

DANTE Inferno

from **The Divine Comedy**

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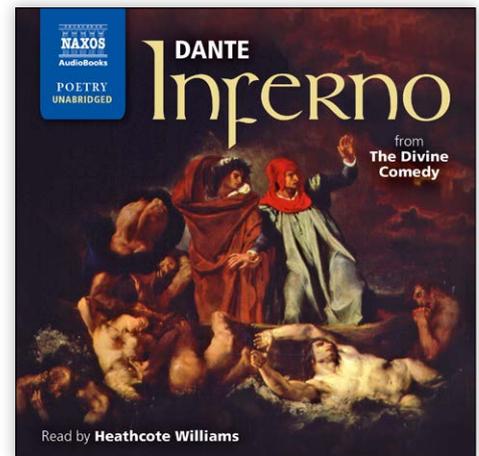
Read by **Heathcote Williams**

ABANDON ALL HOPE YOU WHO ENTER HERE

(Lasciate ogne speranza voi ch'intrate)

Dante's Hell is one of the most remarkable visions in Western literature. An allegory for his and future ages, it is, at the same time, an account of terrifying realism. Passing under a lintel emblazoned with these frightening words, the poet is led down into the depths by Virgil and shown those doomed to suffer eternal torment for vices exhibited and sins committed on earth.

The *Inferno* is the first part of the long journey which continues through redemption to revelation – through *Purgatory* and *Paradise* – and, in this translation prepared especially for audiobook, his images are as vivid as when the poem was first written in the early years of the 14th century.



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4 CDs

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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 *Purgatory* and *Paradise* from *The Divine Comedy* for Naxos AudioBooks.

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DANTE Inferno

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 peoples 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, especially in the **Inferno**), but to examine the reality of man's human and spiritual nature in all its various and complex manifestations.

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. There she herself assumes responsibility for his journey of discovery, and it is she who reveals to him the splendours of Paradise, leading him eventually to "that love that moves the Sun and other stars".

Dante calls the three books of **The Divine Comedy** '*canzoni*'. Each contains 33 chapters or 'cantos', except **Inferno** which

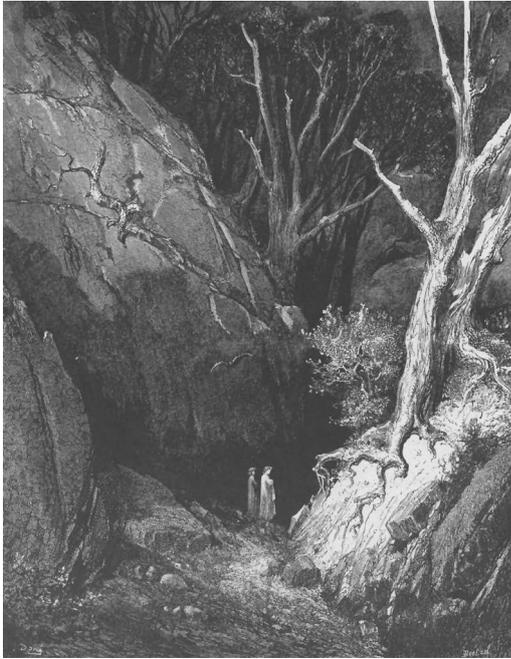
has an additional introductory canto – making 100 cantos in all. Each canto contains roughly 150 lines composed according to a strict metrical and rhyme scheme. The language of the poem is, importantly, not Latin (as was customary for high art in Dante's day) but the language used by educated people 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. Tchaikovsky'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).

Listeners to this reading of the **Inferno** may be struck, too, by Dante's extraordinary vision when, in Canto XXV, a serpent and sinner combine and transform one another in a way which, it might be supposed, was invented by computer 'morphing'. And no horror film has yet surpassed the frozen wastes of the deepest region of Dante's Hell, where the tears of the damned make their eyes freeze over, and where the mortal body of a sinner can begin its torture even before the point of actual death. Be warned.

Notes by Roger Marsh

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.



"Ah! who could relate how wild this wood was?" (Canto I)

Canto I

Dante awakens in a gloomy wood. He tries to leave climbing a sunlit mountain but is driven back by three beasts (Leopard, Lion and She-wolf, symbolising worldly pleasure, ambition, and avarice). He meets Virgil, the poet, who offers to guide him.

Son of Anchises: This was Aeneas. In the *Aeneid* Virgil retells the story of Aeneas' flight from Troy after its defeat by the Greeks and his foundation of the city which would become Rome.

A soul worthier than I: Beatrice who, in Purgatory, will take over the role of guide from Virgil.

Canto II

Late that evening. Dante doubts his worthiness for the journey. Virgil comforts him explaining that he was sent by Beatrice. Dante takes heart and they set out.

Silvius' father: Aeneas, who also journeyed to the underworld (in the *Aeneid*) where he met his father who prophesied his son's role in the future glory of Rome.

the dead... in suspense: see Canto IV

a noble Lady: the Virgin Mary, signifying compassion. Interceding on behalf of the Pilgrim Dante, she begins the process of his rescue by Divine Grace, without which he would be lost. **Lucia** is Illuminating Grace. Beatrice, whose name means blessedness or salvation appears to reveal the will of God to Virgil and Dante.

