

# Paradiso XXVII-XVIII

11 May 2020

*“Paradiso* is not for the philosophically faint-hearted: it gives a Neoplatonic reading of the Scriptures which makes no concessions to the uninformed.”

Boitani, 224

# The Journey

- Dante travels through the Eighth Sphere of the Fixed Stars
  - He has to pass a test on Faith, Hope, and Love
- We encounter him after he has passed the test and is about to move onto the Primum Mobile

# The Heavens and the Sciences

- Seven liberal arts
  - Moon - grammar
  - Mercury - dialectic
  - Venus - rhetoric
  - Sun - arithmetic
  - Mars - music
  - Jupiter - geometry
  - Saturn – astronomy
- The other sciences
  - Fixed stars - physics/metaphysics
  - Primum mobile - ethics
  - Empyrean - theology

# Canto XXVII – Part 1

- What is happening in this canto?
- How exactly does St. Peter focus his discourse?
  - What, exactly, is denounced?
  - What are the images and metaphors we see?

# Canto XXVII – Part 2

- Ascension to the *Primum mobile*
- GROUP DISCUSSION
  - ll. 19-30
  - Consider how metaphor usually works in language and how metaphor works (or doesn't work) in this instance.
  - Dante's innovative mis/use of metaphor here can be seen as a larger trend in the later Cantos of Paradiso. Why might he be using language this way? What effect and/or implications does it have on the narrative?

# METAPHOR AND LOGOS

- The sphere of Jupiter saw the Latin for
  - "Love justice, ye that judge the earth".
  - After it is spelled out, the final "M" of transforms into an imperial eagle

DILIGITE IUSTITIAM.  
QUI IUDICATIS TERRAM.

DILIGITE IUSTITIAM were the verb  
and noun that first appeared in that depiction;  
QUI IUDICATIS TERRAM followed after.



# WHAT IS METAPHOR?

- Dictionary: metaphor is when some word or figure is applied to another to which it is not literally applicable
- Philosophy: When we resort to metaphor, we contrive to talk about two things at once; two different and disparate subject matters are mingled to rich and unpredictable effect
  - Concerned with the difference between the literal and figurative use of language
  - Some modern thinkers and scholars argue that all language is at root metaphorical
- Aristotle, *Poetics*: "To be a master of metaphor is the greatest thing by far. It is the one thing that cannot be learnt from others, and it is also a sign of genius."



# METAPHOR AND LOGOS

- There has been a long meditation in Western philosophy on the idea of 'logos'
  - from a Greek word variously meaning "ground", "plea", "opinion", "expectation", "word", "speech", "account", "reason", "proportion", and "discourse"
- Heraclitus first used it as a term for the principle of order and knowledge
- The Stoics considered it the generative principle of the universe
- The neoplatonists interpreted logos as the principle of meditation, existing as the interrelationship between the hypostases—the soul, the intellect (nous), and the One.
  - For Plotinus, the relationship between the three elements of his trinity is conducted by the outpouring of logos from the higher principle, and eros (loving) upward from the lower principle.

# Dante, metaphor and logos

- So as Dante moves closer to the Source, 'logos', we get the conflation of the layers of signification 'the literal, the metaphorical, the poetic.'
- As we get closer to the source of the universe, metaphor starts to disappear and one thing isn't used to describe something else, one thing literally *is* something else
- Language and being become one -> Logos

