Hell, Purgatory, Paradise: Dante’s Divine Comedy
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William R. Cook holds the rank of Distinguished Teaching Professor of History at the State University of New York at Geneseo. He received his A.B. at Wabash College and his M.A. and Ph.D. from Cornell University. A medieval church historian, Professor Cook teaches courses in medieval, Renaissance, and Reformation history as well as the history of the Bible and of Christianity. Professor Cook's current research focuses on St. Francis and the Franciscan movement in the thirteenth century. His most recent book is *Francis of Assisi: The Way of Poverty and Humility* (Liturgical Press).

Professor Cook received the Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Teaching in 1974. In 1992 the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education named him New York State's Professor of the Year.

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Ronald B. Herzman is a Distinguished Teaching Professor of English at S.U.N.Y Geneseo, where he has taught since 1969. He received a B.A. from Manhattan College and his M.A. and Ph.D. from the University of Delaware, where he was also an instructor for one year.

Professor Herzman teaches courses in medieval literature and specialized courses in both Dante and Chaucer; he also teaches courses on the Bible and Shakespeare. His research includes Franciscan literature and apocalyptic thought as well as Dante and Shakespeare. His most recent book, written with Richard K. Emmerson, is entitled *The Apocalyptic Imagination in Medieval Literature* (University of Pennsylvania Press). He received the Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Teaching in 1976, and in 1991 Manhattan College awarded him the honorary degree Doctor of Humane Letters.

Professors Cook and Herzman have taught together for 20 years. In addition to many courses at S.U.N.Y Geneseo, including the Age of Dante, they have taught their students in England, France and Italy. They have twice taught a Dante course in a college program at Attica Correctional Facility. They have delivered a series of lectures on Dante for the Trappist monks of the Abbey of the Genesee and have lectured throughout the United States. Together, they have written several articles and a widely used book, *The Medieval World View* (Oxford University Press).
Scope:

This series of eight lectures provides insight into the pilgrim’s journey to Hell, Purgatory and Paradise in Dante’s Divine Comedy. By examining the structure of the poem, exploring Dante’s literary influences, and learning about his political life, we come to understand his motivations for writing the poem as well as his hopes for his readers.

Lecture One sets the stage for us to study the poem by providing insight into Dante’s life and the literature that most deeply affected him. We learn that the poet has high expectations for his audience and, therefore, a brief history of Florentine history is helpful. Dante’s life combined poetry and politics. In his youth he wrote poetry as an outgrowth of his training in rhetoric. He became a successful member of the Guelph party but was expelled from Florence in 1301 when the party split into two factions and his White Party lost a power struggle. Dante was born in Florence in 1265 and died an exile in Ravenna in 1321.

Lecture Two examines the literary texts that influenced Dante’s poetry. These texts provided him a source of energy and the organizational principles for his poem. Notable among them are the Bible, Vergil’s Aeneid, and the Confessions of St. Augustine. The Bible provides a structural guide to Dante by referencing stories from the Old Testament in the New Testament. Similarly, ideas and events in the Inferno are completed in Purgatorio and Paradiso. The Bible is a story of exile; so, too, is Dante’s poem. Dante admires the Aeneid for its synthesis of the classical tradition of poetry, and he uses Virgil as the pilgrim’s guide for much of the poem. Like the Bible, the Aeneid is a story of exile, with Aeneas taking a journey to the underworld. The third prominent literary influence is St. Augustine’s Confessions, which chronicles the story of the Catholic saint’s journey to reunification with God.

With this history of Dante completed, the lecture series begins the study of the poem with an introduction to Inferno. Lectures Three and Four examine Inferno V, X, XXVI and XXVII. In Inferno V we follow Dante as he goes deeper into Hell and encounters sinners, including the adulteress Francesca da Rimini, who have no real understanding of their sins. We learn that even private sins have public dimensions and that we do not live in isolation. In Inferno X, Dante encounters the committers of heresy, which can be best defined as wrong belief. He draws parallels between the rejection of God and the partisan politics of Florence through a series of encounters with Farinata, a Ghibelline leader from the generation before Dante, and Cavalcante, whose son was a colleague of Dante. In Inferno XXVI and XXVII the pilgrim enters the eighth circle of hell, which is reserved for false counselors.
Lectures Five and Six examine Purgatory, which marks the pilgrim’s ascent toward heaven. Souls in Purgatory are purified by punishment and eventually rise to meet God. Dante writes that man’s fate is decided by the choice between God and what we want. In Cantos VI-VII, Dante takes aim at both the pope and the Holy Roman Emperor for choosing politics over the welfare of the people. Lecture Six chronicles the pilgrim’s climb toward Heaven. Here Dante encounters the seven deadly tendencies, with pride being the most universal of those sins as well as the sin most relevant to himself. Virgil vanishes as Dante’s guide just as the Florentine poet is about to enter heaven. Beatrice replaces Virgil, and the young women whom Dante has admired since his youth becomes his confessor. Together, they are presented with a series of pageants depicting Church history.