Canto III

The Poets arrive at the door of Hell and pass through to the antechamber. Within are shades who achieved neither praise nor blame in life, rejected by Heaven and Hell. Charon, who ferries the souls of the damned to Hades, refuses to ferry the living soul across the Acheron. Dante falls unconscious.

good of intellect: souls who lost sight of the 'Supreme Truth' or God.

great refusal: either Pontius Pilate or Celestine V who abdicated in favour of Boniface VIII.

Canto IV

Dante awakens in the First Circle, or Limbo whose inhabitants were virtuous but lived without Christianity. He encounters Homer, Horace, Ovid, Lucan and the great poets, heroes and philosophers of antiquity.

A Man of Power: Christ.

they are not sinners: The virtuous souls of Limbo are suspended between the joys of Heaven and the pains of Hell.

The master of men of knowledge: Aristotle.



"The winds changed course. They were blown towards us." (Canto V)

Canto V

They descend to the Second Circle where the lustful are carried aloft in a violent wind. Minos, who judges the dead and assigns them their place in Hell, bars their way. Dante hears Francesca da Rimini's tale of love and death and faints with pity.

Semiramis: the Assyrian empress, rumoured guilty of incest with her son.

That other one: Dido, who broke her oath of fidelity to her dead husband by falling in love with Aeneas.

the couple who fly together: Francesca di Rimini and Paolo Malatesta, brother of Francesca's husband Gianciotto, lord of Rimini. Paolo became her lover, until Gianciotto surprised them *in flagrante delicto* and murdered them.

Caïna's depths: one of the four divisions of Cocytus, the lowest (ninth) circle of Hell.

Galahad: the name of Lancelot and Guinevere's go-between in *Lancelot du Lac*, the medieval romance.

Canto VI

Dante awakens in the Third Circle where the Gluttonous are tormented by freezing filthy rain and the three-headed dog Cerberus, the watchdog of Hell. Ciaccio recognises Dante. He makes a prophecy. Virgil describes The Final Judgement.

solid human flesh: shades only appear to have corporeal form, although they feel actual physical pain.

your city: Florence.

Tell me, if you know: a passage referring to events in Italy, especially Florence, after 1300, the year of Dante's descent through Hell. Shades in Hell see the future and the past but know nothing of the present. Ciaccio is referring to the struggle between factions of the Guelph party. Pope Boniface VIII **whose sail trims to any**

breeze waited for an overall victor before committing his support. Ciaccio's 'prophecy' is accurate, because the events had already taken place.

Farinata: a Florentine politician. Farinata is in the circle of Heretics (Canto X); **Tegghiaio** and **Jacopo Rusticucci** are among the Sodomites (Canto XVI); **Mosca** is with the Sowers of Discord (Canto XXVIII); **Arrigo**, does not re-appear.

great adversary: in Hell the enemy is Christ.

Canto VII

The poets meet Plutus at the entrance to the Fourth Circle. Here the Avaricious and the Spendthrifts roll weights against each other in opposing semi-circles. They descend to the Fifth Circle where the Wrathful tear at each other and the Slothful bubble beneath the Styx.

Plutus: god of wealth in myth. The words are gibberish.

Michael took his vengeance: against the rebellious angels.

Charybdis: the whirlpool in the straits of Messina.

These tonsured ones: the avaricious are mostly priests.

Styx: second of the five rivers of Hades. The Acheron emerges from underground as the **spring**.

Canto VIII

Still in the Fifth Circle Dante and Virgil come to a tall tower. They cross the Styx with Phlegyas, encountering Filippo Argenti. They draw near the red-hot walls of the city of Dis. Their progress to lower Hell is obstructed.

Phlegyas:... guardian and ferryman of the Styx.

Until I was in: Dante, a mortal, has weight. Virgil, a shade, does not.

Filippo Argenti: an enemy of Dante's. Little else is known.

the city of Dis: Dis was the Roman name for Pluto god of the underworld. Here it is applied to Lucifer and the city whose walls mark the boundary between upper Hell and lower Hell.

Canto IX

At the gate of Dis. Virgil tries to calm Dante's fear. The Furies appear and Virgil warns Dante not to look at Medusa. The divine messenger arrives and orders the demons to let the poets through. They enter Dis and reach the Sixth Circle where they encounter the Arch-heretics in their red-hot sepulchres.

three Furies: Tisiphone, Megaera and Alecto, bringers of retribution and torment. The **Queen of endless misery** is Hecate, wife of Pluto.

Let Medusa come: one of the three Gorgon sisters whose hair was turned into snakes by Minerva. **Theseus**, the Athenian hero, descended to Hell to kidnap Hecate but was kept by Pluto in the Chair of Forgetfulness. Hercules set him free.

Cerberus: when Hercules rescued Theseus he dragged Cerberus up from Hell by a chain, stripping the fur from his throat.

Canto X

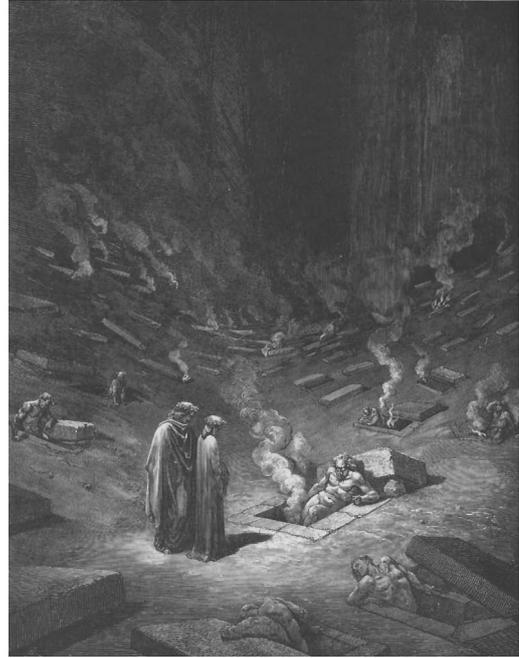
Still in the Sixth Circle the poets come to the Heretics and the Epicureans. Farinata degli Uberti explains that souls in Hell know nothing of the present but are able to remember the past and foresee the future.

