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Premessa di Roberto Antonelli vii

Problematiche

Roberto Antonelli
Come (e perché) Dante ha scritto la Divina Commedia*?* 3

Andreas Kablitz
Die Ethik der Göttlichen Komödie 25

Zygmunt G. Baranski
Dante poeta *e* lector*: «poesia» e «riflessione tecnica» (con divagazioni sulla* Vita nova*)* 81

Roberto Mercuri
Il metodo intertestuale nella lettura della Commedia 111

Albert Russell Ascoli
Tradurre l'allegoria: Convivio *II, i* 153

Teodolinda Barolini
Dante's Sympathy for the Other, or the Non-Stereotyping Imagination: Sexual and Racialized Others in the Commedia 177

Le opere e la ricezione

Natascia Tonelli
Le rime 207

Roberto Rea
La Vita nova*: questioni di ecdotica* 233

Raffaella Zanni
Il De vulgari eloquentia *fra linguistica, filosofia e politica* 279

Giorgio Stabile
Dante oggi: il Convivio *tra poesia e ragione* 345

Antonio Montefusco
Le Epistole *di Dante: un approccio al* corpus 401

Riccardo Viel
Sulla tradizione manoscritta della Commedia*: metodo e prassi in centocinquant'anni di ricerca* 459

Paolo Canettieri
Il Fiore *e il* Detto d'Amore 519

Saverio Bellomo
«La natura delle cose aromatiche» e il sapore della Commedia*: quel che ci dicono gli antichi commenti a Dante* 531

Alessia Ronchetti
Da Beatrice a Fiammetta. Prime risposte boccacciane al modello autobiografico dantesco 555

Simon A. Gilson
«La divinità di Dante»: The Problematics of Dante's Critical Reception from the Fourteenth to the Sixteenth Centuries 581

Riassunti – Summaries 605

Biografie degli autori 617

Teodolinda Barolini

Dante's Sympathy for the Other, or the Non-Stereotyping Imagination: Sexual and Racialized Others in the *Commedia*

God is not otherness but sameness, never *aliud* but always *ipsum*: «qui non es alias aliud et alias aliter, sed idipsum et idipsum et idipsum» («who art not one thing in one place and another thing in another place but the Selfsame, and the Selfsame, and the Selfsame» [12.7])[1]. So writes Augustine in the *Confessions*, in a haunting phrase whose hammering repetition – «sed idipsum et idipsum et idipsum» – performs what it signifies: sameness. Against this backdrop of belief as a rejection of the other, as the ultimate identity, I want to consider Dante's sympathy for the other. In metaphysical terms, this sympathy correlates to the Christian doctrine of creation, and to the affirmation of difference that we hear in Aquinas's statement: «distinctio et multitudo rerum est a Deo» (*ST* 1a. 47. 1)[2]. I now propose a correlation between the embrace of difference in the metaphysical domain that I have documented in the *Paradiso* and Dante's many startlingly non-normative postures in the social and historical sphere[3].

The *Commedia* is a text of enormous cultural authority that at the same time has been very little imitated. Its non-imitability is connected to both what is old and what is new about it: both to the trope of the otherworld vision, already dated when Dante decided

1. The Latin text of the *Confessions* and the beautiful 1631 translation of William Watts are from the Loeb edition, 2 vols., Cambridge-London 1976, II, pp. 298-299. Citations from the *Commedia* are from Dante Alighieri, *La Commedia secondo l'antica vulgata*, Edizione Nazionale a c. di G. Petrocchi, Milano 1966-1967.

2. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 61 vols., New York-London 1964-1981, VIII, p. 91.

3. See the three chapters on the *Paradiso* in T. Barolini, *The Undivine Comedy: Detheologizing Dante* (1992), Italian trans. *La «Commedia» senza Dio: Dante e la creazione di una realtà virtuale*, Milano 2003.

to make use of it, and to a historicity that is so local and specific as to be unfungible. I suggest that Dante's radical historicity may function as a kind of prophylactic against stereotyping and that in any case – whatever the cause – he possesses a non-stereotyping imagination. As a corollary, let me add that the hugely imitated poet in the generation that followed his, Petrarch, was by contrast a brilliant stereotyper who created brilliantly fungible language.

Dantean non-normativity requires historical context to gauge, which is another reason for its having gone largely unnoticed: the *Commedia* has spent most of its textual afterlife isolated from history. Consider that the article *Inferno* in the *Enciclopedia Dantesca* jumps straight into the structure of Dante's hell without acknowledging that hell is an idea, and that as such it has a history[4]. Immersing the *Commedia* in historical context allows us, with surprising frequency, to see the absence of a normative response.

Let us begin with sexuality. The souls of the circle of lust are explicitly defined *peccator carnali*, and yet Dante's treatment of carnal sinners is incommensurate with what we find either in vision literature or in contemporary moral poetry. The visions tend to treat the sins of incontinence (excess desire) with particular asperity and cruelty; Dante treats these sins with comparative mildness. The visions display an «obsession with sexual sin, such as adultery, fornication, promiscuity and sodomy»[5]; there is no such obsession in the *Commedia*.

The visions demonstrate to what degree Dante, by contrast, could be said to desexualize lust. In the earliest Christian vision, *St. Peter's Apocalypse* (2nd c. CE), we find women hung by their hair, hair that they plaited «not for the sake of beauty but to turn men to fornication», and «men hung by their loins in that place of fire» (p.

4. On the benefits of immersing the *Commedia* in historical context, see T. Barolini, *«Only Historicize»: History, Material Culture (Food, Clothes, Books), and the Future of Dante Studies*, in «Dante Studies», 127 (2009), pp. 37-54. On the history of the idea of hell and Dante studies, see Ead., *Medieval Multiculturalism and Dante's Theology of Hell*, in «Italiana», 9 (2000), pp. 82-102, reprint in *Dante and the Origins of Italian Literary Culture*, New York 2006, pp. 102-121; Italian trans. forthcoming Bompiani 2011.

