

Ryan – CPE 4 – Dante’s Inferno Extra Credit
Gustave Doré’s Artistic Representations of Dante’s Work
Each extra credit project is worth 200 points.

Directions: Look through Gustave Doré’s etchings of Dante’s “The Inferno” section of “The Divine Comedy”. Then do either of the following:

1) Choose an etching that interests you from his representations of Dante’s vision of Hell. Read the caption (especially the footnote) that goes with it to discover where this depiction comes from in “The Inferno”. Follow that footnote to the corresponding chapter/canto. Read the chapter, understand it, then write one to two pages discussing

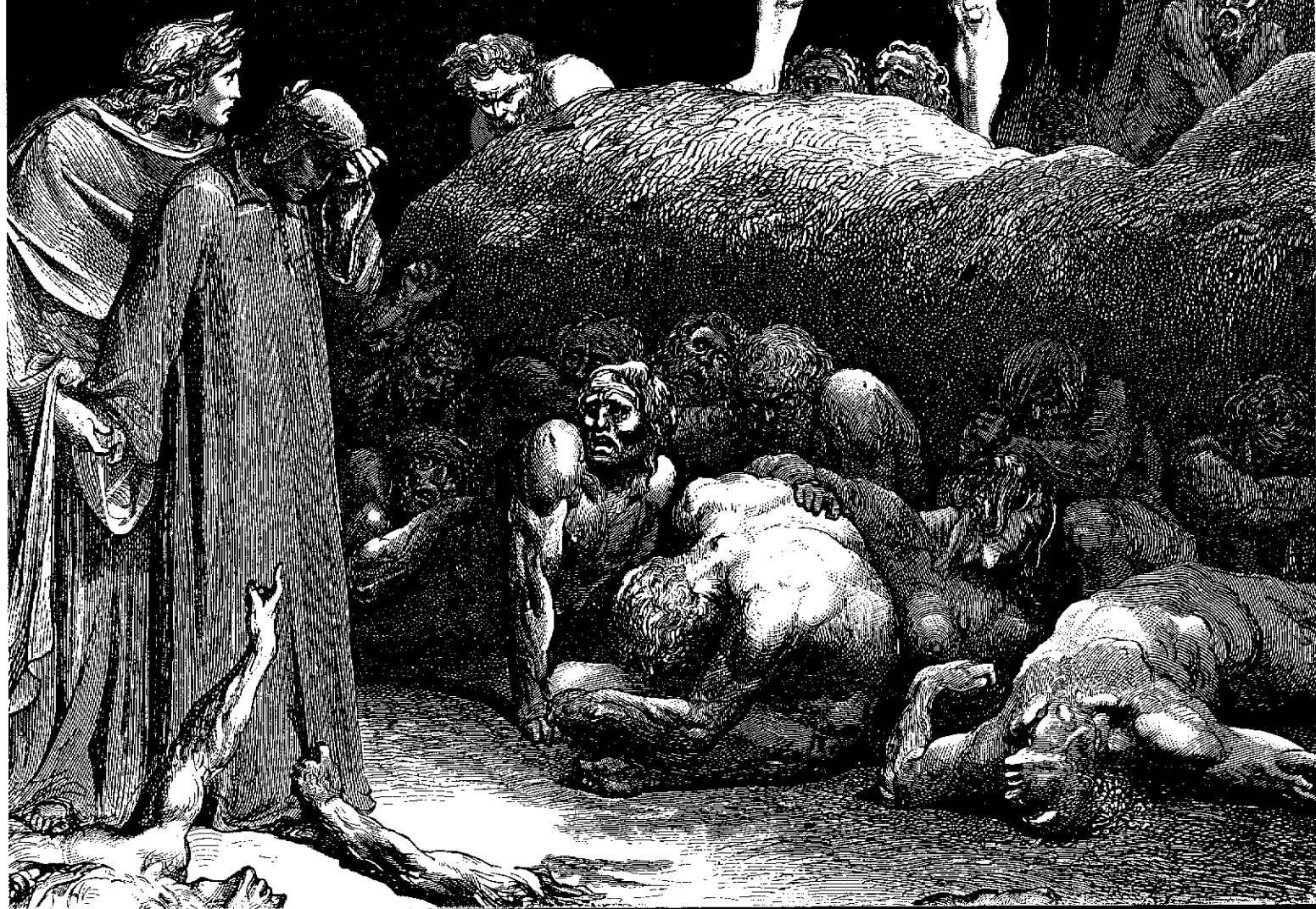
- What sin was depicted? Explain the sin.
- Describe the “symbolic retribution” Dante assigned to this sin.
- Discuss the punishment’s effectiveness; how does the punishment fit the crime here?
- Discuss the success/failure of Doré’s artistic rendering. How does he use his skills to depict this particular sample of pain and suffering in Hell.