Lecture One
Dante’s Life and Times

Scope: To gain the most out of a reading of Dante’s Divine Comedy we should have a basic understanding of Dante’s background, his personal struggles, and the politics of Florence of Dante’s day. At the beginning of this lecture we are introduced to the basic structure of the poem, and given a brief summary of Dante’s life and politics that affect him. Following this, we analyze Dante’s reasons for setting his poem in the year 1300.

Outline

I. The reader’s journey into Dante’s epic poem begins with an understanding of the poem’s structure.
   A. The Divine Comedy is more than fourteen thousand lines long and is divided into three sections: Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise
   B. Each of these sections is comprised of thirty-three cantos.
      1. The Inferno is thirty-three plus one, making the total 100 cantos.
      2. Each canto is subdivided into three stanzas of free verse.

II. Also important is information about Dante’s life and politics, for the poet has high expectations of his reader’s understanding of history, literature, and Florentine politics.
   A. Dante was born in Florence in 1265.
   B. He took up poetry as a young man, probably as an outgrowth of his training in rhetoric.
   C. A great deal of his poetry was about a young woman he admired from afar, Beatrice.

III. Dante was also a successful politician and a member of the Guelph party, a dominant party in Florence.
    A. A rivalry between two factions of the Guelphs, the Blacks and Whites, led to the expulsion of Dante’s White Party.
    B. After being officially exiled from Florence in 1302, Dante lived in Tuscany and then settled for some time in Verona.
    C. Dante died in Ravenna in 1321.

IV. The Divine Comedy is the study of exile.
    A. Dante uses his masterwork to examine the personal impact of exile.
    B. The poem also examines the larger political issues that forced his expulsion from Florence.
V. After being forced from Florence, Dante shifted his focus from the restoration of political power to contemplation and study.
   A. Dante's early days in exile were spent plotting the White Guelphs' return to power.
   B. As the possibility of return faded, his focus shifted to writing, reading, and contemplative study.
   C. Sometime before 1313, Dante wrote *Convivio* and the *Monarchia*, which described his political theories.
   D. From about 1313 to 1321, Dante wrote the *Commedia*.

VI. The poem is set in 1300.
   A. This timeline allows Dante to act as a prophet to various events, which take place during his lifetime.
   B. The device of setting the poem in 1300 allows Dante to include everything he knows and experiences.
   C. Dante is able to place in the story some historical figures that are not yet dead, including his nemesis, Pope Boniface VIII.

VII. Florence in Dante's day afforded little privacy.
   A. The city was a tightly packed state of one hundred thousand people.
   B. The population was socially diverse, with nobility, the middle class, and the poor living together in a very public existence where conversations were easily overhead.

VIII. Florentine politics were very personal, and family relationships were important.
   A. Much of the political strife was caused by disputes among local families.
   B. The two major powers, the pope and the emperor, also shaped political life.

IX. Two major factions, the Guelphs and the Ghibellines, controlled Florence in the 13th century.
   A. The Guelphs sided with the pope against emperor.
   B. Ghibellines sided with the emperor against pope.

X. By 1300, the Guelphs had control of Florence.
   A. The Ghibellines had become a permanent minority.
   B. Internal struggles developed among the Guelphs, and in 1300 the party split into two factions, the Whites and the Blacks.
      1. Both sides appealed for papal support.
      2. Pope Boniface VIII supported the Black Guelphs and sent his troops to expel the Whites, beginning Dante’s exile.

XI. These events provided Dante with an object for meditation.
   A. Dante came to realize that party struggle could not lead to unity and put and end to strife.
   B. This understanding gradually unfolds in Dante's poem.

