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DANTE  
**paradiso**

A VERSE TRANSLATION BY

ROBERT HOLLANDER AND JEAN HOLLANDER

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*Dante Alighieri*  
PARADISO

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A VERSE TRANSLATION BY ROBERT & JEAN HOLLANDER

INTRODUCTION & NOTES BY ROBERT HOLLANDER



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*for*

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*Cornelia (A.R.)*

*& Dr. Buzz*

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# A Note on Using This eBook

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In this eBook edition of *Paradiso*, you will find two types of hyperlinks.

The first type is embedded in the line numbers to the left of the text: these links allow you to click back and forth between the English translation and the original Italian text while staying holding your place.

The second type of link, which is indicated by an arrow (→) at the end of a line of poetry, will bring you to an explanatory note.

You can click on an arrow to navigate to the appropriate note; you can then use the links at the end of each note to return to your location in either the English translation or the original Italian text. You can also click on the note number to return to your location in the English translation.



Since our goals in translating the third *cantica* of Dante's poem are not in substance different from those that animated our translation of the first and second, the reader is asked to consult the similar notices that precede our translations of *Inferno* (Doubleday 2000; Anchor 2002) and of *Purgatorio* (Doubleday 2003; Anchor 2004). *Paradiso*, however, presents some challenges different from those encountered in the first two *cantiche*. Needless to say, we have again attempted to give as accurate a sense of the poetry and meaning of the Italian text as the English language and our abilities allow. The language and style of this part of the poem are, in many respects, dramatically different from those to which the reader has become accustomed in the previous *cantiche*. As we suggested in the front matter for the second volume, "While surely we must acknowledge that *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* are very different poetic places, they nonetheless maintain some arrestingly similar elements. From the vantage point of *Paradiso* the second canticle looks much more like its predecessor than like its successor." Indeed, *Paradiso* is not only unique within Dante's oeuvre; it is simply unique. Theology set to music, as it were, it pushes its reader (not to mention its translator) to the limit.

A particular problem facing translators of the *Paradiso* involves one of its distinguishing features: neologisms, or words new to the Italian language and essentially invented by the creator. The current estimate of the number of neologisms in the poem runs to around ninety, with the great bulk of these appearing in *Paradiso* (see Ferrante [Ferr.1983.1], p. 131, n. 10). It seems appropriate that the requirements of expressing the higher realities of God's realm involve linguistic novelties of the most radical kind. Some of these we have attempted to bring over into English, when Dante's coinage seems so striking that *any* reader would have to pay astonished attention to the violence done "standard Italian"; for example, the verb *intrearsi* (*Par.* XIII.57), literally "to inthree itself," which Dante employs to speak of the Holy Spirit's involvement with the other two Persons of the Trinity, and which we have translated with an English neologism, "the Love that is *intrined* with them." Others we have not, especially when it seemed to us that his usage borders on the "ordinarily daring" language one associates with almost any poetic making, for example, the verb *ingigliarsi* (*Par.* XVIII.113), which literally means "to enlily itself," but is fairly obviously meant to indicate what our translation suggests it does, i.e., "to make itself into a lily." In other words, the first class of neologisms is the linguistic equivalent of self-consciously audacious metaphor, and like it, is obviously intended to make a reader reel, while the second is closer to our normal expectations of heightened poetic language; it may surprise, but does not shock. It is naturally, not exactly easy to make such distinctions. It is also true that the difficulty of bringing the effect of a neologism into a second language is another complicating factor. Sometimes Dante's daring thrusts simply do not "feel right" in English. In short, the reader should be aware that our practice in this regard is various.

We are once again grateful to two friends born in Italy and born to Dante for their willingness to sample our translations and my footnotes with a knowing eye. Margherita

Frankel, formerly a professor of Italian at New York University, was her usual careful and exacting self as she examined our materials. The same must be said of Simone Marchesi, who studied with me when he was a graduate student at Princeton and has now returned to the university to teach students how to read Dante in his own courses. We are pleased to express our continuing gratitude to them both. This translation has brought us into contact with people whom we did not know before. It has been pleasing to hear from readers in the United States, England, and Australia who have enjoyed our English-speaking Dante. And two of them were not only appreciative, but helpful. Professors of law Clayton Gillette (NYU) and Stephen Morse (Pennsylvania) paid for their enjoyment of *Inferno* by reading the penultimate drafts of *Purgatorio* and of *Paradiso* and sharing their questions and comments with us; we are deeply grateful to both of them, in part for demonstrating to me exactly why I have always used the adjective “lawyerly” (as in “a lawyerly argument”) in a positive sense. Finally, I would like to acknowledge those graduate students who worked with me on this *cantica*, first in 1980 (Carolyn Calvert Phipps, Micaela Janan, Albert Rossi, Stephen Rupp, Alex Sheer) and then in 1986 (Sheila Colwell, Roberta Davidson, Martin Elzinga, Frank Ordiway, Laure Scancarelli Seem). I hope that their memories of those seminars glow half as bright as mine.

