



The Herald

November 2015
Page 1 of 3

A Publication of the MCA Office of
Advancement and Development



Classical Literature and Writing at MCA

At the core of MCA's pedagogical philosophy is a classical model of education. This model is based on the trivium, which simply put, uses a three stage process to educate young minds. The three parts are based primarily on the developmental ages and abilities of students, with the first part, the grammar stage, providing rich and meaningful information for our students. The second stage, the didactic or logic stage, focuses on teaching students to develop higher level thinking skills and is implemented primarily in the middle grades. The third stage of the trivium is the rhetoric phase, which is aimed at high school aged students and intent upon helping them learn to articulate their thoughts and feelings properly, whether verbally or in writing. Each successive stage builds upon the previous. Our curriculum is comprised of rich materials to support these three stages.

In direct correlation with this philosophy and pedagogy, MCA high school students recently completed a six-week study of *The Inferno*, the first third of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, written in the early 1300s, which is still highly regarded as one of the preeminent works of literature in western civilization. This study was completed under the direction of Mr. Erick Allen, MCA high school English and Latin teacher, and to mark its end, students completed projects to illustrate their understanding, and in fact, hosted a "Dante Open House Night" to present their projects to their parents. Students created original works of art, composed musical scores, performed original vocal compositions, and made 3-dimensional art pieces. Additionally, all students composed essays about some facet of *The Inferno*. This edition of *The Herald* is sharing two of those essays with you. Through these, you'll see the caliber of writing produced by our high school students, see examples of truth, goodness, and beauty they found in *The Inferno*, and perhaps gain a better understand for yourself of one of the world's great classical works of literature.



Poets Dante and Virgil approach the gates of the Inferno in this drawing by artist Gustave Doré.

Truth in Canto 2

By Madison Meadows, MCA 10th Grade

In Canto II of his *Inferno*, Dante the Pilgrim expresses his unworthiness for the journey which he is about to undertake. Dante asks Virgil, "But why am I to go? Who allows me to? I am not Aeneas, I am not Paul, neither I nor any man would think me worthy; and so, if I should undertake the journey, I fear it might turn out an act of folly . . ." (Dante, 80). Here, we are shown the nature of truth in human nature. Both Dante the Pilgrim and Dante the Poet convey that they are fearful of the journey they are about to embark on. Dante the Pilgrim expresses his inadequateness when compared to the giants of history who have embarked on these journeys long before he



(Dante the Pilgrim) was ever a thought. Dante the Poet, like his fictional counterpart, expresses his fear of not being good enough. His fear resides in the fear of judgement of the people (since this is a large work concerning an even larger idea), as well as his fear of not stacking up to the poets (who wrote about great events and ideas) preceding him. Both the literal and deeper meaning of the work portray the idea of inadequateness. That fact is a simple truth of human nature; in everything we do, we are always comparing ourselves to the people around us and we feel bad when we cannot match the results of those people. Later on in the Canto, we do learn that Dante the Pilgrim accepts the journey. This conveys the truth that humans, at some point in life, accept the fact that they will not always be the best but that they must always try their best.

Even this far past the time of Dante, his conveyance of the natural state of humans is still true. As a teenager, I often find myself being compared to others or comparing myself to them. I cannot imagine a day that goes by that I do not find myself comparing my grades or my answer to my peers' work. Sometimes, I feel as though I am the only person on the face of the planet who experiences this. Dante helped me to see otherwise. Seeing yourself as inadequate has been recognized as one of the many parts of human nature. Both Dante the Pilgrim and Dante the Poet are prime examples of overcoming a fear of being inadequate. For Dante the Pilgrim overcoming his fear meant he was once again reunited with his first love Beatrice. Dante the Poet (and the works he left behind) was rewarded with being studied and remembered hundreds of years later. The work, as well as the man who authored it, have showed the world the true nature of their human existence. Knowing the truth that Dante conveys allows for human to accept this *flaw* (I say this is flaw, even though at times it is necessary to compare yourself to other for means of motivation) and learn that pushing through the fear of failing may end up leading them exactly where they thought they would never be.

Treachery Against Man and God **by Dalton Collins, MCA 10th Grade**

The *Inferno* is considered the greatest installment in Dante Alighieri's masterpiece the *Divine Comedy*. The entire work is considered one of the greatest works of western literature if not one of the greatest in the world. The *Inferno* follows Dante the Pilgrim, not Dante the poet it should be noted, through a Catholic view of Hell. The second part of Dante's masterpiece is Purgatorio (Purgatory), followed by Paradiso (Heaven). This essay will discuss parts of the *Inferno*. A somber, horrific, and profound poem, it leaves a grave emotional and spiritual impact on the reader through Dante's descriptive depictions of punishments for sins that grant sinners eternity in Hell. Throughout, Dante includes characters from world and personal history that add an air of humor as well as a morbid personal aspect to the punishments and depictions of each of the nine circles of Dante's version of Hell. Cantos thirty-one until the end in Canto thirty-four deal with the ninth circle of Hell where the sin is treachery. In Dante's view, treachery is the greatest of all sins because it is the sin committed by Satan against God when he rebelled and fell to Hell. Catholic doctrine does not actually label any sin as worse than any other, all sin distances one from God, and therefore all are equally bad. In a sense this means that all sin is treachery against God, because sin and treachery are both rejections of God. Dante shows his Circle of Treachery through his own views of sin, Hell, and the people he included in the circle. He masterfully combines these factors to shape a circle in Hell that relates to history and his own thought and interpretations.

