

English 10
Ante-Purgatory round-up



Canto 1

In Canto 1 we experience with Dante the emergence from Inferno and preparation to enter Ante-Purgatory

Important characters:

Who are they? Why do you think Dante has chosen these particular figures for his work? What symbolic and practical aspects do they bring?

Dante: Why use his own name?

Virgil: Why Virgil? What are the connections? How does Dante's use of Virgil affect Dante's ethos?

Cato: Why Cato? What does the use of Martia add to the canto?

Important ideas:

What is purgation, as conceived by Dante?

How is Purgatory the most humane of the three realms Dante explores?

What is the role of the individual in the journey?

Fun to think about: How is Dante's trip to the underworld like or unlike Odysseus' katabasis (trip to the underworld) in Book 11 of *The Odyssey*?

How is it important that our story begins just before dawn on Easter?

Important stylistic elements:

How does the poem's use of terza rima affect its content?

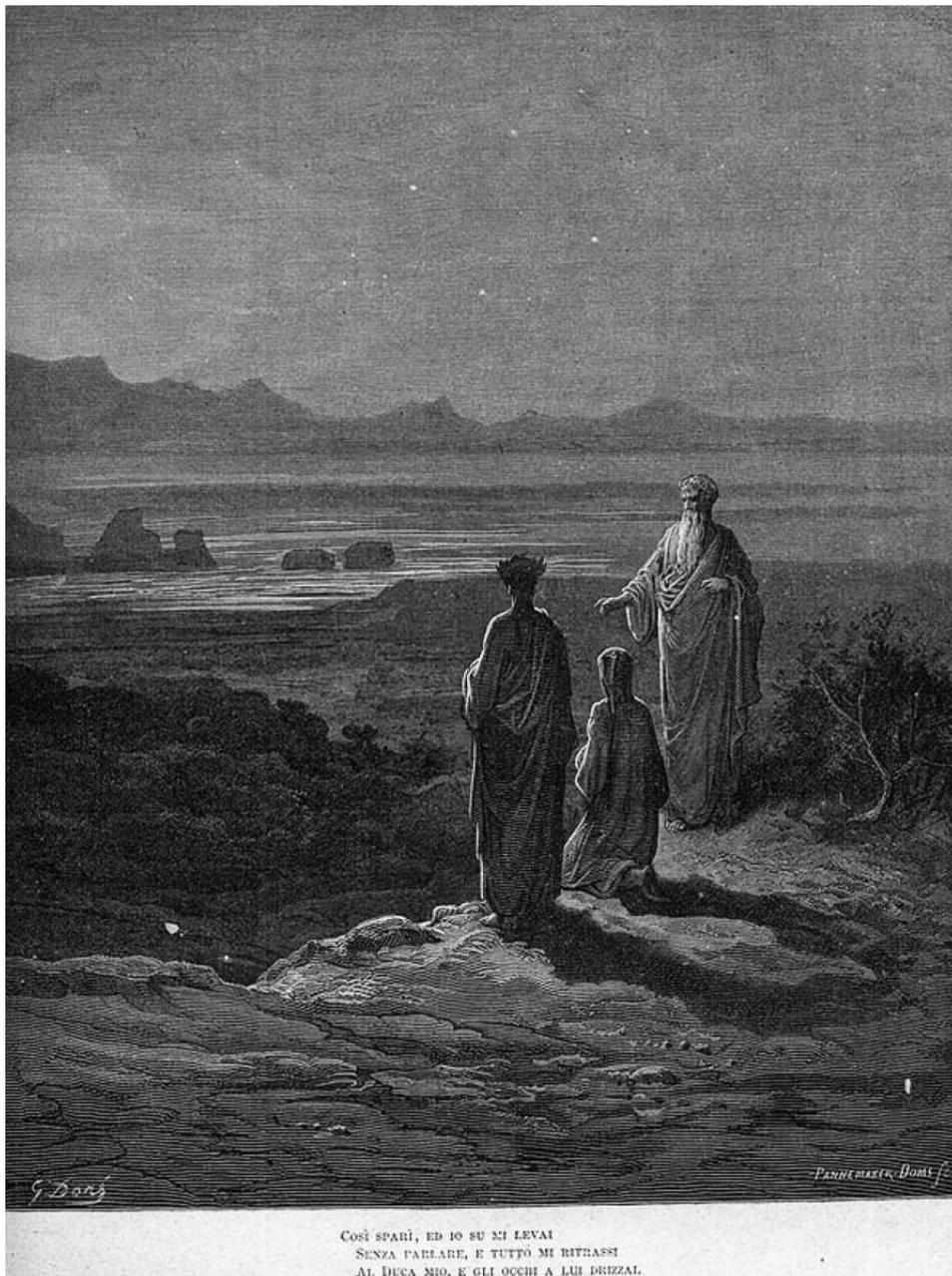
Note the epic conventions, including the invocation of the Muse (c. 1.7). What does the presence of this invocation bring to the text? (To what other great works does it connect the text?)