Gerald Howard, in addition to his more significant titles and duties at Random House, has been our editor for some years now. It was his support that made publication of our work possible and his continuing clear-headed and keen-eyed editorial supervision that has helped keep the project on an even keel. And we are grateful as well to all at Random House and Anchor Books (including three former students of mine at Princeton: Rakesh Satyal, Alice Van Straalen, and Anne Merrow) who have taken such obvious pleasure in their association with this project.

27 November 2005 (Hopewell)

This first Anchor edition has some sixty changes in the translation, some thirty in the commentary, and six additions to the bibliography.

30 January 2008 (Hopewell)

This second edition includes some dozen changes in the translation and some fifty in the notes.

18 January 2012 (Hopewell)

## 1. Dante's works:

<i>Conv.</i>	<i>Convivio</i>
<i>Dve</i>	<i>De vulgari eloquentia</i>
<i>Egl.</i>	<i>Egloghe</i>
<i>Epist.</i>	<i>Epistole</i>
<i>Inf.</i>	<i>Inferno</i>
<i>Mon.</i>	<i>Monarchia</i>
<i>Par.</i>	<i>Paradiso</i>
<i>Purg.</i>	<i>Purgatorio</i>
<i>Quest.</i>	<i>Questio de aqua et terra</i>
<i>Rime</i>	<i>Rime</i>
<i>Rime dub.</i>	<i>Rime dubbie</i>
<i>VN</i>	<i>Vita nuova</i>
<i>Detto</i>	<i>Il Detto d'Amore</i> ("attributable to Dante" [Contini])
<i>Fiore</i>	<i>Il Fiore</i> ("attributable to Dante" [Contini])

2. Commentators on the *Commedia*. These seventy-three texts are all currently available in the database known as the Dartmouth Dante Project (<http://dante.dartmouth.edu>). Dates, particularly of the early commentators, are often approximate. The order followed here is that found in the DDP, which at times seems to violate chronology, and sometimes does so, in order to keep various versions of the same commentator (e.g., Pietro Alighieri) or teacher and pupil (e.g., Trifon Gabriele and Bernardino Daniello) next to one another.

Jacopo Alighieri (1322) (*Inferno* only)  
 Graziolo de' Bambaglioli (1324) (Latin) (*Inferno* only)  
 Jacopo della Lana (1324)  
 Anonymus Lombardus (1325[?]) (Latin) (*Purgatorio* only)  
 Guido da Pisa (1327) (Latin) (*Inferno* only)  
 L'Ottimo (1333)  
 Anonimo Selmiano (1337) (*Inferno* only)

Pietro Alighieri (1) (1340–42) (Latin)  
Pietro Alighieri (2) (1344–55[?])  
Pietro Alighieri (3) (1359–64[?])  
Codice cassinese (1350–75[?]) (Latin)  
Chiose ambrosiane (1355[?])  
Guglielmo Maramauro (1369–73)  
Chiose cagliaritanee (1370[?])  
Giovanni Boccaccio (1373–75) (*Inferno* I–XVII only)  
Benvenuto da Imola (1380) (Latin)  
Francesco da Buti (1385)  
“Falso Boccaccio” (1390[?])  
Anonimo Fiorentino (1400)  
Filippo Villani (1405) (*Inferno* I only)  
Giovanni da Serravalle (1416) (Latin)  
Guiniforto Barzizza (1440) (*Inferno* only)  
Cristoforo Landino (1481)  
Alessandro Vellutello (1544)  
Pier Francesco Giambullari (1538–48)  
Giovanni Battista Gelli (1541–63)  
Benedetto Varchi (1545) (*Paradiso* I & II only)  
Trifon Gabriele (1525–41)  
Bernardino Daniello (1547–68)  
Torquato Tasso (1555–68)  
Lodovico Castelvetro (1570)  
Pompeo Venturi (1732)  
Baldassare Lombardi (1791–92)  
Luigi Portirelli (1804–5)  
Paolo Costa (1819–21)  
Gabriele Rossetti (1826–40) (*Inferno* & *Purgatorio* only)  
Niccolò Tommaseo (1837)  
Raffaello Andreoli (1856)  
Luigi Bannassuti (1864)  
Henry W. Longfellow (1867) (English)  
Gregorio Di Siena (1867) (*Inferno* only)  
Brunone Bianchi (1868)  
G. A. Scartazzini (1874; but the 2nd ed. of 1900 is used)  
Giuseppe Campi (1888)  
Gioachino Berthier (1892)  
Giacomo Poletto (1894)  
Hermann Oelsner (1899) (English)  
H. F. Tozer (1901) (English)  
John Ruskin (1903) (English; not in fact a “commentary”)  
John S. Carroll (1904) (English)  
Francesco Torraca (1905)

C. H. Grandgent (1909) (English)

Enrico Mestica (1921)

Casini/Barbi (1921)

Carlo Steiner (1921)

Isidoro Del Lungo (1926)

Carlo Grabher (1934)

Ernesto Trucchi (1936)

Luigi Pietrobono (1946)

Attilio Momigliano (1946)

