Dante: the divine comedy

Dante Alighieri is the writer of the divine comedy which is the story of his conversion presented in artistic creation. The divine comedy reflects Dante’s vision of human existence. Halfway through his life, the poet Dante finds himself wandering alone in a dark forest, having lost his way on the “**true path**” (I.10). He says that he does not remember how he lost his way, but he has wandered into a fearful place, a dark and tangled valley. Above, he sees a great hill that seems to offer protection from the shadowed glen. The sun shines down from this hilltop and Dante attempts to climb toward the light where Beatrice is. As he climbs, however, he encounters three angry beasts in succ**e**ssion—a leopard, a lion, and a she-wolf—which force him to turn back.

|  |
| --- |
|  |
|  |

*The Divine Comedy* Dante provides his readers with a spiritual map and a moral compass.  Frustrated by his own sinful ways and the growing corruption that he saw around him, Dante hoped that his visions of Heaven and Hell would prompt readers to return to a righteous path just as Beatrice had hoped that Dante's journey would deliver him from sin. To this end, Dante made the lessons of the Bible accessible to his contemporaries by drawing a graphic yet clear picture of the punishments awaiting them in Hell and the rewards found in Heaven. *The Divine Comedy* is "epic" because it not only tells the story of a soul's **journey** from Hell to purgatory reaching at the end Heaven, it also presents an entire world order, and man's place in that order= existential focus.

Introduction:

Dante was a very talented and gifted man but he didn’t profit and invest his talents and abilities in what is good. According to him, the more God gives us gifts the more we become sinful if we don’t take care of the good in him.

Virgil lectures Dante for his weakness and then reassures him with the story of how he knew to find Dante and act as his guide. According to Virgil, a woman in Heaven took pity upon Dante when he was lost and came down to Hell (where Virgil lives) to ask Virgil to help him. This woman was Beatrice, Dante's departed love, who now has an honored place among the blessed. Virgil says that Beatrice **wept** as she told him of Dante's misery and that he found her entreaty deeply moving. Dante feels comforted to hear that his beloved Beatrice has gone to Heaven and cares so much for him. He praises both her and Virgil for their aid and then continues to follow Virgil toward Hell.

All characters are souls, except for Dante is alive which is a privilege, because he knew what happened in hell and purgatory before dying. He has the chance to witness everything so that he would learn.

In this allegorical there are different characters each character represent one different way to reach god:

**Virgil:**

In this allegorical, Dante was trying to locate the place of reason, and to indicate what the role of reason in man’s life is. Virgil was one of the greatest of the Latin poets, in the divine comedy; he represents reason, and the Greek philosophy. Virgil is the reason, for Dante reason can lead us to know god, but it has limits. Virgil was the master and the guide of Dante in hell, but he faded away when Dante reached purgatory because for Dante, reason is a guide towards god but it’s not self sufficient. Virgil told Dante that he cannot tell him everything, and that he has to wait for Beatrice to reach faith. Reason reaches a point where faith is necessary to complete the journey. Our mind is limited to give proves about the existence of god, and cannot explain the nature of what is divine.

**Beatrice:**

Beatrice represents spiritual love. She has a limited role in Inferno but becomes more prominent in Purgatorio and Paradiso. In fact, Dante's entire imaginary journey throughout the afterlife aims, in part, to find Beatrice, whom he has lost on Earth because of her early death.

Purgatory:

**Love:**

The concept of love Dante presents in the *Purgatorio* has a theological bent. Love ultimately comes from God, who is Infinite Love and instills it in each of his creatures. However, being a loving God, He allows each man free will by dividing up man's loves (desires) into natural and rational=mental; the natural inherently loves the ultimate good (God), while the mental love can desire whatever attracts it (usually beautiful things) and must be trained to desire only worthy things. All of the sins punished in Purgatory are forms of **perverted** love or love expressed in improper measure. Perhaps the most shocking idea, though, is that love motivates all human action. Sometimes we love in the wrong way, it may a fault when it turns towards evil, but when it turns towards love then the love becomes a good love, and this is the rational love. But, natural love cannot be evil because god put it in us; he is **goodness** and it turns towards what is good**,** so when we choose evil this is about the rational love not the natural love. Man is free to choose, and not everything pleasurable is good for man. **Perfect love** is the result of virtue. For Dante it’s all about love. If love comes from a source outside ourselves, we cannot be blamed but love is coming from us so we are blamed for our love and our choices. In conclusion, man is free to choose and he has the power to restrain harmful love, and our reason help us in restraining such things.

**Haste, change:**

In Purgatory, everyone rushes about. Dante is warned by his teachers to hurry. The penitent souls rush towards the top of the mountain in their keenness for the gates of Heaven. This awareness and worry over time contrasts sharply with the never-ending tediousness of Hell found in Dante's [*Inferno*](http://www.shmoop.com/intro/literature/dante-alighieri/inferno.html). Like the human world, Purgatory operates on a normal time scale. This means that things change here, which – if you think about it – is the whole point of Purgatory. Men repent for their sins on earth. They work to improve themselves and make themselves morally better in God’s eyes. The passage of time allows these changes to happen.

**Separation between politics and church:**

Dante’s view of politics is essentially a negative one. The sorry state of politics is to be blamed on the passage of time, the infective nature of sin, and man’s misguided exercise of free will. As *Purgatorio* goes on, Dante’s political perspective becomes clear. Dante sees individuals as susceptible to selfishness; societies need a just ruler and laws to guide them towards virtue. However, Dante’s hope for an ideal emperor who might restore a beneficial balance between church and state seems to die halfway through *Purgatorio*. The second half of the text discusses politics not in terms of practice, but in terms of theory and philosophy. An important aspect of Dante’s theory is his emphasis on the importance of the individual and his soul.

**Faith:**

Human reason has been Dante’s primary guide through Hell (in [*Inferno*](http://www.shmoop.com/intro/literature/dante-alighieri/inferno.html)) and Purgatory (in *Purgatorio*). However, reason is not sufficient to get him to Heaven; he must have trust and faith in Christ as the Savior and in God. **One** of the most prevalent examples of faith is prayer – a selfless plea to God that He let only blessings fall on the object of the prayer. **But for Dante, faith must be solidified even further**. Hence the appearance of his new Christian guide, Statius, as a replacement for the pagan Virgil. Beatrice told Dante that you can understand what you are doing on earth only if you understand the eternal and fix your eyes on it. It is the grace of god that saves man.

**Fate and free will**:

All people blame the heaven, the stars, and the fate for evil and committing sins. Dante says that we cannot do this because the spheres are not earthly creatures, they only imitate tendency. But even if we do blame the stars we have their lights that direct us. Dante believes that a well nurtured man have the **free will** to overcome sins. In *Purgatorio*, the famous tension between fate and free will is explained in terms of love. According to *Purgatorio*, there are two kinds of love: natural and mental. Natural love is one’s innate attraction to God (whether or not one is conscious of it) and it is fated; man cannot do anything about it, so he is not judged based on his natural love. **Instead,** his virtue and vice come with his mental love. This love operates by free will. It can target any object of desire. Heaven’s laws, however, require that an individual cannot love unworthy objects (material goods, money) over God, and cannot love anything in improper measure (too much or too little). So if a person exercises free will to sin on either side, he can be punished with eternal damnation.