5. The quotation is from Eileen Gardiner's introduction to her collection, *Visions of Heaven and Hell before Dante*, New York 1989, p. xvii. Citations from the visions are from this volume.

6). The sexuality and shame-value of hair has a long history: there were specific laws in Europe on hair pulling, modulating in severity depending on whether the hair pulled was male or female, and whether the culprit was free or slave[6]. Women's hair was sexualized in Italian love poetry, and Dante himself in one of his most erotically aggressive lyrics imagines grabbing his resistant lover by her beautiful golden braids (*Così nel mio parlar vogli'esser aspro*, 63-67). But in the otherworld of the *Commedia*, Dante imagines no women hung or pulled by their hair. The aggressively sexualized hair-pulling of the canzone feeds not into the *Commedia*'s treatment of female sexual sin but into the shaming of a man in *Inferno* 32 (a canto whose opening request for «rime aspre e chiocce» echoes the incipit of *Così nel mio parlar*). Rather than an adulterous woman, the hair-pulling of *Inferno* 32 involves Bocca degli Abati, the Florentine arch-traitor of the battle of Montaperti: a man.

This transferral of a stereotype redolent of sexual degradation to an application that is no longer stereotypical but supremely local and historically specific is typical of Dante's imaginary processes. In other words, I am linking the saturation in historical specificity that is one of the *Commedia*'s textual hallmarks to a non-stereotyping *forma mentis*: as we know even from the modest use of fire and devils in his hell, Dante is rarely compelled by popular stereotypes.

6. The Burgundian Code treats «Of Women whose hair has been cut off in their own courtyard» (XCII), levying a fine on anyone so charged; see *The Burgundian Code*, trans. K. Fischer Drew, Philadelphia 1976, p. 82. Capitulary III of the Laws of the Salian Franks contains a section «Concerning the woman who has her hair cut or pulled» (CIV): «If anyone pulls a woman's hair so that her hood falls to the ground, he shall be liable to pay fifteen solidi; But if he undoes her headband so that her hair falls to her shoulders, he shall be liable to pay thirty solidi; If a slave strikes a free woman or pulls her hair, he shall lose his hand or pay five solidi»; see *The Laws of the Salian Franks*, trans. Katherine Fischer Drew, Philadelphia 1991, p. 147. An early Lombard law of the 7th century under Rothair (n. 383) states: «If anyone in a quarrel with a freeman drags him by the beard or hair, he shall pay six solidi as composition. If he drags an aldius or household slave or a field slave by the beard of hair, he shall pay the composition for one blow»; see *The Lombard Laws*, trans. K. Fischer Drew, Philadelphia 1973, p. 128. Roger II of Sicily's law involved unlawful pulling of the beard (Assize 32); see *Le assise di Ariano,* ed. and trans. O. Zecchino, Cava dei Tirreni 1984, pp. 94-95. My thanks to Carole Romeo for directing me to this material.

At the end of the vision tradition is *Thurkill's Vision* (dated 1206, of English provenance), whose adulterers must fornicate publicly in an infernal amphitheater, and then tear each other to pieces:

> An adulterer was now brought into the sight of the furious demons together with an adulteress, united together in foul contact. In the presence of all they repeated their disgraceful love-making and immodest gestures to their own confusion and amid the cursing of the demons. Then, as if smitten with frenzy, they began to tear one another, changing the outward love that they seemed to entertain toward one another before into cruelty and hatred (Gardiner ed., pp. 230-231).

It goes without saying that Dante's adulterers do not fornicate in public; or, rather, although it *has* always gone without saying, maybe we *should* say it as a thought experiment: to say it forces us to envision the *Commedia* as a text in which the adulterers Paolo and Francesca perform a degraded sexual act for the pilgrim and his guide. Dante's treatment of lust emphasizes instead the psychology of desire: his adulterers are tossed by a hellish wind as in life they were tossed about by their passions.

The distance between Dante and the various moralistic traditions – not only visions but also didactic poetry and sermons – is immense: he is interested not in what the moralists call fornication but in the self's negotiation of desire. The visionaries, following a tradition in which punishment is inflicted on the sinful body part, are quite insistent that the tortures inflicted on fornicators are genital tortures. Visual depictions of hell are similarly focused. The *Last Judgment* of Dante's contemporary Giotto (c. 1267-1337), in the Scrovegni Chapel in Padova, offers graphic images of what Anne Derbes and Mark Sandona call «torments directed at genitalia», further describing Giotto's figures thus (figs 1-2):

> For instance, just below Satan's left arm, on the bristly back of a serpentine monster, is a soul doomed to spend eternity with a reptilian green demon gnawing on his penis. Above and to the right of Satan, a black demon grips another man's penis in pincers. Hanging to the right are four more damned souls, two of whom – one male, one female – are suspended by their genitals, another by his tongue, and the fourth by her long hair, a common sign of *luxuria*. The fact that her hair is braided may also signify her concupiscence[7].

7. A. Derbes, M. Sandona, *The Usurer's Heart*: *Giotto, Enrico Scrovegni, and the Arena Chapel in Padua*, University Park, Pennsylvania, 2008, citations from p. 66.

From Taddeo di Bartolo's late 14th century (1396) *Hell* in San Gimignano comes this detail of a female sinner sexually punished for the sin of fornication by a bestial female demon (fig. 3).

Again, this is the sin for which Dante's punishment is an infernal windstorm that corresponds to the inner turmoil of uncontrolled passion, as depicted in this fifteenth-century illustration of *Inferno* 5 (fig. 4).

