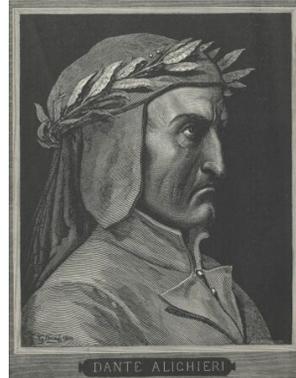


THE INFERNO

by Dante Alighieri



THE AUTHOR

Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) was born into a moderately wealthy family in Florence during a time of great political turmoil in Italy. The two major political parties were the Guelfs and Ghibellines; while originally these represented the democratic middle classes and the aristocrats, respectively, the political situation had become so muddled that, by Dante's time, it was almost impossible to describe with any accuracy the characteristics of the two groups, though the Guelfs tended to favor the Pope and the Ghibellines the Emperor in the conflicts between the two. Later, the Guelfs split into Black and White factions. Dante was a White Guelf, and when the Blacks gained control of Florence in 1302, Dante was exiled, never to return to his home city. It was during the period of his exile, as he wandered from place to place teaching and involving himself in the political scene, that he wrote the greatest of his literary efforts, *The Divine Comedy*.

The Divine Comedy reflects many aspects of Dante's life and times. The figure who is chosen to guide Dante through Hell and Purgatory is Virgil, the author of the *Aeneid*; this shows Dante's familiarity with and appreciation for classical literature. His guide through Paradise is Beatrice, Dante's muse. She was a girl a few years younger than Dante whom he met when they were both children. Though they saw each other only infrequently and each married someone else, she became for him the embodiment of all that was beautiful and noble. After her death in 1290 at the age of twenty-four, he wrote *Vita Nuova*, an account of his unrequited love. The poem reflects the theology of medieval Catholicism (especially that of Thomas Aquinas) and the cosmology of Ptolemy (by the way, note that Dante's earth was *not* flat!). Many of the characters mentioned in the poem were figures from the contemporary history of Italy, so that a good set of notes is essential for one to appreciate the poem fully.

The poem is written in a rhyme scheme called *terza rima*. Each stanza contains three lines of eleven syllables each (similar to iambic pentameter with a weak syllable at the end of the line); the rhyme scheme is *aba bcb cdc ... yzy z* (the translation by Dorothy L. Sayers incredibly preserves both the rhyme and meter of the original). Dante wrote, not in Latin, but in the vernacular of his Tuscan home; he is the first Italian writer to attempt something so ambitious in the vernacular, and thus his great work did much to stabilize the Italian language.

The Divine Comedy consists of three sections - *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso* (it is a comedy in the classical sense - not because it is funny, but because it has a happy ending, moving from Hell through Purgatory to Heaven). The poem is intended to be read on several levels. On the most basic level, it speaks of what one has to do to land in different eternal destinations (Dante has sometimes been accused of putting his friends in Heaven and his enemies in Hell, but the work is far more complex than that; it certainly indicates that one's eternal destiny corresponds to what one has chosen in this life, and also says something about Dante's understanding of the relative seriousness of different sins and the nature of repentance and salvation). The poem also may be interpreted as an allegory of the soul's journey from sin to salvation, and in this sense has much in common with John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. Thirdly, Dante's work has much to say about his view of an ideal society, particularly with regard to the primacy of Pope and Emperor in their respective realms.

MAJOR CHARACTERS

- Dante - The poet himself is the central character of the story. He finds himself lost in a Dark Wood (his sin), and nothing he can do can get him out. He then encounters the shade of the poet Virgil, who has been sent by Beatrice to lead him out; the only problem is that he must go through Hell to get to the top of the mountain on the other side of the world.
- Virgil - The author of the *Aeneid* is Dante's guide through the circles of Hell. He is a wise guide (he symbolizes human reason), but can ultimately take him no further than the top of Mount Purgatory, where Beatrice must take up the task of guiding him.
- Beatrice - Dante's muse who had died almost 25 years before the *Inferno* was completed, she is pictured as the one who is sent from Heaven to fetch Virgil to rescue Dante from the Dark Wood. She later becomes the personification of divine revelation and divine grace.
- Boniface VIII - Pope from 1294-1303, he was corrupt and arrogant, and his treachery led to the defeat of Dante's White Guelfs. The pope winds up in Hell among the simoniacs, and to Dante represents all that is evil within the corrupt church of his day.
- Frederick II - Holy Roman Emperor who defied the great Innocent II and renounced the Catholic faith, leading to his excommunication, was the last powerful Holy Roman Emperor before Dante's time.
- Dis (Satan) - Frozen in ice at the very center of Lake Cocytus at the center of the earth, he perpetually chews on the souls of Judas, Brutus, and Cassius.

NOTABLE QUOTATIONS

“Midway this way of life we're bound upon,
I woke to find myself in a dark wood,
Where the right road was wholly lost and gone.” (Canto I, 1-3)

“Lay down all hope, you that go in by me.” (Canto III, 9)
Or “Abandon hope, all ye that enter here.”

