A GROUP INTERPRETATION SCRIPT BASED ON THE LIFE,
WORKS, AND TIMES OF DANTE ALIGHIERI

THESIS

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The purpose of this thesis has been to prepare a script based on the life and works of Dante Alighieri, with special attention to the effects of medieval culture and politics on him and his works. Chapter I includes a discussion of the reputation and poetry of Dante, as well as the purpose and procedure followed in this thesis. Chapter II describes the historical and cultural background of Medieval Europe during Dante's time. Chapter III describes Dante's life and works. Chapter IV contains the script and a production concept that offers ideas and suggestions concerning the production of the script.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Dante Alighieri was a medieval man of great poetic genius. He took the learning and philosophy of the decaying Middle Ages and produced the great poem of Medieval Christiandom, the Divine Comedy, but produced it with such originality and individualism that it opened the way for the flowering of knowledge that is known as the Italian Renaissance. Dante's poetic genius has been recognized throughout the centuries since his death in 1321. A modern literary scholar, Philip McNair, says, "For most civilized people, the Comedy is the greatest poem ever written." This is a modern view, but even a few years after his death, Dante was widely known and respected. Michele Barbi reports:

Before fifty years had passed, the Commedia was being read publicly in some universities and even in the lesser schools along with the great Latin poets. "Dantist" had become a title of honor, and the teachers of literature who sought lectureships listed, as one of their claims to superiority, their ability to supply a commentary to Dante.

The greatest poets of the day, Petrarch and Boccaccio, spoke of Dante in their works. Boccaccio was especially fond of Dante and was invited in 1373 by the city of Florence "to deliver a series of public readings and comments on the book of the poet." Dante's popularity during this time is also
evidenced by the number of hand-printed manuscripts of the poem which were produced. Paget Toynbee says, "The known manuscripts number between five and six hundred, giving an average of about four a year for the 150 years between the date of Dante's death (1321) and that of the first printed edition (1472)."6

Dante's fame was not limited to Italy. In England, Geoffrey Chaucer, speaking through one of his characters, says "Those who wish more, and on a nobler scale, /Should turn and read the great Italian poet/Dante by name; they will not find him fail/In any point or syllable, I know it."7 Dante's fame continued to grow until the Age of Reason settled upon Europe, at which time everything connected to the "Dark Ages" was considered barbaric.8 Even so, the most famous and critical philosopher of that age, Voltaire, admired Dante for putting popes in Hell.9 During the eighteenth century, the study of Dante steadily increased in popularity. This revival was led by Giambattista Vico's "new approach" to the study of Dante,10 an approach that was new only to that time. "In nineteenth century Italy, the reputation and study of Dante became organized and spread to all the civilized world."11 In 1818, Samuel Taylor Coleridge gave a lecture on Dante in which he praised the poet for his style, his images, and his profundity.12 Coleridge was not the only English Romantic poet to express a fondness for Dante. Wordsworth, Keats, Shelly, Byron, all had high praise for the Italian poet. Byron expressed this view:
"I don't wonder at the enthusiasm of the Italians about Dante. He is the poet of liberty. Persecution, exile, the dread of a foreign grave, could not shake his principles." The study of Dante was by that time respected all over Europe. A friend of the great German poet, Goethe, remarked that he "spoke of Dante with extreme reverence." During the nineteenth century, the study of Dante also began to flourish in America, "where Dante has had admirers of the caliber of Longfellow, James Russell Lowell, and Charles Eliot Norton." Longfellow was the first president of the Dante Society of America. In the twentieth century, the reputation of Dante has grown to such proportions that one scholar observed: "My bibliography of Dante studies from 1930 to 1960 shows about six hundred volumes and an enormous number of articles." One of the most famous modern poets, T.S. Eliot, said of Dante: "I . . . regard his poetry as the most persistent and deepest influence upon my own verse." Eliot wrote a number of essays and lectured in England and America on Dante. Dante is still the poet of Italy, and Italian lyric poetry is considered as "existing only after Dante's efforts." Dante's reputation has been secure for seven centuries. The reason for his greatness lies in Dante's masterful poetry. Dante's own reasons for writing the Divine Comedy are diverse. At the end of La Vita Nuova (The New Life), one of Dante's earlier works, he says, "It was given to me to behold a very wonderful vision: wherein I saw things which determined me that I would say nothing further of this blessed one, until
such time as I could discourse more worthily concerning her."\textsuperscript{20}

The "blessed one" was Beatrice, the unknowing object of Dante's love for many years.\textsuperscript{21} "This promise to say of Beatrice what had been said of no other woman Dante fulfilled in the \textit{Divina Commedia}, the central figure of which is Beatrice glorified."\textsuperscript{22}

Though Beatrice was the central figure, Dante had many other things to speak of in his work. Boccaccio spoke of another purpose for the \textit{Divine Comedy}:

Certain years after [\textit{La Vita Nuova}] . . . there came into his mind a lofty thought whereby he purposed . . . to reprehend the vicious with most grievous pains, and honour the worthy with loftiest rewards, and gain perpetual glory for himself. And since . . . he had preferred poetry to every other pursuit, he purposed to make his work poetic.\textsuperscript{23}

Dante believed mankind had gone astray from the teaching of God and it was his duty "to reveal what God has arranged for the salvation of all mankind."\textsuperscript{24} It was to this end that Dante wrote the \textit{Divine Comedy}, with his journey through Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise.\textsuperscript{25}

One of the most important aspects of Dante's poem is its individuality. "Dante was the first to configure . . . man, not as a remote legendary hero, not as an abstract or anecdotal representative of an ethical type, but man as we know him in his living historical reality."\textsuperscript{26} "He deals with his matter with independence, as a poet, in the light of his own spiritual experience, his own imaginative interpretation of life and history, his own observations of nature."\textsuperscript{27} Part of the power of Dante's poem is that its characters are \textit{human}.\textsuperscript{28} There is
a great difference between seeing Pope Nicholas in Hell for simony, \textsuperscript{29} and seeing a character called Greedy Christian or something similarly allegorical. If we agree with Burckhardt that the Renaissance man was the first individualist, \textsuperscript{30} then Dante was a definite precursor of the Renaissance.

Other aspects of Dante's poetry have been emphasized by different scholars. Allan Gilbert speaks of Dante's use of "variety in similarity," \textsuperscript{31} while Ernest Match Wilkins says, "The dramatic power of The Divine Comedy is due largely to Dante's extensive and masterly use of direct discourse." \textsuperscript{32} Philip McNair speaks extensively of the "visual imagination" of Dante. \textsuperscript{33} A modern Italian poet, Salvatore Quasimodo, emphasizes "the simple style, of which Dante is the greatest master, is a very difficult style... and it is the language of great poetry." \textsuperscript{34} Whatever aspect is emphasized, there is little doubt that Dante is one of "the great world-poets, of which it is usual to reckon four--including Homer, Shakespeare, and Goethe, besides Dante." \textsuperscript{35}

The first sentence of this paper states that Dante was a medieval man of great poetic genius. The importance of his poetry is not in doubt, but the importance of his being a medieval man has not been given enough attention. From the fourteenth to the twentieth century, almost every scholar examined and determined the meaning of the Divine Comedy by looking at internal evidence, or the structure of the poem. \textsuperscript{36} This was because most people agreed with the view of the Middle
Ages formed by the Humanists of the Italian Renaissance. This view stated that "the period of European history following the death of Constantine (337) was a 'dark age,' and ... the artistic and literary achievements of the Middle Ages were 'Gothic,' which meant not only esthetically unworthy, but 'barbarian'..."37 It is not any wonder that the study of cultural factors in Dante took second place to the study of structural factors.

It was the nationalism of nineteenth century Europe that "abetted the rise of the scientific and scholarly study of Western Europe between 300 and 1500."38 As knowledge of this period increased, so did appreciation and recognition of its importance. We have shed most of our biases about the Middle Ages, "and all this new knowledge is the necessary precondition of any reading of the Comedy that is to be really close."39 The historical interpretation of a subject has an advantage over an interpretation that does not take into account history because "the man who has accurate knowledge of what happened in the past has come much closer to a full understanding of human nature, and is able to act with the confidence that comes from knowledge of the truth."40 As important as the internal study of Dante is, the study of the cultural and historical background of Dante and the time in which he lived can give great insight. "The Comedy is first and foremost the whole of Dante's life, both emotional and intellectual. But as well as being the expression of the author's personality, the poem
crowns and epitomizes a great period in the history of civilization. It was the "genesis," or historical and cultural background of the Divine Comedy "which fixed at once its subject matter, its logical architecture, its structure, the free and wide-ranging role of imagination, the novelty and wealth of the expressive resources."

Once the importance of the historical and cultural background in Dante's works has been established, this background, including Dante's life, must be briefly examined. The 1270's were "the last great dividing line in medieval history. They inaugurated a catastrophic period of breakdown and violence. . . . By 1325, the work of centuries had crashed in pieces. . . . Medieval civilization received its mortal wound between 1270 and 1325." Dante was born in 1265 and died in 1321; almost his entire life was during this fatal half-century. Problems arose everywhere. The states of England and France were becoming secular, "nation-states," moving away from the Christian Commonwealth established by Pope Innocent III, the papacy and church were racked with greed and worldly ambition, there was economic depression, and population declined even before the Black Death.

