Dante Alighieri: Literary Genius

Dante Alighieri was and still remains a literary genius whose impact resounds with glory. His profound knowledge and influence simply cannot be overstated he found immortality in the supremacy of his works which few others have accomplished. I will be talking about the life that he lived, the influence he had, and how the meaning that he found in life was written into his works.

Dante was born in Florence although we are unsure about the exact date, we do know it is around the Year 1265. Not many facts were known about Dante's early life however the information we do know is pulled out of his many famous words. Dante had claimed that his parents were descendants of early Romans, his parents were Alighiro and Bela, his father Alighiro was a white Guelph. Which is a supporter of the Pope while the main opposition was in the Ghibellines whose loyalties were with the Holy Roman Empire. While Alighiro is a Guelph a major battle took place between the Guelph's and Ghibellines, that was the Battle of Monteverde. The overall result of this battle led the Ghibellines to victory leaving the Guelph's to retreat. With this shift of power Alighiro could have been exiled. However, he wasn't, from this we can learn that Dante's family had somewhat of a status. But not to the point where it would have forced them out of the country. Dante's mother Bella died when he was only 10, so not much is known about her.

At the age of 12 Dante was promised in marriage to Gemma di Manetto Donati. Promising into a marriage at such an early age was very common during this time, by the time he had made this promise Dante claimed to be in love with another woman named Beatrice Portinari. Looking through his works he had made mention of first meeting her at the age of 9. From this point in his life the time of major events in his life are very vague. However, we do know some important pieces of information, at one-point Dante fought alongside the influential Guelph's in the cavalry at the Battle of Compel Dino the Guelph's arose victorious. This was a major turning point in such a way that it helped to reform the Florentine Constitution. The battle helped to bring power back into the hands of the Pope.

Concerning Dante's education there are very few details however it was thought that he studied at a chapter school that may have possibly been attached to a church or monastery. We do know that while there he studied Tuscan poetry. His interest later leads him to discover Provencal poetry of the troubadours and the Latin writers of classical antiquity, which included Cicero, Ovid, and Virgil. It was at this point in Dante's life that he fought with the Guelph's as they became victorious over Florence. After their rising to power however the Guelph split into two main groups the white Guelph's and the black Guelph's. At first, they were allies, eventually conflict arose. While the white Guelphs wanted more freedom from Rome, the black Guelphs wanted to strengthen ties with the Pope. Initially the white Guelphs expelled the black Guelphs which caused tension. As a result, the Pope initiated a military occupation in Florence. Tension continued to rise as the papal ambassadors were being mistreated. After issues between the two factions of Guelph's multiple delegates were sent to Rome to dispute issues. Dante was one of them, while in Rome the Pope sent all delegates except for Dante back to Florence. However, before the white Guelphs could return the black Guelphs attacked. As a result, a black Guelph government arose in Florence. Dante was in jeopardy and he was sentenced to a

two-year exile and been given a large fine in 1301. As time passed Dante refused to pay the fine, though he never returned back to Florence from Rome. It was at this point when Dante began work on the Divine Comedy. Being away from any business he had in Florence Dante was able to focus on his writings and poetry. While many of his works were completed during this time, we were unfortunately left without a lot of dates. Never returning back to Florence Dante was invited back to Ravenna in 1318 by the prince. This was the closing chapter of his life because while returning to Ravenna, right after finishing Paradise of the Divine Comedy he passed away in 1321.

Life in the time of Dante was very conflict oriented with the struggling between the Guelph's and Ghibellines providing much of that strain. However, beyond all of that Italy had been progressively transitioning it to a new age with the Renaissance waiting in the wings, Dante finished his tenure in the tail end of the medieval period. Dante's influence was very important to historical advancements by choosing to write his poems in Italian rather than Latin decisively influenced the course of literary development. Not only did he lend a voice to the emerging lay culture of his own country, but Italian became the literary language of Western ear for several centuries. Dante's works were extremely influential to the start of the humanism movement which was a literary and cultural movement that started in Italy during the late 14th century.

