

P E N G U I N  C L A S S I C S

DANTE

The Divine Comedy

Volume 1: Inferno

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From the Pages of *the Inferno*

Midway upon the journey of our life
I found myself within a forest dark,
For the straightforward pathway had been lost.
(Canto I, lines 1-3, page 3)

“And a fair, saintly Lady called to me
In such wise, I besought her to command me.
Her eyes were shining brighter than the Star.”
(Canto II, lines 53-55, page 9)

“Bestir thee now, and with thy speech ornate,
And with what needful is for this release,
Assist him so, that I may be consoled.
Beatrice am I, who do bid thee go.”
(Canto II, lines 67-70, page 10)

“All hope abandon, ye who enter in!”
(Canto III, line 9, page 14)

“Lost are we, and are only so far punished,
That without hope we live on in desire.”
(Canto IV, lines 41-42, page 20)

They go by turns each one unto the judgment;
They speak, and hear, and then are downward hurled.
(Canto v, lines 14-15, page 25)

“Envy and Arrogance and Avarice
Are the three sparks that have all hearts enkindled.”
(Canto VI, lines 74-75, page 33)

“But fix thine eyes below; for draweth near
The river of blood, within which boiling is
Whoe'er by violence doth injure others.”
(Canto XII, lines 46-48, page 61)

“Therefore let Fortune turn her wheel around
As it may please her, and the churl his mattock.”
(Canto xv, lines 95-96, page 80)

“Behold the monster with the pointed tail,
Who cleaves the hills, and breaketh walls and weapons,
Behold him who infecteth all the world:’
(Canto XVII, lines 1-3, page 86)

Justice of God! O how severe it is,
That blows like these in vengeance poureth down!
(Canto XXIV, lines 119-120, page 125)

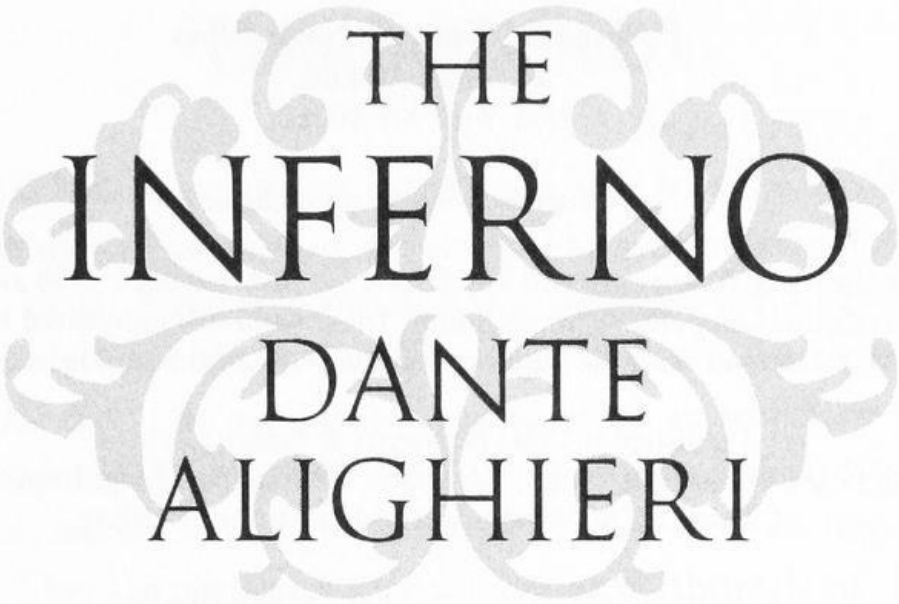
Rejoice, O Florence, since thou art so great,
That over sea and land thou beatest thy wings,
And throughout Hell thy name is spread abroad!
(Canto XXVI, lines 1-3, page 132)

“And all the others whom thou here beholdest,
Sowers of scandal and of schism have been
While living, and therefore are thus cleft asunder.”
(Canto XXVIII, lines 34-36, page 144)

And by the hair it held the head dissevered,
Hung from the hand in fashion of a lantern,
And that upon us gazed and said: “O me!”
It of itself made to itself a lamp.
(Canto XXVIII, lines 121-124, page 147)

Then I beheld a thousand faces, made

Purple with cold; whence o'er me comes a shudder,
And evermore will come, at frozen ponds.
(Canto XXXII, lines 70-72, page 167)



