

POETRY

GREAT EPICS

UNABRIDGED

Dante
Purgatory
from The Divine Comedy
Read by **Heathcote Williams**



NA431612D

1	Canto I	8:16
2	Canto II	8:01
3	Canto III	8:24
4	Canto IV	8:45
5	Canto V	8:23
6	Canto VI	9:01
7	Canto VII	7:35
8	Canto VIII	8:11
9	Canto IX	9:00
10	Canto X	8:20
11	Canto XI	8:14
12	Canto XII	7:54
13	Canto XIII	9:07
14	Canto XIV	8:05
15	Canto XV	8:31
16	Canto XVI	8:11
17	Canto XVII	8:13

18	Canto XVIII	7:53
19	Canto XIX	8:17
20	Canto XX	8:28
21	Canto XXI	8:11
22	Canto XXII	8:12
23	Canto XXIII	7:44
24	Canto XXIV	8:55
25	Canto XXV	8:06
26	Canto XXVI	8:28
27	Canto XXVII	8:09
28	Canto XXVIII	7:47
29	Canto XXIX	7:20
30	Canto XXX	7:55
31	Canto XXXI	7:58
32	Canto XXXII	8:32
33	Canto XXXIII	8:59

Total time: 4:33:28

Dante

Purgatory from The Divine Comedy

The Divine Comedy is an epic poem in three parts, describing the poet's imagined journey through Hell, Purgatory and Paradise, and culminating in his vision of God.

To this extent it has much in common with the epic masterpieces of Homer and Virgil whose roots are in history and myth; but the 'Commedia' is also an allegory, dealing with nothing less than man's relationship with and place within the universe. Dante's universe was, of course, a medieval one in which the sun and stars revolved around the Earth, and while the 'Commedia' takes account of contemporary science in minute detail, his vision of the way in which the regions of the afterworld might be contained within this framework is brilliant in its originality. Hell (the **Inferno**) is conceived as a tapering funnel plunging down into the earth beneath the Northern hemisphere. At its deepest point a passage leads out into the Southern hemisphere, where Mount Purgatory – its shape mirroring that of Hell – tapers upwards towards Heaven. Paradise itself is conceived as a series of ten 'spheres' encircling the Earth, with God somewhere beyond the tenth, merely glimpsed by Dante as consciousness ebbs from him.

This colossal construction is subdivided to create a zone for every facet of human nature. In Hell and Purgatory a place is allotted for every sin and foible which exists within the world, while in Paradise the pure and just, the saints and the Holy Trinity are arranged in a strict hierarchy. Dante

populates each region with figures from literature, history and from his own contemporary society. This allows him to comment on issues of morality not in merely abstract terms, but in relation to actual people and events, many of them of titillating contemporary relevance. Because of this many of the names encountered mean nothing to modern readers, and this is one of the reasons why most editions of Dante incorporate many pages of notes for each page of text (a practice which began, incidentally, within a few years of the poem's first publication). The main purpose, however, is not to point the finger or poke fun at friends and enemies (though there is undoubtedly an element of this), but to examine the reality of man's human and spiritual nature in all its various and complex manifestations.

Dante calls the three books of **The Divine Comedy** '*canzoni*'. Each contains 33 chapters or '*cantos*', except **Inferno** which has an additional introductory canto – making 100 cantos in all. Each canto contains roughly 150 lines composed according to a strict metrical and rhyme scheme. The language of the poem is, importantly, not Latin (as was customary for high art in Dante's day) but the language used by educated people in 14th-century Florence. In addition Dante made liberal use of archaic language and regional dialects, all of which makes life very difficult for the modern translator. But Dante's purpose was to make his work readable by the 'ordinary' reader – not merely clerics and academics – for despite its

lofty theme and layers of symbolism, **The Divine Comedy** is intended to speak to us directly through the power of Dante's imagery and narrative skill.

This work has not only endured, but has exerted a powerful influence on Western thought for almost seven centuries, especially perhaps the **Inferno**, whose characters and images can be found peppered throughout literature and art right up to the present day. Tchaikowsky's **Francesca da Rimini** and Puccini's **Gianni Schicci** are borrowed from it. Illustrations for Dante editions inspired well known masterpieces by Botticelli, Blake and Doré, while the Pre-Raphaelite painter Dante Gabriel Rossetti (his first name an obvious choice for a father who was a Dante scholar and reputedly able to recite the entire 'Commedia' from memory) returned time and again to Dante for inspiration, notably in the enigmatic "Beata Beatrix".

Samuel Beckett's plays and novels are full of allusions to both **Inferno** and **Purgatory** – shades walking slowly weighed down by leaden cloaks (Inf. Canto XXIII), creatures swimming in mud poking and whistling at one another (Inf. Canto XXII), and indolent characters with little inclination to struggle any further (Purg. Canto IV). Indeed, the character Belacqua who Dante encounters here is the primary source for all those later Beckett characters who might say: "what's the good in climbing?"

One of the principal characters in **The Divine Comedy** (though she does not actually appear in the **Inferno**) is Beatrice, whose significance in Dante's life needs to be understood. Dante first

met and fell in love with Beatrice Portinari when she was eight and he nine years old. He worshipped her from afar until her early death at the age of twenty four. (The full story of this strange 'love affair' is told by Dante in his **La Vita Nuova**). Beatrice then came to symbolise for Dante all that is pure and worthy. In the 'Commedia' it is Beatrice who sends the poet Virgil to guide Dante through Hell and Purgatory. In **Purgatory** she herself assumes responsibility for his journey of discovery, and it is she who later reveals to him the splendours of Paradise, leading him eventually to "that love that moves the Sun and other stars."

