in 510 B.C.E. to become one of the first two consuls of the Roman republic. Four female exemplars of Roman virtue are then listed, followed by the Sultan of Egypt from 1171 to 1193, Saladin, who crushingly defeated the Crusaders, but whose magnanimity and generosity were a medieval commonplace.

3. The list of philosophers begins with Aristotle, so influential in Dante’s time he need not be named, followed by Socrates, Plato, and seven other celebrated ancient Greek philosophers.

4. Dioscorides was a Greek physician of the 1st century C.E.; Linus and Orpheus were mythical Greek poets; Tullius is the Roman orator and philosopher Marcus Tullius Cicero (106–43 B.C.E.); Seneca the moral philosopher and writer of tragedies who committed suicide at the command of Nero in 65 C.E.

and Euclid the geometer, and Ptolemy,
Hippocrates and Galen, Avicenna,
Averroës, of the great Commentary.⁵

145 I cannot here describe them all in full;
my ample theme impels me onward so:
what's told is often less than the event.

The company of six divides in two;
my knowing guide leads me another way,
beyond the quiet, into trembling air.

150 And I have reached a part where no thing gleams.

Canto 5

The Second Circle, where the Lustful are forever buffeted by violent storm. Minos. The catalogue of carnal sinners. Francesca da Rimini and her brother-in-law, Paolo Malatesta. Francesca's tale of their love and death, at which Dante faints.

So I descended from the first enclosure
down to the second circle, that which girdles
less space but grief more great,¹ that goads to weeping.

There dreadful Minos stands, gnashing his teeth:
examining the sins of those who enter,
he judges and assigns as his tail twines.²

I mean that when the spirit born to evil
appears before him, it confesses all;
and he, the connoisseur of sin, can tell
the depth in Hell appropriate to it:
as many times as Minos wraps his tail

around himself, that marks the sinner's level.
Always there is a crowd that stands before him:
each soul in turn advances toward that judgment;

15 they speak and hear, then they are cast below.
Arresting his extraordinary task,
Minos, as soon as he had seen me, said:
"O you who reach this house of suffering,

be careful how you enter, whom you trust;
the gate is wide, but do not be deceived!"
To which my guide replied: "But why protest?

Do not attempt to block his fated path:
our passage has been willed above, where One
can do what He has willed; and ask no more."

5. The mathematician Euclid lived c. 300 B.C.E.; the geocentric theory of his fellow Alexandrian, the astronomer and geographer Ptolemy, who was active in the 2nd century C.E., was the basis of medieval astronomy. Hippocrates and Galen were Greek physicians. Avicenna (980–1037) and Averroës (1126–1198) were Muslim philosophers, both authors of influential commentaries on Aristotle.

1. Although separated from the rest of Hell by the

guardian and judge Minos, Limbo is called the first circle. The second circle, where the Lustful are punished, "girdles less space" because the cone shape of Hell narrows as it descends.

2. Minos was legendary king of Crete, and with his brother Rhadamanthus judge in Virgil's underworld. The tail, however, is a Dantesque touch that makes Minos more monster and less king, imitating the spiraling structure of Hell.

25 Now notes of desperation have begun
to overtake my hearings; now I come
where mighty lamentation beats against me.

I reached a place where every light is muted,
which bellows like the sea beneath a tempest,
when it is battered by opposing winds.

30 The hellish hurricane, which never rests,
drives on the spirits with its violence:
wheeling and pounding, it harasses them.

35 When they come up against the ruined slope,
then there are cries and wailing and lament,
and there they curse the force of the divine.

I learned that those who undergo this torment
are damned because they sinned within the flesh,
subjecting reason to the rule of lust.

40 And as, in the cold season, starlings' wings
bear them along in broad and crowded ranks,
so does that blast bear on the guilty spirits:
now here, now there, now down, now up, it drives them.
There is no hope that ever comforts them—
no hope for rest and none for lesser pain.

45 And just as cranes in flight will chant their lays,
arraying their long file across the air,
so did the shades I saw approaching, borne
by that assailing wind, lament and moan;
so that I asked him: "Master, who are those
who suffer punishment in this dark air?"

"The first of those about whose history
you want to know," my master then told me,
"once ruled as empress over many nations.

55 Her vice of lust became so customary
that she made license licit in her laws
to free her from the scandal she had caused.
She is Semiramis, of whom we read

that she was Ninus' wife and his successor:
she held the land the Sultan now commands.³
That other spirit killed herself for love,

and she betrayed the ashes of Sychaeus;⁴
the wanton Cleopatra follows next.⁵

60 See Helen, for whose sake so many years
of evil had to pass; see great Achilles,

3. In Dante's time, Egypt was under the rule of the Sultan. There is some confusion here because Egypt was fairly distant from the Mesopotamian kingdom of Assyria, supposedly founded by Ninus and the lustful Semiramis.

4. Curiously, Virgil does not name Dido, whose story he had related in one of the most celebrated parts of the *Aeneid*. Sychaeus was Dido's husband, murdered by her brother Pygmalion, king of Tyre. Dido fled to North

Africa, where she founded the city of Carthage, and according to *Aeneid* 4, was seduced and abandoned by Aeneas, after which she killed herself in despair.

5. Cleopatra was the queen of Egypt of legendary beauty who was the lover first of Julius Caesar and then of Mark Antony, with whom she was defeated at the battle of Actium in 29 B.C.E. by Augustus. Rather than be taken as a prisoner to Rome, she killed herself with an asp.

who finally met love—in his last battle.⁶
 See Paris, Tristan . . . —and he pointed out
 and named to me more than a thousand shades
 departed from our life because of love.
 No sooner had I heard my teacher name
 the ancient ladies and the knights, than pity
 seized me, and I was like a man astray.
 My first words: "Poet, I should willingly
 speak with those two who go together there
 and seem so lightly carried by the wind."⁷
 And he to me: "You'll see when they draw closer
 to us, and then you may appeal to them
 by that love which impels them. They will come."
 No sooner had the wind bent them toward us
 than I urged on my voice: "O battered souls,
 if One does not forbid it, speak with us."
 Even as doves when summoned by desire,
 borne forward by their will, move through the air
 with wings uplifted, still, to their sweet nest,
 those spirits left the ranks where Dido suffers,
 approaching us through the malignant air;
 so powerful had been my loving cry.
 "O living beings, gracious and benign,
 who through the darkened air have come to visit
 our souls that stained the world with blood, if He
 who rules the universe were friend to us,
 then we should pray to Him to give you peace,
 for you have pitied our atrocious state.
 Whatever pleases you to hear and speak
 will please us, too, to hear and speak with you,
 now while the wind is silent, in this place.
 The land where I was born lies on that shore
 to which the Po together with the waters
 that follow it descends to final rest.⁸
 Love, that can quickly seize the gentle heart,
 took hold of him because of the fair body
 taken from me—how that was done still wounds me.

6. The list switches from women to men with two legendary figures of the Trojan War: Helen, wife of Menelaus, king of Sparta, whose abduction by Paris was the origin of the war, and Achilles, the greatest of the Greek heroes. Homer had him killed under the walls of Troy by Paris, according to medieval legend. Paris lured him to his death at the temple of Apollo by promises that he would be given Priam's daughter Polyxena if he changed sides. Tristan was a celebrated figure of medieval romance, lover of Isolt, who was wife of King Mark of Cornwall, his uncle.

7. The first conversation recorded with a condemned soul is also the first appearance of two of Dante's contemporaries,

the lovers Francesca da Rimini and Paolo Malatesta. Daughter of Guido da Polenta, lord of Ravenna, and aunt of Guido Novello, Dante's host at Ravenna at the end of his life, Francesca was married for political reasons to Paolo's older brother Gianciotto some time after 1275. Around 1285, at which time Francesca had a nine-year-old daughter and Paolo was around 40 years old, Gianciotto apparently found the lovers out and killed them both. The language of the dialogue is suffused with the language of the *dolce stil novo*, the "sweet new style" of love lyric that first brought fame to Dante.

