

# europa

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CASSOLA, Arnold

*Similarities, parallelisms  
and oppositions in the IV and X  
cantos of Dante's "Inferno".*

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## SIMILARITIES, PARALLELISMS AND OPPOSITIONS

in the

## IV AND X CANTI OF DANTE'S «INFERNO»

An analysis of the two above mentioned canti shows us that, from the structural point of view, they have many things in common. To begin with, their disposition in the canticle ; if we examine the « Inferno » as a whole, we find out that both the souls in Limbo (IV) and the heresiarchs (X) belong to a little world of their own, completely cut off from that of the other souls being punished in hell. Let me explain myself better. Dante's hell is divided into two parts : the « alto inferno », outside the city of Dite, and the « basso inferno », within the walls of the city. Canto IV and Canto X serve as a sort of prologue to each of these two sectors of the underworld. The protagonists of these canti are refused entry into hell. In order to justify their exclusion Dante gives the following explanation. The souls in Limbo are confined to their seat of punishment because they never got to know the real God, even though through no fault of their own. On the other hand, the heresiarchs knew who the true God was (naturally, when I say God, I mean the Christian concept of God), but they refused to accept him. Therefore, although punished, they do not deserve to be castigated within the walls of Dite.

Having tackled the first problem, let us pass on to the second one : does Dante treat both the souls in Limbo and the heresiarchs in the same way ? The answer is « No ». It is obvious that his admiration is all for the souls in Limbo. How can we come to such a conclusion ? All we have to do is examine Dante's attitude towards the sufferers he meets. In vv. 31-32 of Canto IV, Virgilio nearly scolds Dante for his lack of interest in the « infanti », « femmine » and « viri » he has just seen. Then he explains the reason for their being in Limbo and makes it a point to specify that they are here through no particular fault of their own : « Or vo' che sappi, innanzi che più andi, / ch'ei non peccaro » ; (vv. 33-34). On getting to know the real reason for their being in Limbo - their not being baptized - Dante feels really sorry for them and, seeing that they are « gente di molto valore » (v. 44), he starts asking his « duca » questions about them. As from this moment onwards, his thirst for information about this particular type of infernal inhabitants will not be quenched.

We certainly cannot observe the same enthusiasm when he meets the heresiarchs. It is true that in Canto X Dante is full of admiration for Farinata degli Uberti, but this admiration is meant only for the individual Farinata, and is not shared by his fellow sufferers. On the contrary, in Limbo, all the penitents Dante meets or sees - and I have counted a total of thirty seven ! - are the object of his unlimited praise. We know that the number of heresiarchs in the Cerchio VI is enormous, but Dante mentions only four names to us. He seems to be ashamed of mentioning any more : « De li altri mi taccio » (v. 118). Why is this ? I think that a close look at the names of the four damned souls in this « cerchio » will explain Dante's behaviour to us. The guilty four are Farinata, Cavalcante de' Cavalcanti, Federico II and Cardinal Ottaviano degli Ubaldini. Why does Dante choose these particular historical figures ? What do they stand for ? Farinata symbolises patriotic love ; Cavalcante, paternal love. The two really negative figures are Federico II and the Cardinale. The former represents the empire ; the latter, the church. Being both corrupt figures, this means that the two « soli » which, according to Dante's beliefs, were supposed to enlighten mankind, are, on the contrary, enveloped in complete darkness. The two « soli » are, in reality, completely « switched off ».

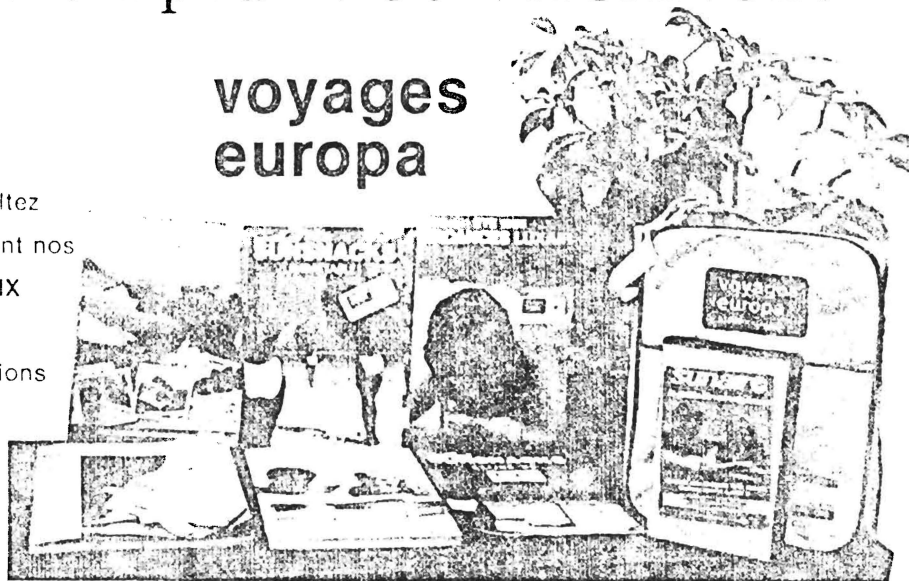
Canto IV and Canto X actually constitute an act of accusation against Dante's contemporary society. In Limbo, this charge is brought up indirectly ; in the Cerchio VI, it is a direct charge. Canto IV is full of praise for the heroes, philosophers and writers of the past. These belong either to the classical world or to the Mohammedan one (Averroes and the Saladin) : they are all non-believers. By exalting the pagan protagonist of the past, Dante is implicitly condemning the corrupt Christians of his era. This charge is explicitly confirmed in Canto X : the four negative protagonists are very near to Dante, both in time and in space ( they are all citizens of the « giardin dell'impero »).

Ironically, therefore, the true virtues can only be found in those who, according to the beliefs of the period, were not supposed to have them ; while the pope and the emperor, who had been directly invested by God with the sacred mission of keeping mankind on the right road, were not living up to their responsibilities. The papal and imperial courts had become a veritable den of vice.

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