

[**Note:** Portions of *La Divina Commedia* in English *terza rima* translation follow essay.]

## ONE DOES NOT DALLY WITH DANTE...

No, one absolutely should not! Such I discovered some 30 years ago during a mid-life “crisis” of my own, when I undertook translating Dante Alighieri’s *La Divina Commedia* (“The Divine Comedy”) from the original Italian into English. A great number of English renditions exist; certainly it wasn’t my intent to try to better them. I began simply for mental occupation, to try to tell the story in English strictly in the *terza rima* form of the original, composed in tercets of 11-13 syllables of which the last words or syllables of first and third lines rhyme.<sup>1</sup> The year of Alighieri’s birth in Florence, Italy is estimated c. 1265 c.e. and the writing of his epic poem, roughly between 1308 and his death. He had named his work only “Comedy;” “Divine” was bestowed by Giovanni Boccaccio, another Italian author and poet. It is held one of the greatest works of world literature, and gave birth to a new literary formation separate from the reigning Latin of clergy and the sophisticatedly educated.

Although immortalized for the *Commedia*, Alighieri wrote prolifically. Other major works include (not limited to) *De Monarchia* (“On Monarchy”/“On World Government” c. 1313, presenting his “political perspective, also a major theme in the *Commedia*”); *Questia de aqua et terra*, c. 1320 (“a scholastic treatise on physics”); lyrics and sonnets (*La Vita Nuova*); and *De vulgari eloquentia*, 1304-1306 (“a Latin treatise ‘on the vernacular tongue’”). The latter treatise focused on Alighieri’s “opposition to the general assumption of his day that Latin must be used for all important writing, urging enrichment with the best from all the spoken dialects to establish a serious literary language, thus unifying the separated Italian territories by the creation of a national culture.”<sup>2</sup>

Italian, a direct offshoot of the Latin of Rome and conveyed to peoples it dominated, is closest to Latin of all Romance languages. Fourteenth century medieval Italy was a mélange of dialects, over which Tuscan became predominate. *La Commedia*;, written in Alighieri’s native Tuscan vernacular, became forbearer of standardized Italian. One encounters some words the closest definition of which better is obtained, not from Italian but their Latin root. The “Divine Comedy” proved Alighieri’s premise-- advanced also in two unfinished treatises--that eloquence in the vernacular could match that of Latin. The lovely cadence of the original is a direct result of Italian’s many-syllable words, so naturally my exercise largely meant using English words of longer syllables. (Quite admittedly, that involved a reach open to criticism.)

*La Commedia* is a first-person tale of a man’s journey through the post-death realms advanced by Christian theology. It is told in three primary parts or *cantiche*: *Inferno* (“Hell”), *Purgatorio* (“Purgatory”), and *Paradiso* (“Paradise”). Each of the three main parts, or *contos*, has 33 three-line verses, for a total of 99 excluding an introductory passage.<sup>3</sup> By the end of three years, my psyche then on track of new life circumstances, merely two cantos were completed. This year (2014), a portion of the third was undertaken, for a total of 367 lines. (I recall how, at the outset, *hubris* whispered a notion

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<sup>1</sup> One finds the form referred to as *hendecasyllabic*, meaning 11 syllables, but very often employing 12 or 13 in a line.

<sup>2</sup> Benet, Wm. Rose, *The Reader’s Encyclopedia*, page 248.

<sup>3</sup> The exact year of Alighieri’s birth being unknown, the prevalence of 33 cannot be attributed definitively to his age when the work began. (However, 33 does correlate with the protagonist’s assertion of being at the mid-point of what then was generally anticipated longevity.)

I might translate the entire work. Needless to say, 13,866 lines remaining of the epic's 14,233, at age 78 certain fantasies perforce must be abandoned!)

