

Linguistics 103
Language Structure and Verbal Art
Translations of Dante

Structure of the Italian Endecasillabo

Inferno: Canto I

1. Awakening in the dark wood

1	Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita	Nel m <u>e</u> z zo del cam m <u>i</u> n di n <u>o</u> s tra v <u>i</u> ta 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11
		<i>In the middle of the way of our life</i>
2	mi ritrovai per una selva oscura	mi ri tro v <u>a</u> i per un a s <u>e</u> l va <u>o</u> s c <u>u</u> r a 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11
		<i>I found myself in a murky woodland</i>
3	ché la diritta via era smarrita.	ché la di r <u>i</u> t ta v <u>i</u> a <u>e</u> ra smar r <u>i</u> ta 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11
		<i>because the right road was lost.</i>

- Each line seems to have 11 syllables; hence the Italian name for the meter: *endecasillabo*
- Elision is extremely frequent.
- The first three lines all show stress maxima in even-numbered syllables
- If this were always true, then the *endecasillabo* would just be a kind of iambic pentameter with an extrametrical syllable at the end of the line.

Non-iambic lines

4 Ahi quanto a dir qual era è cosa dura
1 Ahi | quan|to_a dir| qual | e|ra_è cò|sa dū|ra
2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11

Oh, it's so hard to speak about how it was –

5 esta selva selvaggia e aspra e forte
es|ta | sé|va sel|våg|gia_è| às|pra_è fòr|te
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11

that wild, harsh, powerful forest –

6 che nel pensier rinnova la paura!
che | nel | pen|sièr | ri|nò|va la | pa|ù|ra
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11

Just thinking about it frightens me again!

- Sequences of vowels inside of words sometimes comprise two syllables in Italian, but they are also potentially subject to elision/syncope: *ahi* (h is silent) 'Oh', *io* 'I'
- In line 5, the word *sé/va* has its stressed syllable in an odd-numbered syllable (3). Lines of this sort are less common than lines which would be acceptable iambic lines, but they are still numerous.
- Clearly the *endecasillabo* is not exactly the same as English iambic pentameter.
- The tenth syllable is *always* accented

Tendencies in stress placement in the line

- There are clear statistical tendencies as regards the placement of accent in the 3rd and 4th foot, however:

Fasani 1982 examined 1000 lines of the *Inferno* and found the following percentages:

	accented syllable	percentage
A	6	59.2 %
B	4 and 8 (not 6)	24.7 %
C	7 (but not 6 or 4 and 8)	16.1 %

Examples:

A	Nel mèz /zo del / cam mín / di nòs /tra víta	2-6-8
	esta / sél va / sel vág /gia e ás /pra e fòr/te	3-6-8
	sì ch'io / vég gia / la pòr /ta di /san Pietro	3-6
	dirò / de l' ál /tre cò /se ch'i' / v'ho scòrte	2-4-6
B	mi ri/tro vai / per u/na sél /va oscúra	4-8
C	E co/me quei / che con / lè na af/fannáta	7
	l'ora / del tèm /po e la / dól ce / stagióne;	1-3-7

Note that any line having accent on 3, 5 or 7 — at least in the absence of other exceptional circumstances — would be unacceptable in English iambic verse.

Lines with ten syllables instead of eleven

7	Tant'è amara che poco è più morte;	<i>It was so bitter that death is hardly more so;</i>
8	ma per trattar del ben ch'i' vi trovai,	ma per trat tar del ben ch'i' vi tro vai 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
		<i>But to tell of the good that I found there,</i>
9	dirò de l'altre cose ch'i' v'ho scorte.	<i>I'll speak of the other things which I discovered.</i>
10	Io non so ben ridir com'i' v'intrai,	Io non so ben ri dir com'i' v'in trai 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
		<i>I couldn't really say how I got in there,</i>
11	tant'era pien di sonno a quel punto	<i>I was so sleepy at the point</i>
12	che la verace via abbandonai.	che la ve ra ce vi a ab ban do nai 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
		<i>when I left the true path.</i>

