

QUICK CARD: THE DIVINE COMEDY



<p><i>Reference</i></p>	<p><i>The Divine Comedy.</i> Dante Alighieri. (c.1308-1321) ISBN-13: 978-0140440065 978-0140444421 978-0140441055</p> <p>Several good translations of the Comedy have been done. Longfellow’s translation effectively brought the work into the Western cannon. Before his scholarly contribution, the Comedy, which was written in Italian rather than Latin, received little serious attention from academics. Longfellow’s translation is lovely; however many good translators have improved upon his work. Of them, Dorothy Sayers’s translation invites Dante neophytes with its clear explanations of the work’s more opaque, historic allusions. In addition, Sayers retained the meter of the original work, which is no small feat considering that Dante worked in Italian, which, unlike English, provides easy end rhymes.</p>
<p><i>Plot</i></p>	<p>This allegorical epic depicts human life as a defining spiritual quest. In the middle of a midlife crisis, the protagonist Dante finds his path barred by ferocious beasts, allegorical representations of his own besetting sins. Unable to continue his climb toward Mt. Paradise, he is approached by the character Virgil, who, sent by Dante’s deceased and sainted patroness, Beatrice, guides the poet on a tour of Hell in hopes that his experience there would reform him. In Book One of the Comedy, <i>Inferno</i>, Dante relates his descent through concentric circles of hell, describing the occupants who lodge there, their diverse crimes and mete punishments. Resurfacing on Easter morning, Dante and Virgil continue their excursion up Mt. Purgatory in Book 2, <i>Purgatorio</i>. There Dante encounters saints enduring purgatives in order to become fit for Paradise. At the top of this mountain, the poet meets Beatrice herself and, with her aid, comes to a degree of self-knowledge and repentance. In Book 3, <i>Paradiso</i>, Beatrice assumes the role of guide. Dante meets the inhabitants of the heavenlies, learning of their hierarchical degrees of blessedness, yet finding among them a ubiquitous contentment. Dante’s vision ends in the throne room of the heavenly King. Dante wakes from his tri-fold vision with a new understanding of sin and self, a new man who has learned to love the right things the right way. Equipped and eager to continue his own spiritual quest, Dante’s romantic love for Beatrice has effectively ennobled his soul and directed his affections toward God.</p>

<i>Setting</i>	<p>Book One, <i>Inferno</i>, is set in hell. Book Two, <i>Purgatorio</i>, is set in Purgatory. Book Three, <i>Paradiso</i>, is set in the celestial heavens.</p>
<i>Characters</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dante – the persona of the author himself and the protagonist of this epic. It is useful to consider the persona and the protagonist as separate characters. • Beatrice – the poet’s patron saint and deceased love, the image of beatific beauty and female perfection. • Virgil – the shade of the Roman poet. He guides Dante through the Inferno and up to the top of the blessed Mt. Purgatory, but is kept from going further into paradise because he died unbaptized. • Various inhabitants of Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven, too numerous to list. These characters inform Dante’s understanding of sin, self, salvation, and sanctification. Sayer’s translation and notes make even the most archaic references useful to modern readers.
<i>Conflict</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Man vs. Self • Man vs. Man • Man vs. God
<i>Theme</i>	<p>Sin and Blessedness</p>
<i>Literary Devices</i>	<p>Depending upon the translation you read, poetic devices such as terza rima rhyme scheme, end rhymes, or blank verse may be present. This is the perfect opportunity, too, to teach allegory and symbolism. Watch for allusions to literary, biblical, historical and political ideas and personalities. Dante’s vivid imagination lives through his use of imagery and sensory language.</p>