



Dante & the Unorthodox: The Aesthetics of Transgression

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During his lifetime, Dante was condemned as corrupt and banned from Florence on pain of death. But in 1329, eight years after his death, he was again viciously condemned?this time as a heretic and false prophet?by Friar Guido Vernani. From Vernani's inquisitorial viewpoint, the author of the *Commedia* "seduced" his readers by offering them "a vessel of demonic poison" mixed with poetic fantasies designed to destroy the "healthful truth" of Catholicism. Thanks to such pious vituperations, a sulphurous fume of unorthodoxy has persistently clung to the mantle of Dante's poetic fame.

The primary critical purpose of *Dante & the Unorthodox* is to examine the aesthetic impulses behind the theological and political reasons for Dante's allegory of mid-life divergence from the papally prescribed "way of salvation." Marking the septicentennial of his exile, the book's eighteen critical essays, three excerpts from an allegorical drama, and a portfolio of fourteen contemporary artworks address the issue of the poet's conflicted relation to orthodoxy.

By bringing the unorthodox out of the realm of "secret things," by uncensoring them at every turn, Dante dared to oppose the censorious regime of Latin Christianity with a transgressive zeal more threatening to papal authority than the demonic hostility feared by Friar Vernani.

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