

Released by arrangement with Mentor Books

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FL 9871

CONTENTS:

1 LP
1 program notes (8 p.)

Ronald Clyne

DANTE: THE INFERNO
The Immortal Drama
of a Journey Through Hell
Cantos I-VIII Read by John Ciardi

(IN ENGLISH)

PQ
4315.21
I54
1954
c.1

MUSIC LP

University of Alberta Library



0 1620 0506 6210

Library of Congress Catalogue Card No. R 59-760

©1959 FOLKWAYS RECORDS & SERVICE Corp.

701 Seventh Ave., New York City

Distributed by Folkways/Scholastic Records.

906 Sylvan Ave., Englewood Cliffs, N.J. 07632

DANTE: THE INFERNO

DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

The Immortal Drama of a Journey Through Hell

DANTE ALIGHIERI

PQ
4315.21
I54
1954

THE INFERNO

MUSIC LP

a verse rendering for the modern reader

by JOHN CIARDI

Canto I

The Dark Wood of Error

Midway in our life's journey, I went astray
from the straight road and woke to find myself
alone in a dark wood. How shall I say

what wood that was! I never saw so drear,
so rank, so arduous a wilderness!
Its very memory gives a shape to fear.

Death could scarce be more bitter than that place!
But since it came to good, I will recount
all that I found revealed there by God's grace.

How I came to it I cannot rightly say,
so drugged and loose with sleep had I become
when I first wandered there from the True Way.

But at the far end of that valley of evil
whose maze had sapped my very heart with fear!
I found myself before a little hill (15)

and lifted up my eyes. Its shoulders glowed
already with the sweet rays of that planet
whose virtue leads men straight on every road,

and the shining strengthened me against the fright
whose agony had wracked the lake of my heart
through all the terrors of that piteous night.

Just as a swimmer, who with his last breath
flounders ashore from perilous seas, might turn
to memorize the wide water of his death—

so did I turn, my soul still fugitive
from death's surviving image, to stare down
that pass that none had ever left alive.

And there I lay to rest from my heart's race
till calm and breath returned to me. Then rose
and pushed up that dead slope at such a pace (30)

each footfall rose above the last. And lo!
almost at the beginning of the rise
I faced a spotted Leopard, all tremor and flow

and gaudy pelt. And it would not pass, but stood
so blocking my every turn that time and again
I was on the verge of turning back to the wood.

This fell at the first widening of the dawn
as the sun was climbing Aries with those stars
that rode with him to light the new creation.

Thus the holy hour and the sweet season
of commemoration did much to arm my fear
of that bright murderous beast with their good omen.

Yet not so much but what I shook with dread
at sight of a great Lion that broke upon me
raging with hunger, its enormous head (45)

held high as if to strike a mortal terror
into the very air. And down his track,
a She-Wolf drove upon me, a starved horror

ravaging and wasted beyond all belief.
She seemed a rack for avarice, gaunt and craving.
Oh many the souls she has brought to endless grief!

She brought such heaviness upon my spirit
at sight of her savagery and desperation,
I died from every hope of that high summit.

LIBRARY
UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

And like a miser—eager in acquisition
but desperate in self-reproach when Fortune's wheel
turns to the hour of his loss—all tears and attrition

I wavered back; and still the beast pursued,
forcing herself against me bit by bit
till I slid back into the sunless wood. (60)

And as I fell to my soul's ruin, a presence
gathered before me on the discolored air,
the figure of one who seemed hoarse from long silence.

At sight of him in that friendless waste I cried:
"Have pity on me, whatever thing you are,
whether shade or living man." And it replied:

"Not man, though man I once was, and my blood
was Lombard, both my parents Mantuan.
I was born, though late, *sub Julio*, and bred

in Rome under Augustus in the noon
of the false and lying gods. I was a poet
and sang of old Anchises' noble son

who came to Rome after the burning of Troy.
But you—why do you return to these distresses
instead of climbing that shining Mount of Joy (75)

which is the seat and first cause of man's bliss?"
"And are you then that Virgil and that fountain
of purest speech?" My voice grew tremulous:

"Glory and light of poets! now may that zeal
and love's apprenticeship that I poured out
on your heroic verses serve me well!

For you are my true master and first author,
the sole maker from whom I drew the breath
of that sweet style whose measures have brought me
honor.

See there, immortal sage, the beast I flee.
For my soul's salvation, I beg you, guard me from her,
for she has struck a mortal tremor through me."

And he replied, seeing my soul in tears:
"He must go by another way who would escape
this wilderness, for that mad beast that fleers (90)

before you there, suffers no man to pass.
She tracks down all, kills all, and knows no glut,
but, feeding, she grows hungrier than she was.

