



CANTO 1

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*The dark wood—the three beasts—Virgil—the prophecy of the
greyhound—the plan of the journey*

1 Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita
mi ritrovai per una selva oscura,
ché la dritta via era smarrita.
4 Ahi quanto a dir qual era è cosa dura
esta selva selvaggia e aspra e forte
che nel pensier rinova la paura!
7 Tant' è amara che poco è più morte;
ma per trattar del ben ch'i' vi trovai,
dirò de l'altre cose ch'i' v'ho scorte.
10 Io non so ben ridir com' i' v'intrai,
tant' era pien di sonno a quel punto
che la verace via abbandonai.
13 Ma poi ch'i' fui al piè d'un colle giunto,
là dove terminava quella valle
che m'avea di paura il cor compunto,
16 guardai in alto, e vidi le sue spalle
vestite già de' raggi del pianeta
che mena dritto altrui per ogni calle.
19 Allor fu la paura un poco queta
che nel lago del cor m'era durata
la notte ch'i' passai con tanta pietà.
22 E come quei che con lena affannata,
uscito fuor del pelago a la riva,
si volge a l'acqua perigliosa e guata:
25 così l'animo mio, ch'ancor fuggiva,
si volse a retro a rimirar lo passo
che non lasciò già mai persona viva.
28 Poi ch'èi posato un poco il corpo lasso,
ripresi via per la piaggia diserta
sì che 'l piè fermo sempre era 'l più basso.

1 In the middle of the journey of our life, I came to
myself in a dark wood, for the straight way was lost.
4 Ah, how hard a thing it is to say what that wood
was, so savage and harsh and strong that the
thought of it renews my fear!
7 It is so bitter that death is little more so! But to
treat of the good that I found there, I will tell of
the other things I saw.
10 I cannot really say how I entered there, so full of
sleep was I at the point when I abandoned the true
way.
13 But when I had reached the foot of a hill, where
the valley ended that had pierced my heart with fear,
16 I looked on high and saw its shoulders clothed
already with the rays of the planet that leads us
straight on every path.
19 Then was the fear a little quieted that in the lake
of my heart had lasted through the night I passed
with so much anguish.
22 And like one with laboring breath, come forth out
of the deep onto the shore, who turns back to the
perilous water and stares:
25 so my spirit, still fleeing, turned back to gaze
again at the pass that has never yet left anyone alive.
28 After I had a little rested my weary body, I took
my way again along that deserted slope, so that my
halted foot was always the lower.

31 Ed ecco, quasi al cominciare de l'erta,
una lonza leggera e presta molto,
che di pel macolato era coverta;
34 e non mi si partia dinanzi al volto,
anzi 'mpediva tanto il mio cammino
ch'i' fui per ritornar più volte vòlto.
37 Temp' era del principio del mattino,
e 'l sol montava 'n sù con quelle stelle
ch' eran con lui quando l'amor divino
40 mosse di prima quelle cose belle;
sì ch' a bene sperar m'era cagione
di quella fiera a la gassetta pelle
43 l'ora del tempo e la dolce stagione.
Ma non sì che paura non mi desse
la vista che m'apparve d'un leone.
46 Questi pareva che contra me venisse
con la test' alta e con rabbiosa fame,
sì che pareva che l'aere ne tremesse.
49 Ed una lupa, che di tutte brame
sembiava carca ne la sua magrezza,
e molte genti fé già viver grane,
52 questa mi porse tanto di gravezza
con la paura ch'uscia di sua vista,
ch'io perdei la speranza de l'altezza.
55 E qual è quei che volonieri acquista,
e giugne 'l tempo che perder lo face,
che 'n tutti suoi pensier piange e s'attrista:
58 tal mi fece la bestia senza pace,
che, venendomi 'ncontro, a poco a poco
mi ripigneva là dove 'l sol tace.
61 Mentre ch'i' rovinava in basso loco,
dinanzi a li occhi mi si fu offerto
chi per lungo silenzio pareva fuoco.
64 Quando vidi costui nel gran diserto,
"Miisere di me," gridai a lui,
"qual che tu sii, od ombra od omo certo!"
67 Rispuosemi: "Non omo, omo già fui,
e li parenti miei furon lombardi,
mantuani per patria ambedui.

31 And behold, almost at the beginning of the steep,
a leopard, light and very swift, covered with spotted
fur;
34 and it did not depart from before my face but
rather so impeded my way that I was at several
turns turned to go back.
37 The time was the beginning of the morning, and
the sun was mounting up with those stars that were
with it when God's love
40 first set those lovely things in motion; so that I
took reason to have good hope of that beast with its
gaily painted hide
43 from the hour of the morning and the sweet
season; but not so that I did not fear the sight of a
lion that appeared to me.
46 He appeared to be coming against me with his
head high and with raging hunger, so that the air
appeared to tremble at him.
49 And a she-wolf, that seemed laden with all
cravings in her leanness and has caused many
peoples to live in wretchedness,
52 she put on me so much heaviness with the fear
that came from the sight of her, that I lost hope of
reaching the heights.
55 And like one who gladly acquires, and the time
arrives that makes him lose, who in all of his
thoughts weeps and becomes sad:
58 so she made me, that restless beast, who, coming
against me, little by little was driving me back to
where the sun is silent.
61 While I was falling down into a low place, before
my eyes one had offered himself to me who through
long silence seemed hoarse.
64 When I saw him in the great wilderness, "Miisere
—on me," I cried to him, "whatever you may be,
whether shade or true man!"
67 He replied: "Not a man. I was formerly a man,
and my parents were Lombards, Mantuans both by
birth.

70 Nacqui *sub Iulio*, ancor che fosse tardi,
 e vissi a Roma sotto 'l buono Augusto
 nel tempo de li dei falsi e bugiardi.
 73 Poeta fui, e cantai di quel giusto
 figliuol d'Anchise che venne di Troia
 poi che 'l superbo Ilión fu combusto.
 76 Ma tu perché ritorni a tanta noia?
 Perché non sali il dilettoso monte
 ch' è principio e cagion di tutta gioia?"
 79 "Or se' tu quel Virgilio e quella fonte
 che spandi di parlar sì largo fiume?"
 82 risposu' io lui con vergognosa fronte.
 "O de li altri poeti onore e lume,
 vagliami 'l lungo studio e 'l grande amore
 che m'ha fatto cercar lo tuo volume.
 85 Tu se' lo mio maestro e 'l mio autore,
 tu se' solo colui da cu' io tolsi
 lo bello stilo che m'ha fatto onore.
 88 Vedi la bestia per cu' io mi volsi:
 aiutami da lei, famoso saggio,
 ch' ella mi fa tremar le vene e i polsi."
 91 "A te convien tenere altro viaggio,"
 rispuose, poi che lagrimar mi vide,
 "se vuo' campar d'esto loco selvaggio;
 94 ché questa bestia, per la qual tu gride,
 non lascia altrui passar per la sua via,
 ma tanto lo 'mpedisce che l'uccide;
 97 e ha natura sì malvagia e ria,
 che mai non empie la bramosa voglia,
 e dopo 'l pasto ha più fame che pria.
 100 Molti son li animali a cui s'ammoggia,
 e più saranno ancora, infin che 'l veltro
 verrà, che la farà morir con doglia.
 103 Questi non ciberà terra né petro,
 ma sapienza, amore e virtute,
 e sua nazion sarà tra feltro e feltro.
 106 Di quella umile Italia fia salute
 per cui morì la vergine Cammilla,
 Eurialo e Turno e Niso di ferute.

70 I was born *sub Iulio*, though it was late, and I
 lived in Rome under the good Augustus in the time
 of the false and lying gods.
 73 I was a poet, and I sang of that just son of
 Anchises who came from Troy, when proud Iliion
 was destroyed by fire.
 76 But you, why do you return to so much suffering?
 why do you not climb the delightful mountain that is
 origin and cause of all joy?"
 79 "Now are you that Virgil, that fountain which
 spreads forth so broad a river of speech?" I replied
 with shamefast brow.
 82 "O honor and light of the other poets, let my long
 study and great love avail me, that has caused me to
 search through your volume.
 85 You are my master and my author, you alone are
 he from whom I have taken the pleasing style that
 has won me honor.
 88 See the beast for which I have turned back: help
 me against her, famous sage, for she makes my veins
 and pulses tremble."
 91 "You must hold to another path," he replied, after
 he saw me weep, "if you wish to escape from this
 savage place:
 94 for this beast at which you cry out lets no one
 pass by her way, but so much impedes him that she
 kills him;
 97 and she has a nature so evil and cruel that her
 greedy desire is never satisfied, and after feeding she
 is hungrier than before.
 100 Many are the animals with whom she mates, and
 there will be more still, until the greyhound shall
 come, who will make her die in pain.
 103 He will feed on neither earth nor pelf, but on
 wisdom, love, and power, and his birth will be
 between felt and felt.
 106 He will be the salvation of that humble Italy for
 which the virgin Camilla died of her wounds, and
 Euryalus, Turnus, and Nisus.