# The title of this course

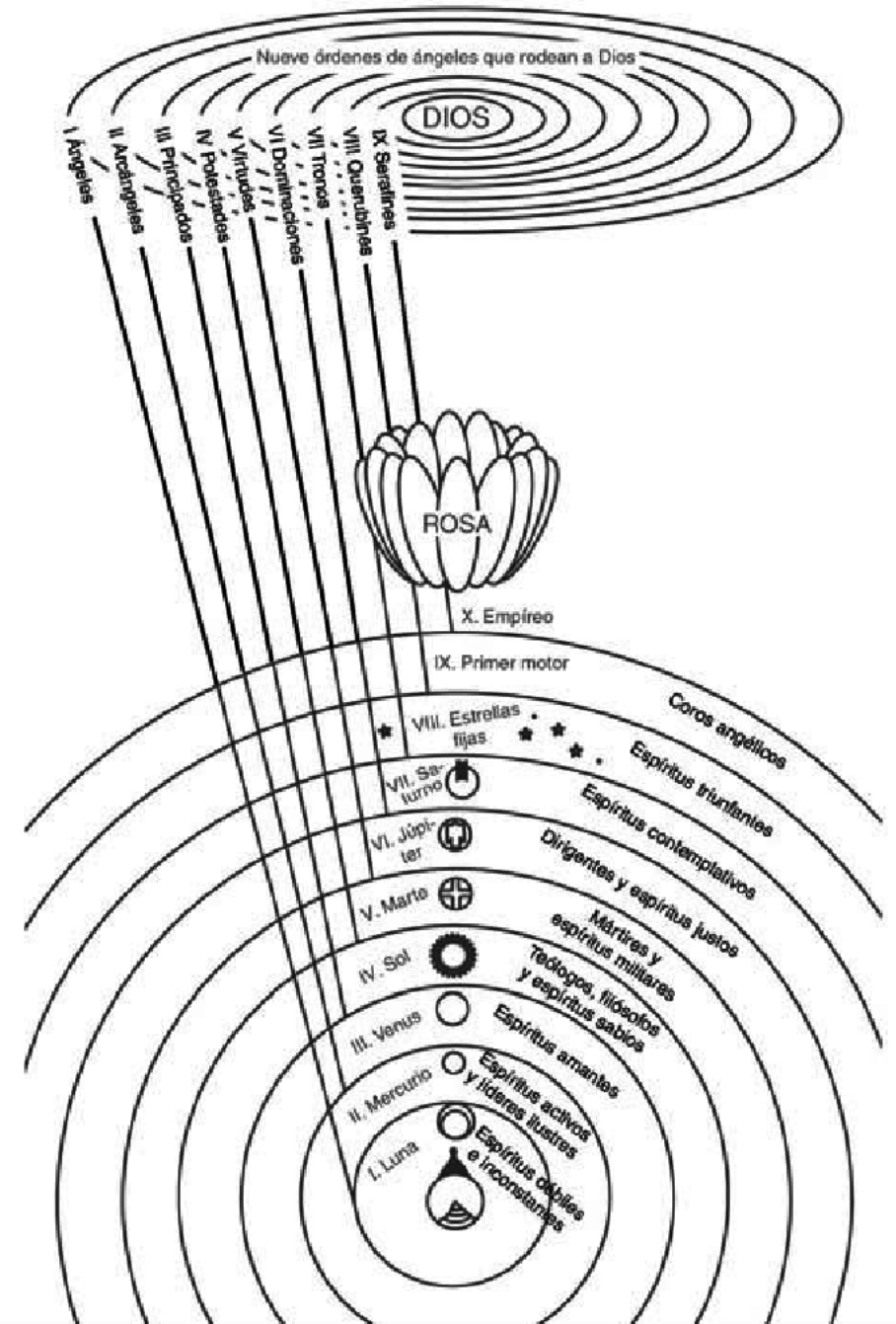
- Borges is preoccupied with metaphor as well
- In part because metaphor signifies the limits of language
  - When we cannot say what something *is*, we say what something *is like*, an approximation
- In part, because metaphor signifies the power of language
  - Metaphor can become truer than description

# Secondary Reading - DISCUSSION

- Canto 29 is 'boldly rescripturing scripture' (226)
- Boitani calls it *philomythic* literature, in which 'difficult concepts are conveyed through metaphor in such a way that they capture the imagination even when they are imperfectly understood.' (231)
  - How might this relate to our discussion of metaphor?
- Boitani asks: Why do modern readers still like this? (232)
  - What is his answer?

# CANTO XXVIII

- What is the shape of the *Primum mobile*?
- How do we first see it?
- Why does Dante reference a chessboard?
- We get our first glimpse of the source of the universe, of God, as it were. What do we see?



# Wheat and chessboard problem

The simple, brute-force solution manually doubles and add each step of the series:

$$T_{64} = 1 + 2 + 4 + \dots + 9,223,372,036,854,775,808 = 18,446,744,073,709,551,615$$

Borges does the same sort of thing for metaphor in his 1967-8 Norton Lectures: As the subject of today's talk is the metaphor, I shall begin with a metaphor. This first of the many metaphors I shall try to recall comes [...] from China. If I am not mistaken, the Chinese call the world “the ten thousand things,” or — and this depends on the taste and fancy of the translator — “the ten thousand beings.” [...] If we accept the number ten thousand, and if we think that all metaphors are made by linking two different things together, then, had we time enough, we might work out an almost unbelievable sum of possible metaphors. I have forgotten my algebra, but I think that the sum should be 10,000 multiplied by 99,999, multiplied by 99,998, and so on. Of course the sum of possible combinations is not endless, but it staggers the imagination.

