
Francis Levy's Divine Comedy

Contributed by Francis Levy

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Â Francis Levy's Divine C

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Inferno, Canto 1

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Seven Eighths of the way through my journey

(an overly optimistic figure some had cautioned)

I found myself in a darkened box

in which the inner workings of my heart

would be read

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I was old enough to flirt with Dante

(like Beatrice)

I boldly compared myself to Augustine

Was I headed for heaven or hell

(on a daily basis)?

or isn't Limbo where the unbaptized land

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it's like applying to colleges
you dream of heaven
expect at least Purgatory
and allow yourself the delusion
that you're doing pretty good
if you land in the first circle of hell
(if you look at the curve it's almost
a B plus)

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on a cloudy day not in the month
of May, but sullen and humid,
the kind of day you would have hopelessly walked
in Central Park, a beer in a brown bag,
looking for your Beatrice decades before
you had finally lived

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"in dreams begin responsibilities," Delmore
Schwartz said
revelations pass by and unless I scribble them
down they're gone for good like cotton balls
at this stage where only the engraved long term
memories remain

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abracadabra no magic was going to occur
I had to carefully vet the minutes and seconds
as they flashed across the scrim of consciousness
and the empty seats at the table
a full accounting was required

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I still travelled,
but unlike Aquinas employed neither reason nor
faith

my solitary arrival greeted by the same Dunkin'
Donuts

my beginning was the end

hindsight always being 20/20

there were no choices

I arrived fresh from the factory with a lifetime warranty

I would be this way

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That's what this hell

must be

stranger anxiety

you remember Capgras

and prosopagnosia

where the face is inhabited by an imposter

or someone you can't recognize.

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I spot the faces of infamous

fictive sinners,

who've aided and abetted

there's Babbitt and Rabbit

and there're all the reviled

and detested Inquisitors who've

boiled us in oil, those

whose fuel is indifference and scorn

and the failure to appreciate

worthy talent, those

who never respond to e mails or return

calls

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and then there are the guiltless

transgressors

who are even

praised for their artful

seductions,
insouciant and merry
even their castaways
clapping for them
their legacy of destruction
rewarded

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it was worse that I was no longer
fueled by envy
the pathetic creatures
who employed
randy swordsmen
in rusting armor
I'm no better
is the real surprise
I'm one of them
in thought if not in deed
but it doesn't really
matter since I will never
see any of them again
(either on earth or in hell)

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you attain that point of maturity
when people pass into
oblivion before they die
they're unrecognizable
and sometimes you even can't
remember them
what day is it?
Thursday all day,

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I'm at the beginning of
my daily journey, the number 6

on the Lexington Avenue line
it's just another day
like the reduction of a gravy
sardined in among the straphangers
and claustrophobic in my isolation

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once upon a time in Paris
I might have been a message
shot through a pneumatic tube
"Mr. Watson—come here—I want to see you"
"only connect"
genocide
under where?

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though all these memories are destined for
oblivion it's a paradox (of the one in the
infinite)
that the Peters, Johns, Jim, Helen, Mikes, Bettys
are the slide show
that keeps making passes at me
the homunculus,
but I fell in love with a
succubus, mon semblable,
mon soeur,
messieur,
garcon,
s'il vous plait!

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we keep our illusion of cosmic
importance until the very end
what do you think makes a dying person
want to live?
and after it is all over Twitter

will continue to notify me

“you have new followers”

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hell is not other people

it's feeling invisible or

returning to your sacred Indian

burial grounds and

not recognizing a single spirit

(just the predicament that

Cosmo Topper faced),

dust jackets of Ellison's *The Invisible Man*

Notes From the Underground,

in packing boxes

and toys in the attic

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that the great man brought

at the airport

in *Through a Glass Darkly*

it was a mockery

I remember as a 5 year old falling in love with a
pair

of cowboy boots

which I had to have

and which I made my beleaguered

grandmother, who would be dead five years later,
buy for me

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I'm just another sinner

carrying this remorse

on my back

as I trudge through hell,

more dreams of my mother

being dreamy

in last night's she was looking for my
lost jockstrap
and found only a waistband
the cup in which my balls
would have been cradled
was gone
don't smile at the banality of the significance

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dreams are overrated
they're like middle management
mine tend not to be biblical and prophetic
they don't carry much weight
I continue to embarrass myself
and even at this late date
make life a living hell
in which there's no Virgil to turn to

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I was never made for mentoring
and take solace only
in a long undisturbed sleep that will require
no nobody,
purgatory, hell and heaven
ultimately are only
the creation of the living
they're the stuff of poetry
of imagination
no?

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it's not so much the memories
but the heavy mud covered boots
that make the trudging forward
so difficult
that I was sure I would

be stopped in my tracks
as if I were wading through
quicksand
or fallen into a sink hole
one day I would make
my final step
into oblivion
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I would be like the ash
hanging off a Gauloise
but I hadn't even decided
on burial or cremation
it was an on going
discussion
the question of whether my Beatrice
and I would be buried together
or our ashes simply disseminated
had little to do with the final
journey (if there was something
other than oblivion in store for
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we nevertheless met
to discuss our arrangements
at the very funeral
parlor on Amsterdam Avenue
in which our
mourners would some day obligatorily
file in
between therapy
and the gym
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it's just like candles
being snuffed
the way the smoke trails into
the air
leaving the blackened wick
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the moment you're born
you begin to die
and embark upon
the long convalescence
you call your life
holding a statue in
your hand as you stand
before the cameras
trying to parse the illegible
scribble on a piece of
scrap paper
in the dream

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Francis Levy is the author of the comic novels *Erotomania: A Romance* and *Seven Days in Rio* and the author of the blog *The Screaming Pope* which also appears on *The Huffington Post*.