And it is in **Purgatory** that Dante gives us the nub of the problem. The lengthy discourse on love and free will (in Canto XVIII) prepares us for Dante's meeting with his idealized love and for her unexpected reprimands (Canto XXX). She argues that at her death Dante might have dedicated his great talents to her (to purity, to wisdom and to truth) but that he allowed himself to be turned away and thus wasted himself. Her purpose in revealing the Divine order to him is to restore him to the true path.

The almost cinematic splendour of Beatrice's appearance at the head of a fantastic allegorical procession provides a stunning climax to this second book of the trilogy.

Notes by Roger Marsh

PURGATORY PROPER

7 Terraces of Purgation

The Earthly Paradise

The Lustful

The Gluttonous

The Avaricious

The Slothful

The Wrathful

The Envious

The Proud

The Gate
of Purgatory

The Indulgent Rulers

Valley of the Princes

The Unshriven

The Indolent

Late Repentant

The Excommunicated

The Island of Purgatory

ANTE PURGATORY

GRAPHIC BY ADAM GREEN

Dante Alighieri was born in Florence in 1265 into a family of the city's lesser nobility in reduced circumstances. They were Guelphs, a party originally identified with the claims of papal authority and opposed by the Ghibellines, who offered allegiance to the German Emperors in Italy. By Dante's time both parties had developed into

vehicles for feud and private interest. In 1302 control of Florence fell into the hands of 'Black' Guelphs and Dante was exiled by the faction. It was during this permanent exile from Florence **The Divine Comedy** was written, completed the year of his death in Ravenna, 1321.

The Island of Purgatory Illustration (opposite): Dante's vivid topography of Hell and Purgatory is based on the fall of Satan. When Satan fell into the seabed, feet first, Hell was formed above him. Meanwhile, under his feet, the earth retreated, forming a mountain on the other hemisphere. This is Mount Purgatory. So, having descended the pit into the deepest point of Hell, Dante and Virgil emerge in the other hemisphere.



*'Bend! Down on your knees: see there, God's Angel'
(Canto II)*

CD 1

Canto I

Dante and Virgil emerge from Hell just before Dawn on Easter Sunday. They meet Cato of Utica, guardian of the shores of Purgatory who challenges them as fugitives from Hell. They explain their mission.

four stars: Prudence, Justice, Fortitude and Temperance.

Cato: guardian of the island-mountain. An opponent of Caesar and a suicide, but also a symbol of devotion to freedom, for which he died. At the foot of Purgatory he is on the highest rung of natural virtues, and the lowest of godly virtues.

Magpies: Pierus, king of Emathia, had nine daughters who unwisely challenged the Muses to a contest of song. Defeated, they were changed into magpies for their presumption

Canto II

Dante observes a strange object crossing the water – the Angel boatman ferrying souls from their gathering place at the mouth of the Tiber to Purgatory's shore.

Casella: a musician-singer friend of Dante's.

all who wish to cross: Boniface VIII declared a Jubilee Year from Christmas 1299 to Christmas 1300 extending plenary indulgence to all pilgrims to Rome, believed to extend to the dead.

Canto III

They race on. At the base of the cliff they meet the first Late Repentants; souls who put off desire

for grace and must wait for purgation. The Contumacious, here, died excommunicated but surrendered their souls to God at the point of death. They must wait thirty times the period it took them to repent, their contumacy.

Brindisi: Virgil's body was taken from Brindisi to Naples in 19 BC.

Manfred: King of Sicily, opposed by the Papacy.

Canto IV

They reach the opening in the cliff face and begin the climb. Dante flags but Virgil urges him to the next level of the Late Repentants: the ledge of the Indolent. Virgil explains that the beginning of the ascent (turning from Sin to True Repentance) is the hardest, but the higher one goes the easier it becomes.

more than one soul: Plato claimed we have three souls, each with a specific function, the vegetative, the emotional and the intellectual. Belacqua: a Florentine lutemaker and friend of Dante's famed for indolence.

Canto V

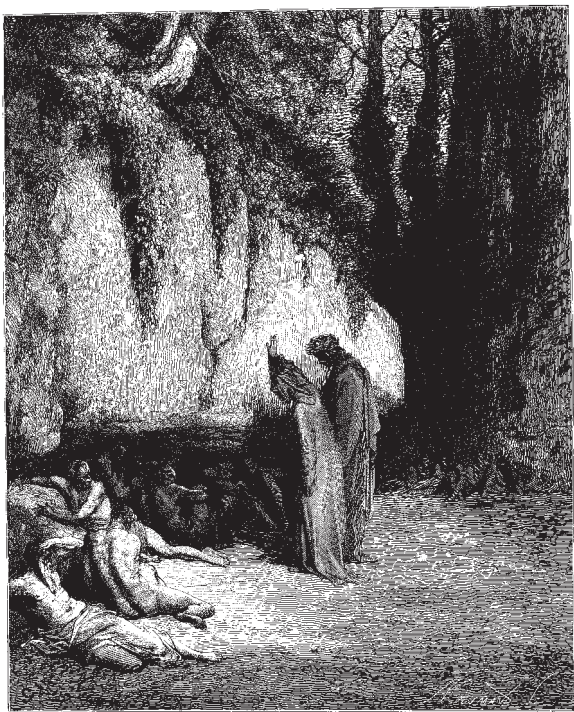
Dante's shadow creates excitement among the souls of the next level, those who died by violence without last rites. Since their lives were cut short they did not have the chance to repent fully, and so are placed higher than the Indolent.