The story begins with the protagonist-poet having lost his way in a (psychologically allegorical) dark wood. In place of rewriting a summary of the tale, *Benet's* words cannot be improved:

*"He is met by the spirit of Vergil, the great classical poet whom Dante considers the incarnation of the highest knowledge attainable by the human mind. ... The cosmology, angelology, and theology of the work are based firmly on the system of St. Thomas Aquinas, but Dante considered the Church of his time a 'harlot' no longer serving God—he meets, for instance, seven popes in the Inferno.... ... Dante's literal journey also is an allegory of the progress of the individual soul toward God, and the progress of political and social mankind toward peace on earth...".<sup>4</sup>*

In part one of the work, *Inferno/Hell*, Vergil conducts Dante through the region of damnation: *"In the anteroom are those who did nothing in life, neither good nor evil. Then follow nine conically descending levels of Hell:...Limbo, where are the blameless but unbaptized spirits, including the great men of pagan antiquity, [followed by] the circles of the sins of incontinence, least terribly punished, includ[ing] carnal sinners...; the gluttons, the misers and the spendthrifts, the wrathful and the sullen. With the sixth circle, that of the heretics, begin the horrible, generally fiery torments of the City of Dis [Hades]. The seventh circle contains the violent against others (murderers), against self (suicides) and against God and Nature (blasphemers, perverts, and the like). The eighth level includes 10 categories of the fraudulent (seducers, sorcerers, thieves, hypocrites, and various kinds of liars and evil counselors). The most odious of the fraudulent, the traitors ["the betrayers of their own relatives or country"] are frozen in the ice of the ninth circle.... [A]t the very center., Lucifer with three heads, gnawing on Brutus and Cassius, the betrayers of Julius Caesar, and Judas Iscariot, the betrayer of Jesus Christ. Turning around at Lucifer's waist, Dante and Vergil emerge through a tunnel into the opposite hemisphere, which is covered with water, to approach the island of the mountain of Purgatory".<sup>5</sup>*

In Part II, *Purgatorio*, *"Vergil conducts Dante up the mountain of Purgatory, or purification."* At the foot, *"Ante-Purgatory, are the negligent who...delayed repentance for their sins and must wait as long as they delayed before beginning their ascent. A terrace makes an ascending spiral up the mountain, and repentant spirits toil forward on it, bowed beneath burdens appropriate to the sins of which they must be purged... ... Dante must join in the labors of this ascent. [Although his] progress is much more rapid than others, [he] successively meets those doing penance for pride, envy, wrath, sloth, avarice, gluttony and lust.*

*"Having guided Dante as far as human intellect can go, Vergil leaves him at the entrance to Paradise [where] Matilda, representing the perfect active life, conducts him through an Eden-like garden to Beatrice, [representing] the perfect contemplative life.... After a series of allegorical appearances and adventures, representing the crises of the Roman Catholic Church, Beatrice prepares Dante for the ascent to Paradise."<sup>6</sup>*

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<sup>4</sup> Benet, *op cit*, page 275.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, pages 498-499.

<sup>6</sup> *Loc cit*, pages 827-828,

"Beatrice" has been identified as Beatrice Portinari (1266-1290), a Florentine woman whom Dante reportedly loved from the time of his boyhood and idealized.<sup>7</sup>

In Part III, Beatrice and Dante are transported to where Dante "*first hears the musical harmony of the heavenly spheres. They move through eight concentric heavens of the Moon, Mercury, Venus, Sun, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn and the Fixed Stars, [there being in each those] blessed spirits notable for its appropriate virtue. ... The ninth heaven is the Primum Mobile, divided into the nine orders of the angels. And beyond is the Empyrean, a river of radiant light at center of which is God's court, pictured as a white rose whose tiers of petals hold angels and beatified souls united in glorification of God. [Beatrice] resumes her place in the rose, and is replaced by St. Bernard...[who prays] the Virgin Mary to allow Dante a glimpse of the Godhead.*" Dante's will, so thoroughly purified although still mortal, "*is totally merged in the Love and Will of the Creator, and thus capable of gazing for a moment on the supremely radiant light of the Trinity in Unity.*"<sup>8</sup>

The political view of the *La Commedia* reflected that of *De Monarchia*, which deplored rivalry for supreme political power between emperors and papacy. In accord with the deep religious faith Alighieri did have, he advanced his belief in peace through a "universal monarchy of the empire...recognized as being dependent only on God, although reverent toward the spiritual authority of the Church...Church and State allies [but] with separate responsibilities in guiding mankind."<sup>9</sup>

My literary-minded, immigrant father was destined to be an uncomplaining laborer supporting a large family. Had Fate deemed otherwise, he himself may have been a poet. He kept his copy of *La Divina Commedia* in a drawer bedside and read from it almost nightly. That book, together with a modest-sized, bronze bust of Alighieri, was my legacy. The worn, thick little book (3-1/2 x 4-3/4 x 1-3/4 inches) is constituted of fine-sheaved, fine-printed pages that include the Gustav Dore illustrations. The burgundy embossed leather cover is well frayed; tape supports its broken spine.