In his treatment of women as well, stereotypes of degraded sexuality had little purchase over Dante's imagination. If we consider an example of degraded female sexuality such as the «femmina balba» of *Pg* 19, 7, we note that she is not a real historical person but an allegorical figure: where historical specificity deflects stereotyping, allegorical figuration enables it. In Dante's circle of lust, the name of historical specificity is Francesca da Rimini, an adulteress. She is the *Commedia*'s second most famous female, after Beatrice, and – like Beatrice Portinari – we would never have heard of her were it not for Dante. If we step outside the text to historicize Francesca and our reading of *Inferno* 5, a picture emerges in which Dante writes a gendered story that places unusual value on the personhood of the dynastic wife[8]. Dynastically unimportant, Francesca was forgotten by contemporary chroniclers. The first and most authoritative chronicler of Rimini was Marco Battagli, whose *On the Origins of the Malatesta* (1352) alludes to the event in which Francesca died without naming her, indeed without acknowledging her existence, except as an implicit cause of her lover Paolo's death, which occurred «causa luxuriae»: «Paulus autem fuit mortuus per fratrem suum lohannem Zottum causa luxurie» ("Paolo was killed by his brother Gianciotto on account of lust"). One son of Malatesta da Verucchio, the founding patriarch of the Malatesta dynasty, killed the other; this fact is of interest because it affects the history of the dynasty. Francesca matters not a whit in herself. And, in fact, the only historical document that records her name is the will of her father-in-law, in which he refers to

8. For the full telling of the story I outline in this paragraph, with full documentation of the sources I mention here, see my *Dante and Francesca da Rimini: Realpolitik, Romance, Gender*, in «Speculum», 75 (2000), pp. 1-28, reprint in *Dante and the Origins of Italian Literary Culture* cit., pp. 304-332.

"the dowry of the late lady Francesca" («pro dotibus olim dominae Francischae»). Otherwise, silence.

The silence of the contemporary historical records is reflected in the silence of our commentaries to *Inferno* 5, which do not tell us about the chroniclers' silence, thus making it impossible for the reader to know that in effect Dante preserved Francesca. He recorded her name and gave her a voice – and, perhaps most significant, through the famous story she tells of how she and Paolo fell in love while reading, he made her a reader rather than a fornicator. Francesca's is the only contemporary name registered in *Inferno* 5: Paolo's name is absent, as is Gianciotto's. She is the protagonist, she is the agent, and she is the one who speaks, while Paolo stands by weeping. Through the intervention of *Inferno* 5, Francesca became a cultural touchstone and reference point, achieving a dignity and a prominence – a celebrity – that in real life she did not possess.

If we stand outside the fiction of who is damned and who is saved – if, in my terms, we "detheologize" – we can see that Dante acted as the historian of record for Francesca da Rimini, and for many other women as well. He seems particularly drawn to cases of marital and family abuse: we think of Pia in *Purgatorio* 3 and Piccarda in *Paradiso* 3. While there are famous women in the *Commedia*, such as Santa Chiara of Assisi and the Empress Costanza, the text seems to engage more fully with women otherwise lost to history; Dante's portraits of them, while brief, allow for subjectivity and assign moral agency[9]. The fact that Dante damns Francesca in his fiction has garnered the critical attention (a sub-category of this critical approach being to castigate him for casting her as a mis-reader, an early Madame Bovary), while the fact that he saves her to history and to cultural memory – and that he lets her read at all! – has gone unremarked. In the same way, to anticipate a later part of my argument, the fact that Dante damns Vergil, Aristotle and the other virtuous pagans is given more historiographic weight than the fact that he literally rewrites the theology of Limbo in order to mitigate their damnation and is still wrestling with their exclusion from grace in *Paradiso*.

An imagination that is not compelled by popular stereotypes is also at work in the *Commedia*'s handling of sodomy. Giotto

9. See T. Barolini, *Dante Alighieri*, in *Women and Gender in Medieval Europe*: *An Encyclopedia*, ed. M. Schaus, New York-London 2006, pp. 190-192.

and Taddeo di Bartolo, in their *Last Judgments*, depict sodomites «skewered from mouth to rear by a pole» (Derbes-Sandona, p. 66); Taddeo's sodomite is labeled with the category that has replaced his personhood, «Sodomitto» (fig. 5).

Dante's damned sodomites are Florentines who are individually named: Brunetto Latini (fig. 6), Iacopo Rusticucci, Guido Guerra, and Tegghiaio Aldobrandi. They run on a scorching plain under flakes of fire. Iacopo, Guido, and Tegghiaio are further described as like three wrestlers who «fenno una rota di sé tutti e trei» ("made a wheel of all three of themselves" [*If* 26, 21]) as champion wrestlers do (*If* 26, 21-27) (fig. 7).

I do not raise the issue of the divergence in punishment because I want to measure gradations in severity, or to congratulate Dante on less severe punishments. I am not raising an issue of quantitative measurement but of qualitatively incommensurate sources of inspiration. Dante is not dealing with externally imposed punishments, but with literalized metaphors that represent the soul's inner state: these literalized metaphors are ways of signifying the path whereby the soul fell into the disorder that is sin (defined by Thomas as «an act lacking the order that it should have»)[10]. The sexual act is not what interests Dante in his treatment of lust; what interests him, and what he tries to depict, is the soul's disordered belief that it is experiencing compulsion, its belief that it does not possess the free will with which to resist desire. Hence there is no suspending of women from their etymologically luxuriant hair while a devil penetrates them sexually, as in Taddeo di Bartolo's depiction of the lustful; there is instead the wind that literalizes the compulsion that the lovers believed they experienced.

Importantly, Dante does not imagine sexualized tortures at all; he does not pander to the most violently pornographic impulses of the viewer. If the absence of sexualized torture from the *Commedia* is counter-intuitive (so counter-intuitive that at least one art historian actually suggests that Giotto's sexualized tortures derive from Dante)[11],

10. Sin is the «actus debito ordine privatus» (*ST* 1a 2ae.72.1); see the discussion of Thomas' definition and its resonance for Dante in Barolini, *Medieval Multiculturalism* cit., pp. 112-113.