Recommended Reading:

Supplemental Reading:
Anderson, William, *Dante the Maker*

Questions to Consider:
1. How does Dante’s political experience shape his role as poet?
2. Why does Dante place the *Commedia* in 1300?
Lecture Two
Dante's Literary Antecedents

Scope: This lecture discusses how Dante used existing literature as his guides for writing his poem. Three guides lead the journey of the pilgrim. The pilgrim's experiences along the way combine the personal and the universal. This theme is carried throughout the *Commedia*. Dante the poet builds upon what already exists in literary tradition, and he uses three texts as his primary sources: the Bible, Vergil's *Aeneid*, and St. Augustine's *Confessions*. All three texts guide Dante the writer in his search for truth.

Outline

I. Three guides who combine the personal and the universal, as Dante combines the two themes throughout the poem, guide the three-part journey of the pilgrim.
   A. The first guide is Vergil, who escorts Dante for two-thirds of the poem.
   B. Beatrice, the woman Dante admired, is a very personal guide through Purgatory and much of Paradise.
   C. Bernard of Clairvaux is the final guide.

II. Literary texts shaped how the poem's journey unfolds.
   A. Dante builds on what already exists in literary tradition.
   B. His evaluation of other texts brings him a source of energy and provides him with the organizational principles for his poem.
   C. A study of Dante reveals the influence of other literature, especially three texts:
      1. The Bible.
      2. Vergil's *Aeneid*.
      3. St. Augustine's *Confessions*.

III. The Bible provides many ideas for Dante.
   A. A great deal of study was conducted in the Middle Ages regarding the differences between the Hebrew writings of the Old Testament and the Christian scripture of the New Testament.
      2. These relationships guide Dante's use of older and younger characters as well as those who are real or mythological.
   B. Dante acknowledges that he attempted to write in the style of the Bible.
      1. This implies that he attempted to place great importance on the story he tells, just as the Bible is revered as a great moral text.
      2. The parallels of the Bible's story of exile and Dante's own exile are drawn.

IV. The second source for Dante is Vergil's *Aeneid*.
   A. Dante believes that the *Aeneid* synthesizes the classical tradition of poetry.
   B. Vergil is thus an appropriate guide.
   C. The *Aeneid* was the great political poem of antiquity, as Dante hopes the *Commedia* will be for his time.

V. The third and final major literary work of influence is St. Augustine's *Confessions*.
   A. Augustine and Dante read the same texts, including the Bible and Vergil.
   B. Through these readings, Augustine and Dante bring together both the pagan and Christian traditions.

Recommended Reading:
Vergil, *The Aeneid*
St. Augustine, *Confessions*

Supplementary Reading:
Singleton, Charles S., *Dante, The Divine Comedy*

Questions to Consider:
1. What aspects of the poem's structure are borrowed from the Bible?
2. What do the three primary literary influences (the Bible, the *Aeneid* and *Confessions*) have in common with each other?
Lecture Three
Introduction to Inferno; Inferno V

Scope: The nine concentric circles of Dante's hell are divided into three large categories of moral failure: incontinence, violence, and fraud. In Inferno V, Dante meets a variety of people, including some known to him in Florence. We meet the unrepentant lustful, including Francesca da Rimini, who tells Dante how she was drawn into a relationship with her silent lover, Paolo. Although Dante the pilgrim feels sorry for Francesca, Dante the writer is warning the reader to beware of sin.

Outline

I. The first part of the three-part journey of Dante takes him through hell, a funnel-like pit that ends at the center of the earth.
   A. Hell consists of concentric circles, each smaller than the previous one, and each containing the souls of sinners who have failed to repent.
   B. The nine circles in Dante's hell are divided into three large categories of moral failure—incontinence, violence, and fraud.

II. Incontinence, violence, and fraud are the three sins Dante encounters.
   A. If we think of sin in terms of crime, we misunderstand Dante.
   B. These are large moral categories.
   C. The people Dante meets are from a variety of times, and Dante knows some from Florence. Again, this is a combination of the local and the universal.

III. If Dante is ultimately seeking God, why meet the unrepentant?
   A. Dante needs to move away from God in order ultimately to ascend to God.
   B. The pilgrim needs to learn the nature of sin from the unrepentant.
   C. The sinners who spend the most time with Dante have the most relevance to him personally and to his own moral direction.