8. Ravenna is on the Adriatic coast of northern Italy, between the Po River and the Rubicon.

Love, that releases no beloved from loving,
 took hold of me so strongly through his beauty
 that, as you see, it has not left me yet.
 Love led the two of us unto one death.
 Caina waits for him who took our life."⁹
 These words were borne across from them to us.
 When I had listened to those injured souls,
 I bent my head and held it low until
 the poet asked of me: "What are you thinking?"
 When I replied, my words began: "Alas,
 how many gentle thoughts, how deep a longing,
 had led them to the agonizing pass!"
 Then I addressed my speech again to them,
 and I began: "Francesca, your afflictions
 move me to tears of sorrow and of pity.
 But tell me, in the time of gentle sighs,
 with what and in what way did Love allow you
 to recognize your still uncertain longings?"
 And she to me: "There is no greater sorrow
 than thinking back upon a happy time
 in misery—and this your teacher knows.
 Yet if you long so much to understand
 the first root of our love, then I shall tell
 my tale to you as one who weeps and speaks.
 One day, to pass the time away, we read
 of Lancelot—how love had overcome him.
 We were alone, and we suspected nothing.
 And time and time again that reading led
 our eyes to meet, and made our faces pale,
 and yet one point alone defeated us.
 When we had read how the desired smile
 was kissed by one who was so true a lover,
 this one, who never shall be parted from me,
 while all his body trembled, kissed my mouth.
 A Gallehault indeed, that book and he
 who wrote it, too; that day we read no more."¹
 And while one spirit said these words to me,
 the other wept, so that—because of pity—I
 fainted, as if I had met my death.
 And then I fell as a dead body falls.

9. Francesca's speech combines echoes of a famous canzone by Dante's friend Guido Guinizelli and its definitions of courtly love with harsh concluding phrases on her own fate. Caina is the first of the four divisions of the ninth circle of Hell, named after Cain, who killed his brother Abel. This place where those who betray their kin are punished "waits for" Francesca's husband because he was still alive in 1300.

1. The story of Lancelot, "flower of the knighthood of the

world," and the love for Queen Guinevere, wife of his lord, King Arthur, that caused him to fail in his quest for the Holy Grail, was one of the most popular medieval romances. In the Old French romance, *Lancelot du lac*, it was Lancelot's friend Gallehault who arranged an interview between the pair and induced them to kiss. The book, as well as its author, are accused of being the "go-between" that led to the death and damnation of Francesca and her silent lover.

Deleted: Canto 6-10

Canto 11

Still the Sixth Circle. Pope Anastasius' tomb. Virgil on the parts of Dis they now will visit, where the modes of malice are punished: violence in the Seventh Circle's Three Rings; "ordinary" fraud in the Eighth Circle; and treacherous fraud in the Ninth Circle. Hell's previous circles, Two through Five, as circles of incontinence. Usury condemned.

Along the upper rim of a high bank
formed by a ring of massive broken boulders,
we came above a crowd more cruelly pent.^o

And here, because of the outrageous stench
thrown up in excess by that deep abyss,
we drew back till we were behind the lid

of a great tomb, on which I made out this,
inscribed: "I hold Pope Anastasius,
enticed to leave the true path by Photinus."¹

"It would be better to delay descent
so that our senses may grow somewhat used
to this foul stench; and then we can ignore it."

So said my master, and I answered him:

"Do find some compensation, lest this time
be lost." And he: "You see, I've thought of that."

"My son, within this ring of broken rocks,"
he then began, "there are three smaller circles;²
like those that you are leaving, they range down.

Those circles are all full of cursed spirits;
so that your seeing of them may suffice,
learn now the how and why of their confinement.

Of every malice that earns hate in Heaven,
injustice is the end; and each such end
by force or fraud brings harm to other men.³

However, fraud is man's peculiar vice;
God finds it more displeasing—and therefore,
the fraudulent are lower, suffering more.

The violent take all of the first circle;
but since one uses force against three persons,
that circle's built of three divided rings.⁴

To God and to one's self and to one's neighbor—
I mean, to them or what is theirs—one can
do violence, as you shall now hear clearly.

Violent death and painful wounds may be
inflicted on one's neighbor; his possessions
may suffer ruin, fire, and extortion;

confined

1. Anastasius II was pope from 496 to 498. Tradition appears to have confused him with Anastasius I, Byzantine emperor from 491 to 518, an adherent to the heresy of Photinus, which denied the divine origin of Christ.

2. The seventh, eighth, and ninth, "smaller" because further down in the cone.

3. "Malice" is the blanket term for all the sins of lower

Hell, either by force (seventh circle) or by fraud (eighth and ninth), and distinguishes them from those of upper Hell.

4. "First circle" here means the first of lower Hell, the seventh, subdivided into three rings in order of gravity: the violence against one's neighbor, against self, and against God.

thus, murderers and those who strike in malice,
as well as plunderers and robbers—these,
in separated ranks, the first ring racks.

A man can set violent hands against
himself or his belongings; so within
the second ring repents, though uselessly,
whoever would deny himself your world,
gambling away, wasting his patrimony,
and weeping where he should instead be happy.

One can be violent against the Godhead,
one's heart denying and blaspheming Him
and scorning nature and the good in her;⁵

so, with its sign, the smallest ring has sealed
both Sodom and Cahors and all of those
who speak in passionate contempt of God.⁶

Now fraud, that eats away at every conscience,
is practiced by a man against another
who trusts in him, or one who has no trust.⁷

This latter way seems only to cut off
the bond of love that nature forges;⁸ thus,
nestled within the second circle⁹ are:

hypocrisy and flattery, sorcerers,
and falsifiers, simony, and theft,
and barrators and panders and like trash.

But in the former way of fraud, not only
the love that nature forges is forgotten,
but added love that builds a special trust;

thus, in the tightest circle, where there is
the universe's center, seat of Dis,^o
all traitors are consumed eternally.^o

"Master, your reasoning is clear indeed,"
I said; "it has made plain for me the nature
of this pit and the population in it.

But tell me: those the dense marsh holds, or those
driven before the wind, or those on whom
rain falls, or those who clash with such harsh tongues,
why are they not all punished in the city
of flaming red if God is angry with them?

And if He's not, why then are they tormented?"¹

5. Any sin against Nature is considered an injury to God's order of Nature.

6. The Old Testament city of Sodom was identified with the act of sodomy, which in theological discussion was generally called simply "the vice against nature." Cahors is a town in southern France famous as a center of usury, the lending of money with a rate of interest. The third form of violence against God is blasphemy.

7. Fraud is the most complex and dangerous of sins because it is "man's peculiar vice." Dante divides it between simple fraud and treachery, where a bond of trust is broken.

8. In Dante's ethics, humankind is created by love and love is the basis of the natural social bond; hence any act of fraud is a conscious severing of that bond just as the sins of upper Hell pervert (by excess or insufficiency) the innate desire for God's creation.

9. The eighth circle, which contains ten subdivisions in all, is the second circle of lower Hell.

1. The pilgrim's question raises a key tension in the depiction of Hell: do all souls suffer equally because all are damned, or do some suffer more than others? Are all sins equally evil, or are some worse than others?

And then to me, "Why does your reason wander so far from its accustomed course?" he said.

"Or of what other things are you now thinking?

Have you forgotten, then, the words with which your *Ethics* treats of those three dispositions that strike at Heaven's will: incontinence and malice and mad bestiality?²

And how the fault that is the least condemned and least offends God is incontinence?