- Lines 8, 10 and 12 have in fact only 10 syllables. Not every *endecasillabo* line has 11 syllables, the name of the meter notwithstanding!
- However, the 10th syllable is always a stressed syllable.
- Lines with 10 (counted) syllables have a word at the end with final stress
- Lines with 11 syllables have a word at the end with penultimate stress: this type of word is more common in Italian, so this type of line is more common too. Hence, 11 syllables is typical, but not obligatory.
- The *Endecasillabo* differs from English iambic pentameter in only one detail:
Endecasillabo = iambic Pentameter but:
The only stress maximum that must be in S position is the final one in the line.
All post-tonic syllables (syllables occurring after the stressed syllable) of the last word in the line are extrametrical.

Terza Rima rhyme scheme

2. The Mountain

Ma poi ch'i' fui al piè d'un colle giunto, -ùnto a
là dove terminava quella valle -àlle b
che m'avea di paura il cor compunto, -ùnto a

But when I arrived at the foot of a hill where the valley which had filled my heart with fear ended,

guardai in alto, e vidi le sue spalle -àlle b
vestite già de' raggi del pianeta -età c
che mena dritto altrui per ogne calle. -àlle b

I looked up, and saw the heights of the hill were already covered in the rays of that planet which leads every one the right way on every road.

Allor fu la paura un poco queta -età c
che nel lago del cor m'era durata -ata d
la notte ch'i' passai con tanta pieta. -età c

During all that anxious night I'd had, fear had persisted in the core of my heart; but now it calmed down a bit.

E come quei che con lena affannata -ata d
uscito fuor del pèlago a la riva -iva e
si volge a l'acqua perigliosa e guata, -ata d

Like someone gasping for air, who's just made it to the beach from the ocean, turns around and looks at the dangerous water,

così l'animo mio, ch'ancor fuggiva, -iva e
si volse a retro a rimirar lo passo -asso f
che non lasciò già mai persona viva. -iva e

I turned back, although my mind was still running away, to look again at that passageway which no person had ever left alive.

Poi ch'èi posato un poco il corpo lasso, -asso f
ripresi via per la piaggia diserta, -erta g
sì che 'l piè fermo sempre era 'l più basso. -asso f

Then, when I had rested my tired body a little, I started off again up through the deserted slopes, always making sure my lower foot was on strong ground.

- The lines are arranged in groups ('stanzas') of three and the first and third lines of every stanza rhyme.
- The second line of every stanza does not rhyme with any lines in its own stanza or the stanza preceding it
- The first line of each stanza rhymes with the second line of the preceding stanza (if any)
- The resulting pattern is aba bcb cdc ded efe etc.
- This pattern of rhyme is called **terza rima** or, sometimes, 'triple rhyme' in English.

Comparing translations

1. Awakening in the dark wood

Sir Edward Sullivan (1893)

Midway on the journey of our life I found myself within a darksome wood, for the right way was lost. Ah me! how hard a thing it is to tell how wild and rough and unyielding was that wood, which even in remembering bringeth back my fear. So fraught with bitterness it is, that death is little more so. But that I may set down the good I found there, I will make mention of the other things that I discerned there.

I know not rightly how to tell the manner of my entrance; so filled was I with drowsiness just at the moment when I strayed from the true path.

Lawrence Grant White (1948)

Midway upon the journey of our life
I found that I was in a dusky wood;
For the right path, whence I had strayed, was lost.
Ah me! How hard a thing it is to tell
The wildness of that rough and savage place,
The very thought of which brings back my fear!
So bitter was it, death is little more so:
But that the good I found there may be told,
I will describe the other things I saw.

How I arrived there, it were hard to tell:
So weary was my mind, so filled with sleep,
I reeled, and wandered from the path of truth.