109 Questi la caccerà per ogne villa,
 fin che l'avrà rimessa ne lo 'nferno,
 là onde 'nvidia prima dipartilla.
 112 Ond' io per lo tuo me' penso e discerno
 che tu mi segui, e io sarò tua guida,
 e trarrotti di qui per loco eterno,
 115 ove udirai le disperate strida,
 vedrai li antichi spiriti dolenti,
 ch' a la seconda morte ciascun grida;
 118 e vederai color che son contenti
 nel foco, perché speran di venire,
 quando che sia, a le beati genti.
 121 A le quai poi se tu vorrai salire,
 anima fa a ciò più di me degna:
 124 con lei ti lascerò nel mio partire;
 ché quello Imperador che là sù regna,
 perch' i' fu' ribellante a la sua legge,
 non vuol che 'n sua città per me si vegna.
 127 In tutte parti impera e quivi regge;
 quivi è la sua città e l'alto seggio:
 130 oh felice colui cu' ivi elegge!"
 E io a lui: "Poeta, io ti richeggio
 per quello Dio che tu non conoscesti,
 133 acciò ch'io fugga questo male e peggio,
 che tu mi meni là dov' or dicesti,
 sì ch'io veggia la porta di san Pietro
 e color cui tu fai cotanto mesti."
 136 Allor si mosse, e io li tenni dietro.

109 He will drive her from every town until he has
 put her back in Hell, whence envy first sent her
 forth.
 112 Thus for your good I think and judge that you
 shall follow me, and I shall be your guide, and I will
 lead you from here through an eternal place,
 115 where you will hear the desperate shrieks, you
 will see the ancient suffering spirits, who all cry out
 at the second death;
 118 and you will see those who are content in the fire,
 because they hope to come, whenever it may be, to
 the blessed people.
 121 To whom then if you shall wish to rise, there will
 be a soul more worthy of that than I; with her I shall
 leave you when I depart;
 124 for that Emperor who reigns on high, because I
 was a rebel to his law, wills not that I come into his
 city.
 127 In every place he commands, and there he rules;
 there is his city and high throne: O happy the one he
 chooses to be there!"
 130 And I to him: "Poet, I beg you by that God whom
 you did not know, so that I may flee this evil and
 worse,
 133 that you lead me where you have just now said,
 so that I may see the gate of Saint Peter and those
 whom you call so woebegone."
 136 Then he moved, and I followed after him.



1. **In the middle of the journey of our life:** Later passages (e.g., 21.112–14) place the action of the poem in April 1300; if, as is probable, Dante was born in May 1265, he would be thirty-five in 1300, midway in the normative biblical lifespan, “threescore years and ten” (Psalm 90.10), mentioned by Dante in *Convivio* 4.23 (cf. Is. 38.10: “In the midst of my days I shall go to the gates of Hell”). The line suggests, with the plural possessive “our,” that the pilgrim is a representative human being, an Everyman. Dante omits or postpones the traditional “topics of exordium,” such as announcement of subject, dedication, and invocation of the muse; the abruptness of this beginning is highly unconventional in medieval as well as classical narrative.
2. **I came to myself:** The traditional translation of *mi ritrovai* is “I found myself.” In our view, the prefix *ri-*, rather than denoting repetition here, serves to intensify the inward nature of the event: Dante is describing a moral awakening. We believe there is also, both here and in line 11, a (very understated) reference to the literary genre of dream-vision, in which the dream regularly begins with an awakening (early illustrations often show a “sleeping” poet-as-author at the beginning); this question is more fully discussed in the note on *Par.* 32.139 (see the note to 2.8).
2. **a dark wood:** The “wood” of error and sin (cf. *Convivio* 4.24.12); there may be a reference to the “ancient forest, deep dwelling of beasts” near the mouth of Hades in *Aen.* 6.179. There is probably a reference to the Platonic idea of matter (*silva* in the Latin translation of the *Timaeus*) and also to the forest of Arthurian romance. Dante is perhaps drawing on the beginning of his teacher Brunetto Latini’s allegorical poem the *Tesoretto*, in which the narrator loses his way in a wondrous forest, where the goddess Nature appears to instruct him.
3. **the straight way:** The course of the just man, leading to God (see Psalm 23.3, Prov. 2.13–14, 2 Peter 2.15). If *ché* is taken as *che*, the so-called modal conjunction (the orthography of Dante’s time did not distinguish them), the line could mean “where the straight way was lost.”
- 4–7. **Ah, how hard . . . death is little more [bitter]:** Note the characteristic stress on an identity between the writing of the poem and the experience it relates: though in terms of the fiction the narrator has seen God, he is still subject to all the terrors of the journey as he narrates them.
8. **to treat of the good that I found there:** *Tattar* [to treat systematically] is a semi-technical term, like *good*; this is an oblique announcement of the subject of the poem, for the “good” he found there would seem to be the undertaking of the journey (cf. 2.126).
11. **so full of sleep:** The sleep of sin and moral oblivion (as in Romans 13.11–14), again, we believe, with implicit reference to dream-vision (see the note to line 2).
13. **a hill:** Like the sea and the dark wood, the hill, later called a mountain, is part of a traditional symbolic landscape we intuitively understand as representing the position of human beings between the depths and the heights (Dante may well have in mind the famous instance in the Old French *Queste del saint Graal*, pp. 91–92). For the “Lord’s holy mountain,” see Psalms 24.3, 43.3, 121.1 and Is. 2.2–5.
- 17–18. **the planet that leads us straight:** The expression emphasizes the role of the sun as revealer of knowledge and wisdom. In *Convivio* 3.12, Dante discusses the sun as the chief visible analogue of God. The sun is a “planet” (wanderer) like the six others, moving against the background of the fixed stars.
20. **lake of my heart:** Medieval physiology thought of the heart not as a pump, but as a reservoir of blood and pneuma (“spirit”): fear would rush them back to the “lake,” leaving the limbs pale and weak. Compare *Vita nuova* 2.4 and the canzone “Così nel mio parlar voglio esser aspro,” lines 45–47 (translated in Durling and Martinez 1990, pp. 286–90).
21. **anguish:** Dante’s word is *pieta*, a form of *pietà*, which includes the meanings “pity,” “pitiable suffering,” even “piety.”
22. **like one with laboring breath:** The first formal simile: the pilgrim has metaphorically escaped shipwreck (“slope” at line 29 can also mean “shore”), as Aeneas does literally at the beginning of the *Aeneid*. Hollander (1969) explores an elaborate system of parallels with the opening of the *Aeneid* in the first cantos of the *Inferno*.
27. **the pass that has never yet left anyone alive:** Probably damnation itself (see Prov. 12.28).
28. **my weary body:** The presence of the pilgrim’s body, of which this is the first mention, will be insisted on throughout *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*.
30. **my halted foot was always the lower:** Freccero (1959) has given the best explanation of this famous crux. In the act of walking, one foot must be fixed to support the body while the other moves; according to Aristotle and others, we naturally begin to walk by lifting the right foot, so that the left can be referred to as the naturally fixed or halted foot. Thus the pilgrim’s left foot is dragging behind his right one, is always “the lower.”
The soul was said to walk (i.e., to move toward its objects) on the two “feet” of its two chief faculties, intellect and will (desire); the left foot of the soul (will, for the heart is on the left side) drags behind the right foot (intellect) because of the laming wound in man’s nature inflicted by Adam’s Fall: intellect is able to see the goal clearly, but will moves toward it only haltingly.

32. a leopard: Commentators do not agree on the significance of this and the other beasts—lion and she-wolf—that drive back the pilgrim, which Dante's Italian ties together with alliteration (*lonza, leone, lupa*). Various possibilities have been suggested; the most likely correlates them with the triple division of Hell into sins of disordered appetite (she-wolf), violence (lion), and fraud (leopard); other identifications, such as the leopard with lust and the she-wolf with fraud, though traditional, seem arbitrary. The poem does seem to call out for labels here, but it is important to see that at this point it is withholding definitive clues: the pilgrim may be as mystified as the reader, and only later experience will explain the beasts.

37-43. The time was . . . the sweet season: This second astronomical reference identifies the beginning of the action as related to the spring equinox (March 21 by convention, March 14 in fact, in Dante's time); medieval tradition held that at the moment of creation the sun was at the first point of Aries. Other evidence in the poem suggests the date of April 8, 1300.

44-48. but not so . . . tremble at him: Note the repeated emphasis on Dante's fear. The dreamlike character of the scene raises the question to what extent the beasts are projections of internal dangers.

49-54. And a she-wolf . . . of reaching the heights: Why the pilgrim should be most afraid of the she-wolf is not explained (cf. line 97, with note).

55. gladly acquires: The economic simile (first of many) targets a society, the Florence of Dante's youth and young adulthood, only recently become wealthy and acquisitive.

60. the sun is silent: That is, where knowledge is darkened and hope is gone. The sun is traditionally associated with speech (e.g., Psalm 18.2-3).

62-63. before my eyes . . . seemed hoarse: Virgil is now introduced, to become Dante's guide. The elaborately contorted phrasing, which the translation renders literally, is striking in two respects. First, the pluperfect "had been offered" suggests that in some sense Virgil has been there for some time; second, the passive suggests that Dante must see Virgil before Virgil can speak to him. These features are particularly appropriate if the figure of Virgil is taken to refer to the codex of the historical Vergil's works (for our spellings, see below), where his voice does exist for the eye; they are most probably to be connected with an allegorical meaning: a reading of Vergil's works, especially of the *Aeneid*, would seem to have played a prominent role in the spiritual crisis of 1300 (cf. Leo 1951). Thus the conventional allegoresis of Dante's Virgil as representing "human reason," while at times undeniably valid, is much too narrow. The figure of Virgil in the poem should be taken to refer to the soul of the historical Vergil, expressed in his voice—his poetry—but in possession of added knowledge because he is

dead, though still subject to some of his old limitations. Virgil's hoarseness has been variously explained (the Italian allows "dim" or "weak" as well as "hoarse"); his Latin is no longer understood; his works have been disregarded (whether by Dante or others); or he is a shade like those of the Vergilian underworld.