If you consider carefully this judgment and call to mind the souls of upper Hell, who bear their penalties outside this city,

you'll see why they have been set off from these unrighteous ones, and why, when heaven's vengeance hammers at them, it carries lesser anger."

"O sun that heals all sight that is perplexed, when I ask you, your answer so contents that doubting pleases me as much as knowing.

Go back a little to that point," I said, "where you told me that usury offends divine goodness; unravel now that knot."

"Philosophy, for one who understands, points out, and not in just one place," he said, "how nature follows—as she takes her course—the Divine Intellect and Divine Art;

and if you read your *Physics* carefully,³ not many pages from the start, you'll see that when it can, your art would follow nature, just as a pupil imitates his master;

so that your art is almost God's grandchild.⁴

From these two, art and nature, it is fitting, if you recall how *Genesis* begins, for men to make their way, to gain their living;

and since the usurer prefers another

pathway, he scorns both nature in herself

and art, her follower; his hope is elsewhere.⁵

But follow me, for it is time to move;

the Fishes glitter now on the horizon

2. In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, known to Dante through the commentaries and translations of Averroës (page 766), Aquinas, and others, Aristotle drew a distinction between three types of immoral practice. Incontinence signifies excess in any passion which, in moderation, is lawful, including all the vices punished in the second through fifth circles. "Mad bestiality" here means violence, and "malice" fraud. Aristotle's classification does not include heresy, and Virgil never mentions the sixth circle in this discussion; nor does he mention the lukewarm souls of Ante-Inferno or the souls of Limbo, whose sins were of omission rather than commission.

3. The *Physics* of Aristotle.
4. Nature, daughter of God, follows his eternal ideas and his art in her own operation; human art and industry, daughter of Nature, ought to follow her and her art in the same way.

5. God's command to Adam and Eve when he expelled them from Eden was that they should gain their living by the sweat of their brows (*Genesis* 3:19). Because the usurer gains his living from money rather than either from Nature or from her follower, art, he despises her twice over.

Deleted: Canto 12 - 18

115 and all the Wain is spread out over Caurus;⁶
only beyond, can one climb down the cliff."

Canto 12

The Seventh Circle, First Ring: the Violent against their Neighbors. The Minotaur. The Centaurs, led by Chiron, who assigns Nessus to guide Dante and Virgil across the boiling river of blood (Phlegethon). In that river, Tyrants and Murderers, immersed, watched over by the Centaurs.

The place that we had reached for our descent along the bank was alpine; what reclined upon that bank would, too, repel all eyes.

5 Just like the toppled mass of rock that struck—because of earthquake or eroded props—the Adige on its flank, this side of Trent, where from the mountain top from which it thrust down to the plain, the rock is shattered so that it permits a path for those above:¹

10 such was the passage down to that ravine. And at the edge above the cracked abyss, there lay outstretched the infamy of Crete,²

conceived within the counterfeited cow; and, catching sight of us, he bit himself like one whom fury devastates within.

15 Turning to him, my sage cried out: "Perhaps you think this is the Duke of Athens here, who, in the world above, brought you your death. Be off, you beast; this man who comes has not

20 been tutored by your sister; all he wants in coming here is to observe your torments."

Just as the bull that breaks loose from its halter the moment it receives the fatal stroke, and cannot run but plunges back and forth, so did I see the Minotaur respond;

25 and my alert guide cried: "Run toward the pass; it's better to descend while he's berserk."

And so we made our way across that heap of stones, which often moved beneath my feet because my weight was somewhat strange for them.

30 While climbing down, I thought. He said: "You wonder, perhaps, about that fallen mass, watched over

6. The position of the constellations indicates the time: two hours before sunrise, or 4 A.M.

1. The comparison is to the Slaviini di Marco, a "toppled mass of rock" resulting from an enormous landslide between Trent and Verona on the Adige River in northeast Italy.

2. The Minotaur, half-man, half-bull, the result of a union

between a bull and queen Pasiphaë of Crete, who, within an artificial cow to mate with the bull. King Minos of Crete extracted an annual tribute of seven Greek youths and seven maidens to be thrown to the Minotaur in the labyrinth. Theseus, Duke of Athens, traveled to Crete one of the sacrificial youths and killed the Minotaur.

That shade is Jason, who with heart and head
deprived the men of Colchis of their ram.⁶

He made a landfall on the isle of Lemnos
after its women, bold and pitiless,
had given all their island males to death.

90 With polished words and love signs he took in
Hypsipyle, the girl whose own deception
had earlier deceived the other women.⁷

And he abandoned her, alone and pregnant;
such guilt condemns him to such punishment:
and for Medea, too, revenge is taken.
95 With him go those who cheated so: this is
enough for you to know of that first valley
and of the souls it clamps within its jaws.⁸

We were already where the narrow path
reaches and intersects the second bank
and serves as shoulder for another bridge.
100 We heard the people whine in the next pouch
and heard them as they snorted with their snouts;
we heard them use their palms to beat themselves.

105 And exhalations, rising from below,
stuck to the banks, encrusting them with mold,
and so waged war against both eyes and nose.
The bottom is so deep, we found no spot
to see it from, except by climbing up
110 the arch until the bridge's highest point.

This was the place we reached; the ditch beneath
held people plunged in excrement that seemed
as if it had been poured from human privies.⁹
And while my eyes searched that abysmal sight,
115 I saw one with a head so smeared with shit,
one could not see if he were lay or cleric.⁸

He howled: "Why do you stare more greedily
at me than at the others who are filthy?"
And I: "Because, if I remember right,
120 I have seen you before, with your hair dry;
and so I eye you more than all: you are
Alessio Interminai of Lucca."⁹

Then he continued, pounding on his pate:
125 "I am plunged here because of flatteries—
of which my tongue had such sufficiency."

6. Jason was leader of the Argonauts on the expedition to Colchis to obtain the golden fleece. Along the way, they landed at Lemnos, where Jason seduced and then abandoned Hypsipyle, daughter of the king, leaving her with twin sons. After Medea, daughter of the king of the Colchians, had helped him to secure the fleece, Jason took her with him as his wife, but later left her for Creusa, daughter of Creon, king of Corinth. In revenge, she killed the two children she had borne him (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 7.1–397).

7. When the women of Lemnos had killed all the other men on the island, Hypsipyle had managed secretly to save her father's life (Statius, *Thebaid* 5.403–85).

8. That is, he couldn't tell if the head was tanned. Like their hypocrisy (see the sixth pouch), the flattery of clerics was proverbial.

9. Member of a prominent Gueff family of the Tuscan town of Lucca.

At which my guide advised me: "See you thrust
your head a little farther to the front,
so that your eyes can clearly glimpse the face
of that besmirched, bedraggled haridan^o
who scratches at herself with shit-filled nails,
and now she crouches now she stands upright.
That is That's, the harlot who returned
her lover's question, 'Are you very grateful
to me?' by saying, 'Yes, enormously.'"¹

130 And now our sight has had its fill of this."
135

Canto 19

*The Eighth Circle, Third Pouch, where the Simonists are set, heads down, into hole
in the rock, with their protruding feet tormented by flames. Pope Nicholas II
Dante's invective against simoniacal popes.*

O Simon Magus! O his sad disciples!
Rapacious ones, who take the things of God,
that ought to be the brides of Righteousness,
and make them fornicate for gold and silver!

The time has come to let the trumpet sound
for you; your place is here in this third pouch.¹

We had already reached the tomb beyond
and climbed onto the ridge, where its high point
hangs just above the middle of the ditch.

