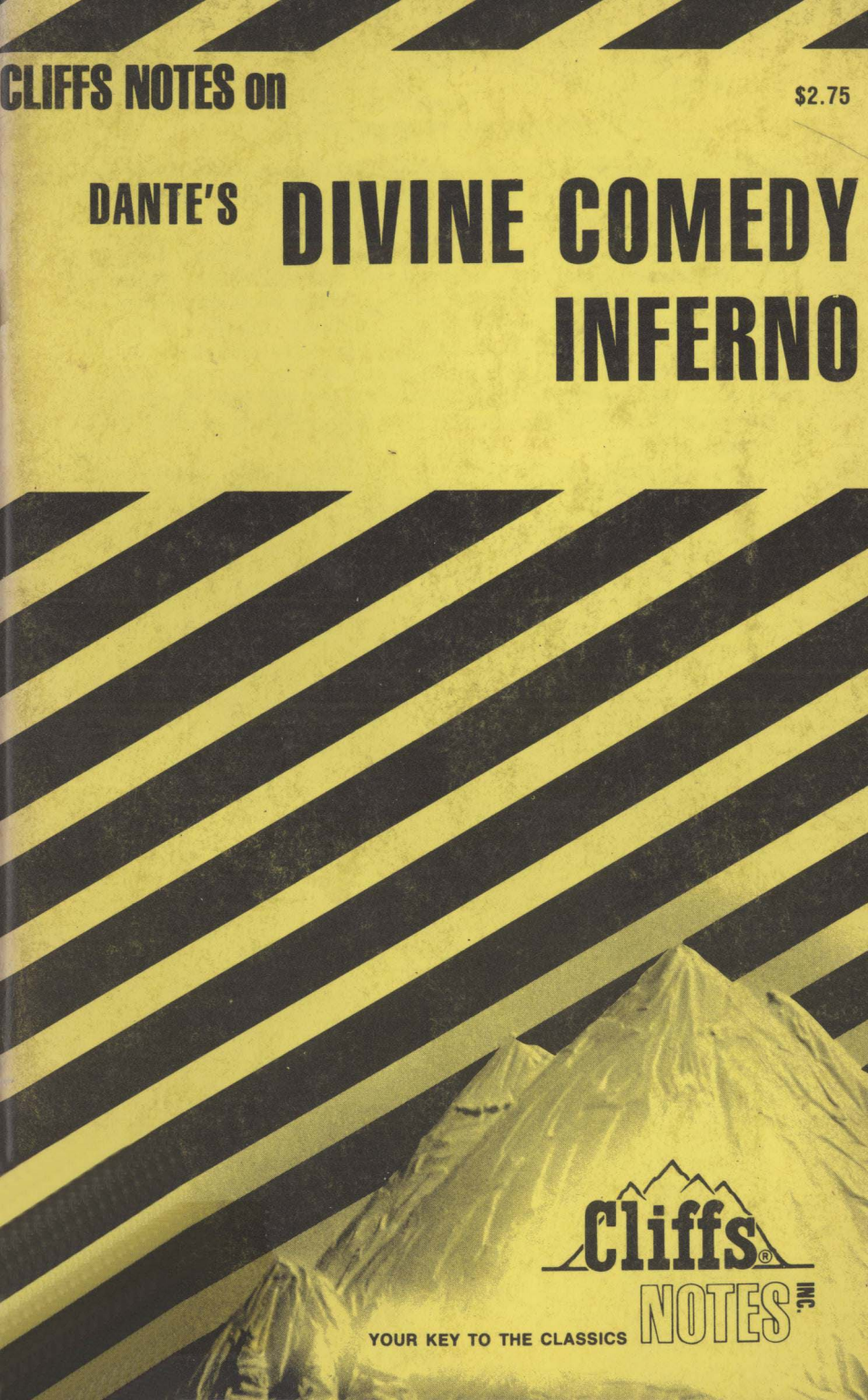


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DANTE'S

DIVINE COMEDY INFERNO



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THE DIVINE COMEDY: THE INFERNO

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- *Selected Bibliography*

NOTES

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NEW EDITION



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The Inferno Notes

LIFE AND BACKGROUND

Dante Alighieri was born in Florence in May, 1265, of an old family, of noble origin but no longer wealthy. His education was probably typical of any youth of his time and station: he studied the *trivium* and *quadrivium*, probably spent a year, or part of a year, at the University of Bologna, and came under the influence of some of the learned men of his day. Most notable of these was Ser Brunetto Latini, whose influence Dante records in his poem (*Inferno* 15).