Modern scholarship has established that *Vergilius* is the correct spelling of Vergil's name; Dante follows the traditional medieval spelling in writing *Virgilio*. We shall maintain the distinction, using *Vergil* to refer to the historical Vergil, and *Virgil* to refer to the character in Dante's poem.

65. Miserere [have mercy]: The Latin here derives most immediately from the Psalms (especially Psalm 51 [Vulgate 50], liturgically the most important penitential psalm).

67. Not a man: Because dead, a disembodied soul. In Dante's Christian Aristotelian view, a human being is the union of body and soul (see the note to 6.109-111).

70. born sub Iulio: Publius Vergilius Maro was born in 70 B.C. at Andes, near Mantua, then in Cisalpine Gaul; he died at Brundisium in 19 B.C., leaving the *Aeneid*, on which he had spent eleven years, incomplete. At the order of Augustus, Vergil's literary executors disregarded the poet's wish that it be burned. Vergil's other principal works are his pastoral *Eclagues* or *Bucolics*, which strongly influenced Dante, and his versified treatise on agriculture and husbandry, the *Georgics*, which has left fewer apparent traces in Dante's work. Vergil was born "under Julius" when Julius Caesar, born about 100 B.C., had barely qualified for the Senate; he was only twenty-six when Caesar was assassinated in 44 B.C. Although Caesar was not in power at Vergil's birth, Dante wishes to associate the poet of the Roman empire with the figure that he considered its founder (see the note to 2.20-24).

72. false and lying gods: Christian opinion, based on Psalm 96.5 [Vulgate 95], and established since Augustine, was that the gods of the pagan world (Jove, Juno, Mars, etc.) were demons that had led humanity astray through the oracles, which were silenced at Christ's birth (see *City of God* 2.2, 2.10); certain individuals, such as Plato and Aristotle, and often Vergil, were thought to have been essentially monotheists though they used polytheistic terminology. Dante frequently uses the names *Jove* and *Apollo* to refer to the Christian God (e.g., 31.92, *Par.* 1.13).

73-74. just son: Justice, the noblest of the moral virtues, is attributed to Aeneas, son of the goddess Venus and Trojan Anchises, founder of Rome after the destruction of Troy ("proud Iliion") by the Greeks (see *Aen.* 1.544-45). Vergil sang of Aeneas in his *Aeneid*, vessel of one of the Middle Ages' most significant myths: the descent of Europeans from Aeneas and other Trojans.

78. origin and cause of all joy: The mountain is designated as the origin of happiness following Aristotle's analysis of causation, in which the final cause (the *telos*, the goal or end) is also the first cause (the *arché* origin).

79-80. are you that Virgil . . . river of speech: That Vergil's poetry was like a great river was a traditional topic in ancient and medieval literary criticism. In the Middle Ages, the *Aeneid*, *Georgics*, and *Ecllogues* were thought to define the levels of poetic style: "tragic" or "high," "middle" or "rustic," and "low" or "bucolic," respectively.

79. are you that Virgil: Compare *Aen.* 1.617: "Tune ille Aeneas quem . . ." [Are you that Aeneas whom . . .], in Dido's first speech to Aeneas.

85. You are my master and my author: The translation will uniformly translate *maestro* as "master," though the word also means "teacher"; the modern "author" no longer conveys the meaning the term *autore* had for the Middle Ages. An *autor* is one whose formative influence on others has been so great and so widespread that he has acquired *authority* in the strongest possible (positive) sense: he is "worthy of faith and obedience" (*Convivio* 4.6).

87. the pleasing style that has won me honor: There are traces of Vergil's stylistic influence on Dante as early as the *Vita nuova* (ca. 1294) and the *rime petrose* (1296). Dante was already well known as a poet in 1300.

91. You must hold to another path: The pilgrim cannot proceed directly up the mountain; he must first descend. See Romans 6.3-4:

Know ye not, that all we, who are baptized in Christ Jesus are baptized in his death? For we are buried together with him by baptism into death: that as Christ is risen from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also may walk in newness of life.

The penitential descent into Hell imitates Christ's death on the Cross and is parallel to baptism, the sacramental death to sin, followed by "newness of life." The pattern by which the believer's experience is a figural imitation of Christ is fundamental to the poem.

97. she has a nature . . . : Virgil's account of the she-wolf, obscure as it is, makes clear that, as the pilgrim sensed in line 51, she is a terrible external power and a major force in history.

100. the animals with whom she mates: The language is that of the Old Testament prophets, for whom unfaithfulness to Jehovah is "fornication" (cf. Is. 1.21, Jer. 3.1, and Apoc. 18.3).

101-5. the greyhound . . . felt: Innumerable explanations have been offered of this prophecy. There are two main families of interpretation: (1) the greyhound refers to the Second Coming of Christ or to an ecclesiastical figure prefiguring it; (2) the greyhound refers to a secular ruler, who would also prefigure the Second Coming. Prime candidates for the latter figure are Can Grande della Scala, the Ghibelline leader of the Veronese noble house that offered Dante hospitality during his exile (his title, derived from *khan*, also means "dog," hence

greyhound), and Emperor Henry VII, whose descent into Italy in 1311 to 1313 seemed to Dante to promise, before his untimely death, the reform of religious and political institutions for which he yearned. "Between felt and felt" has been taken to mean a geographical location (between the towns of Feltré and Montebellro), an astrological sign (the Gemini, Dante's own natal sign, were sometimes shown with felt caps), the two mendicant orders (Franciscans and Dominicans), and a technique of election (counters dropped into felt-lined boxes), perhaps with reference to an emperor. Along with the prophecy in the last canto of the *Purgatorio* (to which it is closely related), this passage remains one of the most obscure in the poem. The best discussion is Davis 1976.

106. that humble Italy: Dante adapts *Aen.* 3.522-23, where the term *humilis* [low-lying] refers to the physical appearance of the Italian shore as seen by Aeneas's crew. Note the contrast with line 75, "proud Ilion," itself an echo of *Aen.* 3.2-3 (*superbum/Ilion*).

107-8. virgin Camilla . . . Nisus: Dante lists some of the fallen in the Trojan-Italian war described in the last six books of Vergil's epic, including Turnus, the chief antagonist of Aeneas as rival for the hand of Lavinia. But Trojans (Nisus and Euryalus) and native Italians (the Rutulian Turnus, the Volscian Camilla) are carefully interwoven in Dante's list, their former antagonisms elided. The lines suggest patriotism as the motive of these deaths.

111. whence envy first sent her forth: See Wisdom 2.24: "by the envy of the devil, death came into the world." The devil's envy of man's favored status is the traditional reason for his enmity.

117. the second death: The death of the soul in eternal damnation, following the first, physical death; for the expression, see Apoc. 20.15, 21.8.

118-19. content in the fire: Souls undergoing the fire of purgation. A metonymy for all of Purgatory, which includes a diversity of punishments; the identification of Purgatory with fire is traditional, resting on 1 Cor. 3.13-15 ("the fire shall try every man's work . . . but he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire").

120-26. the blessed people . . . into his city: The blessed are thought of as inhabiting, along with the angels, the "Empyrean," a sphere of fire beyond the confines of the cosmos; this is "his city," to which the pilgrim ascends in the *Paradiso*.

122. a soul more worthy: Unmistakably, Beatrice, the poet's lady celebrated in the *Vita nuova* (see 2.53).

124-25. that Emperor . . . a rebel to his law: For the question of how Virgil was a "rebel" against God's law, see 4.33-39, with notes.

134. the gate of Saint Peter: The gate to Purgatory (see *Purg.* 9.73-145).



CANTO 2

CANTO 2

*Fears—precedents for the journey—Virgil's account of his being sent—
Beatrice's account of her being sent*

1 Lo giorno se n'andava, e l'aere bruno
 toglieva li animai che sono in terra
 da le fatiche loro; e io sol uno
 4 m'apparecchiava a sostener la guerra
 sì del cammino e sì de la pietate,
 che ritarrà la mente che non erra.
 7 O muse, o alto ingegno, or m'aiutate;
 o mente che scrivesti ciò ch'io vidi,
 qui si parrà la tua nobilitate.
 10 Io cominciai: "Poeta che mi guidi,
 guarda la mia virtù s'ell' è possente,
 prima ch' a l'alto passo tu mi fidi.
 13 Tu dici che di Silvïo il parente,
 corruttibile ancora, ad immortale
 secolo andò, e fu sensibilmente.
 16 Però, se l'avversario d'ogne male
 cortese i fu, pensando l'alto effetto
 ch'uscir dovea di lui, e 'l chi e 'l quale,
 19 non pare indegno ad omo d'intelletto;
 ch' e' fu de l'alma Roma e di suo impero
 ne l'empireo ciel per padre eletto:
 22 la quale e 'l quale, a voler dir lo vero,
 fu stabilita per lo loco santo
 u' siede il successor del maggior Piero.
 25 Per quest' andata onde li dai tu vanto,
 intese cose che furon cagione
 di sua vittoria e del papale ammanto.
 28 Andovvi poi lo Vas d'elezione,
 per recarne conforto a quella fede
 ch'è principio a la via di salvazione.