It became obvious that, if I was to learn what Father seemed to find so humorously fitting of after-life sufferings Alighieri imposed on certain real life politicians, ecclesiastics and aristocrats, I needed to know European and Italian history. Well (I do allow!), all one needs do to ascertain the enormity of *that* undertaking is to peruse the three volumes of Gibbons. Overwhelmed by quantity and minutiae of its detail, I turned to books which seemed conveniently synthesized. Even there, however, one loses track in the progressions of Rome: from a Republic to Empire; succeeding Caesars and Emperors (often dictated by far-flung legions under different vying generals); the split of Rome's empire into *Western Roman Empire* and *Eastern Roman Empire*, dividing medieval Christianity first into two Latin branches--West and East emperors and "patriarchs"--with ensuing ecclesiastical disputes among the Church's jurisdictional patriarchates of Alexandria, Antioch, Rome, and Constantinople—all that *before* the entity that became known as the *Holy Roman Empire* (to say

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<sup>7</sup> As commemorated in his *La Vita Nuova*, written after her young death, also after she had married another. Subsequently (believed c. 1292) Alighieri married Gemma Donati, by whom he had two sons and one or two daughters.

<sup>8</sup> *Op cit*, page 757.

<sup>9</sup> *Loc cit*, page 248.

nothing of monarchical competitions in Italy itself; and Saxon, Goth, and Germanic involvements that ultimately would lead to formations of Britain, France, and Germany)!

In a few words, Alighieri's Italy in the later middle Ages was a broil of ethnic, tribal, royal, and individual politics that had been brewing for centuries. Twelfth-century rival German political parties known as "Guelphs" and "Ghibellines" had been adopted by 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century Italian political parties. Ghibellines supported the then-German, Holy Roman Emperor. The Guelphs, usually supported by the papacy, opposed the emperor.

*"...[I]n the implacable discord of the two factions, the Ghibelins [sic] were attached to the emperor while the Guelfs displayed the banner of liberty and the church."*<sup>10</sup>

Tuscany's Guelphs initially were divided into two rival factions--"Whites" (*Bianchi*) and "Blacks" (*Neri*). Whites advocated for a democratic, constitutional Florence independent of both emperor and pope; Blacks favored compromise with the papacy. Dante affiliated with Whites and "joined actively in both the politics and the actual fighting between Guelphs and Ghibellines." But when Guelph Blacks achieved factional power in late 1301, the Guelph Whites allied with the Ghibellines, and joined in several unsuccessful attacks on Florence.<sup>11</sup>

In 1302, Pope Boniface VIII had issued his papal bull, *Unum sanctum*, which claimed papal supremacy over every human being.<sup>12</sup>

*"Boniface used the authority which he claimed as pope to establish a temporal dominion in central Italy. The treatment of his political opponents as sinners goes far to explain the bitterness aroused in the minds of his enemies. Italian opposition to Boniface emanated from four principal quarters. [First,] nearest home were the members of the great Ghibelline house of Colonna who, like their rivals the Orsini [Ursini], held estates and fortresses...and competed for control of the city of Rome and of the College of Cardinals. Boniface...set himself to destroy the power of Colonna, and to enrich his own relatives at the Orsinis' expense. [Second,] When Sicilians rebelled, rendering ineffective a treaty of territorial exchanges made by Boniface with Sicily's prior ruler (James of Aragon), Sicily's subjects were added to the list of Boniface enemies. **Third was the split of the Guelfs of Florence into the 'Whites' and the 'Blacks'--Ghibellines having been expelled [and] Boniface allying himself with the Blacks.**"*<sup>13</sup>

Alighieri was among the "Whites" exiled from Florence in 1302; and, with many others, he was sentenced to perpetual banishment, and condemned to death by burning if caught again in Florence. Thereafter he existed until he died under patronage of Ghibelline leaders, always away from his beloved Florence, where his wife and children remained.

*"Alighieri's 'bitter hatred shown in the Commedia for Boniface VIII is due in part to Boniface's personal responsibility for Dante's exile. A deeper cause [was] Dante's veneration for the Papacy*

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<sup>10</sup> Gibbon, Edward, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Vol. III, page 1712.

