

Purgatory: Canto 32

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Summary of Canto 32

In Canto 32 we transition our focus from Dante to the corruption of the church. Dante continues to absorb Beatrice's presence to fulfill "the thirsting of ten years" (32.2) recompensing for the time he has not been able to see her. The procession which started back in Canto 29 has now resumed "heavenly realm passed in procession all in front of us" (32.22-23). Dante arrives and dozes off under the tree of knowledge and awakens to see Beatrice guarding the Chariot with the help of company (seven nymphs). Then an overflowing of events unfolds in front of Dante's eyes showing the corruption of the church. Among other events these occur: An eagle comes and tears the bark off the tree symbolizing the persecution of the church, leaving it shaken up "striking the chariot with all its force" (32.115). Then a fox comes leaping into the chariot symbolizing the heresies the church had to face. Following that a dragon fixed his tail into the cart symbolizing the great schism the church had to overcome. All these images finally end with a "loose-dressed whore" (32.149) who appears riding on a monstrous creature hinting at the disastrous events of the church which include the lack of morals and virtues in the church. The monster finally is lost "far into the woods" (32.158-159). As we can see this is a symbolically rich canto.

Main Characters and Themes

Main characters

Dante- The central and main character of Purgatory. He is taking in Beatrice's presence /looking at the church's corruption at his time.

Beatrice- Dante's love and guide through Heaven. Her character in this canto is important because she is taking care of the church through everything it is facing.

The whore and the Giant- These are two new characters who represent the Avignon papacy which is an aspect of the church's corruption.

Themes

Corruption of the church - we see this theme through all the images that unfold in this canto.

Corruption of humanity- Humanity's corruption (loss of morals, virtues.) leads to the corruption of the church. The sin of gluttony in this canto shines this through.

Beauty - Beatrice's presence and continuation of The procession

Stylistic Features

Similes

Dante compares the long-time desire he has had for Beatrice's presence to "thirsting of ten years" (32.2).

Dante compares the protection of the church "as soldiers holding shields high for protection" (32.19).

Dante compares the wrecking of the church to "shaking it like a tempest-battered ship" (32.116).

The comparison of change in color to power and renewal "opening to a more than violet hue and less than rose" (32.59-60).

Biblical References

The procession "passed in the procession" (32.23).

The apostles "Peter, James, John" (32.76).

Noah's ark "O my little boat" (32.129).

Images

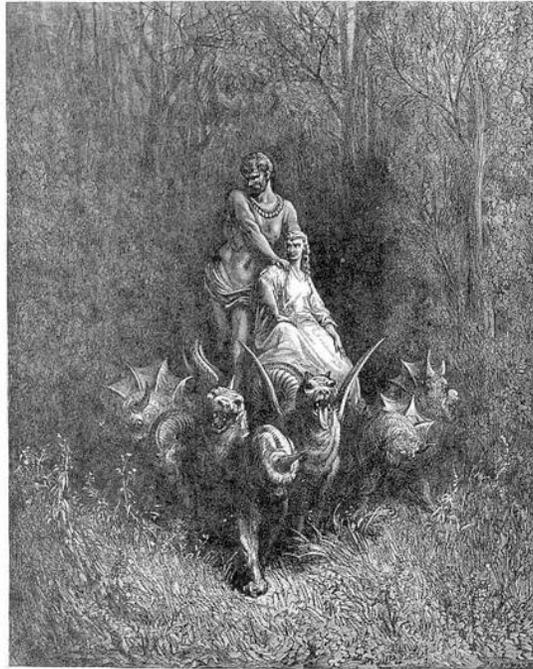
"Sweet fruit of this tree" (32.44).

"From a shattered cloud falls the bright bold of lighting when it storms" (32.109-110).

"The weeds will grow over a fertile fiend, so what remained of all those feathers" (32.136-138).

Artwork from canto 32

The whore and the Giant



THE WHORE AND THE GIANT
Upright beside her I beheld a giant; / And even and even they kissed each other (Purg.
XXXII, 132-133)

Study Questions

1. The "chariot" symbolizes the church. Write about the destruction of the chariot that occurs in this canto.

2. How do we see the corruption of the church at Dante's time through the images in this canto?

3. We meet two new characters in this canto, The whore and the Giant/beast. What do they add to the text?

Works Cited

Alighieri, Dante. *Purgatory*. Translated and edited by Anthony Esolen. New York, Modern Library, 2004.

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