Dante's

DIVINE COMEDY







The Inferno

Purgatorio

Paradiso

Translated by ROBERT and JEAN HOLLANDER
Illustrated by GUSTAVE DORÉ and SANDOW BIRK
"Follow You Down" by MARK MCADAM

Dante & Virgil: A Match Made in Hell Who was Beatrice Portinari? The Divine Comedy as an Allegory Cantos I and II Video Clip What is a Classic? Cantos III and IV Video Clip Canto V Video Clip Cantos VI and VII Video Clip Cantos VIII and IX Video Clip Canto XI Video Clip Pictures Worth a Thousand Words Circle VIII Video Clip Works Cited



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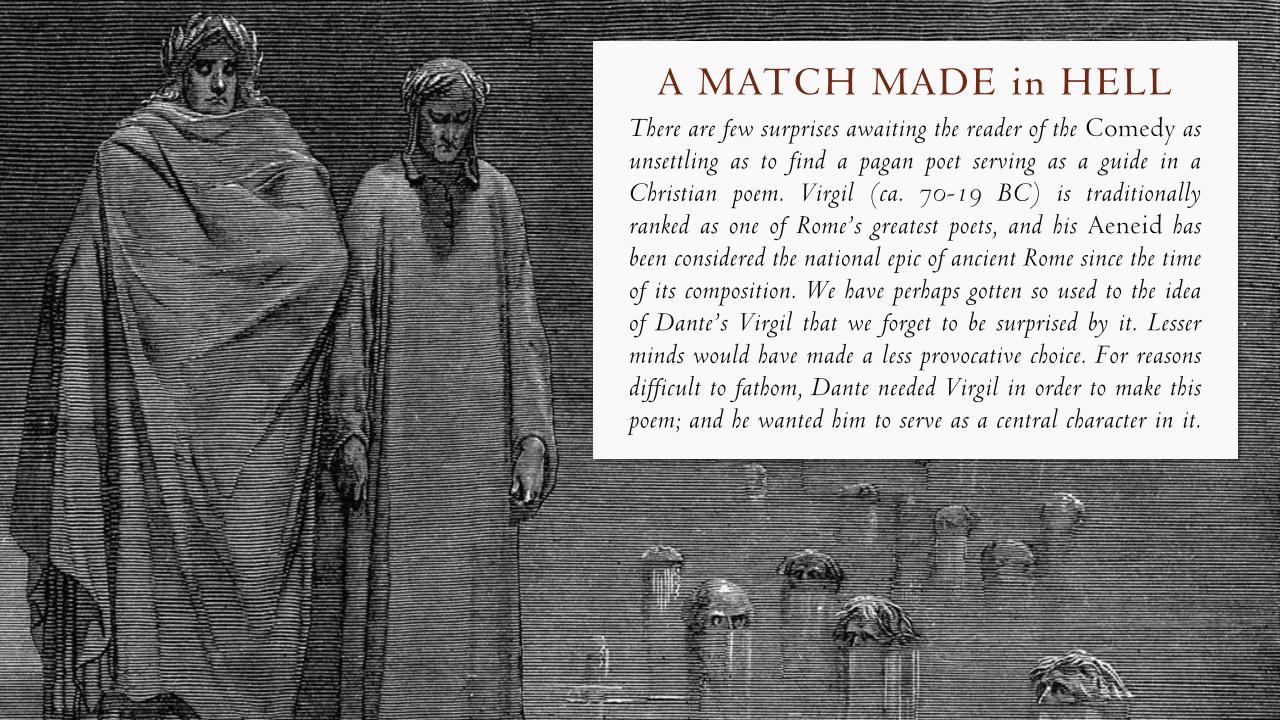


