



WORLD LITERATURE I (ENG 251)

Dante's Inferno Study Guide

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INTRODUCTION

Why Dante is difficult:

- his rigid view of good and evil
- his idea of damnation for any non-Christian (this bothered medieval folks too--they developed the legend of harrowing of hell to rescue virtuous old testament patriarchs; the middle ages also developed the idea of limbo for those who were not Christian, but not evil)

Why Dante is worth studying:

The Commedia is the greatest European medieval poem.

It is near the end of the line of this kind of thinking and art-- The Renaissance was developing in Italy as Dante wrote.

It's a splendid poem (if shocking to modern sensibilities).

It's one of the best and most serious works dealing with good and evil and God's justice in Western culture.

There are many excellent translations. Dante's language is direct, clear, powerful, and lends itself well to translation.

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DANTE'S LIFE

Born in Florence, Italy, in 1265; well-educated in arts and sciences of the time he was betrothed by the age of 12 met Beatrice when he was nine, she eight love for life; first spoke to her nine years later Beatrice married about 1287 and died in 1290 at 25 Dante wrote many poems praising her and was devastated by her death Dante became involved in the bitter politics of his city and country; he was especially opposed to the pope interfering in secular affairs; in 1301 he was permanently exiled from Florence He spent the rest of his life wandering in exile, supported the unsuccessful movement to crown a new emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, and died in exile in 1321.

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ALLEGORY

A method of expressing ideas by using a parallel story or images; Examples: Dante wandering in the woods in the midpoint of his life; the situation is an allegory for his personal confusion and lack of direction, his mid-life spiritual crisis The leopard, wolf and lion are allegorical beasts; each represents a vice which keeps Dante from getting to heaven.

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■ VERNACULAR

The use of the local (Tuscan) dialect of Italian rather than Latin was a daring gamble at the time; most serious writing was done in Latin because the vernacular languages kept changing and people were afraid that no one would be able to read them in a few years. Some dialects lasted better than others and luckily, Tuscan did pretty well that way.

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■ COMEDY

Although it may not seem "funny" to us, the The Divine Comedy is just that, a mixed narrative, some epic, some tragedy, some melodrama, but with a happy ending (Paradise). This was the old definition of comedy, as opposed to our current notion that a comedy should keep us laughing. The Inferno, of course, is not a happy place, but since the Narrator (and presumably his readers) will learn from the Inferno to obey God and be virtuous, all these folks will have an improved chance to end up in Heaven, a definitively happy ending.

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■ CHURCH (POPE) VS STATE (HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE)

After the collapse of the Roman Empire, there were attempts to recreate the "Holy Roman Empire." Charlemagne was crowned emperor of the Romans in St. Peter's church at Rome on Christmas Day, A.D. 800. Conflicts between various Popes and emperors continued for hundreds of years and were based at least partly on the "essentially theological problem of divining the right relationship between spiritual power and the temporal order as such, understood as the whole of material creation. Christ and the apostles had been poor in material possessions. The medieval church was rich--too rich, many thought" (Tierney 4). Dante wanted to separate these two forms of authority and have the church only deal with spiritual powers, while the empire dealt with temporal ones.

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■ CITY-STATES: CONFLICTS AND FACTIONS

Guelphs and Ghibellines; Blacks and Whites; factions based on local, papal, national and imperial politics; people were killing one another over these issues Just know that there were a lot of conflicts between political factions in Italy; Dante was exiled from his native Florence because of political conflict.

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■ VISION LITERATURE

Vision literature describes life after death in terms of other worlds, heaven and hell for medieval Christians. For medieval Christians, the soul was separated from the body at death and then judged based on the life it lived in the body while on earth. The soul was then sent to its proper place in heaven, hell or purgatory until the Last Judgment, at which time it will go to its permanent final place forever. "Until the mid-twelfth century there was no distinct place known as purgatory. The Christian other-world included only heaven and hell. Purgation was, however, a part of the afterlife, and the place of purgation occupied the outer reaches of either hell or heaven, depending on whether the soul was "good but not totally good" or "bad but not totally bad" (Gardiner xii-xiii).