IV. The punishment that the sinners undergo always reflects the sin. It can be seen as an objectification of the sin.
   A. The sinners all attempt to justify their behavior in some way.
   B. Dante must learn to see the sin not from the distorted and egocentric perspective of the sinner, but from a more objective one.

V. Blame is the common theme of the sinners in hell.
   A. They lack self-knowledge of their sin.
   B. Virgil says they have “lost the good of their intellect.”

VI. As Dante enters hell with Virgil, he passes through Limbo. In Inferno V he witnesses real punishment.
   A. This is the place where people had subjected reason to desire.
   B. As the reader will see in other cantos, Inferno V begins with descriptions of the punishment.
   C. Virgil often introduces Dante to the sinners, and he meets the lustful, many of whom have well-known stories.
      1. These stories show that, no matter how private, genuine sins have a public dimension.
      2. The poet is reminding us that we do not live in isolation.
   D. The sinners in this section are blown around by a whirling storm that serves as a metaphor for their undisciplined desires.

VII. In a lengthy encounter, Dante meets someone famous from his own time, the adulteress Francesca da Rimini.
   A. Francesca explains her story to Dante while her lover remains silent.
   B. Her perception of her crime proves faulty as she blames her adultery on having read a romantic story and been driven to passion by “love.”
   C. Dante is drawn in by her story and feels sorry for her.
   D. Even though the pilgrim is blinded to her sin, the poet reminds us that Francesca used her will to turn away from God toward herself.
   E. Hell is a place of justice by God, but the pilgrim and the reader often identify with the sinners.

Recommended Reading:
Dante, The Divine Comedy, trans. Mark Musa.

Supplemental Reading:
Dante, Dante's Inferno. The Indiana Critical Edition.

Questions to Consider:
1. How to the sinners Dante encounters provide models for his own behavior?
2. Why do the sinners Dante meets failed to repent?
Lecture Four
Inferno X, XXVI-XXVII

Scope: This lecture focuses the reader on the sin of heresy, which Dante defined as the sin of wrong belief. We study closely the encounters between the pilgrim and the Ghibelline leader Farinata, with the Guelph Cavalcante, and with Ulysses, whom Dante portrays as the opposite of both Aeneas and Augustine. At the end of the lecture we learn of Dante's meeting with Guido da Montefeltro and how his manipulations led to his placement in the sixth circle of hell.

Outline

I. Dante moves to the sixth circle of hell.
   A. Here he finds those guilty of heresy, also called wrong belief.
   B. The pilgrim moves beyond the sins of pagans to those of Christians.
   C. Vergil, as a pagan figure, does not have much to say at this point.
   D. Heresy does not seem to be a personal problem for Dame, but it is presented to the reader to promote the poem's universality.
   E. To increase the relevance of the sin of heresy, Dante uses the metaphor of politics.

II. Dante draws parallels between the rejection of God and the partisan politics of Florence.
   A. Dante first meets a political enemy, Farinata, a Ghibelline leader in the generation before Dante.
   B. Farinata stops Dante after recognizing him by his speech.
   C. Farinata is only interested in establishing his superiority to Dante, and Dante rises to the bait.

III. Cavalcante, a Guelph, interrupts Dante and Farinata.
   A. Cavalcante knows Dante because his son Guido is a colleague of Dante's.
   B. Cavalcante believes Dante is in hell because he won some sort of prize, and he becomes upset that his son, whom Cavalcante regards as a better poet, is not there.
   C. As Cavalcante withdraws, Farinata continues his diatribe and predicts Dante's exile.

IV. In Cantos XXVI and XXVII, Vergil and Dante meet some pimps, contrasting with the sexual sinners of Inferno V.
   A. They are in the 8th circle of hell, which is reserved for false counselors.

B. Dante provides the reader two versions of false counselors, each chosen for their superior intelligence and ability to attract followers.

V. The first false counselor is Ulysses.
   A. Dante creates a "sequel" to the classical story of Ulysses by sending Ulysses on another journey upon his return to Troy, implying that the voyage is what is most important.
   B. Ulysses' appetite for adventure leads him to sacrifice his sailors.
   C. Dante presents Ulysses as the opposite of Aeneas and Augustine.