In accordance with custom, Dante was betrothed in his youth to Gemma Donati, daughter of Manetto Donati. These betrothals and marriages were matters of family alliance, and Gemma's dowry was fixed as early as 1277, when Dante was twelve years old. There were at least three children: sons Pietro and Jacopo, and a daughter Antonia, who later entered a convent at Ravenna and took the name of Sister Beatrice. A third son, Giovanni, is sometimes mentioned.

There can be no doubt that the great love of Dante's life, and the greatest single influence on his work, was his beloved Beatrice. He first met her when he was nine years old and she was eight. The meeting took place in her father's home, probably at a May Day festival. Dante has described this meeting in his *Vita Nuova*. He tells of seeing the child Beatrice, wearing a crimson gown and looking like an angel. From that day on, his life and work was dedicated to her. He mentions no other meeting with her until nine years later, when he saw her on the street, dressed in white, accompanied by two other girls. She greeted him sweetly by name, and he was in raptures. A short time later, having heard gossip linking his name with another young woman, she passed him without speaking, and Dante mourned for days, determining to mend his ways.

If all this seems slightly preposterous, it is necessary to remember two things: that the young women of marriageable age were so strictly chaperoned that it was virtually impossible to have even a speaking acquaintance with them and that Dante's love for Beatrice was in the strictest tradition of courtly love, wherein the lover addressed his beloved as being completely out of his reach, and which viewed marriage between the lovers as impossible, in fact undesirable.

To what extent this was, at first, a true and lasting love cannot be determined. There is little doubt that Dante enjoyed the sweet misery of his situation and the sympathy of other ladies for his plight. After the death of Beatrice, and particularly after his exile, he put away his adolescent fancies, and Beatrice became a true inspiration.

Beatrice was married in about 1287 to Simone de' Bardi, a wealthy banker of Florence, a marriage of alliance of the two houses and one completely immaterial to Dante and his work.

Dante wrote many poems in praise of his lady during her lifetime, and when she died in 1290, at the age of twenty-five, he was inconsolable. He had had a dream of her death, and in her honor collected the poems he had written about her, which are included in the *Vita Nuova*. The later *Comedy* was also inspired by her memory.

Dante's public life began in 1289, when he fought against Arezzo at Campaldino. In 1295 he was one of the council for the election of priors of Florence, and in May, 1300, went as ambassador to San Gimignano to invite that commune to an assembly of the Guelph cities of Tuscany. From June 15 to August of the same year, he was one of the priors of Florence, and it was during that year that his best friend, Guido Cavalcanti (*Inferno*, Canto 22), caused a street riot on May Day. Guido was exiled to Sarzana by the officers of the city, one of whom was Dante. Sarzana proved so unhealthful that Guido petitioned to return to Florence, and was allowed to do so. He died of malaria, contracted in Sarzana, in August, 1300.

Dante was vigorously opposed to the interference of the pope in secular affairs, and was induced to take a stand with the Whites when the Blacks favored the intrigues of the pope. Charles of Valois was coming to Florence, ostensibly as a peacemaker between the two factions but in reality as a partisan of the Blacks and supporter of the pope. In October, 1301, Dante and two other men were chosen as ambassadors on a mission to Rome, rightly suspecting the motives of Charles as peacemaker. After they had left Florence, the Blacks easily took over control of the city with the help of Charles, and Dante was exiled from his native city, never to return.

The terms of exile were harsh: Dante was charged with graft, with intrigue against the peace of the city, and with hostility against the pope, among other things. The list of charges is so long that it is reminiscent of those brought against the political enemies of any party in power today. In addition, a heavy fine was imposed, and Dante was forbidden to hold public office in Florence for the rest of his life.

Dante did not appear to answer the charges—it probably would not have been safe to do so—and a heavier penalty was imposed: in addition to confiscation of his property, he was sentenced to be burnt alive if caught. Also, his sons, when they reached their legal majority at age fourteen, were compelled to join him in exile.