1 The day was departing, and the darkened air was
 releasing all living creatures on the earth from their
 toils; and I alone
 4 prepared myself to undergo the war both of the
 journey and of pity, which memory, unerring, will
 depict.
 7 O muses, O high wit, now help me; O memory
 that wrote down what I saw, here will your nobility
 appear.
 10 I began: "Poet who are my guide, consider my
 strength, if it is powerful enough, before you entrust
 me to the deep pass.
 13 You say that the father of Silvius, still in
 corruptible flesh, went to the immortal realm and
 was there with his senses.
 16 Therefore, if the adversary of all evil was liberal to
 him, considering the high effect that was to come
 forth from him, and who and what he was,
 19 it does not seem unworthy to a man of intellect;
 for he in the Empyrean heaven had been chosen to
 be father of mother Rome and her empire:
 and Rome and her empire, to tell the truth, were
 established to be the holy place where the successor
 of great Peter is enthroned.
 22 Through this journey that you claim for him, he
 understood things that were the cause of his victory
 and of the papal mantle.
 25 Later the chosen Vessel went there, to bring back
 strengthening for that faith which is the beginning of
 the way of salvation.

31 Ma io, perché venirvi? o chi 'l concede?
 Io non Enéa, io non Paulo sono;
 me degno a ciò né io né altri 'l crede.

34 Per che, se del venire io m'abbandono,
 temo che la venuta non sia folle.
 Se' savio; intendi me' ch'i' non ragiono."

37 E qual è quei che disvuol ciò che volle
 e per novi pensier cangia proposta,
 sì che dal cominciar tutto si tolle:
 tal mi fec' io 'n quella oscura costa,
 perché, pensando, consumai la 'impresa
 che fu nel cominciar cotanto tosta.

43 "S'i' ho ben la parola tua intesa,"
 rispuose del magnanimo quell' ombra,
 "l'anima tua è da viltade offesa,
 46 la qual molte fate l'omo ingombra
 sì che d'onrata impresa lo rivoive,
 come falso veder bestia quand' ombra.

49 Da questa tema acciò che tu ti solve,
 dirotti perch' io venni e quel ch' io 'ntesi
 nel primo punto di te mi dolve.

52 Io era tra color che son sospesi,
 e donna mi chiamò beata e bella,
 tal che di comandare io la richiesi.

55 Lucevan li occhi suoi più che la stella;
 e cominciommi a dir soave e piana,
 con angelica voce, in sua favella:

58 'O anima cortese mantuana,
 di cui la fama ancor nel mondo dura,
 e durerà quanto 'l mondo lontana,
 61 l'amico mio, e non de la ventura,
 ne la diserta spiaggia è impedito
 sì nel cammin, che volt' è per paura;
 64 e temo che non sia già sì smarrito
 ch'io mi sia tardi al soccorso levata,
 per quel ch'i' ho di lui nel cielo udito.

67 Or movi, e con la tua parola ornata
 e con ciò c'ha mestieri al suo campare,
 l'aiuta sì ch'i' ne sia consolata.

31 But I, why come there? or who grants it? I am
 not Aeneas, I am not Paul; neither I nor others
 believe me worthy of that.

34 Therefore, if I abandon myself to the journey, I fear
 lest my coming may be folly. You are wise, you
 understand better than I speak."

37 And like one who unwill's what he just now
 willed and with new thoughts changes his intent, so
 that he draws back entirely from beginning:
 40 so did I become on that dark slope, for, thinking, I
 gave up the undertaking that I had been so quick to
 43 begin.

"If I have well understood your word," replied the
 shade of that great-souled one, "your soul is
 wounded by cowardice,
 46 which many times so encumbers a man that he
 turns back from honorable endeavor, as a false sight
 turns a beast when it shies.

49 That you may free yourself from this fear, I will
 tell you why I came and what I heard in the first
 moment when I grieved for you.

52 I was among those who are suspended, and a lady
 called me, so blessed and beautiful that I begged her
 to command me.

55 Her eyes were shining brighter than the morning
 star; and she began to speak gently and softly, with
 angelic voice, in her language:

58 'O courteous Mantuan soul, whose fame still lasts
 in the world and will last as far as the world will go,
 61 my friend, not the friend of fortune, on the
 deserted shore is so blocked in his journey that he
 has turned back for fear:
 64 and I am afraid that he may be already so lost
 that I have risen too late to help him, according to
 what I have heard of him in Heaven.

67 Now go, and with your ornamented speech and
 whatever else is needed for his escape help him so
 that I may be consoled.

70 I' son Beatrice che ti faccio andare;
vegno del loco ove tornar distio;
amor mi mosse, che mi fa parlare.

73 Quando sarò dinanzi al signor mio,
di te mi loderò sovente a lui.'

76 Tacette allora, e poi cominciò io:
'O donna di virtù, sola per cui
l'umana spezie eccede ogni contento
di quel ciel c'ha minor li cerchi sui,
79 tanto m'aggrada il tuo comandamento
che l'ubidir, se già fosse, m'è tardi;
più non t'è uo' ch'aprimi il tuo talento.

82 Ma dimmi la cagion che non ti guardi
de lo scender qua giuso in questo centro
de l'ampio loco ove tornar tu ardi.'

85 'Da che tu vuo' saver cotanto a dentro,
dirotti brevemente,' mi rispuose,
'perch' i' non temo di venir qua entro.

88 Tener si dee di sole quelle cose
c'hanno potenza di fare altrui male;
de l'altre no, ché non son paurose.

91 I' son fatta da Dio, sua mercè, tale
che la vostra miseria non mi tange,
né fiamma d'esto 'ncendio non m'assale.

94 Donna è gentil nel ciel che si compiange
di questo 'mpedimento ov' io ti mando,
sì che duro giudicio là sù frange.

97 Questa chiese Lucia in suo dimando
e disse:—Or ha bisogno il tuo fedele
di te, e io a te lo raccomando.—

100 Lucia, nimica di ciascun crudele,
si mosse, e venne al loco dov' i' era,
che mi sedea con l'antica Rachele.

103 Disse:—Beatrice, loda di Dio vera,
ché non soccorri quei che t'amò tanto
ch'uscì per te de la volgare schiera?

106 Non odi tu la pietra del suo pianto,
non vedi tu la morte che 'l combatte
su la fumana ove 'l mar non ha vanto?—

I am Beatrice who cause you to go; I come from
the place where I long to return; love has moved me
and makes me speak.

When I shall be before my lord, I will praise you
frequently to him.' Then she was silent, and I began:
'O lady of power, through whom alone the human
race rises above all the contents of that heaven whose
circles are smallest,
so pleasing to me is your command that obeying,
had it already taken place, is slow; no more is
needed than to unfold your desire.

But tell me the reason why you do not shrink
from coming down here, into this center, from the
spacious place where you desire to return.'

'Since you wish to know so deeply, I will tell you
in brief,' she replied, 'why I do not fear to come
inside here.

One must fear only those things that have the
power to harm; not other things, for they are not
fearful.

I am made by God, in his mercy, such that your
misery does not touch me, the flame of this burning
does not assail me.

There is a noble lady in Heaven, who grieves for
this impediment to which I send you, so that she
vanquishes harsh judgment there on high.

She called Lucia in her request and said:—Now
your faithful one has need of you, and I put him in
your hands.—

Lucia, enemy of all cruelty, moved and came to
the place where I was sitting with the ancient Rachel.

She said:—Beatrice, true praise of God, why do
you not help him who loved you so, who because of
you came forth from the common herd?

Do you not hear the anguish of his weeping, do
you not see the death that attacks him there, by the
torrent where the sea has no boast?—

109 Al mondo non fur mai persone ratte
a far lor pro o a fuggir lor danno,
com' io, dopo cotai parole fatte,
112 venni qua giù del mio beato scanno,
fidandomi del tuo parlare onesto,
115 ch' onora te e quei ch' udito l'hanno.
Poscia che m' ebbe ragionato questo,
li occhi lucenti lagrimando volse,
per che mi fece del venir più presto.
118 E venni a te così com' ella volse:
d' inanzi a quella fera ti levai
che del bel monte il corto andar ti tolse.
121 Dunque che è? perché, perché restai,
perché tanta viltà nel core allette,
perché ardire e franchezza non hai,
124 poscia che tai tre donne benedette
curan di te ne la corte del cielo,
e 'l mio parlar tanto ben ti promette?"
127 Quali fioretti dal notturno gelo
chinati e chiusi, poi che 'l sol li 'mbianca,
si drizzan tutti aperti in loro stelo:
130 tal mi fec' io di mia virtude stanca,
e tanto buono ardire al cor mi corse,
ch' i' cominciai come persona franca:
133 "Oh pietosa colei che mi soccorse!
e te cortese ch' ubidisti tosto
a le vere parole che ti posse!
136 Tu m' hai con disiderio il cor disposto
sì al venir con le parole tue,
ch' i' son tornato nel primo proposto.
139 Or va, ch' un sol volere è d' ambedue:
tu duca, tu signore e tu maestro."
142 Così li disse; e poi che mosso fue,
intraì per lo cammino alto e silvestro.

