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Dante's Inferno and Divine Comedy -

I

Lead: Dante, one of the world's finest and most influential poets of western literature, was born in Florence, Italy, in 1265. He got caught up in the economic and political upheavals of his day.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: Dante Alighieri was born of a prominent Florentine family during the high Medieval period and received a comprehensive education in classical and religious studies. His mother died when he was quite

young, and at the age of twelve his family agreed that he would enter into a marriage contract with Gemma Donati. This was a common practice, particularly in upper class society and the marriage probably took place when Dante was about twenty years old.

Gemma was not the only woman in his life. At the tender age of nine, he encountered the graceful and physically dazzling (at least to him) Beatrice Portinari. Permitted only brief glimpses of this vision, Dante idealized her, and she remained a profound inspiration in his life and his writings. Despite her death in 1290. Beatrice appears in Dante's works, most notably in the *Divine*

Comedy, where she is Dante's guide in heaven and leads him to redemption.

During the writer's lifetime there was great political and social upheaval in Florence. It was a time of economic and cultural expansion, and the population of the city-state more than doubled. Italy was not unified, and its independent city-states were pulled in a titanic power struggle between the Holy Roman Empire and the Papacy. He was a devotee of a political party called the Guelph – one generally supportive of the papacy in this struggle. When the Guelph party split, Dante and his faction lost power and were banished. If he returned to Florence, he would die. He never did.
Next Time: *The Divine Comedy*

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Resources

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