John Gordon Nichols (2005)

Halfway along our journey to life's end
I found myself astray in a dark wood,
Since the right way was nowhere to be found.
How hard a thing it is to express the horror
Of that wild wood, so difficult, so dense!
Even to think of it renews my terror.
It is so bitter death is scarcely more.
But to convey what goodness I discovered,
I shall tell everything I saw there.
How I got into it, I cannot say:
I'd fallen into such a heavy sleep
The very instant that I went astray.

Laurence Binyon (1933)

Midway the journey of this life I was 'ware
That I had strayed into a dark forest,
And the right path appeared not anywhere.
Ah, tongue cannot describe how it oppressed,
This wood, so harsh, dismal and wild, that fear
At thought of it strikes now into my breast.
So bitter it is, death is scarce bitterer.
But, for the good it was my hap to find,
I speak of the other things that I saw there.
I cannot well remember in my mind
How I came thither, so was I immersed
In sleep, when the true way I left behind

2. The Mountain

John Ciardi (1954)

But at the far end of that valley of evil
whose maze had sapped my very heart with fear
I found myself before a little hill
and lifted up my eyes. Its shoulders glowed
already with the sweet rays of that planet
whose virtue leads men straight on every road,
and the shining strengthened me against the fright
whose agony had wracked the lake of my heart
through all the terrors of that piteous night.
Just as a swimmer, who with his last breath
flounders ashore from perilous seas, might turn
to memorize the wide water of his death—
so did I turn, my soul still fugitive
from death's surviving image, to stare down
that pass that none had ever left alive.
And there I lay to rest from my heart's race
till calm and breath returned to me. Then rose
and pushed up that dead slope at such a pace
each footfall rose above the last.

J A Carlyle, P H Wicksteed and T Okey (1900)

But after I had reached the foot of a Hill there,
where that valley ended, which had pierced my heart
with fear,
I looked up and saw its shoulders already clothed
with the rays of the Planet that leads men straight on
every road.
Then the fear was somewhat calmed, which had
continued in the lake of my heart the night that I
passed so piteously.
And as he, who with panting breath has escaped
from the deep sea to the shore, turns to the
dangerous water and gazes:
so my mind, which still was fleeing, turned back to
see the pass that no one ever left alive.
After I had rested my wearied body a short while, I
took the way again along the desert strand, so that
the right foot always was the lower.

Louis Biancolli (1966)

I soon came to the bottom of a hill
Where the valley that had impaled my heart
With terror came to an end.
I looked high up the hill and could see its back
Already clad in the rays of that star
Which guides other men along the proper way.
And then I felt a lessening of the terror
Which had lingered in the lake of my heart
That entire night, which was so cruelly long.
And just as a man, panting from exhaustion,
Emerges from the sea and feels the shore,
Then turns to glance back at the perilous deep,
So my mind, that had not yet stopped running,
Turned round to contemplate the vale again
That not one person had ever left alive.
My tired body having had some rest,
I resumed my way along that bare incline,
Keeping my lower foot at all times firmer.

I C Wright 1854

But soon as I had reached a Mountain's base,
(Where the low vale that struck me with dismay
Obtains a limit to its dreadful space)
I looked on high, and saw its shoulders bright
Already with that glorious planet's ray
Which guideth man through every path aright.
Then was awhile allayed the chilling fear
That in my heart's deep lake had trembling stood,
The night I passed in anguish so severe :
And like to one all breathless — who at last
Escaped ashore from out the perilous flood,
Turns to the wave, and gazing, stands aghast;
E'en so my mind, though yet intent on flight,
Turned backward to review that vale of gloom
Which never spared the life of mortal wight.
Soon as my weary frame had rest obtained,
Up the lone steep my journey I resume ;
But firmer still the lowest foot remained.

3. The Leopard and the She-wolf

Ed ecco, quasi al cominciar de l'erta,
una lonza leggèra e presta molto,
che di pel macolato era coverta;

e non mi si partia dinanzi al volto,
anzi 'mpediva tanto il mio cammino,
ch'ì fui per ritornar più volte volto.