Jehosephat: a valley near Jerusalem where the Last Judgement will take place and souls will be reunited with their bodies.

Farinata: di Jacopo degli Uberti, a Ghibelline (pro-imperial) leader in Florence, died 1264. The Ghibellines drove the (pro-papal) Guelph's

from Florence on **two occasions**, but by 1300 the Guelphs had returned to the city.

her whose eyes: Beatrice.



*"The lid of each tomb was pushed to one side,
And rising from within came cries of grief..." (Canto IX)*

Canto XI

Dante and Virgil pause beside Pope Anastasius' tomb before descending to the Seventh Circle. Virgil explains the arrangement of punishment in Hell. Violence in the three rounds of the Seventh Circle; ordinary fraud in the Eighth Circle and complex fraud in the Ninth. Having passed through the circles punishing the (lesser) Mortal sins of Incontinence, Lust, Gluttony, Avarice, Sloth, and Wrath, the sins prompted by Envy and Pride lie ahead.

Anastasius: Pope 494-498. Held as heretic because of his support for Photinus of Thessalonica who denied Christ's divine birth.

Aristotle's Ethics: a work on politics, the *Physics* his work on natural science.

Genesis: Man is to work and earn his bread by the sweat of his brow. Usurers do not, hence usury is sin.

Canto XII

The Seventh Circle, First Round: the Violent Against their Neighbours. The Minotaur and the Centaurs, half man, half horse, led by Chiron. Nessus guides them across the boiling blood of Phlegethon where the Tyrants and Murderers are immersed.

infamy of Crete: the Minotaur, part-man, part-bull born of Queen Pasiphaë who satisfied her lust with a bull. He was killed by Theseus **duke of Athens**.

before he came: Christ, in the harrowing of Hell.

Chiron:... centaur celebrated for his wisdom, tutor to the Greek heroes.

Nessus: centaur killed by Hercules after attempting to rape his wife Deianara. As Nessus died he gave her a robe dipped in his blood which, he said, would preserve Hercules' love. She hanged herself when the robe poisoned Hercules.

God's sanctum: In 1272, Guy de Montfort avenged his father, killed by Edward I of England, by murdering Edward's cousin Prince Henry. Henry's heart was set up on a column on London Bridge to be venerated.

Pyrrhus: son of Achilles. **Sextus,** pirate son of Pompey the Great.
Rinier da Corneto: highwayman of Dante's time, as was **Rinier Pazzo,** who made a habit of attacking clerics.



"We were men once, though we've become trees..." (Canto XIII)

Canto XIII

Seventh Circle, Second Round: the Violent against Themselves. The Wood of Suicides. Harpies and The Profligates, hunted by hounds.

Cecina and Corneto: the limits of the Maremma, a Tuscan swamp.
The tree spoke: Pier delle Vigne, advisor to Emperor Frederick II. Disgraced in 1248 he was imprisoned and committed suicide. **That whore** is envy; **Caesar's household** is Frederick's court; **Augustus** is the Emperor i.e., Frederick II.

two figures: Profligates who deliberately destroyed their worldly goods. Pier delle Vigne, is Arcolano da Squarcia of Padua. **Toppo,** a famous defeat of the Sienese in 1288, at which Lano willfully refused to retreat, dying rather than living in poverty. **Giacomo da Sant'Andrea** is reputed to have thrown money into the river Brenta to while away the time.

my home city: Florence, whose **first protector** was Mars, changed to **John the Baptist** when the citizens became Christian. In revenge Mars punishes Florence with constant fighting, allowing it to rebuild itself so long as fragments of his statue remain at Arno.

Canto XIV

Seventh Circle, Third Round: the violent against God, Nature and Art. Blasphemers, supine on the burning sand. The Ancient Man of Crete whose tears form the rivers of Hell.

Capaneus: one of the Seven who besieged Thebes was struck by Jove's thunderbolt after blaspheming that the gods could not defeat him.

ancient man: an allegory for the ages of man and the decline of human nature from Golden Age to Age of Iron. The statue in Crete, the centre of the known world, is midway between the pagan East (**Darmatta,** an Egyptian seaport) and the Christian West, **Rome.** The fissure which cracks every part except the head is the sorrow in every Age but the first. The tears are the source of the rivers Acheron, Styx and Phlegethon which collect at Cocytus, the lowest point of Hell.

Lethe: river of forgetfulness.

Canto XV

Seventh Circle, Third Round: Sodomites (scholars and clerics) eternally moving across the burning sand beneath a rain of fire.

Brunetto Latini: the Florentine, Guelph statesman–politician and writer 1212-94 wrote *Livres dou Tresor,* an encyclopaedic work and *Tesoretto* a didactic poem. He was in some way an early mentor of Dante.