VI. Dante with Guido da Montefeltro, an older contemporary and one famed as a military leader and tactician.
   A. He tells of his entry into the Franciscan Order, but it is clear that he is trying to manipulate or trick God into accepting him into heaven.
   B. His plan completely falls apart and he is exposed for what he is when he takes the Pope's offer of "repentance in advance" for giving him some shrewd military advice.
   C. This is one of the few stops in hell where the pilgrim has sustained encounters with two people.
   D. By providing classical and contemporary models, Dante is allowing the reader to focus carefully on the nature of the sin by these complementary figures.

Recommended Reading:
Dante, The Divine Comedy, Inferno X, XXVI-XXVII

Supplemental Reading:
Joan M. Ferrante, "Hell as the Mirror Image of Paradise"

Questions to Consider:
1. Why did Dante choose Farinata to prophesize Dante's exile?
2. How do the stories of Ulysses and Montefeltro reflect Dante's discomfort with leaders of the Church?
Lecture Five
Introduction to Purgatorio; Purgatorio VI-VII

Scope: We learn in this lecture that Purgatory has minimal scriptural authority and that Dante created much of our modern imagery of Purgatory. Purgatory is a place where souls receive punishment and are then allowed to leave for Heaven. Purgatory is a mountain with seven terraces, one each for the seven deadly tendencies. The lecture examines a meeting between Dante and Sordello, a poet from Virgil's hometown of Mantua. We learn that Dante is reminding the reader of the relationship between poetry and politics, and we are challenged to think, too, of the relationship between poetry and repentance.

Outline

I. Purgatory begins as Dante rises toward heaven.
   A. Hell and heaven are places where souls dwell for eternity.
   B. Purgatory is marked by time because all souls there will eventually be in heaven.

II. Purgatory has virtually no scriptural authority.
   A. The idea was developed in the early Christian centuries to deal with the question of what happens to sinners who had begun to repent but had not fully turned toward God before they died.
   B. Punishment in Purgatory has the purpose of purification so that the soul is ready to see God face to face in heaven.

III. The geography of Purgatory consists of a mountain that was created when God cast Lucifer into the center of the earth, thus forcing to the surface the matter that was where Hell now is.
   A. The structure of the Purgatorio is threefold: first is the ante-Purgatory, where the late repentant wait because they made God wait; second is Purgatory proper, a mountain with seven terraces; the third part is the earthly paradise at the top of the mountain.
   B. Purgatory proper has one terrace for each of the seven deadly sins or tendencies. They include pride, envy, wrath, sloth, avarice, gluttony, and lust.

IV. A discussion of the nature of free will takes place in Purgatory.
   A. Dante shows that our choices are driven by what we love: whether we choose God or what we want.
   B. As Dante goes up the seven-story mountain, there is increasing discussion of freedom.

V. The caretaker at the base of the mountain is Cato. He seems an unlikely candidate because he was a pagan, a suicide, and an opponent of Julius Caesar.
   A. Dante the poet is reminding us that as we begin the second canticle, a lot of matters that we might think we understand from having taken the journey to Hell are indeed mysterious.
   B. Dante may have chosen Cato to remind the reader that redemption is possible.

VI. In cantos VI and VII, set in ante-Purgatory, Dante and Virgil have an extended encounter with the poet Sordello.
   A. Virgil and Sordello discover they are from the same city, Mantua, and they embrace.
   B. Dante uses this encounter as an opportunity to talk about Italy.
      1. Dante chastises the emperor for ignoring Rome.
      2. He also blames the pope for keeping Italy divided and for keeping the emperor out of Rome.
      3. Dante is accusing both the emperor and the pope of sloth.

VII. In the next canto Sordello learns that he has embraced the famous poet, Virgil.
   A. The reader is again reminded of the relationship between poetry and politics.
   B. The reader is also challenged to think of the relationship between poetry and repentance.

VIII. Dante begins to learn a lesson about family, and he learns that goodness is not necessarily inherited.
   A. Dante learns that there is no predisposition to virtue.
   B. Later on in the poem, Dante will ask his own ancestors what he can expect from them.

Essential Reading:
Dante, The Divine Comedy, Purgatorio VI-VII

Supplementary Reading:
Guy Raffa, Dante's Beloved Yet Damned Virgil.
Questions to Consider:
1. Why does Dante choose the encounter with Sordello, where neighborliness and goodwill is expressed, to launch into criticism of the emperor and the pope?
2. What role does Dante argue freedom plays in salvation?

