

# A Caribbean Translation of Dante's *Divina Commedia*, *Inf. V*

Lorna Goodison

Poet

Dropping down from the first, is the way that I go  
into the second round, a tighter space that hold  
way more pain; stinging souls into wailing souls.

Minos stand up there, grotesque, and screw face  
as he examines the guilty ones at the entrance,  
bully boy judge, dispatch, coil and uncoil him tail.

By that I mean to say, that when any wicked one  
appear before him, it then confesses all of it sins  
And Minos who know to judge sin by the gruesome

ones him commit - say which part of hell that soul  
must go. The amount of time Ox-man wrap tail  
round himself, tell how far down the sinner goes.

And it's so the dammed souls bungle up before him  
one by one. They come for judgement, confess,  
Bullhead hear, wrap them with tail, and then fling.

"O you who come to this establishment where pain  
Is hostess" Minos say when him catch sight of me  
and pause in the carrying out of him dirty duties.



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“Tikya now how you come in and who you trust in,  
It easy to come in, but don’t make ghost fool you”.  
My guide said to him “So why you keep shouting?”  
“Don’t try to stop this journey, for it was written down  
by the source of all power who has willed it to be so.  
What is to be must be. That is all you need to know.”

And right then, heavy metal music of anguish pound  
And clash in my ears, I find myself with sound wave  
after wave of weeping beating on my ear drums.

I come to a place with no kindly light there to lead  
and a squalling like a hurricane raging out at sea,  
when opposing winds whip it from west and east.

The devil of a storm that rail, pitch and torment  
the spirits; blow hard and wheel and turn them,  
that way and this, whip lash them in punishment.

When it swipps them past the site of judgement,  
Is then you hear screams, laments, and bad words  
as they blaspheme against Almighty God self.

I learned this is the place of punishment for those  
who have been condemned for the sin of lust  
The horny hotbloods without check or self control.

And as flights of birds are swept along by currents  
That propel flocks through the air in formations  
Its just so the winds in charge of these unfortunates.

Here so, then there, up, down they go, it sweeps  
them along without any prospect of comfort,  
Not even the hope to get a rest or to suffer less.

And just like cranes who whoop their unison songs  
As they stretch out in elastic lines across the sky  
I saw approaching, keening heartbreak lamentations,

Spirits driven along by the whipping winds. And then  
I asked, “Teacher, tell me what souls are these  
Being lashed by the sting of these terrible currents?

“Well the first one whose story you should know of  
My master did not hesitate to give his answer,  
Was the empress of slackness in the land of wap.

She is screwed, now sanity prevails and she’s unable  
to wind herself and her dollies to gyrate, from stripclub  
on to center stage, turning 42nd street into Broadway.

She is Sawsensespice successor to Ninjbounteeman  
She is the fallen female ruler of defunct dancehall,  
little girls once aspired to draw her pole position.

The next one took her own life when she did not get  
to have sex, preferring death to life as a celibate.  
Miss Cleo who clasped a tumescent snake to her breast.

See Helen there, she can't even launch an old canoe.  
See Achilles-the-heel, the love-rat who died of blood  
lust, leaving behind women he fooled-up and abused.

The last time I saw Paris he was kissing his boss shoes  
on fox news. One thousand such he pointed out to me,  
Naming everyone that lust had destroyed and used."

After I heard my teacher call out the long list of names  
Of lusty saga boys and fleshly queens of concupiscence,  
Pity for them mixed up my senses so I became dazed.

"Poet, I started to ask: I would like with all my heart  
to speak to those two over there who move as one;  
who hover higher in the air and set themselves apart.

Him: When they come nearer to us, what you must do  
Is entreat them in the name of their mighty Love  
that bears them along, and they will come over to you.

So when the winds started to blow my way, I raise  
my voice and say " O, weary souls, come over here,  
and if it is allowed, come and speak with us, please?