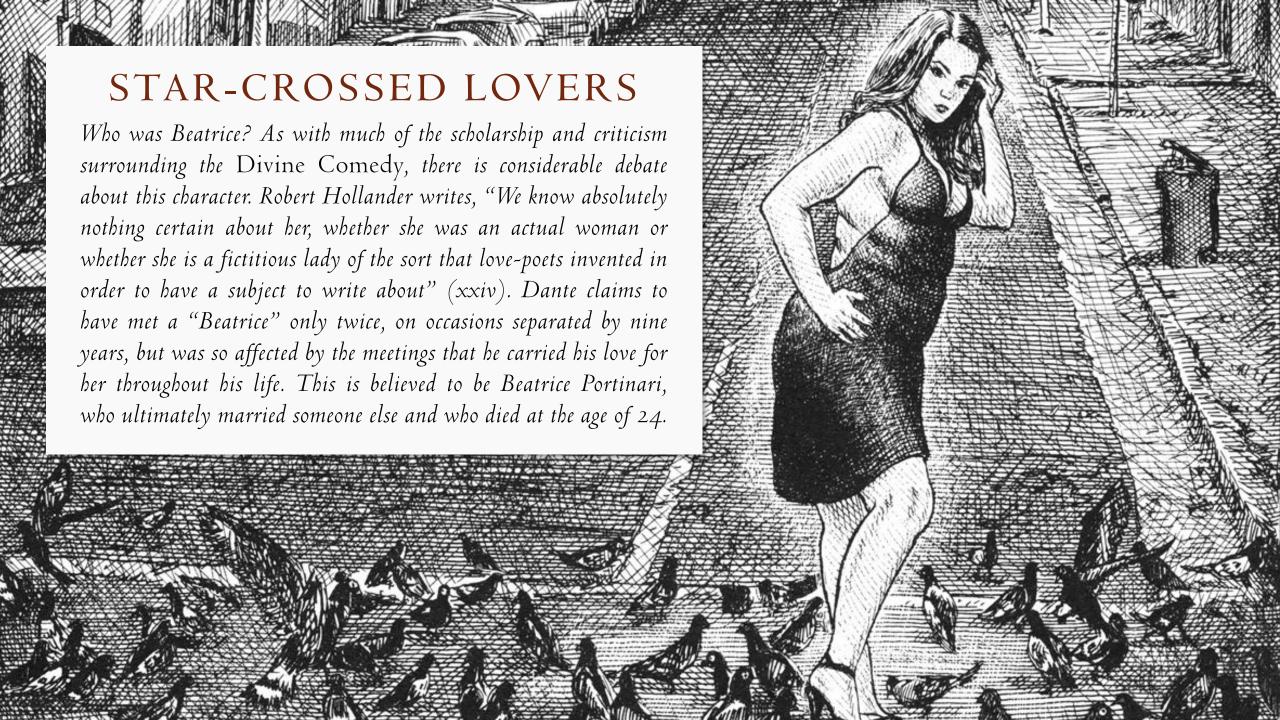
DANTE and VIRGIL

By the time Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) had finished the fourth canto of The Inferno and set his name down alongside six of the all-time great writers, he had already decided he was writing a classic—a work that would be loved, over time, by millions of more-or-less ordinary readers and by thousands of scholars. Exiled from Florence in 1302 for his political affiliations and estranged from his wife, Dante began work on his Divine Comedy. The poem absorbed almost all of his time and energy. Its motivating idea is a simple one, outrageously so. In the Easter period of 1300 a thirty-five-year-old Florentine, struggling with failure and apparently spiritual death, is rescued by the shade of the Roman poet Virgil. Exactly when he began seriously writing the grand three-part poem has always been difficult to determine (the year 1306 is a frequently suggested possibility), but he seems to have finished The Inferno by 1314, and Paradiso



