

# 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*.