

Virgil



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The primary role of Virgil in Dante's renowned piece of writing, the Divine Comedy, is to guide Dante through the nooks and crannies of purgatory and hell. In *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*, he proves to guide Dante with the aim of reaching Beatrice; another guide in *Paradiso* (Heaven). He knows the realms of these infamous worlds like the back of his hand. As a protector, he throws dirt on Cerberus' face so that Dante gets around the watch dog. However, after inciting all the guardians of hell, he seeks help from Geryon and Antaeus to finish the rest of the pilgrimage.

In his role as a teacher, he explains to Dante the proceedings of the underworld. He conveys a lot of concepts to Dante about the inner structure of hell, earth's geography and history of the Underworld Rivers. His gentle way of explaining things to Dante embodies his fatherly nature even though he is a shade. He allows Dante to sympathize and argue with sinners even though he disapproves of the former thus letting him learn some lessons the hard way. Dante keeps on crying foul but soon Virgil orders him to brace himself up for the tough experiences he is grappling with.

Furthermore, Virgil is depicted as a pagan since he is in Limbo and exudes some arrogance. As an allegorical character he signifies human shortcomings. In *Inferno* 1(82-85), Dante exclaims, "light and honor of all other poets, may my long study and the intense love that made me search your volume serve me now. You are my master and my father". In this allusion to subordination, Virgil is a mentor to Dante as a poet and as a pilgrim in *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*. The typical Virgil was a Roman poet who was an icon. To Dante, Virgil was a poet of caliber and one any poet would envy. Hence in his comedy, Virgil continues to play this striking role.

Additionally, Dante's use of Virgil as a character in *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* seems to pass some subtle messages. Virgil portrays the idea of human reason which protects and guides every man (Dante) through the world dominated by sin. Virgil's support from the angelic messenger provides a clear depiction that reason per se is powerless without faith. This faith is a vital principle in Dante's moral philosophy and is instrumental in making *Inferno* a Christian poem as opposed to the classical epics belonging to his predecessors. *Inferno* reveals how Dante uses Virgil to prove his poetic prowess as compared to his predecessors like Virgil (Author of *Aeneid*). Even though he includes Virgil in his book, Dante is alluding that his masterpiece which incorporates classical tradition, supersedes the Virgil's work.

Moreover, Virgil is the embodiment of all the wisdom that Dante the poet has amassed in classical realm. He derives the knowledge he imparts on Dante from a renowned authority in the the world of classical writing: Aristotle. Thus, from Dante's perspective, the confinement of Virgil to classical knowledge is a loophole since he lacks the Christian revelation.

The names like 'father' and 'my sweet father', which Dante uses to call Virgil signifies a fatherly role. This role played by Virgil is a courtesy of the good father that Dante missed in his life. So in the fictional comedy, he used Virgil to represent an important figure that many do not have.

In conclusion, something ironical about Virgil in *Inferno* and *Purgatory* is a wakening in his inner strength and conviction. He is no longer sure of himself as he was in hell (*Inferno*).