<sup>11</sup> Benet, *op cit*, pages 103, 248, 428.

<sup>12</sup> See Appendix for a sketchy addition to chronological events.

<sup>13</sup> Hearder, H. and Waley, D. P., Editors, *A Short History of Italy*, New York:NY and Australia:Melbourne; Cambridge University Press, 1986, pages 53ff.

*as the supreme spiritual power, and his conviction that it was degraded and turned from its true purpose by its assumption of temporal prerogatives. The Papacy under Boniface had usurped the function of the empire. 'Rome...used to have two suns, which lighted the roads of the world and of God. Now one has extinguished the other, the sword is joined with the pastoral staff, and the two together must perforce go ill.'"<sup>14</sup> pages 55-56.*

Here, then, are the current results of my humble exercise:

## ***LA DIVINA COMMEDIA of DANTE ALIGIERI***

### **INFERNO**

Tosca Lenci  
(2016 edit of 2014 translation)

#### **Canto I**

*Halfway along this journey of our existence,  
I found myself in a forest of such darkness  
the proper direction could not be distinguished.*

*Oh, to say all that it was is a difficult thing!—  
that savage forest, so dense and overpowering,  
my fear is renewed in the remembering.*

*Much of it is bitter--death itself, little more.  
But in order to deal with the good encountered  
I shall speak of other things there that I saw.*

*I can't recall well how I came upon that entry,  
so filled with sleepiness was I at that moment  
when from the true way I was cut off completely.*

*But then I was at the foot of an adjoining hill  
where there came an end, finally, to that valley  
which struck such fear in my heart I can feel it still.*

*I looked up and beheld that the rays of the sun  
already were clothing the shoulders of the hill  
with more light than on any path is led anyone.*

*There departed from me then a little of that fright  
which, unremittingly filling the lake of my heart,  
had caused me to pass such a pitiful night.*

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, pages 55-56.

*And, in the way that one exhausted and gasping for air,  
delivered out of danger to the ocean's shore,  
turns around to the perilous waters to stare,*

*Thus my soul also, even as it was fleeing,  
did turn and take a last backward look at that pass  
which never before had let go a living being.*

*Once my tired body had rested temporarily,  
I again set out upon the forsaken landscape  
which beneath each footstep now ascended steadily.*

*And lo there came toward me from near the top of  
the slope  
a lynx, lithely graceful and exceedingly swift,  
all covered by a sleek multi-colored coat.*

*And it persisted in circling in front of me then,  
and impeded me greatly indeed along my way,  
to which it kept me from returning time and again.*

*It was then the beginning hour of morning time,  
and the sun was climbing with the very same stars  
that were joined with it when Creation's love divine*

*first placed into motion all beauties that abide;  
so I had cause to feel hopeful again by reason  
of that animal's colorfully spotted hide,*

*the hour of the day, and sweet season of the year...  
but not so, I wasn't given again to know fear  
at the sight of a lion that was next to appear.*

*Now this apparition approaching me opposite,  
carrying its head high and ravenous with hunger,  
was such the very air seemed to stand still in awe of it.*

*With him, a she-wolf that was hungering so badly  
in all of her skinniness she seemed but a carcass  
despite already having ended many lives sadly.*

*This one brought the gravest weight to descend on me  
by virtue of the fear provoked by the looks of her,  
and I lost the high hope that I had felt previously.*

*Like those who without effort acquire everything,*

*but their time having run out are forced to lose it,  
so all of their thinking is plaintive and sorrowing,*

*so was I made to feel by that relentless beast,  
which continuing toward me little by little  
was forcing my retreat to where the sun reached least.*

*As I stumbled to lower ground, losing my balance,  
before my eyes there manifested a presence  
that seemed to be weakened from a long time of silence.*

*On seeing that presence, from out of the desolate  
misery inside of me I was forced to cry out,  
“Which is it you are?--spectre, or man incarnate?”*

*He replied, “Not man; man I already have been.  
My mother and father both were Lombardian,  
and Mantua the native land of each of them.*

*“Born under Julius, though he was born before I was.  
I was observer at Rome under good Augustus  
during the period of false gods and liars.*

*“I was a poet and I sang of the righteous  
young son of Anchise as he returned from Troy,  
after haughty Ilium was reduced to ashes.”<sup>15</sup>*