“They press to pass the river, for the fire
Of heavenly justice stings and spurs them so
That all their fear is changed into desire.” (Canto III, 124-126)

“We shall take our flight, when all souls take their flight,
To seek our spoils, but not to be rearrayed,
For the spoils of the spoiler cannot be his by right.” (Canto XIII, 103-105)

“Fearful indeed art thou, vengeance of God!
He that now reads what mine own eyes with awe
Plainly beheld, well may he dread thy rod!” (Canto XIV, 16-18)

“I’m one who, turning from the bitter gall,
Seek the sweet fruit promised by my sure guide;
But to the Centre I have first to fall.” (Canto XVI, 61-63)

“I know not whether I was here too bold,
But in this strain my answer flowed out free:
‘Nay, tell me now how great a treasure of gold
Our Lord required of Peter, ere that He
Committed the great Keys into his hand;
Certes He nothing asked save ‘Follow Me.’
Nor Peter nor the others made demand
Of silver or gold when, in the lost soul’s room,
They chose Matthias to complete their band.’” (Canto XIX, 88-96)

“Ah, Constantine! what ills were gendered there -
No, not from thy conversion, but the dower
The first rich Pope received from thee as heir!” (Canto XIX, 115-117)

“Fame, without which man’s life wastes out of mind,
Leaving on earth no more memorial
Than foam in water or smoke upon the wind.” (Canto XXIV, 49-51)

“Absolved uncontrite means no absolution;
Nor can one will at once sin and contrition,
The contradiction bars the false conclusion.” (Canto XXVII, 118-120)

NOTES

Canto I - On Good Friday in the year 1300, Dante finds himself lost in a Dark Wood (his sin); he tries to climb a nearby mountain (repentance; see significance of Mount Purgatory in the second part of the *Divine Comedy*), but is prevented by three beasts - a dancing leopard, a snarling lion, and a

hungry wolf (representing the three major divisions of Hell - Incontinence, Bestiality, and Fraud); his sins are too powerful for him to overcome on his own. He then meets the shade of Virgil. The ancient poet offers to lead him through the pit of Hell and up Mount Purgatory, but notes that a more noble than he (Beatrice) will have to lead him into the heavenly spheres. Dante accepts Virgil's offer, and thus begins his spiritual pilgrimage. Note the relationship here to Aquinas' presentation of the relationship of faith and reason - Virgil leads to the entrance to heaven in the same way that reason leads to the vestibule of faith.

Canto II - After the prefatory first canto, Dante moves into the *Inferno* proper. After an invocation on which he calls upon the Muses, Genius, and Memory, he returns to his narrative. On Good Friday evening, Dante, fearing what lies ahead, begins to make excuses to Virgil, who promptly accuses him of cowardice. Virgil then encourages him by telling him that Beatrice, Dante's true love who had died shortly before, was sent from Paradise by Saint Lucy, who had been sent by the Virgin Mary herself, to see Virgil to rescue Dante from his sin and confusion (the three women serve as symbols of revealing, enlightening, and redeeming grace respectively; Virgil serves as a symbol of the highest that humanistic art and philosophy can attain, and is thus subservient to the symbols of grace). Dante then declares himself prepared to brave whatever lies ahead.

Canto III - Dante arrives at the Gate of Hell, a passage from which none returns. After passing through the Gate, they arrive in the vestibule of Hell, where Dante observes those who made no final choice, either for God or against Him, during their lives. Their uncertainty and double-mindedness leaves them in a condition where, though they are not suffering punishment or enjoying bliss, they spend eternity forever chasing after a standard (flag) that constantly changes direction. Dante and Virgil then reach the river Acheron, where Charon, the ferryman of the dead, waits to transport all lost souls across the river into the nether regions. Charon at first refuses to take Dante into his boat because he is still alive, but Virgil silences him by saying that God has declared it. As a boatload of souls departs, an earthquake shakes the shoreline and Dante faints.

Canto IV - When he awakens from his faint, Dante finds himself on the other side of Acheron, on the verge of the pit of Hell. He and Virgil then descend into the first circle of Hell - Limbo, the abode of the righteous pagans and children who have died unbaptized in infancy. The place is green and peaceful, much like the Elysian Fields of pagan mythology. If the vestibule is the abode of those who refuse to choose, Limbo is the destination of those who have never had the opportunity to choose. Virgil tells Dante that this circle is his own abode, and while there, Dante meets many great philosophers, poets, and statesmen of the past. Interestingly enough, he also sees there noble pagans such as Saladin, Averroes, and Avicenna, who lived after the time of Christ, but sincerely followed another path. Dante thus admits into Limbo not only those who have never heard the Gospel, but those who by their own lights legitimately rejected it, yet led moral lives. Virgil also tells Dante of the descent of Christ into the first circle of Hell, in which he removed the saints of the Old Testament era and took them into the presence of God (apparently, Old Testament believers were in Limbo until the Resurrection).

Canto V - Dante and Virgil enter the second circle of Hell; circles two through five are the circles of incontinence - the sins of the leopard seen in the opening canto. In the second circle, Dante and Virgil first meet Minos, who mans the threshold of Hell and assigns each soul to its appropriate circle. He, too, refuses to let Dante pass until Virgil invokes the authority of the One none can resist

(those in Hell never use the name of Christ, or that of Mary, but resort to circumlocutions). In the second circle, the travelers observe the punishment of the lustful, who are doomed forever to be tossed to and fro by mighty winds. Dante sees famous illicit lovers like Paris and Helen of Troy, and has a lengthy conversation with Francesca da Rimini, who fell in love with the handsome younger brother of her deformed husband. When the two became lovers, the wronged husband stabbed them to death in their adulterous bed (this occurred during Dante's lifetime, in 1285). Dante, feeling great pity for the sufferers, faints again.

