Dante's Epic Journeys

Thompson, David

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Preface

This essay in comparative literature represents the first extended attempt to relate Dante’s major allegorical mode to classical and medieval interpretations of epic poetry rather than to patristic Biblical exegesis and also the first comprehensive explanation of Dante’s enigmatic Ulysses. As such it constitutes, in a sense, the logical outcome of my principal studies and interests, particularly my interest in the classical tradition. However, I have been less concerned with tracing sources than with showing some ways in which one great writer made creative use of a rich and complex heritage. I hope to have thrown new light not only upon Dante’s allegory—and thus upon the whole troubled question of exactly what an allegory was thought to be—but also upon the intricate relationship between poet and poem and between Dante’s spiritual journeys and his written representation of those itineraries.
Appropriately enough, it was in Ithaca that I first made Virgil’s and Dante’s acquaintance. The several portions of my study have since been written at diverse ports of call; and along the way, grants (sometimes, be it admitted, ostensibly for different purposes) from the University of California, Los Angeles, the University of New Mexico, and the University of Washington have facilitated my research and writing, as have materials kindly supplied by friends and colleagues on both coasts. My primary debts, however, are acknowledged in the dedication.

Seattle, Washington