

# *Virgilio and Dante's Hell*

Virgilio and Dante are two of the most influential authors of Italian and Roman literature. Both of them described Hell, imagining a trip in it and Dante, who came way later than Virgilio, took a lot of inspiration from the roman's work.

## **Virgilio**

According to Virgilio, Hell is located in Pozzuoli, near Naples. Here Enea asks the Sibilla to go together inside Hell to meet his father and she agrees if Enea accomplishes some challenges that are presented to him, one of which is to take to Proserpina a golden twig. Finally he can get in and at the entrance they find all the bad emotions of human beings and monstrous creatures, like Harpies, Centaurs and Chimers. In Hell there are four important rivers, Acheronte (pain's river), Stige (hate's river), Cocito (cry's river) and Flegetonte (fire's river). Caronte is on the edge of Acheronte and has to bring souls to Antinferno, letting them cross the river. He is described as a God, with a vigorous body, a white beard and flaming eyes. Souls pile around Caronte's boat to get in and Virgilio describes them as "leaves that fall in autumn". The demon initially doesn't want Enea to get in the boat and he agrees only when Sibilla shows him the golden twig, a divine symbol. Cerberus and Minos are met by Enea and Sibilla in Antinferno, where Minos has to judge every soul, sentencing it to a penalty. Cerberus is a monstrous dog with three heads and snakes around his

## **Dante**

The trip begins inside an obscure forest, symbolizing sin. Dante's accompanied by Virgilio, standing for human reason, who manages to get them out from the forest and from three beasts, lion (pride), leopard (desire) and wolf (greed). Inside Hell there will also be other monstrous creatures like Harpies (who torture suicidals) and Centaurs. The roman poet and Dante then come across a door, which is Hell's entrance. Hell is a chasm under Jerusalem but before entering it there is the Antinferno, in which are trapped people who didn't choose good or bad during life. Between Antinferno and Hell there is the Acheronte river and going on with the trip there are also the three other Infernal rivers (Stige, which is a swamp, Cocito, a frozen lake, and Flegetonte, a river filled with boiling blood). Caronte is the ferryman of souls and he is described as an old man, with white hairs and flaming eyes and initially he doesn't want to carry Dante because he's not a soul. Then Virgilio speaks and convinces him, claiming that he has to accomplish God's will. Amongst the mythical creatures there's also Cerberus, described as a demon

neck. He's calmed down by Sibilla who gives him a bun of flour, some honey and sleeping herbs. In the Antinferno there are people who died before their time, like suicides and here Enea meets Didone, queen of Cartagho that committed suicide after he had left, not exchanging her love. Enea tries to talk to her but she does not respond.

that scratches souls and that Virgilio calms by feeding him with dirt. At the entrance of the second circle they also run into Minos, legendary king of Crete, who's an Infernal judge and dooms every soul to a circle. To do that he rolls his tail as many times as the circle's number the soul is doomed to. People around the boat want to get up and in order to describe them, Dante uses the similitude of falling leaves. In the second circle there's Didone, the famous queen of Cartagho, who committed suicide after being rejected by Enea.