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Edited by
Diana Glenn

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Abstracts

"As you walked next to death …": The Dantesque Iter of Kazantzakis's *Zorba the Greek*
This article will examine first, how Kazantzakis, like Dante, absorbs the landscape of his own journey of exile to create the landscape of his iconic story of the quest for salvation. It will then consider how Kazantzakis uses the figure of Dante, the pilgrim-poet, to lend an inter-textual layer to the novel that serves as both hermeneutic device and a means of aligning Kazantzakis's quest with Dante's. Finally, it will consider how Kazantzakis uses the figure of Ulysses, both Homer's and Dante's, presenting him as an "anti-pilgrim," to expose the futility of the search for heavenly paradise.

The Inferno of Pinocchio: Dante's Legacy in *Le avventure di Pinocchio* by Carlo Collodi
This article investigates textual and theme-related connections between Collodi's *Le avventure di Pinocchio* and Dante's *Divina commedia,* with *Inferno* as the main focus. In late-nineteenth-century Italy the figure of Dante faced a substantial revival after almost two hundred years of neglect. With their literary and political efforts, intellectuals like De Sanctis or Cantù proclaimed Dante one of the *Padri* of the recently constituted Italian nation. The famous Statue of Dante in Piazza Santa Croce in Florence, for instance, was inaugurated in 1865 to celebrate the author. Starting from the most recent interpretations of Pinocchio as an anti-establishment text, this article investigates correlations with Dante's poem. In light of this, we propose to read the puppet's conversion into a middle-class prototype as the climax of a journey that shares some key aspects with Dante's descent to the underworld. The comparative analysis of the two works also underlines significant echoes of the *Commedia* in *Pinocchio* with regard to character representations, references to place, or the use of imagery. For example, in the final scene of *Pinocchio* the wooden puppet becomes a mere physical vessel, an empty shell separated from the soul: an epilogue that evokes one of the theological foundations of the *Inferno*.

Mandelshtam and Dante: The Russian Connection
Through the prism of close reading this comparative essay focuses on Dante's influence on one of the greatest poets of the Russian Silver Age, Osip Mandelshtam (1891–1938). The author first analyzes Mandelshtam's theoretical essay "Conversation about Dante," where Mandelshtam not only provided his critical commentary to *The Divine Comedy* but formulated his views on poetry as the art form. Several poems by Mandelshtam, written when he was in political exile in Voronezh, directly inspired by Dante's imagery and poetics, are also discussed.

Dante e Matelda nell'*Eden* perduto

Il saggio si propone di indagare il senso più autentico e profondo dell'incontro tra Dante e Matelda nel Paradiso terrestre assegnato da Dio agli uomini come loro dimora originaria. Al di là di ogni opinabile identificazione storica, Matelda è una figura femminile complessa e misteriosa che racchiude in sé molteplici sfaccettature simboliche. Intermediaria tra Virgilio e Beatrice, tra la Scienza umana e la Scienza divina, nel senso di *Mathesis*, è allegoria dello stato di primigenia innocenza umana, la sola che può ricondurre l'uomo verso la felicità originaria cui allude anche il suo nome, un *senhal*, la cui lettura palindromica, *ad laetam*, rinvia alla letizia dell'anima, declinata nei secoli precedenti nel mito pagano dell'età dell'oro. Matelda in ultima analisi è l'immagine riflessa dello stesso viaggio di Dante, *itinerarium mentis in Deum*, metafora del faticoso *transitus* dell'anima dall'oscurità e dalla cecità del mondo verso la luce suprema, attraverso un lento processo metafisico di ascesi e di ricongiunzione a quell'unico Dio-Amore che non conosce la caducità dell'effimero.

English Abstract: This essay aims to investigate the most authentic and profound meaning of the encounter between Dante and Matelda in the Earthly Paradise assigned by God to men as their original home. Beyond any debatable historical identification, Matelda is a complex and mysterious female figure who encompasses multiple symbolic facets. An intermediary between Virgil and Beatrice, between human Science and revealed Science, in the sense of *Mathesis*, she is an allegory of the state of primordial human innocence, the only one that can lead man back to the primordial happiness to which her name alludes, a *senhal*, whose palindromic reading, *ad laetam*, refers to the original joy of the soul, declined in previous centuries in the pagan myth of the Golden Age. Matelda, in the final analysis, is the reflected image of the same journey by Dante, *itinerarium mentis in Deum*, a metaphor for the soul's laborious *transitus* from the darkness and blindness of the world towards the supreme light, through a slow metaphysical process of asceticism and reunion with the one God-Love who does not know ephemeral transience.