Canto VI - Dante here visits the third circle of Hell, where the gluttonous lie face-down in the mud, drenched with perpetual rain, hail, and snow, and continually under attack from the three-headed dog Cerberus (mutual indulgence is now degraded into private indulgence, and the gluttons eternally ingest mud while themselves being subject to the insatiable hunger of the monstrous hound; their souls are the real victims on which their gluttony feeds). Virgil stops the dog's incessant barking by throwing mud into all of its mouths, and Dante speaks to Ciaccio, a notorious glutton from his own city of Florence. During the conversation, supposedly occurring in the year 1300, Ciaccio "prophesies" the events of the decade that follows, including the feud between political factions in the city that led to Dante's exile; he also tells Dante where in Hell other Florentines may be found. Virgil then explains to Dante that, after the resurrection, these shades will be reunited with their bodies, and thus will be more perfect in their suffering. Prepared to descend to the next circle, Dante and Virgil encounter Pluto, the god of the Underworld (here not Satan, but a symbol of the corruption of wealth).

Canto VII - Pluto opposes their entrance to the fourth circle of Hell, but again Virgil silences him, and the travelers continue on their way. In this circle, hoarders and spendthrifts continually roll rocks against one another in a futile joust (selfish indulgence now leads to conflict with others, not just isolated wallowing). Virgil then explains that what men call luck is really divine providence (luck is here symbolized as an angelic power doing God's bidding) by means of which people and nations rise and fall due to circumstances beyond their control. They then descend to the marsh of the River Styx, which contains the fifth circle, where the wrathful suffer, either by engaging in constant combat with one another (now the selfish cannot even form groups motivated by a common enemy, but descend into "a war of all against all"), or by being submerged in the marsh, where they sullenly complain, though no one hears or sees them, and the only sign of their presence is bubbles that float to the surface. By this time, it is midnight on Good Friday, and Dante and Virgil see a tower in the distance.

Canto VIII - The tower is the entrance to the city of Dis, which incloses the circles of Nether Hell. A beacon light signals the arrival of the travelers, and Phlegyas, a mythological king who was killed for burning the Temple of Apollo (and thus is a suitable mediator between the circle of the wrathful and that of the heretics), ferries them across the Styx to the tower. On the way, Filippo Argenti, another Florentine who is among the wrathful, attacks Dante, but is driven off by Virgil. At the gate of Dis, a city whose walls are burning hot because of the flame within, fallen angels refuse to grant them entrance, and Virgil is powerless to force them to do so (humanism underestimates and is unable to cope with real, deliberate evil). They settle down to wait for divine assistance to continue their journey.

Canto IX - After Dante and Virgil are stopped by the demons at the Gate of Dis, Dante asks his guide if he really knows where he is going, or if it is possible that they might never make it through. Virgil assures him that he made the trip once before. At this point, the Furies rise from the tower above the gate and threaten to bring out Medusa and turn Dante to stone (to harden his heart and thus remove any hope of repentance). Virgil quickly makes Dante hide his face. Then a messenger from Heaven arrives, walks across the Styx, rebukes the demons and opens the gate. Dante and Virgil pass through unhindered and enter Nether Hell. There in the sixth circle they encounter a large field filled with burning tombs - the abode of the heretics.

Canto X - As Dante and Virgil walk beside the field containing the tombs of the heretics, Dante asks if the inhabitants of the tombs may be seen. Virgil responds in the affirmative, and shortly thereafter a voice comes from one of the tombs, speaking to Dante - the shade had recognized his accent. From the tomb emerges the shade of Farinata degli Uberti, a Florentine Epicurean who helped the Siennese to slaughter the army of Florence in battle and was later condemned of heresy and burned in 1283. Farinata and Dante belonged to opposing factions in Florence, and now taunt each other about the wars their sides fought. Farinata then prophesies Dante's exile from Florence (which occurred in 1302). While they speak, another Epicure, Cavalcante dei Cavalcanti, rises from a tomb nearby to inquire about his son. Guido dei Cavalcanti was a friend and fellow-poet of Dante's, and his father wonders why his poetic gifts did not enable him to accompany Dante on the journey, but Dante responds that Guido disdained Virgil, his guide (commentators disagree as to why this was the case). Cavalcanti then explains that the souls in Hell know the past they have experienced and have a dim view of the future, but no knowledge of the present at all. Dante then comforts the shade by assuring him that his son is still alive. Before Dante leaves, Cavalcanti mentions that among the inhabitants of that circle is the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II. As they prepare to descend to the next level, Virgil tells Dante that all his questions will be answered when he is under the guidance of Beatrice (in Paradise).

Canto XI - By now it is 4:00 AM on Holy Saturday, and Dante and Virgil pause to rest. As they do so, Virgil explains to Dante the overall structure of Hell. It has three main divisions, corresponding to the three beasts Dante met in Canto I - Incontinence (the leopard), Violence (the lion), and Fraud (the wolf); the divisions are taken from Aristotle's *Ethics*, and are based on the idea that sins arising from the will are worse than those arising from the emotions, while fraud, which is an evil of which men alone are capable, is the worst sin of all. Dante then subdivides Aristotle's categories by infusing into them Christian concerns such as ignorant unbelief (Limbo) and heresy. We have already seen that Limbo and the realm of Incontinence outside the City of Dis take up five circles. The sixth circle is that of the heretics; Virgil then explains what they have not yet seen. The seventh circle is that of the Violent - the sins of the Lion. It is subdivided into three rings, for those who have committed violence against others (their bodies or their property), themselves (the suicides), and God (blasphemers, but also usurers and sodomites, who sin against Art and Nature, God's creations, are here). The eighth and ninth circles are reserved for the Fraudulent; the former for those who have practiced deception on humanity in general, and the latter - the deepest part of the pit of Hell, for those who have betrayed a those who had reason to trust them.