*“But you--why are you returning to all that madness?  
Why not climb instead that blissfully sweet mountain  
that is origin and cause of every gladness?”*

*“Are you now not that Vergil?—the very fountainhead  
of speech overflowing that becomes a wide river?”  
I exclaimed somewhat imprudently but with bowed head.*

*“Oh, of other poets all of honorable mention,  
they were worthy of long study and my great love  
which was the cause for my seeking your dimension.*

*“You were my teacher and mentor, the author for me.*

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<sup>15</sup> Legendarily, Anchise was a prince of Dardania neighboring ancient Troy. Publius Vergilius Maro *Virgil* (70 – 19 b.c.e.). in his classic epic poem, the *Aeneid*, tells the story of how Anchise’s son, Aeneas, (said to have been born of the Goddess Aphrodite), carried his father from the burning sack of Troy; how they sailed with survivors of Troy to the west coast of Italy in search of a new homeland; and how Aeneas did battle to found a city that would become Rome.

*You the one and one, only, who gave unto me  
that beautiful style I respect so deeply.*

*“See that wild beast from which I have turned to flee?  
Assist me to escape from her, oh famous sage,  
for she makes me quake in every vein and artery!”*

*“It would be better for you to take another path  
because,” he responded, “I see weeping ahead  
if you insist on staying in this place of wrath.*

*“For that beast, the reason behind all of your cries,  
does not permit any person to get beyond her;  
indeed, impedes them so much as to cause their demise.*

*“And her nature is so evil and bent upon gore  
that the greed of her appetite never is sated,  
and after each meal she is hungrier than before.*

*“Many are the animals to which she plights her troth  
and more will be, until the hound finally comes  
to cause her to die in the pangs of bringing forth.”<sup>16</sup>*

*“Those born thereby will feed not on land or precious  
ores,  
but shall be nourished by knowledge, love, and virtue;  
and their nation, from the hills to where Mount Feltro  
soars,*

*“of that humble Italy that shall be whole once more,  
for which died the maid Camilla, and Enrialo,  
and Turno and Niso, from the woundings of war.”<sup>17</sup>*

*“These newborn shall hunt for her from villa to villa  
until they have forced her to return into Hell—  
there, from whence envy originally unleashed her.*

*“Wherefore for you, I think--and it is my opinion—*

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<sup>16</sup> Per Ciardi, *hound* “[a]lmost certainly refers to Can Grande della Scala (1290-1329), great Italian leader born in Verona, which lies between the towns of Feltre and Montelfeltro.” Page 33.

<sup>17</sup> In Italy, Aeneas successfully territorially battled one Turnus/*Torno*, King of the Rutulians, also winning thereby the hand of Lavinia (daughter of King Latinus), who previously had been promised to Turnus. Niso/*Nisus* and Enrialo/*Euryaluso* “were Trojan comrades-in-arms who died together fighting Rutulians. Camilla was the daughter of the Latian king and [a Volscian] warrior woman; she was killed in a horse charge against the Trojans.... Turnus was killed by Aeneas in a duel.” Ciardi, page 32.



*you should follow me and, with myself as your  
guide, withdraw from here unto the eternal region,*

*“wherein you will hear the shriekings of desperation;  
and you will see the spirits of the ancients, mourning  
all lamentations of Death’s second visitation.*

*“And there also you will see those content to endure,  
because from the fire they know, with time, to ascend  
and be joined together with those blessed and pure.*

*“From that point should you wish to ascend farther  
there shall be a soul that is more worthy than mine,  
and to whom at our parting I shall give you over;*

*“as the Emperor who reigns over that dominion,  
for the reason that I rebelled against his laws,  
does not want to have sight of me in his kingdom.*

*“Of all parts of the empire He rules in all respects,  
that is His own City and high seat of authority.  
Oh, happy is the one who thereto He elects!”*

*And I, to him, “Poet, once again I do implore,  
by that God whom you once did not deign to recognize,  
in order I may escape present evil and more,*

*“that you lead me to the place of which you were  
speaking,  
so that I, yes, will see the gate of Saint Peter  
and all that you have made to sound so intriguing.”*

*At that he moved off, and I followed my leader....*

## **Canto II**

*The day was ending in the dusk of the setting sun.  
All the souls upon the earth were being released  
from their toils except for me--alone, one--*