It was into this decay that Dante Alighieri was born, though he was born and lived in Florence, one of the most prosperous areas of the time. There was continual factional strife in the city, and much violence. In his early life, Dante was studious and loved Beatrice from afar. In 1295,
Dante became involved in the politics of Florence, as a moderate member of one faction. In 1300, he was one of the priors, who were the highest authorities in Florence. During this time, Pope Boniface VIII wanted control of Florence and its wealth. Dante took a firm stand against papal control, so, when the papal party gained control of the city in 1301, Dante was exiled under pain of death. During the last twenty years of his life, Dante wandered from town to town across northern Italy, seeking patronage from various princes and writing his *Divine Comedy* and other works. Before his death in 1321, Dante had gained a great deal of fame as the author of *Inferno* and *Purgatory*, which had been completed and made public a few years before his death. His exile from his native Florence, his wanderings, the corruption of the church, and the general decay of the period had an influence on his works. "Dante was not a passive victim of misfortune. He drew a fruitful lesson from it."

Voltaire says Dante was "a mysterious oracle; few men understand his oracles. . . ." In order to get the fullest understanding of Dante, one might want to perform his works orally. Henry James said literature will "give out its finest and most numerous secrets . . . under the . . . pressure of the attention articulately sounded. . . . that fullest experience . . . waits but on a direct reading. . . ." A noted American Dante scholar, Ernest Hatch Wilkins, said, "Any group of students of *The Divine Comedy* may derive pleasure and gain
understanding through a cooperative reading. . . ." Philip McNair says Dante's strongest appeal is to the mind, so adaptation of Dante's literature for oral group performance would seem most suitable for a medium which has been called "Theatre of the Mind." The definition of that group performance most applicable to this study would be that of Brooks, Bahn, and Okey, who say, "Readers Theatre is a group activity in which a piece of literature is communicated from manuscript to an audience through the oral interpretation approach of vocal and physical suggestion." The literature of Dante is obviously appropriate for oral performance. Equally appropriate is that literature written about Dante and Medieval Europe. Wallace Bacon says that one should not overlook essays, history, and biography when looking for material suitable for oral interpretation. Thus, the literature of Dante may be combined with material designed to illustrate the medieval influences on Dante to produce an informative, interesting, and entertaining narrative which could have significant educational value to both the student of history and the student of literature.

The purpose of this thesis has been to compile a group interpretation script based on the life and works of Dante Alighieri. The central thesis of the script has been to present Dante and his works, and to show the influences of Medieval culture and politics on those works; thus, the man, his works, and historical background against which both should be
viewed are inextricably interwoven. An oral script has been chosen as the most appropriate means for such a study since it is generally felt that Dante's work is immeasurably enhanced when heard in performance.

The procedure followed in this thesis has been similar to that followed in many historical research studies. Research material has been taken from essays, criticisms, books, magazines, journals, and other available sources. This material has then been analyzed and studied, and a group interpretation script based on Dante and his works has been adapted that is historically accurate and adheres to the Readers Theatre principles for scripting, which will hopefully result in an informative and entertaining program for presentation to audiences.
NOTES


8. Hoyt, p. 610.


15Barbi, p. 115.


24Barbi, p. 71.

25Barbi, p. 87.


27Gardner, p. 141.


31Gilbert, p. 22.

33 McNair, p. 39.


35 Blow, p. iii.


37 Hoyt, p. 610.


39 Sapagno, p. 7.

40 Cantor, p. xxii.

41 Sapagno, p. 15.

42 Sapagno, p. 15.

43 Cantor, p. 504.

44 Hoyt, pp. 435-436.


46 Barbi, pp. 3-28.

47 Toynbee, p. 128.


49 Voltaire, p. 54.


51 Wilkins, p. 178.

52 McNair, pp. 42-43.


CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL BACKGROUND OF MEDIEVAL EUROPE

Dante Alighieri was greatly influenced by the civilization and attitudes that made up the Middle Ages. A popular conception of the Middle Ages is that it was a time of barbarism and ignorance, an extended lull between the ancient and modern civilizations. The truth, however, is quite to the contrary. The Middle Ages were a total civilization, arising from the debris of ancient civilization, evolving to a period of apex in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and slowly decaying after that.¹ Many unique institutions began and developed during this era, some of which lasted into modern civilization, such as universities and centralized nation-states.

One cannot speak of medieval culture, however, without speaking about religion—in this case, the Roman Catholic Church.² Until the very late stages of the Middle Ages, learning and philosophy in Europe were controlled and disseminated by churchmen. The monastery was the only place one could go for learning before the organization of universities at Bologna and Paris in the twelfth century.³ Even these institutions were under great influence by the Church because most of the men qualified to teach at that time had monastic educations.
Before the twelfth century, the guides for medieval thinking were the Bible, the writings of the Church Fathers, especially St. Augustine, and the Canon Law which had grown up from papal and other Church pronouncements. In the eleventh century some elementary works on logic by Aristotle became known through Arabic translations. This led to the use of logic, or reason, to persuade non-Christians and Christians alike of the truth of Christian doctrine. A very important use of this logic was by St. Anselm of Canterbury, who, around 1100, used reason to prove that God existed. In the first part of the twelfth century, Peter Abelard, famous for his teaching at the University of Paris and other schools, used logic to pursue one hundred and fifty-eight questions dealing with theology. His book, Sic et Non (Yes and No), "accumulated opinions of the Church Fathers on both sides of deliberately shocking questions, for example, 'that sin is pleasing to God and the contrary.'" What made Abelard so important was that he developed the method of medieval scholars used in logical analysis and the synthesis of Christian and pagan knowledge. Where Anselm said, "I believe in order to understand," Abelard said, "I understand in order to believe." This led the way for the logical method to be used for the rational and systematic discussion of religious and philosophical questions.

During the first half of the thirteenth century, Aristotle's most important works on logic, the *Metaphysics* and the *Nichomachean Ethics*, were translated into Latin and became available
to scholars in Medieval Europe. They became immediately popular, especially at the University of Paris, which was the center of medieval theological scholarship at that time. What interested medieval scholars was the natural philosophy of Aristotle, i.e. that there were laws of nature that could be determined by observation and reason unaided by faith. Obviously, this tenet was attacked vigorously by the Church as heresy when it first appeared. However, many churchmen spent years trying to reconcile Aristotelian ideas with the Scriptures.

The most successful reconciliation was done by St. Thomas Aquinas. In the middle of the thirteenth century, he wrote the *Summa Theologica* and the *Summa contra Gentiles*, two very lengthy treatises in which he used "Aristotelian logic to incorporate and harmonize Aristotelian philosophy with Christian theology and philosophy." Thomas used the method of a question followed by pro and con arguments and a refutation of the objections to the question. Earlier development of this method is illustrated by Abelard's *Sic et Non*. This method was the model for medieval scholastic writing, and influenced Dante a great deal by the use of a systematic, logical format for a written work. Beyond the method, however, Thomas' attitude toward reason is very important. He believed there is no contradiction between reason and faith, but that when they seemed to be in conflict, faith provided direction for human reason to reach the right decision. "According to
Thomas, human reason could not by itself comprehend the whole of the Christian universe, but when aided by revelation reason could establish more certainly what a person already accepts by faith."14 Dante expressed similar sentiments in the Monarchia, where he said that, in this life, philosophy, or reason, and theology must both have sway over man, if he is to live to his full potential on earth.15

A great deal of controversy surrounded Thomas' ideas, with many churchmen hostile to his work. However, in the fifty years between Thomas' death (1274) and his canonization (1323), Thomas' reconciliation of Aristotle's ethics and Christian doctrine became accepted by most churchmen as an integral part of its doctrine.16 Where Thomas emphasized that "knowledge of God" led to salvation, however, most people studying Thomas "preferred to emphasize man's will--man's freedom of choice to turn toward or away from God--as the central fact in explaining salvation."17 Dante also emphasized man's free will in the quest for salvation.

While learning and philosophy were blossoming with new ideas and debate, the political structure of the later Middle Ages was rapidly decaying. This decay was revealed in the political strife that engulfed much of Europe, especially in Italy and Germany, during the Middle Ages. In the early part of the Middle Ages, when barbarian hoards were sweeping across Europe, violence and endemic warfare were very common.18 However, as secular rulers began to bring educated churchmen into
their feudal governments, the Church began to have more influence over political affairs. This influence led Church synods, before the end of the tenth century, to declare warfare forbidden in lands occupied by the Church and the poor. "Their decrees solemnly pronounced that noncombatants (the clergy, woman, children, and peasants) should be inviolate in time of war. Such regulations, endorsed by local rulers, were collectively called the Peace of God." 1 These decrees were enforced by the feudal idea of chivalry that made the knight the defender of the Church and the poor peasant. 2 The Church could also enforce these decrees by excommunicating rulers who did not obey the Peace of God. 21 Consequently, there was less petty warfare.