"scuri boschi, in luoghi strani e inculti": The Literary Afterlives of Dante's Wood of the Suicides in the Italian Renaissance

The reception and reconceptualization of Dante's depiction of suicide in the *Commedia* is an understudied aspect of his legacy. Through close textual analysis of Dante's *Commedia* and a comparative analysis with early modern Italian poetry and prose, this study examines the adoption and adaptation of Dante's arboreal imaginary of suicide and explores both the ways in which the literary Renaissance engaged with the rich symbols that Dante associates with suicide, and the potentially obscured meanings of those symbols. The study contributes to a broader understanding of how suicide has been considered and discussed in different historical periods, and as such hopes to further dissolve the taboos that surround the subject.

Introduction

The year 2021 witnessed a steady stream of commemorative events enacted at a global level in honour of the 700th anniversary of the death of Dante Alighieri who died in Ravenna in 1321. In spite of the devastating health situation and restrictions to everyday social connections brought on by the local and global effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, enthusiasm for the organisation of celebrations and publications in the name of the Florentine poet did not diminish, although a number of events pivoted to online versions.

The determination of many individuals and entities to continue the celebrations of the poet's life and works resulted in a rich array of initiatives. The events and encounters were varied and collaborative, taking place in-person, online and through live and recorded performance. There were staged readings, concerts, mini-festivals, exhibitions, international symposia, competitions and numerous publications. The formalising of a national day in Italy to celebrate the poet, aptly named Dantedì, to be held annually on 25 March (marking the date of commencement of the journey to the Inferno), further consolidated the wide-ranging impact and influence of the Florentine poet on Italian identity, scholarship, creative practice and national consciousness.

It is well-known that Dante was influenced by many precursors, sources, and events, including traditional and popular culture, Church doctrine, the classical canon, cultural mores, emerging lyrical poetics and the political exigencies of the day. At the same time, he is a major precursor to many performers, artists and thinkers. Over the centuries, Dante's works have provided inspiration to individuals from many artistic, linguistic and cultural spheres.

In Australia, Dante scholars, writers, translators (including Sir Samuel Griffith and more recently Clive James), poets (e.g. John Kinsella) and a host of creative practitioners have captured and explored aspects of Dante's life and works. There are much-loved art collections such as the copies in bronze of sculptures for Auguste Rodin's Gates of Hell (modelled 1880–1917) which are on display at the Art Gallery of SA, while the National Gallery of Victoria houses Dante Gabriel Rossetti's watercolour of Paolo and Francesca and a precious collection of drawings by William Blake.

Most recently, a sketch in red ink appearing in a 1497 edition of the *Commedia* held in the Fisher Library in Sydney has been attributed to the Italian Renaissance artist

Giorgione. A further celebrated Dantean link to the Antipodes is through the constellation of four stars recalled by Dante in the *Purgatorio*. The constellation known as the Southern Cross which is visible in the southern hemisphere was notably remarked upon by the explorer Amerigo Vespucci in the 1500s.

With the global interest in Dante's anniversary, it was timely to create an issue of *Spunti e Ricerche* dedicated to the legacy of Dante Alighieri. I am extremely grateful and extend sincerest thanks to the Editorial Committee for the opportunity to guest edit this issue. It has been a wonderful experience to work with Tony Pagliaro, and also with Annamaria Pagliaro.

The volume contains a splendid variety of contributions. Two of the articles in this issue are by scholars in Australia, namely Emma Louise Barlow, Luigi Gussago and Andrea Pagani. Barlow's compelling study explores the theme of suicide in Dante's *Inferno* 13 alongside Italian Renaissance imaginaries of suicide, while Gussago and Pagani conduct a perceptive comparative analysis of Dante's *Commedia* (principally the *Inferno*) with Collodi's *Le avventure di Pinocchio*. Two contributions are by US-based scholars: Mary Watt, who offers a lucid analysis of Dante and *Zorba the Greek* by Kazantzakis, and Julia Titus, whose cogent examination of the unique legacy of Russian poet Osip Mandelstam reveals his views on Dante as a dynamic and powerful poetic voice. Finally, Italian scholar, Marcella Di Franco, gives an absorbing account of the figure of Dante's Matelda in the *Purgatorio*.

While Barlow's article examines Dante's legacy on Italian Renaissance writers dealing with the theme of suicide, and Di Franco provides a focus on a single character from the *Commedia*, three articles (Gussago and Pagani, Watt, and Titus) specifically explore the influence of Dante as a precursor on writers born in the nineteenth century, namely Italian writer Carlo Collodi (1826–1890), Russian poet Osip Mandelstam (1891–1938) and Greek author Nikos Kazantzakis (1883–1957). In their analyses, the authors reveal tantalising information about the monumental and precursorial shadow cast by Dante's ground-breaking *Commedia*.