109 In the world there have never been persons so
swift to seek their advantage or to flee their loss, as I,
after hearing such words spoken,
112 came down here from my blessed throne, trusting
in your virtuous speech, which honors you and those
who have heeded it.
115 After she had spoken all this to me, she turned
her shining eyes, shedding tears, which made me
quicker to come here.
118 And I have come to you as she willed: from
before that beast I have taken you, that deprived you
of the short path up the mountain.
121 Therefore what is it? why, why do you stand
still? why do you nurse such cowardice in your
heart? why do you not have boldness and freedom,
124 seeing that three such blessed ladies have a care
for you in the court of Heaven, and my speech
promises you so much good?"
127 As little flowers, bowed and closed in the chill of
night, when the sun whitens them straighten up all
open on their stems:
130 so did I become with my tired strength, and so
much good boldness ran to my heart, that I began
like a person freed:
133 "Oh full of pity she who has helped me! and you
courteous, who have quickly obeyed the true words
she offered you!
136 Your words have so filled my heart with desire to
come with you, that I have returned to my first
purpose.
139 Now go, for one same will is in both: you are
leader, you lord, and you master." So I said to him;
and when he had set forth
142 I entered upon the deep, savage journey.



1-3. **The day was departing . . . and I alone:** Like Canto 1, Canto 2 begins with an indication of time and of the pilgrim's isolation; whereas he slept in Canto 1, here he alone is awake. The contrast between the protagonist and the peace permeating nature draws on several passages in the *Aeneid*, such as 8.26-27:

Nox erat et terras animalia fessa per omnis
altituum pecudumque genus sopor altus habebat,
cum pater . . .

[It was night and through all lands deep sleep held the tired
living creatures, the winged ones and the flocks,
while the father . . .]

and 9.224-25:

Cetera per terras omnis animalia somno
laxabant curas et corda oblita laborum

[Other creatures through all lands in sleep
loosened their cares and their hearts, forgetting their labors]

and compare 4.522-32.

7-9. **O muses . . . appear:** The appearance of an invocation to the muses here retrospectively turns the entire first canto into a kind of *propositio* [announcement of subject]; compare the sequence of Vergil's *Aeneid*, Book 1: lines 1-7, proposition ("Arms and the man I sing . . ."); and lines 8-11, invocation ("Muse, remind [memora] me of the causes . . ."). The opening invocations of *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* constitute an ascending series with this one.

7-8. **O muses, O high wit:** The identification of the muses (the "daughters of memory") with the powers of the poet's own mind or with the lore of the craft was common in the Middle Ages. We use "wit" to translate Dante's term

ingegno, regularly used by Dante to refer to the innate qualities of mind as opposed to those acquired by practice or knowledge; the term is further discussed in the notes to *Par.* 22.1-9.

8. **O memory that wrote down:** Dante's word is *mente* [mind], closely related in derivation to *memoria* (cf. *memora* [*Aen.* 1.8] and compare the English verb to *mind*, as in "Mind your p's and q's"). Implicit here is the idea of memory as a book, basic to the entire *Vita nuova* (see especially Chapter 1). Chaucer adapted this and the following lines in the Prologue to Book 2 of the *House of Fame*, lines 523-28:

O Thought that wrot al that I mette,
And in the tresorye hyt shette
Of my brayn, now shal men se
Yf any vertu in the be,
To tellen al my drem aryght.
Now kythe thyn engin and myght.

[O Thought that wrote down all I dreamed,
And shut it in the treasury
Of my brain, now shall men see
If there be any virtue in thee
To tell all my dream aright.
Now make known thy skill and might.]

The lines strongly suggest that Chaucer thought of the *Comedy* as a dream-vision (see the notes to 1.2 and 1.11).

13. **the father of Silvius:** Silvius was the posthumous son (*Aen.* 6.760-66) of Aeneas, whose journey to the underworld is related in *Aeneid* 6, one of Dante's chief models, especially for the *Inferno*. Here, as elsewhere, Dante writes as if he considered the events of the *Aeneid* to be historical fact.

14-15. **still . . . with his senses:** That Aeneas journeyed to Hades in the flesh, rather than in dream or in the spirit, is repeatedly emphasized in Vergil's account. See, for example, *Aen.* 6.290-94, 413-14; at the end of the book, however, he leaves Hades by the gate of false dreams (lines 893-99).

17. **the high effect:** This is specified in lines 20-24. Line 19 may also be taken to mean "the [Aeneas] does not seem unworthy."

20-24. for he . . . great Peter: Dante's view that the Romans were a second chosen people, and that the establishment of the Roman empire was part of God's providential preparation for the coming of Christ and the establishment of the Church, underlies the entire *Divine Comedy* and is set forth in his *Convivio* (4.4-5) and *Monarchia* (Book 2).

24. the successor of great Peter: The pope; Christ's gift to Saint Peter of the keys of the kingdom (Matt. 16.13-20) was interpreted by the Roman Church as signifying Peter's appointment as the first pope.

26-27. the cause . . . papal mantle: That is, Aeneas's journey to the underworld was the cause of his victory in Latium and thus, according to Vergil, of the Roman empire; for Dante, the cause of the eventual establishment of the papacy as well.

28. the chosen Vessel: *Vas electionis*, the phrase used by God to refer to Saul/Paul in Acts 9.15. Saint Paul relates his vision of the "third heaven" in 2 Cor. 12.1-7. There is an account of Saint Paul's visit to Hell in the fifth- or sixth-century Latin "Apocalypse of Paul" (*Visio Pauli*; see Elliott).

32. I am not Aeneas, I am not Paul: After the periphrases of lines 13 and 28, the use of the names themselves is climactic. In addition to developing the theme of the pilgrim's fear (see below), the raising of this question serves to emphasize the iconoclastic, in fact epoch-making importance of a journey to the other world being claimed by a layman and politically active private individual.

43-45. If I have . . . cowardice: A continuation of the theme of the pilgrim's fear, a chief obstacle in Canto 1 (see 1.19, 44, 52, 90). The *terzina* opposes magnanimity (largeness of spirit) with baseness or smallness of spirit, in this case the pilgrim's unwillingness to believe he is destined for great things and his reluctance to trust Vergil; the concepts are discussed in *Convivio* 1.11, on the basis of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (4.3).

52-117. I was among those . . . quicker to come here: Virgil answers the pilgrim's fears with an account of how he was sent to the pilgrim, which reveals the hierarchical chain of mediation of God's grace (Virgin Mary-Saint Lucy-Beatrice-Virgil) that his presence implies. His authority is guaranteed by his connection with the highest (God) via the hierarchical chain (note that his knowledge of the upper levels is itself mediated by Beatrice's account). On the

importance of the "great chain of being" in the *Comedy*, see Introduction, 18-20.

52. those who are suspended: The souls in Limbo (see Canto 4).

55-57. a lady . . . in her language: The style of Virgil's description of Beatrice derives from the lyric poetry of the *dolce stil novo* (itself deriving from the long medieval tradition of narrative and lyric exaltation of ladies) and especially the *Vita nuova*, which narrates Dante's youthful love for her before and after her death and establishes her status as a miracle. Florentine tradition, related by Boccaccio, identified her with a Beatrice Portinari, a young married woman who died on the appropriate day; the name *Beatrice* means "she who makes blessed."

61. not the friend of fortune: That is, he loved her without regard to personal advantage.

67. your ornamented speech: Virgil's rhetorical power, praised also in lines 113-14 and exemplified in this entire account (see the note to line 126).

71. the place . . . return: The Emyrean (see the note to lines 120-26).

76-78. O lady . . . smallest: This is the first reference in the poem to the allegorical dimension of Beatrice; in addition to being the soul of the Florentine lady Dante loved, she represents, variously, the principles of mediation, accommodation, revelation, and divine grace.

78. that heaven whose circles are smallest: That of the moon. Change was thought to be confined to the sublunar realm, since all the heavenly bodies, beginning with the moon, were perfect and changeless.

82-114. But tell me . . . those who have headed it: Virgil's question and Beatrice's answer reproduce the structure governing the canto as a whole: the pilgrim's question expressing his fears (lines 10-36) and Virgil's answer, followed by its result (lines 43-142). Like Virgil, Beatrice answers a question about fear of Hell (in this case, her own lack of it) with the narrative of how she was sent.

91. your misery does not touch me: Beatrice's use of the verb *tangere* [to touch] echoes the risen Jesus' words to Mary Magdalen (John 20.17): "Noli me tangere" [Do not touch me].

94. **noble lady:** The Virgin Mary.

97. **Lucia:** Saint Lucy of Syracuse, the patroness of vision (probably because her name seems derived from the Latin word for "light"). There has been much discussion of the question of Dante's devotion to her, about which nothing more is known except her appearance helping Dante in *Purg.* 9.35-63 and *Par.* 32.136-38.

102. **Rachel:** The story of Jacob's love for Rachel, for whom he served seven years, and then another seven years when her older sister Leah was substituted for her, is told in Genesis 29-30. The two sisters were traditionally interpreted as symbolic of the contemplative life (Rachel) and the active life (Leah) (see *Purg.* 27.94-108).