She mates with any beast, and will mate with more
before the Greyhound comes to hunt her down.
He will not feed on lands nor loot, but honor

and love and wisdom will make straight his way.
He will rise between Feltro and Feltro, and in him
shall be the resurrection and new day

of that sad Italy for which Nisus died,
and Turnus, and Euryalus, and the maid Camilla.
He shall hunt her through every nation of sick pride

till she is driven back forever to Hell
whence Envy first released her on the world.
Therefore, for your own good, I think it well (105)

you follow me and I will be your guide
and lead you forth through an eternal place.
There you shall see the ancient spirits tried

in endless pain, and hear their lamentation
as each bemoans the second death of souls.
Next you shall see upon a burning mountain

souls in fire and yet content in fire,
knowing that whensoever it may be
they yet will mount into the blessed choir.

To which, if it is still your wish to climb,
a worthier spirit shall be sent to guide you.
With her shall I leave you, for the King of Time,

who reigns on high, forbids me to come there
since, living, I rebelled against his law.
He rules the waters and the land and air (120)

and there holds court, his city and his throne.
Oh blessed are they he chooses!" And I to him:
"Poet, by that God to you unknown,

lead me this way. Beyond this present ill
and worse to dread, lead me to Peter's gate
and be my guide through the sad halls of Hell."

And he then: "Follow." And he moved ahead
in silence, and I followed where he led.

Canto II

The Descent

The light was departing. The brown air drew down
all the earth's creatures, calling them to rest
from their day-roving, as I, one man alone,

prepared myself to face the double war
of the journey and the pity, which memory
shall here set down, nor hesitate, nor err.

O Muses! O High Genius! Be my aid!
O Memory, recorder of the vision,
here shall your true nobility be displayed!

Thus I began: "Poet, you who must guide me,
before you trust me to that arduous passage,
look to me and look through me—can I be worthy?"

You sang how the father of Sylvius, while still
in corruptible flesh won to that other world,
crossing with mortal sense the immortal sill. (15)

But if the Adversary of all Evil
weighing his consequence and who and what
should issue from him, treated him so well—

that cannot seem unfitting to thinking men,
since he was chosen father of Mother Rome
and of her Empire by God's will and token.

Both, to speak strictly, were founded and foreknown
as the established Seat of Holiness
for the successors of Great Peter's throne.

In that quest, which your verses celebrate,
he learned those mysteries from which arose
his victory and Rome's apostolate.

There later came the chosen vessel, Paul,
bearing the confirmation of that Faith
which is the one true door to life eternal. (30)

But I—how should I dare? By whose permission?
I am not Aeneas. I am not Paul.
Who could believe me worthy of the vision?

How, then, may I presume to this high quest
and not fear my own brashness? You are wise
and will grasp what my poor words can but suggest."

As one who unwill what he wills, will stay
strong purposes with feeble second thoughts
until he spells all his first zeal away—

so I hung back and balked on that dim coast
till thinking had worn out my enterprise,
so stout at starting and so early lost.

"I understand from your words and the look in your
eyes,"

that shadow of magnificence answered me,
"your soul is sunken in that cowardice (45)

that bears down many men, turning their course
and resolution by imagined perils,
as his own shadow turns the frightened horse.

To free you of this dread I will tell you all
of why I came to you and what I heard
when first I pitied you. I was a soul

among the souls of Limbo, when a Lady
so blessed and so beautiful, I prayed her
to order and command my will, called to me.

Her eyes were kindled from the lamps of Heaven.
Her voice reached through me, tender, sweet, and low.
An angel's voice, a music of its own:

'O gracious Mantuan whose melodies
live in earth's memory and shall live on
till the last motion ceases in the skies, (60)

my dearest friend, and fortune's foe, has strayed
onto a friendless shore and stands beset
by such distresses that he turns afraid

from the True Way, and news of him in Heaven
rumors my dread he is already lost.
I come, afraid that I am too-late risen.

Fly to him and with your high counsel, pity,
and with whatever need be for his good
and soul's salvation, help him, and solace me.

It is I, Beatrice, who send you to him.
I come from the blessed height for which I yearn.
Love called me here. When amid Seraphim

I stand again before my Lord, your praises
shall sound in Heaven.' She paused, and I began:
'O Lady of that only grace that raises (75)

feeble mankind within its mortal cycle
above all other works God's will has placed
within the heaven of the smallest circle;

so welcome is your command that to my sense,
were it already fulfilled, it would yet seem tardy.
I understand, and am all obedience.

But tell me how you dare to venture thus
so far from the wide heaven of your joy
to which your thoughts yearn back from this abyss.'

'Since what you ask,' she answered me, 'probes near
the root of all, I will say briefly only
how I have come through Hell's pit without fear.

Know then, O waiting and compassionate soul,
that is to fear which has the power to harm,
and nothing else is fearful even in Hell. (90)

I am so made by God's all-seeing mercy
your anguish does not touch me, and the flame
of this great burning has no power upon me.

