

## VIRGIL IN DANTE'S DIVINE COMEDY

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### Abstract

Apart from the character of Dante, Virgil is the main character in Dante's Divine Comedy. While that choice makes sense if one reads Divine Comedy as just a beautiful poem (the greatest Roman poet guides the greatest Italian poet), we should not forget that Dante is a deeply Christian poet and Divine Comedy is a Christian poem which is meant at least partially as a religious prophecy. How can a Christian poem have as one of its two main characters a famous pagan poet? Most of Dante's serious readers cover this apparent contradiction by basically claiming there is none. The main consensus between those readers is that Virgil in the poem is not the historical poet but a stand in for Reason or Worldly Wisdom. There are many facts to support this vision since all over the Inferno and Purgatorio parts of the poem, Virgil is there guiding and protecting Dante in every corner, opening gates for him, outlining the structure of Hell, explaining the role of Fortune in the human world, teaching Dante to become an advisor to lost souls in Inferno etc. But there are other facts that point that Virgil in the poem is the real poet. For example while Virgil seems to know almost everything there are cases when he gets fooled by demons and later in the poem he even gets ridiculed for his failures. Also in the poem the character of Homer says: "Onorate l'altissimo poeta" referring to Virgil. Also the structure of the poem closely follows that of Virgil's Aeneid, and the language of the poem, especially the language that Dante puts in Virgil's mouth, is very rich in figures, similar to the language of the Aeneid. It is clear that Dante admires Virgil the poet highly and comes to love Virgil in the poem as a father figure. Yet in the poem Dante doesn't put Virgil in paradise even though there are other pagan characters that he does put in paradise. One of them is Statius who is saved by nothing else but the Aeneid. It is very perplexing that Virgil's poem can save somebody and put them in paradise but Virgil himself cannot be saved. In this paper we do not claim to solve this problem but we put together some facts and arguments that one can use to shed light over this remarkable issue.

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