Purgatorio

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF DANTE ALIGHIERI

Little is known of Dante's youth, except that he was born into a family that supported Florence's Guelph political faction. According to autobiographical writings, Dante met a girl named Beatrice Portinari when he was still a child, and he loved her long before he was settled into an arranged marriage with a woman named Gemma Donati, with whom he had several children. As a young man, Dante fought for the Guelphs at the battle of Campaldino in 1289. After the Guelph victory, Dante seems to have taken at least a modest role in Florentine politics. In 1302, as a member of the offshoot known as the White Guelphs, Dante was exiled from Florence, after which he wandered Europe and Italy for a number of years. His interest in poetry and philosophy appears to have deepened as he stepped away from political life, although the exile was always painful for him. It's unknown where Dante was educated, but his writings reveal that he was familiar with the Tuscan and Provençal poetry traditions as well as classical writings. Dante's lifelong love for Beatrice from afar (she died in 1290) also reflects the medieval poetic theme of courtly love, which Dante incorporated into his own literary style (which he called the *dolce stil novo*, or sweet new style). Dante died in Ravenna not long after finishing *Paradiso*, the last volume of *The Divine Comedy*.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

During Dante's lifetime, Italy wasn't a unified nation as it's known today. It was divided into feuding cities and factions—among these were the Guelphs and Ghibellines, whose rivalry features indirectly throughout *The Divine Comedy*. The conflict between these two factions was a contest between the power of the Roman Catholic papacy and the Holy Roman Empire, respectively. Dante's family was affiliated with the Guelphs. After the defeat of the Ghibellines, the Guelphs further divided into two factions called the White Guelphs and Black Guelphs. This division mainly centered on the role of the papacy in Florence, with the Black Guelphs more supportive of the Pope (Boniface VIII, at the time) and the White Guelphs desiring greater political freedom from the papacy. After serving as a White Guelph delegate during Pope Boniface VIII's occupation of Florence, Dante was fined and exiled by the invading Black Guelphs, under threat of execution if he stayed. He never returned to his home city.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The theology of Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologica*, which was completed just before Dante's lifetime and remains a fundamental Roman Catholic theological text to the present day, pervades *The Divine Comedy*. In fact, *The Divine Comedy* has been called "the Summa in verse." Dante also wrote *La Vita Nuova* ("The New Life"), a collection of sonnets, songs, and prose commentary, which also contains the story of his love for the real-life Beatrice. His other works include a work of political philosophy titled *De Monarchia*, and an essay titled *De vulgari eloquentia*, in which he argues that literature written in the vernacular (the language spoken by common people) is just as noble as literature written in Latin (the language used by scholars and the clergy). Virgil's epic poem *The Aeneid* (written 29–19 B.C.E.), an epic poem giving a legendary history of Rome, was a great influence on Dante's poetry as well and explains why Virgil himself crops up in *The Divine Comedy*.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Purgatorio
- **When Written:** Entire *Divine Comedy* written c. 1308–1320; *Purgatorio* likely written by 1319
- **Where Written:** Italy
- **Literary Period:** Medieval
- **Genre:** Narrative Epic Poem; Christian Allegorical Fiction
- **Setting:** Purgatory (envisioned as a mountain in the Southern Hemisphere), Easter Sunday through Wednesday, 1300
- **Climax:** Dante sees Beatrice in the Earthly Paradise.
- **Antagonist:** Human Sin
- **Point of View:** First Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Tuscan Triumph. *The Divine Comedy* was written in a Florentine dialect of Tuscan language. Thanks to the cultural influence of the poem, Tuscan, in turn, became the basis of standard Italian as it is spoken today.

Poetic Pioneer. In *The Divine Comedy*, Dante pioneered a poetic rhyme scheme called *terza rima*, which consists of three-line stanzas, each line with 11 syllables apiece. The three-line structure is probably meant to reflect the Holy Trinity.

PLOT SUMMARY

Dante, having just emerged from his journey through Hell, arrives in Purgatory at dawn on Easter Sunday. With Virgil, his

guide through the afterlife, he meets the soul of Cato, a pagan political leader who died in the first century B.C.E. Cato grants the two men entrance into Purgatory, and in preparation for the **journey**, Virgil cleanses Dante's tear-stained face with dew and girds him with a reed belt, a symbol of humility.

Dante and Virgil watch a ship filled with **singing** souls arrive in Purgatory. Among them is an old friend of Dante's, Casella, who sings a song to soothe his weariness. Soon, Cato returns and scolds the enthralled souls for lingering—it's time for everyone to get on with their journey.

On the lowest terraces of Mount Purgatory, Dante and Virgil talk with some repentant excommunicate souls; souls who simply delayed repentance for their earthly sins until the last moment; and others who, because they died violently, had no opportunity to repent. All of these souls either willfully separated themselves from the Catholic Church while living or failed to attend to their spiritual condition in a timely manner. Because of this, these souls must patiently wait for long years in Purgatory before starting their penitential climb.

As Virgil and Dante continue their climb, they encounter Sordello, an Italian poet who lived a little before Dante's time. Sordello questions Virgil, his literary hero, about life in Limbo, which is the level of Hell where virtuous yet unbaptized people dwell. He also explains the nighttime law of Purgatory, whereby no one can climb in the sun's absence.

The next morning, Dante awakens to find that he has been carried to Purgatory's gate; he and Virgil are then admitted by an angel. Before letting them in, the angel marks seven "P"s on Dante's forehead with the point of his sword; the "P"s stand for the seven capital sins that souls in Purgatory strive to cleanse. The scars will be erased from Dante's forehead as he progresses through Purgatory.

On the first level of Purgatory proper, Dante sees souls doing penance for the sin of pride. Marble carvings represent pride's opposing virtue, humility. The penitential souls bear heavy rocks that drag them earthward. They pray the Our Father, emphasizing their submission to God's will and praying for those souls still on earth. After Dante and Virgil complete their journey through this level, an angel erases the first of the seven "P"s from Dante's brow, and Dante notices that his steps are already growing lighter.

On the next level, Dante finds souls wearing sackcloth. Their eyes are sewn shut with wires, because they are doing penance for envy and accordingly must learn the virtue of generosity. On this level, Dante criticizes Italians' capacity for self-seeking corruption. Before they progress to the next level, Virgil offers a discourse on love, explaining that sharing should increase people's joy, not detract from it.

Next, Dante encounters souls who were wrathful and are now being purged by the virtue of meekness. These souls do penance by fighting through an all-enveloping cloud of smoke. Dante meets a man named Marco Lombardo, who talks with Dante about the cause of human sin. Lombardo rejects the notion that human behavior is solely governed by external influences (the "**stars**"), explaining that humans are also given the gift of rational discernment and free will to choose between good and bad. Lombardo also says that, ideally, good governance helps curb people's behavior, but that earthly and church power have become entangled, resulting in corruption.

As they halt their climb that night, Virgil explains that sin ultimately derives from distortions of love. In particular, people sin when their love is wrongly aimed (as in the case of pride, envy, and wrath), when their love lacks vigor (sloth), and when their love is *too* vigorous (avarice, gluttony, and lust). Virgil further explains that love is drawn by something external to a human being, and that a person's free will enables him or her to distinguish between greater and lesser loves and to direct desire accordingly.

Next, Dante arrives on the level where sloth is purged. Running souls urge one another onward in greater haste and zeal to make up for their former idleness. Before he and Virgil progress higher, Dante dreams of a siren, a symbol of the projection of desire (the siren is ugly, yet the projection of the malformed will makes her appear attractive).

Reaching the upper levels of Purgatory, Dante finds souls stretched prostrate on the ground. One of these is a former pope, Adrian, who explains that he is doing penance for avarice, or greed—during life, he failed to look heavenward, so in Purgatory, he and his fellow penitents remain bound to the earth.

As they continue their climb, Dante and Virgil are startled by a sudden earthquake. The soul of the ancient poet Statius catches up with them and explains that the tremor signaled his own release from Purgatory—his will has finally been cleansed and freed to desire Heaven. He accompanies the pair for the remainder of their journey.

Statius, Virgil, and Dante next visit the level of Purgatory devoted to gluttony, where souls are emaciated from fasting. Dante's old friend Forese explains that the fruit and water in Purgatory aren't quenching or satiating; instead, they elicit constant yearning in these souls as they're taught to hunger and thirst for God. These souls' starved appearance prompts Dante to ask Virgil how souls, which don't require physical sustenance, can become so thin. Statius then delivers a philosophical discourse on the formation of the body in the womb, God's creation of individual souls, and the connection between these souls and the spiritual bodies visible in Purgatory.

On the highest level of upper Purgatory, souls are being purified for lust—they must pass through fire. In fact, *all* souls must pass through this cleansing fire in order to exit Purgatory. Though Dante is frightened, Virgil reassures him that the fire

won't harm him. Virgil also declares that, having brought Dante this far, he won't lead Dante astray now, when his beloved Beatrice—whose prayers made this journey possible—is so near. When they successfully pass through the flames, Dante, Virgil, and Statius settle down for their last night together in Purgatory, and Dante dreams of the biblical Rachel and Leah in an allegory of the practical and spiritually contemplative lifestyles. The next morning, Virgil announces that Dante no longer needs his guidance—Dante's cleansed and renewed free will is now capable of leading him heavenward.

Dante ascends a stairway and enters a beautiful forest. On the opposite bank of a brook, a woman named Matilda is singing. Matilda explains that Dante is in the Earthly Paradise, or the Garden of Eden, in which human beings were originally created and lived in innocence. Matilda leads Dante through the forest and shows him an elaborate pageant, in which white-robed figures sing and marvelous winged creatures surround a chariot, which is drawn by a gryphon. Seven figures, variously described as nymphs, ladies, Virtues, and Graces, dance along. Seven elders (the authors of the New Testament), garlanded with flowers, follow.

This procession stops in front of Dante, and he trembles at the sight of a magnificent veiled lady—Beatrice, who has always symbolized God's love to Dante. Undone by Beatrice's stern glance, Dante begins to weep. Beatrice explains to the watching angels that, during their earthly lives, Dante followed Beatrice on the path to holiness. After she died, however, Dante wandered into sin, and Beatrice arranged for Dante's journey through the afterlife as a last resort to summon him back to goodness. Tearfully, Dante confesses that Beatrice is right and, overcome by her reproof, he faints.

Matilda draws Dante into the stream, whose waters wash away Dante's memories of his sin. Then the dancing ladies lead him to Beatrice, in whose eyes the gryphon is reflected, alternately as eagle and as lion, symbolizing Christ's divine and human natures. The procession makes its way to a bare tree—the one whose fruit tempted Adam to fall—and the Gryphon attaches the pole of Beatrice's chariot to it, which causes the tree to burst into new blossom.

Beatrice later shows Dante a vision of the Church's fate, in which an eagle (symbolizing empire), a fox (heresy), and a dragon (the devil) persecute and damage the Church. In turn, a whore (symbolizing the corrupt papacy) and a giant (worldly power) represent the unholy union of earthly and spiritual power that has plagued the Church in recent centuries. Beatrice prophesies that a ruler is coming who will purify the Church; she tells Dante to write down what he's seen to warn and encourage those still living on earth. Matilda then draws Dante into the river Eunoe, whose sweet waters restore his memory of the past. Dante is renewed and "prepared to rise towards the stars," towards Heaven.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Dante – Dante Alighieri, a citizen of 13th- and 14th-century Florence, Italy, is the poet and author of *The Divine Comedy* and the protagonist of *Purgatorio*. After journeying through Hell in *Inferno*, Dante the pilgrim now travels through Purgatory with Virgil, his guide. As Dante travels through Purgatory, his shadow frequently attracts attention from the penitent souls he encounters, because his shadow indicates that, unlike the souls, Dante is alive. As a character, Dante is inquisitive, ardent, and emotional. He is passionately devoted to Beatrice, a woman he's loved from afar since childhood. Indeed, it was Beatrice's prayers that initiated Dante's **journey** and whose beauty draws him constantly upward as he travels through Hell and Purgatory and finally reaches Heaven. He also frequently looks to his beloved father figure, Virgil, for guidance and reassurance. As he works his way through Purgatory, Dante enjoys meeting and questioning the souls of people he knew personally or has heard of. These meetings, frequently marked by tears of pity and even humorous exchanges, form much of the drama of Dante's journey and also illustrate the nature of the soul's purging of sin. These conversations reveal that Dante is fervently opposed to the political corruption of the Catholic Church of his day and of Italian politics. When Dante attains the Earthly Paradise at Purgatory's summit, he is overcome by the sight of Beatrice, as well as her condemnation of his earthly sins. He confesses his sinfulness and, after witnessing allegorical pageants depicting the history, corruption, and hope of the Church, and then bathing in a river, is prepared to continue his journey to Heaven.

Virgil – Virgil, a poet of the first century B.C.E., accompanies Dante through Purgatory as a guide, leader, and father figure. Virgil is wise, patient, and loving, though he can also be stern, warning Dante not to waste precious time on his **journey**. Because Virgil is not a Christian (he lived before Christ was born), yet is regarded as virtuous, he resides in the relatively benign section of Hell known as Limbo and is given special leave to enter Purgatory, though he cannot accompany Dante beyond it. Throughout the journey, Virgil delivers discourses on the nature of love and sin, which illuminate Dante's understanding of what he witnesses in Purgatory as well as Dante's own spiritual journey towards God. During the journey through Purgatory, several souls of poets, like Sordello and Statius, are in awe of the chance to meet Virgil, their literary hero. Indeed, Virgil's epic poem *The Aeneid* greatly inspire Dante's own writing.

Beatrice – In life, the historical Beatrice Portinari caught Dante's eye when he was just a young boy, and he has loved her from afar ever since. In the poem, Dante describes their relationship, noting how Beatrice kept Dante on a path of

holiness during their youth, but when she died, he strayed into a sinful lifestyle. From Heaven, Beatrice implored Virgil to guide Dante through the afterlife as a warning of his possible fate. In Dante's view, Beatrice symbolizes the love of God in union with the human soul; as such, she is the ultimate unattainable lady, as conceived by the medieval poetic tradition of courtly love. When Dante finally encounters Beatrice in the Earthly Paradise, she is at the center of an elaborate procession attended by both biblical figures and mythical beings. Beatrice is veiled and speaks to Dante sternly, scolding him for straying into sin after her death. Her direct gaze, aloofness, and beauty plunges Dante into remorse and weeping. Beatrice shows Dante a vision depicting the Church's earthly corruption and prophesies that a leader will purify and free the Church, charging him to take this message back to the world with him.

Statius – Dante and Virgil meet Statius, a poet of the first century C.E., as they're leaving the level of Purgatory where covetousness is purged. Because Statius has just been released from Purgatory for Heaven, he's able to guide the other two through the upper levels. Dante describes Statius as a Christian who concealed his faith and also spent money too freely, sins for which he did centuries of penance in Purgatory. Like Dante, Statius's poetry was inspired by Virgil, and Statius is thrilled to meet his literary hero in the afterlife. In *Canto* 25, Statius delivers a discourse on the nature of body and soul.

Cato – Cato was a Roman political figure of the first century B.C.E. He fought against Julius Caesar in battle and, rather than compromise his principles by coming to an agreement with his enemies, he committed suicide. Thus, in ancient Roman culture, Cato was regarded as an exemplar of admirable Stoic principles. In *Purgatorio*, Dante casts Cato as the guardian of the entrance to Purgatory, suggesting that, as a non-Christian, Cato wasn't held accountable to Christian beliefs against suicide. Cato urges loitering souls to get on with their purgatorial **journey**.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Casella – Casella is a musician friend of Dante's. He sings him a soothing song upon arriving in Purgatory.

Sordello – A 13th-century Italian poet, Sordello becomes Dante's and Virgil's guide through the earlier levels of Purgatory.

Manfred – During his lifetime, Manfred was an Italian ruler who was excommunicated from the Church but repented just before death. Now, he must wait for centuries on Purgatory's lowest terrace before undertaking further penance.

Belacqua – Belacqua is a lazy Florentine friend of Dante's who delayed repentance until the end of his life.

Jacopo del Cassero – Jacopo del Cassero is a fellow Guelph soldier whom Dante meets on the lower terraces of Purgatory.

Buonconte de Montefeltro – Buonconte de Montefeltro is a Ghibelline soldier whom Dante meets on the lower terraces of Purgatory.

La Pia – La Pia is a noblewoman whom Dante meets on the lower terraces of Purgatory; she was murdered by her husband and had no chance to repent of her sins before death.

Lucia – Lucia, or St. Lucy, first appeared in *Inferno*, warning Beatrice of Dante's sinful plight. She carries a sleeping Dante to Purgatory's gate.

Omberto Aldobrandesco – Omberto Aldobrandesco is offspring of a noble Tuscan lineage, who is doing penance for his earthly pride.

Oderisi – Oderisi is a talented manuscript artist who is doing penance for his earthly pride.

Provenzan – In life, Provenzan was a despotic Ghibelline ruler and is now doing penance for his earthly pride.

Sapia – Sapia is a woman who's doing penance for envy because she took delight in others' misfortunes on earth.

del Duca – del Duca is an Italian who's doing penance for envy, and who offers a lengthy diatribe on Italy's corruption.

Marco Lombardo – Marco Lambardo's soul inhabits the wrathful level of Purgatory. He discusses the nature of free will with Dante. Lombardo explains that, although people tend to blame human behavior on the **stars** (natural influences), humans also possess the gifts of rational discernment and free will.

Pope Adrian – Adrian is a 13th-century pope who's doing penance for avarice because he cared too much about accumulating earthly power during his brief reign.

Hugh Capet – Progenitor of the French line of Capetian kings, Hugh Capet now does penance for avarice. He laments his descendants' devastating effect on Europe due to greed and cruelty.

Forese – Forese was an earthly friend of Dante's whom Dante sees on the gluttonous level of Purgatory.

Bonagiunta of Lucca – Bonagiunta of Lucca was a hard-drinking poet of the 13th century. Dante encounters him doing penance for gluttony.

Guido Guinizelli – Guido Guinizelli is a poet doing penance for lust.

Arnaut Daniel – Arnaut Daniel is a poet doing penance for lust.

Matilda / The Lady – Matilda is a mysterious, joyful lady and Beatrice's companion. Dante encounters her in the Earthly Paradise. She submerges Dante in the stream called Lethe to erase his memories of sin, and later she submerges him in the river Eunoe to restore his cleansed memories.

Gryphon – The gryphon is a half-eagle, half-lion creature who draws Beatrice's chariot in the Earthly Paradise. The gryphon's

dual nature reflects Christ's human and divine natures.

The Four Virtues – The Four Virtues are four dancing ladies in the Earthly Paradise, symbolizing the virtues of prudence, temperance, justice, and fortitude.

The Three Graces – Like the Four Virtues, the Three Graces are dancing ladies in the Earthly Paradise. They symbolize the Christian graces of faith, hope, and love.

THEMES

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PURGATORY AND THE HEAVENWARD JOURNEY

Purgatorio, the second part of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, describes the poet's vision of journeying through Purgatory, the place where Christian souls (though destined for Heaven) are cleansed of the sins they committed during their earthly lives. The logic of Purgatory, according to medieval Roman Catholic doctrine, was that after souls were cleansed of the guilt of original (inherited) sin through baptism, they still had to purge the *effects* of sins committed throughout life. This was the path to making restitution for one's sins in order to be sufficiently purified to enter Heaven. The big difference between the souls described in Dante's *Inferno* (the first part of the *Divine Comedy*) and those in *Purgatorio*, in other words, is that souls in Hell never repented of their sins or turned toward God. Those in Purgatory *are* repentant, and their desires are oriented toward God, but they still have to be prepared to enter God's perfect presence. Through his allegorical portrayal of Purgatory as a **journey** through which souls undertake penances specific to their sins, Dante suggests that the soul's progress toward God is not primarily a punitive one, but a journey aimed at healing and purifying the soul.

Purgatory's punishments are specifically suited to cleanse particular sins. For example, the sinners categorized as gluttonous (who had an excessive appetite for food and drink during their earthly lives), are denied of enticing-smelling of fruit: "And all these people, weeping as they **sing**, / because their gullets led them past all norms / are here remade as holy, thirsting, hungering. / Cravings to eat and drink are fired in us / By perfumes from that fruit and from the spray [.]" In other words, the hunger and thirst the souls endure in Purgatory is not punishment for its own sake; rather, the "craving" is intended to bring about something good: purging *excessive* desire. This teaches these souls to restrain desire to an appropriate level so that, someday, desire for God will overshadow every other appetite. In a similar way, souls guilty of lust, while hurrying through the purifying fires of Purgatory's highest level, stop to embrace one another fleetingly. Dante sees "the shadows kiss / [...] each one content to keep the frolic brief." This passage suggests that it's not the expression of love (even physically) that's sinful, in and of itself; rather, expressing love to an immoderate degree stains the soul. In Purgatory, souls learn and practice appropriately restrained, "brief" expressions of love, thereby purging the excesses in which they indulged during life.

Another aspect of cleansing in Purgatory is that instead of being turned sinfully inward, souls are turned *outward* in repentance, open to others and ultimately to divine love. In Hell, souls are oblivious to all but their own torment. In Purgatory, by contrast, souls can both help and be helped by the souls of those still living. For instance, Dante hears the proud souls, after praying for protection from Satan, commenting, "This final prayer is made [...] / not for ourselves (we now have no such need). / We speak for those behind us, who've remained. [...] We surely ought to help them cleanse the marks / that they bore hence [.]" In Purgatory, then, there's a sense of community and shared purpose as souls help one another on the journey toward Heaven. These shared efforts particularly help purge pride from those souls who, during their earthly lives, were primarily focused on their own concerns rather than those of others. Likewise, souls being cleansed in Purgatory are trained to replace other self-regarding sins with attitudes that look beyond themselves. Those being cleansed of envy, Virgil explains, must learn to replace it with the virtue of generosity: "For [...] the more that we can speak of 'Ours', / the more each one possesses of the good / and [...] [charity] burns brighter." As self-centered desires are replaced with a focus on collective good, love increases. Generosity, in turn, reflects the "infinite" and "lavish" love of God toward which *all* sinners in Purgatory are learning to orient themselves.

Interestingly, it's only after Dante has reached the summit of Mount Purgatory, progressing through all the stages of purgation (spiritual cleansing), that he fully realizes the enormity of his own sin. After encountering his beloved Beatrice (who symbolizes pure love) face to face, Dante weeps over his former satisfaction with "Mere things of here and now / and their false pleasures." For Dante, Beatrice symbolizes the highest of loves—love for God—and the soul's union with God. His weeping before Beatrice shows, again, that purgation isn't intended just for punishment's sake. Rather, it's meant to prepare the soul to recognize and desire God's love. This, in Dante's view, is what makes Heaven such an infinitely desirable place to begin with—well worth the journey of suffering.

LOVE, SIN, AND GOD

A key to understanding Dante's perspective in *Purgatorio* is that, in his view, all sins are in some

way a distortion of love. If a soul contained nothing of love, it would never have reached Purgatory (the part of the afterlife where Christian souls are cleansed of sin) to begin with. But before reaching Heaven, a person's capacity for love must be purified, stirred up, or redirected so that it's rightly aimed toward God. Whether one arrives in Purgatory suffering from a perverted form of love, too little love for God, or an excessive amount of love for those things which are beneath God (who is the ultimate object of love), there is a remedy to be found for these imbalances in Purgatory. By portraying all sin as being derived from love in some way, Dante argues that every human soul is designed to love God. Sin, he believes, occurs when one's love is corrupted, obscured, or misdirected.

All sins are, in some way, founded upon an imbalance or misdirection of love. As Virgil explains to Dante, there are two kinds of love in a human being: "natural" love and "mind-love," or the love that exists in the mind. "Natural" love "can never go astray"—in other words, it is essentially instinctual and, as such, it can't be held responsible for human misdeeds. "Mind-love," on the other hand, is directed by the human will—it is rational in a way that "natural" love is not. This rationally-directed love is the main concern in Purgatory. Virgil explains that this second form of love "may err when wrongly aimed, / or else through too much vigour or the lack." In summary, the mind's love—or rational, willed love—can go astray in one of three different ways: perverted love (in which a person can aims their love wrongly), excessive love (in which a person loves overzealously), or defective love (in which a person's love is lacking).

Purgatory is designed to correct the various sinful corruptions of mind-love. The entire geography of Purgatory, in fact, reflects the ways in which mind-love can go wrong. The three lowest levels are where love of "neighbors' harm," or wrongly-aimed love, is purged. Such love takes the forms of pride, envy, and wrath. These twisted forms of love mistakenly promote *self*-love by attempting to wrest others' glory for oneself, resenting others' success, or even seeking revenge on others. Such love isn't true self-love, though, because it does harm to the self as it does to others. Next comes the level on which love "which runs, in broken order, after good"—or what's called "sloth"— is punished. As Virgil explains, "We all, confusedly, conceive a good, / desiring that our hearts may rest in that. […] If love is slack in drawing you to view—or win—that good," then repentance in purgatory is needed. In other words, a soul that is heading in the right direction—desiring to direct one's heart toward God—but is insufficiently committed or zealous toward that end, must be spurred to greater energy in pursuit of that ultimate good. Finally, "love that gives itself too much" to anything short of "that good source of being, seed and flower of all that's good" (i.e., love that's excessively directed toward anything lower than God) is purged on the upper levels of Purgatory. Namely, this includes the sins of covetousness, greed, and lust. It's worth noting that, contrary to what one might expect, a sin like lust is nearer the summit of Mount Purgatory than, say, pride or sloth. This is because lust is an excessive love of a secondary good (i.e., something that's genuinely good, but less so than the God, the divine Source of goodness). A sin like wrath, on the other hand—which perverts love in that it actively seeks others' harm—is dealt with near the base of the Mount. In other words, while lust is certainly considered a sin in Purgatory, there's a sense in which it's closer to genuine love than something that specifically hurts another person.

Ultimately, every soul must past through the purifying fire near the summit of Mount Purgatory. While this fire is the specific penance appointed to those guilty of lust, it's needed by every soul as a final cleansing to prepare a person to encounter the ultimate desire and goal of all love—that is, God.

FREE WILL

A recurrent subject in *Purgatorio* is the role of the human will in sin. Dante doesn't assume that his readers will understand this notion: by including a discussion of the subject between himself and Virgil, he suggests that attributing human sin to "the **stars**," or to nature, was not uncommon in his day. Early in the poem, however, Virgil rejects the idea that nature, or any form of abstract determinism (the idea that human actions are determined by something *outside* of the human will), can be blamed for sin. While natural inclination can certainly be a factor, human beings are endowed with a rational will and therefore with the ability to fight against their inclinations and to pursue holiness instead of sin. Not only can people choose to reject sin—proper spiritual alignment can also train a person to actively desire goodness. By showing how human beings can be trained not only to reject sin and desire Heaven but to *choose* Heaven for themselves, Dante argues that human will is a gift that operates most freely when it is closely aligned with God's will.

Dante characterizes sin as a matter of free will rather than something predetermined. Early in their journey, Dante asks Virgil to explain how human sin came about—because of nature or because of human will? It's a debated subject, after all: "Some place the cause in stars, some here below." Virgil quickly dismisses the idea that the problem of sin can simply be assigned to nature, saying, "You, living there, derive the cause of all / straight from the stars alone, as if, alone, / these made all move in mere necessity." It's worth noting that in referring to the "necessity" of the "stars," Virgil isn't speaking simply of astrology or superstition but of the idea that human beings are naturally disposed to behave in certain ways. "Yet were that so," Virgil goes on, "in you would be destroyed / the freedom of your will—and justice fail / in giving good its joy and grief its ill." In other words, if people just behaved as nature predisposed them to do, then it wouldn't be just for people to be either

rewarded or punished for their behaviors. Virgil doesn't deny that "the stars initiate" human behaviors, but he believes that God gives human beings the rational ability to distinguish between right and wrong and to choose to act accordingly: "and free will, too, which if it can endure / beyond its early battles with the stars, / and if it's nourished well, will conquer all." From this, Virgil concludes, "So if the present world has gone astray, / the reason lies in you[.]" A soul that's received proper spiritual "nourishment" is equipped to fight against their sinful nature and toward a fully purified will—which, after all, is the goal of Purgatory (the place where human sin is purged before souls proceed to Heaven).

The entire point of Purgatory is the transformation of human will that's been corrupted by sin. That way, unfettered by its formerly corrupt desires, the soul freely desires God's presence in Heaven. As a newly-cleansed soul explains it to Dante, when a soul is fully purged, it isn't *granted* release from Purgatory, it *chooses* it: "The will alone gives proof of purity / when, wholly free to change its sacred place, / it aids and sweeps the soul up, willing well [...] And I, who've lain five hundred years and more / in that same pain, have only felt just now / the freedom of the better way ahead." By the time a soul finishes its time in Purgatory, the will is so transformed that it's able to fully and freely desire Heaven instead of its once-cherished sin. Dante experiences this himself when, just before ascending the summit of Mount Purgatory and encountering his beloved Beatrice, he is exhorted by Virgil: "Now take what pleases you to be your guide [...] No longer look to me for signs or word. / Your will is healthy, upright, free and whole. / And not to heed that sense would be a fault. / Lord of yourself, I crown and mitre you." Dante, in other words, no longer needs Virgil's guidance because his own free will is now sufficiently purified to serve as his guide. In fact, Virgil can even say that "what pleases you" is now Dante's guide, because Dante's desires are transformed such that he wants exactly what he *should* want: Heaven. Virgil can grant Dante the symbolic "mitre" and "crown," suggesting that now, he needs to rely neither on churchly nor civil leaders to restrain and guide his will. His fully matured, free, and cleansed will is now capable of leading him heavenward.

SPIRITUAL POWER VS. EARTHLY POWER

One of the more challenging aspects of *Purgatorio* is that the poem is replete with figures from Dante's native Florence, Italy—both historical figures and people that Dante himself knew. While most of these figures remain obscure to modern readers, they provide real-world examples of how pervasive sin is and how necessary purgation (cleansing from sin) is for corrupt individuals and societies. In other words, though allegorical, *Purgatorio* was certainly intended as a contemporary critique. This is especially true when Dante attacks leaders of the church of his day. By portraying church leaders as sinners susceptible to worldly corruptions, Dante argues that his society blended spiritual authority with earthly power in ways that tended to harm everyday people—even eternally.

In his discussion of humanity's inborn inclination to sin, Dante also highlights government as a necessary force to restrain human misbehavior. However, he's well aware that earthly power—made up as it is by human rulers—is not infallible. Even the papacy, the rulers of the Catholic Church, are flawed. Marco Lombardo (a 13th-century Venetian whose soul Dante encounters in Purgatory) discusses the ideal ruler, who helps point sinful people heavenward. Because of sin, humanity needs "law [...] to apply this brake, / A king is needed, with the skill to see / the towers of that true city[.]" By "that true city," Marco means that earthly leaders should submit to God's eternal rule and guide people accordingly. However, in practice, this seldom happens. In fact, spiritual rulers fail just as political ones do—and often, they fail because they conflate their spiritual duties with earthly ones. Marco goes on, "The laws are there. Who sets his hand to these? / There's no one. For the shepherd out ahead, / though he can chew the cud / has not split hooves." This imagery refers to an allegorical interpretation of the Old Testament Book of Leviticus, particularly the Israelite priests' responsibility to distinguish between clean and unclean animals. In short, Dante uses the image of the "shepherd" who "has not split hooves" to refer to a church hierarchy that doesn't sufficiently distinguish between spiritual power and worldly power. The result is that, when the people see that their shepherds are mainly concerned about the world's goods, they cannot be expected to aim any higher themselves: "So—as you may well see—bad government / is why the world is so malignant now." If those who are meant to guide others' souls cannot stay spiritually focused, how can their flocks be solely blamed?

Dante even uses the 13th-century Pope Adrian as his primary example of the sin of covetousness—in Adrian's case, a sin taking the specific form of ambition. He portrays Adrian as a Pope who become so enamored of earthly power that he seldom looked heavenward. Now, Adrian must spend time in Purgatory (the place where sins are cleansed before souls are admitted to Heaven) lying prone in the dust, *unable* to look to Heaven ("Because our eyes were fixed on earthly things, / at no point raised to look towards the heights, / so justice sinks them here within the earth"). Far from being immune to earthly sins, even popes are prime examples of them—and they're perhaps especially susceptible to them, Dante suggests. Even more jarringly, near the end of *Purgatorio*, Dante describes the papacy in general as a "vixen" lusting madly for earthly power.

Part of a faction known as the White Guelphs, which favored Florentine independence from papal rule, Dante suffered exile for his political beliefs—so writing about them in the *Divine Comedy* was a high-stakes move for him. He doesn't refrain

from naming names of real-life figures with whom his readers would surely have been familiar. By far Dante's biggest complaint, though, is that the spiritual rulers of his day, by going astray themselves, endanger the souls of those they're meant to serve. He believes that by mixing political ambition with spiritual leadership, the church hierarchy fails in its duty guide humanity. Instead, it models an unholy preoccupation with earthly rewards, which ensnares vulnerable souls all the more.

TIME

In one sense, the souls in Purgatory (the place where souls are cleansed of their sin) have all the time in the world. Having made it to Purgatory, these souls are guaranteed to attain Heaven sooner or later—it's just a matter of how quickly they progress through the various levels of purification on Mount Purgatory. Yet the poem is suffused with a sense of urgency: even as time in Purgatory seems to correspond in some way to earthly time, it must be used in a more spiritually focused and efficient manner than time is used during one's bodily life. This doesn't just apply to souls in Purgatory, however; it's also meant to remind Dante's earthly audience that they should spur themselves to a more spiritually effective use of their lives, so that they will not need to languish in Purgatory (or at least not for very long). By sprinkling in frequent reminders of the pressing nature of time and providing examples of a sinful squandering of time, Dante urges readers to fight against their sins *before* the afterlife, while they have earthly time at their disposal, so that they might shorten their time spent in Purgatory.

Dante finds that Purgatory is a place where time is a constantly pressing concern. He is constantly aware of the passage of time throughout the poem—many cantos begin with Dante observing what time it is by observing the sky. For instance, near the beginning of Canto 15, Dante observes, "As much time [...] / remained, it seemed—till evening—for the sun / to travel and complete its onward way. / There it was vespers (midnight in our clime)." In this case, as elsewhere in the poem, Dante pays particular attention to time not just in Purgatory (where his character currently is in the poem), but in Italy, the site of the author's home and his contemporary audience. Not only that, he's also conscious of Catholic Church time—"vespers" refers to the Church's daily cycle of prayer. In addition, Dante keeps track of the Church's annual cycle of feasts—he arrives on the shores of Purgatory just before dawn on Easter Sunday and ascends to Heaven on the following Wednesday. This shows that he's aware that time in the afterlife encroaches on earthly time and vice versa—the two are deeply connected.

Because souls in Purgatory are frequently urged to spend their time wisely (so they can reach Heaven more quickly), Dante implies that people on Earth should similarly stir up their desire to reach Heaven and beware of spending their limited earthly time too idly. Purgatory isn't a place to pass the time in passive contemplation, much less empty voyeurism. Dante relates that when he pauses to take in the scenery of Purgatory, Virgil rebukes him: "'Dear son,' he said, / 'do come along. The time appointed us / should be more usefully divided out.'" Time in Purgatory is meant to be used toward a specific purpose—that is, making up for one's earthly sins. Therefore, any time idly spent is detracting from time that could be spent in Heaven.

Because their specific sin is being too lazy in their striving for God, the slothful souls in Purgatory exemplify the need for a holy use of time. There is an entire level of Purgatory devoted to the sin of sloth (laziness or irresponsibility). "For they moved at speed," Dante describes, "racing towards us, that great multitude"—making up for time spent dawdling on Earth. Part of the penance of the slothful also consists in recalling occasions when pious haste was warranted, such as when "Maria hastened up to Juda's hill" (referring to the Virgin Mary's eager visit to her cousin, Elizabeth, after she learned of her pregnancy with Jesus). As they run, the penitents spur one another on with reminders of the importance of haste: "Quick! Quick! Let's lose no time through lack of love! [...] You people, whose keen fervour now repays / some negligence or else delay of yours, / through tepidness in acting for the good [.]" The words "through lack of love" highlight the fact that the worst kind of sloth is when a soul is lukewarm in their devotion to God, as this results in wasting the time allotted to pursue God during life. The purging of the sin therefore consists of cultivating the haste, greater love, and corresponding good works that one failed to do during life. Had the soul made good use of time earlier, they might already have been enjoying the peace of eternity rather than undergoing this cleansing in Purgatory.

By making frequent references to both earthly and eternal timeframes, Dante repeatedly draws his audience's attention back to their own use of time. An eternal afterlife may seem distant and inaccessible, but Dante's allegory portrays eternity as a state in which human beings participate (in some sense) even as they live on Earth—and thus, they're accountable for using the present time in the best way possible.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

STARS

Throughout *Purgatorio*, stars symbolize the light of God's grace. In particular, the stars symbolize different virtues that are reflective of good, godly behavior. At the beginning of the poem, four stars hang in sky. They represent the "cardinal" or "natural" Virtues of justice, prudence, temperance, and fortitude—virtues that were believed to be attainable by non-Christians and Christians

alike. As Canto 8 draws to a close, Dante notices that these four stars have set, and three new stars have risen in their place. These three stars represent the "theological" virtues (or Graces) of faith, hope, and love, which are instilled and strengthened by means of the Church and its sacraments. While these three virtues are attainable only by Christians, all seven of these virtues are vehicles for God's grace—in other words, like a star, God "shines" through the person who demonstrates these virtues.

In the poem, stars also represent Heaven, playing on the long-held association between the skies and the heavens. At the end of the *Purgatorio*, having now journeyed through Hell and Purgatory, Dante prepares to enter Heaven, or Paradise (as chronicled in Dante's *Paradiso*). To restore Dante's memories of his past sin without shame, Matilda leads him to the river Eunoe. After drinking from its sweet waters, Dante feels "remade […] pure and prepared to rise towards the stars." Now that he's made it through Purgatory, grappled with his past sins, and been cleansed of those sins, Dante is ready to "rise towards the stars," meaning that he's now pure and wise enough to enter Heaven. But given the explicit association earlier in the poem between stars and virtues, it also seems that Dante, having now been thoroughly educated, cleansed, and renewed throughout his journey in both Hell and Purgatory, is "prepared to rise towards the stars" in the sense that he can now fully embody all of the godly virtues outlined earlier in the poem, like justice, hope, and love.

Alternately, "the stars" sometimes symbolize the role nature plays in influencing human behavior—something that God-given free will is meant to overcome. In the poem, Dante questions where sin first came from. Some people believe that sin came from nature, while others believe that sin arose out of humankind's free will: "Some place the cause in the stars, some here below." Lombardo, a soul in Purgatory, explains, "the stars initiate" human behaviors—that is, to some extent, humans are naturally predisposed to behave in certain ways—but this isn't the full story. Lombardo argues that God imbued humans with the ability to discern right from wrong and then choose accordingly, which is also known as free will. So while "the stars" perhaps explain some human behaviors, people also have the capacity to choose sin or reject it.

JOURNEYS AND CLIMBING

Dante's journey through Purgatory is envisioned as an arduous climb up a mountain, which symbolizes the soul's ascent to God. With this image, Dante doesn't intend to map the literal geography of Purgatory but to instead suggest that transforming from a sinful human being, to a soul being purged of that sin, to a spotless soul worthy of Heaven and being in God's presence is a long and difficult process. However, Dante emphasizes that this journey isn't primarily a harsh, disciplinary one. While climbing a mountain can be arduous and painful, that pain is purposeful—a climber undertakes a grueling climb with the purpose of getting to the top of the mountain, which will be sweet and rewarding and make the climber's struggle worth it. Likewise, one's journey through Purgatory is pain with a purpose, intended not to gratuitously torture the soul but to cleanse and renew them so that they can have the sweet reward of ascending to Heaven, the metaphorical mountain peak. In order to reach God, the soul must be cleansed of the sins they committed on Earth; as the soul is purged of this sin, it becomes perceptibly lighter, and the climb accordingly becomes easier. When a soul is fully cleansed of sin, its will is completely free of the sinful desires that used to keep it from God, and it chooses release from Purgatory. In other words, like a difficult climb, one's journey through Purgatory is painful but also purposeful and rewarding.

MUSIC, SONG, AND SINGING

In *Purgatorio*, singing is communal activity and points to the hope of a common salvation toward which the souls in Purgatory **journey** together. By contrast, the souls in Hell (as described in Dante's *Inferno*) don't sing—devoid of hope for redemption, these souls mostly lament in isolation.

For instance, when Dante encounters the souls in Purgatory who are being purged for gluttony, he notices that the souls are singing even as they cry: "And all these people, weeping as they sing, / because their gullets led them past all norms / are here remade as holy, thirsty hungering. / Cravings to eat and drink are fired in us / By perfumes from that fruit and from the spray [.]" Having overindulged themselves on earth, these souls are now subject to constant longing, as the food and drink they can smell around them only makes them hungrier and thirstier. This is obviously painful—and a clear reminder of their gluttonous, sinful pasts—which is why they're understandably weeping. But their pain is purposeful, meant to cleanse or purge them of their sinfulness so that they're able to ascend to Heaven. It is this hope for their salvation that spurs the souls to sing even in their suffering.

Likewise, newly arriving souls sing a Psalm in unison, and throughout Purgatory, each level has its own Psalm or hymn which penitents sing as part of the soul's cleansing and training in virtue. That the souls in Purgatory sing together activity symbolizes the basic hopefulness that underpins Purgatory, that Heaven is within reach.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin edition of *The Divine Comedy* published in 2013.

Canto 1 Quotes

To race now over better waves, my ship
of mind – alive again – hoists sail, and leaves
behind its little keel the gulf that proved so cruel.

And I'll sing, now, about that second realm
where human spirits purge themselves from stain,
becoming worthy to ascend to Heaven.

Here, too, dead poetry will rise again.
For now, you sacred Muses, I am yours.
So let Calliope, a little, play her part [...]

Related Characters: Dante (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 160

Explanation and Analysis

These are the opening lines of Dante's *Purgatorio*. In the first part of the *Divine Comedy*, *Inferno*, Dante saw defeated souls in Hell, those without hope of Heaven. Now, in Purgatory, the whole tone of the epic poem shifts to one of certain hope ("to race now over better waves [...] dead poetry will rise again").The souls here must spend years or even centuries purging their sins by learning to practice the corresponding virtues. But despite this, these souls know that they will eventually arrive in Heaven. Much as souls suffering in Purgatory must rely on divine grace to help them progress toward Heaven, Dante, too, calls upon a kind of divine aid to help him—the Muses of Greek mythology, of whom Calliope, the muse of eloquence and epic poetry, is the chief. Dante's appeal to the Muses also signals that classical, "pagan" images and sources, the foundation of his literary heritage, will feature as prominently in his poem as Christian ones will—though, as he did in *Inferno*, he will have to find ways of reconciling and balancing these sources with Christian ideas. They form part of the journey toward the perfections of truth and love, which are, in Dante's view, only found in God.

Canto 2 Quotes

Celestial, at the stern, the pilot stood –
beatitude, it seemed, inscribed on him –
and, ranged within, a hundred spirits more.

'*In exitu Israel de Aegypto*':
they sang this all together, in one voice,
with all the psalm that's written after this.

[...]

The crowd that now remained, it seemed, was strange,
astray there, wondering, looking all around,
as people do, assessing what is new.

Related Characters: Dante (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 165

Explanation and Analysis

This quote describes one of Dante's first sights in Purgatory—a ship filled with penitent souls sailing towards it, an angel at the helm. Even before the souls arrive, they sing in anticipation. *In exitu Israel de Aegypto* is the beginning of the text of Psalm 114, "When Israel went out from Egypt." This Psalm refers to the Israelites' departure from enslavement in Egypt, as God parted the Red Sea to aid their escape. Allegorically, then, the Psalm points to the sinners' rescue from slavery to sin by God's grace, which also underscores the point that Purgatory is a place of hopeful heavenward progress, not despair.

Furthermore, singing in unison, as opposed to wailing in isolated agony (as the souls do in Hell), signifies the communion these souls enjoy with one another as members of the Church and the shared salvation toward which they journey together. Nevertheless, it is a challenging journey, disorienting at first, as the group's halting, uncertain arrival suggests.

Canto 3 Quotes

❝ It's madness if we hope that rational minds
should ever follow to its end the road
that one true being in three persons takes.

Content yourselves with *quia*, human kind.
Had you been able to see everything,
Mary need not have laboured to give birth.

You saw the fruitless yearning of those men
who might have had that yearning satisfied,
now given them eternally to mourn.

Plato, I mean, and Aristotle, too, and many more with them.'

Related Characters: Virgil (speaker), Dante

Related Themes:

Page Number: 169

Explanation and Analysis

As Virgil and Dante begin their journey through Purgatory, Dante is puzzled by the fact that Virgil's form casts no shadow, whereas his does. In response, Virgil cautions Dante not to expect to be able to grasp the "why" behind everything he sees using his rational mind. "One true being in three persons" refers to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity—a markedly difficult-to-understand teaching and a good example of something that no human being can presume to fully understand. For a Christian, it's an article of faith that should be accepted, but that doesn't mean a Christian should pry into *why* it's the case. People should be content *that* (the Latin word *quia*) something is true and not pridefully expect that they're capable of understanding God's reasons for everything. If they were, they wouldn't require God to reveal truths to them, like he did through the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. Christians, in particular, should gratefully receive such gracious revelation. Pre-Christian philosophers, like Plato and Aristotle, yearned for such fullness of truth, but it was not granted to them.

Canto 7 Quotes

❝ There is a place down there not grim with pain
but only with sad shades whose deep laments
sound not as screams but melancholy sighs.

I take my place with children – innocents
in whom the bite of death set lethal teeth
before they'd been made free of human sin.

And there I stay with all who were not clothed
in those three holy virtues – though I knew,
and, guiltless, followed all the other four.

Related Characters: Virgil (speaker), Sordello

Related Themes:

Page Number: 189

Explanation and Analysis

As they climb the lower terraces of Purgatory, Dante and Virgil meet the soul of a man named Sordello, a poet, who wants to know more about Virgil's fate in the afterlife. This prompts Virgil to describe conditions in Limbo, a less tormenting section of Hell. Unlike darker regions of Hell described in Dante's *Inferno*, Limbo is a more benign place marked by sadness and the deprivation of God's presence instead of pain and suffering. Virgil lives there with the souls of infants who had not received the sacrament of baptism before dying (through which souls, inheriting Adam's sin, are washed clean, according to Catholic teaching) but who were otherwise innocent, not having committed their own sins. Virgil also lives with other souls like himself who were considered by the Church to be fundamentally virtuous, practicing the so-called natural virtues of justice, prudence, temperance, and fortitude. The reason such souls could not be admitted to Purgatory or Heaven, however, is that they lacked the specifically Christian graces of faith, hope, and charity, which were acquired and practiced over the course of a Christian's life participating in the sacraments of the Church. Virgil's description sums up the medieval Church's view on so-called "virtuous pagans" who didn't have the opportunity to develop holiness in this way but who were nevertheless admired as virtuous.

Canto 11 Quotes

❝ This final prayer is made, O dearest Lord,
not for ourselves (we now have no such need).
We speak for those behind us, who've remained.'

Then praying, for themselves and us, 'God speed',
these shadows made their way beneath such loads
as sometimes in our nightmares can be seen. [...]

We surely ought to help them cleanse the marks
that they bore hence – till, light in weight and pure,
they've power to rise towards the wheeling stars.

Related Characters: Dante (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 207

Explanation and Analysis

This quote describes the prayer of the proud, the sinners occupying the lowest level of Purgatory proper. Each group of penitents in Purgatorio has been assigned a specific prayer that's fitted to the particular sin they're striving to purge. On this level, the prayer of the prideful is the Lord's Prayer—perhaps the most familiar Christian prayer—which is fitting because of its focus throughout on humble dependence on God instead of oneself. As Dante listens to the souls recite this prayer, he notices the commentary they offer on the last section, which asks for protection from Satan. The sinners specify that, having made it to Purgatory, they don't ask for this protection on their own behalf; it seems that Satan can't attack them here, and so they're not susceptible to committing fresh sins. Rather, they're praying for the souls left back on earth who still do need such protection. In shifting the attention off of themselves, Dante suggests, these souls also purge the self-concern that characterized their own lives. He also remarks that living Christians ought to pray for these souls from afar, to help reduce their penitential burden and release them sooner to Heaven.

Canto 12 Quotes

We were, by now, ascending that great stair.
And I, it seemed, was lighter now by far
than I had seemed while still on level ground.

So, 'Tell me, sir,' I said, 'what weight has now
been lifted from me, so I almost feel
no strain at all in walking on my way?'

He answered: 'When the "P"s that mark your brow,
remaining still, though growing now more faint,
have all (as is the first) been sheared away,

your steps will then be conquered by good will
and, being thus impelled towards the heights,
will feel no strain but only sheer delight.'

Related Characters: Virgil, Dante (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 215

Explanation and Analysis

When Dante and Virgil explore Purgatory, the journey is envisioned as a strenuous climb up a mountain, with different sins being cleansed on successively narrower ledges of the mountain. At the beginning of the journey, an angel inscribes seven "P"s on Dante's forehead, standing for the seven primary sins ("sin" in Latin is *peccatum*). As Dante proceeds through each level, the angel attending that level brushes away the relevant "P," symbolizing the purging of that particular sin. Dante notices that, as he climbs higher, his steps—which felt so heavy at first—feel lighter and lighter, suggesting as that sins are purged, the journey to Heaven becomes easier. Virgil explains that Dante isn't just imagining this, and that it's happening because Dante's will is being transformed as he goes. In other words, he's being made not only more worthy of Heaven through the cleansing from sin, but more desirous of Heaven—more inclined, that is, to choose Heaven instead of choosing sin. This is in keeping with the idea of the human will that pervades the Divine Comedy. The goal of purgation is not simply a person who no longer commits sins, but whose will aligns with God's, resulting in a human being who actively desires God's presence.

Canto 15 Quotes

Because your human longings point to where
portions grow smaller in shared fellowship,
meanness of mind must make the bellows sigh.

If love, though, seeking for the utmost sphere,
should ever wrench your longings to the skies,
such fears would have no place within your breast.

For, there, the more that we can speak of "ours",
the more each one possesses of the good
and, in that cloister, *caritas* burns brighter.

Related Characters: Virgil (speaker), Dante

Related Themes:

Page Number: 227

Explanation and Analysis

This somewhat obscure passage is simply Virgil's way of describing generosity and human reciprocity to Dante. The two have just proceeded through the level of Purgatory where the sin of envy is purged, and Dante has had the appropriate "P" (signifying *Peccatum*, or sin) erased from his forehead by the Angel of Generosity—generosity being the virtue that sinners should adopt in the effort to cleanse themselves of envy. As they continue heading upward, Virgil takes the opportunity to deliver a discourse on an aspect of

love. He explains that, when it comes to generosity, human beings typically assume that sharing means that each person has *less* of the object desired. A human soul that's rightly oriented toward Heaven, however—one that's motivated by love—doesn't think this way. In Heaven, the more something is shared, the more each individual is enriched—hence caritas (charity, or love) overflows, too. This is an example of how, in Dante's theology, the human will must be fundamentally transformed in order to make Heaven (and the kinds of relationships that prevail there) truly desirable.

Canto 16 Quotes

❝ You, living there, derive the cause of all
straight from the stars alone, as if, alone,
these made all move in mere necessity.

Yet were that so, in you would be destroyed
the freedom of your will – and justice fail
in giving good its joy and grief its ill.

The stars initiate your vital moves.
I don't say all. And yet suppose I did,
you're given light to know what's good and bad,

and free will, too, which if it can endure
beyond its early battles with the stars,
and if it's nourished well, will conquer all.

Related Characters: Marco Lombardo (speaker), Dante

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 233

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Dante talks with a soul named Marco Lombardo on the level of Purgatory where the sin of wrath is purged. Dante wants to better understand the underlying cause of human sin. Marco says that people tend to attribute their misdeeds to the promptings of the "stars"—that is, to natural, instinctual urgings. But this isn't true, Lombardo explains; if it were, then how could people be justly punished in Purgatory or rewarded in Heaven? While nature might give rise to certain inclinations in people, people are also endowed with a "light," or judgment, and "free will," which enable them to discern between right and wrong and act accordingly. Free will must be "nourished," or trained, in order to function as it should and ultimately to "conquer all." Lombardo's discourse on free will sheds light on the underlying logic of Purgatory—that the human will, distorted by sin, must be straightened out and reoriented such that it desires God above all else. The will of a soul that's healed in this way will be truly "free," able to choose the best at all times.

❝ So law is needed to apply this brake.
A king is needed, with the skill to see
the towers of that true city, at the least.

The laws are there. Who sets his hand to these?
There's no one. For the shepherd out ahead,
though he can chew the cud, has not split hooves.

Related Characters: Marco Lombardo (speaker), Dante

Related Themes:

Page Number: 233

Explanation and Analysis

After explaining to Dante the nature of free will, Marco Lombardo also explains that government fulfills a role within human society that's somewhat equivalent to the role that judgment plays in a person's conscience. Law helps curb human impulses—at least, that's the ideal. When the law is interpreted and applied by a ruler who glimpses "the true city"—the heavenly ideal—then society will be governed justly. However, this is seldom the case in practice, and this, Lombardo suggests, accounts for present societal disarray, particularly in divided, war-torn Italy. His reference to "the shepherd" who "has not split hooves" is a slightly obscure biblical allusion. Old Testament priests were supposed to distinguish between clean and unclean animals; Dante applies this allegorically to the necessity for present-day rulers to distinguish between earthly and spiritual power—something that the popes no longer do. Lombardo goes on to complain that the joining of earthly and spiritual power—what he describes as "the sword joined [...] to the shepherd's crook"—is bad for society, throwing the naturally divided powers out of balance.

Canto 17 Quotes

Neither creator nor created thing
was ever, dearest son, without' (he starts)
'the love of mind or nature. You know that.

The natural love can never go astray.
The other, though, may err when wrongly aimed,
or else through too much vigour or the lack. [...]

Hence, of necessity, you'll understand
that love must be the seed of all good powers,
as, too, of penalties your deeds deserve.

Related Characters: Virgil (speaker), Dante

Related Themes:

Page Number: 238

Explanation and Analysis

Halfway through the poem, when Dante and Virgil have to stop climbing for the night, Virgil takes the opportunity to explain the nature of sin—the theory governing the cleansing of sin in Purgatory. Virgil explains that, contrary to expectation, all sin arises from love. Every created human being is endowed with what he calls "the love of nature"—which is basically instinct—and "the love of mind," or love governed by the rational will. It's this latter form of love that gets a person into trouble. Such love can get off course in three major ways, which correspond to the three major divisions found within Purgatory. The first is perverted love, which consists of misguided efforts to love oneself through harm of neighbor (pride, envy, and wrath). The second, defective love, refers to too little vigor in love, known as sloth. The third is disordered love of good, meaning excessive vigor in love, which manifests as avarice, greed, and lust. Virgil emphasizes that God is the cure for all of these different distortions of love. In other words, love has to be redirected to the source of all good things.

If love is slack in drawing you to view –
or win – that good, then this ledge, where we're now,
after your fit repentance, martyrs you.

And other goods will not bring happiness,
not happy in themselves, nor that good source
of being, seed and flower of all that's good.

Related Characters: Virgil (speaker), Dante

Related Themes:

Page Number: 239

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote Virgil further elaborates on the nature of sin as it's rooted in love, particularly defective and excessive forms of love. Arriving on the level of Purgatory where sloth is purged, Virgil explains that everyone has some inkling of the ultimate Good (God), but that not everyone pursues that Good with all their ability (that is, their rationally directed love doesn't pursue God avidly enough). That's why the sin of sloth must be purged by instilling the virtue of zeal in its place. As for the remaining levels of Purgatory, the nature of sin is that people pursue subordinate goods instead of the ultimate Good. In other words, it's not that earthly goods, food, or sexual desire are inherently bad. In fact, they're good things, but they fall short of their divine source. So excessive pursuit of such things is in fact a failure to love God ("seed and flower of all that's good"). Those sins are accordingly purged by instilling virtues that direct the soul away from lesser goods and toward the ultimate Good.

Canto 18 Quotes

Soon they were on us. For they moved at speed,
racing towards us, that great multitude.
And two ahead were shouting, weepingly. [...]

'Quick! Quick! Let's lose no time through lack of love!'
so all of those behind now shouted out.
'For zeal in doing good turns grace new green.'

Related Characters: Dante (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 243

Explanation and Analysis

This quote describes Dante's arrival on the level of Purgatory where the sin of sloth is purged. Sloth is a unique sin because, unlike sins resulting from love wrongly aimed (like envy) or those resulting from love for things less than God, sloth is the result of insufficient love for God. There's a humorous note in the penance of slothful souls. Because, during their earthly lives, these souls were too lazy in their love for God, in Purgatory they must learn the virtue of Zeal by doing everything hastily. Here, for instance, the penitent souls run so fast that Dante can hardly keep up with them or hear their self-reproachful shouts. But this quote is also a good example of the idea that time is a precious resource in Purgatory. All souls want to attain Heaven as soon as they

possibly can; the slothful, in particular, endeavor to make up for time lost during their earthly lives through lukewarm love, renewing, by their zeal, the grace they once neglected.

Canto 19 Quotes

Because our eyes were fixed on earthly things,
at no point raised to look towards the heights,
so justice sinks them here within the earth.

Since avarice extinguished all our love
for any good – and so good works were lost –
justice here holds us tight within its grip.

Related Characters: Pope Adrian (speaker), Dante

Related Themes:

Page Number: 249

Explanation and Analysis

In the level of Purgatory where avarice (desire for earthly power and gain) is purged, Dante questions a figure whom he soon learns is the soul of a pope who died within Dante's lifetime. Pope Adrian V was elected Pope in 1276, having previously served as a papal representative to England. He died later the same year that he ascended to the papal throne. Dante's readiness to use ecclesiastical figures as examples in his poetry has already been well established in the *Inferno*. His use of Adrian as an example of avarice suggests Dante's broader attitude about the combining of Church power with earthly power. The avaricious are portrayed as people who were so fixated on gaining earthly goods that they neglected the wellbeing of their souls. Therefore, in Purgatory, these souls are forced to lie prostrate for many years, staring at the earth while their souls are trained to yearn for Heaven. Their love for the greatest good—God—was "extinguished" by their love for lesser goods. Therefore, by extension, Dante suggests that the Catholic Church of his day was excessively fixated on earthly gain in general.

Canto 21 Quotes

Tremors strike here when any soul feels pure
and rises, newly cleansed, to start its climb.
And that cry follows as the soul ascends.

The will alone gives proof of purity
when, wholly free to change its sacred place,
it aids and sweeps the soul up, willing well.

Related Characters: Statius (speaker), Virgil, Dante

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 257

Explanation and Analysis

Near the top of their climb up Mount Purgatory, Dante and Virgil are startled by an earthquake and a shout of praise from nearby penitents. Upon questioning their present guide, Statius, they learn that whenever a soul a liberated from Purgatory, the entire mountain shakes. Statius's point in these lines has to do with the role that individual will plays in a soul's liberation. In short, it's not that a cleansed soul is *granted* release, but that the soul *chooses* release ("the will alone gives proof of purity") because his or her will has become completely free at last ("willing well"). This underscores the centrality of the human will in Dante's understanding of Purgatory. The whole point of the purging of sin is that the human will is trained to love as it was originally created to do—that is, to love God above all things. Once it gains the ability to love in this way, the will is truly free for the first time—more free than it was when it chose to orient itself toward lesser things, like envy, sloth, lust, or any other sin.

Canto 23 Quotes

While I, through these green boughs, fixed searching sight
as might some hunter tracking little birds,
who spends his life in vain on that pursuit),
my more-than-father spoke. 'Dear son,' he said,
'do come along. The time appointed us
should be more usefully divided out.'

Related Characters: Dante (speaker), Virgil

Related Themes:

Page Number: 265

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Dante and Virgil reach the level of Purgatory allotted to the gluttonous. When they first arrive, however, Dante looks more like a sightseer than someone seeking spiritual understanding, peeking through the branches of trees at the souls present instead of proceeding on his pilgrimage. Virgil duly scolds him, reminding him that

they have a set time appointed for their journey through the afterlife and should use it as effectively as possible. This is a reminder that Purgatory isn't a place for curiously observing others' sins, but for diligent labor on behalf of one's own sin. While this lesson is of course associated with the slothful sinners seen earlier, it holds true for all pilgrims through Purgatory. It's also a reminder of the theme of the pressing nature of time as people seek eternal rest. Dante's reference to Virgil as his "more-than-father" also underscores the filial affection he holds toward Virgil, not only as his guide through Purgatory, but as the one who has tutored him in his symbolic progress through the spiritual life.

And all these people, weeping as they sing,
because their gullets led them past all norms,
are here remade as holy, thirsting, hungering.

Cravings to eat and drink are fired in us
by perfumes from that fruit and from the spray
that spreads in fans above the greenery.

Related Characters: Forese (speaker), Dante

Related Themes:

Page Number: 267

Explanation and Analysis

When they reach the level of the gluttonous, Virgil and Dante encounter the soul of a close earthly friend of Dante's named Forese, who explains the nature of the penance undertaken here. On earth, gluttonous people's insatiable desire for food and drink had "led them past all norms," meaning that they failed to limit themselves to reasonable amounts of what they craved. In Purgatory, therefore, they're forced to learn how to endure hunger and thirst as they are constantly surrounded by the scent from a tempting fruit tree. This passage provides two important reminders of the nature of Purgatory. First, when it comes to sins of so-called excessive love, it's not that material objects like food are inherently bad; it's excessive indulgence that's sinful. Second, this penance fits the overall logic of Purgatory. Penance isn't simply punishment for its own sake, but a way of instilling a holy virtue—in this case, temperance—in order to train the soul to desire God as the highest Good.

Canto 25 Quotes

Open your heart. Receive the coming truth.
Know this: when once the foetal brain is brought
to full articulation in the womb,

the Primal Cause of Motion turns in joy
to see so much of Nature's art, and breathes
new breath of spirit filled with power within,

which draws all active elements it finds
into its being and thus forms one soul
which lives and feels and turns as conscious self.

Related Characters: Statius (speaker), Dante

Related Themes:

Page Number: 276

Explanation and Analysis

This rather obscure passage considers a theory of the formation of the human soul. After visiting the level of the gluttonous, Dante is puzzled as to why the spiritual bodies of the penitents—which do not require sustenance, after all—are so withered and thin from fasting. At this point, his and Virgil's guide, Statius, explains the philosophy behind this apparent paradox. To put it briefly, souls are created out of the same material as bodies and, because of this direct connection, accurately reflect the truth about the individual's body. Building on this point, Statius clarifies the further point that God directly creates each human soul by breathing life into each.

By articulating this view of the formation of the soul, Dante aligns with the position of Catholic theologian Thomas Aquinas (and hence with Aristotle, who informed Aquinas's philosophy) over against that of the 12th century Islamic philosopher Ibn Rushd, who held to the idea of a universal, transcendent soul, not individual souls. Though obscure today, these matters were hotly debated in the medieval period. This shows that even though Dante intended his *Comedy* for a common audience, he didn't think that abstract theological and philosophical ideas were beyond his readers or irrelevant to their interests.

Canto 27 Quotes

Over my suppliant hands entwined, I leaned
just staring at the fire, imagining
bodies of human beings I'd seen burn.

And both my trusted guides now turned to me.
And Virgil spoke, to say: 'My dearest son,
here may be agony but never death.

Remember this! Remember! And if I
led you to safety on Geryon's back,
what will I do when now so close to God?

Believe this. And be sure. Were you to stay
a thousand years or more wombed in this fire,
you'd not be made the balder by one hair.

Related Characters: Virgil, Dante (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 284

Explanation and Analysis

This passage explains that the penance of the lustful involves passing through a wall of purifying fire—something all souls must go through as the exit Purgatory. The same is true for Dante; the wall of purifying is the last obstacle that stands between him and the Earthly Paradise, where he will meet Beatrice. It's also the first time in his journey through Purgatory that Dante balks at what he faces, and Virgil speaks moving words of encouragement to his "son," reminding him that, all the way through Hell and Purgatory, he hasn't steered Dante wrong, and he won't do so now when they're so close to their goal. He also explains that this fire, though its heat will be hard to endure, cannot harm Dante.

It's important to note that Dante was banished from Florence on threat of execution by fire—and he'd no doubt witnessed such executions before—which likely feeds his "imagining" here. He's afraid to proceed through the fire precisely because he knows that, on earth, fire destroys. The point of Purgatory, though, is to purify the soul, not to harm it or even to gratuitously punish it.

Then, firmly, Virgil fixed his eyes on me,
saying: 'The temporal and eternal fires
you've seen, my son, and now you're in a place
where I, through my own powers, can tell no more.

I've drawn you here by skill and searching mind.
Now take what pleases you to be your guide.
You're now beyond the steeps, beyond all straits. [...]

No longer look to me for signs or word.
Your will is healthy, upright, free and whole.
And not to heed that sense would be a fault.
Lord of yourself, I crown and mitre you.'

Related Characters: Virgil (speaker), Dante

Related Themes:

Page Number: 287

Explanation and Analysis

These final words from Virgil movingly conclude the fatherly guidance he's given Dante all the way through Inferno and now Purgatorio. He explains to Dante that he can no longer serve as guide. In part, this is because Virgil has only been granted leave to journey this far; he's not a Christian, and as such, he's been presented throughout Purgatorio as lacking the requisite grace to draw near to God.

The even bigger reason for Virgil's departure, though, is that Dante is now capable of being his own guide. His will has been purified by the journey through Purgatory, so Dante is now capable of being rightly led by "what pleases [him]." So to neglect the guidance of his remade will would not just be an oversight, it would be wrong. Dante is now "lord of himself," a position Virgil likens to being invested with the symbols of political and Church rule. This scene is therefore significant not just for Dante's journey as a character, but as an illustration of the goal of Purgatory for each soul that journeys through it—the total purification of the soul, to the point that the soul can freely choose what's best for it.

Canto 30 Quotes

Risen from body into spirit-form,
my goodness, power and beauty grew more strong.
Yet I to him was then less dear, less pleasing.

He turned his steps to paths that were not true.
He followed images of failing good
which cannot meet, in full, their promises.

Related Characters: Beatrice (speaker), Dante

Related Themes:

Page Number: 302

Explanation and Analysis

When Dante arrives in the Earthly Paradise at the summit of Mount Purgatory, he finally meets his beloved Beatrice face to face. Beatrice had been the object of Dante's ardent love on earth, and following her death, she became for Dante the symbol not just of all things good and holy, but of God's loving union with the human soul. Seeing from Heaven that Dante had fallen into sinful habits and was bound for damnation, Beatrice originally sent Virgil's soul to rescue Dante by leading him through the afterlife. When Dante finally sees her again, however, the reunion isn't quite as he'd imaged. Beatrice scolds Dante at length for falling into the trap of pursuing earthly things instead of being inspired to seek God following her death. Her description of sinful pursuits—"images of failing good / which cannot meet [...] their promises"—is summarizes what, according to Dante's theology, sin delivers to everyone who chooses to follow its illusory appeal. In her authoritative aloofness (and Dante's abject shame and remorse in response), Beatrice is also the ultimate example of the courtly love poetic tradition that was all the rage at this time—featuring an idealized female who inspired her male pursuer to ever greater feats.

Canto 33 Quotes

However, since these pages now are full,
prepared by rights to take the second song,
the reins of art won't let me pass beyond.

I came back from that holiest of waves
remade, refreshed as any new tree is,
renewed, refreshed with foliage anew,

pure and prepared to rise towards the stars.

Related Characters: Dante (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 318

Explanation and Analysis

These closing words of the *Purgatorio* some up Dante's journey so far and look ahead to his subsequent travels through Paradise, which are chronicled in *Paradiso*. The last thing Dante must do in the Earthly Paradise is to bathe in the river Eunoe, which (after the river Lethe erased the memory of his sins) restores his memory of the past, only now without shame or remorse. Thus he's now able to commit himself anew to telling his story, with a richer spiritual understanding than he had before. Like a tree sprouting with renewed life, Dante is a more mature, fruitful version of what he was when he began his journey. This renewal makes him fit not only to enter Heaven but to fully desire the joys it offers. He's also "prepared to rise towards the stars"—drawing on the symbolism of stars as representing the gracious power of God that leads and equips Christian on their journey to eternal life. Accordingly, each *cantica* of the *Divine Comedy* ends with the word "stars."

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CANTO 1

Having left Hell behind, Dante will now speak of Purgatory, the realm where souls cleanse themselves for Heaven. He invokes the Muses, specifically Calliope. After the darkness of the infernal realm, the blue skies above Purgatory refresh Dante. He is in the Southern Hemisphere, and he sees four **stars** that nobody else has ever seen, except for Adam and Eve.

It is dawn on Easter Sunday. According to Christian theology, the death and resurrection of Christ is what makes Heaven attainable to sinners, so it's appropriate that this Cantica—whose characters are all ultimately bound for Heaven—opens on Easter morning. Calliope is the Muse of epic poetry, hence Dante's invocation of her at the beginning of this Cantica. According to Dante's geography, the Earthly Paradise, or Garden of Eden, is located at the summit of Purgatory. In Dante's mind, after Adam and Eve were expelled from Eden, nobody else lived in this Hemisphere. The stars symbolize the so-called cardinal virtues of justice, prudence, temperance, and fortitude—virtues that pagans, uninformed by Christian grace, could practice.

Dante sees a respectable-looking, white-bearded old man, who asks Dante and Virgil what they're doing here—have the laws changed, allowing inhabitants of Hell to enter Purgatory? Virgil nudges Dante to reverently kneel and explains to the man, Cato, that Beatrice's prayers led him to guide Dante through the afterlife, even though Dante's still living. Virgil adds that Dante seeks liberty, and that Cato knows the value of this, since he died for it himself. He promises that if Cato grants them entrance to Purgatory, he will pass along Cato's greetings to his wife, Marcia, who lives, like Virgil, in Hell (Limbo, in particular).

Cato lived in the first century B.C.E. He is remembered for having committed suicide after the battle of Utica, rather than compromise his principles by coming to an agreement with his enemy, Julius Caesar. Dante views this suicide as a praiseworthy self-sacrificial act, hence Cato's surprising presence in Purgatory rather than in Hell. (Besides, Cato was a pagan who seems not to have been held accountable to Christian teachings condemning suicide.) Dante's favorable view of Cato also hints at his personal belief in political freedom.

Cato instructs Virgil to gird Dante with a reed belt and to wash Dante's face. After Cato leaves, Virgil and Dante walk a little distance, and Virgil wets his hands in the dewy grass, then wipes Dante's face, which is tear-stained and dirty from the **journey** through Hell. He also plucks a reed from the shore and places it around Dante's waist. Another reed promptly shoots up in place of the first.

Dante's face must be cleansed of the tears he shed while visiting Hell. This suggests that, unlike Hell, Purgatory is not a place of grief primarily, or of wallowing in one's past sins, but of striving toward Heaven with hope.

CANTO 2

It's now sunrise, and Virgil and Dante walk along the shore. Suddenly, Dante sees a light moving swiftly across the sea, growing brighter as it draws near. Virgil points out that the approaching ship is being piloted by an angel with upraised wings. The ship contains 100 spirits, all **singing** "*In exitu Israel de Aegypto*" in unison. The angel makes the sign of the cross over the group of spirits and departs.

The ship bears souls newly arrived in Purgatory. This arrival contrasts with the ferrying of damned souls into Hell in Dante's Inferno*; while those souls arrived individually, weeping and cursing, these souls arrive singing in unison—suggesting that the journey toward salvation is communal, marked by fellowship, and that all of these souls have hope because they will eventually get to Heaven. The song they sing is Psalm 114, "When Israel went out of Egypt…"*

The souls huddle on the shore, taking in their new surroundings. They ask Virgil and Dante for directions to Mount Purgatory, but Virgil explains that they, too, are pilgrims. Awed, the souls notice that Dante is still living, and one figure steps forward from the crowd to embrace him. Dante realizes it is his friend Casella and asks Casella to sing one of the love songs he used to compose to soothe Dante's weariness. Casella does, to everyone's enjoyment. As the group stands still, Cato returns and scolds them all for loitering. The souls scatter like a flock of startled birds.

Little is known of Casella except that he was a real-life musician friend of Dante's, and the song he sings, "Love that speaks reasons in my mind to me," was based on Dante's own poetry. Cato's rebuke, however, reminds everyone that Purgatory is not a place for leisured enjoyment, but for active striving.

CANTO 3

As Dante and Virgil continue on their way, Dante is puzzled by Virgil's lack of a shadow. Virgil tells Dante that it's foolish to try to fully grasp God's doings with one's rational mind; Dante must content himself with the fact *that* something is the case, not *why* it is the case. If humanity had perfect understanding, he goes on, then it would not have been necessary for the Son of God to become Incarnate. Virgil reminds Dante that Plato and Aristotle must spend eternity in Hell with an unsatisfied thirst for knowledge.

In Purgatory, souls have spiritual bodies of a sort. With his distinction between "what" and "why," Virgil follows Aristotle and the Scholastic theologians like Thomas Aquinas, claiming that human beings shouldn't speculate about why *things are but should instead be satisfied with examining things as they exist. If humanity had been content with this, they wouldn't have fallen into sin (by doubtingly questioning God's goodness) in the first place. Non-Christian philosophers long to know God, but, being in Hell, that knowledge remains eternally beyond them.*

Dante and Virgil arrive at the mountain's base. The mountain is forbiddingly steep. A group of souls, looking like a wandering flock of lost sheep, slowly draws near, and Dante approaches them to ask for advice on the best way to proceed. Among this group, he recognizes a figure named Manfred, with the scar of a sword stroke across his forehead. Manfred asks Dante to find his daughter back on Earth and to let her know how he died. He explains that while it's true he was excommunicated, there is still hope for his soul—repentant excommunicates must stay in Purgatory for 30 times the span of years that they separated themselves from the Church while living.

Manfred was an Italian ruler and adherent of the Ghibelline faction who'd been excommunicated by the Pope as a heretic and was then killed by a rival. Being excommunicated from the Church was a dire situation because it cut a person off from the source of salvation. However, there was still hope of salvation if a person repented at the end of life, as Manfred apparently did—though he and other excommunicates now make up for their earthly sin through patient endurance and waiting. Those on earth can help these sinners through their prayers.

CANTO 4

From this first terrace of Purgatory, Dante and Virgil follow the excommunicated souls and **climb** up a steep, narrow passage. After scrambling on hands and knees, they sit on the second terrace to rest and overlook the path they've traveled. Virgil explains to Dante that because they're in the Southern Hemisphere, they see the sun in the North. On the other side of a rock, they discover a group of penitents sprawled lazily. Among them Dante recognizes an old friend, Belacqua. Belacqua explains that, before he's allowed to ascend the mountain higher, he must remain here for the length of his earthly life—he'd delayed repentance until his deathbed.

Belacqua was a friend of Dante's from Florence, known both for his wit and his laziness. On this second terrace of Purgatory, Dante finds those, like Belacqua, who remained within the Church's fold but who nevertheless delayed repentance for their sins until the last possible moment of life—in this case, out of sheer laziness and procrastination. They're now forced to remain idle for the length of time they initially delayed.

CANTO 5

Dante and Virgil continue their **climb** up the Second Terrace. They come across a group of souls chanting the *Miserere*, but, noticing Dante's shadow, the curious penitents are distracted from their prayers. They flock to him, calling out questions. They are all, the souls explain, victims of violent deaths, who died repentant but without the benefit of a final confession. These include a man named Jacopo del Cassero, another named Buonconte de Montefeltro, and a lady named La Pia. Each of them describes the circumstances of his or her death and their last-minute turning to God, and they ask for prayers to speed their time in Purgatory.

The Miserere, *Psalm 51, is perhaps the best known penitential psalm ("Have mercy upon me, O God") and is particularly assigned to the unshriven, or those who died without a final confession of sin. Interestingly, Jacopo del Cassero and Dante, both Guelphs, fought together in a military campaign in which Montefeltro, a Ghibelline, died. La Pia was a wife of a minor nobleman and was murdered by him a few years before Dante wrote the poem.*

CANTO 6

By promising prayers to various unshriven penitents, Dante manages to extricate himself from the crowd. Dante asks Virgil if the people's requests are in vain, since he recalls that Virgil's own writings suggest that prayers for the dead serve no purpose. Virgil replies that in his writing, prayer wasn't connected to the Christian God and didn't take into account God's justice and love. Anyway, Dante will understand all of this after he meets Beatrice above. Hearing this, Dante is encouraged to **climb** more quickly.

Again, the unshriven *refer to people who died without a final confession of sin. Dante refers to a passage in Virgil's* Aeneid, *in which Aeneas hears a warning that prayer cannot alter the gods' decree. It's important to remember that Virgil predated Jesus and Christianity; he now argues that the prayer of a living Christian, motivated by love, can fulfill the demands of justice for a penitent soul in Purgatory. The brief mention of Beatrice spurs Dante to commit to the journey with greater fervor, which speaks to his deep and enduring love for her. (Beatrice was a real person in Dante's life; they met in their youth, and Dante loved her and pined for her from afar all his life.)*

As Virgil and Dante continue the **climb**, they meet another familiar soul, this one silent and haughty. When Virgil asks the soul for directions, the figure questions the two about *their* origins; learning that Virgil comes from Mantua, the soul embraces him, identifying himself as Sordello. Dante reflects that, despite this warm brotherhood between fellow Italians, Italy is splintered by bitter infighting, and there is no one to take leadership. Justinian's "reins" are of no avail, since "the saddle's riderless." "German Albert" has abandoned Italy.

Sordello was a 13th-century poet. Justinian was a 6th-century Roman emperor who codified Roman law, which Dante accuses contemporary leaders of ignoring (the "riderless" saddle). According to Dante, the recent Holy Roman Emperors have neglected Italy altogether, with Albert—murdered in 1308—being an especially egregious example. Dante hoped for stronger imperial rule to be restored in Italy.

Dante continues his tirade, naming several rival Italian families, including the Montagues, Capulets, and others, who suffer strife due to Italy's present disarray. He particularly denounces Florence's continual shifts of allegiance.

The families that Dante names here are divided among the Guelph and Ghibelline factions who were warring in Italy during Dante's lifetime. Dante himself was personally impacted by this conflict, having been exiled from Florence himself for siding with the Guelphs.

CANTO 7

Virgil identifies himself to Sordello, explaining that he has been barred from Heaven for his lack of Christian faith. Sordello humbly embraces Virgil around the knees, praising him as the pioneer of Latin literature. Sordello wants to know more about Virgil's eternal fate, so Virgil explains that Limbo, though "melancholy," is not as grievous and painful as the rest of Hell. Then Virgil asks Sordello how to reach Purgatory proper. Sordello explains that there's no fixed path and adds that no one is permitted to **climb** overnight—it's a law of Mount Purgatory.

On each of the three major tiers of purgatory (ante-Purgatory, or the lower terraces, and the lower and upper levels of Purgatory proper), an interpreter appears who can guide Virgil and Dante. On the lower terraces, Sordello fills this role. Virgil explains to Sordello that he dwells in Limbo, the level of Hell where the unbaptized and so-called "virtuous pagans" do not endure torment but are nevertheless denied the bliss of God's presence.

Sordello leads Dante and Virgil to a cliff, overlooking a valley filled with beautiful flowers and a sweet aroma, where they can pass the night in pleasant company. In the valley is gathered a group of souls singing *Salve, Regina* in unison. Sordello identifies the members of the group, among them the Emperor Rudolph, the prince Ottakar, and England's King Henry. These figures are in Purgatory because, during life, they were too preoccupied with worldly matters to attend to their souls.

Salve, Regina *is a hymn to the Virgin Mary, seeking her advocacy for sinners. The souls' singing together suggests that communal prayer is an aspect of the healing that occurs in Purgatory (as opposed to isolated self-concern). The figures identified make up the Vale of Princes, and some of these—like Rudolph and Ottakar—were earthly rivals who now pursue a common purpose, suggesting that the suffering that goes on in Purgatory has an equalizing effect.*

CANTO 8

Night is falling. A single soul rises from the group of penitents and reverently leads the rest in an evening hymn. The group gazes expectantly skyward. Soon, two sword-bearing angels descend; the points of their swords are broken, and they wear bright green garments. Sordello explains that these guardian angels descend nightly to protect the penitents from a snake that always passes through the valley.

The presence of a snake on the lower levels of Purgatory recalls the tempting serpent who led Adam and Eve to sin in the Garden of Eden, suggesting that humans in Purgatory—or at least this level of it—are likewise susceptible to sin and require divine intervention to protect them from it. However, the blunted sword-points suggest that the conflict is nearer to victory than it was in Eden.

As Virgil and Dante draw nearer to the group of penitents, an old acquaintance of Dante's, Nino, recognizes him. Nino asks Dante to find his daughter, Giovanna, back on earth and to ask her to pray for him. Meanwhile, Virgil points out to Dante that the four **stars** they saw that morning have set, and three other stars have risen in their place. Suddenly, Sordello points out the serpent's approach; the angels promptly scare it off.

Nino was a leader of the Guelphs whom Dante seems to have known in real life. The three stars signify the so-called theological virtues: faith, hope, and love. The rapid ejection of the serpent suggests that the threat of sin does not loom large in Purgatory as it does on earth; the point here is repentance from earthly sin, not fighting against present temptation.

CANTO 9

Dante falls asleep and dreams of a golden eagle sweeping him into the sky. Waking, he finds that it's morning, and that he and Virgil have been carried to the portal of Purgatory proper. A lady named Lucia carried Dante, Virgil explains, while he followed behind. The two approach a gate in Purgatory's outer wall; before it, an angel sits on the stair, holding a blindingly bright sword. After Virgil explains that Beatrice has sent them on this journey, the angel welcomes them to enter.

On each of the three nights Dante spends in Purgatory, he has a dream. This first dream symbolizes God's grace in carrying a person toward himself. Lucia refers to St. Lucy, who, in Dante's Inferno, helped alert Beatrice to Dante's sinfulness.

Virgil and Dante climb three steps—the first of marble, the second of rough stone, the third of bright-red gemstones—toward the angel. Beating his breast in a sign of penitence, Dante falls before the angel and asks to be admitted. Before letting Dante in, the angel writes seven "P"s on Dante's brow with his sword-point. He tells Dante to wash off these scars as he travels through Purgatory. Using a set of gold and silver keys, the angel unlocks the gate. As the gate opens, Dante hears the hymn *Te Deum laudamus*.

The different steps symbolize three steps of penitence, according to Catholic theology: confession (admitting sin), contrition (genuine sorrow for sin), and satisfaction (the individual's efforts to make up for sin, as well as Christ's blood shed for it). The seven "P"s represent the seven deadly, or capital, sins that are purged on the various levels of Purgatory. The hymn has a joyous note of thanksgiving, which is a reminder that purgation is a step toward salvation.

CANTO 10

The gate of Purgatory slams shut behind Dante and Virgil, and they **climb** cautiously up a narrow, zigzagging cleft of rock. They eventually stop to rest on a deserted road that circles the mountain—a ledge that's about the width of three body-lengths. Around them, Dante notices beautiful images carved into the marble bank, which Virgil encourages him to study carefully. The images include the Angel Gabriel addressing the Virgin Mary, David dancing before the Ark of the Covenant, and the legend of Trajan and the poor widow.

In this canto, Dante and Virgil reach the lower level of Purgatory—the first of three levels where they will witness souls being purged of the sin of love perverted. On each level, there will be examples of the positive virtue corresponding to the specific sin that's being purged—in this case, humility in place of pride. The examples here include God's humility in becoming a man (the impending event Gabriel announced to Mary) and Mary's humble acceptance; David's humility in freely dancing in celebration before the Ark of the Covenant; and the classical story of the emperor Trajan, who was loved by the people for his simplicity and justice.

Dante and Virgil notice humanlike forms moving toward them, but their appearance is strange, as they are bent almost to the ground. Dante realizes that these are souls doing penance for the sin of pride. Each soul is bearing a stone, its heaviness matching the weight of his or her sin.

The specific sins named in Purgatory are not meant to provide an exhaustive list of human sin but to include those sins that are, in Catholic theology, understood to be the source of all others. The first three sins addressed in Purgatory are categorized as perversions of love. Pride is the first example of a perversion of love, because it puts the self, instead of God, at the center of a person's life. Hence these souls, who once strove to occupy a Godlike position in life, are now literally and metaphorically brought down to earth by heavy rocks. This is an example of how penance functions in Dante's Purgatory, cleansing the soul by instilling virtue in place of sin.

CANTO 11

The prideful penitents pray the Our Father, or the Lord's Prayer. As they conclude the prayer, the sinners observe that they pray not for themselves, for they don't need it anymore; rather, they pray for those remaining on earth. They continue on their way, each bearing his or her assigned load. Dante observes that those on Earth ought to help these sinners through their own prayers.

Each group of penitents is assigned a specific prayer that is meant to shape the will to desire God—in this case, the prideful souls pray the Lord's Prayer, which emphasizes submission to God rather than to one's own will. The prideful especially benefit from praying for the sake of others, as during their earthly lives, they were mostly inclined to think about themselves. People on earth can also pray on behalf of the souls in Purgatory.

In response to Virgil's questioning, the souls direct him and Dante along a less-difficult path. One soul introduces himself as Omberto Aldobrandesco, offspring of a noble Tuscan lineage, who is doing penance for his earthly pride. Dante recognizes another soul as the artist Oderisi, who explains that he'd once striven for excellence alone, failing to recognize how swiftly earthly fame passes from one man to another. Oderisi also points out a man named Provenzan who was a political leader. Though he remained unrepentantly prideful until death, Provenzan gained admittance to lower Purgatory through a last-minute act of sacrificial love for a friend.

Several different manifestations of pride are shown here. Aldobrandesco, who came from a well-known Ghibelline family, had excessive pride in his heritage. Oderisi, a skilled illustrator of medieval manuscripts, had excessive pride in his achievements. And Provenzan, a Ghibelline nobleman and despotic leader, had pride in his domination over others. Provenzan's situation is unusual in that, although he failed to repent of his sin before death (typically a prerequisite for admittance to Purgatory), the love he showed to his friend satisfied for his sin in this case.

CANTO 12

As Virgil and Dante continue to **climb**, Dante notices fine carvings along the path, depicting various biblical and classical figures. Among these are Satan being thrown down from Heaven; Briareus, who tried to overthrow the Olympian gods; Nimrod, who tried to climb to Heaven by building the Tower of Babel; and the destruction of the city of Troy. As Dante contemplates these, Virgil urges him not to waste time; an angel is approaching.

These carvings correspond to the carvings Dante saw when he first entered the Pride level of Purgatory. While those carvings showed examples of humility, these ones give examples of prideful behavior and its consequences. Each level of Purgatory contains a meditation of this type, showing a virtue and its sinful opposite.

The angel shows them a set of steps that will lead them more easily upward, and he brushes his wings across Dante's forehead, erasing the first of the seven "P"s. As the two **climb**, they hear voices **singing** *Beati pauperes* ("Blessed are the poor in spirit"), and Dante notices how different this is from the atmosphere in Hell. He also notices that he's walking more lightly, and Virgil explains that as each "P" is erased, Dante's journey will become easier. As he climbs higher, he will be led by his own will, and it will be his delight to climb higher.

Each level also includes a concluding blessing, or benediction, from Christ's Beatitudes in the Gospel of Matthew. The singing gives Purgatory a sense of hope that contrasts with the despair of Hell. The erasing of each "P" marked on Dante's forehead symbolizes the purging of a particular sin. Because pride is the root of so many other sins, its purging makes the rest of the journey easier already, and it also liberates Dante's will to more freely desire and pursue God.

CANTO 13

As Dante and Virgil **climb** to the next level, they reach another ledge curving around the mountain, this one narrower than the one below it. They hear invisible voices calling things like, "Look, they have no wine!" and "I'm Orestes!" Virgil explains that these voices are a meditation on the sin of envy. A little further ahead, Dante sees a group of souls dressed in drab cloaks. As he gets closer, he sheds tears of pity, seeing that not only are these figures dressed in rough hair shirts and leaning on one another for support, but that their eyes are sewn shut with wires.

The sin of envy is purged on this particular level of lower Purgatory. The meditation includes voices calling out examples of envy's opposite—generosity. These meditations always begin with an example from the life of the Virgin Mary; here, she's quoted asking Christ to supply the wedding at Cana with wine (Gospel of John, Chapter 2). The meditations also always include an example from classical literature—as told by Cicero, Orestes' friend Pylades offered to die in his place. Because self-sufficiency is at the root of the sin of envy, these souls are needy beggars; and since they couldn't bear seeing others' good fortune on earth, now they're blinded and unable to see at all.

Dante asks if any of these pitiful souls is Italian, and a soul named Sapia, a Sienese woman, addresses him. Sapia explains that, in her earthly life, she took greater joy in other's misfortunes than in her own good fortune. She recalls witnessing a battle between the Sienese and the Florentines and cheering on the routing of her enemies. Dante promises to pray for her and to ask the same of her loved ones on earth.

The name Sapia is akin to the word sapience, *meaning "wisdom"—Sapia's tone in this section is meant to be self-deprecating, showing that her attitude of self-regard is shifting to one that takes herself less seriously. It's an example of the gradual transformation of the will that happens in Purgatory.*

CANTO 14

Two souls, leaning on one another, approach Dante to ask him about his origins. When Dante identifies himself as originating from the banks of the Arno (an Italian river), the first figure, del Duca, goes on a lengthy rant about the corruption of present-day Tuscany, naming many obscure Italian figures. Then he identifies himself and explains that he's doing penance for his lifelong tendency to envy others' joy.

These two figures are Italians, Guido del Duca (a Ghibelline) and Rinieri da Calboli (a Guelph). Dante uses his encounter with these two men to highlight not only perennial human sins, but also what he sees as corruptions endemic to his Italian society—especially self-seeking envy.

As the two figures move on, Dante and Virgil hear the voices in the air reciting examples of envy, like Cain slaying his brother Abel and Aglauros being turned to stone. Virgil explains to Dante that human beings stubbornly keep their gaze fixed on earthly things instead of heavenly joy, and that's why God strikes people down.

The voices in the air give biblical and classical examples of envy, contrasting with the examples of generosity voiced earlier. In the Book of Genesis, Cain murdered his brother Abel out of jealousy. In classical mythology, Aglauros, a daughter of Cecrops, the mythical king of Athens, was turned to stone by the god Mercury for her jealousy of her sister.

CANTO 15

Dante and Virgil continue their **climb** and are greeted by a joyful angel who encourages them to climb a stair—less steep than the previous ones—up to the third level of Purgatory. The **song** "Blessed are the merciful" rings out. As they journey, Dante asks Virgil about some of del Duca's remarks. Virgil explains that human beings see sharing as a reduction of what each individual gets. But this isn't the way that a loving soul should think. Rather, such a soul sees mutual possession as *increasing* each one's good. Though Dante remains puzzled, Virgil promises that Dante will understand better once they've met Beatrice above. They press onward.

Blessed by the Angel of Generosity, Dante and Virgil progress from the level where envy is purged to the level where wrath is purged. This section contains Virgil's first discourse on love. He touches on the ideas of sharing and reciprocity, which are things that Dante is not yet sufficiently cleansed of his own sin to understand. Dante's will (and the human will, more generally) must be shaped so as to understand higher spiritual truths, which is why Virgil says Dante will understand better once they ascend to where Beatrice is.

Arriving on the next level, Dante sees a vision of Mary discovering Jesus in the temple, the near-execution of Pisistratus, and the stoning of Stephen. These visions leave Dante reeling, and he tells Virgil about what he's seen. As they **journey** onward, they see a thick cloud of smoke in the distance.

This level's examples are of meekness, the virtue corresponding to wrath (or anger). The example of Mary is from the story of Jesus, as a young boy, seeking God in the temple and Mary's meek acceptance of this. Dante also has a vision Pisistratus, an ancient Greek tyrant, who stoped the execution of a young man for embracing his daughter. And Dante's third vision encompasses early Christian Stephen's meekness in the face of death by persecutors. Each of these examples shows someone refusing to act in sudden anger.

CANTO 16

Virgil guides Dante through the enveloping smoke of the third level of lower Purgatory. They hear souls **singing** "Lamb of God." Out of the smoke, one voice asks Dante if he is still among the living; Dante acknowledges that he is. He asks the soul, who identifies himself as a Lombard named Marco, to explain why the world is so filled with wrongdoing—is the cause in "the **stars**" or elsewhere?

The smoke on this level of Purgatory symbolizes the way that wrath, or anger, tends to obscure a person's judgment. Souls stained by this sin must endure literal blindness as a means of purging the sin. As Dante talks with various souls, he has more and more questions about the nature of human sin. Here, he asks Marco about the cause of sin and if it's in "the stars," meaning if it simply the result of humans' natural inclinations.

Marco Lombardo replies that, although people tend to believe that everything's caused by the **stars**, this isn't true—if it were, that would destroy the freedom of the human will, and it wouldn't be fair for souls to be either rewarded or punished. "The stars" might initiate human behavior, but humans are given "light" to discern between good and bad, and "free will" which, when shaped well, can guide behavior accordingly.

Marco Lombardo, a soul doing penance for anger, rejects the idea that people's behavior is determined by something outside of them. Natural influences might be present, but people also possess a God-given ability to make their own choices, so they can, in fact, be held accountable for their behavior.

Marco Lombardo further explains that simple, untrained souls tend to chase any pleasure as far as they can, unless they are curbed by some external power, such as a king, ideally a virtuous one. However, there's no such ruler today—the "shepherd [...] has not split hooves." That being the case, people behave no more virtuously than their ruler does. In other words, poor governance is another reason for the present state of the world.

According to Lombardo, human behavior, while a matter of individual choice, isn't strictly individualistic. *Government also has a significant shaping influence. The reference to "split hooves" is from the Old Testament Book of Leviticus, which Dante allegorically interprets to refer to the pope's ability to distinguish between secular power and sacred power. Because the pope doesn't do this and instead is power-hungry, it's no surprise that people behave in the same corrupt way.*


Marco Lombardo goes on to explain that, once, Rome differentiated between earthly and heavenly power. But then, "one sun [...] snuffed the other out," and sword and shepherd's crook are now joined. When these two forms of power are connected by force, nothing good follows. Dante wants to question Lombardo further, but Lombardo must turn back, seeing the angel in the distance.

Lombardo's comments reveal a significant aspect of Dante's political outlook. Dante believes that the fusing of spiritual and earthly power results in a wealthy, power-hungry Church and a poorly governed state that imperils its citizens earthly and spiritual welfare.


CANTO 17

As Dante emerges from the cloud of smoke, he sees visions of wrath, such as the hanging of Haman and of Lavinia's mother. Then an angel removes the "P" of wrath from Dante's forehead as he hears the **song**, "Blessed are the peacemakers." Night falls, and it's too late to **climb** further, but Virgil explains that the next circle is where the sin of sloth—"the love of good [...] when this falls short"—is purged.

Haman was a figure in the biblical story of Esther—Esther averted the killing of all Persia's Jews, and the king's corrupt adviser, Haman, was killed instead. Lavinia was a figure in Virgil's Aeneid *whose mother killed herself in rage after wrongly believing that Lavinia's betrothed had been killed. Both of these are examples of anger's deadly potential, in contrast to the meekness that Mary, Pisistratus, and Stephen displayed earlier in Dante's visions.*


Virgil takes the opportunity to discuss the nature of sin. Every created thing, he explains, possesses "love of mind" and "natural love." Natural love is instinctual and can't be blamed for anything. On the other hand, "mind-love" can go wrong in a few different ways—it can be aimed wrongly, it can be too vigorous, or it can *lack* vigor. In other words, as long as "mind-love" maintains its focus on "primal good" (God) and ensures that other things are of secondary importance to God, it can't go wrong. On the other hand, "mind-love" goes wrong when it veers away from the primal good or progresses too quickly or too slowly towards it. In this sense, then, love "must be the seed" of both good deeds and misdeeds.

Virgil's discourse here encapsulates Dante's theory of love and sin. According to Virgil, sin is a matter of the human will gone wrong. What Dante calls "mind-love" refers to love that's rooted in the rational will (as opposed to mere instinct). Love that's rooted in the mind, or will, can be twisted into sin in a few different ways—but whether it's a matter of misdirection, too little love, or too much love, each of these sins is ultimately a distortion of that foundational love.

Virgil elaborates on the three types of sin being purged in Purgatory. The first three types fall within the category of perverted love—that is, love of other people's harm. This takes the form of pride, envy, and wrath, as he and Dante have already seen.

Virgil argues that a person sins when they mistakenly pursue self-love by harming others. In other words, even prideful, envious, and wrathful actions are misguided efforts to love self.

The next types of sin, Virgil explains, are those which "[run], in broken order, after good." The first of these, sloth, is too slack in its pursuit of that good. The other types fall short of seeking the greatest good (God). As Dante will soon see, these include sloth, avarice, greed, and lust.

The remaining two types of sin derive from love, but they both fall short of the ultimate good, which is God, either by pursuing God with too little energy, or by becoming diverted by lesser goods.

CANTO 18

Dante asks Virgil to explain love further. Virgil explains that the human mind tends toward things that give it delight. The mind internalizes an image of such things, and the mind's "bending" toward these images is called love. When a mind is captured by what it loves, that's called desire, and desire pursues what's loved until it attains it, which then yields joy. Virgil explains that, given this process, it's clear why all loves aren't praiseworthy.

This is Virgil's second discourse on love. Whereas the first focused on how love works, this discourse focuses on love's origin. The basic point Virgil is making is that the object of love must be something external to the self—something outside of a person which draws them towards it by desire.

Dante understands Virgil's words but is nevertheless confused. If love is drawn by an object outside of a person, then why does the person who accordingly pursues that object of love commit either right or wrong? Virgil says that Dante will have to wait for Beatrice to better reveal this. In short, though, he explains that there's an innate power within a person that helps the will distinguish between good loves and bad. A person has the power to restrain love that ignites within them—it's called freedom of the will.

Dante essentially asks why, if an object of love attracts a person from outside of themselves, a person can be held responsible for following that desire. Virgil admits that this is a tricky philosophical problem that's beyond him. However, in essence, each person possesses free will, which gives them the power to follow or resist the urgings of love.

After this exchange, Dante suddenly sees a multitude of people running towards them. The two at the forefront are tearfully shouting examples of zeal, like Mary hurrying to see Elizabeth. The rest of the crowd urges one another on, saying that time mustn't be lost "through lack of love." After the crowd passes by, Dante eventually dozes off.

On this level of Purgatory, the sin of sloth—spiritual idleness and laziness—is being purged. The virtue that replaces sloth is zeal, or energetic effort—one example being the Virgin Mary's haste to visit her cousin after learning of her immaculate conception of Jesus. Sloth, as Virgil earlier discussed, is basically the sin of loving God too lazily—hence the penance of literal running, which is also an example of the urgency of time in Purgatory.

CANTO 19

Before sunrise, Dante is approached by a cross-eyed, decrepit crone who begins to sing attractively—she's a siren. Just as her song ends (recalling her distraction of Ulysses and other mariners), another woman, looking "holy and alert," appears and silences the siren. When Virgil rips the siren's guts open, Dante awakens, realizing it's been a dream, and Virgil urges him onward. An angel erases another "P" and blesses Dante.

Before Dante and Virgil progress to the next level of Purgatory, the siren provides an illustration of Virgil's words above regarding the attraction of an external object to the mind. The woman is herself ugly, but Dante instinctively perceives her song as beautiful and accordingly desires her. In this way, the soul is projecting an image that it loves—it's not truly loving another person. The other woman symbolizes the proper action of free will in response to such attraction.

As the two continue their **climb**, Dante is distracted by the nightmare of the siren. Virgil says that the next level of Purgatory will help explain things. As they ascend, Dante sees figures stretched prostrate on the ground, sighing, "My soul cleaves to the dust." After getting directions from one of these souls, Dante asks why the souls are positioned in this way. He's surprised to learn that the man he's speaking to is Pope Adrian.

The prayer of these penitents is from Psalm 119, and indeed they literally cleave to the dust—the penance for coveting, or an excessive desire for worldly things. Dante even uses a pope as an example, showing his readiness to criticize spiritual authorities whose actions he deplores.

Pope Adrian explains that the souls doing penance in this way—Purgatory's harshest—are guilty of avarice, or covetousness. Because they never looked toward Heaven while living, these souls are forced to remain earthbound here. Pope Adrian warns Dante not to waste any time doing him honor—in the afterlife, they're just co-servants of the same God. He asks Dante to request prayer from his family back on earth and then dismisses him.

The penance for avarice is another example of the logic of Dante's purgatory—the penances are meant to instill the virtue opposite to the sin, in this case a failure to look heavenward. The soul that now desires heaven must endure a lengthy period of looking earthward. Again, Dante emphasizes that when it comes to sin, popes are no less susceptible than others.

CANTO 20

As Dante and Virgil continue **climbing**, Dante hears a weeping voice calling out examples of poverty, greed's opposite—such as Mary's humble dwelling after Christ's birth. Dante investigates the source of this voice and learns it's Hugh Capet, an ancestor of the kings of France. Hugh laments his offsprings' lust for earthly power and wealth, which was accompanied by much cruelty over centuries. He prophesies that, out of this line, Charles of Valois will betray Florence and Charles's brother Philip the Fair will have Pope Boniface slain, "Christ recaptured."

Hugh Capet was the 10th-century founder of the Capetian dynasty of France, which held great power across Europe until Dante's own day. While Pope Adrian provided an example of greed for spiritual power, Hugh Capet is an example of lust for earthly power and the devastation this creates. The two contemporary figures Dante identifies are of special note: Charles of Valois surrendered Florence to the Black Guelph party, resulting in Dante's own exile. And though Dante despised Pope Boniface VIII, he nevertheless views the papal slaying as a betrayal of Christ himself due to Dante's respect for that office.

After Dante and Virgil move on, Dante is alarmed when the entire mountain shakes violently. All the souls cry out the **hymn**, "Gloria in excelsis Deo!" Dante is filled with wonder at this mystery.

"Gloria in excelsis Deo," or "glory to God in the highest," was the angels' hymn at the announcement of Christ's birth. This hymn, praising God in the heavens, is appropriate for souls doing penance for an excessive preoccupation with earthly things.

CANTO 21

Dante and Virgil are overtaken and greeted by an unidentified soul. The figure explains that the tremors happen whenever a newly purified soul is released to Heaven—when the soul is free to choose Heaven for itself. This man himself has just been freed from 500 years of penance for covetousness.

The soul confirms the teaching that Virgil introduced earlier—that souls, when fully purified, are not so much granted release from Purgatory as they are able to freely choose Heaven for themselves for the first time. Since this man (about to be revealed as Statius) is one such soul, he will accompany Dante and Virgil on the remainder of their ascent as an interpreter.

Virgil wants to know who this soul might be, and he identifies himself as Statius, an ancient poet. Recalling his earthly career, Statius names the *Aeneid* as his "nurse in poetry," his inspiration. When Statius says he wishes he'd lived in Virgil's time, Dante can't suppress a smile, and he reveals that Virgil is his guide, standing before them now. Virgil stops Statius from clasping him reverently around the knees.

Statius was a poet of the first century C.E. who wrote on classical themes but, as Dante would have it, converted to Christianity in later life. Given the chance to meet his literary hero, Statius is overcome. The encounter between the two adds a touch of warmth and levity to the serious spiritual journey.

CANTO 22

Having been cleansed by an angel of the sin of covetousness, Dante follows Statius and Virgil upward. Kindly, Virgil asks Statius how a wise man like himself ended up doing such lengthy penance for covetousness. Statius explains that he was actually doing penance for "wild expense," or prodigality, which is punished in the same section of Purgatory. He also explains that the themes of Virgil's poetry inspired him to become a Christian. However, for fear of persecution, he concealed his faith, for which he also did penance for sloth. Statius and Virgil talk about their favorite pagan poets, most of whom live in Limbo with Virgil.

Excessive spending is portrayed as being the other side of the coin from covetous hoarding—the ideal being moderation. Statius would have lived during Emperor Domitian's persecution of Christians in the late first century, and his reluctance to identify publicly with his faith is portrayed as a form of insufficient zeal, or sloth. Like Virgil, most of the famous classical authors are placed in Limbo, the least punitive level of Hell—meaning that though they were virtuous, they didn't possess Christian grace.

As the three continue their **climb**, they come upon a tree with sweet-smelling fruits. Out of the tree come voices proclaiming examples of temperance, like the biblical Daniel and John the Baptist, both of whom fasted.

The group progresses to the next level of Purgatory, where the sin of gluttony is the focus. Gluttony's opposite is restraint, as exemplified by those who could fast, or choose to go without food.

CANTO 23

As Dante idles behind Virgil and Statius, Virgil urges him onward, reminding him that their appointed time should be used wisely. They're soon overtaken by a group of penitents singing, "Lord, open my lips." These spirits appear to be gaunt and emaciated. Dante thinks that the "OMO" of the human face stands out starkly on these figures.

As ever in Purgatory, time is critical—it's meant to be carefully used for spiritual purposes, not wasted. The hymn of the gluttonous suggests that their mouths now ought to be used for praise, not excessive consumption of food and drink. "OMO" refers to the Latin word homo, *or "man." There was a medieval belief that the words* HOMO DEI *("man is of God") could be discerned in the structure of the human face.*

One of the figures addresses Dante, and though Dante doesn't recognize the wasted face, the voice is familiar—it's his old friend Forese. Forese explains that the fruit tree and water on this level of Purgatory have a special virtue which elicits cravings in the gluttonous. He describes a "yearning [that] leads us to the tree" like Christ's yearning. Dante, in turn, explains what he's doing in Purgatory.

Whereas, on earth, gluttonous people craved food and drink, in Purgatory they're trained to direct their yearnings toward God. The reference to the "tree" is a play on words. The cross of Christ is often figuratively described as a tree, on which Christ willingly died out of love for sinners. The gluttonous, similarly, yearn for the tree in Purgatory, even though it causes them pain, as it ultimately leads them to God.

CANTO 24

As Forese and Dante walk along, Forese identifying some of his fellow penitents, Dante is approached by a poet named Bonagiunta of Lucca, who recognizes him as a practitioner of the "sweet new style" in Florence. After Forese continues on his way, Dante comes upon a second fruit tree, near which penitents linger longingly. It's said to be an offshoot of the tree whose fruit once tempted Eve. A voice from the tree recites examples of gluttony.

Bonagiunta was a 13th-century poet who was known for being a heavy drinker, hence his appearance in Purgatory. The "sweet new style," il dolce stil nuovo, was a popular poetic tradition in Dante's generation, which Dante develops in The Divine Comedy *itself. Tempted by the fruit of the tree in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve disobeyed God, so the appearance of a similar tempting tree in Purgatory makes sense.*

CANTO 25

Dante, Virgil, and Statius continue their **climb**, reaching a narrow stairway they must climb single-file. Seeing Dante's puzzled expression, Virgil encourages him to ask the question that's bothering him: how, when souls don't require food, do these spirits become so thin? Statius replies, discussing at length the formation of the soul by God, the development of the physical body in the womb, and the spiritual bodies of the souls in Purgatory.

This difficult passage draws on Aristotelian philosophy to explain the relationship between the body and the soul. Statius first explains (according to the scientific understanding of the time) the development of the fetus in the womb, which, put simply, comes about through a coagulation of semen and menstrual blood. The fetus proceeds through various developmental phases, but how it develops an intellect—the thing that distinguishes it from, say, vegetables or animals—is not precisely understood. However, the key point is that God breathes a soul into the fetus, which makes it an individual person. This soul can never be separated from the person, which explains Dante's ability to recognize individuals in Purgatory even though they are not presently united to their bodies. The soul is the ground of the individual. That, in short, is why the spiritual bodies in Purgatory, though intangible, recognizably reflect the true state of the individuals' souls.

Reaching the top level of upper Purgatory, they are confronted by the sight of blazing fire and must make their way cautiously along a narrow rim. They hear the lustful penitents **singing** the hymn "God of supreme clemency," and Dante sees spirits walking through the flames. After they finish singing the hymn, the spirits call out examples of chastity, such as the virgin Mary, the goddess Diana, and marital chastity in general.

The group reaches the highest level of Purgatory proper, where souls are purged of lust. Lust, or excessive sexual desire, is counteracted by the virtue of chastity (which isn't just celibacy, but also includes sexual desire within the Church-sanctioned bounds of marriage). Fire symbolizes the sin of lust itself, but it's also a purifying element through which every sinner escaping Purgatory must finally pass.

CANTO 26

The souls walking within the fire are puzzled by the fact that Dante is evidently alive. But before he can answer their curious questions, Dante is distracted by the sight of groups of souls pausing briefly to kiss one another. After they embrace, the groups of souls yell things like, "Sodom! Gomorrah!" and the story of Pasiphae, before dispersing in different directions—those guilty of homosexual lusts in one direction and those guilty of heterosexual lusts in another. After witnessing this, Dante chats with the souls of two poets who are known to him—Guido Guinizelli and Arnaut Daniel—before they both retreat back into the cleansing fire.

The point of the souls kissing is that the embraces are restrained—showing that the nature of the sin is its excess. Kept within appropriate boundaries (with the greater part of desire directed toward God, as always), the sexual desire is not itself considered to be intrinsically sinful. As examples of the sin of lust, the souls name the so-called sin of Sodom (the male residents of this Old Testament city engaged in sexual relations with male visitors) and the mythological Pasiphae, wife of the king of Crete, who lusted for a bull and subsequently became the mother of the Minotaur.

CANTO 27

Just before sunset, the angel of chastity **sings** "Blessed are the pure in heart" beyond the wall of flame. The angel tells the souls that without passing through the fire, they can't be purged. When Dante stares uneasily into the fire, Virgil encourages him, promising that though the fire will be painful, it will never harm him. He adds that he won't abandon Dante now that they're so close to God. Besides, this is the last barrier between Dante and Beatrice. The sound of Beatrice's name softens Dante's resistance.

All penitents climbing to Purgatory's summit, whether or not they must cleanse their souls of lust specifically, have to pass through the fire, which symbolizes not just penance, but also the purifying of love. The fire is an allegorical symbol of God's love, by means of the painful earthly pilgrimage, readying the soul for Heaven. Within this story, the fire also fulfills the function within the courtly love genre of the hero (Dante) passing through dangers in pursuit of his lady (Beatrice).

Virgil, Dante, and Statius step into the fire. Immediately, the heat is so intense that Dante wishes he could refresh himself "in a vat of boiling glass." Virgil keeps encouraging him by reminding him of Beatrice. Eventually, through the darkness, they hear an angel **singing**, "Come, blessed of my Father!" Emerging from the fire, they see a steep pathway, and since it's nearly night, they settle down to sleep on the stairs.

The fire is intensely palpable, although it does not literally burn—it's meant to burn away impurity and not to destroy. After passing through unscathed, the group arrives at the threshold of their goal, but since climbing is prohibited overnight, they must wait a little longer.

Dante falls asleep and dreams of a young girl singing and picking flowers; she identifies herself as Leah from the Bible. Leah adds that her sister, Rachel, prefers to sit in front of a mirror all day, contemplating her image—"seeing, for her, is all—as doing is for me." When Dante wakes up, Virgil assures him that, today, all his desires will be satisfied. Encouraged by this, Dante hurries eagerly up the steps.

Dante's last dream in Purgatory is an allegorical comparison of the Old Testament biblical figures Leah and Rachel, wives of the patriarch Jacob. Medieval biblical commentators sometimes took Leah and Rachel as symbols of the active and contemplative lives, respectively—that is, the practical, world-oriented lifestyle that most people pursue, and the less common lifestyle that's wholly devoted to prayer. Dante dreams this on the threshold of realizing the fulfillment of every Christian life, whether active or contemplative.

When they reach the top step, Virgil looks firmly at Dante and says that he's guided Dante through Hell and Purgatory, but he can't show him anything else. Now, he says, "take what pleases you to be your guide." Dante's will, he adds, "is healthy, upright, free, and whole [...] Lord of yourself, I crown and mitre you."

Because Virgil is not a Christian, he cannot enter Paradise; he has led Dante as far as he can. Furthermore, now that Dante's own will has been cleansed in Purgatory, his desires are purified, meaning that he doesn't need Virgil. "[W]hat pleases [him]"—meaning Beatrice, who is symbolic of God's love—can do that. Dante's will can now rule and guide itself.

CANTO 28

Dante emerges into a bright, fragrant forest, eager to take it all in. The wood is filled with gentle breezes and joyous birdsong. He comes to a brook and sees a lady on its opposite bank, picking flowers and **singing**. Dante asks the lady to draw nearer so he can hear the words of her song. The lady steps closer and raises her eyes to Dante; her gaze is full of light, and her laughter fills him with wonder.

This forest is the Earthly Paradise in which humanity originally lived in innocence according to the Book of Genesis. It contrasts with the dark wood from which Dante set out for his journey through Hell in Inferno. The lady (later revealed as Matilda) recalls the figure of Leah in the previous Canto, and she anticipates Beatrice to come.

Dante asks the lady to explain this place, and she explains that it's the Earthly Paradise—a place given to human beings (themselves created good) as "pledge of endless peace." But humanity didn't stay here long, through their own fault. The lady explains that the flowers and fruits here spring forth of their own accord, and the water, too, because of God's will. The water of this brook, called Lethe, takes away all memory of sin. The lady adds that the poets who've spoken of the Golden Age were dreaming of this very Paradise.

According to Christian teaching, human beings were meant to dwell in the Earthly Paradise in peace. But being corrupted by sin, humans had to set out from a darker, corrupted forest (like Dante's) and embark on a perilous pilgrimage back to God. But even if they had remained in Paradise, they were meant—as Dante will soon do—to set out for a still more perfect Paradise. The lady explains that the recurrent poetic theme of a Golden Age of perfection is a dim memory of the Earthly Paradise.

CANTO 29

The Lady says, "blessed are they whose sins are covered." Then she walks along the brook, with Dante following on the opposite bank. As they round a curve, the lady enjoins Dante to watch and listen. As he does, Dante sees a radiant light flash through the forest, growing brighter and brighter. It's soon followed by a beautiful **melody**. Dante then sees seven massive golden candlesticks, which guide people in pure white robes. The people are singing a blessing to Beatrice. In their train come four six-winged animals with beautiful feathers.

The procession is the first of what are described as the Beatrician Pageants, the first being the Pageant of the Sacrament. This procession allegorically displays the history of the Christian Church up to the incarnation of Christ. Beatrice is at the center, because for Dante, she symbolizes the soul's union with God, as Dante's medieval Catholicism understood that union to occur within the church's sacrament of the Eucharist. Dante describes the strange feathered creatures as being like the creatures in the apocalyptic biblical accounts of the prophet Ezekiel and the apostle John.

Between the four-winged creatures is drawn a chariot, a gryphon harnessed to the front. To the right of the chariot, three ladies (the Three Graces) are dancing—one of them fiery read, one emerald green, and one snow white. To the left, four purple-clad ladies (the Four Virtues) sing, led by one with three eyes on her brow. They're followed by a group of seven elders garlanded with flowers. The procession stops in front of Dante, and thunder is heard.

The procession is filled with biblical and classical imagery; at this time, it would also have alluded to the Corpus Christi procession in which the eucharistic elements were paraded through a town. The ladies represent the Theological Virtues of faith, hope, and love, and the Cardinal Virtues of prudence (the three-eyed one), justice, temperance, and fortitude. The elders represent the authors of the New Testament gospels and epistles.

CANTO 30

The procession stops, and the people face the chariot. Above the chariot, 100 angels **sing**, "Blessed art thou who comest," as well as a line from Virgil's *Aeneid*: "With full hands give lilies." As flowers drift around the chariot from the angels' hands, a white-veiled lady in a green robe and red dress appears. Dante, sensing "the ancient power of what love was," begins to tremble and instinctively turns toward Virgil—but Virgil is not there.

For Dante, Beatrice stands for the specific woman he loved in Florence, as well as for the Catholic sacrament of the Eucharist, in which Christ himself is present (hence the phrases "the ancient power of what love was," and the "blessed art thou" which, in the Bible, heralds Christ). In other words, Dante's romantic longing for Beatrice is, at the same time, a desire for the fullest divine love. Throughout his journey, Dante has always looked to Virgil for guidance and assurance, but now, he is left alone, overpowered, in Beatrice's presence.

A voice reproves Dante for weeping at Virgil's absence. At the sound of his name, Dante turns and sees Beatrice, still veiled, looking sternly at him. All are happy here, she tells him—what right did Dante have to **climb** this mountain and weep? Dante looks shamefacedly at the ground and, at the sound of the angels' pitying **song**, bursts into fresh tears.

In keeping with Dante's immersion in the poetic courtly love tradition, Dante occupies a humble, subservient role relative to the object of his romantic longing. This also fits with Dante's arrival on the threshold of God's presence—in the face of pure love, he is fully penitent for the first time.

Beatrice addresses the angels above, explaining that Dante's grief and guilt for his sin are fully surfacing at last. In her youth, she says, she led Dante along with her on the road to truth, but after she died, Dante lost his way, following "images of failing good" instead. Beatrice prayed for him, to no effect. Seeing that nothing else would suffice to save him, Beatrice begged that God would allow Dante to travel through the afterlife and see what becomes of those who die in sin.

Beatrice recounts Dante's journey thus far and her role in leading him on the heavenward journey. Though Beatrice kept Dante on the path of goodness during her earthly life, after she died, he began to content himself with lesser goods—an illustration of Purgatorio*'s doctrine of sin.*

CANTO 31

Weeping and overcome, Dante stammers out a confession that, indeed, after Beatrice's death, he was distracted by "mere things of here and now" and failed to pursue any higher good. Beatrice scolds Dante for allowing himself to be "pierced by the arrows of fallacious things," instead of striving to get closer to God after her death. Dante just stands there, looking shamefully at the ground, like a "little boy," and finally faints with remorse.

Even after Dante has finished climbing Mount Purgatory, it's only after he's confronted by Beatrice face to face that he's fully overcome by the weight of his sin. This suggests that it's only compared to the beauty of innocence (as seen here in the Earthly Paradise) that the ugliness of sin becomes truly apparent. Indeed, because for Dante, Beatrice symbolizes God's love, it's as if he's under God's judging gaze, too.

Then, Dante finds himself being drawn into the stream by Matilda's grip. After he's been submerged in Lethe, he's drawn, still dripping, to join the dancing Four Virtues. These ladies guide him over toward Beatrice, who is standing by the gryphon. When Dante looks at the beast being reflected in Beatrice's eyes, he sees, to his astonishment, that the creature is alternately reflected as an eagle and as a lion. Then, the Three Graces come forward, singing, urging Beatrice to lift her veil and look at Dante.

Being submerged in the waters of Lethe allows Dante to forget his sin and its accompanying grief. The Four Virtues—symbolizing those so-called natural virtues (prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude) that prepare people's souls to receive God's revelation—bring him to Beatrice, who symbolizes God's revelation within creation. The alternating lion/eagle images symbolize the dual nature of God Incarnate (human and divine). The Three Graces, or theological virtues (faith, hope, and love) bring Dante the rest of the way to being able to meet Beatrice's gaze.

CANTO 32

Overwhelmed, Dante cannot stop staring at Beatrice until his gaze is forcibly turned aside by the Graces. When his dazzled eyesight recovers, he sees that the procession has turned and begun to march eastward. He and Statius follow. A short distance away, they come to a bare tree, and everyone murmurs, "Adam." The Gryphon attaches the pole of Beatrice's chariot to the tree, and at this, the tree suddenly bursts into vivid, purplish-rose blossom, and the others **sing** an unearthly hymn, which Dante finds unbearably beautiful.

This Canto draws on the interpretive tradition that viewed the tree (from which Adam and Eve ate, plunging humanity into sin) as that from which the wood of Christ's cross was taken. Hence, the same tree that led to humanity's fall is also the source of its salvation and of eternal life. This unlocks the imagery of the scene: the Gryphon, symbolizing Christ's Incarnation, connects the chariot-pole (the cross) to the barren tree, and the tree bursts into new life as a result.

Dante is lulled to sleep by the beautiful **hymn**, and Matilda awakes him sometime later. She shows him that Beatrice is sitting at the base of the newly flowering tree, guarding the chariot; the rest of the procession has ascended, still singing. The Virtues and Graces surround her. Beatrice tells Dante to write down what he sees in order to instruct those on earth. Dante looks at the chariot and sees an eagle suddenly swooping down, stripping the tree of its bark and blossoms. The chariot lurches, and a "vixen" throws herself within. Out of the earth beneath the chariot, a dragon emerges and stings the chariot with its tail, leaving it damaged.

Earlier, Dante saw a pageant depicting the life of the Church up to the time of Christ. This pageant depicts the life of the Church since then. In short, it depicts the tragedy of conflict between the earthly and spiritual realms. The eagle represents the Roman Empire, persecuting the Church in its early centuries, but also the Emperor Constantine's establishment of the Church as the official imperial religion. The vixen, or fox, represents heresies that troubled the Church from within. The dragon probably presents the devil. Each of these images represents a way in which the Church is persecuted by foreign influences.

The chariot repairs itself, covering its damaged parts with eagle feathers, and then numerous heads emerge from it—three heads horned like oxen, and the other four bearing a single horn each. A scantily dressed "whore" also appears, as well as a giant; the two frequently embrace. When the whore is distracted by Dante, the giant becomes enraged and beats her; the two then disappear into the surrounding woods.

The eagle-feathers represent the world's riches corrupting the Church, turning it into a many-headed beast like the apocalyptic imagery found in the Book of Revelation. Dante uses the "whore" as a symbol of the corrupt papacy and the "giant" as a symbol of worldly power—particularly the French monarchy. In 1305, France's King Philip the Fair had the papal see (essentially the Church's government) transferred from Rome to Avignon, France, a scandal which would have been fresh on Dante's mind.


CANTO 33

Weeping softly, the Virtues and Graces chant the Psalm, "O God, the heathen are come." Then Beatrice speaks in Latin, quoting from the Gospel of John "a little while, and ye shall not see me; and again, a little while, and ye shall see me."

This Canto, like the previous one, focuses largely on the Church's enslavement to worldly influences. The ladies' chant refers to the worldly infiltration of the Church, and Beatrice's quotation probably refers to the successive removal and restoration of the papal see.

Then the whole group continues on their way, but after a little while, Beatrice gives Dante a piercing glance, knowing he has questions. Finally, Dante pulls himself together to ask Beatrice about what he's just been shown. Beatrice explains that the feathered chariot which was shown to be "monster then [...] prey" will not lack an heir forever. Soon, she says, an hour is coming when "five hundred ten and five" is coming to slay both the whore and giant. She urges Dante to communicate this to those still living.

Beatrice prophesies to Dante that the Church will someday have an heir to Constantine, who will presumably restore the church to purity from its worldly captivity. However, there is no scholarly consensus regarding the "515." The significance of this numerological symbol was probably known only to Dante himself.


They approach two diverging streams in the distance, and Matilda explains that this is Eunoe. She draws both Dante and Statius toward the water. Dante takes an inexpressibly sweet drink and withdraws from the stream feeling "remade [...] pure and prepared to rise towards the **stars**."

Just as Dante drank from the river Lethe in order to forget his sin, he now drinks from the river Eunoe, which enables him to remember he past, including his sin, without shame—that is, he's accepted forgiveness for his sins. Thus renewed, he's now prepared to continue his heavenward journey, which Dante will pick up in Paradiso.


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