

The Mysteries of Paradise Revealed & Concealed

“On this account the Scripture condescends unto your faculties, and feet and hands to God attributes, and means something else...” (Paradiso IV:43-45)

Dante undertakes a complex endeavor when he pens *The Divine Comedy*, attempting to both retain the mystery of a realm outside humankind’s full comprehension and also open the door to a more complete picture of this realm. Particularly in his third canticle, *Paradiso*, Dante strikes a delicate balance between creating a rich depiction of Heaven and shrouding the domain in a mystery that transcends full understanding.

To the best of his ability, Dante avoided presenting an incomplete view of Paradise, relying on the motifs of circles, light, and a careful depiction of vision to retain the mystery of the domain. This paper will examine these motifs in detail and seek to explain how each contributes to Dante’s illustration of Paradise to provide a more complete view of Heaven. We will compare the immutable and immaterial nature of a Biblical Heaven to the material illustrations that Dante provides in *Paradiso*. First, we will analyze how the nine spheres of Heaven, descriptions of the Holy Trinity, and the parallelism between certain cantos in the *Inferno* and in *Paradiso* all contribute to this overall theme within the motif of circularity. For the symbol of light, contrast between the *Inferno* and *Paradiso* is particularly crucial, as is the connection between light and theological revelation. We will also discuss how Dante uses Beatrice’s eyes to communicate the motif of vision. Finally, the significance behind the structure of *Paradiso* will be shown to provide a more complete view of Dante’s intention in creating *The Divine Comedy*. Specifically, within the organization of the canticle, references to St. Thomas Aquinas’ angelic hierarchies contribute heavily to Dante’s description of Heaven.

Through the motifs of circles, light, and vision, readers of *The Divine Comedy* are able to more fully appreciate the infinite obscurity of God’s resting place. This appreciation is further developed through Dante’s deliberate arrangement of the organizational scheme of Paradise in layers that contribute to his portrayal of the complexity of Heaven.