



The Cross That Dante Bears: Pilgrimage, Crusade, and the Cruciform Church in the Divine Comedy

Mary Alexandra Watt

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Mary Watt proposes that the *Divine Comedy* employs a series of strategically placed textual cues to create a meta-textual structure beyond Dante's literal narrative. Dimly perceptible at first, the structure becomes ever more knowable as the protagonist reaches his ultimate goal. As the pilgrim wends his way through the three realms of the afterlife, references to medieval maps and to medieval cruciform churches, together with images of crusading and pilgrimage, ultimately reveal the shape of this structure as the reader becomes aware that Dante's journey traces the figure of a cross.

Watt explores the textual cues, codes, and other strategies that Dante employs to discover how and why he conjures up the shape of a cross. She considers the visual arts and medieval cartographic and architectural conventions in addition to traditional texts as potential sources for the literal narrative of the *Comedy*. While the image of the cross within the *Comedy* has been frequently noted, Watt approaches the observation and the poem in holistic fashion, arguing that this image is a clue to the greater underlying structure that gives form and therefore meaning to the entire work.

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