The architecture of Dante's time was marked by the Gothic period. Structures stood upright by use of flying buttresses and Gods essence was delivered into each brick, this attitude of reverence for God for understanding and feeling his presence really marked this period with a sense of purpose and duty. Dante conveyed this sense most dramatically in the Divine Comedy with a symbolic meaning behind each layer of prose, constructing such a monumental world was a true tenant of his period. While the Pope held a grandeur of power in Rome. Dante's Florence was influenced by a love for Rome's antiquity. Attempts to match Florence with Rome's excellence were brought on by the city's structuring as a republic. The economy was incredibly successful after adopting a gold coining system and the Florentine Society was held with pride. The need for someone such as Dante with his genius and influence became apparent from the impacts that he made. He was a proprietor of Dolce Stil Novo or sweet new style; it was a literary movement involving high intellect and prose for the wonders of life and love. With this Dante put the long-term wheels in motion, his overall influence added fuel to the fire of romanticism which would shape the course of arts history in Europe during the Renaissance.

Dante's works are many and varied but these are the ones which have had the biggest impact. De Monarchia was written in 1312 and 1313, it is a treatise on the relationship between the secular and spiritual authorities portrayed by the Holy Roman Emperor and the Pope. This work dealt specifically with the corruptible nature of man's body and the incorruptible nature of man's soul. While the Pope had rain over the eternal life the spiritual aspect, the Holy Roman Emperor dealt with things that were bound by time on earth. Dante concluded that neither the Holy Roman Emperor nor the Pope had more power over the other even though they were both divinely appointed, they were both necessarily separated. Another great work of Dante's was Dela Volgare Eloqvenzia, this book was not fully finished as it was abandoned after chapter 14 of book 2. It was written in the years 1302 to 1305 and was influenced by rhetorical works by classical writers. The main goal of this piece was to speak on how many languages evolved from one. This was due to man's ignorance as referred to in the story of the Tower of Babel. Dante makes a distinction between the European languages of the time putting those of the Germanic origin in the north, the Greek to the east, and the romantic of the South. Dante saw

the gramatica, the static language with unchanging rules that comprised every single one of the natural languages. Aside from Dante's discourses was his poetry and la Vita Nuova was comprised in 1295 as a collection of Dante's previous poetry's. Adding commentary to each one of his poems Dante wound up having forty-two brief chapters surrounding thirty-one poems. This was one of Dante's more personal pieces and it really allowed one to peer into his mind and heart. A major focus in this piece of work was that romantic love leads to a capacity for divine love. It was written in Italian unlike most poetry of the day. Another collection of Dante's works was made in 1307 with Convivio, rather than having a focus of love this time around Dante shifted to philosophy, introducing it to the Italian language for the first time. This collection had rationalistic outlook on the nature of nobility for example. It was full of reflective thoughts; it is noted that Dante changed a lot of his views that he spoke of in this collection when it came to the Divine Comedy.

Speaking of the Divine Comedy since it is Dante's most famous work. It is one that could be spoken of for hours upon hours and I'll try to keep it short here the Divine Comedy was written between 1304 and 1321 and was Dante's greatest work. He was written as a verse style poem and was set in the Easter week of 1300. It's full of unbelievable occurrences that serve as powerful thematic tools. With this work Dante constructed an afterlife in three realms Inferno, Purgatorio, and Paradiso. Each plane holds a specific destination for the dead and is built within the order of nine plus one. In the case of the most famous Inferno, there are nine circles of hell through which the Roman poet Virgil leads Dante. To witness unrepentant sinners of Hell that have fates befitting of their earthly vices. Dante learns the lessons of each wailing soul as he sees the damning justice of god. Once they emerge from Satan's dwelling place, they continue their journey into the second book of the comedy Purgatorio. Purgatory is a mountain which houses the repentant souls of sinners, it is a mark of God's love and willingness to rehabilitate those who are truly sorry for their wrongdoing. Dante traverses this place again with Virgil and learns the lasting effects of sin and how one must work to be rid of them. Once reaching the top of the mountain Purgatory, Dante meets his love Beatrice. She causes Dante to admit his own guilt as a sinner and he repents. It is then that they enter into Heaven. The third book Paradiso sends Dante with Beatrice through the spheres of Heaven. Dante is amazed when meeting some of the holiest figures in history and when he is tested on what he's learned of the natures of love faith and hope he uses his newfound knowledge to proceed into the light of God. The novel ends with Dante becoming one with God's love, being enveloped in his mystery forever.