There is a Lady in Heaven so concerned
for him I send you to, that for her sake
the strict decree is broken. She has turned

and called Lucia to her wish and mercy
saying: 'Thy faithful one is sorely pressed;
in his distresses I commend him to thee.'

Lucia, that soul of light and foe of all
cruelty, rose and came to me at once
where I was sitting with the ancient Rachel,

saying to me: 'Beatrice, true praise of God,
why dost thou not help him who loved thee so
that for thy sake he left the vulgar crowd? (105)

Dost thou not hear his cries? Canst thou not see
the death he wrestles with beside that river
no ocean can surpass for rage and fury?

No soul of earth was ever as rapt to seek
its good or flee its injury as I was—
when I had heard my sweet Lucia speak—

to descend from Heaven and my blessed seat
to you, laying my trust in that high speech
that honors you and all who honor it.'

She spoke and turned away to hide a tear
that, shining, urged me faster. So I came
and freed you from the beast that drove you there,

blocking the near way to the Heavenly Height.
And now what ails you? Why do you lag? Why
this heartsick hesitation and pale fright (120)

when three such blessed Ladies lean from Heaven
in their concern for you and my own pledge
of the great good that waits you has been given?"

As flowerlets drooped and puckered in the night
turn up to the returning sun and spread
their petals wide on his new warmth and light—

just so my wilted spirits rose again
and such a heat of zeal surged through my veins
that I was born anew. Thus I began:

"Blesséd be that Lady of infinite pity,
and blesséd be thy taxed and courteous spirit
that came so promptly on the word she gave thee.

Thy words have moved my heart to its first purpose.
My Guide! My Lord! My Master! Now lead on:
one will shall serve the two of us in this." (135)

He turned when I had spoken, and at his back
I entered on that hard and perilous track.

Canto III

THE VESTIBULE OF HELL

The Opportunists

I AM THE WAY INTO THE CITY OF WOF
I AM THE WAY TO A FORSAKEN PEOPLE.
I AM THE WAY INTO ETERNAL SORROW.

SACRED JUSTICE MOVED MY ARCHITECT.
I WAS RAISED HERE BY DIVINE OMNIPOTENCE,
PRIMORDIAL LOVE AND ULTIMATE INTELLECT.

ONLY THOSE ELEMENTS TIME CANNOT WEAR
WERE MADE BEFORE ME, AND BEYOND TIME I STAND.
ABANDON ALL HOPE YE WHO ENTER HERE.

These mysteries I read cut into stone
above a gate. And turning I said: "Master,
what is the meaning of this harsh inscription?"

And he then as initiate to novice:
"Here must you put by all division of spirit
and gather your soul against all cowardice. (15)

This is the place I told you to expect.
Here you shall pass among the fallen people,
souls who have lost the good of intellect."

So saying, he put forth his hand to me,
and with a gentle and encouraging smile
he led me through the gate of mystery.

Here sighs and cries and wails coiled and recoiled
on the starless air, spilling my soul to tears.
A confusion of tongues and monstrous accents toiled

in pain and anger. Voices hoarse and shrill
and sounds of blows, all intermingled, raised
tumult and pandemonium that still

whirls on the air forever dirty with it
as if a whirlwind sucked at sand. And I,
holding my head in horror, cried: "Sweet Spirit, (30)

what souls are these who run through this black haze?"
And he to me: "These are the nearly soulless
whose lives concluded neither blame nor praise

They are mixed here with that despicable corps
of angels who were neither for God nor Satan,
but only for themselves. The High Creator

scourged them from Heaven for its perfect beauty,
and Hell will not receive them since the wicked
might feel some glory over them." And I:

"Master, what gnaws at them so hideously
their lamentation stuns the very air?"
"They have no hope of death," he answered me,

"and in their blind and unattaining state
their miserable lives have sunk so low
that they must envy every other fate. (45)

No word of them survives their living season.
Mercy and Justice deny them even a name.
Let us not speak of them: look, and pass on."

I saw a banner there upon the mist.
Circling and circling, it seemed to scorn all pause.
So it ran on, and still behind it pressed

a never-ending rout of souls in pain.
I had not thought death had undone so many
as passed before me in that mournful train.

And some I knew among them; last of all
I recognized the shadow of that soul
who, in his cowardice, made the Great Denial.

At once I understood for certain: these
were of that retrograde and faithless crew
hateful to God and to His enemies. (60)

These wretches never born and never dead
ran naked in a swarm of wasps and hornets
that goaded them the more the more they fled,

and made their faces stream with bloody gouts
of pus and tears that dribbled to their feet
to be swallowed there by loathsome worms and
maggots.

Then looking onward I made out a throng
assembled on the beach of a wide river,
whereupon I turned to him: "Master, I long

to know what souls these are, and what strange usage
makes them as eager to cross as they seem to be
in this infected light." At which the Sage:

"All this shall be made known to you when we stand
on the joyless beach of Acheron." And I
cast down my eyes, sensing a reprimand (75)

in what he said, and so walked at his side
in silence and ashamed until we came
through the dead cavern to that sunless tide.