11. Thus, *à propos* the detail from Giotto's *Last Judgment* shown as fig. 1 in this essay, Anne Derbes and Mark Sandona wrote in 1998: «These particular forms

that is because we are in the grip of a reception history which imposes its own logic. We must also contend with the relentless appropriation of Dante's authority by the Catholic church and the Italian state, which have successfully reconfigured this unorthodox thinker as an enforcer of orthodoxy. A recent example of such appropriation is the rebuke issued by former Prime Minister Andreotti to his political opponents in the Italian debate on same-sex union: «Non sarebbe male se tutti, compreso Prodi, si andassero a rileggere Dante: i sodomiti nella *Divina Commedia* finiscono all'inferno» ("It would be a good thing if everyone, Prodi included, were to reread Dante: the sodomites in the *Divina Commedia* end up in hell")[12].

Had Andreotti read beyond *Inferno*, to *Purgatorio* 26, he would have realized that Dante's treatment of homosexuality is not so simple. Yes, Dante places homosexuals in hell, classifying them as violent against nature. But his purgatorial terrace of lust features both heterosexuals and homosexuals: two files of souls moving in opposite directions around the fiery terrace who meet and hastily exchange brief kisses (fig. 8).

The figures in one group are identified as those whose sin was that for which Caesar heard himself called «Regina» when he paraded in triumph through Rome (*Pg* 26, 77-78); part of their penance is calling out «Sòddoma» as they move through the purging flames of the terrace of lust (*Pg* 26, 79). Remembering the context provided by the image labeled «Sodomitto» in Taddeo di Bartolo's hell, we note that 1) the sexually charged violence of the visions and pictorial tradition finds no echo in Dante's infernal treatment of sodomy; 2) Dante is able to imagine sodomites in purgatory – to imagine, in other words, that they can be saved.

Dante could have precluded any discussion of saved sodomites by simply ignoring homosexuality outside of *Inferno*. Moreover, had he

of torture – surely visual versions of Dantean contrappasso – are especially apt here»; see *Barren Metal and the Fruitful Womb: The Program of Giotto's Arena Chapel in Padua*, in «The Art Bulletin», 80 (1998), 2, pp. 274-291, p. 284. This mischaracterization of the «Dantean contrappasso» was corrected in the book by Derbes and Sandona cited previously.

12. From *Andreotti: non posso dire sì a unioni dello stesso sesso*, by M. Antonietta Calabrò, in «Corriere della Sera», 14 February 2007. My thanks to Gian Maria Annovi for drawing my attention to this article.

avoided any reference to sodomy in *Purgatorio*, as he so easily could have done, he would have avoided the need to reclassify it: sodomy in the *Commedia* would have been remained classified in only one way, as a sin of violence against nature, without needing to undergo the reclassification required by the transition to purgatory, a realm organized by Dante according to the seven capital vices. As a result of the decision to reference sodomy in the *Purgatorio*, homosexuality is reclassified as a form of lust, and thus homosexuals undergo purgation along with heterosexuals on the terrace of lust. Dante's reclassification has far-reaching implications, since it tells us that lust – excess desire – is the impulse underlying any form of sexuality, normative or non-normative[13]. Moreover, Dante's commitment to placing sodomy in purgatory leads him to accept a dangerous symmetry. Lust is by definition a sin of incontinence, meaning that the impulse that leads to lust is not sinful when it is controlled and moderated. Extending this logic to homosexual lust, however, would imply not just that one can repent of homosexual lust and be saved, but also that limited and moderated homosexual behavior is not sinful, just as limited and moderated heterosexual practice is not sinful.

In ethnic terms as well, I believe we can see Dante pushing at the normative boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. In *Dante and the Origins of Italian Literary Culture*, I wrote that Dante was not «immune from the blind spots of his time nor his poem without historical stain» (p. 9): as an example, I cited Sylvia Tomasch's essay on the «erasure» of Jews, who «never appear *as Jews* anywhere in the *Divine Comedy*»[14]. While there are remarks in the *Commedia* that I would classify as anti-Jewish (I am thinking in particular of the acceptance of the deicide charge in *Paradiso* 7)[15], I am no longer

13. Dante's radical claim has traditionally been glossed over by commentators. A new generation of scholars is pursuing the pioneering work of John Boswell, as articulated in *Dante and the Sodomites*, in «Dante Studies», 112 (1994), pp. 63-75. See for instance the 2010 Columbia University dissertation of Vlad Vintila, *After Iphis: Ovidian Non-Normative Sexuality in Dante and Ariosto*.

14. S. Tomasch, *Judecca, Dante's Satan, and the Dis-placed Jew*, in *Text and Territory: Geographical Imagination in the European Middle Ages*, ed. S. Tomasch and S. Gilles, Philadelphia 1998, pp. 247-267, p. 248.

15. On the deicide charge, see R. Jacoff, *Dante and the Jewish Question*, in «Bernardo Lecture Series», No. 13, Center for Medieval & Renaissance Studies, Binghamton 2004. Troubled as Jacoff is by *Paradiso* 7, she acknowledges the sig-

convinced by Tomasch's argument that the absence of Jews from the *Commedia* is itself a negative. Once I had viewed the virulent visual evidence on Jews (coming it is true from Germany, England, and France) laid out in Debra Strickland's *Saracens, Demons, and Jews: Making Monsters in the Medieval Art*, I decided that in this case exclusion is a good thing[16]. In a context in which visual representations of hell were full of contemporary Jews, depicted with the visual stereotypes that served as markers for Jews (hooked noses, Phrygian caps, and moneybags) (figs. 9-11), the absence of any contemporary Jews in Dante's hell may again indicate the non-stereotyping nature of his imaginative processes. Maybe this is why the prominent Jewish writer and scholar, Immanuel ben Solomon, contemporary of Dante, (c. 1270-c. 1330), so admired Dante that he wrote a Hebrew imitation of *Inferno* and *Paradiso*[17].