How and to what end does the poem use setting?

What is the symbolism of the four stars (1.23)?

What is the use and symbolism of the reed?

Look at potential water symbolism here in Canto 1, for use later when more water appears.



Canto 2

Important characters:

Casella

Stylistic features:

Why depict the approaching angel and boat of spirits as a light growing closer instead of just telling us what it is? Surely the point of narration is later, so why do it this way?

What is the use of the double allusion in 2.46?

How does the imagery of the souls' arrival affect the tone of the text?

Important moments:

Where and how does Dante and do the souls learn to grapple with Dante's physicality?

Why, according to Canto 2, is Dante undertaking this journey?

What is the thematic importance of Cato's reminder to Dante and Casella when they are singing?

Look at the language of Cato's rebuke:

What lingering, what carelessness down here!

Hurry to scrape away the scales that keep
the Lord from being manifest to you! (2.121-123)

What do you make of the simile that ends the Canto? What does it add to the overall text?





celadana

www.d



R

Canto 3

Cantos 3-9 explore Ante-Purgatory itself.

Canto 3 treats the ex-communicated. What does the presence of the ex-communicated in Purgatory say about the nature of salvation?

Important characters:

Manfred (Who is Manfred? Why is he here? What does he want? What does his appearance tell us about the rules of Dante's afterlife?)

Important themes:

Dante is "in a sudden panic" because he sees only one shadow (3.19). What is he afraid of? What does Dante's awareness of his own corporeality add to the story? Why hasn't this been resolved in *Inferno*?

What does Canto 3 say about the limits of intellect (3.38-43 or so)?

What does Canto 3 add to our idea about Dante's attitude toward community (3.62-65)?

What does Manfred want from Dante? How does this request fit an overall pattern, and what does that pattern mean?

Stylistic elements:

Explore the allusion: "Even now, such little faith? Don't you believe/that I am with you, and will guide your way" (3. 22-23).

Here, as we have discussed, the setting includes steep aspects. Note them here and in Canto 4, where we have already discussed them.

Explain the simile 3.79-82. What does the use of the simile add to the text?

What seems to be the symbolism of the color green (3.135)?



Canto 4

Canto 4 treats the souls who are late repenters because of their indolence.

Important character:

Belacqua

Thematic moments:

While Dante is talking with Manfred, he doesn't notice time passing. How does this experience add to our theme of the temporal nature of Purgatory?

Stylistic elements:

Explore the allusion: "Fly, I say, with feathers, light and fleet,/of great desire, behind a guide who gave/me hope, and held a lamp unto my feet" (4.28-30).

Canto 4 also treats the role of the community. As Dante knows and does not know where to go, to whom does he turn?

We have handled most of the rest of Canto 4 in the earlier screencast.

Canto 5

Canto 5 treats the souls who are late-repenters because they have died violently.