There, steering toward us in an ancient ferry
came an old man with a white bush of hair,
bellowing: "Woe to you depraved souls! Bury

here and forever all hope of Paradise:
I come to lead you to the other shore,
into eternal dark, into fire and ice.

And you who are living yet, I say begone
from these who are dead." But when he saw me stand
against his violence he began again:

"By other windings and by other steerage
shall you cross to that other shore. Not here! Not
here!
A lighter craft than mine must give you passage." (90)

And my Guide to him: "Charon, bite back your spleen:
this has been willed where what is willed must be,
and is not yours to ask what it may mean."

The steersman of that marsh of ruined souls,
who wore a wheel of flame around each eye,
stifled the rage that shook his woolly jowls.

But those unmanned and naked spirits there
turned pale with fear and their teeth began to chatter
at sound of his crude bellow. In despair

they blasphemed God, their parents, their time on earth,
the race of Adam, and the day and the hour
and the place and the seed and the womb that gave
them birth.

But all together they drew to that grim shore
where all must come who lose the fear of God.
Weeping and cursing they come for evermore, (105)

and demon Charon with eyes like burning coals
herds them in, and with a whistling oar
flails on the stragglers to his wake of souls.

As leaves in autumn loosen and stream down
until the branch stands bare above its tatters
spread on the rustling ground, so one by one

the evil seed of Adam in its Fall
cast themselves, at his signal, from the shore
and streamed away like birds who hear their call.

So they are gone over that shadowy water,
and always before they reach the other shore
a new noise stirs on this, and new throngs gather.

"My son," the courteous Master said to me,
"all who die in the shadow of God's wrath
converge to this from every clime and country. (120)

And all pass over eagerly, for here
Divine Justice transforms and spurs them so
their dread turns wish: they yearn for what they fear.

No soul in Grace comes ever to this crossing;
therefore if Charon rages at your presence
you will understand the reason for his cursing."

When he had spoken, all the twilight country
shook so violently, the terror of it
bathes me with sweat even in memory:

the tear-soaked ground gave out a sigh of wind
that spewed itself in flame on a red sky,
and all my shattered senses left me. Blind,

like one whom sleep comes over in a swoon,
I stumbled into darkness and went down.

Canto IV

CIRCLE ONE: *Limbo*

The Virtuous Pagans

A monstrous clap of thunder broke apart
the swoon that stuffed my head; like one awakened
by violent hands, I leaped up with a start.

And having risen; rested and renewed,
I studied out the landmarks of the gloom
to find my bearings there as best I could.

And I found I stood on the very brink of the valley
called the Dolorous Abyss, the desolate chasm
where rolls the thunder of Hell's eternal cry,

so depthless-deep and nebulous and dim
that stare as I might into its frightful pit
it gave me back no feature and no bottom.

Death-pale, the Poet spoke: "Now let us go
into the blind world waiting here below us.
I will lead the way and you shall follow." (15)

And I, sick with alarm at his new pallor,
cried out, "How can I go this way when you
who are my strength in doubt turn pale with terror?"

And he: "The pain of these below us here,
drains the color from my face for pity,
and leaves this pallor you mistake for fear.

Now let us go, for a long road awaits us."
So he entered and so he led me in
to the first circle and ledge of the abyss.

No tortured wailing rose to greet us here
but sounds of sighing rose from every side,
sending a tremor through the timeless air,

a grief breathed out of untormented sadness,
the passive state of those who dwelled apart,
men, women, children—a dim and endless congress. (30)

And the Master said to me: "You do not question
what souls these are that suffer here before you?
I wish you to know before you travel on

that these were sinless. And still their merits fail,
for they lacked Baptism's grace, which is the door
of the true faith you were born to. Their birth fell

before the age of the Christian mysteries,
and so they did not worship God's Trinity
in fullest duty. I am one of these.

For such defects are we lost, though spared the fire
and suffering Hell in one affliction only:
that without hope we live on in desire."

I thought how many worthy souls there were
suspended in that Limbo, and a weight
closed on my heart for what the noblest suffer. (45)

"Instruct me, Master and most noble Sir,"
I prayed him then, "better to understand
the perfect creed that conquers every error:

has any, by his own or another's merit,
gone ever from this place to blessedness?"
He sensed my inner question and answered it:

"I was still new to this estate of tears
when a Mighty One descended here among us,
crowned with the sign of His victorious years.

He took from us the shade of our first parent,
of Abel, his pure son, of ancient Noah,
of Moses, the bringer of law, the obedient.

Father Abraham, David the King,
Israel with his father and his children,
Rachel, the holy vessel of His blessing, (60)

and many more He chose for elevation
among the elect. And before these, you must know,
no human soul had ever won salvation."

