

poetic or magical levels, can only go so far in the comprehension of reality, and that is to the external limits of the Earthly Paradise. Therefore when Dante, having traversed the deepest pits of Hell, and climbed the spiral path of Mount Purgatory, comes to the brook that circumscribes the Garden of Eden, he is able to go no further under Virgil's guidance. Virgil can only return to Limbo, the noble but loveless state of the intellect, that can only see the world on its own terms and within its own limitations. To go further the force of love is necessary.

This force is embodied by Beatrice, who expresses not only mortal love but carries the blinding, transfiguring power of divine love as well; that which created the worlds and holds them in being. It is she who meets Dante at the limits of the Earthly Paradise and escorts him through the Heavenly Spheres to the limits of the Uncreate Empyreum beyond the Heavens.

It is in fact she, the embodiment of the feminine principle, who is responsible for the whole Divine Comedy anyway, for it is upon her initiative that Dante, wandering lost in the dark wood of the world, is given the opportunity to embark upon his conducted tour of the inner conditions of the soul.

In fact, in accordance with the most ancient goddess symbolism, this feminine initiative is threefold. Dante's condition had first been the concern of the Virgin Mary, the noble Lady of Heaven. She calls it to the attention of Saint Lucia, described as the enemy of all cruelty, and whose very name signifies light. She in turn asks Beatrice, whom he loved in mortal life, to intercede. Beatrice then appears to Virgil, beseeching him to conduct Dante on the first stages of this errand of mercy.

It is not until Virgil has led Dante through the depths of Hell and up the spiral path of the terraces of Mount Purgatory in a form of alchemical or initiation process, that Dante can face the purity and beauty of the heavenly Beatrice. This is a meeting of great power and significance for it is the moment of the purified soul coming face to face with the reality of divine love after sloughing off the limitations of the vales of illusion.

The Earthly Paradise

When Dante finally approaches the verges of the Earthly Paradise he finds it represents the world as it should have been. Sweet gentle breezes blow through beautiful glades in which songbirds sing. A clear stream runs under the shady trees at its perimeter and on the further side he sees a maiden gathering flowers. She is singing like one in love, and wending her way like a nymph through the woodland shades.