Thus began Dante's wanderings. At first he joined in the political intrigues of his fellow exiles, but, disgusted by what he considered their wickedness and stupidity, he formed a party by himself. It is not known exactly where he spent the years of his exile, though part of the time he was with the Malaspini, and he also spent time at the court of Can Grande

della Scala in Verona, with whom he remained on good terms for the rest of his life.

Once during the years of his banishment his hopes for peace in Italy, and his own return to Florence, were revived. This was in the reign of Henry VII of Luxemburg, who announced his intention of coming to Italy to be crowned. Dante addressed a letter to his fellow citizens urging them to welcome Henry as emperor. When Henry was met by strong opposition, Dante in great bitterness sent a letter to him, urging him to put down the rebellion quickly; he also addressed a letter in similar vein to Florence, using abusive terms which could not be forgiven. When Henry's expedition failed, and the hopes of empire died with him, Dante was not included in the amnesty granted certain exiles. Later, amnesty was extended to him on the condition that he admit his guilt and ask forgiveness publicly, which the poet refused to do. His sentence of death was renewed.

Dante's last years were spent in Ravenna, under the protection of Guido Novello da Polenta. They seem to have been years of relative contentment in compatible company—but Ravenna was not Florence. One final mission was entrusted to Dante: he was sent to Venice in the summer of 1321 by his patron in an unsuccessful attempt to avert a war between Ravenna and Venice. On his return trip, he fell ill, possibly of malaria. He reached Ravenna and died there on the night of September 13, 1321.

He was buried with the honors due him. Several times during the following centuries, the city of Florence sought to have his body interred with honor in the place of his birth, but even the intercession of popes could not bring this about. His opinion of the citizens of his city was clearly stated in the full title of his great work: *The Comedy of Dante Alighieri, Florentine by Citizenship, Not by Morals*.

Dante still lies in the monastery of the Franciscan friars in Ravenna.

DANTE'S WORLD

Dante's world was threefold: the world of politics, the world of theology, and the world of learning. His *Comedy* encompasses and builds upon all of these, and so interdependent were they that it would be impossible to say that any one was the most important.

Throughout the Middle Ages, politics was dominated by the struggle between the two greatest powers of that age: the papacy and the empire. Each believed itself to be of divine origin and to be indispensable to the welfare of mankind. The cause of this struggle was the papal claim to temporal power, supported and justified by the spurious "Donation of Constantine." This document, which was a forgery of the eighth century, maintained that Emperor Constantine, before leaving for Byzantium, had

transferred to the Bishop of Rome, Pope Sylvester I, political dominion over Italy and the western empire.

Dante lived in an era of virtually autonomous communes, ruled by either an autocratic hereditary count or a council elected from an aristocratic—and exclusive—few. The political situation was never stable, and the vendettas went on forever, family against family, party against party, city against city.

The strife began in the tenth century with Otto I, the emperor who laid the foundation for the power which was to transform Germany into the mightiest state in Europe and who dreamed of restoring the Holy Roman Empire. At the beginning of the eleventh century, the situation worsened, with Henry IV humiliated at Canossa by an aggressive opponent, autocratic Pope Gregory VII (Hildebrand).

In the first part of the thirteenth century, the growing conflict was headed by two outstanding antagonists: Innocent III, the most powerful of all the popes, and the brilliant Frederick II, King of Germany, Emperor of Rome, and King of Naples and Sicily, the most gifted of all the monarchs of the Middle Ages. The enmity of the pope, who was firmly resolved to free Italy from German authority, shook the stability of the empire, which was already undermined by the insubordination of the princes in Germany and the rebellion of some of the city-states of northern Italy.

When Frederick died in 1250, he left a very unstable situation to be handled by his successors, especially in Italy. There, in 1266, his illegitimate son Manfred was defeated and killed in the battle fought at Benevento against Charles of Anjou, who had been summoned to Italy by the pope. Two years later, this same Charles defeated Corradino, Frederick's grandson, at Tagliacozzo, and put him to death. Thus the line of the descendants of the great emperor was extinguished and Italy was lost to the empire.