Manfredi Porena (1946)

Natalino Sapegno (1955)

Daniele Mattalia (1960)

Siro A. Chimenz (1962)

Giovanni Fallani (1965)

Francesco Mazzoni (1965–85) (*Inf.* I–VI, XI; *Purg.* XXXI; *Par.* VI)

Giorgio Padoan (1967) (*Inferno* I–VIII only)

Giuseppe Giacalone (1968)

Charles S. Singleton (1973) (English)

Bosco/Reggio (1979)

Pasquini/Quaglio (1982)

Robert Hollander (2000–7) (English)

Nicola Fosca (2003–6) (*Inferno & Purgatorio*)

NB: The text of the *Paradiso* is that established by Petrocchi, *Dante Alighieri: La Commedia secondo l'antica vulgata*, ed. Giorgio Petrocchi (Florence: Le Lettere, 1994 [1966–67]), vol. I. (This later edition has two minor changes to the text of this *cantica*, which is thus essentially identical with the earlier text.) All references to other works are keyed to the List of Works Cited found at the back of this volume (e.g., Adve.1995.1), with the exception of references to commentaries contained in the Dartmouth Dante Project. Informational notes derived from Paget Toynbee's *Concise Dante Dictionary of Proper Names and Notable Matters in the Works of Dante* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1914) are followed by the siglum (T). References to the *Enciclopedia dantesca*, 6 vols. (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1970–78) are indicated by the abbreviation *ED*. Commentaries by Robert Hollander are (at times) short versions of materials found in the Princeton Dante Project, a multimedia edition of the *Commedia*. Consultation (without charge to the user) is possible at [www.princeton.edu/dante](http://www.princeton.edu/dante).

(1) *Paradiso: An Impossible Poem.*

It is difficult to imagine what life must have been like for Dante, having to manage the details of everyday existence in his exile while his mind was occupied with details of quite another sort. Indeed, the subjects treated in the last *cantica* represent both implausible and daring choices for a poet (an awareness reflected in the title of the three-part Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's series for radio in 2002, *Dante, Poet of the Impossible*). In fact, it seems almost beyond human capacity to have written the *Comedy*. The whole poem might be considered an experiment in pushing back the boundaries of human expression, at times surprising even its creator. What is most surprising (and, to some, offensive) is the incorporation of subjects previously reserved exclusively for prose in an Italian poem: for example, moral philosophy (*Inf.* XI and *Purg.* XVI) and biology (*Purg.* XXV). However, this tactic becomes more noteworthy in *Paradiso*. There we find astronomy (*Par.* II, where Dante takes on the task of Ptolemy or an Alfraganus); free will (Canto V, where he rehearses this topic so dear to Augustine); the theology of history (VI, Orosius); municipal politics (XVI, Cicero and Brunetto Latini); and angelology and its relation to astronomy (XXVIII–XXIX, the Pseudo-Dionysius). If the entire project of the *Divine Comedy* must have caused its author understandable anxiety, the choice of a strategy for making the part of the poem that is called *Paradiso* must have caused its author considerable effort in wrestling with weighty concerns. If Giorgio Petrocchi's work to establish the dates of composition for the various parts of the poem is correct (and it must be considered a provisional, if still the most convincing attempt), Dante spent the years 1313 to 1317 revising *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*, and planning *Paradiso* (see Petrocchi [Petr.1957.1 and Petr.1969.1]). Perhaps because of the time he took for revision, only occasionally in the first two *cantiche* does one sense Dante laboring under his load (as, one might suggest, is apparent in the opening fifty or so verses of *Inferno* I). There is a "finished" quality to the first two *cantiche* that *Paradiso* sometimes does not have. To take a single example, the text of Canto III clearly suggests that Dante originally planned to portray the souls of the saved as dwelling in the stars (indeed, any number of commentators forget themselves from time to time and display a similar misunderstanding) while Canto IV makes it plain that they are ordinarily to be found in the Empyrean [pronounced em-PEER-ian] and only on this very special occasion manifest themselves to a celestial visitor in each of the first eight heavens. Further, a passage in Canto IX seems to drop back into the same mistake overruled in Canto IV. It is possible that a later revision of the poem would have done a better job ironing out this rather alarming inconsistency. And the issue seems worth raising. Are we reading, in *Paradiso*, less finished work than we found in the first two *cantiche*? Given the near-total absence of any hard evidence (there is an anecdotal reference, narrated by Boccaccio in his biography of Dante, to the discovery of the last thirteen cantos by the poet's sons only after his death), a resolution of this question is probably not possible.