Canto XII - As the poets prepare to descend to the seventh circle of Hell, they encounter a horrible stench and find that the sheer cliff is broken in one spot by a rockslide; Virgil tells Dante that this occurred during an earthquake when Christ descended into Limbo. They find the passage guarded

by the Minotaur, but Virgil insults him, which throws him into an uncontrollable rage, during which the two travelers sneak past him. They emerge on the banks of the first ring of the Circle of the Violent, Phlegethon, a river of boiling blood in which the violent against their neighbors suffer eternal torment. The river is guarded by centaurs who shoot their arrows at any doomed souls who try to rise above their designated depth of punishment. Chiron, the chief centaur, who had tutored Achilles, Theseus, and others in Greek mythology, explains the arrangement of the river. The worst tyrants, like Alexander the Great, are submerged up to their eyebrows; other groups up to their necks, their chests, and so on down to their ankles, depending on the amount of violence of which they were guilty. The centaur Nessus, who was killed by Hercules after attempting to abscond with the hero's wife, guides Dante and Virgil to the ford of the river, and prepares to carry Dante across on his back.

Canto XIII - The second ring of the Circle of the Violent contains the suicides - those who committed violence against themselves. Dante and Virgil enter a trackless wood; the trees are the souls of the suicides, who have destroyed their own bodies and thus may not appear in human form, even in Hell. Harpies perch in the branches and tear the leaves of the trees, giving constant pain to the sufferers within. Virgil tells Dante to pluck a twig, and they then have a conversation with Pier della Vigne, the steward of Frederick II; accused by jealous courtiers of treachery against his master, he was blinded and imprisoned, and finally took his own life. He tells the poets that, after the resurrection, the suicides will not reenter their bodies, but instead those bodies will be impaled on the thorns of the trees in which their souls are imprisoned. Then two naked men run through the wood, pursued and torn by vicious dogs; these are the profligates, those who cast aside, not their own bodies, but their own property, by gambling or arson.

Canto XIV - The third ring of the Circle of the Violent consists of a desert of burning sand on which fire rains down perpetually, and contains the souls of those who have committed violence against God, Art, and Nature - the blasphemers, the usurers, and the homosexuals, who, naked, lie on their backs, squat, and roam endlessly, respectively. The poets speak to Capaneus, one of the blasphemers, who had attacked Thebes, and while doing so had dared Jove to stop him; he gazes unrepentant at the heavens, continuing to cry out curses against God. As Dante and Virgil walk between the forest and the desert, they arrive at a narrow stream, and Virgil explains that the four rivers of Hell have their source in the world above, and tumble into the pit of Hell, forming successively the rivers of Acheron, Styx, and Phlegethon, until they arrive finally at the center of the earth and Lake Cocytus. Those waters are the tears of a statue with a head of gold, breast of silver, loins of bronze, legs of iron, and feet of iron and clay; the image is taken from Daniel 2, but also appears in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, where it symbolizes the four ages of man.

Canto XV - As Dante and Virgil walk along the dike beside the stream, they encounter a group of sodomites, who must run perpetually while gazing at the bodies they have abused; among them is Brunetto Latini, Dante's former neighbor. Dante thanks him for his past kindness, and Brunetto tells Dante of the mistreatment he faces at the hands of the citizens of Florence. When Dante asks Brunetto who else is among the violent against nature, he mentions several, including Andrea dei Mozzi, a Bishop of Florence who, because of his unnatural vices and corruption, was transferred by Pope Boniface VIII to the see of Vicenza.

Canto XVI - As Dante and Virgil near the end of the dike, they hear a waterfall in the distance, which carries the water if the stream down into the lowest circles of Hell. Before they reach the

waterfall, they meet three noble Florentines, with whom Dante speaks very respectfully, telling them of the trials and tribulations through which their beloved city was passing. Dante and Virgil then arrive at the waterfall. Virgil takes Dante's rope-belt and throws it over the falls, at which point a strange shape comes swimming toward them.

Canto XVII - The monster emerging from the depths of Hell is Geryon, killed by Hercules in the course of his labors. The monster has the face of a righteous man and beautiful iridescent coloration, but has the paws of a beast and the tail of a scorpion; as such, he represents Fraud. Before Dante and Virgil mount his back for the trip down to the eighth circle of Hell, Dante speaks to a group of usurers, sitting on the burning sands with money pouches around their necks. One commentator noted that, while sodomites sin by rendering sterile what is intended to be fertile, usurers sin by rendering fertile what is intended to be sterile; they produce nothing useful, but make money by exploiting the labor of others. Geryon then flies the poets to the next circle of Hell. They have now entered the region representing the sins of the wolf.

