

INFERNO

CANTO I

Midway in the journey of our life
I came to myself in a dark wood,
for the straight way was lost. 3

Ah, how hard it is to tell
the nature of that wood, savage, dense and harsh,
the very thought of it renews my fear! 6

It is so bitter death is hardly more so.
But to set forth the good I found
I will recount the other things I saw. 9

How I came there I cannot really tell,
I was so full of sleep
when I forsook the one true way. 12

But when I reached the foot of a hill,
there where the valley ended
that had pierced my heart with fear, 15

looking up, I saw its shoulders
arrayed in the first light of the planet
that leads men straight, no matter what their road. 18

Then the fear that had endured
in the lake of my heart, all the night
I spent in such distress, was calmed. 21

And as one who, with laboring breath,
has escaped from the deep to the shore
turns and looks back at the perilous waters, 24

so my mind, still in flight,
turned back to look once more upon the pass
no mortal being ever left alive. 27

After I rested my wearied flesh a while,
I took my way again along the desert slope,
my firm foot always lower than the other. 30

But now, near the beginning of the steep,
a leopard light and swift
and covered with a spotted pelt 33

refused to back away from me	
but so impeded, barred the way,	
that many times I turned to go back down.	36
It was the hour of morning,	
when the sun mounts with those stars	
that shone with it when God's own love	39
first set in motion those fair things,	
so that, despite that beast with gaudy fur,	
I still could hope for good, encouraged	42
by the hour of the day and the sweet season,	
only to be struck by fear	
when I beheld a lion in my way.	45
He seemed about to pounce --	
his head held high and furious with hunger --	
so that the air appeared to tremble at him.	48
And then a she-wolf who, all hide and bones,	
seemed charged with all the appetites	
that have made many live in wretchedness	51
so weighed my spirits down with terror,	
which welled up at the sight of her,	
that I lost hope of making the ascent.	54
And like one who rejoices in his gains	
but when the time comes and he loses,	
turns all his thought to sadness and lament,	57
such did the restless beast make me --	
coming against me, step by step,	
it drove me down to where the sun is silent.	60
While I was fleeing to a lower place,	
before my eyes a figure showed,	
faint, in the wide silence.	63
When I saw him in that vast desert,	
'Have mercy on me, whatever you are,'	
I cried, 'whether shade or living man!'	66
He answered: 'Not a man, though once I was.	
My parents were from Lombardy --	
Mantua was their homeland.	69
'I was born sub Julio, though late in his time,	
and lived at Rome, under good Augustus	
in an age of false and lying gods.	72

'I was a poet and I sang
 the just son of Anchises come from Troy
 after proud Ilium was put to flame. 75

'But you, why are you turning back to misery?
 Why do you not climb the peak that gives delight,
 origin and cause of every joy?' 78

'Are you then Virgil, the fountainhead
 that pours so full a stream of speech?'
 I answered him, my head bent low in shame. 81

'O glory and light of all other poets,
 let my long study and great love avail
 that made me delve so deep into your volume. 84

'You are my teacher and my author.
 You are the one from whom alone I took
 the noble style that has brought me honor. 87

'See the beast that forced me to turn back.
 Save me from her, famous sage --
 she makes my veins and pulses tremble.' 90

'It is another path that you must follow,'
 he answered, when he saw me weeping,
 'if you would flee this wild and savage place. 93

'For the beast that moves you to cry out
 lets no man pass her way,
 but so besets him that she slays him. 96

'Her nature is so vicious and malign
 her greedy appetite is never sated --
 after she feeds she is hungrier than ever. 99

'Many are the creatures that she mates with,
 and there will yet be more, until the hound
 shall come who'll make her die in pain. 102

'He shall not feed on lands or lucre
 but on wisdom, love, and power.
 Between felt and felt shall be his birth. 105

'He shall be the salvation of low-lying Italy,
 for which maiden Camilla, Euryalus,
 Turnus, and Nisus died of their wounds. 108

'He shall hunt the beast through every town
 till he has sent her back to Hell
 whence primal envy set her loose. 111

'Therefore, for your sake, I think it wise you follow me: I will be your guide, leading you, from here, through an eternal place	114
'where you shall hear despairing cries and see those ancient souls in pain as they bewail their second death.	117
'Then you will see the ones who are content to burn because they hope to come, whenever it may be, among the blessed.	120
'Should you desire to ascend to these, you'll find a soul more fit to lead than I: I'll leave you in her care when I depart.	123
'For the Emperor who has his seat on high wills not, because I was a rebel to His law, that I should make my way into His city.	126
'In every part He reigns and there He rules. There is His city and His lofty seat. Happy the one whom He elects to be there!'	129
And I answered: 'Poet, I entreat you by the God you did not know, so that I may escape this harm and worse,	132
'lead me to the realms you've just described that I may see Saint Peter's gate and those you tell me are so sorrowful.'	135
Then he set out and I came on behind him.	136