Even a veteran reader is startled each time he or she begins rereading the third *cantica* and

this “theological epic.” For here the usual accoutrements of poetic narrative are downstaged by the language of Scholastic discourse and, finally, of mystical devotion. Dante’s *Paradiso* is surely one of the most daring poetic initiatives we have—perhaps it is simply the most daring. Its extraordinary popular success (in December 2002, Roberto Benigni recited and discussed its final canto before an Italian television audience reported to be more than 1 million in number) is testament to Dante’s stubbornness and to his genius. Its at times endless-seeming theological disquisitions, to be sure, have addled many a reader; one finds few who will claim (or admit) that it is their favorite *cantica*. At the same time, the poetic technique found in it reflects a supreme confidence and, in its greatest moments, attains a sublimity that sweeps all cynicism before it. It is perhaps worth the effort to report on one’s own experience in this regard. The writer has twice offered graduate seminars on *Paradiso* at Princeton (in 1980 and 1986). In both of these, the same thing happened. His students found the going difficult (as did he). They did not look forward to breaking their heads each week over the niceties of Scholastic distinction and other arcana. Nonetheless, once each seminar began, it was as though all present became a single instrument working toward a common understanding (perhaps in unconscious imitation of the speaking eagle in the heaven of Jupiter). Rarely have seminars flown by so quickly for all involved (or so it was reported, even by the students), and rarely have students taught their teacher quite so well. *Paradiso* is certainly the most challenging part of the poem, but may also be the most rewarding for those who give themselves to it and let it do its work on them.

## (2) *A Poem of the Stars.*

This poem about a journey through the heavens has little to do with our own notions of astronomy. (For Dante’s astronomy see, in English, at least Moore [Moor.1903.1], pp. 1–10; Orr [Orr.1914.1]; and Cornish [Corn. 2000.2]). Measured in the time that the protagonist is absent from the earth, the *Paradiso* seems to take a little more than twenty-four hours, although the temporal indications are less precise than they have been in the first two *cantiche*. He zooms up from the garden of Eden at noon on Wednesday, March 30 (or April 13, depending on the view of the matter accepted by the reader’s favorite discussant of the problem—see the notes to *Inf.* I.1 and *Inf.* XXI.38) and returns to earth sometime during the evening of the next day. This return is the only temporally unmarked portion of his reported voyage to the three realms of the afterworld, but the rough indications found in crucial passages late in the *cantica* encourage us to believe that the completed adventure, which ostensibly ends with the undescribed reentry of the protagonist, has taken one week: Thursday evening to Thursday evening. Giovanni Agnelli (Agne.1891.1), Table XI, has tried to demonstrate that the time consumed by Dante’s trip through Paradise takes exactly twenty-four hours (with some timeless time allowed for the visionary final four cantos). But even a rough calculation of the duration of time as presented in the text itself would seem to show that the time Dante spent in the heavens, as measured by earthly duration, is somewhat more than twenty-four hours (see the note to *Par.* XXVII.79–81). The first twenty-four hours were spent on earth and began Thursday evening (*Inf.* I and II); the next full day was consumed exploring Hell (*Inf.* III–XXXIV.69); and the next in the ascent to see again the stars (*Inf.* XXXIV.70–139), which brings us to 6 pm on Sunday evening Jerusalem time, or 6 a.m. Sunday morning at the Antipodes, where begins the three-and-one-half-day trip up the mountain (what we call Purgatory) that ended with our hero in the earthly paradise at the

propitious time of noon.

The heavens, conceived by Dante and the astronomers of his time as a series of concentric circular spheres, nine in all, surrounding the center of the universe, this our paltry earth, are formed by transparent crystal bodies, the first seven of which each mounts a single gem. These for Dante are the planets: Moon, Mercury, Venus, Sun, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn. (In Dante's eyes, they all shine with their own light alone.) The eighth sphere contains all the other stars (shining with reflected light, once again precisely reversing the understanding of our time). The ninth, the Primum Mobile or Crystalline Sphere, contains no other physical body besides itself, but, by loving God, propels the movement of the entire universe. Strictly speaking, Dante's physical universe contains only these nine spheres. Surmounting it, existing beyond time and space and yet containing all space and time, is the home of God, of the angels, and of the souls of the saved (with seats reserved for those few yet to come). This placeless place is known as the Empyrean. As we will learn in Cantos III and IV (and the learning is not come by easily), no soul whom we meet in the eight lower spheres actually has a home in them, but has only appeared in a particular sphere to give Dante instruction of a certain hierarchical bent, for while all the blessed are equally blessed (as all the damned are equally damned), there is nonetheless here, as there was in Hell, an order of rank among those present. All the blessed are equally blessed, only some are less blessed than others—perhaps better put, some have fewer apparent credentials for salvation than others (e.g. Piccarda the traduced nun, as compared with St. Benedict; or Folco the former lover and poet, with St. John).

We also learn that each of these heavens, which are "ruled" by one of the nine orders of angels (about which see notes found in Canto XXVIII), is associated with a particular virtue: faith, hope, and love, respectively, in the first three spheres (Moon, Mercury, Venus), but each of these theological virtues in an imperfect form (see Ordiway [Ordi.1982.1]). The next four planetary spheres (Sun, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn) present in turn the four cardinal virtues: prudence, fortitude, justice, and temperance. In the Starry Sphere we encounter the three theological virtues in their perfected form; in the Primum Mobile the nine ranks of angels reflecting each of the nine virtues over which each of their orders presides.