Canto XVIII - Malbowges, the eighth circle of Hell, is divided into ten bowges (trenches), containing those who have committed fraud against mankind in general. The first bowge contains the panders and seducers, who have used the charms of others for their own profit. The two groups run constantly through the trench in opposite directions while being scourged by demons. Dante here speaks with the shade of Venedico Caccianemico of Bologna, who sold his own sister's sexual favors to a nobleman whose gratitude he wished to earn. Later they see the shade of Jason who, after retrieving the Golden Fleece, seduced and then deserted several high-born women. Dante and Virgil pass on next to the second bowge, which contains the flatterers. God's justice requires that they spend all eternity submerged in dung, which they shoveled so plentifully when they were alive.

Canto XIX - The third bowge is the abode of those guilty of simony - the buying and selling of church offices. Here Dante sees men stuck upside-down in burning holes of rock, with only the ends of their legs exposed to view. As they are thus immobilized, flames play across the soles of their feet (simony reverses the proper order of things, putting material values before spiritual ones, and thus the simoniacs spend eternity turned upside down in torment). In this bowge, Dante descends to converse with Pope Nicholas III (1277-1280), and discovers that one hole alone is reserved for popes, and that each is plunged deeper into the hole when the next simoniac dies. Nicholas thus expects to be displaced in short order by Boniface VIII, who died in 1303, and Clement V (1314). Dante then goes on a tirade about the corruption of the papacy, excoriating those who would use holy office for their own material gain, and stating his belief that the Donation of Constantine was at the root of all church corruption.

Canto XX - The fourth bowge contains the sorcerers, whose desire to know the future, which belongs to God alone, causes them to suffer for all eternity the deformity of having their heads turned backwards on their shoulders so they can only see what is behind them. They thus must walk backwards, round and round the trench. Here Dante and Virgil see such famous sages of antiquity as Tiresias and Manto, the sorceress who was said to have founded Mantua; Virgil tells Dante her story. The bowge also contains witches and others who engage in occult practices in order to manipulate the future. By the time Dante and Virgil leave this trench, it is approaching sunrise on Holy Saturday.

Canto XXI - The fifth bowge contains barrators - those who sold justice to the highest bidder, and thus represent the corruption of the state in the same way simoniacs represent corruption in the church. They are punished by being submerged in boiling pitch, and are guarded by demons who attack them with hooks whenever they dare to break the surface. Virgil and Dante go down next to the trench, where they are mobbed by a group of rowdy demons. Virgil tells them that he and Dante are under God's protection and asks to speak to their leader; he is told by Belzecue that the bridge over the sixth bowge collapsed at the time of Christ's death on the cross, and that they must continue their journey another way. Belzecue then appoints ten demons to escort them safely to the next stage of their journey. Dante is petrified to have such companions, but Virgil assures him that the demons seek their sport against the damned souls, and not against them. As the company prepares to depart, the demons stick their tongues out at Belzecue, who returns their salute by turning and passing gas in their direction ("He promptly made a bugle of his breech").

Canto XXII - As the company travels along the bank of the trench, one of the demons hooks a barrator who strays too near the surface. While he is struggling in the demons' clutches and trying to avoid being torn limb from limb, he tells Dante who he is and names several of his fellow-sufferers. He tricks the demons into arguing among themselves, then pulls free and leaps back into the burning pitch. The demons fight among themselves, and two fall into the pitch themselves.

Canto XXIII - Dante and Virgil slip away, but are soon pursued by the outraged fiends. The poets escape as Virgil carries Dante up the slope of the bowge and down into the sixth trench. Here they see the hypocrites, who must walk forever clothed in heavy cloaks of lead, gilded on the outer surface; they thus suffer the weight of heavy ugliness covered by a veneer of beauty - the same garb they chose in life. Here Dante converses with two Bolognese friars whose hypocrisy led to the downfall of Dante's party in Florence. Later they pass by the shade of Caiaphas, who is nailed to the floor of the bowge in the form of a crucifix, while all the hypocrites in their leaden cloaks walk over his body as they move through the trench; they are told that Annas and the other members of the Sanhedrin who convicted Jesus suffer the same punishment.

Canto XXIV - The poets leave the sixth bowge, with Virgil again carrying Dante up the slope and onto the bridge above the seventh bowge. The trench itself is too dark for them to see what is happening, so they descend the far bank. There they find huge serpents, among whom run the naked shades of the thieves (in Medieval thought, possessions were an extension of one's body, so thieves were viewed as violators of the persons of others). They see a serpent bite one of the thieves, who promptly disintegrates into a pile of ashes and then reconstitutes in the form he had before (thus those who deprived others of their possessions are themselves deprived of their very bodies). This particular thief is Vanni Fucci, a notorious mobster from Pistoia, and he tells Dante his story and informs him that the White party of Florence (Dante's party) will be overthrown.

Canto XXV - Vanni Fucci then blasphemes God and runs away, pursued by the monster Cacus. Dante and Virgil continue in the realm of the thieves and see a very disconcerting sight - serpents and shades in human form (all representing Florentine noblemen) merge into one another and are transformed into one another. Thus those who in life refused to make the distinction between "mine" and "yours" suffer an eternal destiny where there is literally no distinction between "me" and "you."

Canto XXVI - This canto begins with a sarcastic paean to Florence, whose fame has spread to the depths of Hell. Virgil and Dante then climb onto the bridge above the eighth bowge, and see there shades encased in flame. These are the counselors of fraud - those who robbed others of their integrity by advising them to defraud other people. Among these shades is a double flame, and Virgil tells Dante that this is Ulysses and Diomedes, Greek warriors who devised the stratagem of the Trojan Horse for the overthrow of Troy. Virgil speaks to them, and Ulysses narrates the account of his last voyage (which Dante appears to have made up, since it has no classical counterpart).