105. **came forth . . . herd:** That is, Dante's love for Beatrice itself distinguished him, and it also motivated him to seek acclaim as a poet.

108. **the torrent . . . no boast:** A deliberately obscure line, variously interpreted; in our view, the reference is the same as in 1.26-27, "the pass that has never yet left anyone alive," in other words the abyss or flood of sin/Hell (Boccaccio). On the assumption that the torrent is a separate river, however, parallels have been suggested with Acheron and Jordan, which do not flow into the sea (Freccero 1966b).

126. **my speech:** Looking back on Virgil's speech, one notes its formal rhetorical structure: proem with *propositio* (lines 43-51), narration (lines 52-120), emotive peroration (lines 121-26). Despite the pilgrim's disclaimer, the sanctions for his journey do strictly parallel the precedents of Aeneas and Saint Paul, though with important differences. Of his two guides, Virgil is a representative of the Roman empire, Beatrice of the Church. But the pilgrim's claim on each is that of an individual, a layman, not someone authorized by institutional status: his claims are his devotion to Virgil's poetry and his being himself a poet (cf. 1.79-87), which of course already place him in an exalted literary tradition, though a secular one (the epoch-making decision to write in the vernacular is also at stake here), and his human love for the earthly Beatrice (cf. 2.61, 103). Virgil's role in the pilgrim's journey will be to prepare him for the coming of Beatrice (implied in 1.121-23), a process analogous to the historical function of Rome as Dante saw it, that of bringing the world under the rule of law in preparation for the coming of Christ. Though it seems to concern only the pilgrim's salvation, the passage in fact lays the foundation for the view of the poem as a providentially inspired intervention in current history, set forth especially in

Paradise 17 and 27. Jacoff and Stephany (1989) discuss many of the interpretive issues in this canto.

127-132. **As little flowers . . . a person freed:** The canto began with the approach of night and the pilgrim's fears; here, in simile, it is dawn again (cf. 1.37-42).

CANTO 3

1 PER ME SI VA NE LA CITTA' DOLENTE,
 PER ME SI VA NE L'ETERNO DOLORE,
 PER ME SI VA TRA LA PERDUTA GENTE.
 4 GIUSTIZIA MOSSE IL MIO ALTO FATTORE;
 FECEMI LA DIVINA PODESTATE,
 LA SOMMA SAPIENZA E' L PRIMO AMORE.
 7 DINANZI A ME NON FUOR COSE CREATE
 SE NON ETERNE, E IO ETERNO DURO.
 LASCIATE OGNE SPERANZA, VOI CH'INTRATE.
 10 Queste parole di colore oscuro
 vid' io scritte al sommo d'una porta,
 per ch'io: "Maestro, il senso lor m'è duro."
 13 Ed elli a me, come persona accorta:
 "Qui si convien lasciare ogni sospetto,
 16 ogni viltà convien che qui sia morta.
 Noi siam venuti al loco ov' i' t'ho detto
 che tu vedrai le genti dolorose
 19 c'hanno perduto il ben de l'intelletto."
 E poi che la sua mano a la mia puose
 con lieto volto, ond' io mi confortai,
 22 mi mise dentro a le segrete cose.
 Quivi sospiri, pianti e alti guai
 25 risonavan per l'aere senza stelle,
 per ch'io al cominciar ne lagrimai.
 Diverse lingue, orribili favelle,
 parole di dolore, accenti d'ira,
 voci alte e fioche, e suon di man con elle
 28 facevano un tumulto, il qual s'aggira
 sempre in quell'aura senza tempo tinta,
 come la rena quando turbo spira.

CANTO 3

*Hell Gate—the trimmers—the Acheron—Charon and the damned
 souls—the pilgrim's faint*

1 THROUGH ME THE WAY INTO THE GRIEVING CITY,
 THROUGH ME THE WAY INTO ETERNAL SORROW,
 THROUGH ME THE WAY AMONG THE LOST PEOPLE.
 4 JUSTICE MOVED MY HIGH MAKER;
 DIVINE POWER MADE ME,
 HIGHEST WISDOM, AND PRIMAL LOVE.
 7 BEFORE ME WERE NO THINGS CREATED
 EXCEPT ETERNAL ONES, AND I ENDURE ETERNAL.
 ABANDON EVERY HOPE, YOU WHO ENTER.
 10 These words I saw written with dark color above
 a gate, and I said: "Master, their sense is hard for
 13 me."
 And he to me, like one alert: "Here one must
 abandon every suspicion, every cowardice must die
 16 here.
 We have come to the place where I told you you
 will see the grieving peoples who have lost the
 19 good of the intellect."
 And, putting his hand on mine with a cheerful
 glance from which I drew strength, he introduced me
 into the secret things.
 22 There sighs, weeping, loud wailing resounded
 through the starless air, for which at the outset I shed
 tears.
 Strange languages, horrible tongues, words of
 25 pain, accents of anger, voices loud and hoarse, and
 sounds of blows with them,
 made a tumult that turns forever in that air
 28 darkened without time, like the sand when a
 whirlwind blows.

31 E io ch'avea d'orror la testa cinta,
dissi: "Maestro, che è quel ch' i' odo?
e che gen' è che par nel duol si vinta?"
34 Ed elli a me: "Questo misero modo
tegnon l'anime triste di coloro
che visser senza 'nfamia e senza lodo.
37 Mischiate sono a quel cattivo coro
de li angeli che non furon ribelli
né fur fedeli a Dio, ma per sé fuoro.
40 Cacciandi i ciel per non esser men belli,
né lo profondo inferno li riceve,
ch'alcuna gloria i rei avrebber d'elli."
43 E io: "Maestro, che è tanto greve
a lor che lamentar li fa sì forte?"
Rispuose: "Dicerolti molto breve.
46 Questi non hanno speranza di morte,
e la lor cieca vita è tanto bassa
che 'nvidiosi son d'ogne altra sorte.
49 Fama di loro il mondo esser non lassa;
misericordia e giustizia li sdegna:
non ragioniam di lor, ma guarda e passa."
52 E io, che riguardai, vidi una 'nsegna
che girando correva tanto ratta
che d'ogne posa mi pareva indegna;
55 e dietro le venia sì lunga tratta
di gente, ch'i' non avrei creduto
che morte tanta n'avesse disfatta.
58 Poscia ch'io v'ebbi alcuno riconosciuto,
vidi e conobbi l'ombra di colui
che fece per viltade il gran rifiuto.
61 Incontanente intesi e certo fui
che questa era la setta d'i cattivi,
a Dio spiacenti e a' nemici sui.
64 Questi sciaurati, che mai non fur vivi,
erano ignudi e stimolati molto
da mosconi e da vespe ch'eran ivi.
67 Elle rigavan lor di sangue il volto,
che, mischiato di lagrime, a' lor piedi
da fastidiosi vermi era ricolto.

And I, my head girt with horror, said: "Master,
what is this I hear? and what people is this who
seem so overcome by grief?"
And he to me: "This wretched measure is kept by
the miserable souls who lived without infamy and
without praise.
37 They are mixed with that cowardly chorus of
angels who were not rebels yet were not faithful to
God, but were for themselves.
40 The heavens reject them so as not to be less
beautiful, nor does deep Hell receive them, for the
wicked would have some glory from them."
43 And I: "Master, what is so grievous that it makes
them lament so loudly?" He replied: "I will tell you
very briefly.
46 They have no hope of death, and their blind life is
so base that they are envious of every other fate.
49 The world permits no fame of them to exist;
mercy and justice alike disdain them: let us not
speak of them, but look and pass on."
52 When I looked again, I saw a flag running in
circles so rapidly that it seemed to scorn all pause;
and after it there came so long a train of people,
that I would not have believed death had undone so
many.
58 After I had recognized several, I saw and knew
the shade of him who in his cowardice made the
great refusal.
61 Immediately I understood and was certain that
this was the sect of cowards, displeasing both to God
and to his enemies.
64 These wretches, who never were alive, were naked
and much tormented by large flies and wasps that
were there.
67 These streaked their faces with blood which,
mixed with tears, at their feet was gathered up by
disgusting worms.

70 E poi ch' a riguardar oltre mi diedi,
 vidi genti a la riva d'un gran fiume,
 per ch'io dissi: "Maestro, or mi concedi
 73 ch' i' sappia quali sono, e qual costume
 le fa di trapassar parer sì pronte,
 76 com' i' discerno per lo fuoco lume."
 Ed elli a me: "Le cose ti fier conte
 quando noi fermerem li nostri passi
 su la trista riviera d'Acheronte."
 79 Allor con li occhi vergognosi e bassi,
 temendo no 'l mio dir li fosse grave,
 infino al fiume del parlar mi trassi.
 82 Ed ecco verso noi venir per nave
 un vecchio, bianco per antico pelo,
 gridando: "Guai a voi, anime prave!
 85 Non isperate mai veder lo cielo:
 i' vegno per menarvi a l'altra riva
 ne le tenebre eterne, in caldo e 'n gelo.
 88 E tu che se' costì, anima viva,
 partiti da cotesti che son morti."
 Ma poi che vide ch'io non mi partiva,
 91 disse: "Per altra via, per altri porti
 verrai a piaggia, non qui, per passare:
 più lieve legno convien che ti porti."
 94 E 'l duca lui: "Caron, non ti crucciare:
 vuolsi così colà dove si puote
 ciò che si vuole, e più non dimandare."
 97 Quinci fuor quete le lanose gote
 al nocchier de la livida palude,
 che 'ntorno a li occhi avea di fannme rote.
 100 Ma quell' anime, ch'eran lasse e nude,
 cangiar colore e dibattero i denti,
 ratto che 'nteser le parole crude.
 103 Bestemmiavano Dio e lor parenti,
 l'umana spezie e 'l loco e 'l tempo e 'l seme
 di lor semenza e di lor nascimenti.
 106 Poi si ritrasser tutte quante insieme,
 forte piangendo, a la riva malvagia
 ch'attende ciascun uom che Dio non teme.

