

Canto XX:

Questions:

- Who are the two unexpectedly saved souls in the eyebrow of the eagle? Based on the logic of Dante's poem so far, where in his afterlife would we expect these characters to be? How does Dante register his surprise at their presence?

- Regarding Trajan (20.106-117), Dante draws on a popular folktale in which St. Gregory the Great prays for the soul of the deceased pagan emperor Trajan. God raises Trajan from Limbo in hell so that Trajan can be baptized. Once baptized, Trajan dies again and ascends to heaven. How does Dante depict Trajan's love and hope for Trajan playing a role in Trajan's salvation? Did Gregory's will *change* God's will for Trajan? How might we see Gregory and Trajan as ciphers for Dante and Virgil?

- Dante likens the magnificent eagle to a humble songbird—the lark (LINES). What does this imagery help us to understand about the relationship between contemplative vision, humility, and praise?

- Who is Ripheus and how is he saved (20.67-78; 118-129)? What is Ripheus' relationship to Virgil? How did Ripheus come to be saved? Does Ripheus' presence in heaven offer any hope for Virgil's salvation?

- Why should mortals restrain themselves from exercising judgment on the eternal state of individuals (20.133-135)?

Canto XXI:

Questions:

- Why does Beatrice without her smile from Dante upon entering the heaven of Saturn? How is it related to the silence of this heaven? Why might Dante choose to depict the heaven of the contemplatives this way?

- Why do the contemplative souls manifest themselves on a ladder? Why do you think Dante describes the movement of the souls up the ladder as a “natural” instinct, like birds (rooks) rising in the morning? How is contemplation part of the natural purpose of the human creature?

- Who is Peter Damian and why is he the one who comes to speak to Dante? How does Dante’s first discussion with Peter indicate an unholy curiosity? And how does curiosity contrast with true contemplative knowledge?