THE
INFERNO
DANTE
ALIGHIERI

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Dante Alighieri

Dante Alighieri was born in Florence in 1265 to Alighiero Alighieri, who appears to have been a moneylender and property holder, and his wife, Bella. Alighieri's was a family of good standing. Much of what we know of Dante's earliest years comes to us from *La Vita Nuova* (*The New Life*, completed around 1293), in which he tells the story of his idealized love for Beatrice Portinari, whom he encountered just before his ninth birthday. Beatrice died in 1290 but remained Dante's idealized love and muse throughout his life. Sometime around 1285 Dante married Gemma Donati, with whom he had three sons and a daughter.

Dante's public life is better documented than his private life. It is known that he counted among his closest friends the poet Guido Cavalcanti and the philosopher and writer Brunetto Latini, who is generally credited with bringing classical literature to thirteenth-century Florence. Dante began an intense study of theology at the churches of Santa Maria Novella and Santa Croce in 1292, and was well-versed in classical literature and philosophy as well as religious thought. Membership in a guild was a requirement to participate in the government of Florence, and Dante partook of this privilege after enrolling in the *Arte dei Medici e Speziali* (Guild of Physicians and Apothecaries) in 1295. He was elected to serve as a prior, the city's highest office, in 1300.

By early 1302, however, Dante had fallen out of favor in Florence. The Guelphs, the ruling body with whom Dante's family had long been associated, had split into two factions, the White and the Black Guelphs. Dante aligned himself with the Whites, who were opposed to the intervention of Pope Boniface VIII and his representative, Charles of Valois, in Florentine politics. While Dante was in Rome with a delegation protesting papal policy, Charles of Valois entered the city and a proclamation was issued banishing Dante and others, ordering them to be burned alive should they fall into the hands of the Florentine government.

Dante never returned to Florence, even after the exiles were granted a pardon. He probably began *La Divina Commedia* (*The Divine Comedy*) around 1380, during his extensive travels throughout Italy. The work brought him fame as soon as it began to circulate (in hand-copied form, at a time when the printing press had not yet been invented). Dante's travels took him to Verona, where he resided on and off for some six years, and finally to Ravenna, where he died on September 14, 1321, after falling ill in Venice.

Dante Alighieri is considered to be one of the world's greatest poets. In the words of the twentieth-century poet T. S. Eliot, "Dante and Shakespeare divide the world between them. There is no third."

The World of Dante and the *Inferno*

1265 In May or June (exact date unknown), Dante Alighieri is born to Alighiero Alighieri, a Florentine moneylender and renter of properties, and his wife, Bella, daughter of a family of good standing. (Dante discusses his ancestry in *Paradiso* [*Paradise*], cantos XV and XVI.)

1272 Bella dies.

1274 According to his later collection of poetry and prose *La Vita Nuova* (*The New Life*), Dante lays eyes on Beatrice Portinari for the first time during festivities on May I. Throughout his life and career Dante cites Beatrice as his muse and as the benevolent force in his life, maintaining that she inspired the best part of his work.

1281 Dante, some scholars contend, studies at the universities of Bologna and Padua.

1282 Dante's father dies, leaving a modest inheritance of property.

1283 Dante passes Beatrice in the street and she greets him. The encounter inspires a visionlike dream, which Dante recounts in a sonnet that he circulates around Florence. One of the readers, the poet Guido Cavalcanti, becomes Dante's friend and mentor. About the same time Dante finds a role model and teacher in Brunetto Latini, a writer and influential Florentine politician and man of letters.

c.1285 Dante is married to Gemma Donati, to whom he was betrothed when he was twelve and Gemma was ten.

1287 Beatrice marries Simone de' Bardi, member of a wealthy clan.

1288 Dante's son, Giovanni, is born. Dante and Gemma will have three more children, Pietro, Jacopo, and Antonia.

1289 It is believed that Dante, having been trained in knightly warfare, fights in the battle of Campaldino on June 11, when the Guelphs, with whom Dante sympathizes, defeat the Ghibellines. On August 16 Dante goes into battle again, this time against the Pisans to restore the fortress at the village of Caprona to the Guelphs, from whom the Ghibellines have captured it.