2) Study the collection of etchings, remembering the goal of the artists was to visually represent Dante’s horrifying vision of Hell. Choose the five most effective pieces, and discuss in artistic terms what Doré did to successfully convey Dante’s sense of horror and chaos.

3) If you are an art major or consider yourself artistically inclined, choose one of the etchings you find inspiring, and create your interpretation of that level of Hell. The ambitious artist can also create a completely new vision from our reading.

THE DORÉ
ILLUSTRATIONS
FOR DANTE'S
DIVINE COMEDY

136 PLATES BY
GUSTAVE DORÉ





DANTE ALIGHIERI

Publisher's Note

Gustave Doré was perhaps the most successful illustrator of the nineteenth century. Born in Strasbourg on January 6, 1832, he revealed his artistic bent early in childhood. His father's desire that he enter a respectable profession was ignored by his mother, who encouraged his development as an artist not only in the early years, but throughout his entire adult life. At the age of fifteen, while on a trip to Paris, he sold some work to Charles Philipon's *Journal pour rire*, and soon after was a regular contributor of lithographic caricatures drawn in the manner of Gavarni and Honoré Daumier. His work was successful and his rise swift. In 1854 he executed wonderfully bizarre illustrations for an edition of Rabelais, and then, according to a systematic plan, went on to illustrate many of the classics, including Balzac's *Contes drôlatiques* (1856), Perrault's *Fairy Tales* (1861), Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (1863), the Bible (1865-66), Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1866), Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* (1867-68), and Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1876). These books appeared in many editions in many nations; a work such as the Doré Bible was a treasured possession of countless middle-class families. His religious and historical paintings and sculptures, to which he devoted great effort, were less successful. He died in Paris on January 23, 1883, leaving unfinished a memorial to Dumas père and illustrations for an edition of Shakespeare.