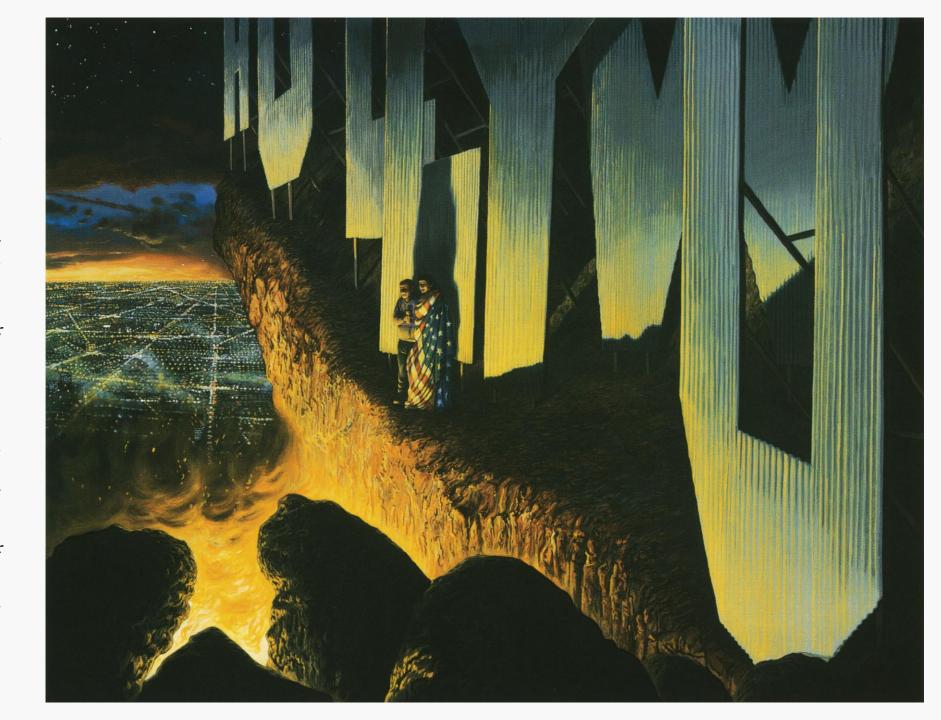
shortly before he died in 1321. It is perhaps difficult to imagine how even a Dante could have managed to build so magnificent an edifice out of so improbable a literary idea. The result was a book that began to be talked about, known from parts that seem to have circulated before the whole, even before it was finished (the first citations begin to be noted around 1315). Within months of his death commentaries upon it began to be produced. It was, in short, an instant classic, the first of its kind since Virgil's *Aeneid*. Today, his *Divine Comedy* is widely considered the most important poem of the Middle Ages and the greatest work in the Italian language.





ALLEGORY

An allegory is a narrative, whether in prose or verse, in which the agents and actions, and sometimes the setting as well, are contrived by the author to make coherent sense on the "literal," or primary, level of signification, and at the same time to signify a second, correlated order of signification. There are two main types: historical and political allegory, in which the characters and actions that are signified literally in their turn represent, or "allegorize," historical personages and events, and the allegory of ideas, in which the literal characters represent concepts and the plot allegorizes an abstract idea (Abrams and Harpham 8).



"The allegory of the Comedy is not allegory as the commentators urge me to apply it. I may read this poem as history, and understand it better."

Robert Hollander

CANTO I

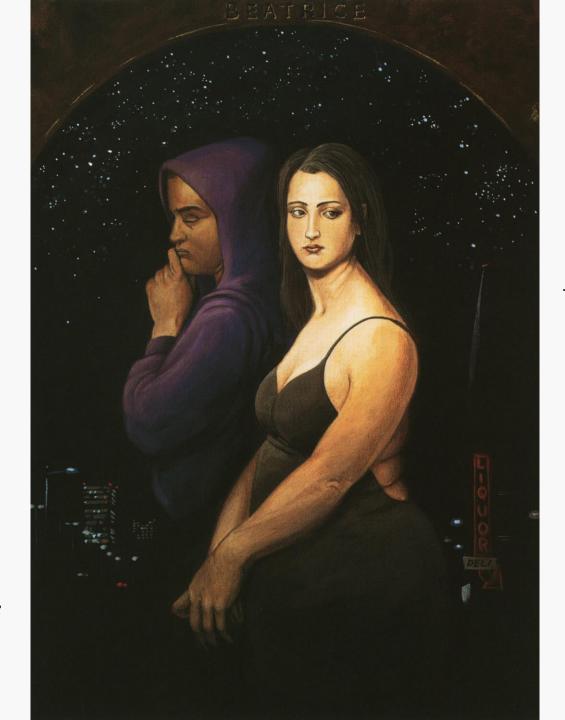
What is the significance of the season and time of day when Dante sets out on his journey?

Why does Dante stop trying to leave the dark wood, ultimately falling deeper into despair?

When Virgil arrives, he tells
Dante that he can be his guide
through Hell and Purgatory but
not Heaven. Why can't Virgil
show Dante Heaven?

Who sends Virgil from the nether regions to find Dante? Why does he or she ask Virgil to do this?

Give two examples from anywhere in Cantos I or II of Dante's recurrent use of the number three.



CANTO II

What is the significance of the season and time of day when Dante sets out on his journey?

Why does Dante stop trying to leave the dark wood, ultimately falling deeper into despair?