1290 Beatrice dies in June.

1292 Dante begins to study theology, first at the Dominican church of Santa Maria Novella, then at the Franciscan church of Santa Croce. His theological readings will have a profound influence on his works.

C.1293 Dante completes *La Vita Nuova*, which he had begun around 1283 to celebrate his beloved Beatrice.

1295 Dante enrolls in the Arte dei Medici e Speziali (Guild of Physicians and Apothecaries), which includes philosophers as well. Membership in a guild gives him a say in the Florentine government. Dante's friend and mentor Brunetto Latini dies.

1300 Dante, a persuasive and eloquent speaker, is appointed to Florence's highest office as one of the city priors. He holds this office from June 15 to August 15. Florence is once again divided into warring factions, the White and the Black Guelphs. Dante's sympathies lie with the Whites, who favor independence from papal authority; in what he considers to be the best interests of Florence, he must concur with the priors when they send Guido Cavalcanti, a Black and his longtime friend, into exile on the Tuscan coast, where he dies of malaria. Dante travels as part of a mission to the city of San Gimignano to rally Tuscan cities against the territorial ambitions of Pope Boniface VIII.

1301 Dante goes to Rome to ask Pope Boniface VIII to help prevent the French Charles of Valois, a papist sympathizer, from entering Florence. Charles takes the city in November, and the Blacks harshly regain power.

1302 On January 27 Dante is accused of corruption and bribery, fined, and sentenced to two years in exile. When he does not reply to the charges, his home and possessions are confiscated, and on March 10 his sentence is increased; he is now banished for life and condemned to be burned alive if he ever returns to the city.

1303- Dante travels throughout central and northern Italy and af

1304 affiliates himself with other Florentine exiles. He appears to have been much dissatisfied with his colleagues. Dante arrives for a stay in Verona, as a guest of Bartolomeo della Scala, son of a local ruling family.

1306—Dante works on *Il Convivio* (*The Banquet*), a philosophical treatise

1308 rise on poetry influenced, in part, by the writings of Aristotle. Throughout these years he travels to Lucca (where some think he encounters his eldest son, Giovanni), Arezzo, Padua, Venice, and other cities. It is believed that Dante probably begins work on *La Divina Commedia* (*The Divine Comedy*), turning first to the *Inferno*, in 1308; he will complete the larger work shortly before his death in 1321.

1309—In January Dante attends the coronation, in Milan, of Henry

1311 VII of Luxemburg as King of Lombardy. Dante views Henry as the rightful ruler of Italy and writes two impassioned letters to the Florentines, imploring them to open their gates to Henry.

1312 Dante begins a six-year stay in Verona, interrupted by frequent travels, as a guest of Cangrande della Scala, a powerful political leader. While in Verona, Dante revises the *Inferno*, writes and revises *Purgatorio* (*Purgatory*), and begins *Paradiso* (*Paradise*). His second son, Pietro, joins him in Verona.

1313 Henry VII dies, putting an end to Dante's hopes of returning to Florence.

1315 Dante refuses an offer from Florence allowing him to return if he pays a reduced portion of a fine imposed upon him at the time of his exile; he calls the pardon "ridiculous and ill-advised." Another decree is issued against Dante, as well as his sons, condemning them to beheading if they are captured. The *Inferno* gains recognition throughout Italy.

1319—Dante stays in Ravenna as a guest of Guido Novello da

1321 Polenta. Two of Dante's sons, Pietro and Jacopo, his daughter, Antonia, and his wife, Gemma, join him. Antonia enters the convent of Santo Stefano degli Olivi in Ravenna, taking the name "Sister Beatrice."

1321 Dante travels to Venice to help negotiate a peaceful resolution to a disagreement that has arisen between Ravenna and Venice. During his return to Ravenna across marshy lands, he contracts malarial fever; he dies on the night of September 13-14. He is buried "with all the honors deemed worthy of such an illustrious deceased man," writes Giovanni Boccaccio, the author of another great fourteenth-century Italian masterpiece, the *Decameron*. Dante's remains are in Ravenna's church of San Francesco, though Florence has tried repeatedly to have them moved to the poet's place of birth.

1337 Florence establishes the Chair of Dante, an academic position for the preservation and study of Dante's works. This position was first held by Giovanni Boccaccio, who was not only a friend of Dante's, but whose own literary perspective was influenced by the poet's writings and who was one of Dante's first biographers.