As even this brief description indicates, Dante's celestial bodies are less important for their physical traits (which are, nonetheless, duly noted) as for their influence on the character of a given human soul. Dante's astronomy is thus, to us today, a curious blend of consideration of the physical characteristics of the heavens and of their influence on human life (see Kay [Kay.1983.1 and Kay.1994.2]). It is at once both astronomy and astrology, but an astrology "cleaned up," drained of its deterministic elements, an astrology that would pass muster with St. Augustine, who cried out so eloquently against it (e.g., *Confessions* VII.vi). The notion that our actions are determined by the stars is simply anathema to Christian theologians, for whom the resultant pleas (e.g., "I was born under Venus; how could I resist the call of sexual pleasure?") were the early version of the dog-ate-my-homework defense. Thus Dante's age combined Ptolemaic astronomy and what we would rightly call astrology in such ways as to maintain the doctrine of Free Will. The stars, we will learn from Charles Martel in *Paradise* VIII.97–148, predispose us toward certain abilities (thus explaining why we become either warriors or poets, for example) but in no way control our moral choices. And it is these that prepare us for our eternal lives, whether in Heaven or in Hell.



### (3) *The Drama of Paradiso.*

This drama is not nearly so much moral, as was that described in the first two *cantiche*, as is intellectual. *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* are both centrally moral in the reactions that they summon in the reader. This pertains at least through *Purgatorio* XXVII; once we arrive in the earthly paradise, we can feel the ground moving beneath our feet, compelling us to take more historical and religious direction. Turning the corner into the heavens, we are soon aware of a more theological (indeed Scholastic) dimension to the poem, one that is, if not altogether a surprise, dramatically different. Here is another way in which the third *canticle* differs from the first two. The motivation of much of the discourse in the canticle comes from Dante's puzzled questions, the result of his shaky understanding of God's justice. Beatrice, given the role that one waggish commentator has characterized as resulting from her having been forced to act the part of St. Thomas in drag, takes over the role of guide from Virgil. And while she fields most of Dante's questions, there are others who do so as well. It is quite a cast of teachers that he is privileged to have, including four eventual saints of the Church: Thomas, Bonaventure, Benedict, and Bernard.

And who is the protagonist of this bildungsroman? Pertile (Pert.1998.2), p. 19, describes him as follows: "A Florentine excluded from his city, aristocrat deprived of means, fervent Christian and unswerving anticlerical, politician constrained to stand on the sidelines, partisan without a party, layman swept up in his own religious mission, intellectual *déclassé*." Dante is a microcosm of all the tensions and contradictions of his time." And now, when he has reached the final portion of his journey, the traces of his worldly identities and cares are, if anything, even more pressing, even more visible.

While the first actual presence of Beatrice in the poem, in the earthly paradise, puts her in the role of moral preceptor rather than that of guide to revealed truth, once we enter *Paradiso*, that becomes precisely her role. It is no wonder that Romantic readers insist that they find her less attractive than Francesca. (And, in the wake of De Sanctis and Croce, they follow many others who try to turn the poem into something it simply refuses to be.) Dante's heavenly preceptor sounds like a Doctor of the Church, exactly as Dante wanted her to. Her role, some have argued, is to supervise the correction of Dante's intellect. In such a formulation, Virgil supervises the correction of Dante's will in *Inferno* and the perfection of his will in *Purgatorio*, while Beatrice has a similar role in the correction of Dante's intellect in the first nine heavenly spheres, and Bernard presides over the perfection of Dante's intellect in the Empyrean (see Hollander [Holl.1976.2]). That role makes the gamut of Scholastic distinctions that she forces Dante (and us) to run through seem only a reasonable course. It is probably true that no one has ever poeticized theology at such length and with better art than Dante has done in *Paradiso*.

There are many large theological and philosophical subjects addressed by Beatrice. (In *Convivio*, Dante might have referred to the passages containing them as *digressio* [digressions]—and in *Paradiso* XXIX.127, he again uses that word.) This is not to consider those offered by Justinian, Charles Martel, Thomas Aquinas, Cacciaguida, or still others. Beatrice's topics include the following: the paradoxical nature of heavenly "gravity," drawing one up and not down (*Par.* I); the spiritual reason for the spots on the Moon (II—another refutation of arguments found in *Convivio* [II.xiii.9]); the information that saved souls do not return to their star but proceed directly (once they have finished their purgation, if they have

had to pass through that realm; at least some saints and most or all martyrs apparently do not) to the Empyrean (IV); the relation between the absolute and the conditional will (IV); the repayment of broken vows and the freedom of the will (V); the *primo mobile* and the root of time (XXVII); the ranks of the angels (XXVIII); the nature of and reason for God's creation of the universe (XXIX); the fallen angels (XXIX); those members of religious orders who teach false doctrines (XXIX); the numberless ranks of the angels (XXIX).