Rachel Jacoff writes that «By the time Dante was writing the *Inferno* the negative associations of Jews with usury were current, but Dante's usurers are all Christian»[18]. We can build on this observation, noting that Dante transfers the stereotypic image – the moneybags worn around the neck – from the stereotypic wearers – the Jews who were synonymous with usurers in much of Europe – to contemporary Florentines and one Paduan, Reginaldo Scrovegni, the father of the man who commissioned Giotto's Scrovegni Chapel. Recent scholarship on the frescoes in the Scrovegni Chapel remarks on Giotto's deployment of «some visual disparaging of Jews and other nonbelievers», arguing with respect to the Passion cycle that «A battery of pictorial signs that include physiognomy, grooming, and

nificance of the absence of Jews in hell: «One question that has arisen for me since I began to work on this material is why Dante refrains from putting any actual Jews, other than the biblical figures Judas, Caiphas, Annas and the Sanhedrin, in Hell (. . .) I'm not sure how to interpret the absence of contemporary Jews from the *Inferno* but, given what was going on in Europe during Dante's lifetime, it is intriguing» (p. 16).

16. D. Higgs Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews: Making Monsters in Medieval Art*, Princeton and Oxford 2003.

17. See *Tophet and Eden (Hell and Paradise), in Imitation of Dante's Inferno and Paradiso, from the Hebrew of Immanuel Ben Solomono Romi, Dante's Contemporary*, trans. H. Gollancz, London 1921.

18. R. Jacoff, *Dante and the Jewish Question* cit., p. 16. Jacoff concludes, cogently: «Dante is much more concerned about the avarice of the Church than he is about the Jews» (p. 16).

dress are deployed here to distinguish Christian from Jew»[19]. All the more suggestive, then, that in his treatment of the sin most associated with Jews in medieval Europe, usury, Dante uses the marker worn by Jews – the moneybag (see the moneybag around the neck of the Jew in hellmouth in fig. 11) – and transfers it to usurers from well-known and non-Jewish families. He specifies that the bag is worn around the neck, and he makes sure that each family is represented in its indelible historical specificity by placing its insignia on the moneybag, and describing the insignia in verses whose precision could allow them to serve as illustrators' instructions, indicating clearly the crests of the Florentine Gianfigliazzi family (azure lion on a gold field), the Florentine Obriachi family (white goose on a red field), and the Paduan Scrovegni family (azure sow on a white field)[20] (fig. 12).

Coming to the other ethnic group in Strickland's title *Saracens, Demons, and Jews*, Dante places both Mohammed and his son-in-law Ali in hell among the schismatics, those who divided and sundered that which should be kept united, in their case the Christian church. The souls in this *bolgia*, which includes disseminators of civil as well as religious discord (the contemporary Christian heretic Fra Dolcino, the Roman Curio, Pier da Medicina, Mosca de' Lamberti, Bertran de Born), are mutilated in ways that indicate their mutilation of the body politic (again, a literalized metaphor: the rending of that which should be whole)[21]. Dante places Saladin, the renowned twelfth-century Muslim general and reconquerer of Jerusalem (1189), in the special part of Limbo that he creates for virtuous pagans, along with the great Muslim philosophers Avicenna (980-1037) and Averroes (1126-1198), whom he places alongside the sages of antiquity. In his philosophical treatise, *Convivio*, as well, Dante treats Muslim philosophers with the respect that he shows the classical philosophers who are his cultural heroes.

19. Derbes, Sandona, *The Usurer's Heart* cit., p. 95.

20. Reginaldo degli Scrovegni, the only speaker among the usurers, predicts the arrival of a fellow Paduan (perhaps Vitaliano del Dente) as well as another Florentine, the greatest usurer of all, Giovanni Buiamonte.

21. Dante moves back in time in dealing with the moderns in this *bolgia*: Pier da Medicina indicates that he knew Dante on earth (*If* 28, 71-72), whereas the Florentine Mosca de' Lamberti died in 1243, before Dante's birth, and the troubadour Bertran de Born died before 1215.

Petrarch, by way of comparison, shows no appreciation for Muslim learning or culture, enacting a wholesale cultural denigration of Islam, deploying east / west stereotypes, and articulating a set of orientalizing tropes that later humanists will adopt [22]. Dante offers, as he so often does, a less unilateral posture (analogously, we find in his texts a mixture of misogyny and of more progressive attitudes toward women)[23]: on the one hand there is the harsh language that we find in the religious context of crusade ideology and on the other the repeated appreciation of the wisdom of Averroes, singled out in Limbo as «Averoìs che ’l gran comento feo» (*If* 4, 144), and referred to again for his wisdom in *Purgatorio* 25[24].

To be clear, Averroes is in Limbo, and Limbo is the first circle of hell. But Limbo, like any other human invention, is susceptible to historical variation and has to be put into historical context: theologians placed only unbaptized infants in Limbo (the Hebrew patriarchs and matriarchs who predeceased Christ were once there, but were rescued and raised to heaven by Christ’s harrowing of hell). The very idea of placing adults of any sort in Limbo is non-orthodox,

22. See N. Bisaha, *Petrarch’s Vision of the Muslim and Byzantine East*, in «Speculum», 76 (2001), pp. 284-314: «In many ways Petrarch employs the discourse of ‘Orientalist’ writers, as described by Edward Said, centuries before the age of colonialism» (p. 286). Examples of stereotypes abound for instance in canzone 28 of the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*.

23. See T. Barolini, *Notes toward a Gendered History of Italian Literature, with a Discussion of Dante’s “Beatrix Loquax”*, in *Dante and the Origins of Italian Literary Culture* cit., pp. 360-378.

24. The harshest language about Islam in the *Commedia* is the most generic, the most stereotyping, and it occurs in the context of Cacciaguida’s narration of his participation in crusade at the end of *Paradiso* 15:

> Dietro li andai incontro a la nequizia
> di quella legge il cui popolo usurpa,
> per colpa d’i pastor, vostra giustizia.
> Quivi fu’ io da quella gente turpa
> disviluppato dal mondo fallace.
>
> (*Pd* 15, 142-46)

The stereotyping language here is «nequizia» and «gente turpa»; Petrarch too will use «turpa». However, the context is specifically religious, as the reference to «quella legge» – referring to the religious code of Islam – makes clear, not generically cultural. Moreover, Dante never uses slurs like «cani», which Petrarch uses in *Triumphus Famae* 2. 274: «’l sepolcro di Cristo è in man de’ cani!»

let alone adult nonbelievers. Dante makes his own theology when he places adult virtuous pagans in Limbo, in a move with far-reaching implications regarding the value of great thought and culture, prized by Dante even if the provenance is not Christian.

