

# The divine comedy



Ken Wood WC 1 5/1/2012 The Divine Comedy The Divine Comedy is commonly thought as one of the many great classics of Western literature. The story describes in much detail Dante's journey through the nine circles of hell, purgatory, and heaven. The Divine Comedy is a story full of symbolism, dealing with the themes of sin, salvation, and redemption. The description of hell is based on the "Catholic Christian doctrine at the time of the late middle ages and Early Renaissance, the time when Dante wrote this story". The epic journey begins during the week of Easter in the year 1300, with the traverse through hell starting on Good Friday. Dante's guide through the different levels is the "eminent Roman poet Virgil in a mythical dark wood; the two poets begin their descent through a baleful world of doleful shades, horrifying tortures, and unending lamentation". The Divine Comedy is a poem of epic proportion that was written between 1308 and 1321. Dante Alighieri composed the poem and completed it just before his death in 1321. Dante chose to use his name as the main character, but is not a depiction of himself. However, upon reading the poem one could argue that Dante the characters journey through hell to get to heaven could be a symbol of the real Dante's exile from Florence. The story is written as a first person account of the journey through the three realms of the dead. Dante chose to use the Roman poet Virgil as his guide through hell and purgatory. However, Virgil cannot continue with Dante into heaven because Virgil died before the existence of Christ, therefore Virgil could not be saved, resulting in his inability to enter heaven. His guide through heaven is his vision of the perfect woman Beatrice. (Beatrice is a woman Dante met during his childhood). The poem is divided into three parts, each one takes place in a different realm, Inferno, Purgatorio, and Paradiso. Each realm is written as a

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book, and done in thirty-three cantos, except for the Inferno which is thirty-four, totaling one-hundred cantos (a canto is the principle division of a long poem, Italian, from Latin cantus, song). The poem begins with a thirty-five year old Dante in the Forest of Error, a very dark and terrifying forest. Dante sees a light at the top of a hill, which he believes to be hope of Christ. As he begins to ascend the hill, he encounters a leopard, lion, and a she-wolf, blocking his path. The spirit of the poet Virgil appears to Dante, and informs him that he can help Dante get to the top of the hill by a different route. Unfortunately that route begins in hell, then into purgatory, and finally into heaven. Dante being set on reaching the summit of the hill he agrees to take Virgil's route. As Dante and Virgil enter hell, they can hear the cries and screams of the damned. They cross the Acheron River, and reach a cone shaped cave with nine circles. The first circle referred to as limbo, it is where the least offensive souls are kept. Their souls are not tormented, but they cannot enter purgatory or heaven. As they descend, further and further into the cavern passing the remaining eight circles. The two travelers see terrible frightening sights the further they go. Circles two through six contain the souls of the people who could not control their desire for money, food, sex, or heresy. Among the people they encounter are Cleopatra, Achilles, and Helen of Troy. Circle seven is where the souls who were violent to themselves or others end up. The eighth circle, keeps the hypocrites, thieves, alchemists, and liars. Finally, the ninth circle reserved for the worst of the worst, traitors, those who deceive their friends, family and their country. Dante sees inside of a frozen lake some of the worst souls yet, Judas Iscariot, the disciple that betrayed Christ, Brutus and Cassius, the men who assassinated Caesar. In addition, Satan incarnate, God's worst enemy is also

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frozen in the lake. The next leg of their journey brings them to Purgatory, which is an island. On the island there are ten terraces placed on the side of the mountain, where souls purge themselves of less offensive sins, like pride, envy, and sloth. An angel appears before Dante and writes seven P's on Dante's forehead, which represent the seven deadly sins. The angel instructs Dante to wash the P's off his forehead, to symbolize his purging of sin while in Purgatory. As they continue their ascent, they encounter the proud, envious, wasteful, and lustful. As they approach the top of the mountain they can see Paradiso, confirming Virgil can no longer continue on the trek, but return to his home in the first circle. As Dante gazes across the river, he can see the human and divine natures of Christ, Saints Peter and Paul along with other disciples of Christ. He also sees Beatrice. She has such a love for Dante she rebukes him for all the sin he has committed. After Dante confesses his sin, Beatrice invites him to cross the river and meet her in heaven. Dante notices that heaven is much different from where he had previously come from. It is a place of wonder and happiness, with other planets and stars. Dante notices it resembles the earth-centered system of Ptolemy and not the sun centered system of Copernicus and Galileo. People are placed according to how good they were in life, though everyone in heaven is able to experience the goodness of God. The upper most level is The Empyrean, where the Triune God, Mary and the other saints reside. St. Bernard greets Dante at the entrance of the Empyrean and prays to Mary on his behalf. Once Dante sees the radiant light of God it overpowers his human body with a love he cannot comprehend. " Finally, with The Divine Comedy Dante provides his readers with a spiritual map and a moral compass. " Angered and discouraged with his own sin and the increasing corruption in every

facet of life, Dante hoped if he painted a disturbing image of hell, but a beautiful picture of heaven, people would turn from their ways and return to righteousness. Dante illustrated clearly the punishment that awaited a soul in hell, and the pleasure one would receive in heaven. The poem warns sinners of the sins God despises, and how to earn a spot in the upper echelon of heaven. Works Cited Alighieri, Dante. *The Divine Comedy*. New York: Everyman; New edition, 1995. "Dante's Inferno." *Dante's Inferno*. <http://www.danteinferno.info/> (accessed May 5, 2012). "Divine Comedy: Theme Analysis Study Guide| Novelguide." *Free Study Guides*, free study guide, free book notes, free literature notes. <http://www.novelguide.com/divinecomedy/themeanalysis.html> (accessed May 5, 2012). Parker, Deborah. "The World of Dante." *The World of Dante*. <http://www.worldofdante.org/index.html> (accessed May 5, 2012). "canto - Dictionary definition and pronunciation - Yahoo! Education." *Yahoo! Education - Dictionary, Colleges, Scholarships, Homework Help, Schools, Reference, Thesaurus & more*. <http://education.yahoo.com/reference/dictionary/entry/canto> (accessed May 5, 2012). ----- [ 1 ]. "Dante's Inferno." *Dante's Inferno*.