We had not paused as he spoke, but held our road
and passed meanwhile beyond a press of souls
crowded about like trees in a thick wood.

And we had not traveled far from where I woke
when I made out a radiance before us
that struck away a hemisphere of dark.

We were still some distance back in the long night,
yet near enough that I half-saw, half-sensed,
what quality of souls lived in that light.

"O ornament of wisdom and of art,
what souls are these whose merit lights their way
even in Hell. What joy sets them apart?" (75)

And he to me: "The signature of honor
they left on earth is recognized in Heaven
and wins them ease in Hell out of God's favor."

And as he spoke a voice rang on the air:
"Honor the Prince of Poets; the soul and glory
that went from us returns. He is here! He is here!"

The cry ceased and the echo passed from hearing;
I saw four mighty presences come toward us
with neither joy nor sorrow in their bearing.

"Note well," my Master said as they came on,
"that soul that leads the rest with sword in hand
as if he were their captain and champion.

It is Homer, singing master of the earth.
Next after him is Horace, the satirist,
Ovid is third, and Lucan is the fourth. (90)

Since all of these have part in the high name
the voice proclaimed, calling me Prince of Poets,
the honor that they do me honors them."

So I saw gathered at the edge of light
the masters of that highest school whose song
outsoars all others like an eagle's flight.

And after they had talked together a while,
they turned and welcomed me most graciously,
at which I saw my approving Master smile.

And they honored me far beyond courtesy,
for they included me in their own number,
making me sixth in that high company.

So we moved toward the light, and as we passed
we spoke of things as well omitted here
as it was sweet to touch on there. At last (105)

we reached the base of a great Citadel
circled by seven towering battlements
and by a sweet brook flowing round them all.

This we passed over as if it were firm ground.
Through seven gates I entered with those sages
and came to a green meadow blooming round.

There with a solemn and majestic poise
stood many people gathered in the light,
speaking infrequently and with muted voice.

Past that enameled green we six withdrew
into a luminous and open height
from which each soul among them stood in view.

And there directly before me on the green
the master souls of time were shown to me.
I glory in the glory I have seen! (120)

Electra stood in a great company
among whom I saw Hector and Aeneas
and Caesar in armor with his falcon's eye.

I saw Camilla, and the Queen Amazon
across the field. I saw the Latian King
seated there with his daughter by his throne.

And the good Brutus who overthrew the Tarquin:
Lucrezia, Julia, Marcia, and Cornelia;
and, by himself apart, the Saladin.

And raising my eyes a little I saw on high
Aristotle, the master of those who know,
ringed by the great souls of philosophy.

All wait upon him for their honor and his.
I saw Socrates and Plato at his side
before all others there. Democritus (135)

who ascribes the world to chance, Diogenes,
and with him there Thales, Anaxagoras,
Zeno, Heraclitus, Empedocles.

And I saw the wise collector and analyst—
Dioscorides I mean. I saw Orpheus there,
Tully, Linus, Seneca the moralist,

Euclid the geometer, and Ptolemy,
Hippocrates, Galen, Avicenna,
and Averrhoës of the Great Commentary.

I cannot count so much nobility;
my longer theme pursues me so that often
the word falls short of the reality. (150)

breathed on my lips the tremor of his kiss.
That book, and he who wrote it, was a pander.
That day we read no further." As she said this, (135)

the other spirit, who stood by her, wept
so piteously, I felt my senses reel
and faint away with anguish. I was swept

by such a swoon as death is, and I fell,
as a corpse might fall, to the dead floor of Hell.

Canto VI

CIRCLE THREE

The Gluttons

My senses had reeled from me out of pity
for the sorrow of those kinsmen and lost lovers.
Now they return, and waking gradually,

I see new torments and new souls in pain
about me everywhere. Wherever I turn
away from grief I turn to grief again.

I am in the Third Circle of the torments.
Here to all time with neither pause nor change
the frozen rain of Hell descends in torrents.

Huge hailstones, dirty water, and black snow
pour from the dismal air to putrefy
the putrid slush that waits for them below.

Here monstrous Cerberus, the ravening beast,
howls through his triple throats like a mad dog
over the spirits sunk in that foul paste. (15)

His eyes are red, his beard is greased with phlegm,
his belly is swollen, and his hands are claws
to rip the wretches and flay and mangle them.

And they, too, howl like dogs in the freezing storm,
turning and turning from it as if they thought
one naked side could keep the other warm.

When Cerberus discovered us in that will
his dragon-jaws yawed wide, his lips drew back
in a grin of fangs. No limb of him was still.

My Guide bent down and seized in either fist
a clod of the stinking dirt that festered there
and flung them down the gullet of the beast.