Dante honors the virtuous pagans of antiquity, along with selected Muslim moderns, in a noble castle in Limbo; the honor he bestows is captured by an illustrator who uniquely clothes the virtuous pagans in Limbo, while the other souls in hell are naked (fig. 13).

Then he does more. He does not limit himself to speculating as to whether virtuous pagans can be saved, as Aquinas does; he actually saves specific pagans: Cato, Trajan, Statius, and most spectacularly Ripheus the Trojan, a figure mentioned in Vergil's *Aeneid*, in an interaction with the past that constitutes a form of what I call medieval multiculturalism. I use "medieval multiculturalism" to refer to the eclectic fusion of intellectual and ideological traditions deriving from different times and places, and I do so deliberately, in order to suggest that Dante's "vertical" syncretism – his interaction with the other not just of the present but of the past – is just as significant in its own time and place as the "horizontal" variety we practice today.

When historians of the early modern period, in search of periodicity and demarcation, point to Dante's placement of Aristotle and other pagans in Limbo and therefore in hell as an index of his still being "medieval" in orientation, they misread Dante's Limbo precisely because they do not historicize. The idea of Limbo addresses very specific intellectual and emotional concerns; it is an idea that offers protection from hell to groups whose damnation is not easily tolerated by the community of believers. Traditionally, Limbo protected the Hebrew righteous and unbaptized infants from unmediated contact with the rigors of hell (the Church's current move to do away with Limbo altogether shows a contemporary response to the same intellectual and emotional concerns)[25]. Only Dante, in the

25. «After several years of study, the Vatican's International Theological Commission said there are good reasons to hope that babies who die without being baptized go to heaven. In a document published 4 / 20 / 07, the commission said the traditional concept of limbo – as a place where unbaptized infants spend eternity but without communion with God – seemed to reflect an 'unduly restrictive view of salvation'». From *Vatican Commission: Limbo Reflects 'Restrictive View of Salvation'*, in «Catholic News Service», 4 / 20 / 07 (http://www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/0702216.htm).

history of the idea of Limbo, expanded it to similarly protect adult virtuous pagans, mostly ancients but also a few Muslim moderns, and so doing he expresses a concern that is specific to him.

Moreover, the connection between virtuous pagans of the past and virtuous pagans of the present – between otherness construed vertically, along a temporal axis, and otherness construed horizontally, along a geographical axis – is a connection that Dante made. Cultural otherness construed temporally is represented through two-thirds of the *Commedia* by the character «Virgilio», the guide who accompanies the pilgrim from *Inferno* 1 to *Purgatorio* 30 and around whom Dante constructs a narrative that embodies the tension between *aliud* and *ipsum*, a tension only enhanced because the *aliud* is deeply beloved[26]. But in the heaven of justice, where Dante puts the legitimacy of exclusion from grace on the table for discussion, the question of how it can be just that some are damned through no fault of their own is articulated in language that, while clearly evoking the character Virgilio, replaces the temporal framing of the issue with a geographical frame, conjuring not a nonbeliever of antiquity but a contemporary born on the banks of the Indus:

> ché tu dicevi: "Un uom nasce a la riva
> de l'Indo, e quivi non è chi ragioni
> di Cristo né chi legga né chi scriva;
> e tutti suoi voleri e atti buoni
> sono, quanto ragione umana vede,
> sanza peccato in vita o in sermoni.
> Muore non battezzato e sanza fede:
> ov' è questa giustizia che 'l condanna?
> ov' è la colpa sua, se ei non crede?".

(*Pd* 19, 70-77)

Many more children die unbaptized than in the past, and therefore this relaxation of the entrance rules for Limbo reflects an accommodation to the realities of the present.

26. For the narrative that Dante constructs around the figure of «Virgilio» (I use the name in Italian to distinguish the character in the fiction from the historical author), enhancing him on the affective axis while diminishing him on the intellective axis, see T. Barolini, *Dante's Poets* (1984), chapter 3; Italian trans. *Il miglior fabbro*, Torino 1993.

The language of this extraordinary challenge to orthodoxy, with its searing questions «ov' è questa giustizia che 'l condanna? / ov' è la colpa sua, se ei non crede?», resonates with the poem's many descriptions of Virgilio: he too is good in all his actions as far as human reason can discern. By posing this greatest of his intellectual challenges (his ancient hunger as he calls it), in its geographical form, as a query about the fairness of condemning the perfectly virtuous man born on the bank of the Indus, while at the same time explicitly echoing language that the poem has used for Virgilio, Dante indicates that he views contemporary ethnic and cultural communities different from his own, for instance the community of men born «a la riva / de l'Indo» (*Pd* 19, 70-71), as in some way analogous to the Greeks and Romans of antiquity. It is interesting from this perspective that the surprise saved pagan of *Paradiso*, announced in the same heaven of justice that poses the dilemma of the virtuous man born on the banks of the Indus, turns out to be Ripheus the Trojan: Troy is further east than Rome or Athens, and Ripheus might be seen as the ancient stand-in for the virtuous Indian.