Given this array of subjects, we may be excused if we wonder what Dante expected in the reader of *Paradiso* by way of education. We are puzzled by the always interesting and sure difficult question of the writer's intended audience. To have garnered the respect and popularity he apparently did within a short period of time, his audience would have had to understand many at least recondite allusions and be able to follow some fairly sophisticated theological disquisition. How broad an audience could Dante have had that fully appreciated his achievement? (We should not forget that there also sprang up an enthusiastic illiterate audience for the work, memorizing the text from the recitals of others, a tradition that has continued into our own times (see Ahern [Aher.1982.3]). Obviously, it had to be literate, which we may safely assume means that he had a small audience to begin with (but for the growth of that potential audience from the tenth century on and the development of a "intellectual elite," see the classic study of Le Goff, *Les intellectuels au Moyen Âge* [English ed. Lego.1957.1]; and for laymen's interests in and knowledge of formal philosophy, see Imbach [Imba.1996.1], pp. 1–128). That audience is expected to be conversant with all the disciplines on which Dante relies to convey his thoughts, not only theology, not only the so-called liberal arts (divided into two parts, the *trivium* and *quadrivium* [see below]), but with developing issues in what we would refer to as philosophy and natural science. This was not the nineteenth century, when there were numerous readers of a professional preparatory school (*liceo*) who entered into debate in the *Giornale dantesco* or other literary periodicals over some of the poem's finer points in a kind of "official amateur" role. There were, in the fourteenth century, perhaps no more than a happy few with such preparation. The educated readers to whom Dante addresses his poem had perhaps surprisingly similar educational backgrounds, having been subjected to the seven liberal arts: grammar, rhetoric, dialectic (roughly what was covered less cogently by preparation for what is measured by the "verbal" portion of the Standard Achievement Tests, familiar to American high school students); arithmetic, music, geometry, and astronomy (disciplines that were all associated with mathematics, and thus something like the preparation for the SATs in math). The most educated were mainly priests; they had also studied theology, the "highest science," the only field for the "PhD" in most medieval universities, on the model of Paris, where Thomas Aquinas taught. And so, while we may feel challenged by any or all of the "fields" that are represented in the poem, the educated elite probably could manage to understand a lot more of it than we, as is evidenced by the early commentaries, which produce a good deal of lore regarding what we would call astronomy, biology, geology, and physics.

#### (4) *Language and Style in Paradiso.*

Most of the diction of *Paradiso* is solemn, but some is surprisingly lighthearted (Canto V.13 "il seguente canto canta" [the next song sings]), exalted, but also giddily playful (Canto V.122–123: "Dì, dì ... a dii" [Speak, speak ... in gods]); and, at times, colloquial and sal-

(Canto XVII.129: “e lascia pur grattar dov’ è la rognà” [and let the one who itches scratch]) If the low comic speech we heard so much of in *Inferno* and a good smattering of in *Purgatorio* is less often present in *Paradiso*, the fact that it is there at all tells us something about Dante’s determination to keep that low comic thread present in the fabric of the last canticle. It is probably correct to say that *Purgatorio* is the more “churchly” of the last two *cantiche*, while *Paradiso* is the more “Scholastic.” Nonetheless, the very presence of a few low-vernacular moments determines our sense of the linguistic range that defines the enterprise. Jean Racine, who was grandly alert to such problems, once wrote that one cannot have a character say the word *mouchoir* (handkerchief) in a tragedy (because it violates the stylistic register of the genre). In even the most exalted parts of *Paradiso*, Dante keeps the low-mimetic present, as for instance in the last canto (*Par.* XXXIII.7) when he refers to Mary’s womb, not in a Petrarchan and noble and politely metaphorical way (as one commentator thought he should have, by saying *virginal chiostro* [virginal cloister]), but by the unvarnished plainness of *ventre* (“womb” or “belly”).

All the speakers overheard by us, eavesdropping at Dante’s shoulder, are saved. This fact understandably colors the intonations that we hear. The more academic and abstract subjects normally addressed by Beatrice and by those Dante meets in the heavens would seem to call for different stylistic registers, and indeed we do hear a lot of Scholastic discourse, most notably from St. Thomas and from Dante’s three apostolic examiners, Peter, James, and John, on the theological virtues. Nonetheless, we catch the inflection not only of that speech appropriate to such discourse, but also of Franciscan narrative (see Canto XI), with plenty of room left for a Christian version of Old Testament prophetic rage in the various denunciations of earthly behavior we hear in the first nine heavens. As Fredi Chiappelli (Chia.1967.3) suggested, in moving to *Paradiso* we encounter, at first (and as we might expect), a much greater degree of abstraction, both linguistic and conceptual, than we have become accustomed to in the earlier parts of the poem. However, and as Chiappelli points out, starting in Canto XXII the poet begins to move back to the concrete. This paradox is surely allied to the Incarnational basis of the Christian faith as well as of the poetics of the *Commedia*.