Lecture Six
Purgatorio X-XII, XXIX-XXXIII

Scope: A common pattern of the Purgatorio poem is reviewed with the use of examples from the New Testament, the Old Testament, and classical antiquity. Canto V begins on the terrace of pride, the most serious and universal of the seven deadly sins. In Purgatorio VII, Dante uses an elaborate acrostic to dramatize the power and universality of the sin of pride. The last five cantos form a group in which Dante's guide changes from Virgil to Beatrice. Beatrice and the pilgrim witness a series of pageants that present the Church in its universal and public dimension, highlighting Dante's ability to combine the particular and the universal.

Outline

I. Dante has entered a great gate guarded by an angel clearly modeled after St. Peter.
   A. Seven terraces climb the mountain, each representing a deadly sin.
   B. The first terrace is pride, the most universal of the seven deadly tendencies and the one most relevant to Dante.

II. The pilgrim and the souls on this terrace learn from the art they view.
   A. The art is connected to the sin itself.
   B. The art Dante sees on the first terrace is sculpture.

III. Three sculpture scenes are presented on the first terrace.
   A. The first scene is the annunciation of Mary.
   B. In the Middle Ages this story was understood as one of Mary's virtuous humility, the opposite of pride.
   C. From level to level, Dante will view examples of the virtues opposite the vice, often using Mary as an example.

IV. The carvings Dante views on the Terrace of Pride are suggested to be the work of God.
   A. Dante describes the sculpture as more real than nature, implying that it exceeds what is found on earth.
   B. For example, when the pilgrim found the scene of the annunciation of Mary, he could "hear" the words of Mary.
   C. Dante is suggesting to contemporary readers that art should be true to life if it is to be valuable toward moral improvement.
V. The punishments on the Terrace of Pride are related to the sins of those found there.
   A. The souls are forced to carry heavy rocks and are forced to look down as a sign of humility and in order to better view the art.
   B. Dante describes the souls as hunched over and thus not natural, but still a work of art sculpted by God.

VI. Several of the sinners talk to Dante in canto XI.
   A. The same rhythm of politics to art to politics is used as when Dante meets the heretics in *Inferno* X.
   B. Dante meets a politician, an artist and then another politician, each expressing repentance in his conversation.
      1. In *Purgatorio* VII, Dante uses an elaborate acrostic to dramatize the power and universality of the sin of pride.
      2. This device is taken from classical poetry.
      3. Dante is once again uniting two mediums: the visual arts with the verbal art of poetry.

VII. The last five cantos of *Purgatorio* form a group in which Dante’s guide changes from Virgil to Beatrice.
   A. The disappearance of Virgil as guide is dramatic because Dante does not have an opportunity to say farewell.
   B. Beatrice appears to take over as guide. She is the only person to call Dante by name.
   C. Beatrice will first serve as Dante’s confessor.
   D. She chastises Dante for not understanding the lesson of her death, telling Dante he should have learned at that time to turn away from earthly things.
   E. Dante finds Beatrice a stern judge as she tells him where he goes wrong.

VIII. In these cantos also, Dante is presented with a series of pageants, in which the movement of the Church through history is presented in allegorical terms.
   A. This series of pageants presents the Church in its universal and public dimension, and thus it fits the pilgrim’s personal journey into the universal pattern of salvation history.
   B. The poet’s ability to combine the particular and the universal gives such energy to the end of the *Purgatorio*.

Essential Reading:
Dante, *The Divine Comedy*, Purgatorio X-XII, XXIX-XXXIII.

Supplementary Reading:
Helen M. Luke, *Dark Wood to White Rose: Journey and Transformation in Dante’s Divine Comedy*

Questions to Consider:
1. What value does Dante place on art, and what role might art play in the education of morals?
2. Why does Vergil leave and Beatrice appear just as Dante prepares to enter heaven?
Lecture Seven
Paradiso X-XII

Scope: The encounter with the souls is somewhat different in the cantos examined in this lecture. The imagery of light provides an important link between human and the divine, and the pilgrim's ascent is defined in terms of illumination. Dante meets the great sages of Christianity, represented by Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventure.