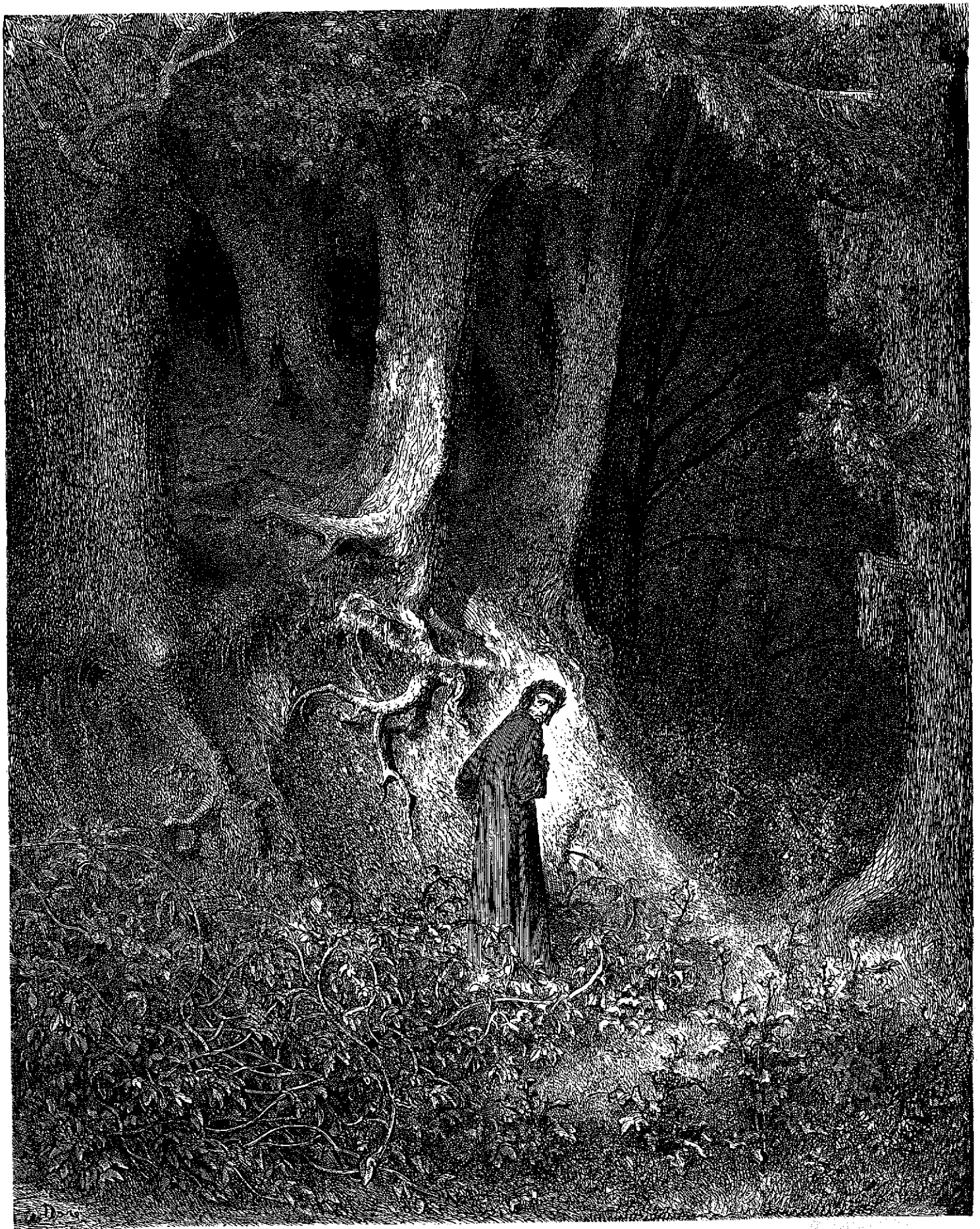
Doré first seriously entertained the idea of illustrating Dante's *Divine Comedy* in a large folio edition in 1855. Although he could read no Italian, and probably relied on the French prose translation of Pier Angelo Fiorentino which later appeared with his illustrations along with the original Italian text, his study of the masterpiece was thorough. Work on the first section, the *Inferno*, began in 1857. When he was finished, he found that no publisher was willing to undertake the work; it was generally held that so large a volume would have to be sold at a prohibitively high price. Undaunted, Doré published the

plates and text at his own expense in 1861. The work immediately won extravagant praise. Doré, many contended, had supplanted Botticelli as the greatest illustrator of Dante. These illustrations remained Doré's personal favorites; he frequently went back to them as sources for paintings. In 1868 work on the *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* was finished, and the complete *Divine Comedy* was published by L. Hachette et Cie., Paris.

Doré worked with astonishing speed, usually drawing his designs directly onto the woodblocks. Early in his career he had been upset by the low quality of engraving, and he assembled a shop of about 40 engravers he thought competent to work on his illustrations—Pisan, Pannemaker and Jonnard foremost among them. Much of the credit for the success of Doré's illustrations, especially those contained in this volume where the thick, rich blacks of the *Inferno* melt into the grays and whites of the *Paradiso*, belongs to these skilled artisans.

These illustrations mark a sharp contrast with Doré's earlier ones. In place of the grotesque and satirical, Doré, moving onto a grander plane, creates a weird, rather theatrical otherworldliness. Théophile Gautier commented on this atmosphere: "What strikes us at first glance in Gustave Doré's illustrations for Dante are the surroundings in which the scenes that he draws take place and which have no relation to the appearance of the mundane world." (*Moniteur Universel*, July 30, 1861.)

The illustrations for the present edition have been taken from *Dante Alighieri's Göttliche Komödie, Uebersetzt von Wilhelm Krigar. Illustriert von Gustav Doré. Mit einem Vorwort von Dr. Karl Witte. Verlag von W. Moeser in Berlin, n.d.*, two volumes, because of the superior quality of the plates. The translation used in the captions is that of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow as published by Ticknor and Fields, Boston, 1867, three volumes.



THE FOREST

Midway upon the journey of our life / I found myself within a forest dark, / For
the straightforward pathway had been lost (*Inf.* I, 1-3).