Common Elements of Vision Literature:

one individual visionary, almost always male
soul separated from the body
visionary usually lies as if dead for three days while his soul views heaven and hell
a guide, usually an interested guardian angel or saint
guide interprets and protects
the vision is a profound religious experience - purges & illuminates

Following Gardiner xv-xxiii

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PUNISHMENT FITS THE CRIME: JUST RETRIBUTION IN HELL

"One large and important group of punishments in the tours of hell consists of those based on the principle of measure-for-measure. The principle appears in many ancient legal systems. The biblical formulation, "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" is part of a wider ancient Near Eastern pattern." Example: Fortunetellers pretend to know future; in hell their heads are fastened on backwards so they must always look behind themselves (Himmelfarb 75-76).

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GEOGRAPHY OF HELL: NINE CIRCLES OF INFERNO

1.	Limbo
2.	Lustful
3.	Gluttonous
4.	Misers & Spendthrifts
5.	Wrathful & Sullen
6.	Heretics
7.	Violent
8.	Fraudulent
9.	Traitors

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ENTRY TO HELL

Leopard, Lion and Wolf - Canto 1: 31-33 (worldly pleasure/lust; lion - ambition, wolf - avarice); these creatures turn Dante from his true path.

Beatrice and Virgil - Canto 2: 70 - Virgil stands for human reason; he is sent by Beatrice, who stands for divine love

Gate to Hell: "Abandon all hope ye who enter here." Dante's hell is a place where sinners deliberately chose their sins and did

not repent; now they are unable to repent forever; each vice is personified in the Inferno; the soul IS the vice; it retains those qualities which sent it to hell in the first place. Consequently, there is no possible hope of change or salvation for these sinners.

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TOUR OF HELL

VESTIBULE - UNCOMMITTED race endlessly after a blank banner; they would not shed blood or tears in life for any cause; now they shed it endlessly for nothing; feed worms. Includes fallen angels who took no stand for or against the rebellious angels.

CHARON & RIVER ACHERON - Canto 3: 82-84.

CIRCLE 1: LIMBO - INNOCENT SOULS - Canto 4: 41, 42 - blameless but unbaptized; old testament patriarchs rescued by Christ; great pagan poets and philosophers comfortable but separate forever from God.

CIRCLES 2 - 5: INCONTINENCE (SINS WITHOUT MALICE):

2.	Lustful
3.	Gluttonous
4.	Spendthrifts and Misers
5.	Wrathful (in Styx) & Sullen (under Styx) These sins do not hurt others.

CIRCLE 2 - LUSTFUL

The second circle is the real beginning of hell. Here we see the principle of retribution: sinners tossed and whirled by winds as in life they were helpless in tempests of passion. Paolo and Francesca go swirling by in Canto 5. They were murdered before they could repent carnal courtly love as sin.

CIRCLE 3 - GLUTTONS

This circle is guarded by Cerberus with three hungry heads that are appeased with clumps of mud; gluttons who feasted away their lives now lie like pigs in the mire.

CIRCLE 4 - MISERS AND SPENDTHRIFTS

Pluto, god of riches, guards the entrance to the fourth circle. Misers and Spendthrifts - Canto 7: 64 - 66 - roll stones to crash against one another; opposites in life and in death; they abused material goods.

CIRCLE 5 - WRATHFUL

Styx (river of hate) forms a marsh holding the openly wrathful who strike and bite one another; sullen lie under the surface of the marsh, just as their silent anger lay hidden during their lives.

AN ANGEL COMES TO OPEN GATES TO DIS - Canto 9: 89, 90 - DIS (SINS WITH MALICE). The abyss of the rest of hell is included within the walls of the city of Dis.

CIRCLE 6 - HERETICS

Heretics chose their own opinions instead of following the teachings of the Church.

Farinata, an epicurean - Canto 10: 40 - 42 - epicureans believed there was no soul, that pleasure was the primary goal of life, and that everything dies with the body, so they get to spend eternity with their bodies in burning graves.

CIRCLE 7 - VIOLENCE

1. Violent against Neighbors

2. Violent against Self

3. Violent against God

First Ring: Violent against others; includes murderers and robbers - NOTE: Dante does not really distinguish between lives and property; submerged in Phlegethon - river of blood.