Outline

I. Like the other two major divisions of the *Commedia*, the *Paradiso* has the pilgrim encounter souls—in this case the souls of the saved.
   A. Dante encounters these souls as he ascends through the spheres of the Ptolemaic Universe.
   B. The souls who appear to Dante are all in reality part of the mystical rose, but they appear to the pilgrim in the sphere, which connects most strongly to their life on earth.
   C. Thus he will meet warriors in the sphere of Mars, lovers in the sphere of Venus.

II. Canto 1, lines 1-3, discuss how God has left traces of Himself in the universe.
   A. The image of things stamped by God is used over and over in the *Paradiso*.
   B. It is inferred that these clues can be used to find the way back to God.
   C. The implication is that the good reader of nature and the universe can find his way to God.

III. Dante presents paradise with the souls experiencing God at all times.
   A. This does not make sense; how would the souls then be able to talk to Dante?
   B. Dante solves this by saying that the souls make a concession to Dante's earthly limitations.

IV. Dante uses many images to provide a link between the human and the divine in the *Paradiso*, but none is more important than imagery of light.
   A. Starting with the circle of the sun, the pilgrim sees a spectacular light show that continues at the beginning of each new sphere.
   B. The light show seems to prepare Dante for new discourse at each sphere and to prepare him for the vision of God.

V. In cantos X-XII of the *Paradiso*, Dante the pilgrim is in the circle of the sun, where he meets the great sages of Christianity.
   A. They are arranged in two groups of 12, reminiscent of both the 12 apostles and the 24 elders of the Book of Revelation.
   B. There is one speaker for each of the two groups, Thomas Aquinas for the first and Bonaventure for the second.
   C. These are the two great "scholastic" philosophers of the thirteenth century.
   D. Francis' example of voluntary poverty is presented as the ideal, especially if the individual is willing to give up not only material possessions but also knowledge, power, and pride.
   E. Bonaventure tells the story of Dominic to emphasize the need for integrity and honesty in leaders.

Essential Reading:
Dante, *The Divine Comedy*, Paradiso X-XII

Supplementary Reading:
William R. Cook and Ronald B. Herzman *The Medieval World View*

Questions to Consider:
1. How do Bonaventure and St. Francis' speeches contribute to Dante's theme of combining the personal with the universal?
2. What imagery does Dante provide to link earth and the heavens?
Lecture Eight
Paradiso XV-XVII, XXXII

Scope: In this final lecture we cover the meeting between Dante and his great-great-grandfather, Cacciaguida, who tells Dante about his ancestry, his city's history, and his future. Dante learns of his coming exile and becomes determined to rise above politics to write the Commedia. In the final canto Dante sees God face to face, reminding the reader why the journey has taken place.

Outline

I. Dante leaves the circle of the sun for the sphere of Mars.
   A. Dante meets his great-great-grandfather Cacciaguida, who tells Dante about his ancestry, his city's history, and his future.
   B. Cacciaguida is in this sphere because he was a participant in the Second Crusade and was killed while fighting the Muslims.
   C. Dante learns about the value of ancestors; they do not guarantee anything but they can provide examples of good conduct and standards.

II. Cacciaguida provides a description of Florence before Dante, when divisions and corruption were not as rampant.
   A. Cacciaguida's Florence was small and had a sense of unity.
   B. As Florence grew, the families who would lead the White and Black Guelphs were imported, causing political problems.
   C. Cacciaguida describes a different moral climate in which people lived more simply and modestly and in which both parents were present and involved in child-rearing.
   D. Political exile had not yet divided families.

III. Dante trusts Cacciaguida as a kind of guide and asks his ancestor about his own future.
   A. Cacciaguida tells Dante that he will soon become an exile.
   B. Also predicted is that Dante will ally himself with the wrong people in a vain attempt to return to Florence.
   C. Dante is told that he must rise above the challenges of exile to be true to himself, "a party of your own."
   D. Cacciaguida also tells Dante that he needs to write the Commedia and thus become a prophet and crusader.
   E. Dante understands that he should write for truth and not for fame.

IV. Moving to canto XXXIII, the one hundredth canto of the poem, Dante has the experience of seeing God face to face.
   A. The canto begins with a prayer of St. Bernard of Clairvaux, who has become Dante's final guide.
   B. The prayer begins with the paradox that the Virgin Mary is virgin and mother, daughter of her son, exalted and most humble.
   C. This prayer prepares the reader for the paradoxes of the Incarnation and the Trinity.
   D. Dante cannot fully relate his experience with God, but he shares traces with the reader.

