

DANTE ALIGHIERI

ITALY (1265–1321)

LANGUAGE: ITALIAN (FLORENTINE DIALECT)

INFERNO (FRAGMENT)

Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita
mi ritrovai per una selva oscura
ché la diritta via era smarrita.

Ahi quanto a dir qual era è cosa dura
esta selva selvaggia e aspra e forte
che nel pensier rinova la paura!

Tant'è amara che poco è più morte;
ma per trattar del ben ch'i' vi trovai,
dirò de l'altre cose ch'i' v'ho scorte.

Io non so ben ridir com'i' v'intrai,
tant'era pien di sonno a quel punto
che la verace via abbandonai.



Dante Alighieri is often called “the Father of the Italian language.” He wrote *The Divine Comedy*, the first-ever epic poem in Italian. Before Dante, poetry was written in Latin or Greek, not in the common languages used in everyday life. Dante grew up in Florence during a period of warfare and political fighting. When his enemies took power, the poet was exiled from the city forever. Unable to return home, he wandered throughout Italy. This was when he began to write his masterpiece, an allegory about the soul’s journey through the afterlife. These are the first four stanzas of that masterpiece.

TRANSLATOR'S GLOSSARY		
WORD	DEFINITION	POSSIBLE SYNONYMS
a dir (v.)	from the verb <i>dire</i> —to utter words so as to convey information	to say, to tell, to recount, to explain, to express
a quel punto (phrase)	used to indicate a certain time in which an event or action takes place	at the moment, at the time, in the instant, at the point
abbandonai (v.)	from the verb <i>abbandonare</i> —to give up completely	I had abandoned, I had left, I had forsaken, I had renounced
ahi (interj.)	expressing physical or emotional pain	ah!, ay!, oh!, ah me!, oh boy!
amara (adj.)	painful or unpleasant to accept or contemplate	bitter, awful, agonizing, distressing, nasty
aspra (adj.)	having an unpleasantly broken, rocky, and uneven surface	rough, harsh, rugged, jagged, rocky
ben (n. or adv.)	1. <i>noun</i> —that which is morally right 2. <i>adverb</i> —in a good or satisfactory way	good, goodness, virtue, integrity, righteousness; well, properly, completely, thoroughly, fully
cammin (n.)	the act of traveling from one place to another	journey, passage, voyage, trek, excursion, wandering
che (pron.)	refers to something previously mentioned when introducing a clause giving further information	that, which, in which
ché (conj.)	due to the fact that	because, for, since
ch'i' (conj.)	refers to something previously mentioned when introducing a clause giving further information about the speaker	which I, that I
com'i' (conj.)	in what way or manner the speaker does something	how I, whereby I
cosa (n.)	refers to a general act of labor or situation	thing, matter, undertaking, task, enterprise
cose (n.)	objects or situations that are unnamed	things, items, figures, entities
de (prep.)	expressing the relationship between a part and a whole	of

WORD	DEFINITION	POSSIBLE SYNONYMS
del (prep. + art.)	expressing the relationship between a part and a whole already mentioned or assumed to be common knowledge	of the
di (prep.)	expressing the relationship between a part and a whole	of, through
diritta (adj.)	without a bend, angle, or curve; honorable or upright	straight, direct, even; true, honest, good, proper, moral
dirò (v.)	from the verb <i>dire</i> —to utter words so as to convey information	I will speak, I will tell, I will recount
dura (adj.)	requiring effort or skill to accomplish, deal with, or understand	hard, difficult, tough, grueling, demanding, exhausting
e (conj.)	in addition to	and, as well as, plus
è (v.)	from the verb <i>essere</i> —to be	is
era (v.)	from the verb <i>essere</i> —to be	was, had been
esta (adj.)	referring to a specific thing or situation just mentioned	this
forte (adj.)	serious and unrelenting	stem, severe, hard, unfriendly intense, grim
inferno (n.)	a place regarded in many religions as a spiritual realm where the wicked are punished after death	inferno, hell, Hades, underworld
io (pron.)	used by the speaker to refer to himself or herself	I
la (art.)	denoting a person or thing already mentioned or assumed to be common knowledge	the
l'altre (art. + adj.)	that which is different or distinct from one already mentioned or known about	the other, those other, the additional, the alternative
ma (conj.)	used to introduce something contrasting with what has already been mentioned	but, yet, still, however
mezzo (n.)	the point or position at an equal distance from the ends of something	middle, midst, midpoint, center, halfway point
mi ritrovai (v.)	from the verb <i>ritrovarsi</i> —to arrive in a specified state, situation, or place	I found myself, I wound up, I ended up