*being held in preparation to sustain the war--  
yes, of the journey and yes, the expiation—  
from which thought wished retreat but could not ignore.*

*Oh Muse, oh higher intellect, now do assist me!  
Oh Mind that will write to Memory all that I see,*

*here we shall learn what is your true nobility.*

*I commenced: "Poet, you who are to be my guide,  
examine my virtue if it be strong enough  
before entrusting to me that high divide.*

*"You told about how the parent of Silvius<sup>18</sup>  
entered into the age of immortality  
while still incarnate and retaining full consciousness.*

*"But that God, foe of all evils, was not to him abrupt--  
considering the high good Aeneas rendered,  
wherever he was and upon whom, and upon what--*

*"does not seem unmerited to a man of reason;  
for he was of the soul of Rome and, of her Empire--  
father-elect by the celestial empyrean.*

*"The one and the other-- the Empire and Rome--  
in truth were established in the same holy place  
of each successor to the great Peter's throne.*

*"For that traversing, to which your verses give vaunt,  
was to serve the purposes that were occasioned by  
Rome's victorious achievements and Papal wont.*

*"Then after went the Vessel<sup>19</sup>, of his own volition,  
to bring back the gift of consolation to that Faith,  
which is the starting point of the way to salvation.*

*"But why has it come to me? Or, who grants me leave?  
I am not Aeneas; I am not Apostle Paul.  
I merit not that or other honor, I believe.*

*"However, should I give over to this exercise,  
I am anxious that what should come may be folly.  
Being wise, you grasp what I cannot rationalize."*

*And like those who lose want for that which they had wished--  
and the prospects change with every new passing thought,  
so that before beginning anything they desist--*

*such happened to me on that hill in shadowy dark.*

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<sup>18</sup> Silvius/Sylvius was son of Aeneas. In Book 6 of the *Aeneid*, Aeneas is led by a 'Sibyl' to Hades, where he saw Anchise, his dead father, who told him of Rome's future

<sup>19</sup> Saint Paul.

*Thought ate at the enterprise which it initially  
had been so immediately ready to start.*

*“If I understand well what you mean, it is this,”  
that ghostly presence replied, magnanimously:  
“your soul now has suffered an attack of cowardice—*

*“that which causes man’s breathing to be fast and shallow,  
making him to turn away from an honorable deed  
like a blinded animal will bolt from a shadow.*

*“In order that I may make you free of this fright,  
I will tell you why I came, and that which was purposed  
from my very first feeling of pity for your plight.*

*“I was among those who are in suspended state,  
and a woman called to me-- blessed and so lovely  
that in asking her command I could not hesitate.*

*“Eyes brighter than the star by which the shepherds were led  
she began to speak to me, sweetly and softly  
with the sound of an angel in her voice, as she said,*

*“‘Oh gentle and courteous Mantuan spirit,  
of whom fame and renown continue still in the world,  
and shall endure for as far as motion shall take it,*

*“‘A friend of mine not highly favored in fortune’s sight  
is impeded greatly on the deserted slope—  
yes; where on the pathway he has turned back out of fright.*

*“‘He has lost his way already, and I am afraid  
that I am too late to be able to raise him  
to the plan in Heaven I there have heard for him made.*

*“‘Now, will you go and by the richness that your words hold,  
and with that expertise of which you are master,  
assist him so that thereby I shall be consoled.’*

*“‘I am Beatrice, making it that you will go,  
and come from that place, where I desire to return.  
Love is it that moves me, and causes me to speak so.*

*“‘Whenever I should be before my Lord on high,  
‘I shall praise you and commend you to Him,’ she said.  
“At that she fell silent, and then recommenced I:*

*“Oh woman of virtue!--it is through you, alone,  
that the human species exceeds all that is contained  
by that circle of sky lesser than that of your home.*

*“Your commandment pleases me so very deeply,  
if already obeyed would not be soon enough.  
No more need you unburden yourself to me.*

*“But tell me what has caused this lack of self-concern,  
descending here like this, into this middle place,  
from that spacious one to which you long to return.”*

*“‘From that,’ she said, ‘you are wanting to go deeper here.  
The response I give to you will be very brief:  
it is because entering here I have no fear.*

*“‘We are given fear only through matters that go  
to the power of being harmful to another.  
Of the remainder, they are not frightening--no...*