V. Dante uses the final canto to echo much of the beginning of the poem.
   A. He discusses the binding of the universe, where it had been coming apart at the beginning of the poem.
   B. Dante tells the reader that he has the ability to find understanding and that the clues to God can be found in nature.

VI. At the end of the poem, Dante presents an image of perfect harmony.
   A. Dante ends the poem here, apparently because he has switched from Dante the pilgrim to Dante the poet.
   B. The reader is left in a position to begin again with the information necessary to take the journey with understanding.

Essential Reading:
Dante, The Divine Comedy, Paradiso XV-XVII, XXXII

Supplementary Reading:
Marino A. Balducci, Dante and the Ancient World: Classical Myths in the Divine Comedy.

Questions to Consider:

1. How is the experience of God in Paradiso XXXIII both the goal of the poem as well as the source of the poem?
2. Why must Dante become a "party of his own" to successfully be prophet and crusader?
Augustine, St. (354 A.D. - 430 A.D.) Bishop of Hippo in North Africa. Author of *The Confessions* and *City of God*, as well as numerous other sermons and tracts. Augustine is the most important Christian writer outside of the Bible. In addition to their philosophical and theological profundity, Augustine's works are among the supreme examples of Latin prose. *The Confessions* is the first autobiography in Western literature.

Beatrice. Beatrice Portinari. Dante's lifelong love and subject of his romantic poetry. She dies young and Dante memorializes her as the second of three guides to the pilgrim in the *Divine Comedy*.

Bernard of Clairvaux, St. (1090-1153). He reinvigorated the Cistercian order and preached in support of the Second Crusade. He becomes Dante the pilgrim's final guide in the final canto of *Paradiso*.

Bonaventure, St. (1221-1274). Roman Catholic theologian who entered the Franciscan order in 1243. He became general of his order in 1256 and was created cardinal and bishop in 1273.

Boniface VIII (1228-1303). Pope from 1294. He attempted to assert the temporal and spiritual power of the papacy but was ineffective.

Cacciaguida. Dante's great-great-grandfather who had been a participant in the Second Crusade and was killed while fighting the Muslims. Dante meets Cacciaguida in *Paradiso*, where he tells Dante about his heritage and informs Dante of his impending exile.

Cavalcante. A Guelph from Florence who appears in the *Inferno*. Dante and Cavalcante's son Guido were fellow poets.

Dido and Aeneas. Dido was a Phoenician princess who committed suicide in the *Aeneid* after Aeneas deserted her.

Farinata. A Ghibelline leader from the generation before Dante. He appears in the *Inferno*.


Guelph Party. The Guelphs were the rival party to the Ghibellines in medieval Germany and Italy. The Guelphs supported the pope.

Hadrian (76-138) Roman emperor from 117.

Ptolemaic System (Universe). The Egyptian astronomer asserted the geocentric theory that the earth is the center of the universe and that the sun, moon, and stars revolve around the earth.

Sordello. A poet from Vergil's hometown of Mantua. Vergil and Dante meet Sordello in cantos *Purgatorio VI-VII*.

Ulysses. Roman name for Odysseus, a Greek mythological hero. Homer's *Odyssey* describes the ten-year voyage of Odysseus after the fall of Troy in the 12th century B.C.
Bibliography


Dante, *The Divine Comedy*, ed. and trans. Charles S. Singleton. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970-5. This is the standard edition of the poem for English readers, with facing page Italian and English translation. The translation is literal and the commentary, a large volume for each of the three parts of the *Commedia*, can be overwhelming for someone coming to the poem for the first time.

Dante, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. Mark Musa. New York: Penguin, 1971-84. A more poetic translation, this paperback edition is the version that we quote in our lectures. The notes and commentary are the best for a reader coming to the poem for the first time.


Raffia, Guy P. "Dante's Beloved Yet Damned Virgil", in *Dante's Inferno, the Indiana Critical Edition*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press. Considers the multi-faceted role of Virgil in the *Commedia*.


*Dante Studies*. A journal published annually by the Dante Society of America; it includes new critical articles on Dante and summaries of all work done in English for the year.