As barbary doves that carry in their breasts a desire  
to return to their nest with wings pointed skywards  
they float down piloted by pure will through the air,

so these two peel off from the flock where Lady D is,  
And waft towards us on a fetid and polluted breeze.  
That was how powerful the pull of our call was.

"O living one, so kind-hearted, good and generous  
Who is making your way through this poisoned pit  
To come look for us who stained the world with blood.

If we could ever call the King of Kings our friend  
We would intercede and beg him grant you peace,  
You who sorry for us and our suffering without end.

Whosoever you might wish to hear or speak about  
We will hear it and we will speak about it with you,  
As long as the winds can stop blow hard in this spot.

The place where I was born is by the banking  
of the Hope River fed by mountain streams, it falls  
to find its final resting place in the blue Caribbean .

Love that is a fire easy to swipe into life as Tinder,  
Take hold of this one for my body, now taken from me  
- ah the way it happened, the grief that bring me ya.

Love that gives no pass nor bye to the object of desire,  
Pulled him hard to me with such magnetic feelings  
that as you can see, he's now stuck on to my side.

Love led us straight over Lovers Leap like two lovesick  
Tainos. Hell awaits the influencers who led us astray  
and took away our lives." Word, from them about this.

After the two sinned-against souls told us the story, how  
I hung down my head like Tom Dooley, and kept it so.  
My Poet said: "What are you thinking of right now?"

When I finally found my voice, all I could say was this:  
But look how leggo beast desire and libidinousness,  
Bring down these two into this place of degradedness.

And then I turned to them and tried to say this: say I:  
"Francesca, you are like liza, for when I remember you  
(And I see you suffering so) water come a mi eye.

But tell me, during that time that you were caught up  
In the rapture of love, what were the signs that love  
showed You, so you could recognize what love was?"

Hear her to me: "No pain is hotter than to remenisc  
on nice times gone by, especially when you're feeling  
pain right now. But my teacher, you well know this.

But if what you truly want is to find out the root cause  
of an endless love like ours, I will tell you, but through  
cataracts of long eyewater brined with coarse salt.

We two were ambitious scholars of popular culture  
like Dancehall and Rap; e.g. take a jam by Sir Mixalot  
about his Love for big boots-he did not mean footwear.

Time and time again our two eyes would make four  
As we did our field work there on the dancefloor,  
but we remained detached, restrained and composed

till lyrics about lips wanting to lick, and put yu back in  
it, fired up this one-who now is always and forever  
with me side by side-to penetrate me by daggering.

We told ourselves we were engaged in legitimate area  
of study, How did we not see that it was but carnality?  
Alas, That was the beginning of the end of us that day.

As one of these joined-up spirits spoke to us, I said  
hear how the other one wails in a heartbreaking way.  
Then Pity overwhelmed my senses, I fainted almost dead

away, like a maiden of old swooning onto hell's floor.

Lorna Goodison, who was born in Kingston, was Poet Laureate of Jamaica from 2017 to 2020. She is the author of twelve collections of poetry, three collections of short stories, a collection of essays (*Redemption Ground*) and a memoir, *From Harvey River: A Memoir of My Mother and Her People*, winner of one of Canada's largest literary prizes, the British Columbia National Award for Canadian Non-Fiction.

She has been a central figure at festivals such as the Poetry International at the South Bank Centre in London, England; the Harbourfront International Poetry Festival in Toronto; the Poetry Africa Festival in Durban, South Africa; the National Black Writers Conference in New York; the Interlit International Conference in Erlangen, Germany; the Poetry International in Rotterdam; the Cuirt Literary Festival in Galway and the Aldeburgh Poetry Festival in England, to name just a few.

She is Professor Emerita at the Department of English and the Centre for African and Afroamerican Studies at the University of Michigan.

Her Caribbean translation of Dante's *Inf. V* is part of a larger work in progress; she has already translated twenty Cantos and plans to complete the whole *Commedia*.

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