*“‘I am created of God, and such is God’s mercy  
that I am not touched by abject human misery.  
Neither does the burning of its flame assail me.*

*“‘A gentle woman in Heaven is in concordance  
with the sending of you through this impediment.  
So, from above, there emanates hard guidance.*

*“‘Lucia mandated that which she wished me to do.  
“Your true, faithful friend,” she said, “presently needs you,  
for which reason I now am entrusting him to you.”*

*“‘Lucia, staunch enemy of everything cruel,<sup>20</sup>  
removed herself to come to the place where I then was--  
sitting with she of antiquity named Rachel.*

*“‘“Beatrice—praiseworthy are you of God--”, she said, “true!--  
lest you not give aid, to those who have loved you greatly,  
and have left the vulgar commonality for you.*

*“‘“Do you not hear the pitiful laments he has cried?  
Do you not perceive that Death is doing battle  
on the raging waters of that sea which has no pride?”*

*“‘No person in the world was made more swift to run--*

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<sup>20</sup> This word is an example of Dante’s marriage of Latin and Tuscan—from *L. inimicus*.

*whether to gain advantage or avoid injury--  
as was I made, after Lucia's words all were done--*

*"'to leave my seat of bliss and to venture down here,  
confidently trusting honesty in your speech,  
which does honor to you, and to all those who hear.'*

*"Then, after this reasoning had come to its last,  
Beatrice's eyes glistened with tears of her longing,  
altogether prompting me come all the more fast.*

*"And, as she wished, I came to you like this---to talk;  
removing you from before that wild animal  
that had turned you from the beautiful mountain walk.*

*"So, therefore, what is it? Why, why this desistance?--  
Is it that much cowardice is obstructing your heart?--  
because you are lacking courage for straightforwardness?*

*"Moreover, with three of consecrated womanhood  
solicitous for you in the high court of Heaven;,  
and my words, that promise all to the well and good?"*

*As do the little flowers on a night cold to them,  
bend low and close. Then, when sunlight brightens again,  
they all straighten, each one opening on its stem,*

*of my weary manliness, my Self did that to me;  
and so much healthy courage went flowing to my heart  
that I began to speak boldly like a person free.*

*"Oh, compassionate She!--she whose aid I am offered;  
and you!--your courtesy, in complying instantly  
with the trustworthiness of the words that she proffered.*

*"In my heart has eagerness to please been disposed--  
yes, to come!--because of the words that you have said,  
I am back to what initially was proposed.*

*"Thou noble man...thou gentle man...thou Master, I say!"  
Those are the words I spoke to him as, belatedly,  
I set foot upon the difficult, forested way.*

### **Canto III**

**THROUGH ME, ONE ENTERS THE CITY OF SORROW AND WOE.**

**THROUGH ME, ONE PASSES INTO GRIEF FOR ETERNITY.  
THROUGH ME, THOSE WHO ENTER AMONG THE DAMNED MUST GO.**

**JUSTICE MOVED THIS MAKING BY MY CREATOR ABOVE.  
OVER IT, I WAS MADE THE DIVINE POTESTATOR.<sup>21</sup>  
*THE SUM AND SUBSTANCE OF ALL WISDOM IS THE FIRST LOVE.***

**BEFORE ME NOTHING WAS CREATED TO APPEAR  
IF NOT ETERNAL, AND I LAST ETERNALLY.  
ABANDON EVERY HOPE, YOU WHO ENTER HERE....**

*The above words, of a color dark and gloomy,  
I saw written upon the top of a doorway.  
“Teacher,” said I, “the meaning of them eludes me.”*

*Upon which he, to me, like one informedly wise:  
“Here, necessarily, is left every yearning.  
Here, imperatively, every cowardice dies.*

*“We have come to that place of which I was speaking,  
where you are to see the persons in misery  
who, strictly speaking, have lost all good reasoning.”*

*Then laying a hand on top of mine, unbidden,  
and turning to me a gentle, comforting look,  
he admitted me into the secrets hidden.*

*Here, loud weeping, lamentations, and woeful sighs  
all resounded within a starless atmosphere  
that was such it began to bring tears to my eyes.*

*Diverging tongues amid a horrible ranting;  
painful words heightened by furious, wrathful ire;  
voices high-pitched and weak, and withal, hands sounding.*

*Altogether, all around, a tumult was sown,  
continuously in that air untinged by Time,  
as when the sand by the wind whirlingly is blown.*

*And I, as around my head horror was circling,  
said, “Teacher, what is all this that I am hearing?  
And who, the persons speaking vanquishedly sorrowing?”*

*And him, to me: “Within these wretched conditions  
are imprisoned the unhappy souls of those people*

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. Latin, “wielder of power.”