WORD	DEFINITION	POSSIBLE SYNONYMS
nel (prep. + art.)	expressing a period of time during which an event takes place or a situation exists	in the, during the, at the, in the course of the
non (adv.)	used to form the negative	not, do not, don't
nostra (adj.)	belonging to or associated with the speaker and one or more other people	our
oscura (adj.)	with little or no light	dark, dim, shadowed, black, obscured, gloomy, shadowy
paura (n.)	an unpleasant emotion caused by the belief that something or someone is dangerous	fear, fright, dread, horror, terror
pensier (n.)	the action or process of thinking	thought, reflection, recollection, contemplation, consideration
per (prep.)	expressing the situation of being enclosed or surrounded by something else; expressing intent	in, inside, within, in the middle of, enclosed by; in order to, so as to
pien di (adj.)	containing or holding as much as possible	full of, brimming with, encumbered by, weighed down by
poco è più morte (phrase)	implies an essential similarity to the end of one's life, despite apparent disparities	death is little more, death is nearly better, it's no better than death, it's hardly better than death, it's more or less death
qual (pron.)	the thing or things that	what, that which
quanto (adv.)	to what degree or extent	how
ridir (v.)	to give an account of an event or experience	repeat, recount, explain, tell, relate, relay
rinova (v.)	to cause to resume after an interruption	renews, restores, revives, reignites, reawakens
selva (n.)	a large area covered chiefly with trees and undergrowth	forest, wood, woods, timberland, jungle, woodland
selvaggia (adj.)	living or growing in the natural environment without restraint or order	wild, savage, ferocious, untamed, uncultivated, unruly

WORD	DEFINITION	POSSIBLE SYNONYMS
smarrita (adj.)	unable to be found	lost, obscured, missing, gone, nowhere to be found
so (v.)	from the verb <i>sapere</i> —to know	know how to, can, understand how to
sonno (n.)	the state in which the nervous system is relatively inactive, with the eyes closed, muscles relaxed, and consciousness practically suspended	slumber, sleep, sleepiness, languor, drowsiness
tant'è (adv. + v.)	characterizing something to a great extent	so...it is, it is so, it is so very
tant'era (adv. + v.)	characterizing the speaker to a great extent	so much was I, I was so, for I was so
trattar del (v.)	to talk about, though usually indirectly	to point out the, to tell of the, to bring to light the, to recount the
trovai (v.)	from the verb <i>trovare</i> —to perceive by chance or unexpectedly	found, discovered, observed, encountered, saw
una (art.)	one single	a
verace (adj.)	in accordance with high moral standards	true, correct, righteous, honest, good, virtuous
v'ho scorte (v. + adv.)	from the verb <i>scorgere</i> —to catch sight of	saw there, witnessed there, encountered there, glimpsed there
vi (adv.)	in, at, or to that place or position	there, in that place
via (n.)	the course or means of reaching a place	way, road, path, pathway, route
v'intrai (adv. + v.)	from the verb <i>entrare</i> —to come or go into a place or start to do something	entered there, accessed that place, there began, went there
vita (n.)	the period of time or state of being between the birth and death of a living thing	life, lifetime, existence, being

NAME: _____ DATE: _____

PHRASE BY PHRASE

INFERNO _____

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ché la diritta via era smarrita. _____

Ahi quanto a dir qual era è cosa dura _____

esta selva selvaggia e aspra e forte _____

che nel pensier rinova la paura! _____

Tant'è amara che poco è più morte; _____

ma per trattar del ben ch'i' vi trovai, _____

dirò de l'altre cose ch'i' v'ho scorte. _____

lo non so ben ridir com'i' v'intrai, _____

tant'era pien di sonno a quel punto _____

che la verace via abbandonai. _____

REFLECTING AND FINDING MEANING

Group Member Names:

Date: _____

Pick a scribe for the group, and work together to answer the questions.

What are the best parts of this translation, and why do you think they are good?

What elements of the original poem did you lose in the translation? What did you manage to keep?

Did you achieve something new with your translation, and if so, does it make sense in the poem or not?