Canto XXVII - The next shade to approach is that of Guido da Montefeltro, who asks Dante about conditions in his native Romagna, then tells his story. He is suffering in the vale of thieves because he counseled Pope Boniface VIII to make promises that he had no intention of keeping for the purpose of political gain (he offered the Colonna family, with whom he was at war, refuge if they surrendered, but when they did so, he razed their castle to the ground).

Canto XXVIII - Virgil and Dante now cross to the bridge over the ninth bowge, which contains those who sowed discord on earth. They are cloven in two by demons and walk around with their insides hanging out, much as they parted men in their lifetimes (after each circuit of the trench, the clefts heal and they are sundered all over again). The poets first encounter Muhammad and his successor Ali (Islam was at this time viewed as a Christian heresy), then Curio, who advised Julius Caesar to cross the Rubicon and initiate war with the Roman Republic, then other schismatics. The inhabitants of this circle were the causes of religious, civil, and familial strife, and the ways that they are cut apart fit the types of strife they engendered.

Canto XXIX - Dante lingers at the ninth bowge, hoping to see a relative of his there, but Virgil tells him the man has already passed. They then move on to the tenth bowge, where the falsifiers (forgers, counterfeiters of goods and money, alchemists, perjurers, impersonators, and others who undermine the values by which society functions) lie, covered with scabs and boils. As they generated a sick society by their fraud, so they must spend eternity picking at their sores. Dante speaks to several of the sufferers there.

Canto XXX - Dante here encounters more of the falsifiers, including Potiphar's wife. Two of them begin to quarrel, and Dante lingers, enjoying the repartee. Virgil, however, rebukes him for taking pleasure in such vulgar behavior, and the poets move on.

Canto XXXI - After Virgil and Dante leave the tenth bowge, they approach the well in which the very pit of Hell is sunk. The well is guarded by giants, who can be seen from the waist up above the rim. Among these giants is Nimrod, who built the city of Babel and thus caused the confusion of tongues (when he speaks, none can understand him), Ephialtes and Briareus, who attempted to overthrow Jove, and Antaeus, who was defeated by Hercules. The last lifts the poets from the eighth circle of Hell down to the shores of Cocytus, the frozen lake that makes up the ninth and final circle of Hell.

Canto XXXII - The frozen lake of Cocytus is at the center of the earth, and there are found the traitors. Those near the edge of the lake, in a region called Caina, who are traitors against their own families, are submerged in ice up to their necks. In this region may be found Mordred, among others. Moving further toward the center, the poets arrive in Antenora, the region of traitors to their

countries. Here Dante encounters Bocca degli Abati, who betrayed Florence, and angrily tears a handful of hair from his head. He is then told of other traitors from the wars of Guelf and Ghibelline, Black and White who are to be found in this region.

Canto XXXIII - Dante then encounters two heads sticking out of the ice, with one gnawing on the other. Count Ugolino, who is chewing on the head of Archbishop Ruggieri degli Ubaldini, had been betrayed by the archbishop, with the result that he and four of his sons and grandsons had all starved to death in a tower prison (Ugolino had earlier betrayed his city, Pisa). Virgil and Dante then move further toward the center, to the third ring of Cocytus, called Ptolomaea, the abode of traitors against their guests. These were frozen, lying on their backs in the ice, so that the very tears of their mourning froze on their faces. One of the souls so imprisoned tells Dante that, unlike the other regions of Hell, souls may be sent here while their bodies still live, inhabited by demons.

Canto XXXIV - The last ring of Cocytus is Judecca, where the traitors against their masters are wholly immersed in ice. In the very center of the lake is Satan himself. He is an enormous three-headed monster (the colors yellow, black, and red represent the descendants of Shem, Ham, and Japheth, and are also a parody of the Trinity) with wings like those of a bat (the beating of the wings keeps Cocytus frozen), and in each of his mouths is found one of the worst traitors in the history of man - Brutus and Cassius, who betrayed and murdered Julius Caesar, and, of course, Judas Iscariot. Satan both chews on them eternally and shreds their bodies with his claws. Virgil again picks Dante up and begins to carry him down the body of Satan. At the center of his body, Virgil turns upside-down and begins to climb *up* the demon's legs (this confuses Dante, but they have now passed through the center of the earth and are again moving upward). When they encountered Satan, it was 7:30 in Holy Saturday evening, but now, having passed through the center of the earth, it is 7:30 AM on the same day. As they climb, they encounter Lethe, the river of forgetfulness (they are climbing upstream, so they are moving toward remembrance). By the time they manage to climb from the center of the earth to the base of Mount Purgatory on the other side, it is 5:00 AM on Easter Sunday.

ESSAY QUESTIONS

Discuss the following in a five-paragraph essay:

1. Discuss the relationship between Dante's *Inferno* and the *Summa Theologica* of Thomas Aquinas. In particular, how do the roles of Virgil and Beatrice in Dante's spiritual pilgrimage relate to Aquinas' understanding of the relationship of faith and reason? Be sure to support your arguments with specifics from the poem.
2. Discuss the theme of free will as it appears in Dante's *Inferno*. To what extent is it true that those in the different circles of Hell get what they choose? Use three specific examples from the poem to support your argument.
3. Compare Dante's *Inferno* to John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. The former was written by a medieval Catholic, the other by a seventeenth-century Particular Baptist. How are the theological differences in the two poems reflected in their pictures of the Christian life. Be specific in analyzing the theological content of the two works.