Miserere: Psalm 51, which asks for forgiveness and purification of the soul.

Buonconte: the son of Guido da Montefeltro, in



'The celestial helmsman'
(Canto II)



Belacqua: 'Brother,' he said, 'what's the good in climbing?'
(Canto IV)

Hell as an evil counsellor. Buonconte was killed at the battle of Campaldino. Giovanna was his wife.

Pia: traditionally Pia de' Tolomei of Siena, whose jealous husband suspected her of adultery and threw her from a window to her death.

Canto VI

The souls of those who died by violence continue to press around Dante. He promises to bear word of them back to the world, but does not pause. Virgil speaks of the power of prayer to shorten time in Purgatory but tells Dante to wait for Beatrice to explain. They come upon Sordello, a Mantuan like Virgil.

Sordello: a troubadour poet of the early thirteenth century.

Justinian: emperor of Constantinople 527-565, author of the code of Roman law, 'the bridle'.

Marcellus: a Roman senator who opposed Caesar but was forgiven by him.

Canto VII

Sordello pays homage to Virgil and offers to guide the poets to St Peter's Gate. He explains that none may climb during sunset, and shows them a flowering valley to rest in. They observe the Negligent Rulers of the Late Repentants, to whom personal satisfaction was more important than public duty.

snubnose: Philip III of France, the lily is the symbol of France.

kindly features: Henry of Navarre, reportedly suffocated by his own fat.

France's Plague: Philip IV of France, whose misrule unites him with his father and father-in-law Henry of Navarre.

robust soul, handsome nose: former enemies, Pedro III of Aragon and Charles I of Anjou. Pedro was responsible for the massacre of the French in the 'Sicilian Vespers' of 1282.

young man: Alfonso III, the Magnificent, King of Aragon who died in 1291 without heirs.

Henry [III] of England: a pious but slothful king whose son, Edward I, was an improvement.

William, Marquis: of Montferrat, was captured quelling a rebellion in Alessandria and displayed in an iron cage until his death. The Alessandrins invaded Montferrat and Canovese.

Canto VIII

The hour of evening worship arrives. The souls gather and sing the evening Compline hymn asking for protection in the night. Two angels descend from heaven and take their posts one on each side of the valley. The poets join the souls.

Te lucis ante terminum: 'To thee before the ending of the light', the opening lines of the Compline hymn.

CD 2

Canto IX

Dante falls asleep. He dreams he is clasped in the talons of an eagle and raised into an orb of fire. When he wakes he is alone with Virgil, further up the mountain, at the portals of Purgatory itself. The angel inscribes seven P's on his forehead (for



'Dreaming, I seemed to see an eagle poised'
(Canto IX)



'Sat on the highest step, as yet silent, was a guardian.'
(Canto IX)

peccatum – sin) representing seven deadly sins to be purged.

Tithonus: husband of Aurora, for whom she gained the gift of eternal life but not eternal youth. He grew old and decrepit beside his ageless bride, who eventually turned him into a cicada.

we reached the steps: the three stages of repentance. White for sincerity, black and rough for contrition and sorrow for sin, red for penance and the ardour that leads to good works.

Seven P's: the sins of Pride, Envy, Wrath, Sloth, Avarice, Gluttony and Lust.

Te Deum laudamus: 'We praise thee O God'

Canto X

The door clangs shut behind them, and they are faced by narrow fissure to climb. Three hours later they come to the first terrace. On one side is a precipice, on the other a frieze of marble reliefs. Virgil asks Dante to observe the penitents of this level bent double under the weight of boulders – the proud brought low.

Polycletus: A fifth century sculptor unsurpassed in carving images of men. 'ecce ancilla Dei': behold the hand maid of the Lord, the words of the Virgin Mary at the Annunciation. (Luke 1:38)

the humble psalmist: King David, dancing in humility before the Ark of the Covenant. (11 Sam. 6:1-17) Michal his wife was punished with sterility for her scorn.

Canto XI

The proud souls, bent double, speak a version of

the Lord's Prayer interceding for the living and those still in Purgatory.

Oderisi glory of Gubbio: an illuminator of manuscripts who in life boasted he had no equal in painting.

Cimabue: a great Florentine master c. 1240-1302 who broke from the Byzantine tradition of art with a more natural style.

Giotto: a pupil of Cimabue who went on to surpass his master.

Canto XII

Virgil bids Dante straighten up, but then asks him to observe the relief beneath his feet, with depictions of great pride from Lucifer to the story of Troy; the Reign of Pride. They reach the angel guiding the next terrace, who erases the symbol of pride from Dante's forehead.

Briareus: one of the giants who challenged Jupiter.

Thymbræus: another name for Apollo.

Niobe: the mother of seven sons and seven daughters who claimed her superiority over Latona, who had only two. These were Apollo and Diana, who killed her sons and daughters respectively. Niobe was turned to stone, and left to weep stone tears.

Arachne: challenged Minerva to a weaving contest, and won, but was turned into a spider.

Tomyris: a Scythian queen who decapitated her son's murderer, Cyrus, Emperor of the Persians, and threw his head into a vessel of blood, urging him to drink.



*'I am Omberto and the sin of Pride has not harmed me alone but all my house...'
(Canto XI)*

Beati paupares spiritu: the first beatitude. Blessed are the poor in spirit; in praise of humility.

