

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-27390-9 - Dante Philomythes and Philosopher: Man in the Cosmos

Patrick Boyde

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Dante
Philomythes and Philosopher
MAN IN THE COSMOS

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-27390-9 - Dante Philomythes and Philosopher: Man in the Cosmos

Patrick Boyde

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Dante
Philomythes and Philosopher
MAN IN THE COSMOS

PATRICK BOYDE

*Professor elect of Italian in the University of Cambridge
and Fellow of St John's College*

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge

London New York New Rochelle

Melbourne Sydney

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-27390-9 - Dante Philomythes and Philosopher: Man in the Cosmos

Patrick Boyde

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521235983

© Cambridge University Press 1981

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,
no reproduction of any part may take place without the written
permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 1981
First paperback edition 1983
Re-issued in this digitally printed version 2007

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-0-521-23598-3 hardback
ISBN 978-0-521-27390-9 paperback

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-27390-9 - Dante Philomythes and Philosopher: Man in the Cosmos

Patrick Boyde

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Contents

Preface	<i>page</i> vi
Introduction: Dante and Lucretius	i

Part 1: The cosmos

1	Wonder and knowledge	43
2	The elements	57
3	Meteorology	74
4	Land and sea	96
5	The natural world and the Scale of Being	112
6	Concerning the heavens	132
7	The angels	172

Part 2: Coming into being

8	Images of God as maker	205
9	Creation (<i>Paradiso</i> XXIX, 1–57)	235
10	Generation and universal nature	248
11	The makings of a man	270

Part 3: Texts, references and notes

Introductory notes to Part 3	299
Abbreviations	301
Notes	302
Suggestions for further reading	381
Index of longer quotations	382
Index	385

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-27390-9 - Dante Philomythes and Philosopher: Man in the Cosmos

Patrick Boyde

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Preface

I HAVE COME TO THINK OF THIS BOOK SIMPLY AS *Dante Philomythes* (which I pronounce so that it scans like *Samson Agonistes* and rhymes with *Shanty Bill o' High Seas*). Some of my friends found the projected title 'intriguing'; others thought it might be 'daunting'; and all of them were a little perplexed. So I decided to begin this preface with a brief explanation of my choice.

'Philomythes' has yet to appear in any dictionary of the English language. It is in fact the medieval Latin transliteration of a late Greek form that had grown up alongside the classical *philomythos*; and I prefer its full and virile sound to that of any of its potential rivals such as 'philomyth', 'philomyther' or 'mythophile'.

The meaning of the word will be readily divined from its roots. Just as the *philo-soph-os* was a lover of true knowledge, so the humbler *philo-myth-os* was a lover of myth, or a lover of the old stories and legends, or, as we might say today, a lover of fiction. It is not difficult, either, to see how these two terms might have been paired and contrasted in earlier debates about the Two Cultures. But my title is to be understood as a specific allusion to the opening chapters of the *Metaphysics* where Aristotle attempted some kind of reconciliation between them. 'The lover of myth', he wrote, 'is in some sense a lover of true knowledge, because a myth is composed of wonders.'

As it happens, I first came across this sentence in the Latin paraphrase and commentary by St Thomas Aquinas in which the subject and predicate are reversed, thus: 'the lover of true knowledge is in some sense a lover of myth' – *philosophus aequaliter est philomythes*. This is certainly not a correct translation of Aristotle. But my argument will be that, in the case of Dante at least, the proposition is valid in both forms. And the book has been written to throw some light on that *aequaliter*, and to indicate in *what* sense Dante was inseparably philosopher and philomythes, or philomythes and philosopher.

We shall return to the sentence and its context in due course, and we shall discover exactly what Aristotle meant by wonder and knowledge, how they relate to sensation, memory, experience and art, and what

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-27390-9 - Dante Philomythes and Philosopher: Man in the Cosmos

Patrick Boyde

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

PREFACE

influence these concepts may have exercised on Dante before and during the composition of his *Comedy*. For the moment, however, it is enough to establish the point that Dante's poetry and his thought will be treated throughout as equal partners demanding an equally thorough analysis.

The book has grown out of lectures given to undergraduates in the Department of Italian at Cambridge and to the wider audiences who have come so faithfully to hear our public *Lecturae Dantis* over the past fifteen years. It is a longer and heavier work than the one I set out to write, but it is still intended to meet the needs of a similar cross-section of readers elsewhere in the English-speaking world. Those who are already familiar with the *Comedy* in whole or in part will have some initial advantage, as will those who have made some study of Italian or of medieval philosophy – virtue must have its reward. But I have done all I can to emulate my author and to write for anyone with an 'innate desire to find things out', whatever the present state of his or her knowledge may be; and I have tried to take nothing for granted apart from a serious interest in Dante and a certain relish for detail.

My thanks are due to the friends who read some or all of the chapters in draft and helped me to make many improvements: Stephen Bemrose, Piero Boitani, Peter Brand, Judith Davies, Roger Griffin, Joan Hall, Jon Hunt, Robin Kirkpatrick, Guy Lee, Malcolm Schofield, David Sedley. And I owe a special debt of gratitude to Kenelm Foster and Uberto Limentani, who not only made constructive criticisms of the whole draft, but have given me their friendship, advice and encouragement throughout the years in which the book has been evolving into its present form.

P.B.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-27390-9 - Dante Philomythes and Philosopher: Man in the Cosmos

Patrick Boyde

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

. . . it's as well at times
To be reminded that nothing is lovely,
Not even in poetry, which is not the case.
(W. H. Auden)