The most faraway and exotic peoples referred to in the *Commedia*, and always coordinated as though to acknowledge their similar otherness, are the Indians and the Ethiopians, as black Africans were called[27]. Later on in the very canto that challenges

27. On Ethiopians and Indians – i.e. Africans and Asians – Dante offers interestingly coordinated references in the *Commedia*, referring three times to Ethiopia / Ethiopians and three times to India / Indians, as follows (I am excluding from this tally the many references in astronomical periphrases to the Ganges; Dante seems to use the river Ganges as a spatial marker, and the river Indus as an ethnic marker):

If 24, 89	mostrò già mai con tutta l'Etiopia
Pg 26, 21	che d'acqua fredda Indo o Etiopo
Pd 19, 109	e tai Cristian dannerà l'Etiòpe
If 14, 32	d'India vide sopra 'l suo stuolo
Pg 26,21	che d'acqua fredda Indo o Etiopo
Pd 19, 71	de l'Indo, e quivi non è chi ragioni

He refers to the place "India" and "Ethiopia" in hell, *If* 14 and *If* 24 respectively; to the people "Indians" and "Ethiopians" in *Pg* 26, 21, cited for their desire for cold water, i.e. as denizens of torrid lands; to the people again in *Pd* 19, where we find coordinated references to both groups as examples of non-Christians who may well be more virtuous than Christians. In her 2007 commentary to *Othello*,

divine justice with respect to the man born on the banks of the Indus we learn that there will be Ethiopians nearer to God at the Judgment Day than many Christians:

> Ma vedi: molti gridan "Cristo, Cristo!"
> che saranno in giudicio assai men *prope*
> a lui, che tal che non conosce Cristo;
> e tai Cristian dannerà l'Etïòpe,
> quando si partiranno i due collegi,
> l'uno in etterno ricco e l'altro inòpe.
>
> (*Pd* 19, 106-111)

We can contrast Dante's provocative remark on the possibility of saved Ethiopians, all the more provocative for coming in a heaven in which he has gone out of his way to draw attention to an exotic saved figure from the deep eastern past, Ripheus the Trojan, to Strickland's contention that «Ethiopians and demons are (…) dramatically allied in pictorial works of art»[28]. To make this point she offers an image of an image of Blemmyai, one of the monstrous races, and Ethiopians *en route* to Antichrist, and an image of an Ethiopian, Saracen, and Jew adoring Antichrist (fig. 14).

To create a richer context for the understanding of «Ethiopian» in Dante's Italy (an Italy that did not know Greek and that had not yet rediscovered Herodotus and Heliodorus' *Aethiopica*), we can consider three Italian references slightly later than the *Commedia*. In the Latin life of San Pier Pettinaio da Siena (d. 1289), written by the Franciscan Pietro da Montarone in 1330, Ethiopians are explicitly linked to demons: «When he came near the church he saw two demons, in the horrifying shape of Ethiopians»[29]. In Fazio degli Uberti's *Dittamondo*

Kim Hall notes that «in early modern Europe "Ethiopian" frequently referred to black peoples in general»; see *Othello, the Moor of Venice: Texts and Contexts*, ed. K. F. Hall, Boston 2007, p. 185. For the man on the banks of the Indus, the Bosco-Reggio commentary notes: «Si designa inoltre, in modo generico l'Oriente» (p. 324); see *Paradiso*, ed. U. Bosco and G. Reggio, Firenze 1979. And note the similarly generic word «Perse», used in the same canto as the Ethiopians and the man on the banks of the Indus: «Che poran dir li Perse a' vostri regi» (*Pd* 19, 112).

28. Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews* cit., p. 80.

29. *Saints and Cities in Medieval Italy*, ed. D. Webb, Manchester 2007, p. 209. My thanks to Davide Bolognesi for this reference, and also for the following from Ubertino da Casale, which holds that when the human soul rebels against Jesus, it

(mid-14th century), Ethiopians are a «gente bestiale e senza legge», entirely given over to the «piacer di Venere»[30]; while in Boccaccio's *Corbaccio* (perhaps as late as 1360s) female lust is so unsatiable that it stoops even to the black Ethiopian: «La loro lussuria è focosa e insaziabile, e per questo non patisce né numero né elezione: il fante, il lavoratore, il mugnaio e ancora il nero etiopo, 'ciascuno è buono, sol che possa'» (par. 224)[31]. All of these references are a far cry from «tai Cristian dannerà l'Etïòpe» of *Pd* 19, 109. Whether one takes the passage in *Paradiso* 19 restrictively, to mean that the virtuous but damned heathens will castigate the damned Christians who neglected to hear the gospel and to be saved, or – as I prefer – expansively, to mean that through their meritorious works pagans (like Ripheus!) may yet be saved, in either case Dante's passage is one that dignifies the Ethiopian[32].

The various forms of sympathy toward the other that we have considered could be arranged on a spectrum: from the profound psychological identification that causes Dante to faint after meeting Francesca, to his assertive dignifying of the Ethiopian and his ability actively to imagine the salvation of sodomites and pagans, to his demonstrable lack of interest in stereotyping ethnic groups

is as if a bride rebelled against the bridegroom by fornicating in front of him with a "very black Ethiopian": «Si aliquis pulcherrimus sponsus nobilissimus et completissimus circuissem mare et aridam (terram) pro una sibi conquirenda sponsam, quam de visceribus suis pavisset et nutrisset, et ad debitam formam stature perduxisset, et ex eisdem suis visceribus vestes et ornamenta ei donasset et fecisset eam reginam nobilissimam et decoram, si illa, in oculis sponsis, vilissimum ribaldellum et *nigerrimum ethiopem acciperet*, et amaret, et stercora eius comederet, et de ipsis totam faciem suam deturparet, et sic diceret sponso, modo de osculare, quia me in alia forma habere non poteris, nihil esset dolor illius hominis sponsi positi in exemplo doctoris Iesu Christi in maculis sponse, quia incomparabiliter plus pro illa fecit quam descriptus ille superius fecisset, et ita incomparabiliter peius cum diabolo fornicatur et turpiorem deo sponso ostendit faciem mentis sue. (*Arbor Vite*, IV, 310a)

30. «Guata / questa gente bestiale e senza legge / come al piacer di Venere s'è data. / E sappi che di quante se ne legge, / non truovi schiatta di questa più vile: / niun conosce il padre, ben ch'el vegge» (*Dittamondo*, Libro 5, cap. 22, 43-48; from Fazio degli Uberti, *Il Dittamondo e Le rime*, ed. G. Corsi, Bari 1952).