In reading Dante, indeed throughout medieval history, one hears much about two major political factions, the Guelphs and the Ghibellines. In Italy the party lines were originally drawn over the dispute between the papacy and the emperor for temporal authority. The Ghibellines, representing the feudal aristocracy, wished to retain the power of the emperor in Italy as well as in Germany. The Guelphs were mainly supported by the rising middle-class merchant society, who hoped to rid Italy of foreign influence and maintain the control of governments in their independent communes. They espoused the cause of the papacy in opposition to the emperor.

The rivalry between the two parties not only set one city against another but also divided the same city and the same family into factions. In time the original alliances and allegiances became confused in strange ways. For example, Dante, who was a Guelph, was a passionate supporter of imperial authority all his life.

In Florence the Guelphs and Ghibellines succeeded each other, alternately ruling the city. During the reign of Frederick II, the Ghibellines, supported by the emperor, gained the upper hand and drove the Guelphs out of the city. But at the death of Frederick II, in 1250, the Guelphs were recalled to Florence for a temporary reconciliation and later gained control of the city.

The Ghibellines again returned to power in 1260, and ruled the city until 1266, but the next year the Guelphs, aided by French forces, gained supremacy in the city, and the Ghibellines left Florence, never to return.

Dante was an ardent White Guelph, putting his hopes for Italy's future in the restoration of the empire, and to the end of his days was politically active, though ultimately he was forced by the violence of his views to form a party "by himself," and, as a White, was actually allied to the Ghibellines.

Not even the supremacy of the Guelphs, however, endowed Florence with a peaceful and stable government, for in 1300 the Guelph party split into two factions: the Whites and the Blacks, led respectively by the families of the Cerchi and the Donati. The basis of this split was the usual blood-feud between two families. In nearby Pistoia, a family quarrel existed between two branches of the Cancelliere family. The first wife of the original Cancelliere was named Bianca, and her descendants called themselves Whites in her honor. The name of the second wife is not known, but her descendants, in opposition to the Whites, called themselves Blacks. The quarrel erupted into open violence after a murder committed by one Focaccia (mentioned by Dante in Canto 32 of the *Inferno*).

The Guelphs of Florence, in the interests of maintaining the precarious peace of the district, intervened in the hostilities, and in so doing furthered the jealous rivalry of the Cerchi and the Donati families, who naturally took opposite sides. The city was torn by strife; personal ambitions, feuds, and the arrogance of individuals and families further agitated the situation.

At this point, the Blacks secretly enlisted the aid of Pope Boniface VIII, who intervened in the affairs of the city, largely in his own interest. The pope considered the throne of the empire still vacant, since Albert I had not received his crown in Rome. In his assumed capacity as vicar of the emperor, Boniface plotted to extend the rule of the church over the territory of Tuscany. To accomplish this, he first obtained the favor of the Blacks, then dispatched Charles of Valois, brother of the King of France, to Florence, ostensibly as a peacemaker, but actually as a supporter of the Blacks. In 1302, with the help of Charles of Valois, the Blacks gained control of the city. In the list of some six hundred Whites banished from Florence was the name of the citizen Dante Alighieri.

While the rest of Italy, like Florence, was troubled by rivalries between parties, or by wars of city against city, in Germany the emperor's throne was vacant, first because of an interregnum, then because of a conflict

between two rival claimants. The emperor's position was still regarded as vacant by the Italians when the two emperors who followed, Rudolph of Hapsburg and Albert I, failed to come to Italy to be crowned and paid no attention to Italian affairs. Therefore when the news came that Henry of Luxemburg, who succeeded Albert I in 1308, was coming to Italy to oppose King Robert of Sicily, many Italians, for whom Dante was the most eloquent and fervent spokesman, welcomed the prospect with feverish enthusiasm. They saw in the figure of Henry the end of all the woes which had wracked the peninsula.

Henry was crowned at Milan early in 1311. Very soon after, he faced the armed hostility of the opposing party, which had Florence as its leader. Henry, nevertheless, was able to reach Rome and be crowned there in 1312. The coronation took place in the church of St. John Lateran rather than in St. Peter's because the latter was being held by the forces of King Robert of Sicily. The emperor was still fighting to unite the empire when he died in the summer of 1313, succumbing to a fever with suspicious suddenness. The death of Henry put an end forever to the expectations of Dante and all other Italians who had longed for the restoration of the imperial power in Italy.