Chiron - Canto 12: 77,78 - warrior-centaurs patrol this circle; another man/beast combination; easily angered; they patrol & torture those who killed others violently.

Second Ring: Violent against themselves - suicides (wasted their bodies) and squanderers (wasted their goods) NOTE: Dante does not differentiate much between the values of life and property.

Suicides - Dante plucks a branch - Canto 13: 31 - 33 - this recalls Polydorus in the Aeneid.

Suicides (with harpy) - Canto 13: 115 - 117 - Harpies stole anything, so here they symbolize stealing away of the souls by suicides.

Third Ring: Violent against God - blasphemy and denial; the worst kind of violence in Dante's world-view

CIRCLE 8 FRAUD: MALEBOLGE OF FRAUD (ten pockets or pouches for the ten kinds of malicious fraud)

1.	Panderers, Seducers
2.	Flatterers
3.	Simoniacs (sell church favor)
4.	Fortunetellers
5.	Grafters (sell political favor)
6.	Hypocrites
7.	Thieves
8.	Evil Counselors
9.	Sowers of Discord
10.	Falsifiers (Alchemists & Counterfeiters)

Fraud starts at base of an abyss, so Dante and Virgil must descend on the back of the Fraud Monster, Geryon - Canto 17: 115, 116. Geryon has a pleasant face, a snaky body, to symbolize the pleasant first appearance of fraud and its twisted snaky dealings.

Bolge 1	Panderers and Seducers (Jason)
Bolge 2	Flatterers are sunk in excrement
Bolge 3	Simonists trade the grace and favor of the church for money - Canto 19: 47, 48. Their punishment is a kind of reverse baptism; they are upside-down in fonts (holes) and baptised by fire, not water; several popes here; NOTE: Dante criticizes popes BECAUSE he is a devout Catholic.
Bolge 4	Fortunetellers - they tried to foretell the future, so now their heads are on backwards.
Bolge 5	Grafters - Canto 22 - (grafters or barrators trade the powers and favors of their political office for money).
Bolge 6	Hypocrites - they wear gorgeous cloaks lined with lead; pretty outside, awful inside; heavy cloaks force them to behave sedately, although seething within (inner anger); cloak true character in false appearance.

Bolge 7	Thieves turning into snakes and snakes turning into thieves - Canto 24: 91, 92. Thieves steal other people's possessions; they cannot keep their own bodies.
Bolge 8	Evil Counselors - Ulysses and Diomedes helped to destroy Troy with the Trojan horse scam. Ulysses cut loose from all human ties (home, family, etc.) to sail to the edge of the world. Deceit and pride, virtues in Homer's Odysseus, have become Ulysses' sins in the Christian middle ages.
Bolge 9	Sowers of Discord - Mahomet, disembowelled. Dante thinks of Mohammed as a sinner whose religious beliefs led to discord and schism. Note the total intolerance for another religion; this is typical of the Christian middle ages and later; it led to many wars against those who believed differently (including different sects of Christians) and massacres of unbelievers as well as Christian heretics Another sower of discord was Bertram de Born, a Provencal troubadour poet - Canto 28: 121 - 123. He carries his head like a lantern because he used vicious scandals to separate Henry II of England from his eldest son. Therefore, his head is separated from his body.
Bolge 10	Falsifiers (alchemists and counterfeiters) - Canto 29: 79 - 81. Falsifiers include Sinon, the Greek in the Aeneid who let himself be captured by the Trojans and gave them a story about the Trojan Horse, which tricked them into bringing it into Troy. How far we've come from Greek heroes!

ANTAEUS hand-carries Virgil and Dante down to the last circle - Canto 31: 142,143] (Antaeus was a giant from Greek myth who accosted passing strangers and wrestled them to death, because he was invulnerable while touching earth. Hercules killed him by holding him in the air to weaken him and then crushed him.

CIRCLE 9 - TRAITORS IN COCYTUS

1.	To Kindred - Caina
2.	To Country - Antenora
3.	To Guests - Ptolemaea
4.	To Masters - Judecca

Cocytus is a frozen lake of ice; Satan is immobilized at the center. Cocytus includes four kinds of traitors.