As a hungry cur will set the echoes raving
and then fall still when he is thrown a bone,
all of his clamor being in his craving, (30)

so the three ugly heads of Cerberus,
whose yowling at those wretches deafened them,
choked on their putrid sops and stopped their fuss.

We made our way across the sodden mess
of souls the rain beat down, and when our steps
fell on a body, they sank through emptiness.

All those illusions of being seemed to lie
drowned in the slush; until one wraith among them
sat up abruptly and called as I passed by:

"O you who are led this journey through the shade
of Hell's abyss, do you recall this face?
You had been made before I was unmade."

And I: "Perhaps the pain you suffer here
distorts your image from my recollection.
I do not know you as you now appear." (45)

And he to me: "Your own city, so rife
with hatred that the bitter cup flows over
was mine too in that other, clearer life.

Your citizens nicknamed me Ciacco, The Hog:
gluttony was my offense, and for it
I lie here rotting like a swollen log.

Nor am I lost in this alone; all these
you see about you in this painful death
have wallowed in the same indecencies."

I answered him: "Ciacco, your agony
weighs on my heart and calls my soul to tears;
but tell me, if you can, what is to be

for the citizens of that divided state,
and whether there are honest men among them,
and for what reasons we are torn by hate." (60)

And he then: "After many words given and taken
it shall come to blood; White shall rise over Black
and rout the dark lord's force, battered and shaken.

Then it shall come to pass within three suns
that the fallen shall arise, and by the power

of one now gripped by many hesitations

Black shall ride on White for many years,
loading it down with burdens and oppressions
and humbling of proud names and helpless tears.

Two are honest, but none will heed them. There,
pride, avarice, and envy are the tongues
men know and heed, a Babel of despair."

Here he broke off his mournful prophecy.
And I to him: "Still let me urge you on
to speak a little further and instruct me: (75)

Farinata and Tegghiaio, men of good blood,
Jacopo Rusticucci, Arrigo, Mosca,
and the others who set their hearts on doing good—

where are they now whose high deeds might be-gem
the crown of kings? I long to know their fate.
Does Heaven soothe or Hell envenom them?"

And he: "They lie below in a blacker lair.
A heavier guilt draws them to greater pain.
If you descend so far you may see them there.

But when you move again among the living,
oh speak my name to the memory of men!
Having answered all, I say no more." And giving

his head a shake, he looked up at my face
cross-eyed, then bowed his head and fell away
among the other blind souls of that place. (90)

And my Guide to me: "He will not wake again
until the angel trumpet sounds the day
on which the host shall come to judge all men.

Then shall each soul before the seat of Mercy
return to its sad grave and flesh and form
to hear the edict of Eternity."

So we picked our slow way among the shades
and the filthy rain, speaking of life to come.
"Master," I said, "when the great clarion fades

into the voice of thundering Omniscience,
what of these agonies? Will they be the same,
or more, or less, after the final sentence?"

And he to me: "Look to your science again
where it is written: the more a thing is perfect
the more it feels of pleasure and of pain. (105)

As for these souls, though they can never soar
to true perfection, still in the new time
they will be nearer it than they were before."

And so we walked the rim of the great ledge
speaking of pain and joy, and of much more
that I will not repeat, and reached the edge

where the descent begins. There, suddenly,
we came on Plutus, the great enemy.

Canto VII

CIRCLE FOUR

The Hoarders and the Wasters

CIRCLE FIVE

The Wrathful and the Sullen

"Papa Satán, Papa Satán, aleppy,"
Plutus clucked and stuttered in his rage;
and my all-knowing Guide, to comfort me:

"Do not be startled, for no power of his,
however he may lord it over the damned,
may hinder your descent through this abyss."

And turning to that carnival of bloat
cried: "Peace, you wolf of Hell. Choke back your bile
and let its venom blister your own throat.

Our passage through this pit is willed on high
by that same Throne that loosed the angel wrath
of Michael on ambition and mutiny."

As puffed out sails fall when the mast gives way
and flutter to a self-convulsing heap—
so collapsed Plutus into that dead clay. (15)

Thus we descended the dark scarp of Hell
to which all the evil of the Universe
comes home at last, into the Fourth Great Circle

and ledge of the abyss. O Holy Justice,
who could relate the agonies I saw!
What guilt is man that he can come to this?

Just as the surge Charybdis hurls to sea
crashes and breaks upon its countersurge,
so these shades dance and crash eternally.

Here, too, I saw a nation of lost souls,
far more than were above: they strained their chests
against enormous weights, and with mad howls

rolled them at one another. Then in haste
they rolled them back, one party shouting out:
"Why do you hoard?" and the other: "Why do
you waste?" (30)

So back around that ring they puff and blow,
each faction to its course, until they reach
opposite sides, and screaming as they go

the madmen turn and start their weights again
to crash against the maniacs. And I,
watching, felt my heart contract with pain.

"Master," I said, "what people can these be?
And all those tonsured ones there on our left—
is it possible they *all* were of the clergy?"