However, a struggle between pope and emperor in the Medieval German Empire, which included the northern half of Italy, during the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries undermined this peace in Germany and northern Italy. This struggle was labeled by later ages as the "Investiture Struggle." The struggle began over the lay investiture of bishops and other church personnel. Lay investiture was the process whereby secular rulers, kings, dukes, or, in this case, the emperor, gave newly elected clergy their symbols of authority. Most of the time the secular ruler also picked the bishop or other clergyman in his area of control. 22 "So long as secular rulers and lords exercised this right, they could be sure of a loyal clergy. . . ." 23 This right was disputed in the last part of
the eleventh century by church reformers led by Pope Gregory VII, who felt that spiritual authority could be given only by the pope, as St. Peter's successor, or other spiritual officer. This struggle led to a "rapid rise of papal pretensions," and the decay of imperial government. These two consequences of the investiture struggle were very influential in Dante's life and works, as shall be seen later.

One direct result of this struggle was a civil war which broke out in the first half of the twelfth century between two factions known as Welfs and Wablings, Guelf and Ghibelline in Italian. In the early period of this war, "Welf generally represented ecclesiastical independence under the papacy plus feudal particularism, while the Wablings stood for control of the Church and a strong imperial government." Later these names just became the names of competitive factions in towns and other lands without having much to do with the ideas the parties originally espoused. For example, in Florence the Ghibellines were the party of the great landowners, while the Guelfs were the party of the petty nobles and the trade guilds. After gaining control of the city, the Guelfs split into two factions, one favoring great papal influence on the city, one against it. The main result of this struggle was the disintegration of the Medieval Empire's authority, and northern Italy lapsed into constant factionalism and warfare, which lasted until the country was unified in the nineteenth century.

The second result of the struggle between Church and Empire was the slow decay of religious authority over every aspect
of medieval life. Popes, since the late eleventh century, had claimed independence from the Empire and the superiority of spiritual over secular authority. These claims came closest to being realized by Innocent III, who was pope at the beginning of the thirteenth century. Innocent began to act like a secular ruler involved in political disputes and making war on his enemies. Innocent was successful in unifying Medieval Christiandom into one realm, but his successors did not have the same ability. His successors did, however, have ambition and became involved in many petty political disputes in Italy. Instead of behaving like a spiritual authority, popes during this period behaved like secular rulers, raising armies, going to war for territorial gain, raising money, and executing propaganda campaigns. As one example, during the political struggle with the German emperor, the pope asked for French intervention. These French allies defeated the imperial army for the pope, but stayed in Italy to influence papal decisions and Italian politics, and finally ended up fighting the pope and moving him from Rome to France. By "... playing politics the popes had become politicians... they could be opposed and sometimes defeated by purely political weapons. Their prestige was lessened, their position of leadership shaken. ..." In other words, the popes spent less time praying for salvation and more time fighting for territory.

It was to this decadent situation that Dante addressed his Divine Comedy, "to reveal what God has arranged for the salvation
of mankind." If the Church, led by its undignified popes, could not lead mankind to salvation, then Dante, through his poetry, was going to lead man to paradise.

The political and religious strife, and the learning and philosophy all had a great influence on Dante's writings. Another medieval influence on Dante was the tradition of vernacular literature. This tradition was not very extensive, since Latin was considered the language of the learned, and had existed mainly in the literature of courtly love before the thirteenth century. During the thirteenth century, however, an element of realism appeared in a new type of literature, "the fabliaux or brief tales written in rhymed verse for a bourgeois audience." The characters in these tales were common people who were usually stereotypes. These tales were very popular with the townsfolk, and troubadours carried them from town to town. When brought to Italy, the tales were told in "the French of the Provencal troubadours which had until this time dominated Italian verse." However, when Dante and his friends began writing lyrics similar to the ones of the troubadours, they wrote, not in French, but in their own native Tuscan tongue. Dante's *Divine Comedy* was the first widely popular work written in the Tuscan vernacular, and because of that work, the Tuscan vernacular became the vernacular language for the whole of Italy.
NOTES


4 Perelman, p. 113.


7 Strayer, pp. 129-130.

8 Hoyt, p. 319.

9 Hoyt, pp. 318-320.

10 Hay, p. 154.

11 Hoyt, pp. 378-380.

12 Hoyt, p. 380.


14 Hoyt, p. 381.


16 Perelman, p. 122.

17 Hoyt, p. 384.

18 Hay, pp. 22-23.
19 Hoyt, p. 201.
20 Hoyt, p. 297.
21 Hoyt, p. 304.
22 Hay, pp. 69-71.
23 Hoyt, p. 228.
24 Strayer, pp. 71-72.
26 Hoyt, p. 286.
28 Strayer, p. 112.
29 Hoyt, p. 349.
30 Strayer, pp. 160-161.
31 Hoyt, pp. 498-508.
32 Strayer, p. 162.
34 Hoyt, p. 427.
35 Strayer, p. 183.
36 Hoyt, p. 430.
CHAPTER III

LIFE AND WORKS OF DANTE

Dante Alighieri was born in Florence in May, 1265. He was of noble birth, though his family was not one of the principle families of the city, being of modest wealth. In a passage in Paradise, canto XV, Dante introduces his great-great-grandfather Cacciaguida, who lived in the twelfth century. Cacciaguida was knighted by Emperor Conrad III, and died during the Second Crusade. Dante's family was a member of Florence's lesser nobility, so they were part of the Guelf party in the city.1 Less than a year after Dante was born, the Guelfs soundly defeated the Ghibelline party and were restored to supremacy in Florence and the outlying areas of Tuscany.2 Little is known of Dante's early life except that when he was nine years old, he first met Beatrice, an event which had a great influence on his later years.3

Very little is known about Dante's early education. Dante says in the Inferno, canto XV, that Brunetto Latini taught him the art of rhetoric, which at that time included public speaking and writing in Latin.4 Latini may not have been a teacher in the modern sense, but more of an experienced friend giving some guidance to a younger writer.5 Scholars do not agree on Latini's role in Dante's studies. By the time Dante was eighteen, he had taught himself the art of writing in rhymed verse.
He was able to discourse with the troubadours that came to Florence and became a close friend of Guido Cavalcanti, another distinguished Florentine poet.6

In the area of scholarship and letters, also, Dante was his own teacher. After Beatrice's death in 1290, Dante consoled himself in the area of classical studies. He read Boethius and Cicero, Aristotle, Virgil, Horace and many other classical writers.7 New schools sponsored by the religious orders were on the rise and Dante frequented those near Florence which were involved in religious and philosophic discussion. He became so zealous in his reading that after two or three years his eyes had been greatly weakened. Also during this time following the death of Beatrice, Dante collected the poems he had written praising her. These poems were published under the title Vita Nuova, or New Life.8

Sometime before 1298, Dante married Gemma Donati, and they are known to have had four children, perhaps five.9 Meanwhile, Dante became involved in the volatile politics of Florence. At this time, Florentine government was in the hands of the craft-guilds. In 1295, a law was passed stating that enrollment in a guild, whether one actually practiced the trade or not, would enable a person to participate in the city's government. Dante enrolled in the guild of physicians and apothecaries.10 His name is recorded in the minutes of various councils in Florence between 1295 and 1298, he was an ambassador to a neighboring city in May, 1300, and from June 15 to
August 15, 1300, Dante was one of the six priors who constituted the highest authority in Florence.  

The political situation in Florence at this time was very unstable. The Guelf party had split into two opposing factions, the Blacks and the Whites, as a result of a feud between two rival families. There was no room for a neutral party, so Dante attached himself to the Whites, who seemed less violent than the Blacks. Another element in Florentine politics was the aims of Pope Boniface VIII, who wished to put the rich province of Tuscany, including Florence, under the rule of the Church. During his entire two month priorate, Dante opposed the schemes of the pope and his legate in Florence. The split between the Blacks and Whites was increasingly violent and Dante was sent as one of the ambassadors to Pope Boniface to protest papal policy. However, in November, 1301, while Dante was in Rome, the pope's supposed neutral peacemaker, Charles of Valois, a relation of the king of France, entered Florence and treacherously allowed the Blacks to overthrow the Whites. Dante was one of the first Florentines to be sentenced, first to pay a heavy fine and then to be burned, if he ever again set foot in Florence. He never did.

In the early years of his exile, Dante stayed with the main body of Whites, but he broke with them after two or three years. He wandered through northern Italy from place to place, "to the houses of the great lords who were famous for their generosity toward men of genius and learning or of
pleasing personality." Dante felt that, if he could write a great and learned work, he might be recalled to Florence. So, "to reestablish his reputation impaired by exile," he wrote the Convivo and De Vulgari Eloquentia, two learned treatises which were both left unfinished. They were left unfinished because Dante had gone on to a more worthy work, the Divine Comedy.

Dante lived in great expectation for a few years after 1310, when Emperor Henry VI came into Italy from Germany. During the course of his studies, Dante believed that a universal empire was "the only agency which could transcend individual dissensions between city and city, kingdom and kingdom, and secure by . . . just decisions the peace essential to the well-being of the world." Dante espoused this view in De Monarchia, which was written at this time. He also hoped Henry would make Dante's dream of returning to Florence a reality. However, Henry died in 1313, and Dante's last chance for a noble return to his native city died with Henry.