Dante's theological ideas were strictly orthodox, that is, those of medieval Catholicism. He accepted church dogma without reservation. His best authorities for insight into the more complex problems confronting the medieval thinkers were Augustine, Albertus Magnus, and Thomas Aquinas. He followed the Pauline doctrine of predestination and grace as presented by Augustine, but he managed to bring this into a kind of conformity with free will, to which he firmly adhered. Man has inherited sin and death through Adam's fall, but also hope of salvation through Christ's redemption. God in his love created humans with the power of perceiving good and evil and the opportunity of choosing. On the basis of their choice depended their eternal bliss or damnation. Those who set their will against the divine law were sentenced to Inferno and everlasting torment. Those who sinned but confessed and repented were given their reward in heaven after a period of purifying atonement in Purgatory. Thus repentance, the acceptance of divine law, was the crux of judgment in the afterlife.

Among the familiar tenets of medieval theology, we recognize such concepts as the "seven deadly sins" in Purgatory and the corresponding seven virtues in Paradise. The doctrine that only those persons who had been baptized as worshipers of Christ were to be admitted to Paradise is expressed in the treatment of the souls in Limbo (*Inferno* 4). Of the many more complex theological concepts expounded through the *Commedia*, explanations will be offered in the textual commentaries.

In castigating the individual popes (and particularly his bitter enemy, Boniface VIII), he was in no way showing disrespect for the *office* of the

papacy, for which he held the greatest reverence. He was, in fact, following the long tradition of critics, many of them in high places in the church, who had not hesitated to recall popes to the duties and responsibilities of the chair of Peter. Dante held to the ideal of the papacy and the empire as the dual guardians of the welfare of man, spiritual and secular, each deriving its separate powers directly from God.

Readers cannot fail to recognize Dante's erudition. He appears to have taken all learning for his province, or what passed for learning then. The fact that much of the scientific teaching was hopelessly in error is not Dante's responsibility. The fact that he displayed extraordinary curiosity and avid interest in all branches of scientific learning (geography, geology, astronomy, astrology, natural history, and optics) reveals something important about the poet's mind.

Among the concepts that influenced the plan of the *Commedia* was the belief that only the northern hemisphere of the earth was inhabited, that the southern hemisphere was covered with water except for the mount of Purgatory. The scheme of the heavens was dictated by the Ptolemaic, or geocentric, system of astronomy, upon which Dante based the entire plan of *Paradiso*.

THE FIGURE OF VIRGIL

In the Middle Ages, Virgil had come to be regarded as a sage and necromancer. Virgil's poems were used in the type of divination called *sortes*, in which the book is opened at random and a verse selected in the same manner, as an answer to a problem or question. The Bible has been, and still is, used in the same manner.

Virgil's *Aeneid* offered the pattern for the structure of Dante's Hell, but this alone is not the reason why Virgil was chosen as the guide through Hell. Dante himself salutes Virgil as his master and the inspiration for his poetic style; further, Virgil is revered by Dante as the poet of the Roman Empire, since his *Aeneid* tells the story of the empire's founding. Finally, in his fourth eclogue, Virgil writes symbolically of the coming of a Wonder Child who will bring the Golden Age to the world, and in the Middle Ages this was interpreted as being prophetic of the coming of Christ. Thus, in the figure of Virgil, Dante found symbolically represented the two institutions, church and empire, destined by God to save mankind.

STRUCTURE OF THE "COMEDY"

Dante lived in a world that believed in mystical correspondences, in which numbers—like stars, stones, and even the events of history—had

a mystical significance. In planning the structure of the *Divine Comedy*, therefore, Dante had in mind a series of symbolic numbers: three, a symbol of the Holy Trinity; nine, three times three; thirty-three, a multiple of three; seven, the days of creation; ten, considered during the Middle Ages a symbol of perfection; and one hundred, the multiple of ten.