Canto XIII

The next terrace is apparently deserted, but as Dante and Virgil walk on they hear voices crying out examples of great love for others. These voices are the Whip of Envy. The souls, when they see them, have their eyes sealed, until their envious looks are cured. The examples are of charitable concern for others.

‘Vinum non habent’: they have no wine, an allusion to the wedding feast at Cana, where Mary solicits Christ’s first miracle.

‘I am Orestes’: Orestes was condemned to death for avenging the murder of his father, Agammemnon. Pylades pretended to be Orestes to save his friend’s life, but Orestes would not allow it and asserted his identity. Each declared ‘I am Orestes’.

Canto XIV

Two speakers begin to discuss Dante as though he were as deaf as they are blind. When Virgil and he move on Dante is struck with terror by two disembodied voices that break over them like thunder- the Rein of Envy. Circe: an enchantress, with the power to turn men into beasts.

It flows on: Guido describes the nature of the inhabitants of the various towns of the Arno valley. **‘I shall be slain’:** the voice is of Cain facing God’s punishment ‘I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth and who ever finds me will

kill me.’ (Gen 4: 13-14)

I am Aglauros: the second example of Envy. Aglauros, daughter of the king of Athens. tried out of jealousy to prevent a meeting between her sister and Mercury, and so was turned to stone.

Canto XV

The travellers have rounded a quarter of the mountain and now face the sun setting in the north. Dante is dazzled by the Angel of Caritas, who passes them on to the next ledge. The Angel sings the fifth beatitude as they enter the Third Cornice – the Wrathful. The visions that entrance Dante are the Whip of Wrath, extolling the virtue of Meekness.

the more each possesses : sharing love does not diminish but increases the quantity of it.

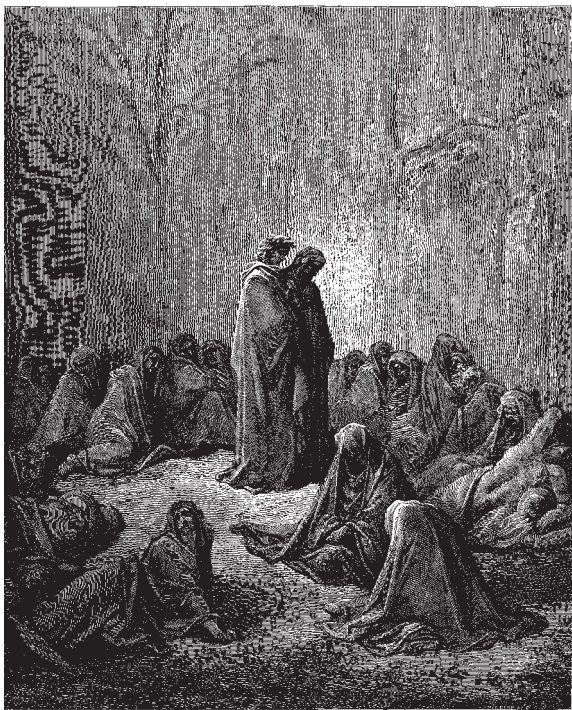
‘why have you done this to us’: the words of Mary when she finds Jesus in the temple are meek, despite her distress at losing him.

‘If you are ruler of this city’: the allusion is to Athens, over which Neptune and Athena contested. Pisistratus, its benevolent tyrant was famous for turning away anger with a soft answer.

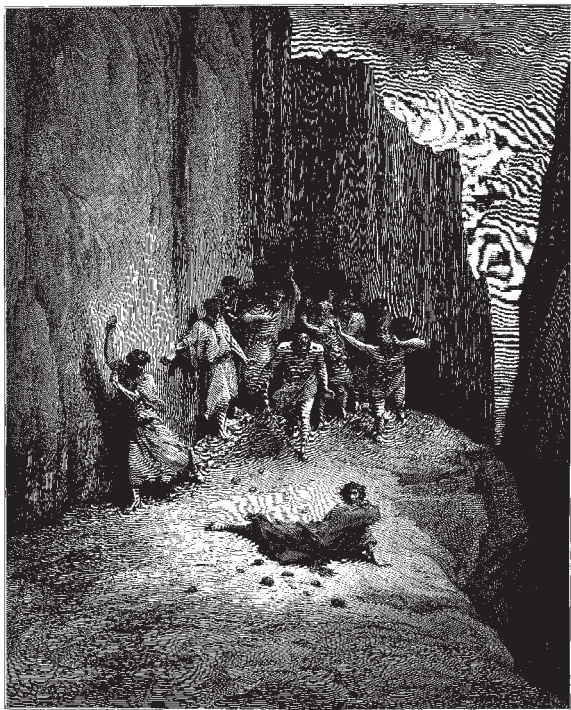
stoning a boy to death: St Stephen, the first Christian martyr.

Canto XVI

Dante is blinded by smoke that purifies the wrathful, and clings to Virgil. He hears their voices singing Agnus dei, the lamb of God symbol of the meekness of divine love. They sing with one voice for Wrath is the sin that breeds division among men.



*'The eyelids of those shades has been sewn shut but with threads of iron...
(Canto XIII)*



'Then I saw people, ignited by hate, stoning a boy to death...'
(Canto XV)

From the fond hands of God: Marco has said that if the world has gone astray it is man's fault, not the stars. But the state of the world is not caused by depravity inherent in human nature – the soul is innocent but in need of guidance. The lack of guidance has brought the present corrupt state about.