Around the time of Henry's descent into Italy, Dante began composing his great poem. He resolved to tell of his love for Beatrice in such a way that he would combine that love with a poetical vision of a world that had gone astray from God. The exact date of the composition of the Divine Comedy is uncertain, but certain limitations may be accepted. The Inferno must have been completed after April 20, 1314, because of an allusion to Pope Clement, who died on that date. Both
the *Inferno* and *Purgatory* must have been completed no later than 1319, because they are referred to as finished in a Latin poem by Dante in that year. There is an allusion to Pope John XXII in *Paradise*, so it must have been finished after August, 1315, the date of John's accession to the papacy. The *Paradise* was obviously finished before Dante's death on September 14, 1321, in Ravenna.

In the last three or four years of his life, Dante lived in Ravenna, on the eastern coast of Italy, near Venice. While he was there, the *Inferno* and *Purgatory* had been made public, and Dante became quite famous.

Boccaccio says of Dante at Ravenna, "By his teachings he trained many scholars in poetry, especially in the vernacular, which vernacular to my thinking he first exalted and brought into repute amongst us Italians. . . ." Dante was offered the laurel crown of Bologna, but he refused, wanting rather the laurel from his beloved Florence. Dante died after doing some diplomatic work for the lord of Ravenna, and at Ravenna Dante was buried.

Even after his death, Dante could have no rest. Florence repeatedly begged Ravenna to return the bones of the poet, each time to no avail. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, Florence obtained help from the pope in its quest for Dante's bones, and the lord of Ravenna finally granted permission. However, the Franciscans in charge of the bones removed them secretly, and the move to Florence did not take place. In 1865, during the celebration of the six hundredth
anniversary of Dante's birth, a mason doing work in the chapel adjoining Dante's tomb found the remains hidden in a wooden casket in a wall. They were verified, put on display, and thousands of people visited the display. Afterwards, they were sealed in the original tomb and now rest in Ravenna.25

Dante would not be considered an extremely prolific writer, by modern standards. Besides the Divine Comedy, he wrote only two other finished books. Two others were left unfinished, and there are numerous lyrical poems written in his youth, and various letters and ecologues written during his exile. However, if Dante had written only the Divine Comedy, he would still be one of the greatest poets in history. All of his minor works are important, though, in determining his growth as a writer and thinker.

Besides the Divine Comedy, Dante wrote only two other works in Italian. The Vita Nuova, or New Life was his first work. It is a collection of poems he wrote describing his love for Beatrice and were collected, with the addition of a prose text for the introductions and transitions, after the death of Beatrice. Dante's other Italian work was the Convivo, or Banquet. It is a philosophical treatise which was left unfinished, and was probably written after Dante's exile began, but before the Divine Comedy.26

Dante also wrote a number of works in Latin, the official language of learned men during the Middle Ages. He wrote two ecologues to a Latin teacher in Bologna, one refusing the
laurel crown offered him. He also wrote ten letters, or epistles, to various people throughout northern Italy. After his exile, Dante began a Latin work entitled De Vulgari Eloquentia, which was a treatise on the vernacular tongue. It was intended to justify writing in the vernacular, but this work was left unfinished.27 Dante's most important minor work is De Monarchia, or the World-Empire. In this work Dante gives his political philosophy. Dante put forth the idea that the Empire was put on earth to guide men in the temporal sphere, just as the Church was put on earth to guide men in spiritual matters. Dante believed that man had two goals, one a natural, or earthly goal, and the other a supernatural, or spiritual, goal. The first goal is achieved by philosophy, or reason, under the guidance of the emperor, and the second by theology, under the pope's guidance. Dante believed the pope had usurped the emperor's role on earth in his greed for material things, and was the cause of much of the evil and violence in the world.28

Much has already been said in this thesis about Dante's Divine Comedy, especially in Chapter One. Dante desired to write a work in which the wicked would be punished and the good would be honored. He also wanted to show his love for Beatrice as no other had shown love for any other woman. Since the Church, and especially its leader, the pope, had become so corrupt, Dante believed it was his duty, "to reveal what God has arranged for the salvation of all mankind."29
Dante did this, but in a way that was unique. He wrote in a language that was unique to literature, and with unique individualism. Being a medieval man, Dante used a form that was proven in learned circles. He also agreed with the medieval idea that poetry included "the practical ends of teaching and moral reform." There are many places in Dante's Divine Comedy where philosophical discussions take place during the action. However, Dante broke with medieval tradition in his belief in the importance of individual human beings and individual destiny, shown by his extensive use of individuals familiar to many people and important to him for one reason or another; in his use of the Italian vernacular for a major literary work; in his great use of imagination; and in his use of himself as narrator and as the "hero" in the work.

Dante's own title for his greatest work was simply the Comedy. It was not until the sixteenth century that the word "Divine" was added to the title in a Venetian edition of the work. That title has remained, though, probably owing to the reputation of Dante and his work.

The use of Dante in oral interpretation has been discussed by many scholars not even connected with this field. As was quoted earlier, literary scholar Ernest Hatch Wilkins suggests, "that any group of students of the Divine Comedy may derive pleasure and gain understanding through a cooperative reading." Philip McNair brings the audience, a very
important part of any interpretation program, into the picture. He says, "For the poet's audience the effects of poetry begin in the ear." He goes on to say that Dante displays "a mastery of words which by their very disposition in the poetic period capture the ear. . . . if we have more than an inkling of the poet's meaning, we should find that sound and sense often compliment each other to a marvel." McNair goes on to point out the appeal to the listeners' "visual imagination." However, he goes further than that, and says, "Just as the appeal to the ear is transcended by the appeal to the eye, so the appeal to the eye is transcended by the appeal to the mind." This type of appeal is entirely appropriate for interpretation, a medium in which the location of the action is in the audience's mind. One could ask for no better literature for interpretation than Dante Alighieri's _Divine Comedy_.

NOTES


4Barbi, p. 4.

5Howell, p. 11.

6Barbi, p. 5.

7Toynbee, pp. 90-91.

8Barbi, pp. 7-8.

9Barbi, p. 10, and Toynbee, pp. 95-96.


11Barbi, pp. 11-12.


14Toynbee, pp. 112-113.

15Toynbee, pp. 117-118.

16Barbi, p. 18.

17Barbi, p. 20.

18Barbi, pp. 24-25.


20Howell, pp. 60-63.

21Toynbee, pp. 207-208.
22Toynbee, p. 128.


24Toynbee, pp. 129-130.


26Toynbee, pp. 193-201.


29Barbi, p. 71.

30Barbi, p. 83.


CHAPTER IV

THE SCRIPT AND THE PRODUCTION CONCEPT

The Script

"A Journey Into Dante"

R 3: "... Sighs, lamentations and deep wailings resounded through the starless air, so that at first I began to weep. Diverse tongues, horrible languages, words of pain, accents of rage, voices loud and hoarse, and the sounds of blows made a tumult which moved forever in that air unchanged by time, as sand eddies in a whirlwind."\(^1\)

R 4: "Now I am in the third circle of the rain, eternal, accursed, cold and heavy; its amount and kind never change. Large hailstones, dirty water, and snow pour through the dark air; the ground that receives them stinks. Cerberus, the fierce and cruel beast, barks doglike with three throats over those submerged there."
... Grasping the spirits, he flays and tears them.
The rain makes them howl like dogs,
... We passed over the spirits subdued
by the heavy rain, placing our feet
on their nothingness which appears as flesh.”

R 5: "... Look below, for the river of blood
is near, in which are boiled
those who through violence harm others.
... I saw a wide moat making a bend
surrounding the level ground
... and between the foot of the bank and the ditch
centaurs, armed with arrows, were running, in
single file,
as they used to go hunting in our world.
... Around the ditch they go by the thousands
shooting shades that rise from the blood
farther than their sin allows.”

R 4: "... I saw fires and heard laments,
at which I crouched back all trembling.”

R 3: "... I saw people plunged in excrement...”

R 2: Dante Alighieri is known as the Italian poet who imaginatively journeyed through the depths of Hell, to
Purgatory, and to Paradise in his Divine Comedy.
Because of this journey, he is considered to be, along
with Homer, Shakespeare, and Goethe, one of the four
greatest poets of western civilization. But this was
not the only journey Dante took. During his lifetime, he was exiled from his beloved home of Florence, and was destined to journey from place to place, receiving the aid of lords who patronized men of genius and talent. Even after his death, Dante could have no rest. The city of Florence spent twenty years trying to humiliate Dante while he lived, and spent over two hundred years trying to retrieve the bones of the man they had exiled. Another journey is at hand; come journey with us through Hell, Purgatory, Paradise—and through the world, as Dante knew it.

**R 3:** Dante lived at the end of the Middle Ages. The year 1300 was, as Dante says, "the middle of the journey of our life," meaning he was thirty-five years old. Medieval civilization was disintegrating—the popes were feeble and corrupt and violence and warfare were common—especially in Dante's Italy.

**R 5:** Northern Italy was composed of hundreds of small independent states and cities who were constantly fighting over minute amounts of territory, or fighting because the wrong party was governing a city, or over gold, or just because of boredom. Dante did not enjoy this situation.