The plan was carried out with consummate precision. We find three *cantiche*, each formed by thirty-three cantos, totaling ninety-nine. The introductory first canto of the *Inferno* makes one hundred cantos in all. The entire poem is written in the difficult *terza rima*, a verse form of three-line stanzas, or tercets. The first and third lines rhyme, and the second line rhymes with the beginning line of the next stanza—again, three, and three.

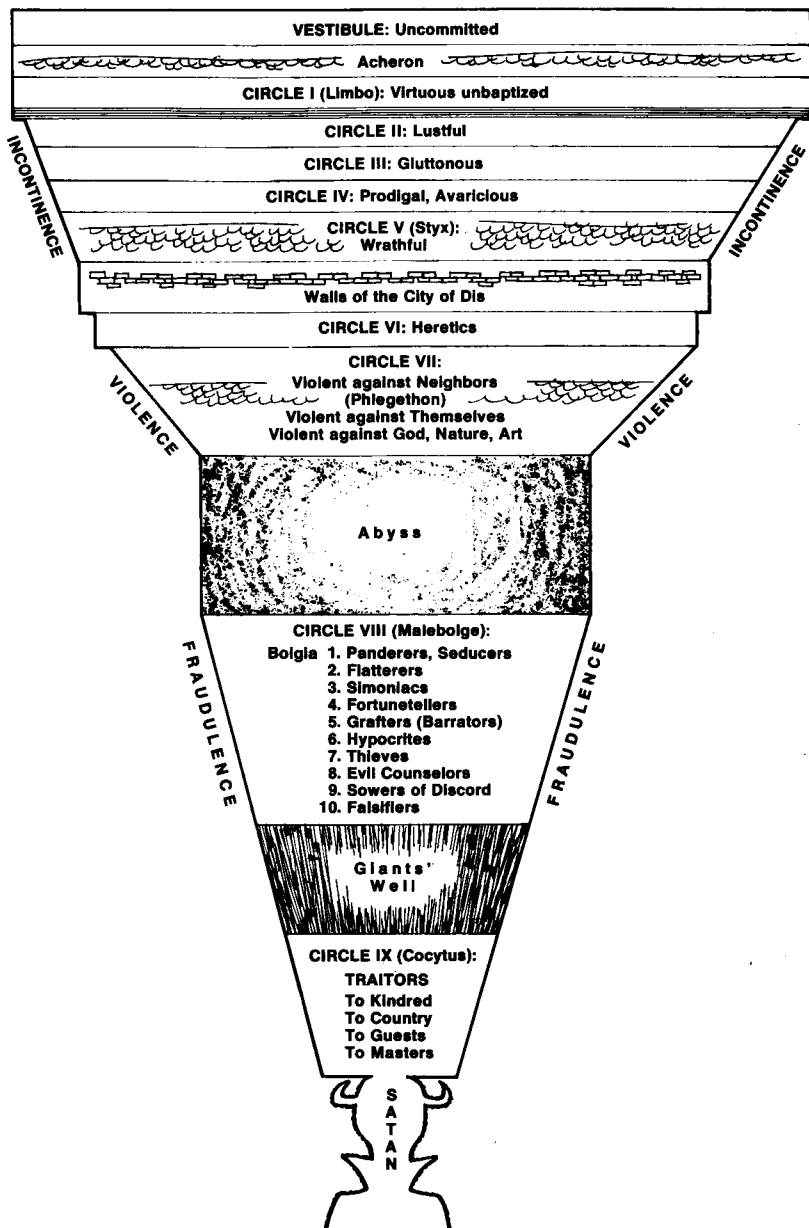
Hell is divided into nine circles (in three divisions), the vestibule making the tenth; Purgatory is separated into nine levels, the terrestrial paradise making ten; and Paradise is formed by nine heavens, plus the Empyrean. The celestial hierarchies are nine and are divided into triads. The sinners in Hell are arranged according to three capital vices: incontinence, violence, and fraud. The distribution of the penitents in Purgatory is based on the threefold nature of their rational love. The partition of the blessed in Paradise is made according to the secular, active, or contemplative nature of their love for God. The very fact that each *cantica* ends with the word “stars” helps to demonstrate the studied plan of the whole work.

