

DANTE ALIGHIERI'S DIVINE COMEDY

Verse Translation
and Commentary by

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INFERN

Italian Text and Verse Translation



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CANTO V

Così discesi del cerchio primaio
giù nel secondo, che men loco cinghia
e tanto più dolor, che punge a guaio.

3

Stavvi Minòs orribilmente, e ringhia:
essamina le colpe ne l'entrata;
giudica e manda secondo ch'avvinghia.

6

Dico che quando l'anima mal nata
li vien dinanzi, tutta si confessa;
e quel conoscitor de le peccata

9

vede qual loco d'inferno è da essa;
cignesi con la coda tante volte
quantunque gradi vuol che giù sia messa.

12

Sempre dinanzi a lui ne stanno molte:
vanno a vicenda ciascuna al giudizio,
dicono e odono e poi son giù volte.

15

“O tu che vieni al doloroso ospizio,”
disse Minòs a me quando mi vide,
lasciando l'atto di cotanto officio,

18

“guarda com' entri e di cui tu ti fide;
non t'inganni l'ampiezza de l'entrare!”
E 'l duca mio a lui: “Perché pur gride?

21

Non impedir lo suo fatale andare:
vuolsi così colà dove si puote
ciò che si vuole, e più non dimandare.”

24

Or incomincian le dolenti note
a farmisi sentire; or son venuto
là dove molto pianto mi percuote.

27

CANTO V

So this way I went down from the first circle
into the second one that girds less space
but much more pain—stinging the soul to wailing.

3

There stands Minòs grotesquely, and he snarls,
examining the guilty at the entrance;
he judges and dispatches, tail in coils.

6

By this I mean that when the evil soul
appears before him, it confesses all,
and he, the connoisseur of mortal sin,

9

knows to what place in Hell the soul belongs;
the times he wraps his tail around himself
tells just how far the sinner must go down.

12

The damned keep crowding up in front of him:
they pass along to judgment one by one;
they speak, they hear, and then are hurled below.

15

“Oh you who come to where your host is pain,”
Minòs spoke out when he caught sight of me,
putting aside the duties of his office,

18

“be careful how you enter and whom you trust:
it is easy to get in, but don't be fooled!”
And then my guide to him: “Why bother shouting?

21

Do not attempt to stop his fated journey;
it is so willed there where the power is
for what is willed; that's all you need to know.”

24

And now the notes of anguish start to play
upon my ears; and now I find myself
where sounds on sounds of weeping pound at me.

27

<p>I reached a place where no light shone at all, that belloved like the sea racked by a tempest, when warring winds attack it from both sides. The internal storm, eternal in its rage, sweeps and drives the spirits with its blast; it whisks them, lashing them with punishment. When they are swept back past their place of judgment, then come the shrieks, lament, and anguished cries; I learned that to this place of punishment all those who sin in lust have been condemned, those who make reason slave to appetite;</p>	<p>so does that wind propel the evil spirits; and as the wings of strafing in the winter bear them along in wide-spread, crowded flocks, hope, not of rest, but even of suffering less. now here, then there, and up and down, it sweeps them forever, never with the hope of comfort— I saw approaching an endless line in their formation, Souls that were carried by the battering winds. So I asked: "Teacher, who are these souls here punished within the sweep of the black wind?"</p>	<p>"The first of those whose story you should know," my master wasted no time answering, "was emperor over lands of many tongues; he vicious tastes had so corrupted her, to cleanse the stain of scandal she had spread; she is Semiramis who, legend says, was Ninus' wife as well as his successor; she governed all the land the Sultan rules.</p>	<p>"The second was Nero, who, as his son A vizio di lussuria fu si rotta, che libato fe licito in sua legge, per tosse il bisamo in che era condotta. E II è Semiramis, di cui si legge che succedette a Nino e fu sua sposa: teneva la terra che il Soldan corregge.</p>
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L'altra è colei che s'ancise amorosa,
e ruppe fede al cener di Sicheo;
poi è Cleopatrà lussuriosa.

63

Elena vedi, per cui tanto reo
tempo si volse, e vedi 'l grande Achille,
che con amore al fine combatteo.

66

Vedi Parìs, Tristano"; e più di mille
ombre mostrommi e nominommi a dito,
ch'amor di nostra vita dipartille.

69

Poscia ch'io ebbi 'l mio dottore udito
nomar le donne antiche e ' cavalieri,
pietà mi giunse, e fui quasi smarrito.

72

I' cominciai: "Poeta, volontieri
parlerei a que' due che 'nsieme vanno,
e paion sì al vento esser leggieri."

75

Ed ellì a me: "Vedrai quando saranno
più presso a noi; e tu allor li priega
per quello amor che i mena, ed ei verranno."

78

Sì tosto come il vento a noi li piega,
mossi la voce: "O anime affannate,
venite a noi parlar, s'altri nol niega!"

81

Quali colombe dal disio chiamate
con l'ali alzate e ferme al dolce nido
vegnon per l'aere, dal voler portate;

84

cotali uscir de la schiera ov' è Dido,
a noi venendo per l'aere maligno,
sì forte fu l'affettuoso grido.

87

"O animal grazioso e benigno
che visitando vai per l'aere perso
noi che tignemmo il mondo di sanguigno,

90

se fosse amico il re de l'universo,
noi pregheremmo lui de la tua pace,
poi c'hai pietà del nostro mal perverso.