4. While some critics have complained that Dante's *Inferno* is little more than an opportunity, in print, for the poet to reward his friends and pay back his enemies by placing them in either Heaven or Hell, respectively, it is widely recognized that the *Divine Comedy* is also an allegorical picture of the journey from sin through repentance to redemption of the individual soul in general, and the poet's soul in particular. Compare Dante's *Inferno* to John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. Which is the more effective allegory of the soul's spiritual pilgrimage? Why do you think so? Support your argument with specifics from the two works.
5. When viewing Dante's *Inferno* as an allegory of the pilgrimage of the human soul from sin to salvation, one is confronted with Dante's belief that salvation is not possible unless one is first confronted with the horror of his own sin. As Dante says in Canto XVI,

"I'm one who, turning from the bitter gall,
Seek the sweet fruit promised by my sure guide;
But to the Centre I have first to fall." (lines 61-63)

Do you agree with Dante's understanding of the path to salvation? Why or why not? Defend your analysis from Scripture, and illustrate it with details from the poem.

6. In Dante's *Inferno*, the poet is very much a creature of the medieval Catholic Church. Choose three specific aspects of the poem that clearly reflect the theology of the Catholic Church during the Middle Ages and discuss how Dante presupposes Catholic orthodoxy.
7. While Dante's *Inferno* is a Christian poem, the poet also draws heavily on Greek and Roman mythology to communicate his message. Why did Dante include these references? In your opinion, do these references detract from the Christian thrust of the material? Why or why not? Be sure to use specific references to support your arguments.
8. Discuss the ways in which the poet demonstrates his love for the Papacy and the Roman Empire in Dante's *Inferno*. Why should he so strongly advocate centralized authority in church and state? Analyze how his treatment of souls in Hell demonstrates his political views. Be sure to use specific examples.
9. In Dante's *Inferno*, the Vestibule of Hell is the abode of those who refused to choose either for God or against Him, while Limbo is the dwelling place of those who never had a chance to choose Christ. In both places, the souls who live there suffer no punishment. Evaluate the thinking represented in Cantos III-IV from Scripture. Are there really people who refuse to choose? Will those who have never heard of Christ experience something like the Elysian Fields, an eternal bliss limited only by the weakness of the humanistic imagination?
10. In Dante's *Inferno*, the lustful are assigned to the second circle of Hell, indicating that the poet considered consensual sexual sin to be a relatively minor peccadillo. In fact, the murderer of Francesca and her lover is assigned to a far worse punishment than they are. Our society would obviously agree. Do you? Evaluate Dante's view of extramarital sex from Scripture, being sure to reference the examples he uses in Canto V.

11. In Dante's *Inferno*, the further Dante descends into the pit of Hell, the less sympathy he feels for the suffering souls he encounters. On one level, this is understandable, since their sins become increasingly heinous the lower he goes. But if the allegory represents Dante's confrontation with his own sin rather than the sin of others, what interpretation would you place on this fact? Why is it important that Dante no longer pity the sinners he encounters? Support your conclusion with specifics from the poem.
12. As the poet descends through the first five circles of Hell in Dante's *Inferno*, he sees the gradual unfolding of the consequences of self-indulgence. Trace the relationships among circles two through five, and explain how each one, if unchecked, naturally leads to the next. Support your analysis with Scripture.
13. The choices made by the free will of man form an important theme of Dante's *Inferno*. How is this theme expressed in the distinction between Upper Hell and Nether Hell? How do the sins punished in the former differ from those in the latter, and how does this distinction help Dante to communicate his theme of the centrality of the human will?
14. In Canto XI of Dante's *Inferno*, Virgil explains to Dante the layout of Hell. This explanation gives the reader insight into Dante's views (which he borrowed from sources including Aristotle, Cicero, and the Catholic Church) concerning the relative seriousness of various sins. Discuss the poet's evaluation of different kinds of sins. Do you agree with his assessments? Why or why not? Support your evaluation from Scripture as well as from the poem itself.
15. In the third ring of the seventh circle of Hell in Dante's *Inferno*, we see the violent against God, Art and Nature - the blasphemers, usurers, and sodomites. In our day, these are hardly considered sins at all. Do you agree that these three sins are of equal seriousness? Are they sufficiently heinous to justify placing them in such a deep place in the pit of Hell? Justify your answer from the poem and from Scripture.
16. Dorothy Sayers, in her commentary on her translation of Dante's *Inferno*, suggests that the second bowge in the eighth circle of Hell would be the appropriate destination for political spin doctors, commercial advertisers, and tabloid journalists. Do you agree with her? Why or why not? If you would place these scourges of humanity elsewhere in Hell, where would it be?
17. Discuss the portrayal of demons in Dante's *Inferno*. Include in your discussion both the way they are pictured by Dante and the place they occupy in Hell. Be sure to support your arguments both from the poem and from Scripture.
18. Both J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* and Dante's *Inferno* portray a protagonist who must pass through Hell in order to achieve Heaven, in the process learning much about the nature of evil. Compare and contrast the visions of evil pictured by the two authors. What are they attempting to communicate when they have their central characters pass through realms of unspeakable evil in order to gain Paradise?