Fiesole: the hill town where Catiline took refuge against Caesar. After its destruction the survivors, with a number of Roman families, were used to people Florence. This mix was seen as the root of Florentine civil discord.

Priscian: a sixth-century Latin grammarian.

Francesco d'Accorso: (1225-94) a celebrated Florentine jurist.

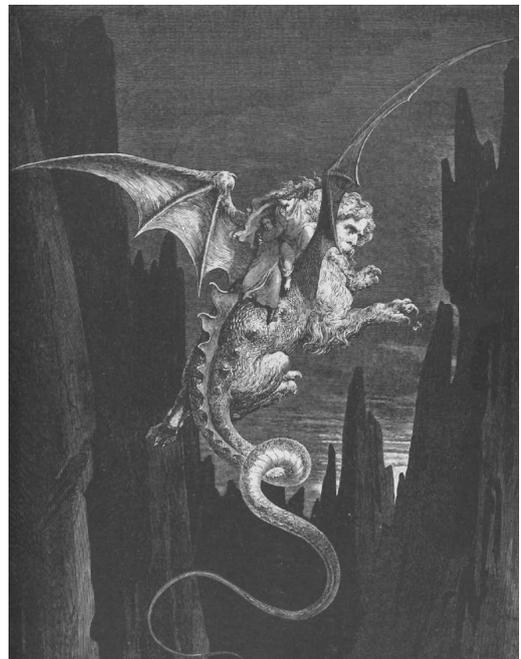
Servant of Servants: Pope Boniface VIII, who transferred the well-known sodomite Andrea de' Mozzi, bishop of Florence to Vicenza.

Canto XVI

Seventh Circle, Third Round: Sodomites (warriors and leaders). The decadence of Florence. Phlegethon plummets over the precipice. Dante's cord summons a monstrous figure.

Guido Guerra and Tegghiaio Aldobrandi: Guelph leaders. Little is known of **Jacopo Rusticucci.** My **downfall was my wife** suggests he was driven to homosexuality by her.

the centre: to Cocytus, the centre of the earth and the lowest part of Hell.



"Look, the monster with its sharpened tail..." (Canto XVII)

Canto XVII

Geryon. Seventh Circle Third Round: Violent Against Nature and Art. Usurers with their purses. Virgil and Dante descend to the Eighth Circle.

the monster: Geryon was the mythological Spanish giant king killed by Hercules in the course of his Labours.

Arachne: the weaver whose work rivalled Minerva's. She was turned into a spider.

beaver dips its tail: the beaver was supposed to catch fish by dangling its tail in the water.

The sovereign cavalier: held to be Gianni Buiamonte di Becchi, a usurer who held high office in Florence.

Phaeton: begged Apollo to let him drive the Sun-chariot. He was unable to control it and burnt the streak of sky known as the Milky Way.

Canto XVIII

The Eighth Circle, Malebolge, with Ten Ditches containing those who committed Fraud against mankind in general. The First Ditch; Panders and Seducers, scourged by demons. The Second Ditch; Flatterers immersed in filth.

Malebolge: a word invented by Dante meaning 'evil pouches', where sinners are pocketed in a set of concentric ditches.

Jubilee year: 1300, when Boniface VIII granted absolution to those who made a pilgrimage to Rome. Many thousands came and a traffic control system was instituted.

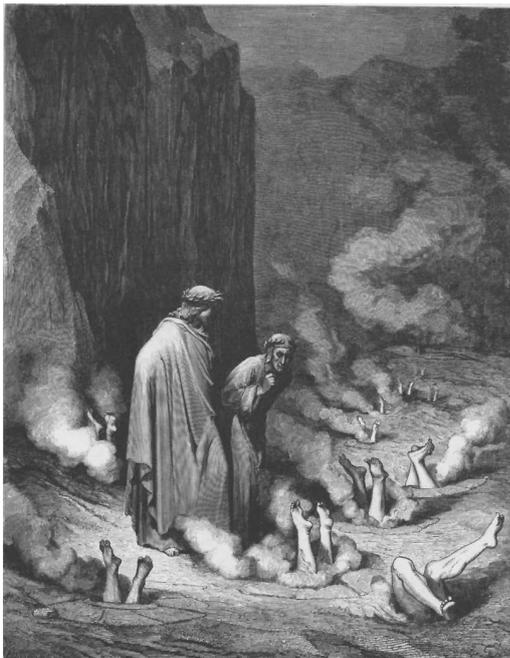
Venedico Cacciamenico: a Bolognese Guelph who procured his sister Ghisolabella for the Marchese of Ferrara.

sipa: the word for 'yes' in the Bolognese dialect. Caccianemico suggests there are more Bolognese in the ditch than in Bologna.

other misbegotten spirits: seducers, who defraud the innocent for their gain.

Jason: leader of the Argonauts, who captured the golden fleece. Sailing home he stopped at Lemnos where he seduced Hypsipyle, but abandoned her, pregnant. The men of Lemnos were slaughtered because they had brought home Thracian concubines. Hypsipyle

gulled the other women by hiding her father, Thoas, the king, pretending she had slain him. Later Jason married **Medea**, the sorceress, but abandoned her too. Medea took her revenge by killing Creusa, for whom Jason had abandoned her and murdered her own children.