93

The next is she who killed herself for love
and broke faith with the ashes of Sichaeus;
and there is Cleopatra, who loved men's lusting.

63

See Helen there, the root of evil woe
lasting long years, and see the great Achilles,
who lost his life to love, in final combat;

66

see Paris, Tristan"—then, more than a thousand
he pointed out to me, and named them all,
those shades whom love cut off from life on earth.

69

After I heard my teacher call the names
of all these knights and ladies of ancient times,
pity confused my senses, and I was dazed.

72

I began: "Poet, I would like, with all my heart,
to speak to those two there who move together
and seem to be so light upon the winds."

75

And he: "You'll see when they are closer to us,
if you entreat them by that love of theirs
that carries them along, they will come to you."

78

When the winds bent their course in our direction
I raised my voice to them, "Oh, wearied souls,
come speak with us if it be not forbidden."

81

As doves, called by desire to return
to their sweet nest, with wings raised high and poised,
float downward through the air, guided by their will,

84

so these two left the flock where Dido is
and came toward us through the malignant air,
such was the tender power of my call.

87

"O living creature, gracious and so kind,
who make your way here through this dingy air
to visit us who stained the world with blood,

90

if we could claim as friend, the King of Kings,
we would beseech him that he grant you peace
for pitying this atrocious plight of ours.

93

Di quel che udire e che parlar vi piace,
noi udiremo e parleremo a voi,
mentre che 'l vento, come fa, ci tace.

Siede la terra dove nata fui
su la marina dove 'l Po discende
per aver pace co' seguaci sui.

Amor, ch'al cor gentil ratto s'apprende,
prese costui de la bella persona
che mi fu tolta; e 'l modo ancor m'offende.

Amor, ch'a nullo amato amar perdona,
mi prese del costui piacer sì forte,
che, come vedi, ancor non m'abbandona.

Amor condusse noi ad una morte.
Caino attende chi a vita ci spense.”
Queste parole da lor ci fuor porte.

Quand' io intesi quell' anime offense,
china' il viso, e tanto il tenni basso,
fin che 'l poeta mi disse: “Che pense?”

Quando rispuosi, cominciai: “Oh lasso,
quanti dolci pensier, quanto disio
menò costoro al doloroso passo!”

Poi mi rivolsi a loro e parla' io,
e cominciai: “Francesca, i tuoi martiri
a lagrimar mi fanno tristo e pio.

Ma dimmi: al tempo d'i dolci sospiri,
a che e come concedette amore
che conosceste i dubiosi disiri?”

E quella a me: “Nessun maggior dolore
che ricordarsi del tempo felice
ne la miseria; e ciò sa 'l tuo dottore.

Ma s'a conoscer la prima radice
del nostro amor tu hai cotanto affetto,
dirò come colui che piange e dice.

96

99

102

105

108

111

114

117

120

123

126

Whatever pleases you to hear or speak
we will hear and we will speak about with you
as long as the wind, here where we are, is silent.

The place where I was born lies on the shore
where the river Po with its attendant streams
descends to seek its final resting place.

Love, quick to kindle in the gentle heart,
seized this one for the beauty of my body,
torn from me. (How it happened still offends me!)

Love, that excuses no one loved from loving,
seized me so strongly with delight in him
that, as you see, he never leaves my side.

Love led us straight to sudden death together.
Cain awaits the one who quenched our lives.”
These were the words that came from them to us.

When those offended souls had told their story,
I bowed my head and kept it bowed until
the poet said, “What are you thinking of?”

When finally I spoke, I sighed, “Alas,
all those sweet thoughts, and oh, how much desiring
brought these two down into this agony.”

And then I turned to them and tried to speak;
I said, “Francesca, the torment that you suffer
brings painful tears of pity to my eyes.

But tell me, in that time of your sweet sighing
how, and by what signs, did love allow you
to recognize your dubious desires?”

And she to me: “There is no greater pain
than to remember, in our present grief,
past happiness (as well your teacher knows!).

But if your great desire is to learn
the very root of such a love as ours,
I shall tell you, but in words of flowing tears.

96

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114

117

120

123

126

Noi leggiavamo un giorno per diletto
di Lancialotto come amor lo strinse;
soli eravamo e senza alcun sospetto.

129

Per più fiate li occhi ci sospinse
quella lettura, e scolorocci il viso;
ma solo un punto fu quel che ci vinse.

132

Quando leggemmo il disiato riso
esser baciato da cotanto amante,
questi, che mai da me non fia diviso,

135

la bocca mi baciò tutto tremante.
Galeotto fu 'l libro e chi lo scrisse:
quel giorno più non vi leggemmo avante.'

138

Mentre che l'uno spirto questo disse,
l'altro piangéa; sì che di pietade
io venni men così com' io morisse.

141

E caddi come corpo morto cade.

141

One day we read, to pass the time away,
of Lancelot, of how he fell in love;
we were alone, and innocent of suspicion.

129

Time and again our eyes were brought together
by the book we read, our faces flushed and paled.
To the moment of one line alone we yielded:

132

We read the passage where those longed-for lips
were being kissed by such a famous lover,
and this one (who shall never leave my side)

135

then kissed my mouth, and trembled as he did.
Our Galehot was that book and he who wrote it!
That day we read no further." All the while

138

the one of the two spirits spoke these words,
the other wept, in such a way that pity
blurred my senses; I swooned as though to die,

141

and fell to Hell's floor as a body, dead, falls.