19. In Canto XIX of Dante's *Inferno*, Dante expresses his conviction that the Donation of Constantine was at the root of the corruption of the papacy that had become such a scandal by the beginning of the fourteenth century. He says:

“Ah, Constantine! what ills were gendered there -
No, not from thy conversion, but the dower
The first rich Pope received from thee as heir!” (lines 115-117)

Do you agree, or was some other consequence of the conversion of Constantine more central? Support your conclusion from your knowledge of church history, from the poem, and from Scripture.

20. In Dante's *Inferno*, the poet treats Islam as a Christian heresy. To what extent is this a legitimate assessment? Use your knowledge of Islam to discuss the validity of the medieval view of the religion founded by Muhammad.
21. In Dante's *Inferno*, the presence of Judas in the very pit of Hell is obvious, but why does Dante also place Brutus and Cassius there, since there have been many other traitors against rightful rulers in the history of the world? Relate your discussion to Dante's understanding of the ideal society.
22. Compare and contrast the journeys from sin to salvation recorded in Dante's *Inferno* and the morality play *Everyman*. Do the two stories convey the same message? Do they have the same focus? What accounts for their similarities and differences?
23. Compare and contrast the spiritual journeys of the soul recorded in Dante's *Inferno* and the morality play *Everyman*, particularly with regard to their fidelity to the theology of the Catholic Church. In what ways do their visions of the spiritual life differ? Be specific.
24. Compare and contrast the pictures of sin recorded in Dante's *Inferno* and the morality play *Everyman*, particularly with regard to their differing emphases. Recognize as you do this that the *Inferno* is merely the first part of a trilogy that covers the same ground as that found in the morality play. Be sure to cite specifics in your discussion of the two works.
25. Discuss the similarities and differences between the two protagonists of Dante's *Inferno* and *Everyman*. Is the character of Dante in his poem a universal figure, or does his connection to the life of the poet limit the universal applicability of his experience in comparison to the protagonist of the morality play? Why or why not? Illustrate your answer with specifics from the two works.
26. In what way does the Hell of Dante's *Inferno* demonstrate the poet's belief in the justice of God? Be specific in answering the question.
27. Dante wrote before the dawn of the Renaissance. In what ways does Dante's *Inferno* anticipate that great movement in Italian culture? Pay particular attention to the poet's view of the value of classical literature and its relationship to Christianity.

28. Discuss the view of the relationship of church and state found in Dante's *Inferno*. How does the poet believe the two great institutions of society should relate to one another? Does his view correspond to that of the medieval church? Use details from the poem to support your arguments.
29. In one of the Bible commentaries produced during the Ancient Church period, Origen's *Hexapla*, the author approaches the text on three levels - literal, moral, and allegorical. Origen's approach influenced the church throughout much of the Middle Ages, where the same multiple interpretations were used to understand Scripture. In Dante's *Inferno*, we find a poem that may be interpreted on the same three levels. In general, what are the literal, moral, and allegorical meanings of the poem? Choose a specific canto and develop the three levels of interpretation in greater detail.
30. Analyze the inscription over the gate of Hell at the beginning of Canto III of Dante's *Inferno*. How does the inscription introduce some of the main themes of the poem? How are those themes worked out later in the text?
31. Discuss the significance of Virgil in the overall scheme of Dante's *Inferno*. What does Virgil represent? Why can he lead Dante through Hell and Purgatory, but not into Heaven? Pay particular attention to what Virgil can and cannot do as the poet's journey through the nether regions.
32. Compare the pictures of Hell found in John Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Dante's *Inferno*. Why is it difficult in many ways to compare the two? To what extent do the pictures of Hell given in the two poems reflect the respective theologies of the poets?
33. Compare and contrast the views of the classical world and classical literature found in John Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Dante's *Inferno*. Discuss both poets' views of the relationship between the classical and Christian worlds, their own relationships to the classical poets, and their views of the value of classical civilization and literature.
34. John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* and Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy* are both pictures of a journey from the place of destruction to the place of paradise. Compare and contrast the views of the journey and what makes success possible as expressed by the two authors.
35. In the first section of Albert Camus' *The Fall*, the speaker compares the canal system of Amsterdam to the circles of Hell in Dante's *Inferno*. Many critics have noted the similarity of Dante's journey through the circles of Hell and the decline and downfall of Clamence in Camus' novel. Find as many connections as you can between the two, paying special attention to the sequence of the circles and their relationship to Clamence's fall.

36. In Dante's *Inferno*, the gates of Hell carry the superscription, "Abandon hope, all ye that enter here." When the narrator in Albert Camus' *The Fall* speaks of debauchery, he describes it as a jungle, a place separated from the world, where one who enters "leaves behind fear and hope." While Dante portrays the afterlife, Camus speaks of the human condition. Why does he compare it to Hell, and in what ways is it like the Inferno pictured by the Medieval Italian poet?
37. In Book VI of Virgil's *Aeneid*, the hero ventures into the underworld in order to seek out his father. More than thirteen hundred years later, Dante chose Virgil to guide him in his travels through Hell in his *Inferno*. Though the former was a pagan writer and the latter a Catholic, their accounts of the underworld bear many similarities. Compare and contrast the portrayals of Hell found in the two poems.