31. Giovanni Boccaccio, *Il Corbaccio*, ed. G. Natali, Milano 1992.

32. The restrictive interpretation may be found in the commentary of Robert Hollander, while the expansive interpretation may be found in the commentary of Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi, with whose position I wholeheartedly agree.

different from his own, such as the Jews. Behind these various forms of sympathy toward the other is an imagination captivated by difference, not only by the «gloria di colui che tutto move» but also by the process whereby that glory is differentiated «in una parte più e meno altrove» (*Pd* 1, 1 and 3). When Dante reaches the end of his vision and is granted the sight of the universe bound together in one volume, what entrances him is not plain oneness but all that multiplicity somehow contained and unified. His heart is set on seeing and knowing that multiplicity, an otherness that is still stubbornly present in the poem's penultimate word: God is the love that moves the sun and the *other* stars – «l'amor che move 'l sole e *l'altre* stelle». Much has been written about the transcendent *stelle* with which the *Commedia* ends; let us give due weight as well to the adjective that modifies those stars, the poem's penultimate word, *altre*. Dante may believe in a transcendent One, but his One is indelibly characterized by the multiplicity, difference, and sheer otherness embodied in the «altre stelle» – an otherness by which he is still unrepentantly captivated in his poem's last breath.

Fig. 1. Giotto, Last Judgment, detail, Cappella degli Scrovegni (Arena Chapel), Padova.
With permission of Comune di Padova.

Fig. 2. Giotto, Last Judgment, detail, Cappella degli Scrovegni (Arena Chapel), Padova.
With permission of Comune di Padova.

Fig. 3. Taddeo di Bartolo, Last Judgment (Lustful), Collegiata di San Gimignano. With permission of Basilica di Santa Maria Assunta, San Gimignano. Photograph by Christopher Kleinhenz.

Fig. 4. Paolo and Francesca, Manuscript illustrations (Venetian, 2nd quarter 15th century). With permission of the Biblioteca Riccardiana, ms Riccardiana 1035, 10v. Image and caption from: *Illuminated Manuscripts of the Divine Comedy*, eds. P. Brieger, M. Meiss, C. S. Singleton, Princeton 1969, p. 88b.
Fig. 5. Taddeo di Bartolo, Last Judgment (Sodomite), Collegiata di San Gimignano. With permission of Basilica di Santa Maria Assunta, San Gimignano. Photograph by Christopher Kleinhenz.

Fig. 6. Brunetto Latini, Manuscript illustrations (Florentine, 1330's). Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale, ms Palat. 313, 35v. Image and caption from: *Illuminated Manuscripts of the Divine Comedy* cit., p. 184a.
Fig. 7. Florentine sodomites, Manuscript illustrations (Bartolomeo di Fruosino, ca. 1420). With permission of Bibliothèque Nationale de France. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, ms it. 74, 47v. Image and caption from: *Illuminated Manuscripts of the Divine Comedy* cit., p. 193a.

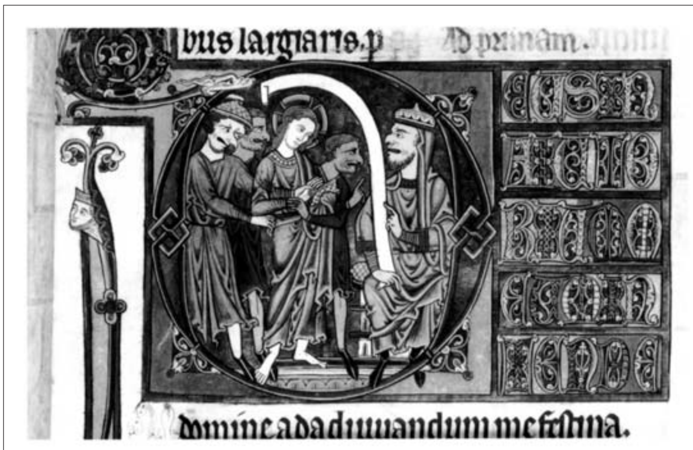

Fig. 8. Terrace of lust in Purgatory, Manuscript illustrations (Priamo della Quercia, mid 15th C.). With permission of the British Library. © British Library Board. All Rights Reserved British Library, London, Yates Thompson 36, 113v. Image and caption from: *Illuminated Manuscripts of the Divine Comedy* cit., p. 403b.
Fig. 9. Jews stereotyped. Christ before Caiphas. Salvin Hours. England, c. 1270. With permission of the British Library. © British Library Board. All Rights Reserved British Library, London, Add. ms 48985, fol. 29 (detail). Image and caption from: D. Higgs Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, & Jews*, Princeton 2003, fig. 43, p. 110.

Fig. 10. Jews in hell. Jacob asks to be buried in Canaan; Jews in hell. *Bible moralisée*. Paris, 1240s. With permission of Bodleian Library, Oxford, ms Bodl. 270b, fol. 34 (detail). Image and caption from: D. Higgs Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, & Jews* cit., fig. 53, p. 126.

Fig. 11. Jew with moneybag in hell. The Virgin and child in heaven; Jew in hell. Psalter. Northern France, late 13th century. With permission of the British Library. © British Library Board. All Rights Reserved British Library, London, Add. ms 17868, fol. 31. Image and caption from: D. Higgs Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, & Jews* cit., fig. 52, p. 125.
Fig. 12. Usurers in hell, Manuscript illustrations. With permission of the British Library. © British Library Board. All Rights Reserved British Library, London, ms Egerton 943, 30v. Image and caption from: *Illuminated Manuscripts of the Divine Comedy* cit., p. 195b.

Fig. 13. Illustrations to *Inferno* 4 and *Inferno* 5: Classical poets in Limbo, Paolo & Francesca. Budapest, ms Codex Italicus 1, 4v. From the photographic reproduction. Verona 2006.

Fig. 14. Ethiopians. Blemmyai and Ethiopians en route to Antichrist; Ethiopian, Saracen, and Jew adore Antichrist. *Antichrist*. Bavaria, c. 1440-50. With permission of Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin, ms germ. f. 733, fol. 4. Image and caption from: D. Higgs Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, & Jews* cit., plate 7, p. 18.