Important characters:

Jacopo del Cassero

Bonconte da Montefeltro

Pia



Compare and contrast these three souls: who they are, what they want. Dante seems to prefer Pia and gives her the end of the Canto.

In the screencast from Canto 5 I mention the relationship of *Purgatory* 5 to *Inferno* 5, with regard to Pia, who, according to tradition—and this is different from what was said on the discussion forum—was also an unfaithful wife. Even in her sin, her needs are simple and she is modest rather than demanding.



As I discussed in the earlier screencast, we get the pathos of the sin—and the pathos of the punishment.



Here is the text from *Inferno* 5, trans. Longfellow:

Then unto them I turned me, and I spake,
And I began: "Thine agonies, Francesca,
Sad and compassionate to weeping make me.
But tell me, at the time of those sweet sighs,
By what and in what manner Love conceded,
That you should know your dubious desires?"
And she to me: "There is no greater sorrow
Than to be mindful of the happy time
In misery, and that thy Teacher knows.
But, if to recognise the earliest root
Of love in us thou hast so great desire,
I will do even as he who weeps and speaks.
One day we reading were for our delight
Of Launcelot, how Love did him enthrall.
Alone we were and without any fear.
Full many a time our eyes together drew
That reading, and drove the colour from our faces;
But one point only was it that o'ercame us.
When as we read of the much-longed-for smile

Being by such a noble lover kissed,
This one, who ne'er from me shall be divided,
Kissed me upon the mouth all palpitating.
Galeotto was the book and he who wrote it.
That day no farther did we read therein."
And all the while one spirit uttered this,
The other one did weep so, that, for pity,
I swooned away as if I had been dying,
And fell, even as a dead body falls.

Other features of Canto 5 worth mentioning are:

- the way the souls regard Dante at the beginning of the Canto
- the role of the mercy of God in saving those who die violently

Dante doesn't mention Jacopo by name when he appears (5.64), as Dante's contemporaries would know who he is. It is worth considering Dante's contemporary audience—not only what knowledge it brings but also how readers would regard the poem.

Bonconte appears l. 88. You all talked intelligently about him on the discussion forum. You should know that readers of *Inferno* would already have met his father, Guido da Montefeltro, in *Inferno* 27. Guido has made a false repentance and is damned.

Canto 6

Important character:

Sordello

Beatrice (discussed, does not appear) (What is the role of Beatrice in this Canto? 6.43-49)

Stylistic features:

What is the effect of the long simile that begins Canto 6? Think about the usual aspects of similes (making the unfamiliar familiar using connections the audience would know) as well as the effects of the particular choices.

Thematic aspects:

What does Canto 6 add to your ideas about the role of praying for souls in Purgatory (6.37-40)?

When Dante and Virgil approach Sordello, it is to ask for directions. How does this act resonate symbolically as we all seek to find our ways?

The political material in *Purgatory* is less important for our reading, but it is important to consider what is wrong with Italy, according to Dante.

Before Sordello understands who Virgil is, they share the bond of being from Mantua. How does this fact resonate thematically?



Here, Dante and Virgil meet Sordello.

Canto 7

Important character:

Sordello

Theme:

How does the encounter between Sordello and Virgil, an example of brotherly love, resonate throughout this part of *Purgatory*? Does the parallel of Casella and Dante to Sordello and Virgil tell you anything new?

Virgil tells Sordello that he is not able to go to Heaven because he “did not have the faith” (7.8). While you may write journal entries about the unfairness of this policy, for us as readers of *Purgatory*, this statement tells us what we may remember from Augustine when he spends his time with the Neo-Platonists: Reason will only get us so far.