O Highest Wisdom, how much art you show
in heaven, earth, and this sad world below,
how just your power is when it allots!²

Along the sides and down along the bottom,
I saw that livid rock was perforated:

15 the openings were all one width and round.
They did not seem to me less broad or more
than those that in my handsome San Giovanni
were made to serve as basins for baptizing;

and one of these, not many years ago,
I broke for someone who was drowning in it:
and let this be my seal to set men straight.³

1. That's is a courtesan in *Eunuchus*, a play by the ancient Roman playwright Terence. In fact, the flatterer in the scene referred to is the go-between, a soldier named Gnatho.

2. In the Bible, Simon Magus was a converted sorcerer who attempted to buy the power of conferring the Holy Ghost. He was rebuked by the apostle Peter for presuming that the gift of God might be purchased (Acts 8:9–24).

3. From his name is derived the word "simony," which refers to the buying or selling of spiritual goods and offices. The metaphor of lines 3–4 relates this pouch with the previous one by depicting simonists as pimps of the Church, the Bride of Christ. Town criers would sound a

trumpet to announce the public reading of judicial sentences; the word also alludes to the sounding of the angel's trumpet on Judgment Day.

2. The apostrophe to the Lord praises the "art" which has devoted to the design of hell as much as to the heaven and earth.

3. Like most Florentine children of the time, Dante baptized in the famous Baptistery of Florence, Giovanni. It is possible Dante mentioned his motif breaking the font to defend himself against accusations of sacrilege; it is certainly noteworthy that he placed in a canto devoted to the misuse of sacred vessels.

130

135

5

10

15

20

toilets

Out from the mouth of each hole there emerged
a sinner's feet and so much of his legs
up to the thigh: the rest remained within.

Both soles of every sinner were on fire;
their joints were writhing with such violence,
they would have severed withes⁴ and ropes of grass.
As flame on oily things will only stir
along the outer surface, so there, too,
that fire made its way from heels to toes.

"Master," I said, "who is that shade who suffers
and quivers more than all his other comrades,
that sinner who is licked by redder flames?"

And he to me: "If you would have me lead
you down along the steepest of the banks,
from him you'll learn about his self and sins."

And I: "What pleases you will please me too:
you are my lord; you know I do not swerve
from what you will; you know what is unspoken."

At this we came upon the fourth embankment;
we turned and, keeping to the left, descended
into the narrow, perforated bottom.

My good lord did not let me leave his side
until he'd brought me to the hole that held
that sinner who lamented with his legs.

"Whoever you may be, dejected soul,
whose head is downward, planted like a pole,⁵
my words began, "do speak if you are able."

I stood as does the friar who confesses
the foul assassin who, fixed fast, head down,
calls back the friar, and so delays his death;⁶
and he cried out: "Are you already standing,
already standing there, o Boniface?"

The book has lied to me by several years.

Are you so quickly sated with the riches
for which you did not fear to take by guile
the Lovely Lady, then to violate her?"⁷

And I became like those who stand as if
they have been mocked, who cannot understand
what has been said to them and can't respond.

But Virgil said: "Tell this to him at once:
"I am not he—not whom you think I am."
And I replied as I was told to do.

4. In the punishment known as "the planting of grapevines," assassins were stuck head downward in a hole that was then filled with dirt, choking them to death.

5. The speaker, Pope Nicholas III, believes he is addressing Boniface VIII, who he knows will die in Rome in 1303, three years after the date of the present encounter, enabling Dante to place a soul in its "proper" place by

anticipation. Boniface was surrounded by many accusations of nepotism and simony, as for the charge that he took "by guile the Lovely Lady," that he was elected pope by fraud: he was said to have offered his services to Charles of Anjou in his war in Sicily in return for support of his candidacy.

65

At this the spirit twisted both his feet,
and sighing and with a despairing voice,
he said: "What is it, then, you want of me?"

If you have crossed the bank and climbed so far
to find out who I am, then know that I
was one of those who wore the mighty mantle,
and surely was a son of the she-bear,
so eager to advance the cubs that I
pursed wealth above while here I purse myself.⁶

Below my head there is the place of those
who took the way of simony before me;
and they are stuffed within the clefts of stone.
I, too, shall yield my place and fall below
when he arrives, the one for whom I had
mistaken you when I was quick to question.

But I have baked my feet a longer time,
have stood like this, upon my head, than he
is to stand planted here with scarlet feet:
for after him, one uglier in deeds
will come, a lawless shepherd from the west,
worthy to cover him and cover me.⁷

He'll be a second Jason, of whom we read
in *Maccabees*; and just as Jason's king
was soft to him, so shall the king of France
be soft to this one.⁸ And I do not know
if I was too rash here—I answered so:

"Then tell me now, how much gold did our Lord
ask that Saint Peter give to him before
he placed the keys within his care? Surely
the only thing he said was: 'Follow me.'⁹
And Peter and the others never asked
for gold or silver when they chose Matthias
to take the place of the transgressing soul.¹

Stay as you are, for you are rightly punished;
and guard with care the money got by evil

65

6. The Roman family of Giovanni Orsini, Pope Nicholas III, were commonly referred to as *fili orate*, cubs of the she-bear, known as a rapacious beast especially fierce in protecting her young. Giovanni was elected pope ("the mighty mantle") in 1277 and died three years later, but his brief tenure was marked by nepotism and intrigue. Line 72 neatly expresses the *contrapasso*: the font in which he is placed is his purse in which he keeps the rewards he sought above.

7. Nicholas has to wait 23 years for Boniface to take the topmost place in the hole, but Boniface will need wait less than 11 for the next simonist pope to replace him: Clement V, who died in 1314 near Avignon. Born in Gascony ("from the west") and elected pope in 1304, Clement saw the Papal See removed from Rome to Avignon in southern France, where it remained for nearly 70 years in what is referred to as the "Babylonian Captivity."

8. While still Archbishop of Bordeaux, Clement had negotiated his election as pope with the powerful King Philip the Fair of France, just as Jason had first been appointed High Priest of the Jews by bribing King Antiochus of Syria, endeavoring afterward to reintroduce Greek customs and pagan worship in place of the Jewish religion (2 Maccabees 4:13-16).

9. The apostle Peter was considered to have been the first pope: "And I say to thee, thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church. . . . And I will give thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 16:18-19). "Follow me" were the words with which Jesus first called the brothers Simon (Peter) and Andrew to be his disciples (Matthew 4:18-19).

i. After Judas Iscariot had betrayed Jesus, Matthias was chosen by lot to fill his vacant place among the 12 apostles.

that made you so audacious against Charles,²
 And were it not that I am still prevented
 by reverence for those exalted keys
 that you had held within the happy life,
 I'd utter words much heavier than these,
 because your avarice afflicts the world:
 it tramples on the good, lifts up the wicked.
 You, shepherds, the Evangelist had noticed
 when he saw her who sits upon the waters
 and realized she fornicates with kings,
 she who was born with seven heads and had
 the power and support of the ten horns,
 as long as virtue was her husband's pleasure.³
 You've made yourselves a god of gold and silver;
 how are you different from idolaters,
 save that they worship one and you a hundred?
 Ah, Constantine, what wickedness was born—
 and not from your conversion—from the dower
 that you bestowed upon the first rich father!⁴
 And while I sang such notes to him—whether
 it was his indignation or his conscience
 that bit him—he kicked hard with both his soles.
 I do indeed believe it pleased my guide:
 he listened always with such satisfied
 expression to the sound of those true words.
 And then he gathered me in both his arms
 and, when he had me fast against his chest,
 where he climbed down before, climbed upward now;
 nor did he tire of clasping me until
 he brought me to the summit of the arch
 that crosses from the fourth to the fifth rampart.
 And here he gently set his burden down—
 gently because the ridge was rough and steep,
 and would have been a rugged pass for goats.
 From there another valley lay before me.