**DANTE:** "Ah, servile Italy, hostelry of woe! ship without a pilot in a great storm, no longer a mistress of provinces, but a brothel!
... Now those living in you cannot remain without war; and one gnaws the other, even those whom a single wall and moat enclose. Search, miserable one, around your shores and then look within your boundaries to see if any part of you enjoys peace.

... See how vicious this beast has become, ... for the cities of Italy are full of tyrants, and every villain that joins a party becomes a [hero] Marcellus."

R 5: This was the condition of the land in which Dante lived.

R 4: His home of Florence was one of the most violent places in Italy. A few years before Dante's birth in 1265, a great battle was fought between the Guelfs and the Ghibellines, two parties who each wanted control of Florence. In his early twenties, Dante himself fought in a number of battles between Florence and her neighboring cities. So the tradition of violence was a strong one, strengthened by the fact that the ruling Guelf party had itself divided into two opposing factions.

R 5: This was not the best time to be involved in Florentine politics, but Dante made the mistake of being a conscientious citizen.

R 3: (in character) This city must be doomed. For fifty years we have violence between supporters of the
Ghibellines and supporters of the Guelfs. Battle after bloody battle. Finally the Guelfs drive the Ghibellines out once and for all. Fine! It's about time somebody won.

R 4: (in character) It really didn't matter to me who won, just so we can stay home and make a little money.

R 3: (in character) But once the Guelfs get in power and have their hands on all the strings, they have to start quarrelling and hating each other. Now, instead of Guelfs against Ghibellines, we have White Guelfs against Black Guelfs. When will it all end?

R 4: (in character) Well, what do you expect in a city as rich as Florence. We have the most prosperous merchants in the world and the best banks--everyone knows that Florentine money is good anywhere, and every man in Florence wants to have some say about where that money goes, and to whom!

R 3: (in character) And in the meantime, we have to fight each other. You have to belong to one party or the other. No one is allowed to compromise. It's either Blacks or Whites--there's no middle ground. And there's not a moment of peace for anyone!

R 2: Dante knew that it was impossible to remain neutral. He had to belong to one of the parties, so he picked the Whites. To him, they seemed more civilized, less prone to violence, which was true.
R 5: But they were also, as we shall see, indecisive at the moment of truth.

R 2: Dante served on various councils, and finally, in the summer of 1300, he was elected to the Priorate, a council which constituted the highest authority in Florence.

R 4: (in character) We must do something! This factional violence is ruining our city. Who knows, they may burn down my house next, or yours!

DANTE: So we must take action, but we must be careful, and justice must be distributed equally among those in both factions, so as not to give one the upper hand.

R 3: (in character) Then we will banish the leaders of violence in both parties. It is they who direct the violence. It will be they who suffer.

R 2: Justice was meted out equally, the extremists of both factions were exiled—and so both parties were unhappy.

R 5: This was not the only crisis of government. Pope Boniface VIII had long cast covetous eyes on the rich city of Florence. Dante and the other White Guelfs in the government of Florence staunchly defended the independence of their city from all other powers.

DANTE: We must not give money to Pope Boniface for his army, because eventually it may be used against us!

R 3: (in character) Then we're all agreed.
A little more than a year after Dante's two-month term as Prior, Florence appealed to Pope Boniface to send a neutral peace-maker who would stop the factional violence and reconcile the two parties. The pope sent Charles of Valois, a close relative of the French king. Charles entered the city, and treacherously gave arms to the Black Guelfs. Dante was in Rome as ambassador at this time, and the rest of the Whites—well . . .

(in character) What are we going to do? Charles has armed our enemies. We'll all be killed!

(in character) But we have much more popular support. The Black Guelfs can't win if we oppose them.

(in character) But Charles is related to the French king. He might bring more troops. What should we do?

(in character) French troops? King . . .? Goodbye!

(in character) Where are you going?

Away from here, quickly!

Agreed! Let's save our own lives as best we can.

Florence fell into the hands of the pope and the Black Guelfs.

Dante was among the first to be sentenced to exile, and he never returned to his beloved home.

He never forgave Pope Boniface for his treachery, or the French for their part in it. In Purgatory, Dante puts these words into the mouth of Hugh Capet, founder of a line of French kings.
(in character) "I was the root of an evil tree that darkens the whole Christian land, so that good fruit is seldom plucked from it. ... Yonder I was called Hugh Capet; from me are born the Philips and the Louis's by whom France has recently been ruled. I was the son of a Parisian butcher. When the ancient kings died out,... I found that I held tightly in my hands the reins of the kingdom, and such power from new possessions, and so many friends. ... With violence and deception its rapine began, and afterward ... it seized Ponthieu, Normandy, and Gascony. ... I see a time not far from the present which will bring ... Charles of Valois from France to make himself and his family better known. He will come alone, armed only with the lance with which Judas fought, and he will aim it so that the paunch of Florence will burst. For that, he will gain, not land, but sin and shame, all the heavier the lighter he esteems such crimes. ... O, avarice, what more can you do since you have drawn my family to yourself. ... O my lord, when will I be happy
in observing the vengence which, hidden, makes Thine anger sweet in Thy secret council?  

Because of this treachery, Dante was doomed to wander throughout Italy from prince to prince, seeking his livelihood from patrons of the arts. For a brief time, about ten years after his exile began, Dante had hopes of returning to Florence. Henry, emperor of Germany had come to Italy and attempted to extend his realm.

Dante had always believed that the emperor had been created by God to guide men in earthly matters, just as the pope was to guide men in spiritual matters. He longed for the days of the Roman Empire, when there was peace throughout the land, and when pope and emperor worked together in guiding men to salvation. However, Dante felt the popes had usurped the emperor's power, wanting to control both the realm of man and the realm of God. So Dante wrote an elaborate, scholarly treatise entitled De Monarchia, translated The World-Empire, outlining his views of emperor and pope.

DANTE: "It has been shown that the work proper for the human race, taken as a whole, is to keep the whole capacity of the potential intellect constantly actualized, primarily for speculation, and secondarily for action. And since it is with the whole as it is with the part, and it is the fact that in sedentary quietness the
individual man is perfected in knowledge and wisdom, it is evident . . . that universal peace is the best of all those things which are ordained for our blessedness. . . . 8 Now, when more things than one are ordained for a single purpose, needs must one of them guide or rule. . . . If we consider a city, the end of which is to live well, there must be a single rule. . . . If we consider a kingdom . . . there must be one king to rule, else not only do they in the kingdom fail to reach their goal, but the kingdom itself lapses into ruin. . . . Now . . . the whole human race is ordained for a single end. Therefore there must be one guiding or ruling power. . . . Thus it appears that for the well-being of the world there must be a monarchy or empire. 9 . . . Now, understand that man, alone of all beings . . . partakes of corruptibility and incorruptibility, so he alone should be ordained for two final goals. . . . Now, for diverse ends there must be diverse means. For to the first we attain by the teachings of philosophy . . . to the second by spiritual teachings . . . yet would human greed cast them behind were not men held in the way. . . . Wherefore, man had need of a twofold directive power according to his twofold end, to wit, the supreme pontiff to lead the human race to eternal life . . . and the emperor, to direct the human race temporal [happiness]." 10
Dante's hope for a return to Florence ended when Henry died of a fever shortly after coming to Italy.

But Dante would not give up. He finally came to believe that, if he could write some great work of learning, he might restore his reputation and Florence would invite him back.

If I could only find a worthy subject. One that would live forever and be worthy of God above. The only subject worthy of heaven would be God's mercy—which is love—and justice.

Yes, love! A subject upon which Dante had contemplated a great deal.

In his early youth, Dante had met a young girl named Beatrice, with whom he had fallen in love at first sight. He loved her from afar until her death before the age of twenty-five. While still a very young man, Dante had written many love poems about Beatrice, which he collected into a small book. He ended this early book with a look toward his future work.

"A wonderful vision appeared to me, in which I saw things which made me resolve to speak no more of this blessed one, until I could more worthily treat her. So that, if shall please Him through whom all things live, that my life be prolonged for some years, I hope to say of her what was never said of any woman."

Dante had found the object of his love. He idolized Beatrice until she became a near-deity in his mind.
She became to Dante a symbol of the innocence and supreme goodness of God.

AND AS FOR JUSTICE, WE DISCOVER A GREAT DEAL OF DANTE'S MOTIVATION TOWARD THIS SUBJECT IN A CONTEMPORARY ACCOUNT OF DANTE'S LIFE, BY THE POET BOCCACCIO.

IN CHARACTER "... THERE CAME INTO HIS MIND A LOFTY THOUGHT WHEREBY HE PURPOSED ... TO REPREHEND THE VICIOUS WITH MOST GRIEVIOUS PAINS, AND HONOR THE WORTHY WITH LOFTIEST REWARDS, AND GAIN PERPETUAL GLORY FOR HIMSELF." 12

DANTE HIMSELF EXPLAINS A GREAT DEAL ABOUT HIS WORK IN A LETTER TO ONE OF HIS PATRONS, THE CAN GRANDE DELLA SCALLA.