On the overall newness of the treatment of the subjects in the final canticle, see E. I. Wilkins (Wilk.1961.1), p. 3: “Certain differences between the *Inferno* and the *Purgatorio* on the one hand and the *Paradiso* on the other may be noted briefly. In each of the first two *cantiche* the number of lines that are spoken is a little less than half the total number of lines in the *cantica*: in the *Paradiso* considerably more than half of all the lines are spoken. In each of the first two *cantiche* the number of spoken passages is about three hundred and fifty; in the *Paradiso* it is about one hundred and fifty. In each of the first two *cantiche* the spoken passages average about six lines in length: in the *Paradiso* they average about twenty lines in length. In each of the first two *cantiche* the number of individual speakers is somewhat more than fifty: in the *Paradiso* it is less than twenty.” Wilkins’s census confirms what readers probably generally feel without extensive reflection: the third *cantica* is essentially different from the first two because of the sharp reduction in the amount of narrative it deploys. If, indeed, we examine the speeches of the twenty or so speakers in *Paradiso*, we quickly realize not only that *Paradiso* is characterized by having fewer speakers with more to say, but that very few of these speeches are devoted to narrative. In *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*, for Virgil

hold forth on the nature of sin (*Inf.* XI) or for Marco Lombardo to explain the nature of love (*Purg.* XVI) seemed unusual. We had become enthusiastically accustomed to the experience of sinners and penitents revealing their histories through riveting narratives. Even Beatrice's reproofs to Dante in *Purgatorio* XXX–XXXI generally took a narrative form, a retelling of the dark side of the protagonist's emergent new life. In the third *cantica*, on the other hand, embedded narratives are few and far between. To be sure, the poet will continue to tell how the protagonist moves from place to place in brief descriptions. What is comparatively absent, however, is narrative, narrative deployed in those self-revealing tales told by the souls whom the protagonist encounters in the first two canticles. (These are so prominent a feature of Dante's writing in the *Commedia* that they may seem to be its single most defining characteristic; witness their effect on Robert Browning.) Ugolino's self-narrative, for instance, runs 72 verses (*Inf.* XXXIII.4–75). The eleven speakers in *Paradiso* who tell their own stories, ranging from Piccarda in Canto III (through Justinian, Charles Martel, Cunizza, Folco, Thomas, Bonaventure, Cacciaguida [perhaps, as Dante's ancestor, unsurprisingly the longest-winded, at 19 verses], Peter Damian, Benedict) to Adam in Canto XXVI, tell all eleven of these in some 150 verses scattered over twenty-four cantos (there are none in the first two cantos, exactly as we might expect, nor in the last seven, a fact that may surprise us, until we reflect that the extinction of self-consciousness is one hallmark of the shared behavior of all the saints in Heaven). In short, the total number of verses devoted to self-narrative in the third *cantica* is barely more than double that allotted to a single speaker, albeit the most loquacious one, in *Inferno*.

The language of *Paradiso* is exceptional, in every sense of that word. There are words here that literally were never before used in a poem (or sometimes anywhere else, as far as we know), some simply transferred from one linguistic field to a new one, others made up by our poet. For Dante's versification, his wide-ranging lexicon (e.g., Latinisms, dialectic speech, Gallicisms, neologisms), his rhymes, and his stylistic traits, see the admirably clear and complete summary produced by John A. Scott (pp. 261–80) in his helpful introduction to the study of Dante (Scot.2004.2).

#### (5) *Politics in Paradiso.*

In attempting to come to grips with *Purgatorio*, some readers experience difficulty because they take Dante's views as being more "human" than they in fact are (e.g., the episode involving Matelda in Canto XXVIII may seem to some to valorize sensual love, while in fact it shows the need to transcend it). Others, dealing with *Paradiso*, make the mistake of considering the interests found in this *cantica* to be only "divine" (one oft-repeated view is that after we leave *Purgatorio* behind, the poem reveals no further interest in the political affairs of the world below—which is simply untrue). There is small need to insist on the political nature of so much of Dante's interest in the first two canticles. (For a fairly recent bibliography, see Di Scipio [Disc.1983.1], p. 282, n. 1.) *Paradiso*, however, is frequently portrayed either as having left such worldly concerns behind or as, if they are seen as present, downplaying their importance. Such a view is countered by even casual attention to the text. The reader may want to consider Canto VI, in which Justinian narrates the history of the eagle of imperial Rome; Cantos XV–XVII, in the course of which Cacciaguida describes, in detail, the political life of Florence in the "good old days" and the city's decline, as well as the future, political and personal, of its most famous exile, Dante Alighieri (see Dav