Temp'era dal principio del mattino,
e 'l sol montava 'n sù con quelle stelle
ch'eran con lui quando l'amor divino

mosse di prima quelle cose belle;
sì ch'a bene sperar m'era cagione
di quella fiera a la gaetta pelle

l'ora del tempo e la dolce stagione;
ma non sì che paura non mi desse
la vista che m'apparve d'un leone.

Questi pareva che contra me venisse
con la test'alta e con rabbiosa fame,
sì che pareva che l'aere ne tremesse.

Ed una lupa, che di tutte brame
sembiava carca ne la sua magrezza,
e molte genti fe' già viver grame,

questa mi porse tanto di gravezza
con la paura ch'uscìa di sua vista,
ch'io perdei la speranza de l'altezza.

E qual è quei che volontieri acquista,
e giugne 'l tempo che perder lo face,
che 'n tutt'i suoi pensier piange e s'attrista;

tal mi fece la bestia senza pace,
che, venendomi 'ncontro, a poco a poco
mi ripigneva là dove 'l sol tace.

3. The Leopard and the She-wolf

Robert Durling (1986)

And behold, almost at the beginning of the steep, a leopard, light and very swift, covered with spotted fur; and it did not depart from before my face but rather so impeded my way that I was at several turns turned to go back.

The time was the beginning of the morning, and the sun was mounting up with those stars that were with it when God's love

first set those lovely things in motion; so that I took reason to have good hope of that beast with its gaily painted hide

from the hour of the morning and the sweet season; but not so that I did not fear the sight of a lion that appeared to me.

He appeared to be coming against me with his head high and with raging hunger, so that the air appeared to tremble at him.

And a she-wolf, that seemed laden with all cravings in her leanness and has caused many peoples to live in wretchedness,

she put on me so much heaviness with the fear that came from the sight of her, that I lost hope of reaching the heights.

And like one who gladly acquires, and the time arrives that makes him lose, who in all of his thoughts weeps and becomes sad:

so she made me, that restless beast, who, coming against me, little by little was driving me back to where the sun is silent.

Henry Johnson 1915

And almost where the steep began, behold!

A leopardess, light and exceeding agile;

And she was covered with a spotted skin,

And from before my face went not away,

But rather was impeding so my path,

That many times I turned me to go back.

The time was the beginning of the morning;

The sun was mounting upward with those stars,

Which were with him when first the Love Divine

Set those fair things in motion; hence I deemed

The hour of time and the sweet season grounds

Of hoping well concerning that wild beast

Of bright and spotted coat; and yet not so,

But that the sight, which suddenly appeared

Before me, of a lion made me fear.

It seemed to me that he was coming on

Against me, with head high, and famishing

So that the air appeared in fright at him;

And a she-wolf, who in her leanness seemed

With every craving to be loaded down,

And had ere now made many live distressed.

She brought upon me such a heaviness,

Because of fear that sprang from sight of her,

That I lost hope of coming to the height.

And like a man whose pleasure is to gain,

But who, when comes a time which makes him lose,

In all his thoughts is saddened and laments,

E'en such this restless beast has rendered me,

Which, coming on against me, thrust me back

Little by little where the sun is silent.

Michael Palma (2002)

But I had hardly started when I spied

a leopard in my pathway, lithe and fleet,

all covered with a sleek and spotted hide.

And as I faced it, it would not retreat,

but paced before me and so blocked my way

that more than once I had to turn my feet

to retrace my steps. It was the break of day,

the sun was mounting in the morning sky

with the same stars as when that whole array

of lovely things was first given movement by

divine love. The sweet season of the year

and the hour made me think that I might try

to evade that bright-skinned beast as it came near,

but then I felt my good hopes quickly fade

and in an instant I was numbed with fear

to see a lion in my path that made

straight for me, head held high and ravenous,

and seemed to make the very air afraid.

And a she-wolf too, that in its leanness was

laden with every craving. Those who seek

fulfillment there find only wretchedness.

