

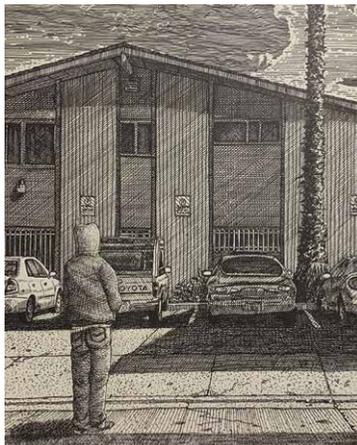


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Series editor: Matthew Collins

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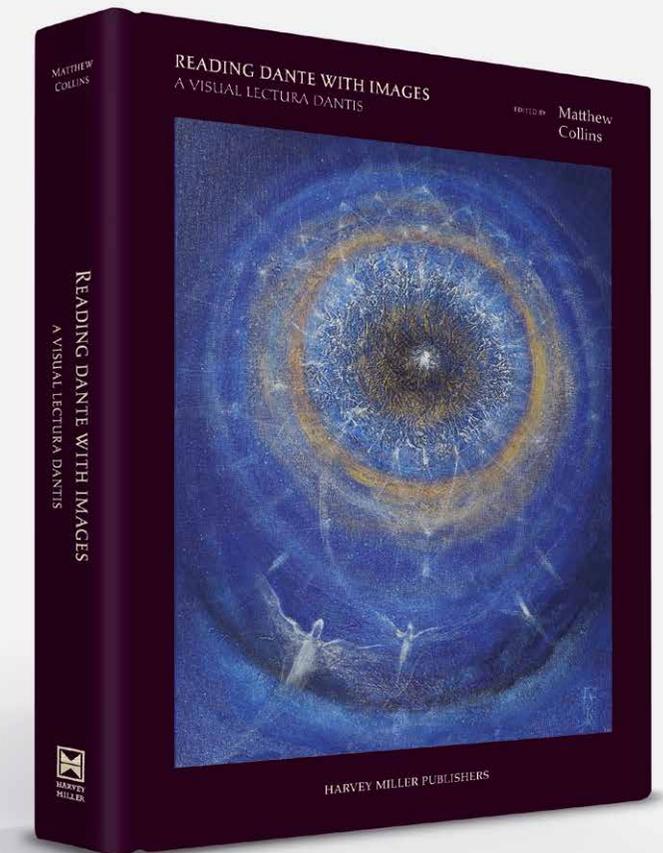


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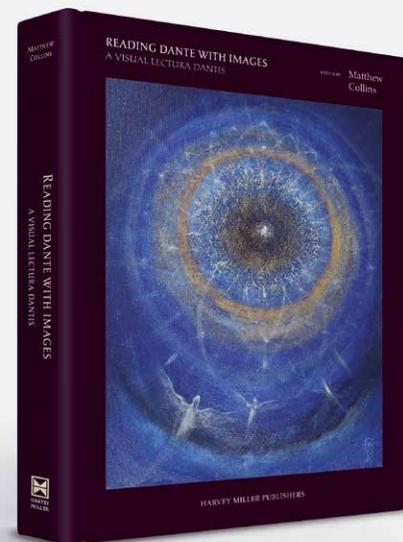


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# READING DANTE WITH IMAGES

## A VISUAL LECTURA DANTIS

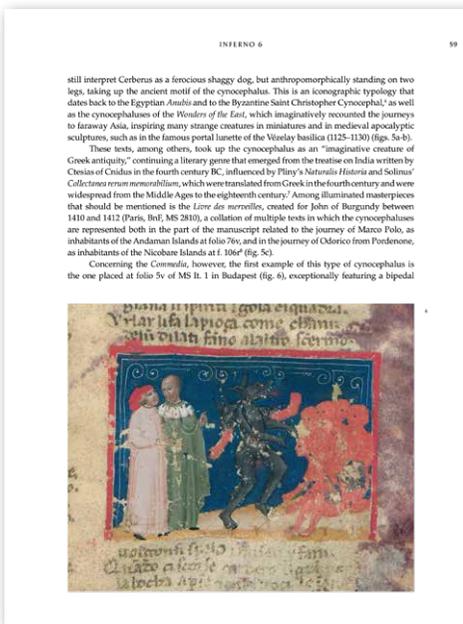
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Matthew Collins holds a PhD from Harvard University's Department of Romance Languages and Literatures. He has published, among other things, on the reception history of Dante's *Commedia* in illuminated manuscripts, drawings, and early printed illustrations, as well as later literary receptions of the work, including the influence of Dante on Giacomo Leopardi and Bob Dylan.



