

# literature and theology

*Dante and the Medieval Other World*

By Alison Morgan.

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, 256 pp, £30.00.

Alison Morgan's book is a historical and contextual investigation which owes something to some modern schools of historiography which try to throw light on the past by close examination of the lives of ordinary people and the motifs of popular culture. It is a study of Dante's representations of the after-life, both concrete and abstract, against the background of similar representations as they appear in the 'popular' literature and art of the late medieval world. She examines, for example, images of the after-life in some of the texts of the 'vision literature' of the period and notes their appearance in the *Comedy*. Particularly valuable and interesting is the work the author has done on medieval penitentials: the classification of sins in the *Comedy* can be seen to bear a close resemblance to the arrangements of sins in these manuals. We need to be reminded of the probability of Dante's mind and emotions being shaped as much by popular devotion as by the teachings of the great scholars and mystics; this book corrects our tendency always to locate Dante in the learned tradition of the Middle Ages and to trace all the influences in his work from the great names of the period.

Brian Horne, King's College London

<https://academic.oup.com/litthe/article-abstract/6/1/93/942967>