Canto XVII

Emerging from the smoke Dante sees the visions that make the rein of Wrath. The Angel of Meekness calls them to the next level, but it is dark and the Poets must rest. Virgil explains Purgatory.

I saw the cruelty of one: Procne, angered by her husband's rape of her sister killed her own son in wrath and fed him to his father. She was turned into nightingale.

a figure who was crucified: Haman, minister of Ahasuerus, king of Persia, enraged that the Jew Mordecai refused to do him homage persuaded the king to crucify all the Jews. Esther convinced Ahasuerus of Haman's wickedness and the minister was crucified instead.

O my queen: Amata wife of Latinus and mother of Lavinia, hoped Turnus would marry her daughter and kill Aeneas, the invader. Amata killed herself in a rage after hearing a rumour of Turnus' death. Her crime was against herself and God's will however because Aeneas was chosen by God to found Rome and the Empire.

CD 3

Canto XVIII

Dante enquires more about the nature of love. Virgil explains warning that he must seek the final answer from Beatrice. A train of souls come running round the mountain – the slothful, now in too much of a hurry to stop and talk.

Ismenus and Asopus: Boetian rivers, near Thebes.

Barbarossa: Emperor Frederick I, who destroyed Milan in 1162.

one foot in the grave: Alberto dell Scala, Lord of Verona, who died in 1301; the year is presently 1300.

Canto XIX

Dante dreams of the Siren, hideous in her true form but who grows irresistible as men stare on her. Virgil, prompted by a Heavenly lady strips the Siren, exposing her deformities. Dante awakes and they continue to the fifth cornice of the Avaricious – the hoarders and spendthrifts.

the sweet Siren: represents the vices of Avarice, Gluttony and Lust which will be purged on the upper three terraces.

'I was Peter's successor': Pope Adrian V, of the counts of Lavagna, the river mentioned.

Canto XX

The Poets find the ledge so crowded with sinners there is only a narrow path left to walk. Dante hears a soul cry out the Whip of Avarice. The sinner proceeds to denounce the Capetian



'As avarice vanquished our love for good...here we shall lie motionless.'
(Canto XX)

dynasty, which he founded, then offer exempla of the Rein of Avarice. The mountain is shaken as if by an earthquake.

how poor then you were: the blessed poverty of Mary

Fabricius: the honourable poverty of a Roman Consul who refused to deal in bribes, and died so poor the state buried him.

(Saint) Nicholas: bishop of Myra in Lycia, whose generosity saved an impoverished nobleman from turning his daughters to a life of sin through lack of dowry.

evil past and future may seem less: refers to Philip the Fair's attack on Boniface VIII in 1303. He was threatened with execution and died of 'hysterical seizures.' The crime, to Dante, dwarfed all else. Pygmalion: a king of Tyre Achan: stole some of the consecrated spoils of Jericho. Joshua had him stoned to death with his family.

Canto XXI

A newcomer explains why the mountain appeared to shake. It is Statius an admirer of Virgil's work and a poet himself.

she who sits spinning: Lachesis, who spins the thread of a man's life from the measure of wool her sister Clotho puts on the distaff. Atropos the third sister cuts the thread when it is finished.

Thaumus daughter: Iris, personification of the rainbow.

tremors: for Dante, earthquakes were caused by winds trapped underground.

worthy Titus: emperor from 79-81 AD, destroyed Jerusalem.

Statius: the major poet of the Silver Age of Latin literature. He never completed his second major work the Achilleid. His first is the Thebaid.

Canto XXII

Statius explains how he became a Christian, and inquires after his favourite poets of aniquity. Statius' besetting sin was prodigality. They come to a tree laden with fruits, and from within the foliage a voice cries out exempla for the whip of Gluttony.

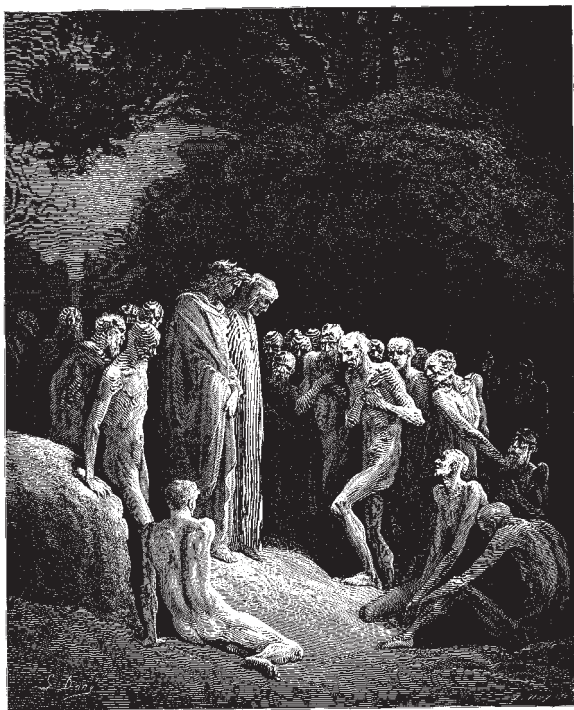
Jocasta: the mother of Oedipus, whom she later unwittingly married. Her two sons Eteocles and Polynices killed each other, the subject of Statius Thebaid.

many of your people: characters from Statius works. a tree that blocked our path: small branches at the bottom, growing larger at the top, make the fruit unattainable.

Daniel: spurned meat and drink of the king's table and was given the gift by God of interpreting visions and dreams.

Canto XXIII

The three poets hear Psalm 51, and a band of emaciated spirits come from behind them – the Gluttonous. Dante recognises one by his voice, his features are so changed by starvation. Forese Donati although a late repentant, has moved up the mountain because of his widow's prayers.



