



## DANTE ALIGHIERI

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1265-1321

From *Inferno: Canto XXVI*  
(An Alternative Ending to Homer's *Odyssey*)



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90       the flame took on a voice and said: "When I  
set sail from Circe, who, more than a year,  
had kept me occupied close to Gaëta  
93       (before Aeneas called it by that name),  
not sweetness of a son, not reverence  
for an aging father, not the debt of love  
96       I owed Penelope to make her happy,  
could quench deep in myself the burning wish  
to know the world and have experience  
99       of all man's vices, of all human worth.  
So I set out on the deep and open sea  
with just one ship and with that group of men,  
102       not many, who had not deserted me.  
I saw as far as Spain, far as Morocco,  
both shores; I had left behind Sardinia,  
105       and the other islands which that sea encloses.  
I and my mates were old and tired men.  
Then finally we reached the narrow neck  
108       where Hercules put up his signal-pillars  
to warn men not to go beyond that point.  
On my right I saw Seville, and passed beyond;  
111       on my left, Ceuta had already sunk behind me.  
'Brothers,' I said, 'who through a hundred thousand  
perils have made your way to reach the West,  
114       during this so brief vigil of our senses

that is still reserved for us, do not deny  
yourself experience of what there is beyond,  
117 behind the sun, in the world they call unpeopled.

Consider what you came from: you are Greeks!  
You were not born to live like mindless brutes  
120 but to follow paths of excellence and knowledge.’

With this brief exhortation I made my crew  
so anxious for the way that lay ahead,  
123 that then I hardly could have held them back;

and with our stern turned toward the morning light,  
we made our oars our wings for that mad flight,  
126 gaining distance, always sailing to the left.

The night already had surveyed the stars  
the other pole contains; it saw ours so low  
129 it did not show above the ocean floor.

Five times we saw the splendor of the moon  
grow full and five times wane away again  
132 since we had entered through the narrow pass—

when there appeared a mountain shape, darkened  
by distance, that arose to endless heights.  
135 I had never seen another mountain like it.

Our celebrations soon turned into grief:  
from the new land there rose a whirling wind  
138 that beat against the forepart of the ship

and whirled us round three times in churning waters;  
the fourth blast raised the stern up high, and sent  
141 the bow down deep, as pleased Another’s will.

And then the sea was closed again, above us.”

—Translated from Medieval Italian by Mark Musa

c. 1308-21/1995

90 gittò voce di fuori e disse: “Quando  
 mi diparti’ da Circe, che sottrasse  
 me più d’un anno là presso a Gaeta,  
 93 prima che sì Enëa la nomasse,  
 né dolcezza di figlio, né la pieta  
 del vecchio padre, né ’l debito amore  
 96 lo qual dovea Penelopè far lieta,  
 vincer potero dentro a me l’ardore  
 ch’i’ ebbi a divenir del mondo esperto  
 99 e de li vizi umani e del valore;  
 ma misi me per l’alto mare aperto  
 sol con un legno e con quella compagna  
 102 picciola da la qual non fui deserto.  
 L’un lito e l’altro vidi infin la Spagna,  
 fin nel Morrocco, e l’isola d’i Sardi,  
 105 e l’altre che quel mare intorno bagna.  
 Io e ’ compagni eravam vecchi e tardi  
 quando venimmo a quella foce stretta  
 108 dov’ Ercule segnò li suoi riguardi  
 acció che l’uom più oltre non si metta;  
 da la man destra mi lasciai Sibilia,  
 111 da l’altra già m’avea lasciata Setta.  
 ‘O frati,’ dissi, ‘che per cento milia  
 perigli siete giunti a l’occidente,  
 114 a questa tanto picciola vigilia  
 d’i nostri sensi ch’è del rimanente  
 non vogliate negar l’esperienza,  
 117 di retro al sol, del mondo senza gente.  
 Considerate la vostra semenza:  
 fatti non foste a viver come bruti,  
 120 ma per seguir virtute e canoscenza.’  
 Li miei compagni fec’ io sì aguti,  
 con questa orazion picciola, al cammino,  
 123 che a pena poscia li avrei ritenuti;

126 e volta nostra poppa nel mattino,  
de' remi facemmo ali al folle volo,  
sempre acquistando dal lato mancino.

129 Tutte le stelle già de l'altro polo  
vedea la notte, e 'l nostro tanto basso,  
che non surgëa fuor del marin suolo.

132 Cinque volte raccesso e tante casso  
lo lume era di sotto da la luna,  
poi che 'ntrati eravam ne l'alto passo,

135 quando n'apparve una montagna, bruna  
per la distanza, e parvemi alta tanto  
quanto veduta non avëa alcuna.

138 Noi ci allegrammo, e tosto tornò in pianto;  
ché de la nova terra un turbo nacque  
e percosse del legno il primo canto.

141 Tre volte il fé girar con tutte l'acque;  
a la quarta levar la poppa in suso  
e la prora ire in giù, com' altrui piacque,

infin che 'l mar fu sovra noi richiuso.”