DANTE: "WE MUST CONSIDER THE SUBJECT OF THIS WORK AS LITERALLY UNDERSTOOD, AND THEN ITS SUBJECT AS ALLEGORICALLY INTENDED. THE SUBJECT OF THE WHOLE WORK, THEN, TAKEN IN THE LITERAL SENSE ONLY, IS 'THE STATE OF SOULS AFTER DEATH,' WITHOUT QUALIFICATION, FOR THE WHOLE PROGRESS OF THE WORK HINGES ON IT AND ABOUT IT. WHEREAS, IF THE WORK BE TAKEN ALLEGORICALLY THE SUBJECT IS 'MAN, AS BY GOOD OR ILL DESERTS, IN THE EXERCISE OF THE FREEDOM OF HIS CHOICE, HE BECOMES LIABLE TO REWARDING OR PUNISHING JUSTICE.' ... THE TITLE OF THE WORK IS, 'HERE BEGINNITH THE COMEDY OF DANTE ALIGHIERI, A FLORENTINE BY BIRTH, NOT BY CHARACTER.' TO UNDERSTAND WHICH, BE IT KNOWN THAT COMEDY ...
differs from tragedy in its content, in that tragedy begins admirably and tranquilly, whereas its end or exit is foul and terrible . . . whereas comedy introduces some harsh complication, but brings its matter to a prosperous end. . . . And hence, it is evident that the title of the present work is 'the Comedy.' For if we have respect to its content, at the beginning it is horrible and fetid, for it is hell; and in the end it is prosperous, desirable, and gracious, for it is Paradise.  

R 4: The subject was epic. As narrator of the story, Dante himself would travel through Hell, to Purgatory, and to Paradise, and describe what he saw, heard, and felt. And the souls who inhabited that other world—they would be people—real and legendary people—but ones with which his readers would be familiar. And this was not just a story of circumstances, but a story that would teach a lesson—a moral lesson.

R 3: Dante would reveal the true path to salvation, while, at the same time, he would give his own opinions on a host of people and subjects.

DANTE: If one is to learn of God and His plan for mankind, then the lessons must be scholarly and must discuss many topics. He above knows all, and we below have so much to learn. I will tell people about the greed of our popes, the failings of our rulers, about wealth
and fortune, the corruption of the world—but my readers will also learn of the Christian virtues—and of the goodness in many people.

R 5: So Dante began his Comedy. With the guidance of the Roman poet Virgil, Dante travelled through Hell, where vicious sinners received terrible punishments for eternity, to Purgatory, where Christian sinners received punishment, but looked forward to eventual bliss and happiness. Then Dante's beloved Beatrice guided him through Paradise, where souls, or shades, as Dante called them, lived in eternal happiness, prosperous and desirable. And the lessons? Popes . . .

R 3: . . . kings . . .

R 4: . . . wealth . . .

R 5: . . . love—all these and more Dante discussed.

R 4: One subject Dante stressed was the idea of man's free will. Through most of the Middle Ages, man's destiny was thought to originate solely from heaven. However, Dante, influenced by the works of Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas, placed great emphasis on man's freedom to choose between good and evil. This subject is discussed in Purgatory by an Italian known as Mark the Lombard.

R 3: (in character) "You who are living consider every cause as originating in the heavens
as if they determined all, of necessity.
If this were so, free will would be destroyed, and there would be no justice, no joy for good nor sorrow for evil. The heavens initiate your impulses--I did not say all, but granting I did say so, a light is given to you to distinguish good from evil, and free will which, if it is severly tested in its first battles with the heavens, afterward, rightly nurtured, conquers all. . . . Therefore, if the world goes astray, the cause is in yourselves." 14

R 5: For Dante, one principal way of rightly nurturing man's free will was through love. Dante speaks of love many times in his Comedy, love being a main motivation for his writing. One of these discourses appears in Purgatory, where Dante, through the character of Virgil, instructs mankind in love that is misguided.

R 2: (as Virgil) "Neither Creator nor creature, my son, . . . was ever without love either instinctive or dependent upon the will, as you know. The instinctive is always without error, but the other can err through a bad object or through too little or too much vigor. While it is directed to primal good and is moderate in other things,
it cannot be a cause of sinful pleasure.
But when it turns to evil or to legitimate pleasures with too much or too little care, the creature works against his Creator. Hence you can understand that love must be the seed of every virtue in you and of every act that deserves punishment. . . . It follows, if I distinguish rightly, that the evil we love is our neighbors', and this arises in three ways in our mortal clay. Some, hoping to excel through their neighbors' decline long only to reduce their greatness. Others fear losing power, honor, and fame if another rises, and wish for the contrary. Still others feel so disgraced by injuries received that they long for vengeance and plan suffering for others. This threefold love is wept for down below."\(^1\)

R 4: Love misguided is reason for punishment, but love correctly guided is divine. In the realm of Paradise, before Dante can reach God, St. John questions him on the subject of love, and does so in the manner of the medieval scholastic teachers.

R 3: (in character) "Begin then and say on what aim your mind is fixed."
DANTE: . . . The Good that contents this court
is the alpha and omega of every scripture
that love proclaims loudly or faintly.

R 3: (in character) . . . Certainly through a finer sieve
you must sift; you must declare
who directed your bow to such a goal.

DANTE: . . . Through philosophical arguments
and through the authority which descends from here
such love had to be impressed in me;
for the Good, as Good, as when understood,
kindles love, and all the greater
in proportion to its degree of goodness.

R 3: (in character) . . . Through human reason
and through authority agreeing with it
your supreme love looks to God,
but tell me further if you feel that other ties
draw you toward Him, so that you may declare
with how many teeth his love bites you.

DANTE: . . . All these things whose bites
can make the heart turn to God
have concurred in creating my love;
the death He bore so that I might live,
and what all the fruitful hope for, as I do,
together with the vivid assurance mentioned,
have drawn me from the sea of perverted love
and have placed my on the shore of the true.
The leaves which cover with foliage
the garden of the Eternal Gardener, I love
in proportion to the good brought to them by Him.  

R 2: Love was a strong motivation for Dante, and his love
for Beatrice is displayed throughout the third book
of his Comedy, a love that is pure and divine.

DANTE: "My enamored mind, always paying court
to its lady, was more eager than ever
to look at her again,
and if nature or art has made a lure
of human flesh or paintings of it
to catch eyes and possess the mind,
all together they would appear as nothing
compared to the divine pleasure that shone on me
when I turned to the smiling face.
And the virtue bestowed by that look
took me from the fair nest of Leda
and lifted me into the swiftest of heavens.
Its highest and lowest parts
are so uniform that I cannot say
which one Beatrice chose for my place;
but she who saw my desire
smiled so happily that God seemed to rejoice
in her countenance. . . ."  

And I prayed,
"O lady in whom my hope is strong,
you who for my salvation endured
to leave your footprints in Hell,
in all the things I have seen
I recognize the grace and virtue
of your power and goodness.
You have lifted me from slavery to freedom
by all those ways, by all the means
through which you had the power to do so.
Continue your generosity toward me,
so that my soul that you redeemed
may be freed from my body pleasing to you.  

R 2: Dante's love for Beatrice had lifted him from Hell, through Purgatory, and to the highest heaven of Paradise.

R 5: Love, though, was not what Dante felt toward another of his subjects in the Comedy. Dante had never forgotten the role of the pope in his exile from Florence. But this subject was more controversial than his discourses on love or free will. The pope, as head of the Roman Catholic Church, was an extremely strong force in medieval society. And the popes, as vicar of God on earth, thought very highly of themselves and their role in the world.

R 4: (in character) I present His supreme excellence, the pontiff of the Church, holy shepherd of the lord's people.
R 3: (in character) As head of the Church, I was chosen in accordance with the wishes of God Almighty. Infallible on earth, I hold the keys to the kingdom of heaven, and know the true path to salvation. Divine providence determines man's role on earth, and heaven demands I raise an army to smite my enemies.

R 5: The popes of Dante's era raised armies to fight rival princes over disputed territories. When the popes began acting like other secular rulers, there was a great decline in papal prestige. In Hell, Dante rebukes a suffering pope for his rejection of spiritual happiness and his obsession for material rewards.

DANTE: "... Now tell me, how much treasure did our Lord ask of St. Peter before he put the keys in his hands? Surely he demanded only, 'Follow me!' Nor did Peter and the others ask Matthias for gold and silver when he was chosen for the place the guilty soul had lost. Therefore, stay there, for you are well punished. ... And if I were still not prevented by reverence for the holy keys which you kept in the happy life, I would use words still heavier; for your avarice afflicts the world, crushing the good and lifting up the bad.
You have made a god of gold and silver, and how do you differ from the idolator, except that he worships one thing of gold, and you a hundred?

R 3: (in character) Heresy! It's heresy to put a pope in Hell!

R 2: Even in Paradise, though, Dante's characters were unhappy with the leader of the Church. St. Peter says this about the current pope, Boniface VIII.

R 4: (in character) "That one who on earth usurps my place, my place which is vacant in the sight of the Son of God, has made of my cemetery a sewer of blood and filth, so that the perverse one who fell from here is pleased.

... The Bride of Christ was not nurtured with my blood, nor with the blood of Linus and Cletus to be used for acquiring gold; but to gain the happy life...