"Out of the mouth of each hole there emerged
A sinner's feet and his legs up to the calf." (Canto XIX)

Canto XIX

The Eighth Circle, Third Ditch: the Simonists set head down into holes in the rock, flames tormenting their feet.

Simon Magus: tried to buy the power of the Holy Spirit from Peter and John. The sin of simony, the fraudulent use of the Church and sale of its offices for money or power, derives from his name.

Whoever you may be: Pope Nicholas III.

vile assassin: in the Florence of Dante's time murderers were executed by being placed upside down in a hole which was then filled with earth.

Is that you Boniface:... the soul, able to see the future knows Boniface VIII will take his place on his death, in 1303. Since it is 1300 Nicholas thinks the writings lied; Boniface is early. Boniface tricked Celestine V into abdicating the See of St Peter and was infamous for simony.

Fairest of Women: the Church.

great mantle: the papacy.

one of the she-bear's sons: Nicholas III was a degli Orsini, which means of the little bears (orsa = bear), notorious for simony and nepotism – his desire to **advance the bear-cubs**.

lawless shepherd: another corrupt pope, Clement V, puppet of Philip, King of France.

Canto XX

Eighth Circle, Fourth Ditch: Soothsayers, Astrologers, Magicians, whose heads are twisted so that they look only backwards. Virgil explains the origin of Mantua.

amazing deformation: these sinners who attempted to divine the future, are forced to look backwards eternally.

Amphiaraus: another of the seven kings who assaulted Thebes and a seer.

Tiresius: a soothsayer of Thebes.

Michael Scott: a Scottish philosopher (1175-1235). Reputedly a magician.

Cain with his thorns: the medieval Italian equivalent of 'the man in the moon'.

Canto XXI

Eighth Circle, Fifth Ditch: Barrators, swindlers in civic and public office, plunged beneath boiling pitch guarded by demons. A new arrival from Lucca. Dante and Virgil proceed, escorted by demons.

Malebranche: the generic name for the demons.

Sacred Face: a crucifix at the cathedral in Lucca. The **Serchio** is a nearby river – perhaps the sinner is lying on his back in the pitch with his arms open.

smashed to bits: broken by the earthquake at the death of Christ.



"Grappled him by his sticky, pitchy hair,
And hauled him up..." (Canto XXII)

Canto XXII

Eighth Circle, Fifth Ditch Barrators. The demons fork out a Navarrese barrator from the pitch. The Navarrese plays a trick; two demons end up in the pitch.

You Aretines: Dante was at the battle of Campaldino 1289, when Guelphs from Florence and Lucca defeated Ghibellines from Arezzo.

Gomita: a Sardinian friar hanged when it was discovered he was selling prisoners freedom.

Don Michele Zanche: governor of another Sardinian district, Logodoro. Murdered in 1275 by his son-in-law Branca d'Oria.

Canto XXIII

Eighth Circle, Fifth Ditch: Barrators. Pursued by demons, Dante and Virgil escape by scrambling down the bank into the Sixth Ditch where the Hypocrites file along beneath cloaks of lead. The Jovial Friars of Bologna.

King Frederick's: a punishment instituted by Emperor Frederick II for traitors. They were given a leaden cape, which was melted on their bodies.

Jovial Friars: the nickname of a religious Order of Knights dedicated to the Virgin; disbanded because of scandalous corruption.

nailed down figure: Caiaphas, High Priest of the Pharisees urged the death of Jesus. Annas, Caiaphas' father-in-law, is one of the counsellors who **seeded so much evil**; the destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersal of the Jews.

Canto XXIV

A difficult passage to the Eighth Circle, Seventh Ditch. The Thieves. The sinner bitten by a serpent turns to ash, then resumes his shape. Vanni Fucci, and his prophecy.

heliotrope: a stone that protected the wearer from snake bite.

Vanni Fucci: violent bastard of Fuccio de' Lazzeri, a leader of the Black Guelph faction in Pistoia. He is here because of his theft of treasure from the chapel of Saint James in Pistoia. Vanni's 'prophecy' meant the Florentine White Guelphs would help the White Pistoians score a victory over the Blacks in May 1301. That autumn Charles of Valois arrived in Florence, sided with the Blacks and turfed out the Whites. Moroelo Malaspina, lord of Lunigniana (**Valdimagra**), is the **fiery thunderbolt**, who drove the Whites from their last stronghold in Tuscany.

Canto XXV

Eighth Circle, Seventh Ditch: the Thieves. The centaur Cacus. Three Florentine thieves arrive, then two more in the form of snakes. Bizarre metamorphoses occur.

Pistoia: was supposedly founded by the remnants of the army of Catiline, composed of criminals and brigands.

fell from Thebes rampart:... Capaneus.

Cacus: the son of Vulcan and Medusa. Dante makes him a centaur.

deceitful robbery: Cacus stole the oxen of Geryon belonging to Hercules.

from where unborn we feed: the navel.

Lucan be silent here: in the *Pharsalia* Lucan tells of two soldiers bitten by snakes; **Sabellus** was reduced to a puddle of liquid, the other **Nassidius** swelled up until he died. Ovid describes Cadmus turning into a snake and Arethusa into a fountain.

Puccio Sciancato: 'Sciancato', the nickname of Puccio dei Galigai, a Florentine thief.

Gaville: a village in the Arno valley. Francesco dei Cavalcanti was killed by the inhabitants. His family avenged his death.