The sight of this one made me feel so weak,

so overcome with dread, that instantly

I lost all hope of climbing to the peak.

As a man is eager in prosperity

but when time brings him losses can be found

giving way to weeping and to misery,

so did I feel as the she-wolf pressed me round

so relentlessly that bit by bit I stepped

back where the sun is mute on the low ground.

5. The Meeting with Virgil

Mentre ch'i' rovinava in basso loco,
dinanzi a li occhi mi si fu offerto
chi per lungo silenzio parea fioco.

Quando vidi costui nel gran deserto,
"Miserere di me", gridai a lui,
"qual che tu sii, od ombra od omo certo!"

Rispuosemi: "Non omo, omo già fui,
e li parenti miei furon lombardi,
mantoani per patria ambedui.

Nacqui sub Iulio, ancor che fosse tardi,
e vissi a Roma sotto 'l buono Augusto
nel tempo de li dei falsi e bugiardi.

Poeta fui, e cantai di quel giusto
figliuol d'Anchise che venne di Troia,
poi che 'l superbo Ilion fu combusto.

Ma tu perche' ritorni a tanta noia?
perche' non sali il diletto monte
ch'è principio e cagion di tutta gioia?"

"Or se' tu quel Virgilio e quella fonte
che spandi di parlar sì largo fiume?"
rispuos'io lui con vergognosa fronte.

"O de li altri poeti onore e lume
vagliami 'l lungo studio e 'l grande amore
che m'ha fatto cercar lo tuo volume.

Tu se' lo mio maestro e 'l mio autore;
tu se' solo colui da cu' io tolsi
lo bello stilo che m'ha fatto onore.

Vedi la bestia per cu' io mi volsi:
aiutami da lei, famoso saggio,
ch'ella mi fa tremar le vene e i polsi."

5. The Meeting with Virgil

Charles Rogers (1782)
(first English translation)

While I was falling to th' Æbyfs below,
I saw one who was by long filence hoarfe.
55 Have pity on me, in this defert, then
I cry'd, whate'er you be, or Shade or Man.
He anfwer'd thus: I am not now a Man,

As formerly I was, my Parents both
Were Lombards, and in Mantua they were born,
60 Ere Julius govern'd I began to breathe;
And under good Augustus liv'd at Rome
(A time when Doctrines of falfe Gods prevail'd)
A poet fam'd, and fung the pious Son
Of old Anchifes, who arriv'd from Troy,
65 When lofty Ilium was confum'd in flames.

But why return you to this place of woe?
Why the delightful Hill ascend you not,
Which is the fource and caufe of ev'ry joy?
With modesty I then to him reply'd:
70 Are you that Virgil, You that copious Spring
Of Eloquence, which many streams supplies?
O Light and Honour of all other Bards,
Regard the ftudy, and the ardent love
With which I have attended to your works.
75 You are my Mafter; you are only He
On whom I've form'd that beauty of my ftyle
Which fame and honour to my verfe has brought.
Behold the Beaft who caus'd me to turn back;
Defend me from her with your counfel fage,
80 For my whole frame yet trembles at her fight.

Robert and Jean Hollander 2000

While I was fleeing to a lower place,
before my eyes a figure showed,
faint, in the wide silence.
When I saw him in that vast desert,
'Have mercy on me, whatever you are,'
I cried, 'whether shade or living man!'
He answered: 'Not a man, though once I was.
My parents were from Lombardy --
Mantua was their homeland.
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.
I was a poet and I sang
the just son of Anchises come from Troy
after proud Ilium was put to flame.
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?'
Are you then Virgil, the fountainhead
that pours so full a stream of speech?'
I answered him, my head bent low in shame.
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.
You are my teacher and my author.
You are the one from whom alone I took
the noble style that has brought me honor.
See the beast that forced me to turn back.
Save me from her, famous sage —
she makes my veins and pulses tremble.'

