



## CANTO 1

1           Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita  
mi ritrovai per una selva oscura,  
ché la diritta 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'ì vi trovai,  
dirò de l'altre cose ch'ì v'ho scorte.  
10          Io non so ben ridir com' i' v'intraì,  
tant' era pien di sonno a quel punto  
che la verace via abbandonai.  
13          Ma poi ch'ì 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 ogne calle.  
19          Allor fu la paura un poco queta  
che nel lago del cor m'era durata  
la notte ch'ì passai con tanta pieta.  
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.

## CANTO 1

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

1           In the middle of the journey of our life, I came  
myself in a dark wood, for the straight way was lo  
4           Ah, how hard a thing it is to say what that woo  
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 o  
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 fe  
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 lak  
of my heart had lasted through the night I passed  
with so much anguish.  
22          And like one with laboring breath, come forth c  
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 cominciar 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'ï 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 gaetta 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 grame,  
 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 volontieri 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'ï rovinava in basso loco,  
 dinanzi a li occhi mi si fu offerto  
 chi per lungo silenzio pareva fioco.  
 64 Quando vidi costui nel gran deserto,  
 "Miserere 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,

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, "Miserere  
 —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 dèi 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 diletto 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?"  
 rispuos' io lui con vergognosa fronte.

82 "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'ammoglia,  
 e più saranno ancora, infin che 'l veltro  
 verrà, che la farà morir con doglia.

103 Questi non ciberà terra né peltro,  
 ma sapienza, amore e virtute,  
 e sua nazione sarà tra feltro e feltro.

106 Di quella umile Italia fia salute  
 per cui morì la vergine Camilla,  
 Euriale 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 Ilion  
 was destroyed by fire.

76 But you, why do you return to so much suffering  
 why do you not climb the delightful mountain that  
 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 savior of that humble Italy for  
 which the virgin Camilla died of her wounds, and  
 Eurycleus, Turnus, and Nisus of their

109        Questi la cacerà per ogni 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 fia a ciò più di me degna:  
 con lei ti lascerò nel mio partire;

124        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:  
 oh felice colui cu' ivi elegge!"

130        E io a lui: "Poeta, io ti richeggio  
 per quello Dio che tu non conoscesti,  
 acciò ch'io fugga questo male e peggio,

133        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.



## NOTES

**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:** *Trattar* [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 14), again, we believe, with implicit reference to dream-vision (see the line 2).

**13. a hill:** Like the sea and the dark wood, the hill, later called a mountain of a traditional symbolic landscape we intuitively understand as representative position of human beings between the depths and the heights (Dante may have in mind the famous instance in the Old French *Queste del saint Graal*, ff. 92). For the “Lord’s holy mountain,” see Psalms 24.3, 43.3, 121.1 and Is.

**17–18. the planet that leads us straight:** The expression emphasizes that of the sun as revealer of knowledge and wisdom. In *Convivio* 3.12, Dante casts the sun as the chief visible analogue of God. The sun is a “planet” (derer) 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 at the end of the canzone “Così nel mio parlar voglio esser aspro,” lines 45–47 (translated by Durling and Martinez 1990, pp. 286–90).

**21. anguish:** Dante’s word is *pieta*, a form of *pietà*, which includes the notions of “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 of the self (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, 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 (the foot 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 *Virgili*. 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 *Eclogues* 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 Ilion") 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 *arche*, the 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 *Eclogues* 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: "Tunc 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 *auctor* 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 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 taken to mean a geographical location (between the towns of Feltre and Montefeltro), an astrological sign (the Gemini, Dante's own natal sign, 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 and his crew. Note the contrast with line 75, "proud Ilion," itself an echo of *Aen.* 3.522 (*superbum/Ilium*).

**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, 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 rhotonymy 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 Vergil was a "rebel" against God's law, see 4.33–39, with notes.

**134. the gate of Saint Peter:** The gate to Purgatory (see *Dante's Divine Comedy*, 1.14)