Traitors to Kindred - Caina named after Cain, the first murderer of a kinsman

Traitors to Country - Antenora; named after the Trojan Antenor who in the Middle Ages was believed to have betrayed Troy to the Greeks

Bocca degli Abati - Canto 32: 97 - 99 was a noble Guelph from Florence. He betrayed his party by cutting off the Guelph standard bearer's hand during the battle against Manfred's troops at Montaperti in 1260, which caused the Guelphs to panic and lose the battle.

Traitors to Guests - Ptolemaea, named after Ptolemy, a captain of Jericho who invited guests to a banquet and then murdered them while they were his guests.

Traitors to Masters (or benefactors)- Judecca is where Satan is munching on Judas, Cassius and Brutus) - Canto 34: 20, 21. The Judecca is named for Judas Iscariot who betrayed Christ. Also includes Cassius and Brutus who betrayed Julius Caesar. This puts together the betrayal of masters of Church and State Frozen center contains Satan - total absence of goodness; absolute distance from God; Virgil and Dante climb down Satan's side to the center of the earth; turn around and start climbing up toward Purgatory, but that's another story.

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ISSUES: GENDER

Francesca & Paolo; Dido; Helen; Cleopatra; are all women in hell there for sexual behavior? It seems that way. "The sins in the

[pre-Dantean Jewish and Christian] tours of hell range from murder to idle chatter in church or synagogue, but the two most common kinds of sins are sexual sins and sins of speech [e.g. breaking vows and blaspheming]" (Himmelfarb 69). In early Jewish and Christian vision tours of hell, "Adultery/fornication is the most widely diffused category of sexual sin...It appears almost everywhere. Loss of virginity before marriage and abortion/infanticide... appear almost exclusively in Christian texts....

"Sexual sins also play a part in texts of the Hellenistic and Roman period that are neither Jewish nor Christian, although they do not seem to have rated among the major sins of archaic and classical Greece... Sexual wrongdoing and even the tendency to such wrongdoing, a lustful disposition, are found in pagan lists of vices" (Himmelfarb 71).

Courtly love and the Judeo-Christian sexual ethic: Love as both a positive and a negative force - Beatrice and Francesca. This makes an interesting contrast to other pairs of lovers, such as Dido and Aeneas or Odysseus and Penelope, or Adam and Eve.

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ISSUES: UNDERWORLD

Look at how Dante's Inferno is similar to and different from Virgil's Underworld: Virgil's underworld is not forever; temporal recycled souls; concerned with destiny destiny and future Dante focuses on punishment for timeless sins instead of possibilities eternity No future except Last Judgment which will fix current hell forever (heaven too) Fate is forever after moment of death; if a person dies unrepentant, he/she is fixed forever in that part of hell based on his/her dominant vice.

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ISSUES: RESPONSIBILITY, FATE AND FREE WILL

Look at concept of just retribution: the punishment fits the crime and all crimes are known and punished. Concept of free will, the ability to choose to sin or not to sin, was central to medieval Catholicism, although they had difficulty explaining exactly how this worked (so do we). A very interesting concept to compare/contrast with Aeneas' devotion to will of Destiny and the gods in the Aeneid.

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ISSUES: HERO/KING'S CHARACTER

Pilgrim (Dante) as flawed, seeking knowledge as means to salvation Virgil (poet) as hero a far cry from the armored warriors of the Greeks. Ulysses is now seen as an evil hero - his ability to lie and manipulate now seen as evil Also, Troy understood as the homeland of Europe, so anyone who harmed Troy was evil. This makes a fascinating contrast to Homer's Odysseus.

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ISSUES: HERETICS AND MONSTERS

Monsters: Geryon, Cerberus & Satan (both three headed), Demons, Centaurs, all creatures in hell Heretics: Mohammad & Epicureans; Dante full of anger against those who were not "true believers;" both religiously and politically. Dante's monsters can be compared to the raging monsters such as Allecto (and Juno...) in the Aeneid, and hungry monsters, such as Polyphemos and Skylla in the Odyssey.

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