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0521021723 - Dante and the Mystical Tradition Bernard of Clairvaux in the *Commedia*

Steven Botterill

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In this study, Steven Botterill explores the intellectual relationship between the greatest poet of the fourteenth century, Dante, and the greatest spiritual writer of the twelfth century, Bernard of Clairvaux. Botterill analyses the narrative episode involving Bernard as a character in the closing cantos of the *Paradiso*, against the background of his medieval reputation as a contemplative mystic, devotee of Mary, and, above all, a preacher of outstanding eloquence. Botterill draws on a wide range of materials to establish and illustrate the connections between Bernard's reputation and his portrayal in Dante's poem. He examines in detail two areas in which a direct intellectual influence of Bernard on Dante has recently been posited: the portrayal of Mary in the *Commedia*, and the concept of 'trasumanar' (*Paradiso*, I. 70). Botterill proposes a fresh approach to the analysis of the whole episode, re-evaluating its significance and its implications.

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IN THE *COMMEDIA*

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*For my parents, Jeanne and Peter Botterill
and my grandmother, Alice Stone
con amore*

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If we could get the hang of it entirely
It would take too long;
All we know is the splash of words in passing
And falling twigs of song,
And when we try to eavesdrop on the great
Presences it is rarely
That by a stroke of luck we can appropriate
Even a phrase entirely.

Louis MacNeice

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By pure coincidence, if there is such a thing, I am writing these words on my thirty-fifth birthday, truly 'nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita'. It is thus not only pleasant, but peculiarly appropriate, to recall how much I owe to the three people who were with me at my journey's beginning, and who have sustained me with their love, unstinting and unquestioning, ever since. Because it is mine, this book is also theirs; and to them it is dedicated.