

## **The Grace-Filled Form: The Repentant Transformation of Character, Reader, and Text in Dante's *Inferno***

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Dante scholarship has provided many different glimpses into the relationship of form and content in the *Inferno*. However, few have addressed the theological, and in fact sacramental, understanding of this relationship in any great detail. Like many previous treatments, my analysis depends on Thomistic understandings of grace and nature, but unlike those prior studies it uses Thomistic theology to discuss the process of writing and reading poetry in the *Commedia*. Dante presents the reality of grace throughout his narrative; he documents its effects on himself as the protagonist and narrator of his own poem. However, Dante does something more when he makes the text an allegory for the reader's experience of grace in the world. By doing this, Dante puts his reader and the text into a dialogical relationship, exposing the grace which inculcates his text with meaning. In exploring Dante's conception of authorship and devotional reading, this paper draws on scholarship on medieval writing practices, as well as examinations of classical poetry and Thomistic theology to demonstrate Dante's theo-poetic innovation. Ultimately, I show that the character, reader, and text of Dante's *Inferno* come together in a community of grace-filled texts and readers moving together toward a moment of repentance before the upbuilding of love which is *Purgatorio*.

### *Information about the Author:*

Jeremy Reed is a senior English, Spanish, and humanities major in Christ College. This presentation is a shortened version of his longer Christ College honors thesis that allowed him to discuss the relationship between religion and literature, specifically in terms of the relationship between grace and nature in the form of language, which he has been interested in throughout his time at Valpo. He will be pursuing a Master's degree in English literature this fall.

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