"How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations" (*King James Version Bible*, Isa. 14.12)! This is the closest verse in the Bible that suggests Satan fell into Hell due to the original sin of treachery against God. The fact that the first sin was treachery against God, the ultimate supreme being in the view of Catholicism, makes it the worst of all sins in Dante's mind. Repetitions of the sin of treachery by humans mirror the primal act of Satan. Therefore any humans who commit the sin of treachery will also be punished in the same fashion as Satan, eternally frozen in ice at the center of Hell. Interestingly, there are three particular sinners singled out by Dante as the three worst other than Satan. These sinners are Judas, Brutus, and Cassius, all three are traitors. Dante describes the imprisonment of Satan in such vivid detail, "The king of the vast



kingdom of all grief stuck out with half his chest above the ice... this body was in proportion to his arms... If once he was as fair as now he's foul... it is fitting that all grief should spring from him" (Dante 380). Dante also notes that Satan has a three faced head. The exact appearance of Satan serves to induce extreme fear in the reader and embody sin in one great beast. He creates the eternal ice of Cocytus with his constant wing-flapping. An interesting contrapasso appears here: Satan is constantly frozen in a place where his body and head constantly face away from God when he originally tried to rebuke God and leave God's side. His feet constantly face God, showing that Satan is still away from God. Gustav Dore produced a magnificent depiction of Satan locked in ice. He poses Satan in a bored pose in which he rests his chin upon the balls of his hands as he chews Judas in his middle mouth, and Brutus and Cassius in his others (Dante 381). While Catholic tradition would regard Satan as the greatest of all sinners, treachery would not be called the greatest sin. Dante took liberties with his poem to suggest that some sins are worse than others.

While Satan is the apparent center of attention in Canto 34, three other sinners are singled out as aforementioned, Judas, Brutus, and Cassius. Judas must be discussed in length to understand his significance. Judas betrayed Jesus, but more specifically he betrayed the entire Holy Trinity, this essentially puts him on the same level as Satan himself as a traitor of God. Judas betrayed God and that is most likely why Dante chose to put him in the position of extreme agony that is the middle mouth of Satan. Dante depicts Judas not only being chewed, but ripped free of his skin and clawed, a much more painful punishment than Brutus and Cassius. Judas' legs stretch upwards towards God, just like Satan's, a clear representation that Satan and Judas are on very similar levels of sinfulness. In Dante's mind and in Catholic doctrine, betrayal and sin against God is the ultimate sin. Dante calls it "treachery." The fact that Dante includes the line that reads, "sometimes his back was raked free of its skin" (Dante 381), is similar to the punishment Jesus endured after Judas' betrayal which took form in the whipping of Jesus.

The other two sinners eternally chewed by Satan in his left and right mouths are Brutus and Cassius, traitors to Caesar, their leader and friend. The story of Caesar is a great one, both tragic and great. When they felt that Caesar had far transcended the powers of the Senate, Brutus, Cassius, and other Senators plotted against Caesar to kill him. Caesar was the greatest leader of man as Jesus was the most humanly form of God. Brutus and Cassius's heads constantly protrude from Satan's mouth as he chews them. In a contrapasso, Brutus and Cassius are chewed and somewhat stabbed by Satan's teeth. This is similar to the manner in which they murdered Caesar in a flurry of knife stabs that killed him long before the stabbing ceased.

It is essential to separate the four sinners depicted here in the center of the Inferno. Judas and Satan betrayed God himself, the supreme ruler of all creation, no being is greater. Brutus and Cassius betrayed one of the greatest if not the greatest leader of man, Caesar. The traitors to God and the traitors to man represent the epitome of all sins in the mind of Dante. These four iconic people embody the greatest sins of all in the labyrinthian mind of Dante. Treachery against God and treachery against man, the two ultimate betrayals. Religion greatly influenced Dante's writing in the *Inferno*, but he still interprets the Bible and Catholic doctrine to suit his own needs, which creates an original and imaginative Hell that goes much deeper than just basic sin. He spent time in thought, in a way taking his own journey through Hell. He created a masterpiece of western literature that mystifies and inspires thought throughout the ages in each new generation of thinkers.

Works Cited

Alighieri, Dante. *Inferno*. Trans. Mark Musa. New York, NY: Penguin, 2003. Print.

"Catechism of the Catholic Church - Sin." *Catechism of the Catholic Church - Sin*. Vatican.va, n.d. Web. 29 Oct. 2015.

Isaiah. "Isaiah." *The Holy Bible*. King James Version ed. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1976. N. pag. Print.

Mandelbaum, Allen, Anthony Oldcorn, and Charles Ross, eds. *Lectura Dantis: Inferno*. Los Angeles: U of California, 1998. Print.

Raffa, Guy P. "Dante's Inferno - Cantos 31-34." *Danteworlds*. The University of Texas at Austin, 2007. Web. 29 Oct. 2015.