Canto 20

The Eighth Circle, Fourth Pouch, where Diviners, Astrologers, Magicians, all have their heads turned backward: Amphiarus, Tiresias, Aruns, Manto. Virgil on the

2. It was commonly believed that Nicholas had intrigued against Charles of Anjou when Charles had refused to marry Nicholas's niece.

3. In the Book of Revelation, attributed to the Evangelist, St. John, the whore "who sits upon the waters" (17:1-3) was most likely pagan Rome, while Dante interprets her as the Church corrupted by secular interests. The seven heads symbolize the seven sacraments; the ten horns the Ten Commandments.

4. Due to a skillful forgery known as "The Donation of

Constantine," probably composed in the papal court during the 8th century, it was believed that the Emperor Constantine had given to the Church his temporal power in the west when he moved the imperial capital eastward to Constantinople in the 5th century. For Dante, this fraud marked the beginning of the ecclesiastical corruption denounced in this canto. "The first rich father" is Pope Sylvester I, to whom the Donation was said to have been made in exchange for curing Constantine of leprosy.

origin of Mantua, his native city. Eurypylos. Michael Scot and other moderns adept at fraud.

I must make verses of new punishment
 and offer matter now for Canto Twenty
 of this first canticle—of the submerged.
 I was already well prepared to stare
 below, into the depth that was disclosed,
 where tears of anguished sorrow bathed the ground;
 and in the valley's circle I saw souls
 advancing, mute and weeping, at the pace
 that, in our world, holy processions take.
 As I inclined my head still more, I saw
 that each, amazingly, appeared contorted
 between the chin and where the chest begins;
 they had their faces twisted toward their haunches
 and found it necessary to walk backward,
 because they could not see ahead of them.¹
 Perhaps the force of palsy² has so fully
 distorted some, but that I've yet to see,
 and I do not believe that that can be.
 May God so let you, reader, gather fruit
 from what you read; and now think for yourself
 how I could ever keep my own face dry
 when I beheld our image so nearby
 and so awry that tears, down from the eyes,
 bathed the buttocks, running down the cleft.
 Of course I wept, leaning against a rock
 along that rugged ridge, so that my guide
 told me: "Are you as foolish as the rest?"
 Here pity only lives when it is dead:
 for who can be more impious than he
 who links God's judgment to passivity?
 Lift, lift your head and see the one for whom
 the earth was opened while the Thebans watched,
 so that they all cried: 'Amphiarus,
 where are you rushing? Have you quit the fight?'
 Nor did he interrupt his downward plunge
 to Minos, who lays hands on every sinner.³
 See how he's made a chest out of his shoulders;
 and since he wanted so to see ahead,
 he looks behind and walks a backward path.
 And see Tiresias, who changed his mien

1. In this *bolgia*, diviners and soothsayers are punished for their attempt to see the future by being condemned to see only backward.

2. A condition marked by the paralysis or uncontrollable tremor of a body or a body part.

3. Amphiarus was a great prophet and hero of Argos and at Thebes.

another of the Seven against Thebes consigned to He for his attempt to see the future by being condemned to see only backward.

2. A condition marked by the paralysis or uncontrollable tremor of a body or a body part.

3. Amphiarus was a great prophet and hero of Argos and at Thebes.

Deleted: Canto 20-24

bewildered by the heavy anguish he
 has suffered, sighing as he looks around;
 so did this sinner stare when he arose.
 Oh, how severe it is, the power of God
 that, as its vengeance, showers down such blows!
 My guide then asked that sinner who he was;
 to this he answered: "Not long since, I rained
 from Tuscany into this savage maw.
 Mule that I was, the bestial life pleased me
 and not the human; I am Vanni Fucci,
 beast; and the den that suited me—Pistoia."¹
 And I to Virgil: "Tell him not to slip
 away, and ask what sin has thrust him here;
 I knew him as a man of blood and anger."
 The sinner heard and did not try to feign
 and coloring with miserable shame,
 but turned his mind and face, intent, toward me;
 he said: "I suffer more because you've caught me
 in this, the misery you see, than I
 suffered when taken from the other life.
 I can't refuse to answer what you ask:
 I am set down so far because I robbed
 the sacristy of its fair ornaments,
 and someone else was falsely blamed for that.²
 But lest this sight give you too much delight,
 if you can ever leave these lands of darkness,
 open your ears to my announcement, hear:
 Pistoia first will strip herself of Blacks,
 then Florence will renew her men and manners.
 From Val di Magra, Mars will draw a vapor
 which turbid clouds will try to wrap; the clash
 between them will be fierce, impetuous,
 a tempest, fought upon Campo Piceno,
 until that vapor, vigorous, shall crack
 the mist, and every White be struck by it.³
 And I have told you this to make you grieve."

Canto 25

Still the Eighth Circle, Seventh Pouch: the Thieves. Vanni Fucci and his obscene figs against God. The Centaur Cacus. Five Florentine Thieves, three of them humans and two of them serpents. The astounding metamorphoses undergone by four of them.

1. The "mule" or illegitimate son of a noble family of Pistoia, northwest of Florence, Vanni Fucci was an ardent Black Gueff. Dante may have known him from the war against Pisa (1289–1293).
2. There are various reports concerning the robbery of the treasury of San Jacopo in the church of San Zeno at Pistoia; an innocent man was nearly executed for the crime.
3. The Blacks of Pistoia were expelled and their houses burned in 1301, but with the help of the ostensible peacemaker, Charles of Valois, they and the Blacks of Florence were able to expel the Florentine Whites, including Dante, in 1302 (lines 143–44). The "vapor" drawn by the war-god from Val di Magra is the Gueff leader Morello Malaspina. The defeat of the Whites ("the mist" of line 150) may refer to events of 1302 or to the capture of the city in 1306.

When he had finished with his words, the thief
 raised high his fists with both figs cocked and cried:
 "Take that, o God; I square them off for you!"¹
 From that time on, those serpents were my friends,
 for one of them coiled then around his neck,
 as if to say, "I'll have you speak no more";
 another wound about his arms and bound him
 again and wrapped itself in front so firmly,
 he could not even make them budge an inch.
 Pistoia, ah, Pistoia, must you last:
 why not decree your self-incineration,
 since you surpass your seed in wickedness?²
 Throughout the shadowed circles of deep Hell,
 I saw no soul against God so rebel,
 not even he who fell from Theban walls.³
 He fled and could not say another word;
 and then I saw a Centaur full of anger,
 shouting: "Where is he, where's that bitter one?"
 I do not think Maremma has the number
 of snakes that Centaur carried on his haunch
 until the part that takes our human form.⁴
 Upon his shoulders and behind his nape
 there lay a dragon with its wings outstretched;
 it sets ablaze all those it intercepts.
 My master said: "That Centaur there is Cacus,
 who often made a lake of blood within
 a grotto underneath Mount Aventine.
 He does not ride the same road as his brothers
 because he stole—and most deceitfully—
 from the great herd nearby; his crooked deeds
 ended beneath the club of Hercules,
 who may have given him a hundred blows—
 but he was not alive to feel the tenth."⁵
 While he was talking so, Cacus ran by
 and, just beneath our ledge, three souls arrived;
 but neither I nor my guide noticed them
 until they had cried out: "And who are you?"
 At this the words we shared were interrupted,
 and we attended only to those spirits.
 I did not recognize them, but it happened,
 as chance will usually bring about,

1. The "fig" is an obscene gesture produced by thrusting out the fist while holding the thumb between the forefinger and middle finger.
2. According to legend, Pistoia was founded by survivors of the forces of Cadine, the conspirator against the Roman republic defeated nearby in 62 B.C.E.
3. The blasphemous Capaneus in Canto 14.46–72.
4. The beast-filled Tuscan wood of Maremma was referred to already in Canto 13.7–9 to describe the wood of suicides and squanderers; here, serpents are added to contents.
5. Cacus was the fire-breathing, half-human son of Vulcan and Medusa who stole cattle from Hercules. In order to conceal their tracks, Cacus dragged the cattle backward into his cave, but their bellowing alerted Hercules, who slew the thief (*Aeneid* 8.193–267). Dante makes Cacus Centaur, and displaces the fire-breathing to a dragon milking on its shoulder.

that one of them called out the other's name,⁶ exclaiming: "Where was Cianfa left behind?"