*who lived with neither infamy nor commendations.*

*“Mixed with this unlucky and evil choral union  
are those angels that were deemed, not rebellious to  
God, but whose fidelity was for their own forum;*

*“nor because less beautiful, from Heaven driven;  
but unreceivable into the depths of Hell  
due to certain glory by kings given to them.”*

*And I, “Teacher, what is the great despondency  
causing them to wail their laments so fiercely?”  
He responded: “That, I will tell to you briefly.*

*“These, of dying, have no hope to anticipate;  
and their blinded existence is so shallow that  
they envy every other possible fate.*

*“No word of them is left for world to decry;  
while by mercifulness and justice they are scorned.  
We will not reason of them, but look and pass by.”*

*And I looked again and beheld a long banner  
that was whirling about with great rapidity,  
in all appearance contemptible in manner.*

*And at its end there was being drawn a line, lengthy  
of persons the likes of whom I never would believe  
could be held off from their dying to such a degree.*

*Then it was something caught my eye in my perusal:  
I saw and I could distinguish the shadow of he--  
that coward who persisted in the great refusal.<sup>22</sup>*

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<sup>22</sup> Scholarship has yet to agree completely as to this person (e.g. Esau, Diocletian and Pontius Pilate being suggested by some); however, he largely has been identified as Pope Celestine V (Pietro), a devout monk roped into the papacy at the end of a two-year impasse in papal election, who served five months in 1294. He resigned a week after securing confirmation of a pope's right to abdicate; fulfilled his wish for humble priestly life; founded the Order of Celestines (later branch of Benedictines), eventually embracing 36 monasteries; then, by pope-successor Boniface VIII, ultimately was placed in imprisonment, where he died. His “cowardice” was disputed as early as Petrarch. (Perhaps Alighieri's sentence was a reflection of personal disappointment, of hope he had held *vis-à-vis* his own religio-political views, for the efficacy of a Celestine tenure.)

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## **Appendix**

### c.e. Year

1054 Final rupture (the "East-West Great Schism") of medieval Christianity into Eastern and Western branches (later known as "Roman Catholic Church" and "Eastern Orthodox Church"), and opposing claims to universal papal jurisdiction.

1080 Pope Gregory VII levied a second excommunication against King Henry IV of Germany. Henry invaded Rome, forced Gregory's retreat, and named Clement III Pope. The rooting of a Roman empire then was permanently damaged, as the Church became an independent player in a political system not subject to imperial authority. (Subsequently, for a period the Papacy was beset by opposing claimants/"anti-popes" to the papal throne.)

1084 Henry IV was crowned west Emperor, with Henry VI as Pope of Roman Catholic Church. Emperor Henry IV's tenure would coincide with final phase of popes pitted also against emperors and kings ("great Investiture Controversy").

1122 European sovereigns' attempts to autonomously control their respective domains led to the "Concordat of Worms" between Pope Callistus II and west Emperor Henry V, concluding the



Investiture Controversy. Henry V yielded to reforms, ending the first phase of power struggles between Papacy and Emperors (which carried the germ of nation-based sovereignty later to be confirmed in the 1648 Peace of Westphalia). By the Concordat, a king had the right to invest bishops with secular authority in his own territory ("by the lance"), but not with sacred authority ("by ring and staff"); bishops owed allegiance to both king and pope, while popes--above and out of direct control of the Emperor--ended the concept of divine right of kings.

1257 German selection of a new king resulted in a "double election"-- two kings over the realm, reflecting political split between "Guelf" and "Ghibelline" persuasions . The Guelf faction supported the Papacy and Holy Roman imperial rule in central and northern Italy; the Ghibellines (largely Italian aristocrats) supported German imperial rule.

1261 Greek dynasty recaptured Constantinople from Latin rule in east; papal influence in the East ended.

1265 Estimated year of birth of Dante Alighieri

1273 Germanic House of Habsburg became ruling dynasty of Holy Roman Empire.

1294 Boniface VIII was Pope.