The Italian Poet Dante brought Italy into the literary running by penning his *Divine Comedy*. A revolutionary yet much criticized work during its time, the *Comedy* sets itself apart in the realm of literature; holding vast hoards of knowledge for the willing learner. These paragraphs will delineate this truth more closely.

Dante tells the story of himself, led by Virgil through Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise, where they view certain contemporaries and ancestors of Dante and their locations, tasks, or punishments.

The clarity of the narrative might seem lacking to newer readers, but to those of his time Dante’s words struck home. They knew of every character placed either in the Inferno, Purgatory, or Paradise; and they would have recognized subtle references. The details are plenty; the mental images are painted clearly and effectively.

Though not intended to be seen as a possible or plausible event, the *Comedy* is a consistent narrative. Dante’s punishment of the souls in Hell, combined with the tasks assigned to those in Purgatory, are consistent with the character of the souls on Earth. If Dante had intended his readers to accept the physical possibility of the story he couldn’t have done a better job. Hell is really and truly Hell, despite its differences from the beliefs of Dante’s contemporaries, and Purgatory is really and truly Purgatory, where souls from Earth atone for their sins by climbing a mountain to Paradise. The smaller details and descriptions are internally consistent all throughout the narrative, making a very believable

Dante did not write for the squeamish, and his writing might well be criticized as inappropriate for younger readers. However, the full force of his message would be diminished by removing these key elements. There are times when Christians must face the horrors of the world and not close their eyes to the things around them, and in order to grasp Dante’s message one must do so. For his context, Dante’s writing is appropriate and necessary.

As to the purported virtue of this narrative, it abounds. Whether seeing through cunning irony in the Inferno how sins come back to haunt the sinner, or through the toils of souls in Purgatory how in this life we may better live for God’s glory, we can learn much from Dante. Many say examples are the best method of teaching, and through a creative, though-provoking context Dante does as much. By placing key figures in Italian history into certain circles of Hell or realms of Purgatory,

Though Dante’s story can be simply a story with enjoyable literary themes and historical reference, it is more than that. It is a guidebook to life, said by many to be second only to the Bible, and it ought to be respected and read.