

# *Dante's INFERNO*

## *Canto III: The Gates of Hell*

## Summary of Canto III

Dante and Virgil have just entered through the Gates of Hell. There, Dante first sees some of the types of torture that befall even the least unholy of sinners. The inhabitants of this circle chase banners endlessly, as their skin is eaten by maggots. Already thoroughly shaken, Dante meets Charon, a spirit who steers a boat down the River of Acheron. Despite not wanting to grant passage to a living man, Charon is persuaded by Virgil and relents. As soon as Dante is safely in the vessel, he faints, weakened by the fear Hell has given him.



# *Dante's World*

Dante's imagination created a “marginal place”, somewhere for souls to go that have been neither good enough for heaven nor bad enough for hell. The idea for the “gate” of Hell is said to have come from Apocalypse (Revelation) 3:16: “But because thou art lukewarm and neither cold nor hot, I will begin to vomit thee out of my mouth.” Included among these souls are angels that did not choose between God and Lucifer.





## *Fate of the Uncommitted*

- This Canto reveals that those who refuse to commit to God will be punished
- They are placed on the outer reaches of Hell
- Dante sees them as deserving of neither Paradise, nor Hell
- Law of Retribution: These people glorified themselves on Earth by committing to themselves rather than God, so they are not given any recognition for their actions on Earth.



And, lo! toward us in a bark  
Comes on an old man, hoary white with eld,  
Crying, "Woe to you, wicked spirits!"  
*Canto III., lines 76—78.*

## *Dante's Character*

Even though Dante, the author, is writing this story based on his feelings of anger and vengeance, his own personal character in the story is based on courage and curiosity. When he spots a sign above the Gate, he asks “Master, what is the meaning of this harsh inscription,” to which the master replies that in order to enter the Gates of Hell, Dante must be able to “put by all division of spirit and gather your soul against all cowardice”. With his curiosity satisfied, he displays courage when he is able to enter the Gates of Hell later in the Canto.



## *Dante's Lines*

“So saying, he put forth his hand to me, and with a gentle and encouraging smile he led me through the gate of mystery” (Dante's Inferno: Canto III 19-21)

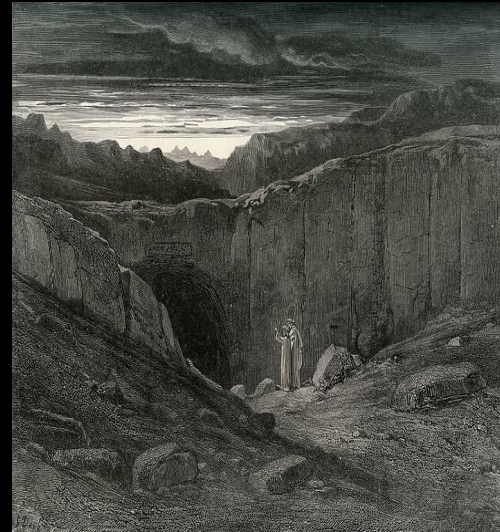
This group of lines means that even though that they are in Hell, and at first Charon was very reluctant to give Dante passage, he feels sympathy and agrees to let him through. He did need a bit of coaxing by Virgil, but in the end Charon could have done whatever he wanted because he is the only one who can grant access across the river and he decided Dante was worthy of crossing the river.

## Imagery

Overall, imagery is used as an elaborative device to draw the reader in and create a realistic mental environment. The mood throughout the story continues to be serious and portray a religious theme. This portrayal is assisted with descriptive words that continue to make the reader feel a part Dante's journey.



(The Opportunists' Punishment)



(‘Abandon All Hope Ye Who Enter Here’)



## *Sensory Imagery*

At the end of the canto, Dante uses visual, tactile, and auditory imagery to describe the terrifying scenes Dante encountered as he and Virgil exit the Vestibule of Hell and attempt to cross the Acheron River with Charon's service. Dante witnesses the daunting flaming red sky, the thundering, violent voice of Charon, and the tear-soaked ground and wind. These events caused Dante to eventually faint before they cross the river, as described in the final stanza.





## *Allegory in the Gates of Hell*

For starters, Dante does not go to Hell but ventures through it. In the beginning of the book it was written that he was lost of the “true way” which relates to him being morally lost in reality. Dante's writings were an allegory of life about a man who has strayed away from the path of God, and has to be shown the consequences of his past actions. This type of allegory relates to Medieval Christians as it represents the fate of those who succumb to sin and fail to follow God's path.



## *The Burning Question*

“So saying, he put forth his hand to me, and with a gentle and encouraging smile he led me through the gate of mystery”

What is the symbolism of the given lines and how does it work with the allegory to produce a theme, regarding Dante's character?