

# Dante's *The Divine Comedy*: The Inferno (modified)

*(The poet Dante, lost in a forest, reaches a hill which he begins to climb. He is threatened by three beasts and turns back, but he is met by Virgil, the famous poet of ancient Rome. Virgil suggests guiding Dante into the eternal world through Hell, Purgatory and Heaven. Doubtful of his own abilities, Dante is discouraged. Virgil encourages him by telling him that he was sent to help Dante by a blessed spirit from Heaven named Beatrice, the love of Dante's life. Dante is inspired by Beatrice and gains courage. The two poets journey to the gates of Hell...)*

**THROUGH ME THE WAY TO THE INFERNAL CITY:  
THROUGH ME THE WAY TO ETERNAL SADNESS:  
THROUGH ME THE WAY TO THE LOST PEOPLE...  
ABANDON ALL HOPE, ALL YOU THAT ENTER HERE.**

These were the words, with their dark color, that I saw written above the gate, at which I said: "Master, their meaning to me is hard."

And Virgil replied to me, as one who knows: "Here, all uncertainty must be left behind: all cowardice must be dead. We have come to the place where I told you that you would see the sad people who have lost all that is good." And placing his hand on mine with a calm expression that comforted me, he led me onward.

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*(Virgil leads Dante past the gates into the Vestibule<sup>1</sup> of Hell.)*

Just inside the Gates of Hell bellows of agony and deep groans sounded through the starless air, so that it made me weep. Many tongues, a terrible crying, words of sadness, accents of anger, voices deep remorse, with sounds of hands amongst them, making a turbulence that turns forever in the air, stained eternally, like sand spiralling in a whirlwind. And I, my head surrounded by the horror, said: "Master, what is this I hear? Who are these that are so overcome by suffering?"

And Virgil said to me, "These are the miserable who lived without praise, but without blame. These were not rebellious, but nor were they faithful to God. They were only for themselves; selfish. Heaven drove them out to maintain its beauty, and Hell does not accept them, lest evil have glory over them."

And I: "Master, what is so heavy on them, that makes them moan so deeply?"

He replied: "They have no hope of death, and their darkened life is so mean that they are envious of every other fate. Earth allows no mention of them to exist: mercy and justice reject them: let us not talk of them, but look and pass."

And I looked and saw a banner<sup>2</sup> that moved so quickly that it seemed to never stop or pause, and behind it came so long a line of people, I never would have believed that death had taken so many.

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<sup>1</sup> a lobby next to the outer door of a building; outside the main part of a building

<sup>2</sup> a long strip of cloth bearing a slogan or design, hung in a public place or carried at the head of a line of people.

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Immediately I understood that this was the despicable crew, hateful to God and his enemies. These wretches, who never truly lived, were naked and goaded<sup>3</sup> viciously by hornets and wasps, making their faces stream with blood, which mixed with tears and was collected at their feet to be eaten by loathsome worms...

*(Virgil leads Dante into Limbo, the first of 9 circles of Hell. Limbo contains the spirits of those who lived virtuously but without Christianity. Virgil is later greeted by his fellow poets.)*

A HEAVY THUNDER broke the deep sleep in my head, so that I started up like a person who by force is awoken. I moved my rested eye round about, and looked fixedly to distinguish the place where I was. True it is, that I found myself on the edge of a woeful abyss<sup>4</sup> that gathered in infinite<sup>5</sup> wailings. Dark and cloudy, so that though I fixed my sight on the bottom I could not see anything below.

"Now we descend down here into the blind world," began the Poet all deadly pale, "I will be first, and thou shalt be second."

And so he made me enter within the first circle that girds<sup>6</sup> the abyss of Hell. Here, so far as could be heard, there was no cries of agony, but that of sighs, which were many and great, of infants and of women and of men.

Virgil said to me, "You have not asked what spirits you see. I would have you know that they have not sinned, except they have not been baptized, which is essential to your faith. If they were born before Christianity, they did not fully worship God. I too am one of these souls. Through this defect, and no other guilt, we are lost. We suffer only knowing we may never leave here."

When I raised my brow a little more, I saw both Socrates and Plato<sup>7</sup>, who before the others stand nearest to him, Euclid<sup>8</sup> and Ptolemy<sup>9</sup>.

Four other mighty spirits I saw approaching us neither sorrowful nor glad. To me my gracious Master said, "Him that comes before the three, even as their lord. That one is Homer, the Greek poet great. He who comes next is Horace, the satirist. The third is Ovid, and the last is Lucan, poets all. They do me honor."

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<sup>3</sup> driven, provoked; usually by physical or emotional pain

<sup>4</sup> a deep or seemingly bottomless chasm

<sup>5</sup> limitless or endless

<sup>6</sup> encircle or go-around like a belt or a band

<sup>7</sup> ancient Greek philosophers

<sup>8</sup> ancient Greek mathematician

<sup>9</sup> ancient Greek astronomer

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1. Who rescues Dante and agrees to guide him on a journey through Heaven, Hell and Purgatory?
  - a. Three beasts
  - b. Beatrice
  - c. Virgil
  - d. Plato
2. Circle the four-word phrase that BEST explains why Dante is **inspired** by Beatrice.

*“Virgil encourages him by telling him that he was sent to help Dante by a blessed spirit from Heaven named Beatrice, the love of Dante’s life.”*

3. What quote by Virgil best describes WHY people live in the vestibule of Hell?
  - a. “These are the miserable who lived without praise, but without blame.”
  - b. “These were not rebellious, but nor were they faithful to God.”
  - c. “They were only for themselves; selfish.”
  - d. “Heaven drove them out to maintain its beauty, and Hell does not accept them.”
4. *“I found myself on the edge of a woeful abyss<sup>10</sup> that gathered in infinite<sup>11</sup> wailings.”* What does Dante see and hear?
  - a. valley/mumbling
  - b. deep canyon/crying
  - c. plains/laughing
  - d. mountains/silence
5. What sin have the people in Limbo committed?
  - a. caught stealing
  - b. selfish
  - c. not baptized Christian
  - d. murder
6. Who does Dante recognize in Limbo?
  - a. Socrates
  - b. Diabetes
  - c. Beatrice
  - d. Rome

7. Dante includes ancient Greek and Roman poets like Homer, Lucan, and others as characters in his story because he admires them. Please circle/underline words in the text that prove this idea:

*“Four other mighty spirits I saw approaching us neither sorrowful nor glad. To me my gracious Master said, “Him that comes before the three, even as their lord. That one is Homer, the Greek poet great. He who comes next is Horace, the satirist. The third is Ovid, and the last is Lucan, poets all. They do me honor.”*

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