When Virgil arrives, he tells
Dante that he can be his guide
through Hell and Purgatory but
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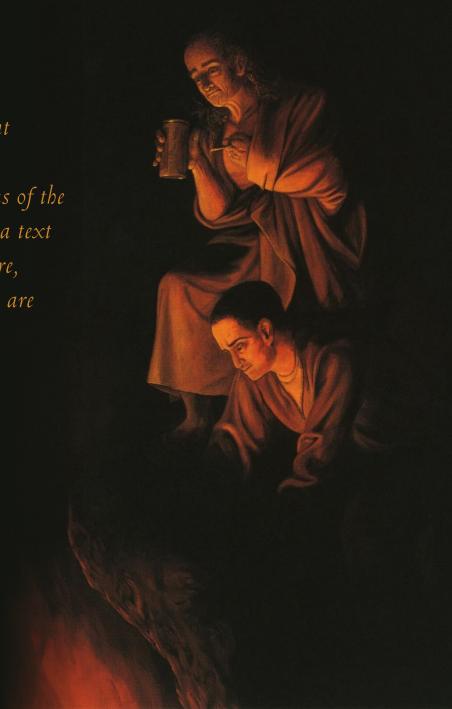
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Cantos I & II

WHAT IS A CLASSIC?

A classic is a text that has a permanent significance, or carries a permanent message, for all generations; its words remain always the same, but their meanings slowly change by adapting themselves to the needs and aspirations of the various ages, as we ride on the rhythm of time. In other words, a classic is a text that never belongs to the past but always to the present, and that is, therefore, always contemporary, a text in which human beings, precisely because they are human beings, keep rediscovering themselves.





Canto V

Cantos VI & VII

Cantos VIII & IX





DRAWING DANTE

What does it mean for Sandow Birk to be remapping his droll and detailed contemporary social observations onto Gustave Doré's classic prints? Turn to page 16 of your packet to answer this question.



Circle 8: THE TEN MALEBOLGE



Reading Comprehension

CIRCLE IX

Which character, or characters, guard the ninth Circle of Hell? How does the guard try to deter intruders?

While walking across Cocytus, Dante is alarmed by an uncanny breeze, asking Virgil, "Are not all winds banished here below?" (XXXIII.105). How does Virgil respond to Dante's question, and what causes the wind to blow?

One of the motifs Dante uses throughout the Divine Comedy is the use of the number three. Give two examples from anywhere in Cantos XXXI-XXXIV of this recurrent thematic element.

Who "bears the greatest pain" in all of Hell? What did this character do that Dante finds so repulsive?

How are Virgil and Dante able to escape from Hell? Describe the sequence of events which lead to them being able to set foot on earth's surface again and gaze at the heavenly stars. Make a slide for the 9 circles Poster assignment!

What emerges from an archetypal approach to Dante's Inferno is instructive because it clearly demonstrates that Dante was writing on a symbolic level of a universal condition that is outside of time and therefore applicable to all human beings. Juxtaposing a scene from the conclusion of Star Wars: The Force Awakens (2015) with the introduction the Divine Comedy (1321) will hopefully illustrate this concept. The awakening in the dark wood can be considered the typical starting point of the journey to the center of the self, which is what the Divine Comedy represents. The forest at nighttime is the first manifestation of what psychologist Carl Jung called the Shadow—the part of the unconscious that holds the unknown or little-known attributes and qualities of the ego—and corresponds to the first stage in the process of individuation, that is, becoming aware of one's unconscious and confronting fears and repressed emotions. The Shadow, the dark and dangerous aspect of the unconscious, must be confronted directly if the process of individuation is to continue. This explains why Dante cannot ascend to the mountain of purgatory directly from the dark wood. The evil within him must be faced, recognized, assimilated, and transformed: in the language of mythology, the dragon must be slain. Dante must come to terms with those energies that lurk in the dark wood in an undifferentiated form. How does this theory align with Rey's encounter with Kylo Ren?

And yet, in legends such as Robin Hood, or the great Hindu love story of Rama and Sita, forest becomes a hiding place, a sanctuary. The forest provides refuge for great heroes who after a period of exile re-emerge into the world to fight for vengeance and justice. Their time in the forest (a full fourteen years in the case of Rama) could perhaps be interpreted as a period of personal development. A rite of passage perhaps?

In his book The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning And Importance of Fairy Tales, Bruno Bettelheim explores the significance of the forest in fairy tales. He writes:

'Since ancient times the near impenetrable forest in which we get lost has symbolized the dark, hidden, near-impenetrable world of our unconsious. If we have lost the framework which gave structure to our past life and must now find our way to become ourselves, and have entered this wilderness with an as yet undeveloped personality, when we succeed in finding our way out we shall emerge with a much more highly developed humanity.'