Canto XXVI

They leave the Seventh Ditch for the Eighth Ditch, Dante, condemns Florence. The poets view the Eighth Ditch, where those who counselled fraud burn in the flames that enclose them. Ulysses and

Diomedes share a flame. Ulysses describes his final voyage.

avenged by bears: Elisha, mocked by some boys who were later eaten by bears. He saw Elijah ascend to heaven in a fiery chariot.

Eteocles and his brother: Polynices, sons of Oedipus, so hated each other the flames on their joint funeral pyre refused to mingle.

Ulysses: (Odysseus) the Greek hero who fought at Troy with **Diomedes** and devised the stratagem of the Wooden Horse.

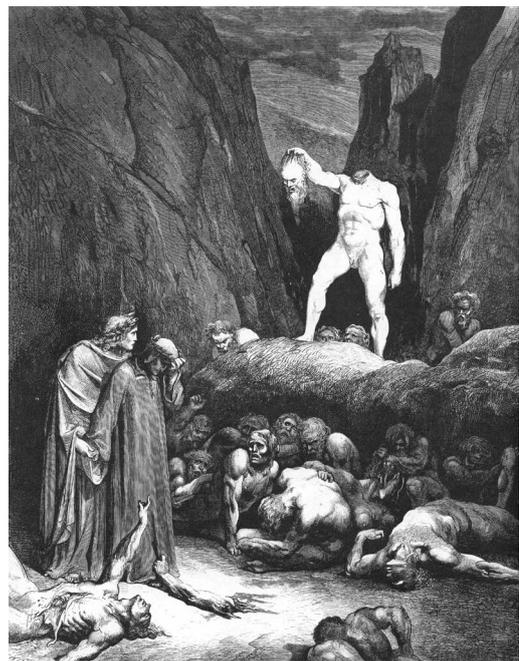
Deidamia was the daughter of king of Scyros and mother of Achilles' child. The **Palladium** was the sacred symbol of Troy and guarantee of its safety: its theft meant the city would fall.

Leaving Circe: journeying home from Troy, Ulysses was detained by the sorceress Circe.

Gaëta: a promontory near Naples Aeneas named after his nurse, Caieta.

narrow strait: Gibraltar, where the pillars of Hercules marked the westernmost end of the known world.

a mountain: the Mount of Purgatory.



*"The corpse was carrying its hacked off head
By the hair, swinging it like a lantern." (Canto XXVIII)*

Canto XXVII

Eighth Circle, Eighth Ditch: Fraudulent Counsellors. The state of Romagna. Guido's tale of self-deception.

As the torturer's Sicilian bull: Perillus of Sicily constructed a brass bull as an instrument of torture for the tyrant Phalaris. Victims were roasted inside the bull so fashioned that their cries sounded as if the bull itself was bellowing. Perillus was its first victim.

Those hills between Urbino: a region called Montafeltro. The speaker is Guido da Montefeltro.

If I believed: Guido was known as one of the wiliest soldiers and politicians of his time. He fought successfully for the Ghibellines against Papal and Guelph forces in Romagna between 1274 and 1282. Excommunicated and banished he returned to Pisa to lead its Ghibellines, but was reconciled with the church by 1296 and became a Franciscan friar.

Prince of Pharisees: Boniface VIII, who rather than crusading against the traditional enemies of the church, **Saracens or Jews**, chose to subdue the Colonna family, who refused to recognise his papacy.

"He asked me for my counsel...": The Colonna family took

refuge in their fortress of Palestrina, near the **Lateran**, the papal palace in Rome. Advised by Guido da Montefeltro, Boniface falsely promised them a pardon. They surrendered and lost everything.

The two keys: symbols of papal authority.

Canto XXVIII

Eighth Circle, Ninth Ditch: the sowers of discord perpetually circling wounded after each turn by a demon. Mohammed and Ali. Warnings to those still alive.

Apulia's fateful earth: to Dante 'Apulia' described southern Italy, scene of the following wars.

Mohammed: founder of Islam, was traditionally held to be a Christian schismatic. Mohammed's son-in-law **Ali** was responsible for the Sunni-Shi'ite schism in Islam.

Fra Dolcino: lead a dissenting sect preaching simplicity and community of property.

Pier de Medecina:... stirred up the feud between the houses of Polenta and Malatesta. **Guido** and **Angiolello** were drowned off the Adriatic coast, by Malatesta.

Mosca: Moscadei Lamberti fomented Guef-Ghibelline strife in Florence.

Bertran de Born: twelfth-century troubadour. Stirred up animosity between Henry II of England and his son.

Canto XXIX

Eighth Circle, Ninth Ditch: sowers of discord. Dante expects to see an ancestor. He and Virgil cross the bridge into the Tenth Ditch where the Falsifiers lie with their hideous diseases. The Alchemists.

Geri del Bello: kinsman of Dante and troublemaker. **Altaforte** is Bertran de Born.

Maremma to Sardinia:... an area famous for breeding malaria.

Capoccio: burned for alchemy in Siena, in 1293.

Canto XXX

Eighth Circle, Tenth Ditch: the Falsifiers. Gianni Schicchi and Myrrha (impersonators); Master Adamo (counterfeiter) Potiphar's wife and Sinon the Greek (perjurers). The quarrel between Adamo and Sinon.

Semele: a Theban princess seduced by Jupiter. In revenge Juno drove mad Semele's brother-in-law Athamas. He took his wife Ino for a lioness and their children for cubs then killed them.

