

## English 10

### Synopsis with the answers to the review

Here is a synopsis of Cantos 1–17:

Before dawn on Easter, Virgil brings Dante to the shores of the island mountain in the midst of the southern ocean. When they are challenged by Cato, guardian of the realm, Virgil explains Dante's right to pass through Purgatory by heavenly dispensation. Cato instructs Virgil to wash the stains of Inferno from Dante's face and to gird him with a reed from the shore. After performing that ritual, they notice a bright light on the ocean that is swiftly approaching the island. It is a ship bringing a group of souls who are free to undertake the journey through Purgatory. Among them Dante recognizes Casella, a musician who had composed music for some of Dante's early lyrics. Happy at this meeting, Dante asks Casella to sing one of his works, and the group of spirits gathers around, charmed by the singing. Cato interrupts their pastime with a stern remonstrance, reminding the spirits of their mission on the island, and they quickly disperse.

By now the sun has risen, and as the poets are searching for a path leading up the mountain, they meet a crowd of spirits who greet them with astonishment because they discover that Dante casts a shadow indicating that he has a living body. This first group of souls in Ante-Purgatory is composed of persons who were under excommunication when they died. Their spokesman, Manfred, son of Emperor Frederick II, tells Dante that his repentance at the time of his death gained him divine forgiveness but that he must wait in Ante-Purgatory for a time before he can enter Purgatory because of his long-delayed repentance. This is the key to Ante-Purgatory. All of the sinners lingering on the lower slopes must delay their entrance into Purgatory proper because, for one reason or another, they postponed repentance or were unable to receive the final sacrament of the church.

Farther up the mountain on a second ledge of Ante-Purgatory the "pilgrims" meet three types of negligent souls. The first is a group of spirits who are listlessly waiting out their time. Dante learns from Belacqua, a former acquaintance from Florence, that these are indolent, those who neglected their religious obligations until their last moments because of indifference. Another group in this region is the unshriven souls, those who failed to receive extreme unction because they died sudden deaths, having been killed in battle or murdered. Dante talks to three of these, learning something of the circumstances of their deaths. When they realize that Dante is alive, all of the spirits plead with him to speak to their relatives or friends when he returns to earth, asking for their prayers in the hope of shortening the stay of the spirits in Ante-Purgatory. Apart from that group the poets meet a spirit who at first seems aloof, the poet Sordello. When he learns that Virgil was a native of Mantua, his own birthplace, he salutes him cordially; and when he learns that this is Virgil, the great Roman poet, he expresses his indebtedness in tones of reverence.

The last group of spirits in Ante-Purgatory, the preoccupied, is made up of rulers who were so busy with affairs of state that they found little time for spiritual concerns and made their peace with the church only late in life. Included are some famous emperors, dukes, and magistrates. The section of the mountain where they await their time to ascend to Purgatory is a beautiful valley. At evening two angels come to guard the valley, and when a serpent approaches, it is driven away by them.

The pilgrims have spend the entire day in Ante-Purgatory; since they cannot travel on the mountain at night, they lie down to rest in the Valley of Kings. In the early morning hours Dante dreams that an eagle seizes him and soars with him into the region of fire. When he wakes it is morning, and he discovers that he and his guide are higher up on the mountain at the gate of Purgatory. While Dante was sleeping, St. Lucia came and carried him up the steep slope.

Admittance to Purgatory proper is attended with some ceremony. An angel, guardian of the entrance, is seated above a flight of three steps which Dante must mount. The steps, symbolic of the three stages of purification (or the three parts of confession) are white, purple/black, and red. Dante mounts the steps and kneels before the angel, who inscribes seven P's on his forehead with the point of his sword, on initial for each of the sins to be purged on the mountain. The angel, satisfied that Dante is qualified, opens the gate with the keys of St. Peter, one of gold and one of silver.

The terraces of Purgatory, one above the other, represent the "seven deadly sins." In each an appropriate type of penance is practiced, and the spirit ascending the mountain must cleanse itself of each sin of which is was guilty.

When the pilgrims reach the first terrace they observe marble carvings on the side of the path illustrating instances of notable acts of humility. Since the sin atoned for on this terrace is pride, the penitents are shown examples of the virtue opposite to that sin. Comparable examples of virtue, called "goads" or "spurs," are introduced in each terrace as incentives for the penitents.

The souls on this terrace plod slowly around the mountain, bowed double by huge rocks on their backs. Dante converses with one of the penitents, the artist Oderisi, who explains how pride over his achievement in art was his besetting sin; and he reflects bitterly on the futility of that love of fame which possesses men and which is found in the end to be transient. Dante also learns of the other kinds of pride that stained the other two spirits, pride of ancestry, which led to arrogance, and pride of power.

As the poets are continuing their passage on the first terrace, they discover more scenes carved on the rocky path, this time presenting the tragic effects of excessive pride. These examples, intended as deterrents, are referred to as "checks," "reins," or "bridles." The Angel of Humility salutes Dante, brushes a P from his brow, and directs the poets to the path leading up to the next terrace.

Dante is surprised to discover that climbing now seems easier than it did before. The reason, Virgil tells him, is that one of the initials has been removed from his forehead by the angel and that the effort will be increasingly lessened as he climbs higher.

On the second terrace, where envy is atoned for, the goads are instances of love or fellow man, or charity. The penitents are huddled against the wall of the mountain clad in hair shirts and have their eyes sewn shut with iron wires. The first soul is Sapia, a lady from Siena. Her envy was such that it surmounted affection for her kindred and loyalty to her city. She now begs Dante to try to restore her good name among her neighbors. Next the poet meets two men from the region of Romagna. The spokesman, Guido del Duca, denounces the inhabitants of the valley of the Arno, calling some of them swine, others curs, wolves, or foxes. He then directs his venom against his own people of Romagna as a corrupt and degenerate lot, greatly inferior to their forebears. In praise of the numerous nobles of Romagna now dead he is offering recompense for his earthly sins, for those were the men he envied during his lifetime.

The Angel of Charity, having brushed away a second P from Dante's brow, invites him to mount the next terrace. While the poets are climbing, Virgil explains a remark of Guido del Duca that has puzzled Dante, involving a distinction between those material possessions men set their hearts upon, possessions that incite envy, and spiritual possessions, which increase in worth when shared with others.

On the third terrace, the goads appear to Dante in the form of visions revealing examples of peacemaking and of mildness of manner under provocation. The penitents on this terrace, who had been ruled by anger, must walk in a blinding and irritating cloud of smoke, and Dante is likewise obliged to make his way through the cloud. He cannot see the spirits nor can they see him, but they hear him speaking to Virgil. One of the spirits identifies himself as Marco of Lombardy, someone whom Dante evidently regarded as a person of learning and character. The poet asks him what is the cause of depravity in men: Are the stars to blame or is it the fault in their character? Marco then delivers an impressive discourse on free will, on the necessity for laws to regulate men's lives, and on the division of authority between spiritual and temporal powers.

The curbs or checks of this terrace, showing examples of insane anger, are revealed to Dante in the form of visions. When the visions have passed, the Angel of Peace appears, touches Dante's brow with his wing, and shows the pilgrims the path to the next terrace.

By the time they reach the fourth terrace it is evening and they stop to rest. Virgil explains the plan of Purgatory and the rationale on which it is based. The three lower divisions, which they have already visited, represent different forms of love perverted: pride, envy, and wrath. The terrace they have now reached is for the slothful, those who had either defective love or insufficient zeal. The three terraces above this deal with different forms of excessive love for unworthy objects.