

# E Lucevan le Stelle



*Mi ritrovai per una selva oscura, che la diritta via era smarrita.*

*E quindi uscimmo a riveder le stelle*

*Dante Alighieri: Inferno*

*E lucevan le stelle ed olezzava la terra*

*Giacomo Puccini; Libretto, Luigi Illica & Giuseppe Giacosa*

In his famous poem, Dante begins his descent into Hell saying: "I came to myself in a dark wood where the straight way was lost". As he journeys downward he travels through seven levels of Hell, each representing escalating punishments for escalating degrees of crime, from liars and cheats, through oath breakers and traitors, to robbers and murderers, and most particularly, down in the depths, to the killers of children and other innocents. Many represented by historical figures and personalities from his own time. Having journeyed down and then back up through the seven, he finally returns to the surface saying: "And thence we emerged to see the stars again

TS Elliot wrote, "*between the idea and the reality, between the motion and the act, falls the Shadow*".

## I

High stand the stars and moon,  
And meanwhile, down below,  
Towers fall and tyrants fade  
Like footprints in the snow.

The bane of bad geography,  
The burden of topography.  
The lines where they're not meant to be  
Are letters carved in stone.

They're hollowed of all empathy,  
And petrified through history,  
A medieval atrophy  
Defends a feeble throne.

So order goes, and chaos flows  
Across the borderlines,  
For nature hates a vacuum,  
And in these shifting tides,

Bombs and babies, girls and guns,  
Dollars, drugs, and more besides,  
Wash like waves on strangers' shores,  
Damnation takes no sides.

*Many have perished,  
And more most surely will.*

The paradox of piety observes no disconnect,  
Nor registers anxiety  
As the ship of fools is wrecked.  
So, leaders urge with eloquence,  
And martyrs die in consequence.

We talk in past and present tense.  
As greed and fear persist.

For reasons only dead men know,  
Few can resist the call to go.  
That is your fate, the wise man said,  
The good book in his fist!

The craven call of hatred rings  
Across a thousand hills.  
The children play in war array.  
Communication kills.

The rockets fly in desert sky  
And swift and deadly the reply.  
So babies die and mothers cry,  
United in the bye and bye.

*Many have perished  
And more most surely will.*

And time, 'tis said, reveals it's dead,  
And we shall voice what was unsaid.  
Why he was wrong, and I was led,  
His song I sing who gives me bread.

I was not weak, I used my head,  
I had my kin and kind to serve,  
It wasn't me – I kept the faith,  
It wasn't me who lost his nerve!

All glory to the gods of men  
Who guide us hence and back again  
All glory to the men of gods  
Who goad us thence with iron rods,

Admonish all who rise too high,  
And all who ask the reason why,  
For are all here but to live,  
And die as we're commanded

And is not life a bitter pill,  
The rock to hew, the soil to till,  
Oh, brother, are we striving still?  
We are so sorely stranded.

*Many have perished,  
And more most surely will.*

We've laboured since antiquity  
In mines of man's iniquity  
We've marvelled at the perfidy  
That covers all we do.

Observed with incredulity  
The boundaries of cruelty,  
How the men they slew,  
The young ones too.

What is a moral soul to do?  
In times. in times of such morbidity,  
But strive for lost lucidity  
And yearn for higher ground.

Above the flood of bigotry,  
We reach for cleaner poetry,  
And pray that in a better place,  
We'll hear, we'll hear a joyous sound.

II

Many have perished  
For the protocols of hate.  
Many have perished  
On the orders of the state.  
Many have perished  
By the prophets' holy words  
Many have perished  
By the gun and by the sword.  
Many have perished  
In defence of blood and soil.  
Many have perished  
For diamonds and for oil.  
Many have perished  
In the inquisition's fire.  
Many have perished  
On the wall and on the wire.

Many have perished  
And more most surely will.  
Many have perished  
And the stars are shining still.

III

And cast down, creation's crown must one day pay the cost.  
As swept off in the maelstrom, the straight way we had lost.  
But out there in the shadow lands upon that darkling plain,  
We may come out of darkness and see the stars again.

Above the clouds that rise so high, indifferent to all,  
Concealing the anatomy of man's ascent and fall,  
Concealing trails of infamy beneath the veil of night,  
Above the clouds that cover all, the stars are shining bright.

I wear the weave of history like a second skin,  
I wake with runes of mystery of how we all begin,  
I walk the paths of pioneers who watched the circus start,  
The past now beats within me like a second heart.

I stand as on a rock amidst the churning of the sea,  
I gaze into the distance that is laid out far for me,  
I wonder lonely as a cloud that roams o'er vale and hill,  
Above the clouds that cover all, the stars are shining still.

*God moves in a mysterious way  
His wonders to perform;  
He plants His footsteps in the sea  
And rides upon the storm.*  
William Cowper (1731-1800)