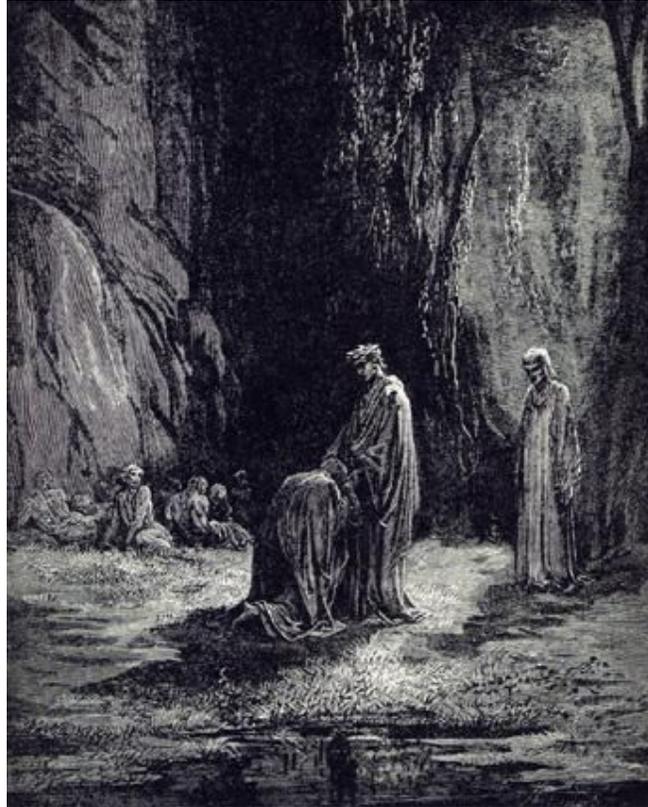
Virgil also makes clear that he is where he is because “[p]ower/from Heaven has moved me, and by that power I come” (7.23-24). This also seems like a good jumping off place for discussions that begin with Augustine’s experience with salvation as the work of God, not the work of man.

Canto 7 also includes the negligent rulers and offers some thoughts about family dynasties. Some are better; some worse as time goes on.

Stylistic features:

Explore the symbolism of the sun (7. 53-54).

The descriptions of nature become more lush and detailed through the middle of Canto 7 (7.72-78 or so). What do you make of this attention to detail? What does the beauty of nature bring to bear on the material of the Canto?



Here is Gustave Doré's Sordello before Virgil

Canto 8

Important characters:

Nino Visconte

Conrad Malaspina (What is Conrad's family's main virtue? Why is it worth mentioning here in Canto 8?)

Stylistic features:

How does the anaphora at the beginning of Canto 8 contribute to the tone?

The rituals of singing are connected to the passing of time in Purgatory. How does this connection of activity and time relate to medieval life generally? What is the thematic significance of this motif (repeated element)?

Now the four stars have given way to the three stars. What do you make of the change that has taken place? See also Esolen's note on the symbolism.

Theme:

Critics are quick to point out the comparisons at the beginning of Canto 8 as related to historical Dante's own exile from Florence. How does the theme of exile resonate throughout the text?

What do you make of the descent of the angels and the approach of the snake?

Dante tells Nino why he is traveling (8.59-60). This answer corroborates his earlier answer to the same effect. Why do you think the text repeats the reason for Dante's journey?



Here is Doré's version of the snake in Canto 8.

Canto 9

Important characters:

The Porter of Purgatory

Stylistic elements:

Again, the text allows the reader to experience with Dante the main action. That is, we follow Dante in his dream and then get the explanation from Virgil. What is the knowable purpose of this narration technique?

Dante apostrophizes the reader (9.70). What is the effect of this move?

The three steps of of Purgatory: They are white, dark, and red. Explore as many different ideas of what they mean as possible. What makes sense to you?

Think through the ideas of Esolen, Sayers, Sinclair, Grandgent, and others.

Dante receives seven P's on his head. What do you make of this? The symbolism of the P's is clear—but on his head?

What do you make of the symbolism of the two keys, gold and silver?

Theme:

What is the special significance of having St. Lucia take Dante to the steps of Purgatory?

The Porter of Purgatory says that Dante may enter but that “those who look back are cast outside once more” (9.131-132). How does this admonition apply to our own lives?



Diagrams of Purgatory:

