

*The Divine Comedy*

**Place: Italy**

**Time: Easter, 1300**

**Age: 35 (half of “threescore & ten” – see Ps. 90:10)**

## **Three Structural Principles**

### **A. The conversion experience: going down is going up**

- 1. *Inferno* – Dante is taken through hell, sees its torments, learns about divine justice and what sin is**
  - a. Intellectually, revisiting Aristotle & interpreting what he sees**
  - b. Experientially**
    - i. externally – in others, their torments**
    - ii. internally – terror, disgust**
  
- 2. *Purgatorio* – Climbing Mt. Purgatory = learning of God's mercy, experiencing stages of repentance:**
  - a. internal, personal consciousness of sin (metaphor: fire)**
  - b. confession and forgiveness, canto 31 (metaphor: water)**
  
- 3. *Paradiso* – taken up through Heaven till he is ready for the Divine Vision**

## B. Second Structural Principle: The Trinity

1. Destination (*Paradiso* 33) is “seeing” the trinite God

2. Overall organization of the work

**Inferno:** 34 cantos (the introduction + 33 others)

**Purgatorio:** 33 cantos

**Paradiso:** 33 cantos

3. Verse form is *terza rima* (aba bcb cde . . .):

Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra **vita**  
mi ritrovai per una selva **oscura**,  
ché la diritta via era **smarrita**.

Ahi quanto a dir qual era è cosa **dura**  
esta selva selvaggia e aspra e **forte**  
che nel pensier rinova la **paura**!

Tant' è amara che poco è più **morte**;  
ma per trattar del ben ch'i' vi **trovai**,  
dirò de l'altre cose ch'i' v'ho **scorte**.

**C. Third Structural Principle: The Communion of Saints: ascending chain of guides pointing the way to the Son and the Father**

- 1. Inferno 2: Virgil and the “three blessed ladies”: Mary (“Mother of God”), Lucia (early martyr), Beatrice (his beloved who died when they were teenagers)**
- 2. Purgatorio 31: sees Christ in Beatrice’s eyes**
- 3. Paradiso 33: Bernard to Mary to the Beatific Vision – all “ingathered and bound by love into one single volume”**

Inferno	1	Can't save yourself	
	2	Unwilling what you will	
	3	Not willing at all	
		Desiring what you fear	
	11	Sin =	Far – Incontinence
		Distance	Farther – Violence
		from Love	Farthest - Fraud
	34	Satan: frozen baptism	
Purgatorio	31	The Griffin: real baptism	
Paradiso	33	Unity in Love	

Malice

**Be able to write about this on the final:**

- 1. Describe how Dante uses his imagined “geography” of the cosmos to explore the themes of repentance and of God as Love**
- 2. In Dante’s thinking, what are Fraud, Violence, and Incontinence? Explain which of them is the most evil, which the least, and why. (Inferno 1 and 11)**
- 3. Explain the insights into the human will that Dante develops in Inferno 2 and 3**
- 4. Explain the major symbols used in Inferno 33 and 34**
- 5. Explain the major symbols used in Purgatorio 31**
- 6. Explain Dante’s symbolic use of eyes and vision in Purgatorio 31 and Paradiso 33**
- 7. What poetic devices does Dante use in Paradiso 33 to make us feel the experience of contemplating God directly?**