



Dante: The Poetics of Conversion

John Freccero

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John Freccero enables us to see the *Divine Comedy* for the bold, poetic experiment that it is. Too many critics have domesticated Dante by separating his theology from his poetics. Freccero argues that to fail to see the convergence of the letter and the spirit, the pilgrim and the poet, is to fail to understand Dante's poetics of conversion. For Dante, body and soul go together and there is no salvation that's purely intellectual, no poetry that is simply literary.

The essays that form this book were originally published between 1959 and 1984. They are arranged to follow the order of the *Comedy*, and they form the perfect companion for a reader of the poem. With these essays assembled for the first time, we can now see Freccero's stature: he is the best contemporary critic of Dante. Freccero is that rare article, a critic of eclectic and not dogmatic persuasion. Throughout Freccero operates on the fundamental premise that there is always an intricate and crucial dialectic at work between Dante the poet and Dante the pilgrim, and that it is this dialectic that makes the work so profoundly dramatic, one of the great novels of the self.

Thanks to Freccero we readers have the *Comedy* whole again. Freccero calls upon medieval philosophy, cosmology, science, theology, and poetics to enable us to traverse Dante's moral landscape without losing our way in the confusions of minute exegeses. In a secular age Freccero enables us to see this poem as what it is, something wholly other than what we might believe or write. In doing so he shows us the most that language can achieve in any age, secular or not.

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