*'Each shade had dark and sunken eyes, pallid faces and bodies so emaciated...
(Canto XXIII)*

Labis Mea Domine: ‘Open my lips O lord, and my mouth shall sing your praises,’ the prayer of the gluttonous.

Erysichthon: committed an outrage by cutting down the trees in a grove sacred to Ceres. She afflicted him with ravenous hunger, which led him to eat his own flesh.

OMO: a medieval notion that God had signed his handiwork, OMO dei, man [is] of God. The eye sockets form the O’s and the brows nose and cheekbones the M.

Eli: Eli, eli, lema sabachthani, my God my god who hast thou forsaken me. (Matthew 27:46).

Barbagia women: famous for being lascivious and bare-breasted.

Canto XXIV

Forese identifies many of the Gluttonous. They come to the Tree of Knowledge and having skirted it meet the Angel of Abstinence who shows them to the ascent.

Piccarda: Forese’s sister, who took vows but was forced into a political marriage.

Bonagiunta of Lucca: poet and orator of repute, but a famous glutton and drinker too.

one behind him: Pope Martin IV, a good pope, if a glutton.

Take heart: Forese’s prophecy of the downfall of Corso Donati, his brother.

Canto XXV

Dante wonders how purely spiritual beings can feel hunger and thirst. Statius explains and he finishes as they arrive at the seventh and last terrace.

Meleager: was fated to live as long as a piece of wood on his mother’s hearth remained unconsumed. She kept it from the fire until in revenge for the death of her brothers, whom he killed, she burned it. As it was consumed, he died.

Summus Deus clementia: God of supreme clemency, the hymn of the Lustful, asking God to banish Lust from their hearts.

‘virum non cognosco’: ‘I know no man,’ the reply of the Virgin Mary when she was told she would conceive and bear a son. Diana **Helice:** Diana took to the woods to preserve her virginity. Helice one of her nymphs was seduced by Jove and banished.

CD 4

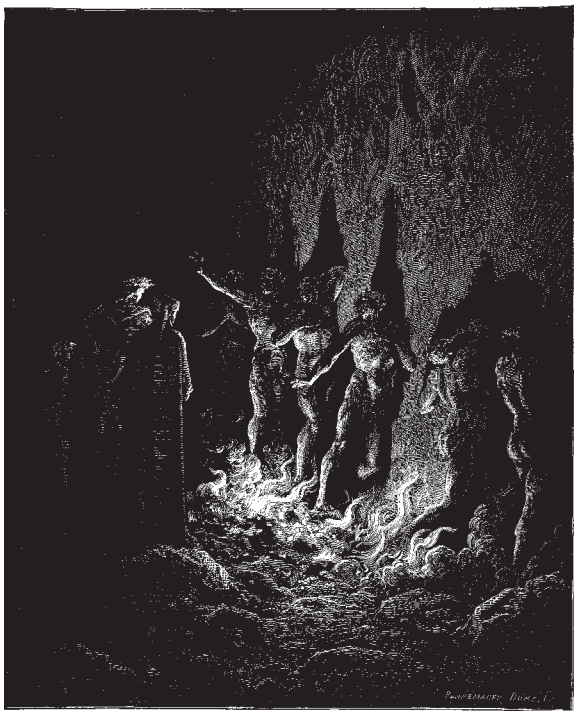
Canto XXVI

They proceed avoiding the flames. A conversation begins between Dante and some souls, but is interrupted by another group of souls rushing in the opposite direction. The two groups greet each other, then shout exempla of Lust.

Sodom and Gomorrah: words shouted in self-reproach for the sin of sodomy. Pasiphae enters the cow: the wife of Minos of Crete who Poseidon caused to lust after a bull. She had a structure made resembling a cow into which she climbed and was possessed by the bull. The union produced the Minotaur.

Guido Guinzelli: vernacular poet of mid 13th century.

Arnaut Daniel: author of late 13th century Provençal poetry, some pornographic.



'The care and nourishment of flames and hymns they endure sustains them...'
(Canto XXV)

Canto XXVII

They meet the angel of chastity but Dante is afraid to pass through the curtain of fire. Virgil persuades him in Beatrice's name. A chant coming from the other side guides them, sung by the Angel guardian of the Earthly Paradise. They hurry on but night overtakes them and they sleep on the steps up. Dante has a prophetic dream.

Beati mundo corde: Blessed are the pure in heart
Pyramus and Thisbe: tragic lovers of Babylon. At their rendezvous by a mulberry bush Pyramus comes across Thisbe's bloody scarf and assumes she has been killed. He stabs himself, and his blood stains the ground turning the mulberries, hitherto white, a deep red. Thisbe whispers her name to him as he dies.

Leah: the first wife of Jacob, Rachel his second. Leah was fertile, Rachel sterile but with beautiful clear eyes. They were held to be representative of the active and contemplative life respectively.

Canto XXVIII

Dante wanders at leisure in the earthly paradise until his way is blocked by the waters of Lethe. He comes across Matilda who explains the Garden to him.

a solitary lady: Matilda who symbolises the active life of the Soul, but also the intermediary between Human Reason and Beatrice's various manifestations Divine Love, contemplative life of the soul and others.

Delectasti: from Psalm 92. 'For thou Lord hast made me glad through thy Work'

Lethe: classically, the river from which the souls of the dead drink to forget their first existence. Eunoe is Dante's invention from the Greek for well-minded.

