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Salem Press Announces a New Addition to the *Critical Insights* Series ***Critical Insights: Dante Alighieri***

Dante Alighieri (1265–1321) is one of the most important poets in the history of Western literature. His famous epic poem, *The Divine Comedy*, has been translated again and again over the centuries and was recognized almost immediately as a major work of literary art.

The epic poem has also been regarded as one of the most significant literary contributions to the realms of philosophy, theology, history, and even politics. *The Divine Comedy*, however, was only one of several major works composed by Dante. Others include *Convivio* (*The Banquet*, consisting of both poems and prose), *La vita nuova* (*The New Life*, another collection of poems and prose), *De monarchia* (*Concerning Monarchy*), and *De vulgaria eloquentia* (*Concerning Vernacular Eloquence*). Inspired by classical thought and classical writers, crucial in the history of the use of vernacular Italian, central to the tradition of Christian philosophy and theology, and undeniable in his impact on many later writers, Dante carved out a special place for himself during a life full of turbulence and serious dangers. The present volume will explore not just *The Divine Comedy* but many of his other works as well, taking into account deliberately diverse perspectives, including the biographical, historical, sociological, historical, and aesthetic.

A collection of four critical contexts essays are intended to view the author

- 1) From a historical vantage point
- 2) In terms of its critical reception
- 3) Using a specific critical lens
- 4) And by comparing and contrasting it with another important work.

An introductory essay by Edwin Wong highlights Dante's complex attitudes toward some of the great writers, from the classical period, who preceded him. Edwin Wong's opening essay, titled "Amplifications of Antiquity in Dante's *Divine Comedy*," provides a lively overview of Dante's reasons for writing as well as of his relations with his classical predecessors. Dante admired the great classical poets who preceded him (especially Virgil), but Wong argues that he also saw himself in competition *with* them. He felt strongly confident, both about his own talents as a poet and about the worthiness of the poetic project he was undertaking in writing the *Divine Comedy*. In fact, he even made himself that poem's chief character and narrator. According to

Wong, Dante understood, however, that the disadvantage of “writing his own personal odyssey [was] that praising himself was in poor taste.” Therefore, instead of offering “self-praise, he adopts the narrative strategy of amplifying and overcoming antiquity: if others invoke the Muses so many times, he will invoke more Muses more often. If others sight landfall, he *makes* landfall.” Wong thinks that even as Dante “blows the stars out of the sky, he says the right things, humbling himself, paying his debts to his predecessors, addressing them with reverence: in a world where the last will be first, and the first will be last, to be last is the best strategy. To this day,” Wong asserts, Dante “is remembered as the humble hero, who, despite being past his prime, pushed back the everlasting night by everywhere going further than everyone else.”

Following these four Critical Context essays is the **Critical Readings** section of this book, which contains the following essays:

- Dante’s Vita Nuova: A Survey of Recent Introductions and Afterwords
- “By the testimony of reason and authority”: Reason, Rhetoric, and Literature in Dante’s Monarchia
- Which Translation of Dante’s Divine Comedy Is the “Best”?
- Dante’s Art and Ideas: Opinions of Important Translators and Editors
- Rare Illustrated Editions of Dante’s Divine Comedy (With Some Thoughts on Using Illustrations to Read and Teach Dante)
- The Dante Paintings of Joseph Anton Koch
- Unfamiliar Illustrations of the First Canto of Dante’s Divine Comedy
- Depictions of Cerberus, the Three-Headed Dog, by Various Illustrators of Dante’s Divine Comedy
- “It was enough to make you dream for nights”: Dante’s Inferno on the Screen: Milano Films’ L’Inferno
- Norman Bel Geddes’s Stage Designs for Dante’s Divine Comedy

Each essay in *Critical Insights: Dante Alighieri* includes a list of **Works Cited** and detailed endnotes. In the final section, **Resources**, easy-to-follow lists are provided to help guide the reader through important dates and moments in the author’s life, beginning with a **Chronology of Dante Alighieri Life**. This is followed by a list of **Works by Dante** and a **Bibliography**. Finally, this section closes with an **About the Editor** section, **Contributors**, and a detailed **Index**.

The *Critical Insights* Series distills the best of both classic and current literary criticism of the world’s most studied literature. Edited and written by some of academia’s most distinguished literary scholars, *Critical Insights: Dante Alighieri* provides authoritative, in-depth scholarship that students and researchers will rely on for years. This volume is destined to become a valuable purchase for all.

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