At this, so that my guide might be alert,
I raised my finger up from chin to nose.

If, reader, you are slow now to believe
what I shall tell, that is no cause for wonder,
for I who saw it hardly can accept it.

As I kept my eyes fixed upon those sinners,
a serpent with six feet springs out against
one of the three, and clutches him completely.

It gripped his belly with its middle feet,
and with its forefeet grappled his two arms;
and then it sank its teeth in both his cheeks;
it stretched its rear feet out along his thighs
and ran its tail along between the two,
then straightened it again behind his loins.

No ivy ever gripped a tree so fast
as when that horrifying monster clasped
and intertwined the other's limbs with its.

Then just as if their substance were warm wax,
they stuck together and they mixed their colors,
so neither seemed what he had been before;

just as, when paper's kindled, where it still
has not caught flame in full, its color's dark
though not yet black, while white is dying off.

The other two souls stared, and each one cried:
"Ah me, Agnello, how you change! Just see,
you are already neither two nor one!"⁷

Then two heads were already joined in one,
when in one face where two had been dissolved,
two intermingled shapes appeared to us.

Two arms came into being from four lengths;
the thighs and legs, the belly and the chest
became such limbs as never had been seen.

And every former shape was canceled there:
that perverse image seemed to share in both—
and none; and so, and slowly, it moved on.

Just as the lizard, when it darts from hedge
to hedge, beneath the dog days' giant lash,
seems, if it cross one's path, a lightning flash,
so seemed a blazing little serpent moving

6. There are five souls involved in the complex action of this canto; all were thieves of noble Florentine families: Cianfa Donati, lost when he became a serpent (50) and eventually fusing (70-78) with Agnello de' Brunelleschi; Francesco Guercio ("squinting") de' Cavalcanti, the "blazing little serpent" (82) that steals the substance of "Buoso" (85), probably Buoso di Forese Donati, nephew of the Buoso Donati mentioned as a victim of counterfeiting in

Canto 30.41-44, in the transformation that concludes at line 141; and Puccio Sciancato, "the only soul who'd not been changed" (149).
7. Agnello was reputed to have used disguises to facilitate his thieving. The transformation that follows closely resembles the merging of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus in *Metamorphoses* 4.373-79.

against the bellies of the other two,
as black and livid as a peppercorn.

85 Attacking one of them, it pierced right through
the part where we first take our nourishment,⁸
and then it fell before him at full length.

90 The one it had transfixed stared but said nothing;
in fact he only stood his ground and yawned
as one whom sleep or fever has undone.

95 The serpent stared at him, he at the serpent;
one through his wound, the other through his mouth
were smoking violently; their smoke met.

Let Lucan now be silent, where he sings
of sad Sabellus and Nasidius,
and wait to hear what flies off from my bow.

Let Ovid now be silent, where he tells
of Cadmus, Arethusa; if his verse
has made of one a serpent, one a fountain,⁸

100 I do not envy him; he never did
transmute two natures, face to face, so that
both forms were ready to exchange their matter.

105 These were the ways they answered to each other:
the serpent split its tail into a fork;
the wounded sinner drew his steps together.

The legs and then the thighs along with them
so fastened to each other that the juncture
soon left no sign that was discernible.

110 Meanwhile the cleft tail took upon itself
the form the other gradually lost;
its skin grew soft, the other's skin grew hard.

115 I saw the arms that drew in at his armpits
and also saw the monster's two short feet
grow long for just as much as those were shortened.

The serpent's hind feet, twisted up together,
became the member that man hides; just as
the wretch put out two hind paws from his member.

120 And now breeds hair upon the skin of one,
just as it strips the hair from off the other,
the one rose up, the other fell; and yet

they never turned aside their impious eyelamps,
beneath which each of them transformed his snout:

125 he who stood up drew his back toward the temples,
and from the excess matter growing there
came ears upon the cheeks that had been bare;

8. Dante invokes (and outdoes) his two primary sources in this canto: the horrific deaths by snakebite of two Roman soldiers in the Libyan Desert in Lucan's *Pharsalia* 9 and the transformations of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, in this case those of Thebes' founder Cadmus into a serpent (4.576-89) and of the nymph Arethusa into a fountain (5.572-641).

whatever had not been pulled back but kept,
superfluous, then made his face a nose
and thickened out his lips appropriately.

He who was lying down thrust out his snout;
and even as the snail hauls in its horns,
he drew his ears straight back into his head;

his tongue, which had before been whole and fit
for speech, now cleaves; the other's tongue, which had
been forked, now closes up; and the smoke stops.

The soul that had become an animal,
now hissing, hurried off along the valley;
the other one, behind him, speaks and spits.

And then he turned aside his new-made shoulders
and told the third soul: "I'd have Buoso run
on all fours down this road, as I have done."

And so I saw the seventh ballast change
and rechange;⁹ may the strangeness plead for me
if there's been some confusion in my pen.

And though my eyes were somewhat blurred, my mind
bewildered, those three sinners did not flee
so secretly that I could not perceive

Puccio Sciancato clearly, he who was
the only soul who'd not been changed among
the three companions we had met at first;
the other one made you, Gaville, grieve.¹

Canto 26

Still the Eighth Circle, Seventh Pouch: the Thieves. Dante's invective against Florence. View of the Eighth Pouch, where Fraudulent Counselors are clothed in the flames that burn them. Ulysses and Diomedes in one shared flame. Ulysses' tale of his final voyage.

Be joyous, Florence, you are great indeed,
for over sea and land you beat your wings;
through every part of Hell your name extends!

Among the thieves I found five citizens
of yours—and such, that shame has taken me;
with them, you can ascend to no high honor.

But if the dreams dreamt close to dawn are true,
then little time will pass before you feel
what Prato and the others crave for you.¹

Were that already come, it would not be

9. That is, the souls of the seventh *bolgia*, likened to the hold of a ship.

1. Murdered by the inhabitants of the village of Gaville, Francesco de' Cavalcanti was swiftly and savagely avenged by his family.

1. Ancient lore distinguished many sorts of dreams; only

those dreamt near dawn were held to be prophetic, "true." Prato is a Tuscan town between Florence and Pistoia that envied Florentine power; the enigmatic prediction may refer to Cardinal Niccolò da Prato, who placed the city under interdiction after his peacekeeping mission failed in 1304.

too soon—and let it come, since it must be!
As I grow older, it will be more heavy.²

We left that deep and, by protruding stones
that served as stairs for our descent before,
my guide climbed up again and drew me forward;
and as we took our solitary path

among the ridge's jagged spurs and rocks,
our feet could not make way without our hands.

It grieved me then and now grieves me again
when I direct my mind to what I saw;
and more than usual, I curb my talent,

that it not run where virtue does not guide;
so that, if my kind star or something better
has given me that gift, I not abuse it.

