

In this essay, I will closely read lines 100-120 of Canto IV, where Dante is greeted by legendary poets such as Homer, Ovid, Horace and Lucan. They, along with Virgil, invite Dante into their group of five and travel across to view all the famous figures who rest in the first ring. This passage demonstrates the pedestal Dante places himself upon, while also highlighting how Dante values poetry and wisdom.

Firstly, Dante evidently places himself on a pedestal as he describes receiving a "gesture of welcome" by the poets then being "show[n] more honor" as they "made [him] one of their company" (*Inferno* IV, 100-101). Dante writing about being "welcomed" into the company of legendary poets demonstrates that he believes he is of equal status to them, highlighting his propensity to elevate himself to a higher status. This is further reinforced as Dante describes getting along with the poets as they "went on into the light talking of things" (*Inferno* IV, 103), again perpetuating the theme of Dante believing himself to be worthy enough to converse with them. In addition, instead of elaborating on what was said in conversation, Dante instead writes that they "talk[ed] of things better left in silence," (*Inferno* IV, 104) possibly pointing to the idea that Dante either does not deem the reader worthy enough to know the contents of the conversation, or he believes that we would not understand it. In either case, this reinforces the idea that Dante, due to his perceived status among poets, is able to gather information from the poets whereas the reader, a common person, cannot. This notion that Dante's worth is the same as that of legendary figures such as Plato, Homer, and other philosophers is a recurring theme throughout multiple Cantos, and is quite literally the fuel that allows him to push forward through this entire work. Finally, I believe this theme to be especially ironic given that Dante is writing *Inferno* while being exiled from Florence - effectively becoming a forgotten

citizen of the city - where he is far from being a notable figure and consequently pales in comparison to the figure he depicts himself to be within Inferno.

In addition to this, this passage also demonstrates how Dante values poetry and philosophy as the pinnacle of human thought, as he places great poets like Homer, Horace, Lucan and Ovid and other famous figures in a circle where there is a "noble castle" with "towering walls [and] a beautiful stream" (Inferno IV, 108). The adjectives "noble" and "beautiful" paint this environment as one of relative paradise compared to the remainder of Inferno, and since the Inferno was created to punish those who have sinned against God, the fact that these figures live in peace highlights that Dante believes they have not sinned and instead reside here through no fault of their own, as they were born before Christ. In a sense, it almost feels as if Dante *wants* to place these characters in paradise, but is prevented from doing so because they did not worship God, and therefore are not allowed into paradise.

Consequently, Dante concludes that the next best place to place them is within Limbo, where they are not punished and instead live in eternal peace. Dante continues to show high praise for the poets as he describes their group of six walking "into the light," (Inferno IV, 103) with the light being used to represent their wisdom and thought, and perhaps also used as a double meaning to represent their divinity, as the light is often biblically associated with God and holy figures. This imagery of the light is repeated again when Dante writes about approaching a "meadow green," ultimately coming to a place "that was high and open and full of light" where the "spirits of the great" (Inferno IV, 111, 116, 119) were revealed to him. This only further paints the souls who reside in Limbo as divine figures, and also further highlights how Dante values poetry and wisdom as figures like Homer are among the characters listed here. Overall,

the visual imagery of the light and also Dante's peaceful description of the environment within Limbo highlights what he values in one's character, where becoming a great thinker or poet is regarded as one of the highest honors achievable.

Overall, this passage primarily serves to provide further evidence that he is indeed special and deserves to be placed upon a pedestal above others. In addition, the descriptions of the surrounding landscape as peaceful and the visual imagery present highlight the status of the souls that reside here, and great philosophers being among them highlights how Dante values their contributions to humankind very highly. Relative to the entire Inferno as a whole, this passage serves to highlight the characters that Dante believes belong in paradise, but are barred from entering because they failed to worship God. Implicitly, this also serves to show that Dante believes that all notable figures that do not reside here have done something to deserve eternal punishment, as they are found in a deeper circle of the Inferno. In essence, this passage allows us to understand more clearly how Dante wants his character to be portrayed within Inferno, but also more generally it allows us to get a clearer sense of Dante's values and moral compass as a writer.