And he: "In the first life beneath the sun
they were so skewed and squinteyed in their minds
their misering or extravagance mocked all reason.

The voice of each clamors its own excess
when lust meets lust at the two points of the circle
where opposite guilts meet in their wretchedness. (45)

These tonsured wraiths of greed were priests indeed,
and popes and cardinals, for it is in these
the weed of avarice sows its rankest seed."

And I to him: "Master, among this crew
surely I should be able to make out
the fallen image of some soul I knew."

And he to me: "This is a lost ambition.
In their sordid lives they labored to be blind,
and now their souls have dimmed past recognition.

All their eternity is to butt and bray:
one crew will stand tight-fisted, the other stripped
of its very hair at the bar of Judgment Day.

Hoarding and squandering wasted all their light
and brought them screaming to this brawl of wraiths.
You need no words of mine to grasp their plight. (60)

Now may you see the fleeting vanity
of the goods of Fortune for which men tear down
all that they are, to build a mockery.

Not all the gold that is or ever was
under the sky could buy for one of these
exhausted souls the fraction of a pause."

"Master," I said, "tell me—now that you touch
on this Dame Fortune—what is she, that she holds
the good things of the world within her clutch?"

And he to me: "O credulous mankind,
is there one error that has wooed and lost you?
Now listen, and strike error from your mind:

That king whose perfect wisdom transcends all,
made the heavens and posted angels on them
to guide the eternal light that it might fall (75)

from every sphere to every sphere the same.
He made earth's splendors by a like decree
and posted as their minister this high Dame,

the Lady of Permutations. All earth's gear
she changes from nation to nation, from house to house,
in changeless change through every turning year.

No mortal power may stay her spinning wheel.
The nations rise and fall by her decree.
None may foresee where she will set her heel:

she passes, and things pass. Man's mortal reason
cannot encompass her. She rules her sphere
as the other gods rule theirs. Season by season

her changes change her changes endlessly,
and those whose turn has come press on her so,
she must be swift by hard necessity. (90)

And this is she so railed at and reviled
that even her debtors in the joys of time
blaspheme her name. Their oaths are bitter and wild,

but she in her beatitude does not hear.
Among the Primal Beings of God's joy
she breathes her blessedness and wheels her sphere.

But the stars that marked our starting fall away.
We must go deeper into greater pain,
for it is not permitted that we stay."

And crossing over to the chasm's edge
we came to a spring that boiled and overflowed
through a great crevice worn into the ledge.

By that foul water, black from its very source,
we found a nightmare path among the rocks
and followed the dark stream along its course. (105)

Beyond its rocky race and wild-descent
the river floods and forms a marsh called Styx,
a dreary swampland, vaporous and malignant.

And I, intent on all our passage touched,
made out a swarm of spirits in that bog
savage with anger, naked, slime-besmudged.

They thumped at one another in that slime
with hands and feet, and they butted, and they bit
as if each would tear the other limb from limb.

And my kind Sage: "My son, behold the souls
of those who lived in wrath. And do you see
the broken surfaces of those water-holes

on every hand, boiling as if in pain?
There are souls beneath that water. Fixed in slime
they speak their piece, end it, and start again: (120)

'Sullen were we in the air made sweet by the Sun;
in the glory of his shining our hearts poured
a bitter smoke. Sullen were we begun;

sullen we lie forever in this ditch.'
This litany they gargle in their throats
as if they sang, but lacked the words and pitch."

Then circling on along that filthy wallow,
we picked our way between the bank and fen,
keeping our eyes on those foul souls that swallow

the slime of Hell. And so at last we came
to foot of a Great Tower that has no name.

Canto VIII

CIRCLE FIVE: *Styx*

The Wrathful, Phlegyas

CIRCLE SIX: *Dis*

The Fallen Angels

Returning to my theme, I say we came
to the foot of a Great Tower; but long before
we reached it through the marsh, two horns of flame

flared from the summit, one from either side,
and then, far off, so far we scarce could see it
across the mist, another flame replied.

I turned to that sea of all intelligence
saying: "What is this signal and counter-signal?
Who is it speaks with fire across this distance?"

And he then: "Look across the filthy slew:
you may already see the one they summon,
if the swamp vapors do not hide him from you."

No twanging bowspring ever shot an arrow
that bored the air it rode dead to the mark
more swiftly than the flying skiff whose prow (15)

shot toward us over the polluted channel
with a single steersman at the helm who called:
"So, do I have you at last, you whelp of Hell?"

"Phlegyas, Phlegyas," said my Lord and Guide,
"this time you waste your breath: you have us only
for the time it takes to cross to the other side."

Phlegyas, the madman, blew his rage among
those muddy marshes like a cheat deceived,
or like a fool at some imagined wrong.