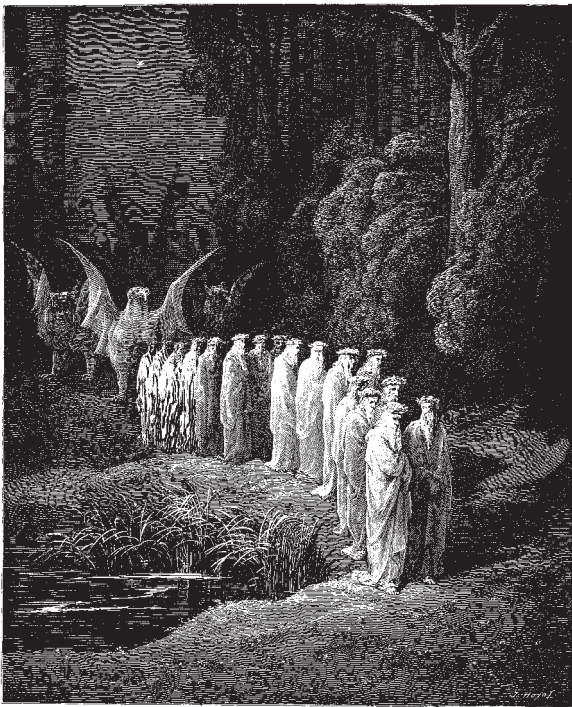
Canto XXIX

When the lady has finished speaking, she begins to walk upstream singing, Dante keeping pace with her on the other side. A glorious light and sweet melody fills the air with rapture. Dante cries out against Eve's daring, through which such joy was lost to mankind.

The heavenly pageant: is an allegory of the church triumphant. The seven candlesticks and their rainbow trails represent the gifts of the holy spirit (wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge, piety and fear of the Lord. The twenty-four elders are the books of the old testament, and the four beasts guarding the chariot, the evangelists – Mathew, Mark, Luke and John. The griffon's dual nature reflects the human and divine nature of Christ. To the right of the chariot the three dancing ladies are the theological virtues Faith, Hope and Charity; to the left are the four cardinal virtues: Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, and Temperance. The seven men following are the remaining books of the New Testament, the last being the Apocalypse of St John.

Three eyes: indicate Prudence's ability to see past present and future. Prudence is a good memory of the past, good knowledge of the present, and good foresight of the future.

great Hippocrates: the reference is to Luke, the physician of the soul.



*'Beneath this magnificence, proceeding two by two, came twenty-four elders...'
(Canto XXIX)*

the other: St Paul. The sword represents the word of God.

four with an humble aspect: the minor epistles of James, Peter, John and Jude.

Canto XXX

Dante encounters Beatrice, feeling shame at the years he has ignored her. Dante turns to Virgil and finds he has disappeared. Beatrice reprimands Dante for having wasted his talents.

veni sponsa de Libano: 'come my bride from Lebanon' from the Song of Solomon. Here the soul is wedded to Christ.

Benedictus qui venis: 'Blessed art thou that comest' (Matthew 21:9).

Manibus, O date lilia plenis: O, give us lilies with full hands (Aeneid VI 883). A tribute to the now departed Virgil. appeared a lady: Beatrice, who in life, left Dante stupefied. He would often faint in her presence.

I know the flame of old: the words spoken by Dido of her passion for Aeneas, which she thought had died (Aeneid IV, 23). In te Domini speravi: 'In thee, O lord have I put my trust.' Psalm 31

Canto XXXI

Beatrice's reprimand continues, forcing Dante to confess his faults until he swoons with grief and pain at the thought of his sin. He wakes in the waters of Lethe, held by Matilda.

Asperges me: Cleanse me [of sin]. Psalms li 7. Matilda is performing the office of absolution after Dante's confession and repentance.

the four women: the Cardinal virtues Justice, Prudence, Fortitude, Temperance. here as nymphs, but also as the stars Dante saw at the base of the mountain.

three beyond: faith hope and charity.

second beauty: i.e., salvation.

Parnassus: the fountain of Castalia. To drink from it is to receive poetic gifts, to grow pale in its shadow is to labour at mastering the art.

Canto XXXII

Beatrice unveils and for the first time in ten years he gazes on her radiance, thereby nearly losing his sight. He recovers to observe a strange metamorphosis of the chariot, an allegory of the church in terms of the misdirections and heresies it has suffered.

The tree: is an off shoot of the Tree of Knowledge, from which Christ's Cross was made. The pole the Griffon is pulling and what draws the Chariot (i.e., the chariot) forward is allegorically the true cross too.

Syrinx: The hundred eyes of Argus, or Panoptes, Juno's gamekeeper set to watch lo her rival in love for Jupiter. Mercury lulled him to sleep and beheaded him. Juno set Argus' eyes into the peacock's tail.

bird of Jove: the eagle. Here its attack symbolises the Roman persecution of early Christianity. The ship metaphor is often used for the Church.

a fox: the heresies that threatened the early church.

a dragon: Satan

the seven heads: the deadly sins. Those with two



*'So, within a cloud of flowers...came a lady wearing
a white veil crowned with olive leaves'
(Canto XXX)*



'She had plunged me up to the throat into the river'
(Canto XXXI)



*'Then there appeared...an ungirt whore...and standing at her side was a giant...'
(Canto XXXII)*

horns are worst, Pride Wrath and Envy, Avarice Sloth Gluttony and Lust have only one, as sins of the flesh not the spirit.

ungirt whore: the corrupt papacy.

the giant: the French monarchy, especially Philip the Fair, who forced the papacy to Avignon and under his control.

