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# Romer

## By Robert Eastwood

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A Study Guide for Students

### Synopsis

Using the schema of Dante's *Purgatorio*, *Romer* is a poem of thirty-three Cantos in three-line stanzas, illuminating the experience of a modern man at every stage of his life. Just as the *Purgatorio* explores the psyche in terms of its earthly existence, *Romer* follows the journey of one man who needs to know who he is, where he is, and what he is trying to do. This need is universal, so in that sense, *Romer* is every man.

### Why Include This Book in the Classroom?

The collection of poetic cantos in *Romer* recalls Plato's dictum that "the unexamined life is not worth living," which might well be considered the credo of any student, devoted reader, or life-long learner. *Romer* tracks fearlessly into that very examination which Plato urges us toward. Using Dante's *Purgatorio* portion of *The Divine Comedy* as a model of poetic form and inspiration, Robert Eastwood extrapolates Dante's self-probation into the 21st century. Never simply trying to "update or adapt" *Purgatorio*, Eastwood summons the spirit which animated *Purgatorio* centuries ago in order to examine the life of a modern Everyman named *Romer*.

*Romer* shares in humanity's quest to find worth, value, even redemption as he roams the earth, ultimately reaching for the summit of understanding. It is a worthy read for any self-probing, life-long learner.

### Author Bio

Robert Eastwood's first book, *Snare*, was published by Broadstone Press in 2016. His chapbooks are *The Welkin Gate*, *Over Plainsong*, *Night of the Moth*, published by Small Poetry Press. His work has appeared most recently in *Legendary*, *Up The Staircase Quarterly*, *Loch Raven Review*, and *The Steel Toe Review*. He has been nominated twice for the Pushcart Prize. Eastwood lives in San Ramon, California, and is a graduate of C.S.U.L.A. and the secondary teaching program at Saint Mary's College. He worked thirty-four years as manager in the telecommunications industry before becoming a high school English teacher and a poet.

### Study Questions

Section 1: Form

1. To what degree is the formal structure of Dante's *Purgatorio* important to *Romer*? Is *Romer* an adaptation? Is it an "update"? Is it an homage? Why or why not?
2. Eastwood uses Dante's famous tercet as the foundational stanza throughout the poem. Looking back through the poem, in what ways does the poet vary his use of the tercet?
3. The poem is divided into three sections, together indicating a trajectory. What is the trajectory—physically and metaphysically?
4. Does Eastwood's verse depend heavily on rhyme? Assonance? Alliteration?

Writing Prompt: Write a page of verse in tercets. Vary them in three different ways.

## Section 2: Style

1. Eastwood has chosen to use the ampersand, instead of the word “and” throughout the entire work. (Title references within use “and”.) Did you notice? Is there a reason? Does there have to be a reason? Is the result, in the end, aesthetic?

2. Often, Eastwood will compound the predicate of a sentence, using only a comma, omitting a conjunction such as “and” or “but.” Can you cite examples of this?

3. The poem is replete with allusions, including popular, historical and classical references. Can you name two principal allusions of characters that refer directly to *Purgatorio*? In a work so allusive, the meaning can often be just as elusive. In your reading, did you ever find yourself googling names, places, characters?

4. “The style is the man [sic] himself.” it has been said. Robert Frost said, “It is the mind skating circles around itself as it moves forward.” Why is Frost’s description of style especially apt when it comes to Eastwood’s *Romer*? Give examples of Eastwood’s strong sense of style in the Frostian sense.

Writing Prompt: Find some provocative object in the room or something your group or class knows well. Write a half page descriptive poem, then compare your description to your peers.

## Section 3: Theme

1. Modes of transport are mentioned often in *Romer*. Skim back through the poem and see what you can find in this regard.

2. Travel and vacation destinations are cited frequently as well, usually as settings. What is the effect on you appearing suddenly in Toledo (Spain) then Kansas City, or Idaho?

3. Why is *Star Trek* such a fitting allusion in the poem?

4. Geography plays an important part in the poem. One of these settings is in Rouen at a famous, ancient Charnel House. Another is in St.-Remy-de-Provence. How does Eastwood tie *Romer*’s preoccupations with the geography?

Writing Prompt: Write a poem in which you are on a train that travels through the town you grew up in.

## Section 4: Narrative

1. Is the telling of *Romer*’s story a linear narrative?

2. The path on Dante’s *Mount Purgatorio* is necessarily a spire. How does this seem to fit the narrative approach of *Romer*’s reminiscences?

3. *Romer* moves rapidly through time and space, maybe a bit like *Star Trek*, but would you call his point of view “flashback” or “memory”? What is the difference? Is his tone what we might call nostalgic? Or is there another word you might use to describe his tone or point of view?

Writing Prompt: Imagine Eastwood’s narrative, as the unfolding of a travel map, a mapping of *Romer*’s mind, where far distances are near to each other as you open up the map simply by the matter of a crease in the poet’s mind. And yet, when the map is unfolded completely (at the end of the poem), one can appreciate a cohesive unity to the man’s life. An old service station road map was like this, something Eastwood might have seen a lot of in his travels. Write a short geo-poetic narrative of your own, as if working not from a map of Eastwood’s era, but from your own: a GPS random access map. How might this influence the structure of your “roaming” poetry? Would that be “roaming” in the same way?

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