70 And when I gazed beyond them, I saw people on
 the bank of a great river; so I said, "Master, now
 grant
 73 that I may know who those are, and what
 disposition makes them seem so ready to cross over,
 as I can discern in spite of the weak light."
 76 And he to me: "These things will be made known
 to you when we stay our steps on the gloomy shore of
 Acheron."
 79 Then with eyes shamefast and cast down, afraid
 that my speaking might displease him, I refrained
 from speech until we reached the river.
 82 And behold coming toward us in a boat an old
 man, white with the hairs of age, crying: "Woe to
 you, wicked souls!
 85 Never hope to see the sky: I come to lead you to
 the other shore, to the eternal shadows, to heat and
 freezing.
 88 And you who are over there, living soul, separate
 yourself from these here, who are dead." But when
 he saw that I did not leave,
 91 he said: "By another way, through other ports will
 you come to shore, not by crossing here: a lighter
 vessel must carry you."
 94 And my leader to him: "Charon, do not torture
 yourself with anger: this is willed where what is
 willed can be done, so ask no more."
 97 Then were quiet the woolly jowls of the pilot of
 the livid swamp; around his eyes he had wheels of
 flame.
 100 But those weary, naked souls changed color and
 gnashed their teeth, as soon as they heard his harsh
 words.
 103 They cursed God and their parents, the human
 race and the place and the time and the seed of their
 sowing and of their birth.
 106 Then all of them together, weeping loudly, drew
 near the evil shore that awaits each one who does
 not fear God.

109 Caron dimonio, con occhi di bragia,
 loro accennando tutte le raccoglie;
 batte col remo qualunque s'adagia.
 112 Come d'autunno si levan le foglie
 l'una appresso de l'altra, fin che 'l ramo
 vede a la terra tutte le sue spoglie:
 115 similmente il mal seme d'Adamo
 gittransi di quel lito ad una ad una
 per cenni, come angel per suo richiamo.
 118 Così sen vanno su per l'onda bruna,
 e avanti che sien di là discese,
 anche di qua nuova schiera s'aua.
 121 "Figliuol mio," disse 'l maestro cortese,
 "quelli che muoion ne l'ira di Dio
 tutti convegnon qui d'ogne paese;
 124 e pronti sono a trapassar lo rio,
 ché la divina giustizia li sprona
 sì che la tema si volve in disio.
 127 Quinci non passa mai anima buona;
 e però, se Caron di te si lagna,
 ben puoi sapere omai che 'l suo dir suona."
 130 Finito questo, la buia campagna
 tremò sì forte che de lo spavento
 la mente di sudore ancor mi bagna.
 133 La terra lagrimosa diede vento
 che balenò una luce vermiglia
 la qual mi vinse ciascun sentimento,
 136 e caddi come l'uom cui sonno piglia.

Charon the demon, with eyes like glowing coals,
 making signs to them, gathers them all in; he beats
 with his oar whoever lingers.
 As in autumn the leaves remove themselves one
 after the other, until the branch sees all its raiment on
 the ground:
 so the evil seed of Adam throw themselves from
 that shore one by one, when beckoned to, each like a
 falcon to its lure.
 Thus they go off across the dark waves, and
 before they have disembarked over there, over here
 again a new flock gathers.
 "My son," said my courteous master, "those who
 die in God's anger all come together here from every
 land;
 and they are ready to cross over the river, for
 God's justice so spurs them that fear turns to desire.
 No good soul ever passes this way; and so, if
 Charon complains of you, you can well understand
 what his words mean."
 As he finished, the dark landscape trembled so
 violently that in terror my memory bathes me again
 with sweat.
 The tearful earth gave forth a wind that flashed
 with a crimson light which overcame all feeling in me,
 and I fell like one whom sleep is taking.



1-9. **THROUGH ME . . . YOU WHO ENTER:** Like Vergil, Dante gives Hell both an outer and an inner gate (see 8.68 and 9.104, with notes). The early commentators identify the "speaking gate" as a personification; Morpurgo (1926; cited in Simonelli 1993) studied the genre of "gate-inscriptions" in medieval Latin; he found they typically include a statement of intent, often anaphorically with *per me* [through me] (cf. lines 1-3); the name of the builder (cf. lines 4-6); and the date of building (cf. line 7). Compare John 10.9, where Christ says, "I am the door [ostium]. Through me, if any man enter in, he shall be saved."

1. **GRIEVING CITY:** The grieving city derives from the biblical personification of Jerusalem mourning its destruction in 586 B.C. See Lamentations 1.1-2:

How doth the city sit solitary. . . . Weeping she hath wept in the night,
and her tears are on her cheeks: there is none to comfort her.

The destruction of Jerusalem was regarded by the exegetes as a figure of the Last Judgment and thus applicable to Hell (this figure is discussed further in the note on 30.58-61). Dante quotes the first verse both in the *Vita nuova* (Chapter 29, on the death of Beatrice) and in a political epistle. That both Heaven and Hell are referred to as cities (cf. 1.126, 128) derives from Augustine's theory of the Earthly and Heavenly Cities in the *City of God*.

5-6. **DIVINE POWER . . . PRIMAL LOVE:** Power is the attribute of the Father, wisdom of the Son, and love of the Spirit: all creation is the work of the Trinity. The central theme of the *Inferno*, of course, is the carrying out of God's justice on sin.

7-8. **NO THINGS . . . EXCEPT ETERNAL ONES:** In *Par.* 29.22-36, Dante notes that the three eternal creatures are the angels (pure form or act), prime matter (pure potentiality), and the heavens (potentiality partially realized in act).

7. **CREATED:** That Hell was prepared for the rebel angels is biblical (Matt. 25.41: "the everlasting fire . . . was prepared for the devil and his angels"); the rebellion of the angels and their casting out from Heaven is mentioned in Apoc. 12.9:

and that great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, who seduceth the whole world: and he was cast unto the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

also 2 Peter 2.4.

dark color: The expression can refer both to the appearance of the writing and to the obscure and harsh meaning ("rhetorical" color).

1. **above a gate:** The gate stands open, like that of Vergil's Hades (*Aen.* 1.127: "noctes atque dies patet atri ianua Dis") [all night and all day the gate [black Dis stands open], but for Dante it was not always so (see 4.52-63 and note).

21. **sense is hard:** See John 6.61: "durus est hoc sermo" [this saying is hard], and by the disciples hearing Christ offer his flesh as food. See also 9.61-63, *Inferno* 8.19-22, with notes.

13-15. **Here one must abandon . . . must die here:** Note the antithesis with line 9. The sense echoes the Sybil in *Aen.* 6.261: "Nunc animis opus, Aenea, nunc pectore firmo" [Now there is need, Aeneas, of bravery, of a strong heart]: the relation between the pilgrim and his guide Virgil is patterned in many respects on that between Aeneas and the Sybil. In this canto Dante alludes to or quotes Aeneas's entrance into Hades (*Aen.* 6.261-414) more than a dozen times.

18. **good of the intellect:** The intellectual vision of God. The Aristotelian source of the phrase (*Nicomachean Ethics* 6.2.1139a) is quoted by Dante at *Convivio* 2.13.6: "as the Philosopher says . . . , the truth is the good of the intellect."

21. **the secret things:** Knowledge of the other world. Compare *Aen.* 6.264-67:

Di, quibus imperium est animarum, umbraeque silentes
et Chaos et Phlegethon, loca nocte tacenta late,
sit mihi fas audita loqui, sit numine vestro
pandere res alta terra et caligine messas.

[Gods, whose power controls the shades [of the dead], and you, silent shadows, and Chaos and Phlegethon, broad places silent in the night, let it not be impious for me to speak things heard, let it be with your power that I set forth things drowned in the deep earth and darkness.]

22-27. Loud wailing . . . sounds of blows: Compare Matt. 13:42: "There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth," also echoed in line 101, where the meaning of "chattering" includes "gnashing." See also *Aen.* 6.557-59 (of the gate to Tartarus):

Hinc exaudiri gemitus et saeva sonare
verbera, tum stridor ferri tractaeque catenae

[From there wailing and fierce blows were heard,
then the grating of irons and chains dragging]

23. starless air: Compare *Aen.* 6.534: "tristis sine sole domos" [gloomy sunless dwellings]; the last word of each cantica of the poem is *stars*.

24. I shed tears: The first of the pilgrim's varying emotional responses to Hell.

25. Strange languages, horrible tongues: The first hint of Hell's kinship with Babel, the place of confused speech.

29. darkened without time: Air darkened forever, beyond time.