The forest offers an antithesis to the town. In ancient times when Europe was greatly covered by woodland, the forest represented the boundary of civilisation. The forest was literally a wild place, the village or town merely a place where man had cleared a settlement. There were many who found refuge in the forest, not just criminals, and those in exile, but shamans, holy men and women, poets, freethinkers and of course trolls, elves and fairies.

Even in contemporary fairytales such as Nausicaa, Hirao Miyazaki's film about a young girl's fight to save a post-apocalyptic world, the forest is a healing place, where trees filter the







THE DIVINE COMEDY



By Dante Alighieri





STAR-CROSSED LOVERS

Who was Beatrice? As with all of the literary criticism surrounding the Divine Comedy, there is considerable debate about this character. Robert Hollander writes, "We know absolutely nothing certain about her, whether she was an actual woman or whether she is a fictitious lady of the sort that love-poets invented in order to have a subject to write about" (xxiv). Dante claims to have met a "Beatrice" only twice, on occasions separated by nine years, but was so affected by the meetings that he carried his love for her throughout his life. This is believed to be Beatrice Portinari, who ultimately married someone else and who died at the age of 24.



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NATHURAN GODSE

G3-24885



Open Response?? Passage from Grendel.

"Theories... They'd map out roads through Hell with their crackpot theories, their here-to-the-moon-and-back lists of paltry facts. Insanity—the simplest insanity ever devised! Simple facts in isolation, and facts to connect them—ands and buts—are the *sine qua non* of all their glorious achievement. But there are no such facts. Connectedness is the essence of everything. It doesn't stop them, of course. They build the whole world out of teeth deprived of bodies to chew or be chewed on" (64).

and brings it forward to our own time in a very contemporary—and disturbing—fashion.

This particular collection of illustrations is the living witness of an artist who has the ability to see beyond the story he illustrates. The story is about Hell—the eternal absence of God—and about the deliberate choice of evil over good. In every case, the punishment fits the sin. But look beyond Dante and Virgil and the sinners they encounter. The background, the very context, is our world. This is deeply disturbing, but it is not beyond our recognition. Strewn with the detritus of the crumbling megalopolis, Birk's illustrations portray the City of Dis inhabited not only by Dante's sinners; he has taken to heart Dante's own torment and struggle, woven tightly into the "visual" background of the poem.

Strangely enough, but fittingly, the Inferno is a feast for the senses—especially the eyes. Birk's illustrations astonishingly juxtapose the horror of Dante's vision with the modern cityscape. The night sky is not filled with stars, but the cold blue search-lights of police helicopters, devil-like, chasing modern-day sinners. Dark alleys, ugly streets, freeway overpasses, traffic signs, commercial logos—even the city's new cathedral—all crowd upon us to provide a backdrop for the drama of Dante's journey with Virgil through a city ordered by chaos.

Birk's images reimagine and update Dante's Divine Comedy for postmodern readers, making this monumental text more accessible. We find ourselves standing alongside Dante and Virgil looking—sometimes with curiosity, other times with horror—upon the eternal consequences of free human choice. Herein Birk captures in his illustrations the visual muscle of Dante's text—and his genius.

We live in a very different world from Dante's. On every level, the collective progress of human achievement through the Renaissance; the Enlightenment; and the industrial, scientific, and technological revolutions; has given us the potential to use what we have achieved for great good. And so we strive. But we also live in a world very much like Dante's. Political intrigue and betrayal among statesmen; war, violence, and destruction; dishonest business practices at the highest levels; loss of faith in time-honored institutions—these and other social ills make the darkness of Dante's Inferno visible and render us vulnerable to forces of evil, not always visible on apocalyptic levels, but felt in the despair and hopelessness that become the unwanted homeless who populate the streets of our hearts.

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INFERNO

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ARTWORKS FROM THE EXHIBITION

For more than fifteen years Sandow Birk utilized the canon of Western art history as the foundation for projects dealing with a variety of social issues in contemporary America.

Early works—all based on the French Romantic paintings that he saw in the Louvre while studying in Paris and England—featured inner-city drug deals, gang wars, graffiti, surfers, and skateboarders. His paintings of events in Los Angeles surrounding the riots of 1992 were satires of the tradi-