My Guide, whom all the fiend's noise could not nettle,
boarded the skiff, motioning me to follow:
and not till I stepped aboard did it seem to settle

into the water. At once we left the shore,
that ancient hull riding more heavily
than it had ridden in all of time before. (30)

And as we ran on that dead swamp, the slime
rose before me, and from it a voice cried:
"Who are you that come here before your time?"

And I replied: "If I come, I do not remain.
But you, who are *you*, so fallen and so foul?"
And he: "I am one who weeps." And I then:

"May you weep and wail to all eternity,
for I know you, hell-dog, filthy as you are."
Then he stretched both hands to the boat, but warily

the Master shoved him back, crying, "Down! Down!
with the other dogs!" Then he embraced me saying:
"Indignant spirit, I kiss you as you frown.

Blessed be she who bore you. In world and time
this one was haughtier yet. Not one unbending
graces his memory. Here is his shadow in slime. (45)

How many living now, chancellors of wrath,
shall come to lie here yet in this pigmire,
leaving a curse to be their aftermath!"

And I: "Master, it would suit my whim
to see the wretch scrubbed down into the swill
before we leave this stinking sink and him."

And he to me: "Before the other side
shows through the mist, you shall have all you ask.
This is a wish that should be gratified."

And shortly after, I saw the loathsome spirit
so mangled by a swarm of muddy wraiths
that to this day I praise and thank God for it.

"After Filippo Argenti!" all cried together.
The maddog Florentine wheeled at their cry
and bit himself for rage. I saw them gather. (60)

And there we left him. And I say no more.
But such a wailing beat upon my ears,
I strained my eyes ahead to the far shore.

"My son," the Master said, "the City called Dis
lies just ahead, the heavy citizens,
the swarming crowds of Hell's metropolis."

And I then: "Master, I already see
the glow of its red mosques, as if they came
hot from the forge to smolder in this valley."

And my all-knowing Guide: "They are eternal
flues to eternal fire that rages in them
and makes them glow across this lower Hell."

And as he spoke we entered the vast moat
of the sepulchre. Its wall seemed made of iron
and towered above us in our little boat. (75)

We circled through what seemed an endless distance
before the boatman ran his prow ashore
crying: "Out! Out! Get out! This is the entrance."

Above the gates more than a thousand shades
of spirits purged from Heaven for its glory
cried angrily: "Who is it that invades

Death's Kingdom in his life?" My Lord and Guide
advanced a step before me with a sign
that he wished to speak to some of them aside.

They quieted somewhat, and one called, "Come,
but come alone. And tell that other one,
who thought to walk so blithely through death's
kingdom,

he may go back along the same fool's way
he came by. Let him try his living luck.
You who are dead can come only to stay." (90)

Reader, judge for yourself, how each black word
fell on my ears to sink into my heart:
I lost hope of returning to the world.

"O my beloved Master, my Guide in peril,
who time and time again have seen me safely
along this way, and turned the power of evil,

stand by me now," I cried, "in my heart's fright.
And if the dead forbid our journey to them,
let us go back together toward the light."

My Guide then, in the greatness of his spirit:
"Take heart. Nothing can take our passage from us
when such a power has given warrant for it.

Wait here and feed your soul while I am gone
on comfort and good hope; I will not leave you
to wander in this underworld alone." (105)

So the sweet Guide and Father leaves me here,
and I stay on in doubt with yes and no
dividing all my heart to hope and fear.

I could not hear my Lord's words, but the pack
that gathered round him suddenly broke away
howling and jostling and went pouring back,

slamming the towering gate hard in his face.
That great Soul stood alone outside the wall.
Then he came back; his pain showed in his pace.

His eyes were fixed upon the ground, his brow
had sagged from its assurance. He sighed aloud:
"Who has forbidden me the halls of sorrow?"

And to me he said: "You need not be cast down
by my vexation, for whatever plot
these fiends may lay against us, we will go on. (120)

This insolence of theirs is nothing new:
they showed it once at a less secret gate
that still stands open for all that they could do—

the same gate where you read the dead inscription;
and through it at this moment a Great One comes.
Already he has passed it and moves down

ledge by dark ledge. He is one who needs no guide,
and at his touch all gates must spring aside."

Also of Interest

FL9977 (FP97/7) THE INFERNO (Dante) read in ITALIAN by
Professor Enrico de Negri. The first Eight Cantos. Ac-
companied by complete "La Divina Commedia" text
in Italian.
1-12" 33 1/2 rpm longplay record

FL9965 ITALIAN CLASSICS. Read in Italian by Prof. Avv.
Mario Palladini. Dante, Inferno; Manzoni, Maggio; D'An-
nunzio, Notturmo; Dante, Paradiso; Boccaccio, Decamerone
—Novella V; Foscolo, XI Sepolcri; G. Della Casa, Galateo.
Novella. With text in Italian and English.
1-12" 33 1/2 rpm longplay record