Inferno is a huge, funnel-shaped pit located with its center beneath Jerusalem, its regions arranged in a series of circular stairsteps, or terraces, diminishing in circumference as they descend. Each of the nine regions is designated for a particular sin, and the order of the sins is according to their wickedness, the lightest near the top of the pit and the most heinous at the bottom.

The punishments in *Inferno* are regulated by the law of retribution; therefore, they correspond to the sins either by analogy or by antithesis. Thus, for example, the carnal sinners, who abandoned themselves to the tempests of passion, are tossed about incessantly by a fierce storm. The violent, who were bloodthirsty and vicious during their lives, are drowned in a river of blood. The sowers of dissension, who promoted social and domestic separations, are wounded and mutilated according to the nature of their crimes.

INTERPRETATION

The *Divine Comedy* has had many interpreters. Some have followed Dante's own thought, as outlined so clearly in his letter to Can Grande; others appear to ignore it.



PLAN OF DANTE'S INFERNO

Dante said plainly that the first meaning was the literal one. By this he meant that the cantos tell the story of the state of souls after death, according to the beliefs of medieval Christianity. He did *not* mean, nor intend his readers to infer, that it was a literal story of a trip through Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise; and he was safe in assuming that his audience was familiar with the literature of such journeys, a favorite subject throughout the Middle Ages. (This does not preclude reading the *Comedy* as excellent science fiction.) Hell (or Purgatory, or Paradise) is, therefore, the *condition* of the soul after death, brought to that point by the choices made during life.

Closely allied to its literal and allegorical meaning is the stated moral purpose of the *Comedy*: to point out to those yet living the error of their ways, and to turn them to the path of salvation.

Allegory is, by definition, an extended metaphor, organized in a pattern, and having a meaning separate from the literal story. C. S. Lewis has said "It is an error to suppose that in an allegory the author is 'really' talking about the thing that symbolizes; the very essence of the art is to talk about both." Aristotle believed that for a poet to have a command of metaphor was the mark of genius because it indicated a gift for seeing resemblances. This implies the gift of imagination, the ability to set down not only the images of vision, but, particularly in Dante's case, vivid images of noise and odor.

Dante wanted his reader to experience what he experienced, and from the beginning of the poem to the end he grows in power and mastery. His language is deceptively simple and so is his method. He writes in the vernacular, using all its force and directness; it is not the high poetic language of tragedy, as he said himself.

The imagery is designed to make the world of Dante's Hell intelligible to the reader. His world is the world of the thirteenth-century church, but his Hell is the creation of his mind, an allegory of redemption in which Dante seeks to show the state of the soul after death.

The poem is a demanding one. The reader must enter Dante's world without prejudice, and perhaps T. S. Eliot was right in recommending that the *Comedy* should be read straight through the first time, without giving too much attention to the background of the times, and without examining the more complex symbols.

GENERAL SYNOPSIS

On the night before Good Friday in the year 1300, Dante, at the age of thirty-five, finds himself astray in a dark wood. The morning sun reveals a beautiful mountain toward which he makes his way, but his ascent is checked by three beasts: a leopard, a lion, and a she-wolf. Dante, therefore,

is forced to return to the forest, where he is met by the shadow of Virgil, who promises to rescue him and take him on a journey through Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise (Canto 1). In undertaking the journey, Dante is troubled by fear; however, this is overcome when Virgil explains that he has been sent to his aid by Beatrice, who descended into Limbo to ask for his help. Moreover, Beatrice was sent by the Virgin Mary through her messenger, St. Lucia. Comforted by this, Dante follows Virgil as his guide and master (Canto 2).

After reading the dreadful inscription written on the gate of Hell, the two poets pass into the Vestibule where the uncommitted are tormented and then reach the bank of the river Acheron. Here the lost souls wait their turn to be carried across the river by Charon, an ancient boatman with flaming eyes who agrees only reluctantly to take Dante on his boat (Canto 3). In Limbo, the first circle of Hell, Dante is received by the great poets of the ages, Homer, Horace, Ovid, and Lucan. In the Palace of Wisdom he is also privileged to see the sages of antiquity, whose only punishment is being deprived of the vision of God (Canto 4).

