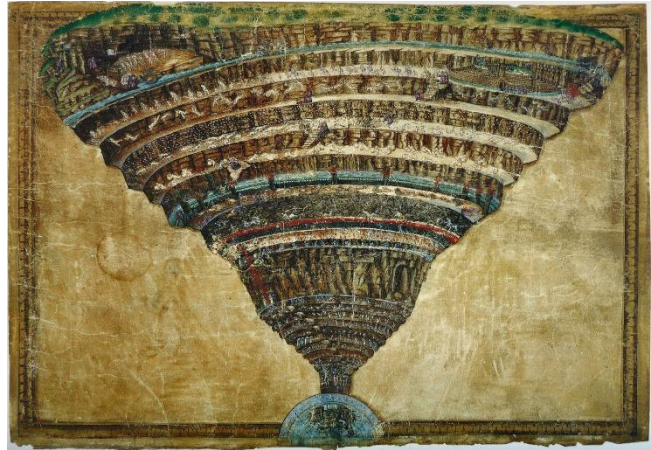


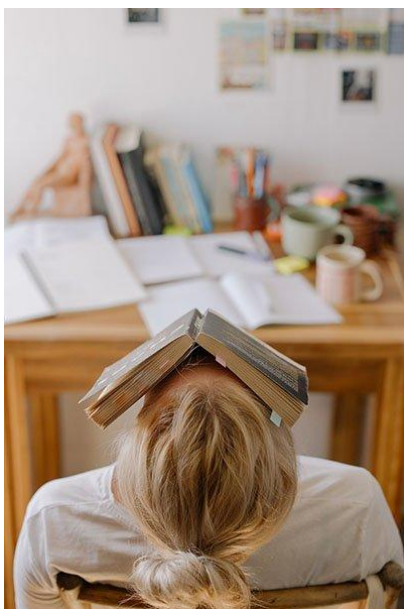
Connecting with Dante

In *Inferno*, Dante's journey through the underworld isn't just about visiting hell, it's all about facing the darkest parts of himself and trying to understand the world he sees around him. When Dante first entered the dark wood (Canto I), he's lost in every way that he could be, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. This "crossing of the threshold" moment into the unknown starts a transformation where he begins to start to understand the



consequences of human actions and things like, sin, and justice. I think what stood out the most was how personal the journey started to become for him. He meets people he once liked and admired, and he realizes that even the "good" people he knows can fall. It's not just a tour of Hell, or a little sight seeing trip for him, it's Dante learning that he has to take responsibility for his own life and beliefs in order to success. With Virgil as his guide (represents reason) he starts to find clarity and order in a world that at first seemed terrifying and very chaotic. For example, when Virgil tells Dante, "Your soul is burdened with cowardice" (Canto II), it's kind of a turning point for him. Dante realizes that to move forward in his life, he has to face his fears and grow up. In that way, this underworld journey helps him begin to reorder his life with more purpose and understanding.

I feel like my own "belly of the whale" moment came during the first semester of



college. It hit me really hard how different and overwhelming everything was compared to high school, and living at home with my parents. I was used to having a clear routine, supportive teachers, and a close group of friends. But suddenly I was in this place where I didn't know anyone, I didn't really know who I was as a student or really even a person anymore, and I was really doubting if I even belonged anywhere. There was one week in particular where I failed a test, forgot an assignment, and just kind of shut down. That was definitely my "dark wood" time. I remember staying up way too late just spiraling, wondering if I'd made a huge mistake choosing to do this. But eventually, I reached out to my advisor and others and started asking for help. Like Dante learning

from Virgil, I had to lean from mentors and learn how to manage things better. It didn't fix everything overnight, but it helped me find a little order in all my chaos around me.

Looking back, I definitely see how my experience kinda mirrors Dante's in some ways. We both had to face that feeling of being lost and overwhelmed and make the choice to keep moving forward anyway and up. For Dante, facing the horrors of Hell helped him understand what he valued and what he needed to change. For me, facing the challenges of college life and living on my own for the first time helped me see where I needed to grow, especially in asking for help and not trying to do everything alone. I think both of us came out of our journeys with a better understanding of ourselves and a new sense of purpose and understanding. And maybe most importantly, we both learned that the way through the hardest moments isn't to run away from them, but to walk through them, even when it's really hard and scary. That lesson gives me a bit more confidence that I'll be able to handle the next big challenge when it comes.