It was not our intention...

... that the keys entrusted to me should become an emblem on a flag to lead a fight against the baptized, nor that I should be a figure on a seal for false and venal privileges,
because of which I often redden and complain.

. . . But high Providence
. . . will soon bring aid, as I conceive.

And you, my son, who because of your mortal weight
will go down again, open your mouth
and do not hide what I do not conceal."

R 3:  (in character) Heresy, I say! Imagine St. Peter telling an enemy of the pope to write about my sins.
What sins? It's heresy!

R 2:  Heresy, maybe.

R 5:  But a popular concept, definitely. After the publication of **Hell** and **Purgatory**, Dante became quite a popular man and many people read his work. And as happens with many popular people, tales grew up about Dante, anecdotes that reflected the popular conception of him as a proud and witty man. One of these tales, told by Franco Sacchetti, shows Dante's uncompromising ways:

R 2:  "After dinner, Dante went out from his house and started on his way. . . . As he passed by the Porta San Piero, a blacksmith was hammering iron on his anvil, and at the same time bawling out some of Dante's verses, leaving out lines here and there, and putting in others of his own, which seemed to Dante a most monstrous outrage.

R 4:  Without saying a word he went to the blacksmith's forge, where were kept all the tools he used to ply his trade,
and seizing the hammer flung it into the street; then he took the tongs and flung them after the hammer, and the scales after the tongs; and he did the same with a number of tools.

R 2: The blacksmith, turning around to him with a coarse gesture, said:

R 3: (in character) What the devil are you doing? Are you mad?

R 2: Dante replied:

DANTE: What are you doing?

R 3: (in character) I am about my business . . . and you are spoiling my tools by throwing them into the street.

DANTE: . . . If you do not want me to spoil your things, do not spoil mine.

R 3: (in character) . . . And what of yours am I spoiling?

DANTE: . . . You sing out of my book, and do not give the words as I wrote them. That is my business, and you are spoiling it for me.

R 4: The blacksmith, bursting with rage, but not knowing what to answer, picked up his things and went back to his work. And the next time he wanted to sing, he sang of Tristam and Lancelot, and let Dante's book alone."

R 2: Whether this story is true or not, it shows the esteem felt for Dante by many people.

R 4: Further evidence of Dante's fame was shown after his death in 1321, in Ravenna. Florence, the city that
exiled him during his life, sorely wanted to recover the remains of its greatest poet.

R 5: But Ravenna, the city where Dante was buried, refused to give up possession of the bones. Five times the people of Florence asked for their return and five times they were unsuccessful.

R 4: An attempt made at the beginning of the sixteenth century would have been successful because Florence had gained the approval of the lord of Ravenna for removal. However, when the tomb was opened, Dante's bones were gone.

R 2: Over three hundred years later, in 1865, during the celebration of the six hundredth anniversary of Dante's birth, the bones were accidentally discovered by a mason at work. They had been hidden in a wall by monks jealous of their charge over three hundred years earlier. They now rest in Ravenna still, not in Florence, due to the fact that Italy was a unified nation, and Dante's exile over.

R 3: All this fuss about a few bones?

R 5: Yes, all this fuss over the bones of a man who travelled Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise. As popular as his teachings on popes and love were, Dante is most remembered for his vision of Hell, and the punishments throughout. The people being punished were a diverse lot:
heroic figures such as Jason and Ulysses,
famous Italians of Dante's day,
even some of Dante's closest friends and teachers.

Hell was a gruesome place, but a place that captured
the imagination of people--then and now. Come with
us into these dark reaches. The entrance to Hell is
just ahead, with words written on the gate:
"Through me you go into the city of grief,
through me you go into the pain that is eternal,
through me you go among people lost.
Justice moved my exalted Creator;
the divine power made me,
the supreme wisdom, and the primal love.
Before me all created things were eternal,
and eternal I will last.
Abandon every hope, you who enter here."23

In Hell, Dante is alive, while all those about him
are dead--shades of their past life on earth. One of
the first punishments Dante is led to by Virgil is
that of those guilty of lust.

"Now I begin to hear the sad notes of pain,
now I have come to where
loud cries beat upon my ears.
I have reached a place mute of all light
which roars like the sea in a tempest
when beaten by conflicting winds."
The infernal storm which never stops
drives the spirits in its blast;
whirling and beating, it torments them.
When they come in front of the landslide,
they utter laments, moans, and shrieks;
there they curse the Divine Power.
I learned that to such a torment
carnal sinners are condemned
who subject their reason to desire.
And, as starlings are borne on their wings . . .
so that blast carries the evil spirits.
Here, there, up, and down, it blows them;
no hope ever comforts them
of rest or even of less pain.
. . . So I saw them coming, uttering laments,
shades borne by that strife of winds.
I asked, 'Master, who are these people
whom the black air so punishes?'

R 2: (as Virgil) See Helen for whom
so many bad years revolved, and the great Achilles
whose last battle was with love.
See Paris, Tristan,--

DANTE: and he pointed out and named
more than a thousand shades
whom love had taken from our life."^24

R 5: Further down in Hell, Dante finds a friend and teacher
of his earlier years, in that circle of Hell reserved
for sodomites. This former teacher speaks with Dante briefly, and ends his conversation by encouraging Dante in his writing.

DANTE: "We met a band of spirits coming along the bank, and each gazed at us as, at dusk, under a new moon, men are wont to look at each other, sharpening their eyes at us as an old tailor does at his needle's eye. Thus gazed by such a group, I was recognized by one . . . I fixed my glance on his baked aspect so that his burned face did not prevent the recognition of him by my memory. . . . I asked, 'Are you here, ser Brunetto?' And he,

R 4: (in character) O my son, may it not displease you if Brunetto Latini goes back with you a little. . . .

DANTE: 'As much as I can I beg you to, and if you want me to sit down with you I will do so. . . .'

R 4: (in character) O son . . . whoever of this flock stops one instant, lies afterward a hundred years without brushing off the fire that strikes him; therefore, go on; I will follow at your skirts and then I will rejoin my band
which goes lamenting its eternal punishment.

... If you follow your star
you cannot fail to reach a glorious port
if I discerned rightly in the fair life.
And if I had not died so early,
seeing the heavens so gracious to you,
I would have cheered you in your work.

DANTE: '... In my mind is fixed and my heart knows
the dear and kindly image of you
as a father when, from hour to hour,
you taught how man makes himself eternal... .'25

R 3: So Dante put not only his enemies into Hell, but also
his friends, if they were deserving of eternal punish-
ment. Farther down, Dante sees new and more terrible
miseries.

DANTE: "On the right I saw new misery,
new torments, and new tormentors. . . .
The sinners along the bottom of the ditch were naked,
coming on this side facing us, on the other
moving with us. . . .
On both sides of the dark rock
I saw horned demons with great whips
beating the shades fiercely from behind.
Ah, how they made them lift their legs
at the first stroke! Indeed,
none waited for the second or third. . . .
And my good master, without my asking, said,
(as Virgil) Look at that great one coming, who, for his pain, sheds no tears; what a regal bearing he still has! That is Jason who through courage and slyness deprived the Colchians of their ram. He passed through the island of Lemnos after the bold and pitiless women had given up to death all their men. There, with gifts and fine words, he deceived Hypsipyle, the young girl who first had deceived all the others. He abandoned her pregnant and forlorn. Such guilt condemns him to this punishment; and vengeance is taken for Medea. With him go all those who deceive in this way.”

Dante's imagination had a unique punishment for every crime, but one of the most terrible punishments was for thieves. Dante and Virgil have stopped to speak with a group of them,

when an amazing metamorphosis begins.

"If you are slow, Reader, to believe what I am to relate, it will be no wonder, for I who saw it scarcely admit it to myself. As I kept my eyes on them, a serpent with six legs darted in front of one and fastened itself wholly to him.
With its middle feet it clasped his belly
and with those in front seized his arms;
then it set its fangs in both his cheeks.
It spread its hind feet over his thighs
and thrust its tail between them
drawing it up along his back.
Ivy never clung to a tree so tightly
as the horrible beast
entwined the other's members in its own;
then they grew together and exchanged their color
as if they had been hot wax,
nor did either one or the other appear as before. . . .
The two heads had already fused into one,
and the shapes of two faces appeared blended
in the one in which the others had disappeared.
The two arms were formed of four strips;
the thighs with the legs, the belly and the chest,
became such members as were never seen.
All former features were blotted out;
the perverse image seemed two and none,
and thus went away with slow steps.
. . . The soul that had become a brute
fled hissing through the ditch.
. . . Thus I saw the seventh ballast change
and interchange, and let the strangeness of it
be my excuse if my pen has gone astray."
The justice of God can be terrible and it can be strange. As they travel further down into the pit of Hell, Dante and Virgil come to the place where evil counselling is punished.

