

ADV1160

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Top Ten Quotes

<http://www.novelguide.com/TheInferno/topntenquotes.html>

1. (Opening lines of Canto 1. Translations are all literal.)

In the middle of the journey of our life,
I found myself again in [or through] a dark wood,
[so dark] that the straight way was utterly lost.
Alas how hard it is to say what it was like,
this savage and sharp and strong forest,
which even in thought renews my fear!
So bitter was it that death is little more so;
but in order to speak of the good that I found there,
I'll tell of the other things I saw there.

2. (Canto 3, line 9)

The final words of the inscription on the Gate of Hell.

"Abandon every hope, you who enter."

3. (Canto 3, lines 56-57)

"I could never have believed that death had undone so many."

Dante expresses his amazement at seeing so many people who were never willing to commit themselves to any real attempt to be happy, whether by choosing good or evil. T. S. Eliot alludes to these lines in "The Wasteland."

4. (Canto 5, lines 133-138)

"When we read that the smile so desired was kissed by so great a lover, this man, who will never be parted from me, kissed my mouth, all trembling. A Galeotto [pander, go-between] was that book and the man who wrote it; that day we read no more."

Francesca speaks these words as she describes to Dante, in answer to his question, how she and Paolo first realized that they were in love. They were innocently reading aloud together about Lancelot and Guinevere.

5. (Canto 7, lines 121-124)

"We were sullen in the sweet air that rejoices in the sun, carrying within ourselves a sluggish smoke; now we are sullen in the black mire."

These are the words, Virgil tells Dante, that the sullen who are sunk in the mire of the Stygian marsh repeat to themselves.

6. (Canto 21, lines 137-139)

"But first each one had his tongue tight between his teeth toward their leader, for a signal, and he had made of his ass a trumpet."

In this, the most grotesque of the circle of Hell, the captain of the devils sends a troop of devils with Dante and Virgil to a bridge where they will supposedly be able to cross into the next level. In fact, the bridge is down.

7. (Canto 23, lines 37-45)

"My leader instantly took me-[behaving just] like a mother who is waked up by the noise and sees near her flames burning, who takes her child and flees, and, caring more about him than herself, doesn't pause so much as to put on a shift-and down from the ridge of the hard bank on his back [he slid], giving himself to the sloping rock that borders one side of the next bolgia."

Dante sees a troop of devils, enraged, swooping down on them. These lines describe the way Virgil picks him up and slides down into the next bolgia, where the devils cannot go.

8. (Canto 26, lines 112-120)

"O brothers," I said, "who through a hundred thousand perils have reached the west, to this so little vigil of our senses that remains, do not choose to deny the experience of [what lies] behind the sun, of the world without human beings. Consider your seed [the race you spring from]: you were not made to live like brutes, but to follow virtue and knowledge."

Ulysses (Odysseus) is telling Dante where he went to die. These are the words he spoke to his companions, urging them to sail on into the open Atlantic.

9. (Canto 27, lines 61-66)


"If I believed my answer were to someone who would ever return to the world, this flame would, without more [words], stand still. But since never from this depth has anyone returned alive, if I hear true, without fear of infamy I answer you."

Guido da Montefeltro, who gave Pope Boniface VIII the advice that made him first promise amnesty to a city and then destroy it, is here trapped in a tongue of flame, through whose tip he speaks. He is explaining why he is willing to tell Dante who he is and what he did.

10. (Canto 34, lines 133-139)

The leader and I by that hidden way
entered to return to the bright world;
and without care for having any rest
we climbed up, he first and I second,

so far that I saw some of the beautiful things
that heaven bears, through a round opening;
and thence we came forth to see again the stars.

The last lines of the *Inferno*. Dante and Virgil climb up the long and winding tunnel that leads from the center of the earth to the mountain  of Purgatory, which Dante describes as the only land in the southern hemisphere. The time is before dawn on Easter Sunday.