Allen Mandelbaum (1982)

While I retreated down to lower ground,
before my eyes there suddenly appeared
one who seemed faint because of the long silence.
When I saw him in that vast wilderness,
Have pity on me, were the words I cried
whatever you may be a shade, a man.
He answered me: Not man; I once was man.
Both of my parents came from Lombardy,
and both claimed Mantua as native city.
And I was born, though late, sub Julio,
and lived in Rome under the good Augustus
the season of the false and lying gods.
I was a poet, and I sang the righteous
son of Anchises who had come from Troy
when flames destroyed the pride of Ilium.
But why do you return to wretchedness?
Why not climb up the mountain of delight,
the origin and cause of every joy?
And are you then that Virgil, you the fountain
that freely pours so rich a stream of speech?
I answered him with shame upon my brow.
O light and honor of all other poets,
may my long study and the intense love
that made me search your volume serve me now.
You are my master and my author, you
the only one from whom my writing drew
the noble style for which I have been honored.
You see the beast that made me turn aside;
help me, o famous sage, to stand against her,
for she has made my blood and pulses shudder.

Charles Eliot Norton (1892)

While I was falling back to the low place, before
mine eyes appeared one who through long silence
seemed hoarse. When I saw him in the great desert,
"Have pity on me!" I cried to him, "whatso thou art, or
shade or real man." He answered me: "Not man; man
once I was, and my parents were Lombards, and
Mantuans by country both. I was born sub Julio,
though late, and I lived at Rome under the good
Augustus, in the time of the false and lying gods.
Poet was I, and sang of that just son of Anchises who
came from Troy after proud Ilium had been burned.
But thou, why returnest thou to so great annoy? Why
dost thou not ascend the delectable mountain which
is the source and cause of every joy?"

"Art thou then that Virgil and that fount which
poureth forth so large a stream of speech?" replied I
to him with bashful front: "O honor and light of the
other poem I may the long seal avail me, and the
great love, which have made me search thy volume!
Thou art my master and my author; thou alone art he
from whom I took the fair style that hath done me
honor. Behold the beast because of which I turned;
help me against her, famous sage, for she makes any
veins and pulses tremble."

6. Virgil's prophecy and invitation

"A te convien tenere altro viaggio",
rispuose poi che lagrimar mi vide,
"se vuo' campar d'esto loco selvaggio:

che' questa bestia, per la qual tu gride,
non lascia altrui passar per la sua via,
ma tanto lo 'mpedisce che l'uccide;

e ha natura sì malvagia e ria,
che mai non empie la bramosa voglia,
e dopo 'l pasto ha più fame che pria.

Molti son li animali a cui s'ammoglia,
e più saranno ancora, infin che 'l veltro
verrà, che la farà morir con doglia.

Questi non ciberà terra ne' peltro,
ma sapienza, amore e virtute,
e sua nazione sarà tra feltro e feltro.

Di quella umile Italia fia salute
per cui morì la vergine Camilla,
Eurialo e Turno e Niso di ferute.

Questi la caccerà per ogni villa,
fin che l'avrà rimessa ne lo 'nferno,
là onde 'nvidia prima dipartilla.

Ond'io per lo tuo me' penso e discerno
che tu mi segui, e io sarò tua guida,
e trarrotti di qui per loco eterno,

ove udirai le disperate strida,
vedrai li antichi spìriti dolenti,
ch'a la seconda morte ciascun grida;

e vederai color che son contenti
nel foco, perché speran di venire
quando che sia a le beate genti.

A le quai poi se tu vorrai salire,
anima fia a ciò più di me degna:
con lei ti lascerò nel mio partire;

che' quello imperador che là sù regna,
perch'ì' fu' ribellante a la sua legge,
non vuol che 'n sua città per me si vegna.

In tutte parti impera e quivi regge;
quivi è la sua città e l'alto seggio:
oh felice colui cu' ivi elegge!"

E io a lui: "Poeta, io ti richeggio

per quello Dio che tu non conoscesti,
acciò ch'io fugga questo male e peggio,

che tu mi meni là dov'or dicesti,
sì ch'io veggia la porta di san Pietro
e color cui tu fai cotanto mesti.”