DANTE: "As a peasant who is resting on a slope
. . . sees fireflies down in the valley . . .
so, with as many flames the eighth bolgia
was all resplendent, as I noticed
when I came to where I could see the bottom.
. . . Each light moved through the ditch,
one revealing what it hid,
and yet each concealed a sinner. . . .
My guide, who saw me so attentive, said,

(as Virgil) Within the fires are the spirits;
each is wrapped in what is burning him.
. . . In that flame Ulysses and Diomed
are tortured, and thus they go together
in punishment as in their battles.
They groan within their flame for the ambush
of the horse. . . .
Also they weep for the art on account of which
Diedamia still weeps for Achilles,
and they suffer too for the Palladium." 28

Those who gave evil advice are forever trapped within
a flame, while those who caused discord and scandal
have their bodies mutilated. Among the people who
are punished for sowing discord are Mahomet and a poet of Dante's time.

DANTE: "A cask without a stave or endboard looks less mutilated than one I saw split from his chin down to where wind is broken. His entrails hung between his legs, the vital parts appeared with the foul sack which makes excrement of what is swallowed. While I was intently looking at him, he gazed at me, and with his hands opened his breast, saying,

R 3: (in character) Now see how I tear myself, see how mangled Mahomet is! In front of me Ali goes weeping, his head split from chin to forelock; and all the others you see here while alive were sowers of scandal and of schism and therefore are split like this. A devil is here behind us who cuts us thus cruelly with the edge of his sword, reopening all the wounds when we have gone around the doleful road, since they are healed before we come again before him.

DANTE: ... I ... looked at the throng, and I saw a thing I would fear
to tell about without more proof, 
except that conscience reassures me. . . . 
I saw certainly, and I still seem to see 
a body without a head, going on 
like the others in this sad troop. 
It held by the hair its severed head 
dangling from its hand like a lantern 
which looked at us and said,

R 4:  (in character) Woe is me!

DANTE: Of itself it made a lamp for itself, 
and they were two in one and one in two; 
how this can be He knows who so ordains. 
When it was at the foot of the bridge, 
it lifted the head high with its arm 
to bring the words closer to me, 
which were,

R 4:  (in character) Now you see my terrible penalty, 
you who, breathing, are visiting the dead; 
judge if any is as great as this. 
And, that you may take news of me, 
know that I am Bertran de Born, the one 
who gave the young king encouragement. 
I made father and son rebellious to each other. 
. . . Because I separated persons thus joined, 
I now carry my brain, alas, 
detached from its source in this body. 
Thus retribution is observed in me."29
R 5: Mutilation, head severed from body, these are indeed terrible punishment, and would keep almost anyone from sin.

R 4: But the worst sinners, in Dante's eyes, were traitors; traitors to kindred, guests,

R 3: traitors to lord and country.

R 5: These are the sinners at the bottom of Hell.

DANTE: "If I had rhymes rough and harsh enough to be fitting for the dismal hole on which all the other circles weigh--. . . . For, to describe the bottom of the whole universe is not an enterprise to take up in jest. . . . When we were down in the dark well . . . I turned and saw a lake in front of me and under my feet which, frozen, had the appearance of glass and not of water. The Danube in Austria never made in winter so thick a veil for its current . . . as this did. . . . The shades were lying in the ice, livid up to where shame appears, their teeth chattering like storks' bills. Each held his face down; their mouths gave evidence of the cold, and their eyes of their sad hearts. When I had looked around a little, . . . I saw two frozen in one hole,
so that the bread of one was a hood for the other,  
and as bread is chewed from hunger,  
so the one on top set his teeth in the other  
where the brain joins the neck.  
'O you who show by such bestial signs  
hatred of him you are chewing,  
tell me why. . . .'30
The sinner raised his mouth from his fierce repast,  
wiping it on the hair of the head  
the back of which he had despoiled,  
and then began . . .

R 3: (in character) I do not know who you are, nor by what means  
you have come down here, but certainly  
you seem a Florentine when I hear you.  
You must understand that I was Count Ugolino  
and this is the Archbishop Ruggieri;  
. . . as the result of his evil thoughts,  
I was seized, trusting in him,  
and put to death. . . .

DANTE: We went farther on. . . .31

R 2: (as Virgil) The banners of the lord come forth  
toward us, therefore, look ahead  
. . . and try to discern him.

DANTE: As, when a thick mist covers the land  
or when night darkens our hemisphere,
a windmill, turning, appears from afar, 
so now I seemed to see such a structure. ... 
When we had gone so far ahead 
that my master was pleased to show me 
the creature [Lucifer] that once had been so fair, 
he stood in front of me, and made me stop, 
saying,

R 2: (as Virgil) Behold, Dis! Here is the place 
where you must arm yourself with courage. ... 

DANTE: The emperor of the dolorous realm 
from mid-breast protruded from the ice, 
and I compare better in size 
with . . . giants than they do with his arms. . . . 
O, how great a marvel appeared to me 
when I saw three faces on his head! 
. . . In each mouth he chewed a sinner with his teeth 
in the manner of a hemp brake, 
so that he kept three in pain. . . .

R 2: (as Virgil) The soul up there with the greatest 
punishment 
. . . is Judas Iscariot. His head 
is inside the mouth, and he kicks with his legs. 
Of the other two whose heads are down, 
the one . . . is Brutus; 
see how he twists and says nothing. 
The other who seems so heavy is Cassius.
but night is rising again now,
and it is time to leave, for we have seen all."^{32}

R 5: "We have seen all," and our journey into Dante is ended. This poet has been acclaimed by scholars for seven hundred years; and by other poets. T.S. Eliot said, "Dante and Shakespeare divide the world between them, there is no third."

The Production Concept

A production concept, according to Long, Hudson, and Jeffrey, establishes a relationship between the script and the production. "Without a production concept, a performance is left to whim or chance...^{33} Therefore, a few words seem appropriate.

This script is an adaptation of Dante's life and works, the main work being the Divine Comedy. The main character is Dante himself. The other readers portray characters in Dante's Comedy, act out probable scenes from Dante's life, and serve as narrators.

Dante's life and times serve as background for the emergence of ideas from his works. The principle conflict in the script is between Dante and society. Dante considered society during his time to be a corrupting influence on man. There are also other conflicts between Dante and specific persons. As the part of the Divine Comedy entitled Inferno, or Hell, was and is the most popular and interesting part, it is em-
phasized near the end, though ample selections from *Purgatory* and *Paradise* are included throughout the script.

Dante's insight into medieval life and his hope for man's salvation are the two main qualities arising from this script.

The translation of the *Divine Comedy* used is crucial for any script of this type. Many English translations of Dante's Italian work are available. Some translations attempt to imitate Dante's rhyme scheme and rhythm, others are written in straight prose. The translation used in this script, by H.R. Huse, is written in prose, but keeps the form of the original verse. This translation seems to be better for use in an oral presentation than many others. Since an audience for a group interpretation program may be hearing all or part of Dante's works for the first time, the meaning of the poetry needs to be understood at once.

Any director of this script will have his own ideas of staging. One suggested method of staging is to designate various areas of the stage as representing Florence and Hell, or this world and the next. This concept may help the audience gain a clearer understanding of the script.

Obviously, any readers who perform this script must have a thorough understanding of the material and the purpose of the script. The director also must have a good knowledge of Dante in order to understand the reasons for various actions and ideas in the script.

This script is designed for students of literature, students of history, or students of Dante—a generally intellectual
audience. It may be less enthusiastically received by a general audience. This script is designed to be not only entertaining, but equally informative and instructional. The educational value should not be overlooked.

Since the Middle Ages were dominated by males, four of five readers are males. Reader 2, a male, reads narration and, when Dante is in Hell and Purgatory, assumes the role of his guide, Virgil. Readers 3 and 4, both male, read narration and take the parts of various characters in Dante's life or characters in Dante's Divine Comedy. Reader 5 is female and reads narration only. When Reader 2 is in the character of Virgil, the words "as Virgil" appear in parentheses preceding the beginning of his line. When Readers 3 and 4 portray various characters, the words "in character" appear in parentheses preceding their lines. Reader 5 has no character lines.
NOTES


2*Inferno* VI. 7-21, 34-37.


4*Inferno* XVII. 122-123.

5*Inferno* XVIII. 113.

6*Purgatory* VI. 76-78, 82-87, 94, 124-126.

7*Purgatory* XX. 43-54, 49-53, 55-57, 64-66, 70-78, 81-84, 94-96.


9Dante, *De Monarchia*, pp. 140-141.

10Dante, *De Monarchia*, pp. 276-277.


14*Purgatory* XVI. 67-78, 82-83.

15*Purgatory* XVII. 90-105, 112-124.


17*Paradise* XXVII. 88-105.
18 **Paradise** XXXI. 79-90.

19 **Inferno** XX. 90-97, 100-105, 112-114.


22 Toynbee, pp. 137-145.

23 **Inferno** III. 1-9.

24 **Inferno** V. 25-40, 42-45, 48-51, 64-69.

25 **Inferno** XV. 16-23, 26-28, 30-42, 55-60, 82-85.


27 **Inferno** XXV. 46-63, 70-78, 136-137, 142-144.


29 **Inferno** XXVIII. 22-42, 112-115, 118-136, 139-142.


31 **Inferno** XXXIII. 1-4, 10-14, 16-18.

32 **Inferno** XXXIV. 1-7, 16-21, 28-31, 37-38, 55-57, 61-69.


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