As many as the fireflies the peasant
(while resting on a hillside in the season³
when he who lights the world least hides his face),
just when the fly gives way to the mosquito,

sees glimmering below, down in the valley,
there where perhaps he gathers grapes and tills—
so many were the flames that glittered in
the eighth abyss; I made this out as soon

as I had come to where one sees the bottom.
Even as he who was avenged by bears
saw, as it left, Elijah's chariot—

its horses rearing, rising right to heaven—
when he could not keep track of it except
by watching one lone flame in its ascent,
just like a little cloud that climbs on high:³

so, through the gullet of that ditch, each flame
must make its way; no flame displays its prey,
though every flame has carried off a sinner.

I stood upon the bridge and leaned straight out
to see; and if I had not gripped a rock,
I should have fallen off—without a push.

My guide, who noted how intent I was,
told me: "Within those fires there are souls;
each one is swathed in that which scorches him."

"My master," I replied, "on hearing you,
I am more sure; but I'd already thought
that it was so, and I had meant to ask:

Who is within the flame that comes so twinned
above that it would seem to rise out of

2. The longer he must wait for a retribution to his city that will be just but bitter-sweet.

3. After the prophet Elijah was mocked by a group of boys, two bears came from the woods and killed 42 of

them; he had already witnessed the ascent of his teacher the prophet Elijah, to heaven in a fiery chariot (2 Kings 2:23–24).

Deleted: Canto 26-33

80 of that fair land where *si* is heard,⁶ because
 your neighbors are so slow to punish you,
 may, then, Caprara and Gorgona⁷ move
 and build a hedge across the Amo's mouth,
 so that it may drown every soul in you!
 85 For if Count Ugolino was reputed
 to have betrayed your fortresses, there was
 no need to have his sons endure such torment.
 O Thebes renewed,⁸ their years were innocent
 and young—Brigata, Uguiccone, and
 90 the other two my song has named above!
 We passed beyond, where frozen water wraps—
 a rugged covering—still other sinners,
 who were not bent, but flat upon their backs.
 Their very weeping there won't let them weep,
 95 and grief that finds a barrier in their eyes
 turns inward to increase their agony;
 because their first tears freeze into a cluster,
 and, like a crystal visor, fill up all
 the hollow that is underneath the eyebrow.
 100 And though, because of cold, my every sense
 had left its dwelling in my face, just as
 a callus has no feeling, nonetheless,
 I seemed to feel some wind now, and I said:
 "My master, who has set this gust in motion?
 105 For isn't every vapor quenched down here?"⁷
 And he to me: "You soon shall be where your
 own eye will answer that, when you shall see
 the reason why this wind blasts from above."
 And one of those sad sinners in the cold
 110 crust, cried to us: "O souls who are so cruel
 that this last place has been assigned to you,
 take off the hard veils from my face so that
 I can release the suffering that fills
 my heart before lament freezes again."
 115 To which I answered: "If you'd have me help you,
 then tell me who you are; if I don't free you,
 may I go to the bottom of the ice."⁸
 He answered then: "I am Fra Alberigo,
 the one who ~~loaded fruits in a bad garden,~~
 120 and here my figs have been repaid with dates."⁹
 "But then," I said, "are you already dead?"

6. The ancient city of Thebes was notorious for crime and bloodshed.

7. The cause of wind was thought to be the heat of the sun.

8. A deceptive promise, since he is in fact headed to the "bottom of the ice."

9. Like Catalano and Lodovico (23.103–9), Alberigo was

a member of the order of the Tivoli Friars; like Tebaldo (32.122), he belonged to the Guelph Manfredi family of Faenza. Alberigo had two of his relatives killed at a banquet at his house in supposed reconciliation. The signal to the assassins was his order at the end of dinner to bring the fruit. He believes his punishment overly severe, as a fig is worth less than a date.

And he to me: "I have no knowledge of
 my body's fate within the world above.
 For Prohmea has this privilege:
 125 quite frequently the soul falls here before
 it has been thrust away by Atropos.¹
 And that you may with much more willingness
 scrape these glazed tears from off my face, know this:
 as soon as any soul becomes a traitor,
 130 away—and keeps that body in his power
 until its years have run their course completely.
 The soul falls headlong, down into this cistern;
 and up above, perhaps, there still appears
 135 the body of the shade that winters here
 behind me; you must know him, if you've just
 come down; he is Ser Branca Doria;²
 for many years he has been thus pent up."
 I said to him: "I think that you deceive me,
 140 for Branca Doria is not yet dead;
 he eats and drinks and sleeps and puts on clothes."
 "There in the Malebranche's ditch above,
 where sticky pitch boils up, Michele Zanche
 145 had still not come," he said to me, "when this one—
 together with a kinsman, who had done
 the treachery together with him—left
 a devil in his stead inside his body.
 But now reach out your hand; open my eyes."
 And yet I did not open them for him;
 150 and it was courtesy to show him rudeness.
 Ah, Genoese, a people strange to every
 constraint of custom, full of all corruption,
 why have you not been driven from the world?
 For with the foulest spirit of Romagna,
 155 I found one of you such that, for his acts,³
 in soul he bathes already in Cocytus
 and up above appears alive, in body.

Canto 34

The Ninth Circle, Fourth Ring, called Judecca, where Traitors against their Benefactors are fully covered by ice. Dis, or Lucifer, emperor of that kingdom, his three

1. Prohmea, where betrayers of guests and friends are punished, may be named for the Egyptian king Ptolemy XII (51–47 B.C.E.), murderer of Pompey (*Pharsalia* 8.536–712), or for a governor of Jericho who murdered his father-in-law, the high priest Simon the Maccabee, and two of his sons at a banquet in their honor in 134 B.C.E. (1 Maccabees 16:11–17). Ptolomea is apparently unique among the parts of Hell in that souls can be condemned to it before they are actually dead. (Atropos was

the one of the three Fates responsible for cutting the thread of an individual's life.) The idea is perhaps the most extreme of the many heterodoxies included in Dante in his conception of the afterlife.

2. A Ghibelline of a famous Genoese family who murdered his father-in-law Michel Zanche at a banquet with the aid of another relation.

3. The "foulest spirit of Romagna" is Alberigo; the "Genoese" is Branca Doria.

mouths rending Judas, Brutus, and Cassius. Descent of Virgil and Dante down Lucifer's body to the other, southern hemisphere. Their vision of the stars.

"*Vexilla regis prodeunt inferni*"

toward us; and therefore keep your eyes ahead," my master said, "to see if you can spy him."

Just as, when night falls on our hemisphere or when a heavy fog is blowing thick,

a windmill seems to wheel when seen far off, so then I seemed to see that sort of structure.

And next, because the wind was strong, I shrank behind my guide; there was no other shelter.

And now—with fear I set it down in meter—I was where all the shades were fully covered but visible as wisps of straw in glass.

There some lie flat and others stand erect, one on his head, and one upon his soles;

and some bend face to feet, just like a bow. But after we had made our way ahead,

my master felt he now should have me see that creature who was once a handsome presence;² he stepped aside and made me stop, and said:

"Look! Here is Dis, and this the place where you will have to arm yourself with fortitude."

O reader, do not ask of me how I

grew faint and frozen then—I cannot write it: all words would fall far short of what it was.

I did not die, and I was not alive;

think for yourself, if you have any wit, what I became, deprived of life and death.

The emperor of the despondent kingdom so towered from the ice, up from midcheat,

that I match better with a giant's breadth than giants match the measure of his arms;

now you can gauge the size of all of him if it is in proportion to such parts.

If he was once as handsome as he now is ugly and, despite that, raised his brows against his Maker, one can understand how

every sorrow has its source in him!

I marveled when I saw that, on his head, he had three faces: one—in front—bloodred;

and then another two that, just above the midpoint of each shoulder, joined the first;

and at the crown, all three were reattached;

1. "The banners of the king of Hell draw closer": modified from a Holy Week hymn, with Hell in place of Heaven, as Lucifer is the negative mirror image of Christ.