Canto XXXIII

The seven nymphs sing a hymn of sorrow for the Church. They walk on in front, with Dante Statius and Matilda behind Beatrice. She delivers an obscure prophecy regarding the church for Dante to record for the living. Dante drinks from the restoring waters of Eunoe and is ready for the stars.

Deus venerunt gentes: a lament for the destruction of the temple of Jerusalem – ‘O God, the nations have come into your inheritance, thy holy temple they have defiled (Psalm 78).

Modicum et non videbitis me: a little while and you shall not see me, (et iterum), and again (modicum et vos videbitis me), a little while and you shall see me. The words of Christ regarding his own departure and return, (John 16:16).

Tigris and Euphrates: two of the four rivers mentioned in Genesis as watering the Earthly Paradise.

About the translation

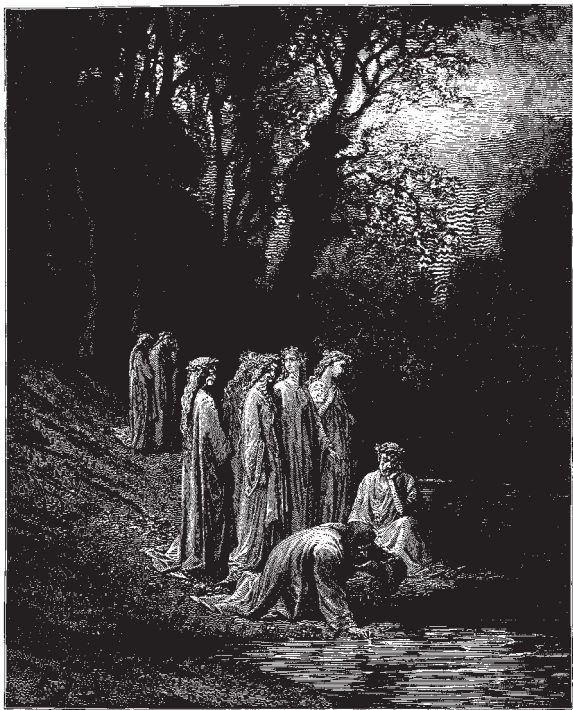
Had Dante guessed at the attention posterity would give his vision, he would no doubt have set aside a special place in the lowest part of hell for translators. Some of the most famous names in literature have attempted a Divine Comedy for their time, and with the most famously awful results. His *terze rima*, or three-fold rhyme scheme, has tied numerous poets in English into such knots that on occasions Dante's rhyme scheme is all that remains of the original.

But as Virgil says to the Poet, ‘Let us not talk of them, but with a glance pass on.’ This translation was made with the listener in mind. Here, couplets and *terza rima* have been rejected for the clarity of blank verse. And while the purist's lip may curl, Dante's sometimes convoluted sentence structure has been occasionally straightened for ease of comprehension.

It may be assumed that for many of Dante's contemporaries, **The Divine Comedy** will have been an aural experience. It is this pleasure of his epic as a story rather than as a classic text that this translation seeks to recapture. Conjured by the listener's own imagination 600 years on, Hell has lost none of its terror nor Paradise its ecstasy.

Note by Benedict Flynn

In addition to translating **The Divine Comedy**, Benedict Flynn has re-told the myths of **The Tale of Troy**, **The Adventures of Odysseus**, **King Arthur** and **Robin Hood** for younger listeners and edited the anthology **Poems of the Orient** – all for Naxos AudioBooks.



'But there flows Eunoe, lead him to it and revive the powers grown faint in him.'
(Canto XXXIII)

The music on this recording is taken from the NAXOS catalogue

SALVE FESTA DIES In Dulcio, Alberto Turco	8.550712
MACHAUT REQUIEM MASS Oxford Camerata, Jerenly Summerley	8.553833
ANON BLACK MADONNA Ensemble Unicorn	8.554256

Music programming by Roger Marsh

Cover picture: Dante reading from 'The Divine Comedy'
Domenico di Michelino (1417-91) by courtesy Bridgeman Art Library, London

Dante

Purgatory from The Divine Comedy

Read by **Heathcote Williams**

*'Now of that second kingdom I shall sing
where human souls are purified of sin,
and made worthy to ascend to Heaven.'*

Purgatory is the second part of Dante's *The Divine Comedy*. We find the Poet, with his guide Virgil, ascending the terraces of the Mount of Purgatory inhabited by those doing penance to expiate their sins on earth. There are the proud – forced to circle their terrace for aeons bent double in humility; the slothful – running around crying out examples of zeal and sloth; while the lustful are purged by fire.

Though less well-known than *Inferno*, *Purgatory* has inspired many writers, including, in our century, Samuel Beckett and has played a key role in literature.



Heathcote Williams, poet, playwright and actor, has made a significant contribution to many fields. He is best known for his extended poems on environmental subjects: *Whale Nation*, *Falling for a Dolphin*, *Sacred Elephant* and *Autogeddon*. His plays have also won acclaim, notably *AC/DC* produced at London's Royal Court, and *Hancock's Last Half Hour*. As an actor he has been equally versatile – taking memorable roles in *Orlando*, *Wish You Were Here* and Derek Jarman's *The Tempest*, in which he played Prospero. He also reads *Inferno* and *Paradise* from *The Divine Comedy* for Naxos AudioBooks.

CD ISBN:

978-962-634-316-6

View our catalogue online at
www.naxosaudiobooks.com

