



# Sense Perception in Dante's *Commedia* (Studies in Mediaeval Literature)

*Edward G. Miller*

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## **Sense Perception in Dante's Commedia (Studies in Mediaeval Literature)** Edward G. Miller

This work traces the literary tradition of metaphysical 'light' from archaic times, and discusses the medieval ideas on sense perceptions and contrasts the differences between Aristotelian and Platonist ideas about perception. There is a cautionary exposition of the 'Three Dantes' found in the poem: the historical Dante Alighieri, the Dante-poeta, and Dante-personaggio. Identification is made of the binary rather than the usually accepted triadic structure of Dante's poem: the dichotomies such as ignorance/knowledge, unity/variety, contrapasso, frequency of turning, and the assistance which the binary structure gives to the subject of freewill. Christian applications of freewill and divine will in the poem are reflected against the thought of Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Boethius, and Aquinas. After recognizing the dark tone of the "Inferno" and the increased illumination of the "Purgatorio", the Divine Light of the "Paradiso" is related to Patristic thought, particularly from the Cappadocian Fathers. Medieval beliefs on illumination and imagination are examined, particularly from the thought of Robert Grosseteste and on to Ficino. Conclusions are drawn range from ancient through to Dante's medieval masterpiece and look ahead to later literary uses of metaphysical light linked with insight, such as Ariosto's "Orlando Furioso", Tasso's "Gerusalemme Liberata", and Milton's "Paradise Lost". 1996

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