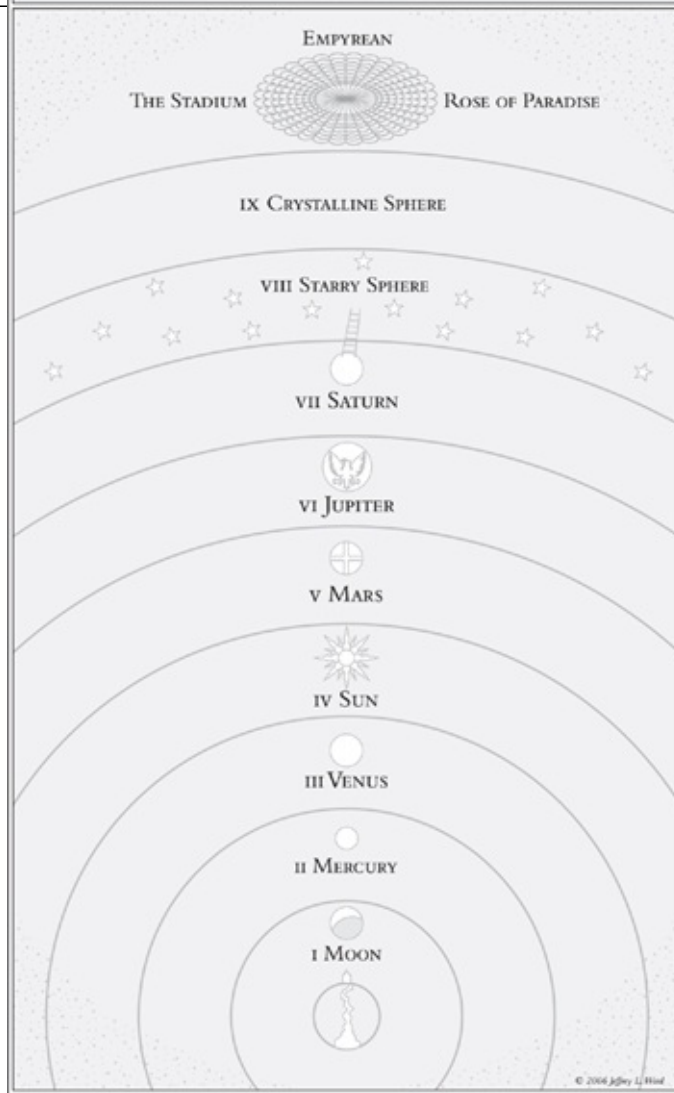
[Davi.1968.1]); Canto XXVII (vv. 136–148), in which the poet offers the final political prophecy in the poem; and Canto XXX (vv. 133–148), where Beatrice shows Dante the vacant throne of the emperor Henry VII and savages the sitting pope (much to the dismay of some commentators, who think the poem should be more pacific at a point so near its vision of God). This is not to exhaust the passages showing a pronounced political concern in the final *cantica*, but does give a rapid sense of the importance of politics in it. Dante's political views are less surprisingly found in *Paradiso* than one at first may think. From their very first presence in the poem (e.g., the prophecy of the *veltro* in *Inf.* I, Ciacco's discussion of better times in Florence's earlier history in *Inf.* VI), they are not mere political views, but reveal themselves as having a religious, even a providential, component.

### *Endword.*

“This commentary, as demanding of our labor as it was of our publisher's support, represents published in these times, an act of faith in our schools and even more in the values found in our culture and in our history that some, shamefully and foolishly, attempt to make matter of debate. In order to preserve our humanity, we believe that it is indispensable to continue to practice philology, criticism, and literary history, that is, to make every effort to understand as precisely as possible the messages passed along to us by our common culture which we in turn bear the responsibility of passing along to those to come. To be witnesses and actors in a civilizational moment that reaches toward the future does not in any way deny the value of the past, the very source of our nourishment.” These words (here translated from the Italian), dated Easter 1978, were written by Umberto Bosco, coauthor (along with Giovanni Reggio) of, in the opinion of the author of these notes, one of the finest commentaries to *Paradiso* available. Bosco's remarks, found on p. x of his *Premessa*, reflect the distress felt by many in Italy during one of the most difficult times of the postwar era, when Italian universities were besieged (often literally) by enemies, both external and internal, and the undersigned, a member of a commission of foreign scholars preparing a report on the situation, had opportunity to observe less than a year after Bosco wrote these words. A quarter of a century later, one hardly senses that the forces of civilization are winning the “culture wars” that seem almost embedded in university life and in the culture that lies outside the gates. On the other hand, one may take some comfort in the fact that Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, and other geniuses in the human arts, in whatever form they are appreciated, are still vital presences if only they are read or seen or heard. Whenever they cease their posthumous vitality, their extinction, like that of the dead canary in its cage within the confines of the coal mine, will tell those still breathing among us that it is time to get back to the surface or else, perhaps, to abandon hope.

*Robert Hollander*  
*Tortola, 21 January 2005*

# MAP OF DANTE'S PARADISE



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Empyrean ascent	XXX.16-XXXIII.145 XXX.1-15
(9) Crystalline Sphere ascent	XXVII.100-XXIX.145 XXVII.88-99
(8) Starry Sphere ascent	XXII.112-XXVII.87 XXII.99-111
(7) Saturn ascent	XXI.16-XXII.98 XXI.1-15
(6) Jupiter ascent	XVIII.70-XX.148 XVIII.52-69
(5) Mars ascent	XIV.88-XVIII.51 XIV.82-87
(4) Sun ascent	X.40-XIV.81 X.28-39
(3) Venus ascent	VIII.16-X.27 VIII.1-15
(2) Mercury ascent	V.100-VII.148 V.86-99
(1) Moon ascent	II.31-V.85 II.19-30
Proem: Eden	I.1-57

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# **The Paradiso: English**

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