Hecuba: wife of Priam, taken prisoner after the fall of the Troy, went mad when her children Polyxena and Polydorus were killed.

Gianni Schicchi: a Florentine mimic, who cheated the family of **Buoso Donati** out of a mare.

Myrrha: tricked her father into incest and gave birth to Adonis.

Master Adamo: falsifier of money.

false wife: Potiphar's wife.

Sinon: who pretended to swap sides in the Trojan war so the Trojans would take in the Wooden Horse.

Canto XXXI

Dante and Virgil descend to the Ninth Circle, the well at the bottom of the abyss. Around it the Giants are visible from the waist up. Dante sees Nimrod and Ephialtes. Antaeus lowers them to the frozen Lake of Cocytus, fourth river of Hell.

Achilles: Achilles and his father Peleus possessed a lance that could heal the wounds it inflicted.

Roland's horn: From the medieval epic *Le Chanson de Roland*, the blast on Roland's horn was heard eight miles away.

Raphèl mai: nonsense language spoken by **Nimrod**, builder of the Tower of Babel.

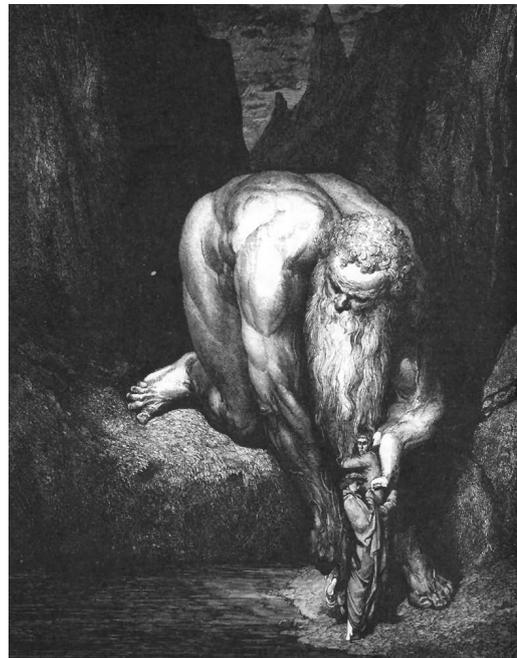


"It is a ring of giants, not towers,
Each one sunk to his navel in the pit." (Canto XXXI)

Ephialtes: he and his brother Oti attempted to invade Heaven by placing Mount Pelion on Mount Ossa.

Briareus: a monster with fifty heads and a hundred arms who attacked Mount Olympus.

Anteus: another Titan, unchained since he did not take their part against the gods. He lived in Libya on a diet of lions, in the valley where Scipio defeated Hannibal.



"He sat us down gently on the bottom,
Within the pit that swallowed Lucifer and Judas." (Canto XXXI)

Canto XXXII

Ninth Circle, First Ring: Caiina, named after Cain, who killed his brother Abel. Traitors to their kin immersed in ice up to the neck. The Second Ring: Antenora, named after the Trojan traitor. Betrayers of their country. Dante encounters two traitors, one gnawing at the other's head.

those ladies: the muses.

Bizensio: The two are the Alberti brothers who killed each other over an inheritance in the Bizensio valley.

Arthur: struck his treacherous nephew Mordred a blow that pierced his body so sunlight shone through the hole onto his shadow.

Focaccia: a Pistoian who murdered his cousin through greed.

Sassol Mascheroni: murdered his nephew to gain his inheritance.

Camiscon de' Pazzi: murdered a kinsman Carlino, a relative, betrayed his party, the White Guelphs surrendering a castle for money; his fate will be worse.

Bocca degli Abati: betrayed his party at Montaperti by cutting off the Guelph standard-bearer's hands, throwing his troops into confusion.

da Duera: a Ghibelline who sold Parma to the French.

Beccaria: Pope Alexander IV's legate decapitated for plotting against the Guelphs.

Gianni de' Solanieri: betrayed the Ghibellines during a Guelph uprising.

Ganelon: betrayed Charlemagne and the rearguard in the *Chanson de Roland*.

Tebaldello: opened the gates of Faenza to enemy Guelphs.

Tydeus:... one of the Seven against Thebes. Mortally wounded by Menalippus, who he managed to kill before dying, Tydeus gnawed on his skull.

Canto XXXIII

Ninth Circle, Second Ring. Ugolino's tale of his death. Virgil and Dante proceed to the Third Ring, named 'Tolomea' after Ptolemy, the captain of Jericho, who killed his guests as they ate with him. The traitors to hospitality, eyes sealed by frozen tears. Some alive on earth but already in Hell.

Count Ugolino: a Ghibelline of Pisa, betrayed Pisan strongholds to Florence and Lucca in 1284. Later, plotting with **Archbishop Ruggieri** and the **Gualandi, Sismondi and Lanfranchi** families against his kinsmen the Visconti, he was betrayed by Ruggieri who imprisoned him in the Tower of Hunger to starve.

Friar Alberigo: a jovial friar who murdered his enemies at a banquet to which he had invited them, the signal for the act being an order for the fruit.

Atropos: one of the three Fates.

Ser Branca: aided by his unnamed kinsman, murdered his father-in-law Michel Zanche, a guest.



