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## The Divine Comedy- Healing Trauma with Literature

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# **LA DIVINA COMMEDIA**

**DA DANTE ALIGHIERI**

**ITALIAN 347**

**OUT OF FLORENCE: DANTE IN  
EXILE**

**CATHERINE GIORGI**

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# TED TALK

## Inferno I

Inferno I marks the start of the infamous poem by Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*. At this point in Dante's life, he has been recently exiled from his hometown of Florence, forced to live his life as an outsider to the city he once worked so hard to protect and maintain. This exile has created a sense of desperation within him, as any person would feel after being driven out of their home. It is then that he began to write this poem, starting with the Inferno, in other words, Hell.

In a way, Dante is feeling as if he is living in Hell right now: isolated from his city, an outcast from his home, desperate for something better. This is how he portrays the Inferno, as a dark forest: nothing good in sight, no light, no hope, full of fear and uncertainty. In a deeper sense, the dark forest is the representation of sin that is inescapable. This is how we begin to see the Inferno in a religious sense. The big picture is that Dante is currently in Hell, desperate to leave and search for something better, which he sees far in the distance. His journey then becomes the act of trying to find a way out of Hell and make it closer to the light far in the distance, but I'm getting ahead of myself. Back to the Inferno and Dante now, I believe at this time in Inferno I he realizes that if he wants a way out of Hell, he must put the work in and begin the journey towards something better. In this sense, I believe that the Inferno is not a place of complete desperation then, but instead a stepping stone or "obstacle" that must be overcome, and I also believe Dante comes to see this, even right away in Inferno I (through the help of Virgil).

Virgil, a poet as well, becomes Dante's guide in his desperation to make his way out of the Dark Forest and towards those brighter days. In order to reach salvation in heaven, Virgil explains that Dante must first make his way through the Inferno and each "level" in Hell. I believe that Dante then recognizes how hard this journey midway through his life will be, but how important and worth it the end result will be.

Inferno I proves not only to be the story of a depressed poet, but also a metaphor and explanation of a journey that every person must make to reach peace in paradise. Through hardships in general, Dante proves that they are possible to overcome when time, energy and sacrifice are put forth into action. This is what Inferno I is all about. Not Dante being depressed and experiencing trauma, but Dante realizing that he has the ability within him to conquer these emotions and replace them with happiness that can be achieved in paradise.





# *LECTURA DANTIS*

## Purgatory I- The Appearance of Dawn

Purgatory I marks the change in not only scene, but also organization and set up of the canticles throughout The Divine Comedy. It is here that our narrative begins to change, the setting is different, and the journey to the top of the mountain has begun. In Purgatory, the sense of time is also present as we are aware of the date and of how time is passing with the stars.

This canto begins with the arrival of Dante and Virgil on Easter Day 1300, demonstrating again the religious importance and theme throughout this poem. It is here, at dawn by the sea, that Dante and Virgil meet the guardian of Purgatory, Cato (see Character Profile for more information). After a conversation between them, Cato lets them pass to make their way to the mountain. This is the path that Dante describes as the one he had previously lost and now has been able to return to.

Their arrival can be tied to the idea of dawn and the rising of the sun. For the first time, light is present and the darkness we grew to know so well in the Inferno has changed rapidly. Dante writes this canto in a completely different tone, being hopeful and looking towards a brighter future. Dante is calmed by the change of scenery and comforted by the sense of hope he feels for this next part of the journey. This dawn in purgatory draws in the idea of the world as temporal and the ability to solve problems presently in the mortal plane of time. Dante is relived to have made it to this next "step" in the journey to Paradise and proves his change in emotions by the complete alteration of how the canto is written.

# CHARACTER PROFILE

## Appearances Continued from Front Cover

Subsequent Appearances			
Date/Part	Attorney/Judge	Bail Status	Notes
<b>Name:</b>			<b>CATO</b>
<b>Nickname:</b>			<b>GUARDIAN OF LIBERTY</b>
<b>Quote:</b>			"But now she dwells beyond the evil stream. And therefore, by a law in force since I came out of it, cannot move me more" Purgatory 1, 88-90
<b>Known for:</b>			<b>Guardian at the entrance to Purgatory</b>
<b>Previous appearances:</b>			Born in 95BC, Cato is known for his outward defiance of Julius Caesar as a political figure in Rome. He takes his own life in battle
<b>Representation:</b>			

Dante represents Cato in an extremely good light which somewhat comes as a surprise at first. Cato's allies of Brutus and Cassius have very different fates than him. Cato was a pagan and also committed suicide, two sins that are seemingly unforgivable, but he did not "pay" the consequences for those sins. Instead, Dante writes him in a favorable sense, due to his ability to stand up for what he believes and sacrifice himself for his cause. In Dante's view, this "makes up" for those sins and Cato is placed with the honor of being the guardian of Purgatory. Dante praises Cato continuously, even saying that "Cato is illuminated by an especial light of divine goodness" and comparing Cato to God. To Dante, the act of sacrifice proves to be more powerful than sin.

# CONVERSATION WITH DANTE IN OUR TIME

## Face Trauma with Literature

Isolation is a feeling that we each have gotten to know very well throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Not only the idea of physical isolation, but the actual act of feeling isolated as well. Feeling trapped, apart from others, lonely, desperate, sad, hopeless. Feeling as if there is no escape and you are forced to be on the outside, watching from afar, set aside. Desperation is another one of those feelings that the pandemic has really let us feel, deep down to the core. This pandemic seems to continue on despite initial hope and faith that things would get better quickly. All of these feelings, never ceasing for months and months, can quickly develop into trauma. As trauma begins to take root and settle into your brain, it is not something that can simply be reversed. You must combat it, overthrow it, fight against it. But above all, you have to face it. There is no way to heal from something unless you face it, head on and without fear (alright, maybe a little fear is okay). Throughout the Divine Comedy, we see how Dante is able to face his trauma. At this time Dante was an outcast in his own city, disliked by many, forced to leave his home. Simply put, Dante was feeling desperate and feeling trauma due to his circumstance.