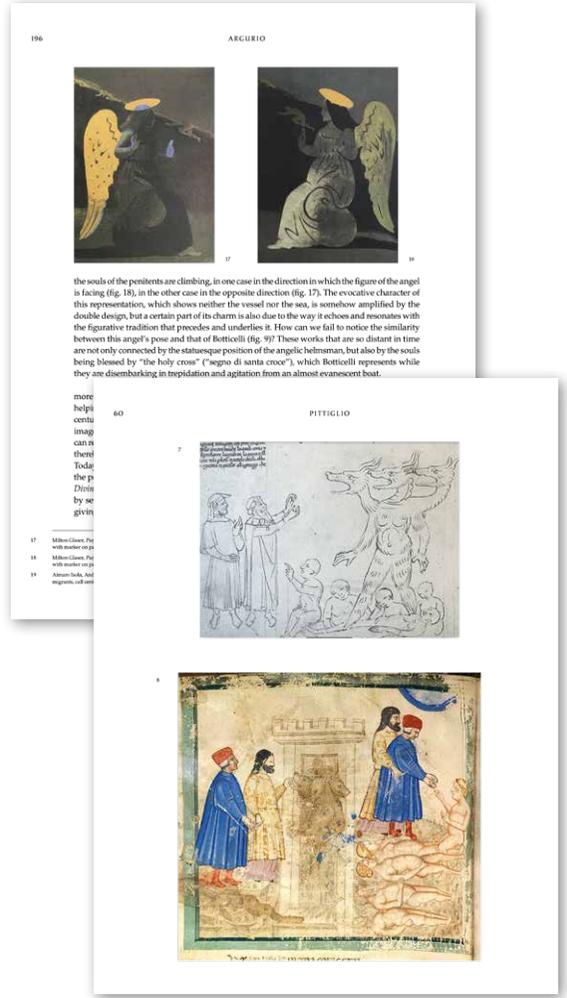
still interpret Cerberus as a ferocious shaggy dog, but anthropomorphically standing on two legs, taking up the ancient motif of the cynocephalus. This is an iconographic typology that dates back to the Egyptian *Anubis* and to the Byzantine Saint Christopher Cynocephal<sup>1</sup>, as well as the cynocephalus of the *Wonders of the East*, which imaginatively recounted the journeys to faraway Asia, inspiring many strange creatures in miniatures and in medieval apocalyptic sculptures, such as in the famous portal lunette of the Vézelay basilica (1125–1130) (figs. 5a–b). These texts, among others, took up the cynocephalus as an “imaginative creature of Greek antiquity,” continuing a literary genre that emerged from the treatise on India written by Ctesias of Cnidus in the fourth century BC, influenced by Ptolemy's *Naturalis Historia* and Solinus' *Collectanea rerum memorabilium*, which were translated from Greek in the fourth century and were widespread from the Middle Ages to the eighteenth century.<sup>2</sup> Among illuminated masterpieces that should be mentioned is the *Enfer des merveilles*, created for John of Burgundy between 1410 and 1412 (Paris, BnF, MS 2810), a collation of multiple texts in which the cynocephalus are represented both in the part of the manuscript related to the journey of Marco Polo, as inhabitants of the Andaman Islands at folio 76r, and in the journey of Odorico from Pordenone, as inhabitants of the Nicobar Islands at f. 106r (fig. 5c). Concerning the *Commedia*, however, the first example of this type of cynocephalus is the one placed at folio 5v of MS It. 1 in Budapest (fig. 6), exceptionally featuring a bipedal

“The Lectura Dantis is an interpretive tradition initiated by Giovanni Boccaccio in the late fourteenth century in which one reads and comments on Dante's *Comedy* on a canto-by-canto basis. This volume, the first of a series, unprecedentedly merges the Lectura with another longstanding interpretive tradition: the illustration of Dante's work, beginning with manuscript illuminations created in the near immediate wake of the poem's completion in 1320 or 1321. In this *Visual Lectura Dantis*, scholars select a canto and engage in some intrinsic fashion with images that intertwine with it. In addition, three artists in this volume provide their creative perspectives on the process of developing visual representations of the poem. In *Reading Dante with Images*, authors thus develop and apply methods for inquiring into the multimedial quality of literary illustration—or, more broadly stated, they confront and/or develop paradigms of visual and verbal relations.”

Matthew Collins

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A new approach to the traditional *Lectura Dantis*: Dante scholars study selected cantos while also taking into consideration the illustrations of those cantos, thus engaging with illustrations as interpretation, and further considering the *Commedia* from the perspective of its ekphrastic nature.

This volume contains an unprecedented meeting of two major traditions, each of which are forms of careful engagement with Dante's *Commedia*: the *Lectura Dantis*, and the illustrations of this work. The *Lectura Dantis*, initiated by Giovanni Boccaccio in the fourteenth century, consists of a canto by canto study of Dante's poem. The history of *Commedia* illustration has equally deep roots, as illuminated manuscripts of the text were

being produced within decades of the work's completion in 1321. While both of these traditions have continued, mostly uninterrupted, for more than six hundred years, they have never been directly brought together. In this volume, Dante scholars take on a single canto of the *Commedia* of their choosing, reading not just the text, but also exploring the illustrations of their selected text to form multifaceted and multi-layered visual-textual readings. In addition to enlivening the *Lectura Dantis*, and confronting the illustrated tradition of the poem in a new fashion, these studies present a variety of approaches to studying not just the *Commedia* but any illustrated literary work through a serious inquiry into the words themselves as well as the images that these words have inspired.