



[Inferno](#), by Dante Alighieri

In A Nutshell

Written in the early fourteenth century by Italian politician Dante Alighieri, the *Divine Comedy* is a literary reaction to the bitterly contested politics of medieval Florence. Florence, the richest of the Italian city-states and possibly all of Europe at that time, was divided between two political parties – the Blacks (who supported the Pope) and the Whites (who didn't). When Pope Boniface VIII schemed with the Blacks to seize power over Florence in a military coup, Dante was exiled. His hatred of the Pope can be seen throughout his *Divine Comedy*.

The *Divine Comedy* is Dante's fictional account of himself traveling through the three divine realms: Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven. Not surprisingly, in this story Dante puts his enemies in Hell; the *Inferno* is heavily populated with corrupt Florentine politicians characterized as sinners.

But more than just a means to get payback, the *Divine Comedy* is the first Italian epic work of poetry that is not in church Latin but in the vernacular – the language of the common people – the Florentine dialect of Italian. So Dante played a major role in standardizing the Italian language, coining new words and paving the way for major works of literature written in the vernacular. In other words, Dante's a big cahuna among poets.

Visit Shmoop for much more analysis:

- [Inferno Themes](#)

Visit Shmoop for full coverage of [Inferno](#)

Shmoop: [study guides](#) and [teaching resources](#) for [literature](#), [US history](#), and [poetry](#)



Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 3.0

This document may be modified and republished for noncommercial use only.
You must attribute Shmoop and link to <http://www.shmoop.com>.

- [Inferno Quotes](#)
- [Inferno Summary](#)
- Also: literary devices, characters, trivia, audio, photos, links, and more

Big Picture Study Questions

- 1 How can forces like love and compassion give rise to banishment to Hell? Do you see any traces of love or compassion in the sinners' punishments?
- 2 What are the three categories of sin, according to Dante? Why are the sins of the deeper circles morally worse than those of the higher?
- 3 Why does Dante so highly admire Nature or anything natural? And if the natural is so good, why are the incontinent sinners – who only follow their natural instincts – condemned to Hell?

Visit Shmoop for many more [Inferno Study Questions](#)

Visit Shmoop for full coverage of [Inferno](#)
Shmoop: study guides and teaching resources for literature, US history, and poetry



Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 3.0

This document may be modified and republished for noncommercial use only.
You must attribute Shmoop and link to <http://www.shmoop.com>.