Then Dante and Virgil enter Hell proper, which may be said to begin with the second circle. There the hideous Minos is seated as a judge, and the carnal sinners are tossed about by an incessant storm. The poets meet Paolo and Francesca and listen to their story of love and death (Canto 5). Among the gluttonous, guarded by the monster Cerberus and buried in mud in the third circle, Dante recognizes the Florentine Ciacco and receives from him a gloomy political prophecy. Then, as they talk about the resurrection of the body, Dante and Virgil move to the fourth circle (Canto 6), where Plutus reigns over the nameless mass of the prodigals and the avaricious, condemned to roll heavy stones against one another. This sight gives occasion for a disquisition upon Fortune. When Dante's doubts have been resolved, the two poets reach the fifth circle, the marsh of Styx, where the souls of the wrathful and sullen are condemned (Canto 7). The Florentine Filippo Argenti, one of the wrathful, tries to overturn the boat on which Dante is carried by the demon Phlegyas, but to Dante's satisfaction, Argenti is ferociously attacked by his companions.

Meanwhile Dante and Virgil come under the walls of the City of Dis, the sixth circle, to which, however, the fallen angels deny access (Canto 8). This is obtained only with the help of a heavenly messenger. Inside the City of Dis, the poets see the burning tombs in which the heretics are confined (Canto 9). Dante stops to speak with a great enemy, the Ghibelline Farinata degli Uberti, and also meets Cavalcante dei Cavalcanti, the father of his friend Guido (Canto 10).

When the poets approach the seventh circle, the air becomes so fetid that they have to halt for a while behind a tomb. While waiting to grow accustomed to the stench, they take advantage of the pause to discuss the

division of the lower part of Hell (Canto 11). Finally the poets begin to descend through a deep valley and first meet the monstrous Minotaur, then reach a river of boiling blood, the Phlegethon, which forms the first section of the seventh circle. Here are plunged those violent against their neighbors, tyrants, and warmakers like Attila and Alexander the Great, watched over by the centaurs (Canto 12).

After being carried across the river by the centaur Nessus, Dante and Virgil enter the second round of the seventh circle, where the souls of the suicides grow like plants in a dreadful wood ruled by the hideous harpies. One of these plants is the soul of Pier delle Vigne, who narrates his sad story. In the same wood the reckless squanderers are seen by the poets being chased and torn to pieces by hounds (Canto 13).

The third round is formed by a desert of burning sand on which the blasphemers, sodomites, and usurers are exposed to a rain of fire. Among the blasphemers, Dante recognizes Capaneus (Canto 14); among the sodomites he encounters his master Brunetto Latini (Canto 15) and listens to the considerations of some famous men of ancient Florence in regard to the sad state of their city (Canto 16).

Then, after a contemptuous exchange with the usurers, Dante and his guide fly down to Malebolge, the eighth circle, on the back of the huge and repugnant monster, Geryon (Canto 17). Malebolge is the circle where the sinners of simple fraud are condemned. In the first bolgia the poets see the panderers and seducers, beaten with lashes; in the second the flatterers, plunged in a canal of excrement (Canto 18). In the third the simoniacs are sunk upside down in round holes, and from each hole protrudes a pair of feet with the soles ablaze. Dante approaches Pope Nicholas III and speaks to him (Canto 19). Then he reaches the fourth bolgia and, standing on the bridge overlooking it, watches the fortunetellers and the diviners who pace slowly and weep silently with their heads reversed on their bodies, so that they are obliged to walk backward (Canto 20).

Thence Dante and Virgil pass to the bridge overlooking the fifth bolgia, where the grafters are plunged into boiling pitch and tormented by black devils. The poets arrive just in time to see a senator of Lucca thrown into the pitch and torn to pieces by the hooks of the demons. At this point, since the bridge across the sixth bolgia lies broken, they have to seek help from the demons, and from their leader, Malacoda, obtain an escort to the next bridge (Canto 21). Walking along the bank of the canal, Dante and Virgil see the sinners lying in the pitch. One is hooked by the demons and pulled out to speak briefly with the poets. The unidentified Navarrese, after furnishing some information to the travelers, plays a trick on the demons who claw him. He escapes into the pitch, and the trick is immediately followed by a brawl in which the black creatures fall into the pitch themselves. The two poets take advantage of the incident and escape from the dangerous company (Canto 22).