2. Lucifer, the "light-bearing" seraph, or angel, was most beautiful of them all before he fell, becoming Satan. Dante identifies him with Dis, the Roman god of the underworld.

the right looked somewhat yellow, somewhat white; the left in its appearance was like those³

who come from where the Nile, descending, flows. Beneath each face of his, two wings spread out, as broad as suited so immense a bird:

I've never seen a ship with sails so wide.

They had no feathers, but were fashioned like a bat's; and he was agitating them,

so that three winds made their way out from him—and all Cocytus froze before those winds.

He wept out of six eyes; and down three chins, tears gushed together with a bloody froth.⁴

Within each mouth—he used it like a grinder—with gnashing teeth he tore to bits a sinner,

so that he brought much pain to three at once.

The forward sinner found that biting nothing when matched against the clawing, for at times his back was stripped completely of its hide.

"That soul up there who has to suffer most," my master said: "Judas Iscariot—

his head inside, he jerks his legs without.

Of those two others, with their heads beneath, the one who hangs from that black snout is Brutus—see how he writhes and does not say a word!

That other, who seems so robust, is Cassius⁴

But night is come again, and it is time for us to leave; we have seen everything."⁵

Just as he asked, I clasped him round the neck; and he watched for the chance of time and place,

and when the wings were open wide enough, he took fast hold upon the shaggy flanks

and then descended, down from tuft to tuft, between the tangled hair and icy crusts.

When we had reached the point at which the thigh revolves, just at the swelling of the hip,

my guide, with heavy strain and rugged work,

reversed his head to where his legs had been

and grappled on the hair, as one who climbs—I thought that we were going back to Hell.

3. The *contrappasso* of Dis reproduces his rebellion: he is depicted as a false, three-faced Trinity, winged like an angel (the seraph also had six wings), and lord of the realm, but a lord as hideous as he once was beautiful, whose only power is the mechanical beating of wings that freezes Cocytus and confines him in the ice of his own making, and the grinding of teeth that punishes the three traitors in his jaws.

4. The three arch-traitors are Judas Iscariot, who sold Christ (after whom this region of Judecca is named; he is gnawed head-first), and two conspirators against Julius

Caesar, Marcus Junius Brutus and Gaius Cassius Longinus (gnawed feet-first) both of whom killed themselves their defeat at Philippi in 42 B.C.E., two years folk Caesar's murder.

5. It is now 6 P.M. on Holy Saturday, 24 hours after pair entered the Gate of Hell on Good Friday. The climactic nature of Satan and the bottom of Hell is evil as an empty negation or perversion of good and intentions rather than a powerful and indepe force of its own.

- “Hold tight,” my master said—he panted like a man exhausted—“it is by such stairs that we must take our leave of so much evil.”⁶
- 85 Then he slipped through a crevice in a rock and placed me on the edge of it, to sit; that done, he climbed toward me with steady steps. I raised my eyes, believing I should see the half of Lucifer that I had left;
- 90 instead I saw him with his legs turned up; and if I then became perplexed, do let the ignorant be judges—those who can not understand what point I had just crossed.
- 95 “Get up,” my master said, “be on your feet: the way is long, the path is difficult; the sun’s already back to middle tierce.”⁷
- It was no palace hall, the place in which we found ourselves, but with its rough-hewn floor and scanty light, a dungeon built by nature.
- 100 “Before I free myself from this abyss, master,” I said when I had stood up straight, “tell me enough to see I don’t mistake: Where is the ice? And how is he so placed head downward? Tell me, too, how has the sun in so few hours gone from night to morning?”
- 105 And he to me: “You still believe you are north of the center, where I grasped the hair of the damned worm who pierces through the world. And you were there as long as I descended; but when I turned, that’s when you passed the point to which, from every part, all weights are drawn.
- 110 And now you stand beneath the hemisphere opposing that which cloaks the great dry lands and underneath whose zenith died the Man whose birth and life were sinless in this world.⁸ Your feet are placed upon a little sphere that forms the other face of the Judecca.
- Here it is morning when it’s evening there; and he whose hair has served us as a ladder is still fixed, even as he was before.
- 120 This was the side on which he fell from Heaven; for fear of him, the land that once loomed here

6. Just as Hell can only be avoided by comprehending every last part of it, so the only way out of it is through its very heart, the body of Satan. Because the waist of his body is placed at the very center of the earth (and of the universe in Ptolemy’s conception), the climb takes the pair from the northern into the southern hemisphere (held to be all water), causing the inversion of direction that so confuses the pilgrim.

7. The reference to the sun—all such references within

Hell were given with respect to the moon and stars—tells us that in the southern hemisphere it is now 7:30 A.M. The climb through the southern half of the earth will take 21 or 22 hours, about the same amount of time as the descent through Hell.

8. Jerusalem was regarded as the center of the northern hemisphere of land; it was often represented on maps with the image of Christ hanging on the cross.

made of the sea a veil and rose into our hemisphere; and that land which appears upon this side—perhaps to flee from him—left here this hollow space and hurried upward.⁹

125 There is a place below, the limit of that cave, its farthest point from Beelzebub,^o a place one cannot see: it is discovered by ear—there is a sounding stream that flows along the hollow of a rock eroded by winding waters, and the slope is easy.

130 My guide and I came on that hidden road to make our way back into the bright world; and with no care for any rest, we climbed—

135 he first, I following—until I saw, through a round opening, some of those things of beauty Heaven bears. It was from there that we emerged, to see—once more—the stars.

from Purgatorio

PURGATORIO

The existence of a place in the afterlife where saved souls would purge their earthly sins before entering heaven was still a new idea when Dante created the version of it that would dominate posterity. As befits a temporary space of souls moving from one world to the next, *Purgatorio* resembles the *Inferno* in some respects, the *Paradiso* in others, and in many ways is unique. As in Hell, the souls here suffer poetically suitable torments on a series of levels and as in Hell, they remain consumed by the worries of their earthly lives. As in *Paradiso*, each level can be seen to correspond to and rectify a circle of Hell, but the divisions are much simpler, and, most importantly, every soul is irrevocably saved rather than damned and consequently joyful even in suffering. What makes Purgatory unique is that each soul moves rather than fixed, making his or her way slowly up the mountain, purging a share of each sin along the way. Rather than nine equivalent levels plus an equivocal tenth as in other two realms, Purgatory is divided into seven terraces purging the seven deadly sins (pride, envy, wrath, sloth, avarice and prodigality, gluttony, and lust at the top), and the parts of Ante-Purgatory at the mountain’s base, where souls that were excommunicated, were indolent in their faith, or that died without last rites must wait before beginning the climb.

Rather than displaying the extremes of *Inferno*, *Purgatorio* is more uniform and optimistic in tone, steeped in the melancholy of the beloved world behind and the hope of the peace to come. The opening cantos introduce this new tension and new tone, while also suggesting the new dilemmas and new dangers of this realm, for the pull of the world is if anything stronger for those who have less to regret in their earthly lives. Canto 22 shows Dante’s conception of the order of Purgatory, the punishment of the terrace (here, of Gluttony), the positive and negative examples presented to the souls on each terrace. It also introduces a unique character, Statius (45–96 C.E.), the Roman epic poet, who will accompany Virgil and Dante to

9. In Dante’s invention, Lucifer’s fall from Heaven provides a geological as well as a theological origin of Hell: Purgatory, when he fell into the southern hemisphere, directly opposite Jerusalem, the land that once filled it fled from northward. Once he became fixed in the center of the earth, the land around him fled southward, raising the Mount of Purgatory and hollowing out the cone of Hell.