31. my head girt with horror: In other words, the pilgrim's scalp is bristling (Latin *horreo*, to bristle) all around his head. The line echoes *Aen.* 2.559: "At me tum primum saevus circumscivit horror" [Then a dreadful horror first encircled me]; Aeneas is describing the decapitation of Priam, king of Troy.

36. without infamy and without praise: Dante's journey will bring infamy to those in Hell and renewed or better reputations to the blessed; but the neutrals are barred from any preservation of their reputations or "names." This verse is usually taken as a reference to Apoc. 3:15-16, spoken by Christ the Judge in reproof of Laodicea: "because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will begin to vomit thee out of my mouth" (see the note to line 64).

37-39. They are mixed . . . for themselves: The legend of the neutral angels, mentioned in numerous medieval texts, including the *Voyage of Saint Brendan*, goes back at least as far as Clement of Alexandria (Gmelin). This mixing of human and angelic is not observed anywhere else in the poem.

39. but were for themselves: The rebel angels first averted themselves from God and then actively turned to evil with Satan, but the neutrals, once averted

did not act further (Freccero [1960] prefers the translation "stood by themselves"); theirs is a "double negation," and lines 36-52 offer a number of places where the double exclusion of the neutrals assumes a characteristic cletic form (Freccero 1983).

35. flag running in circles: The first instance of Dante's *contropasso* [counter-*tempo*]—the fitting of the punishment to the sin (see 28.142). The flag acts as lure, the wasps and flies as prods or stimuli, punishing the neutrals' purposelessness and lack of affiliation.

47. death had undone so many: The infinite number of the dead is a classical topos, discussed in the note to lines 112-17, but Dante's point is more barbed. I have translated this line in *The Waste Land*.

50. him who in his cowardice . . . great refusal: This unnamed soul has been identified as Pontius Pilate, Esau, and a host of others. But Pietro dal Martone, the pious monastic reformer (he founded the order of Celestines) elevated to the papacy in 1294 as Celestine V and canonized shortly after his death, is the choice of the earliest commentators (the expression "saw and knew" suggests that Dante had seen him, and Pietro was in Florence in 1280, though the phrase is also used of Hector and Aeneas in Canto 4). Celestine is a plausible candidate because his abdication cleared the way for the accession of Benedetto Caetani as Boniface VIII, Dante's corrupt enemy (see 19.52-57, 27.85-105). Celestine's act would thus have been a "neutral" failure to oppose a patent evil, resulting from *viltà* [cowardice] (see Virgil's words to the pilgrim in 2.45), but all identifications are inconclusive.

62-64. sect of cowards . . . wretches: The word for "coward" here, *cattivo* (used also in line 37), still retained for Dante the meaning of "captive" (cf. 30.16).

64. never were alive: See Apoc. 3.1 (of the Church at Sardis): "I know thy works, that thou hast the name of being alive: and thou art dead."

65-69. large flies and wasps . . . worms: In Dante's day, flies, wasps, and worms were thought to be born of putrefaction.

70-78. I saw people . . . Acheron: Dante clusters a number of references to Vergil's poem in this part of the canto (a dozen in lines 70-105 alone), where the subject is the boundary river of Hades, the Acheron (Dante has rearranged

the traditional rivers of the underworld, which are not clearly distinguished in Vergil's treatment). Compare *Aen.* 6.318-20:

Dic, ait, o virgo, quid vult concursus ad amnem?
quidve petunt animae? Vel quo discrimine ripas
hae linqunt, illae remis vada livida verrunt?

[He says: Say, virgin, what means this crowding at the river?
what do the souls seek? Or by what decision
do these remain on the shore, while those others beat the dark waters with
oars?]

77-81. when we stay our steps . . . until we reached the river: See *Aen.* 6.295: "Hinc via Tartarei quae fert Acherontis ad undas" [From here the way led down to the waters of infernal Acheron], and 6.384: "Ergo iter inceptum peragunt fluvioque propinquant" [They took up their journey again and approached the river].

82-111. And behold . . . whoever moves slowly: In these lines, Dante adapts Vergil's portrait of Charon, the traditional ferryman of the Styx, *Aen.* 6.298-305:

Portitor has horrendus aquas et flumina servat
terribili squalore Charon, cui plurima mento
cantus inculca iacet, stant lumina flamma,
sordidus et umertis nodo dependet amictus.
Ipse ratem conto subigit velisque ministrat
et ferruginea subvecat corpora cumba,
iam senior, sed cruda deo viridisque senectus.

[A fearsome ferryman guards these waters, this river:
Charon. His filth is frightening, thick gray straggly
whiskers cover his chin; his eyes are flames.
A dirty cloak hangs from his shoulders by a knot.
With a pole he steers and tends the sail
of the iron-hued skiff that conveys the bodies across.
He is old now, but a god's eld is green and raw.]

Note, in Dante's text, 82 "old man" (cf. *senior*), 83 "white with hairs of age" and 97 "woolly cheeks" (cf. *canities mento inculca*), 99 "wheels of flame," "eyes like glowing coals" (cf. *stant lumina flammae*). For this last, compare Apoc. 1.14: "his eyes were as a flame of fire."

... makes Charon a devil (line 109), as he does other figures from the Italian/classical underworld, in keeping with biblical/Augustinian tradition (see the note to 1.72).

89. living soul, separate yourself from these here: Compare *Aen.* 81-94:

Fare age quid venias iam istinc, et comprime gressum.
Umbrarum hic locus est, somni noctisque soporae:
corpora viva nefas Stygia vectare carina.

[Say at once from there, why do you come, and halt your steps.
This is the place of shades, dreams, and the sleep of night:
it is sacrilege to carry living bodies in the Stygian hull.]

91-93. By another way . . . must carry you: Aeneas crosses in Charon's boat, but how the pilgrim crosses Acheron is left unspecified. Charon's words imply that the pilgrim is destined for salvation. The "lighter vessel" appears in *Purg.* 2.40-42.

94-96. this is willed . . . ask no more: The first of several passages where Vergil quells protest by invoking the theological commonplace of God's omnipotence (see 5.22-24, which are identical to these lines, and 7.10-12). These lines have the distinction of being the first attested quotation from the *Inferno*, found on the inside front cover of a register of criminal acts written in Bologna by the notary Gano degli Uesepi of San Gimignano in 1317 (this is important evidence of the circulation of the *Inferno* during Dante's lifetime [Livi 1918]) (see the note to 5.23).

103-5. They cursed God . . . and of their birth: See Jer. 20.14: "Cursed be the day wherein I was born: let not the day in which my mother bore me, be blessed." See also Job 3.1 and Hosea [Vulgate Osee] 9.11.

111. beats with his oar: This vivid detail, not in Vergil, is vividly rendered by Michelangelo in the Sistine Chapel's *Last Judgment*.

112-17. As in autumn . . . to its lure: See *Aen.* 6.309-12:

Quam multa in silvis autumni frigore primo
lapsa cadunt folia, aut ad terram gurgite ab alto
quam multae glomerantur aves, ubi frigidus annus
trans pontum fugat et terris immittit apricus.

[As numerous as in the forest at the first chill of autumn, the leaves fall, let loose, or on the land from the deep waves the many birds gather, when the cold season drives them overseas to warmer climes.]

This famous simile, in Vergil an imitation of Homer, was taken up by Milton for the multitudes of rebel angels and by Shelley for dead leaves driven by the West Wind. Where Vergil's simile gives two views of large numbers—the multitude of souls as dead leaves, as birds—for Dante the shift from one metaphor to the next (closely linked by the leaf and the bird being single) follows the transformation in the souls, as their reluctance is changed into a desire to cross.

115. the evil seed of Adam: Those of Adam's descendants who are damned (even those who did not sin voluntarily are damned by the sin inherited from Adam unless redeemed by faith in Christ). The image draws on the medieval commonplace of the tree of Adam's progeny.

117. each like a falcon to its lure: Dante's term is the generic *uccello* [bird], but the reference is clear and is the first of a large number of images drawn from falconry. Falconers used the lure, often consisting of shiny pieces of metal that could be whirled by an attached cord, to recall their birds after the hunt.

118. dark waves: Compare *Aen.* 5.2, "fluctusque atros."

123. together here from every land: Dante gives itineraries for the soul after death at 1.3.27 and *Purg.* 2.101–5; the idea of a gathering of birds, introduced in the simile of lines 112–17, is still at work here, as in line 119.

125–26. God's justice . . . turns to desire: See the note to lines 112–17. Compare *Aen.* 6.313–14:

stabant orantes primi transmittere cursum
tendebantque manus ripae ulterioris amore.

[the first stood praying to be taken across,
they stretched out their hands in desire for the farther shore.]

130–133. the dark landscape . . . a wind: Medieval geology, based on Seneca's *Natural Questions* and Aristotle's *Meteorology*, understood earthquakes as the result of violent winds pent up in the earth (cf. *Purg.* 21.56–57); like winds

atmosphere, subterranean winds could produce lightning and thunder. Cause of this subterranean wind would not seem to be natural.

32. my memory . . . with sweat: Another instance of the narrating poet's being caught again in the experience narrated, discussed in the note to 1.4–7.

one whom sleep is taking: For other "sleeps" and "swoons" of the poem, see 1.2, 1.6, 5.142, and *Purgatorio* 9, 19, 27, and 31.