

Dante's Divine Comedy: Inferno, Purgatorio, Paradiso

Dr. Alan Haffa

Dante Alighieri (1265-1321)



- Troubadours
- *La Vita Nuova*, The New Life, vernacular, 1292; Beatrice Portinari
- Guelphs and Ghibellines
- 1299; Ambassador
- 1300; One of six Priors
- 1302; exiled for life after Coup d'Etat
- 1307-8; began Divine Comedy

Title

- Dante Simply Called his poem, Comedy.
- Others came to call it Divine Comedy:
Subject Matter and Talent
- Low Style vs High Style (Epic and Tragedy);
Vernacular vs Latin
- Comedy follows a plot trajectory from
Tension and Conflict to Triumph and Love

Dante and the Church

- He advocated for a Holy Roman Empire where Emperor was supreme
- Derided the worldliness of the Church and Popes in the Middle Ages
- Some questioned his faith; 14th century some tried to find heresy in the Comedy
- Debates raged about his orthodoxy
- While he is not a “doctor of the church” or a Saint, his work is no longer condemned outright.

Medieval Dante

- Human Nature is sinful and flawed
- Focus on spiritual redemption
- Christian, Scholastic, Theological influence of Augustine and Aquinas
- Ultimately focus is on the Afterlife rather than this life
- Aristotelian and Ptolemaic World
- Hierarchical Structure

Renaissance Dante

- Focus on secular politics
- Greek philosophical influence
- Courtly Love as a parallel for Divine Love—
Troubadours
- Integration of Classical World and Culture
- Human nature though flawed reflects the
Divine Beauty
- Vernacular Language

Metaphor of Fall and Dante's Identification with Sinners

- "Falls," fainting, out of the level of Lust; Falls, sliding, into the level of hypocrisy; Among the violent, he becomes violent. Among the fraudulent, he becomes fraudulent.
- In Hell his sin is made manifest; in Purgatory it is washed clean; Three P's (Peccata) are put on his forehead but then taken off; In Paradise he enjoys the state of blessedness

Pity, pieta (pity, mercy, compassion)

- Compassion is a Christian virtue; but, it is not proper to show it to the damned who have chosen their own fate.
- Dante feels pity often in the Inferno
- At times he is chastised by Vergil (Reason), his guide
- By the end he shows little or no pity and becomes indignant to the damned.
- Pity implies that one questions the “divine justice of God.”
- Pity for the damned is showing Love for an improper object

Classical World: Tension with Christian

- Vergil, the Classical author, is his guide; but, Vergil is damned (non-baptized in Limbo); Dante seems to have a spot “reserved” for him as the sixth of the great poets.
- Ambivalence toward the classics revealed in the functioning of the Classical figures: Most are the guardians of Hell. (Charon; Minos; Cerberus; Minotaur; Geryon)
- Respects the classical Poets and Mythology but he is superceding them as Christ supercedes their religion. Dante is still a Medieval Poet.

Criticism of Church

- Simony: selling of ecclesiastical favors and offices (Simon Magus, *Acts* viii, 9-24)
- Canto XIX: Pope Nicholas III, upside down in a burning baptismal font
- Awaiting Pope Boniface VIII
- Laments the “Donation of Constantine”—selling of the Papal lands; led to the secular power and wealth of the church; Dante presents it as “fee” paid by the Pope

Light and Music and Prayer

- The journey up the mountain is made possible by the Light of the Sun—Neo-Platonic
- Shedding Pride is the first necessity to Climb the Mountain of Purgatory; Pride is the source of all Sin
- Music also accompanies the journey and eases it; at each level the penitents are singing a different Hymn
- Lucia, Latin for Light, sent Beatrice to D.; Need for Divine Intercession to be Saved

Prayer

- Prayers for those in P. really help and lessen the time of their punishment
- The souls there want D. to know them and to remember them to people on earth
- Canto XXIII: Forese Donati has been moved up from the Negligent to the Gluttons by virtue of his widows prayers for him.

St. Peter's Gate

- Lucia brings him to the Gate; she has two keys (one of Faith and one of Reason?)
- Three Steps; three stages of Mankind (innocence, sin, redemption)
- Seven P's are inscribed on his forehead; Peccata are capital vices of Pride, Envy, Anger, Sloth, Avarice/Prodigality, Gluttony, Lust)
- No Looking Back as he enters: recalls Lot's wife and Orpheus/Eurydice
- Upon entering his first sensation is Music; Te Deum Laudamus

Purgation and Preparation for Paradisio

- Passing through each level purifies D and he loses a "P"
- Finally, he enters a wall of fire; the pain purifies him
- Garden of Eden
- Virgil Leaves and Beatrice Scolds him for turning to worldly affairs after her death
- Baptism in Rivers of Lethe and Eunoe; to forgot his bad deeds and remember his good deeds

Paradisio

- Moves up through Heavens; each one a different level of blessedness; 9 Spheres of Ptolomey and Fixed Sphere is where God resides
- Angels are satisfied wherever they are in Heaven
- Light and Music come to be more and more omnipresent
- St. Francis, Thomas Aquinas, St. Dominic
- Merges with Light of God

Summary

- Displays Tension between Faith and Reason
- Ambivalent attitude toward Classical Past
- Purgatory is a place for souls to be cleansed
- Music and Light are signs of blessedness
- Movement from heavy and immobile to the aerial and Light; from material to spiritual; from earth to the Primum Mobile of the Heavens
- Neo-Platonic idea of Love that can lift us up to God; Love of Beatrice is symbol of this