Allor si mosse, e io li tenni dietro.

7. Virgil's prophecy and invitation

H F Cary (1800)

"For every vein and pulse throughout my frame
She hath made tremble." He, soon as he saw
That I was weeping, answer'd, "Thou must needs
Another way pursue, if thou wouldst 'scape
From out that savage wilderness. This beast,
At whom thou criest, her way will suffer none
To pass, and no less hindrance makes than death:
So bad and so accursed in her kind,
That never sated is her ravenous will,
Still after food more craving than before.
To many an animal in wedlock vile
She fastens, and shall yet to many more,
Until that greyhound come, who shall destroy
Her with sharp pain. He will not life support
By earth nor its base metals, but by love,
Wisdom, and virtue, and his land shall be
The land 'twixt either Feltro. In his might
Shall safety to Italia's plains arise,
For whose fair realm, Camilla, virgin pure,
Nisus, Euryalus, and Turnus fell.
He with incessant chase through every town
Shall worry, until he to hell at length
Restore her, thence by envy first let loose.
I for thy profit pond'ring now devise,
That thou mayst follow me, and I thy guide
Will lead thee hence through an eternal space,
Where thou shalt hear despairing shrieks, and see
Spirits of old tormented, who invoke
A second death; and those next view, who dwell
Content in fire, for that they hope to come,
Whene'er the time may be, among the blest,
Into whose regions if thou then desire
T' ascend, a spirit worthier than I
Must lead thee, in whose charge, when I depart,
Thou shalt be left: for that Almighty King,
Who reigns above, a rebel to his law,
Adjudges me, and therefore hath decreed,
That to his city none through me should come.
He in all parts hath sway; there rules, there holds
His citadel and throne. O happy those,
Whom there he chooses!" I to him in few:
"Bard! by that God, whom thou didst not adore,
I do beseech thee (that this ill and worse
I may escape) to lead me, where thou saidst,
That I Saint Peter's gate may view, and those
Who as thou tell'st, are in such dismal plight."
Onward he mov'd, I close his steps pursu'd.

Henry Wadworth Longfellow (1882)

"Thee it behoves to take another road,"
Responded he, when he beheld me weeping,
"If from this savage place thou wouldst escape;
Because this beast, at which thou criest out,
Suffers not any one to pass her way,
But so doth harass him, that she destroys him;
And has a nature so malign and ruthless,
That never doth she glut her greedy will,
And after food is hungrier than before.
Many the animals with whom she weds,
And more they shall be still, until the Greyhound
Comes, who shall make her perish in her pain.
He shall not feed on either earth or pelf,
But upon wisdom, and on love and virtue;
'Twill Feltro and Feltro shall his nation be;
Of that low Italy shall he be the saviour,
On whose account the maid Camilla died,
Euryalus, Turnus, Nisus, of their wounds;
Through every city shall he hunt her down,
Until he shall have driven her back to Hell,
There from whence envy first did let her loose.
Therefore I think and judge it for thy best
Thou follow me, and I will be thy guide,
And lead thee hence through the eternal place,
Where thou shalt hear the desperate lamentations,
Shalt see the ancient spirits disconsolate,
Who cry out each one for the second death;
And thou shalt see those who contented are
Within the fire, because they hope to come,
Whene'er it may be, to the blessed people;
To whom, then, if thou wishest to ascend,
A soul shall be for that than I more worthy;
With her at my departure I will leave thee;
Because that Emperor, who reigns above,
In that I was rebellious to his law,
Wills that through me none come into his city.
He governs everywhere, and there he reigns;
There is his city and his lofty throne;
O happy he whom thereto he elects!"
And I to him: "Poet, I thee entreat,
By that same God whom thou didst never know,
So that I may escape this woe and worse,
Thou wouldst conduct me there where thou hast said,
That I may see the portal of Saint Peter,
And those thou makest so disconsolate."
Then he moved on, and I behind him followed.

