

March English Language Meeting and Pasta Dinner

“An Overview of Dante’s *Divine Comedy*: The Aging Poet’s Struggle to the End”

Presented By Lloyd Howard, Asst. Prof. of Italian (Retired), University of Victoria

Wednesday, March 14, 2018, 6:30 pm, Garden House, 2336 15th Avenue South

After a brief over-view of Dante’s world, Prof. Howard will turn to the first line of the *Divine Comedy*, where the reader determines Dante’s age of 35 when he appears in the guise of the poem’s main character. As a literary figure, this protagonist, “Dante the pilgrim,” will be forever 35. But as the writer of this poem, Dante, referenced as “Dante the poet,” will not be frozen in time. Cast out of Florence at age 37, he will grow old in exile, where he writes along-side his otherworldly, traveling pilgrim from the depths of *Inferno*, out and up, through *Purgatorio* to *Paradiso*. The aging poet’s implicit problems with failing eyesight and memory are filtered through the struggles of Dante the pilgrim, whose eyes as a mere mortal are constantly challenged to see their way to the heights of Paradise, and whose compromised memory as a mere mortal in this heavenly realm is a constant source of frustration, knowing that he has been sent on this journey precisely so that his recall can serve as the text of the poem yet to be written.

Lloyd Howard received his PhD from the Johns Hopkins University in 1976. A year later he was appointed Assistant Professor of Italian at the University of Victoria where he taught until his retirement as Professor in 2016. Along with teaching, he served as Chair of the Department of Hispanic and Italian Studies for a total of 15 years, Acting Dean of the Faculty of Humanities on two separate occasions, and Director of the Medieval Studies Program for 3 years. His research focussed initially on the extant poetry of Guido Cavalcanti, before turning to Dante’s *Commedia*. Lloyd’s approach to interpreting this work follows an alternate, non-linear journey through Dante’s three realms of the afterlife. The signposts that mark the way consist of recurrent linguistic patterns, or formulas, by which the reader is guided through the space that comprises the poem’s 100 cantos. Along with a number of articles, he has written two books adopting this method: *Formulas of Repetition in Dante’s Commedia: Signposted Journeys across Textual Space* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001); *Virgil the Blind Guide: Marking the Way through the Divine Comedy* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010). Scholarly recognition of his methodology includes the former book being chosen as an “Outstanding Title” for 2002 by the American Library Association, and one of its chapters being selected by Harold Bloom to form part of Bloom’s edition on the *Commedia: Dante Alighieri*, published in 2011. Lloyd’s articles in more recent years have been published by *Letteratura Italiana Antica* in Rome.