*"The emperor of that realm of despair
Towered above the ice from mid chest up." (Canto XXXIV)*

Canto XXXIV

The final division of Hell. Ninth Circle, Fourth Ring; Judecca, named after Judas Iscariot. Traitors to their benefactors totally immersed in ice. Lucifer rending Judas, Brutus and Cassius. Descent of the poets down Lucifer's body, to the southern hemisphere. The stars.

Judas Iscariot: who betrayed Christ; **Brutus** and **Cassius** conspired to kill Caesar.

grasped the shaggy flank: Dante and Virgil climb feet first down Lucifer's leg. But since Lucifer's navel is the world's centre of gravity, once past it they must turn round to clamber up towards Lucifer's feet. Gravity is acting now in reverse.

the side covered by dry land: the northern hemisphere. The southern hemisphere contains no dry land except the Mount of Purgatory.

About the translation

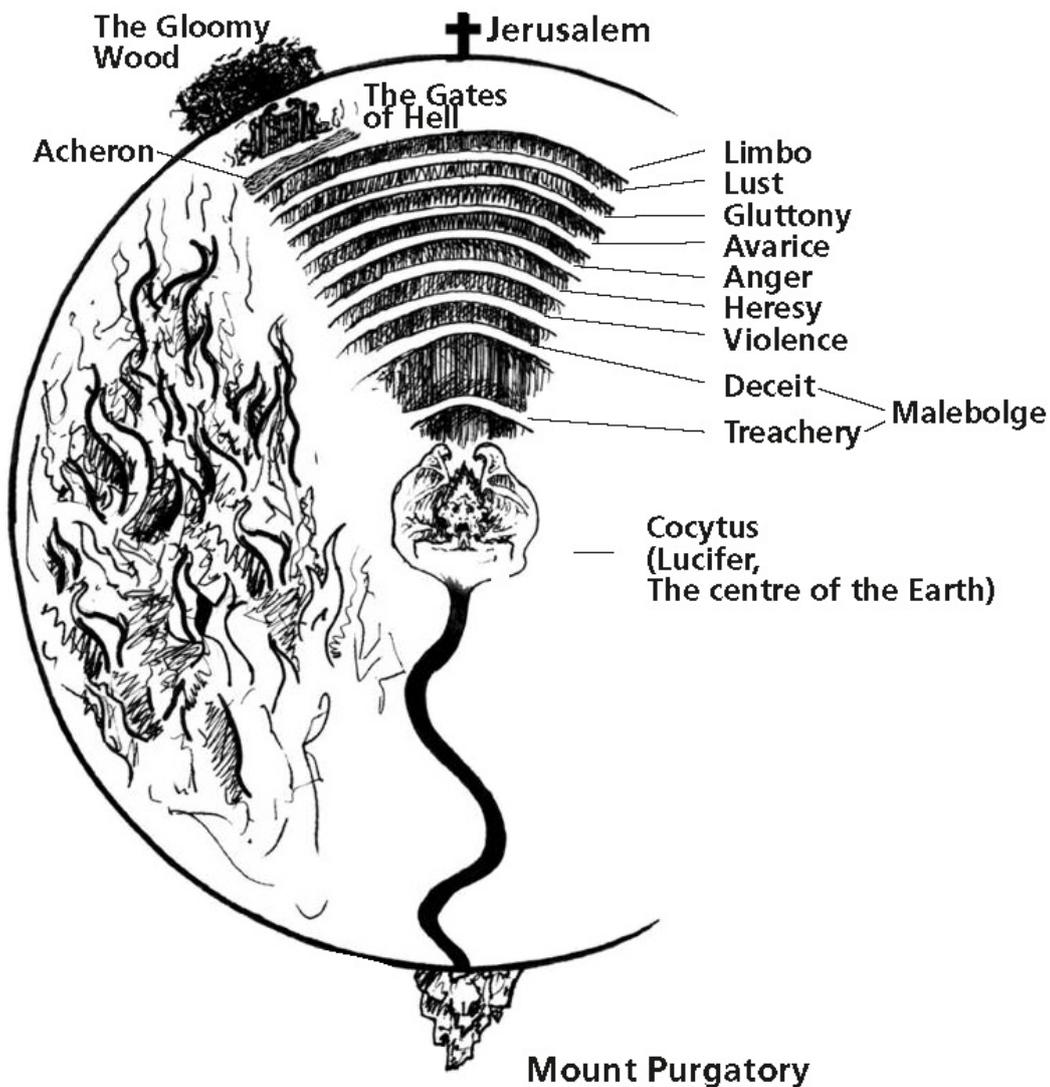
Had Dante guessed at the attention posterity would give his vision, he would no doubt have set aside a special place in the lowest part of hell for translators. Some of the most famous names in literature have attempted a Divine Comedy for their time, and with the most famously awful results. His terza 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.

Notes 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.



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Total running time: 4:10:30 • 4 CDs

Translation by Benedict Flynn. Produced by Roger Marsh
 Post-production: Simon Weir, The Classical Recording Company
 Engineer (speech): Alan Smyth, Bucks Audio Cassettes
 Music programming by Roger Marsh

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Booklet and cover design: Hannah Whale, Fruition – Creative Concepts

Cover image: *Dante and Virgil in Hell*, by Eugene Delacroix (1798–1863). Courtesy of AKG, London.

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CD catalogue no.: NA431712

Digital catalogue no.: NA431712D

CD ISBN: 978-9-62634-317-3

Digital ISBN: 978-9-62954-652-6