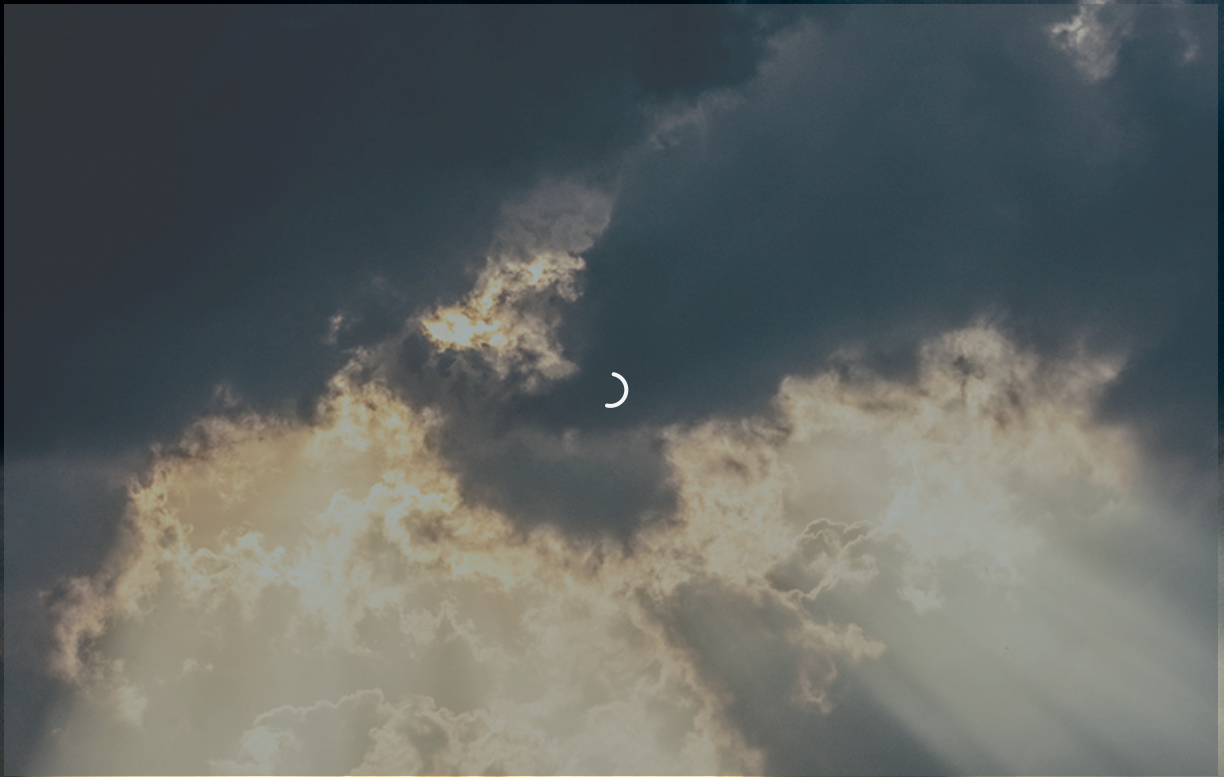


When one is plagued with a traumatic experience and trauma there are different ways to respond. For Dante, I believe he had two choices: let it consume him, or let it help him grow and overcome it. As we know, Dante decides to take his time in exile and write this beautiful poem, *The Divine Comedy*. I don't believe it is mere coincidence that the *Divine Comedy* demonstrates how hardships (*Inferno*) and obstacles (*Purgatorio*) must be overcome and faced in order to reach the light and goodness (*Paradiso*). His feelings of despair are highlighted throughout *Inferno*, but we see his overall progress and ability to fight through his trauma to reach eventual peace and maybe even happiness. Dante allows for his feelings on the matter of his exile to help shape him and the person he becomes, but he doesn't let these feelings and trauma define him.

A lot of similarities can be drawn between those feelings of Dante in exile and the feelings of many people in the pandemic. Just as Dante felt trapped in exile, the world felt trapped by COVID. The work of Dante can be used to teach lessons on trauma and the ability to overcome things. Dante shows how nothing is permanent and it is possible to take life's circumstances and not let them consume you, but instead use them to overcome trauma and alienation. Although written many many years ago, the lessons of *The Divine Comedy* continue to help the world overcome those difficult times and search for that light that they know is present at the end of the journey.

# NUVOLE BIANCHE

## "WHITE CLOUDS"







The song Nuvole Bianche was composed by an Italian composer in 2004. He writes that this song is about his life, and is an overall story. The song itself is known for its ability to be happy and heartbreaking at the same time. The overall theme of the song is to create opposite emotions at the same time, sometimes even emotions one cannot explain. The song creates an overall sense of peace, while at the same time making you "feel" all those emotions you sometimes don't wish to feel. Nuvole Bianche reminds me of Dante and the journey he is on throughout the Inferno and the whole Divine Comedy. He is troubled by these thoughts and feelings since his exile, causing him to feel sad and angry... but maybe also happy. The Inferno follows a journey of an upset Dante, but one who knows there are brighter days ahead, in Paradiso, as long as he keeps moving forward. This song and Dante's journey follow a similar path because by getting through those dark, upsetting and heartbreaking times in life (or in a song), one is able to look up to see, and finally reach, those White Clouds.

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