Mary Watt's insightful analysis, entitled "'As you walked next to death . . . ': The Dantesque Iter of Kazantzakis's *Zorba the Greek*", explores affinities in the landscapes of the *Commedia* and *Zorba the Greek*. The connections are notable for the allegorical links that can be traced, as Watt explains:

> . . . the subtle yet insistent affinities that Kazantzakis creates between the two landscapes connect the narrator's experience to Dante's and thus infuse Kazantzakis's text with an even greater allegorical significance, expanding it beyond a personal account of an existential crisis to an anthem for modernity.

Dante's meticulous evocation of landscapes as the Pilgrim journeys through the

three realms of the afterlife is aligned to his allegorical intent. Watt is signalling that the landscape of *Zorba the Greek* is intentionally Dantesque as its author seeks to create an association with Dante's poetic landscape in the reader's mind. She proffers the view that Kazantzakis's deliberate choices in mirroring the Dantesque iter may be regarded as 'a project of appropriation' with the deliberate use of tropes such as the descent/ ascent narrative movement, the Ulyssean echoes, and the dual protagonist/ author model.

Kazantzakis, himself an avid reader and translator of the *Commedia*, maintained a lifelong admiration for Dante and looked to Homer, Dante and Bergson as prime sources of inspiration. Indeed, as Watt notes, Kazantzakis's epic *Odyssey – A Modern Sequel* (1938) follows the Dantean model of an aged Odysseus who embarks on a final fateful journey. At the same time, Kazantzakis is exploring the theme of exile and, ultimately, the power of the written word to enact change and signpost aspiration to a higher transcendent experience.

In "The Inferno of Pinocchio: Dante's Legacy in *Le avventure di Pinocchio* by Carlo Collodi", Luigi Gussago and Andrea Pagani convincingly explore textual and thematic links between Collodi's *Le avventure di Pinocchio* and Dante's *Commedia*, with particular attention paid to the *Inferno*. Following Italy's Unification in 1861, Dante's fame as a national figure to be celebrated and revered was highlighted through his election as a *Padre* of the new Italian nation. In addition to a publishing enterprise to produce a national edition of Dante's works, the public placement of his statue in Florence in Piazza Santa Croce in 1865 serves as a highly visible example of politically-motivated efforts to stimulate the veneration of the Florentine poet at a time when Florence was enjoying prominence as the national capital in the face of a defiant Papal State.

Through a comparative approach, the authors trace mirroring images, references and themes between the major works by the two renowned Florentine authors, Dante and Collodi, most notably in the focus on the Pilgrim's descent to the Inferno, and Dante's unique realisation of a nether world in which plasticity and incorporeality frame the protagonist's experience of the damned shades in Hell. This theological approach may be compared with the representation of the body-soul complex in the creation of Collodi's metamorphic wooden puppet who comes to life and experiences myriad adventures but who lacks a soul. The authors state: "*Le avventure di Pinocchio* stands out as a unique example of corporeality applied to fiction". As becomes evident to the reader, the hybrid elements present in both the Pinocchio narrative and Dante's otherworldly journey were ahead of their time and underscore the innovative approach taken by both authors who created their masterpieces centuries apart.

Julia Titus explores the connections between Dante and the renowned Russian poet Osip Mandelstam in "Mandelshtam and Dante: The Russian Connection". Titus

informs us that the first Russian translation of the *Commedia* was undertaken by Pavel Alexandrovich Katenin, with Mikhail Lozinsky later producing a version in *terza rima.* For the poets of Russia's Silver Age, the influence of Dante is undisputed.

Employing a close reading approach, the author presents a revealing analysis of Mandelstam's essay, "Conversation about Dante", published circa 1933, in which Mandelstam, who was under Stalinist persecution at the time, presents critical and futurist observations of the *Commedia* with insights on its poetic voice and form. The Russian poet regarded Dante as "the greatest, the unrivaled master of transmutable and convertible poetic material" and, according to Titus, he approached the text "through the prism of his own artistic beliefs as a poet". Widening his purview in the essay, Mandelstam also shared dynamic perceptions about poetry, art and philology.

Both Dante and Mandelstam experienced political exile, with Mandelstam dying in exile in Voronezh where he composed poems that took inspiration from Dante's work. The article analyses a selection of Mandelstam's poetic compositions that reveal the direct references to the *Commedia* so admired by Mandelstam, as Titus explains: "Dante was able to combine organically his imagery and its phonetic and syntactic expression". Thus Mandelstam identified in Dante's *Commedia* an "organic unity".

In "Dante e Matelda nell'*Eden* perduto", Marcella Di Franco undertakes a detailed analysis of Dante's encounter with the enigmatic figure of Matelda in the Earthly Paradise. Over the centuries, critical commentary has assigned multiple symbolic functions to this figure who serves as an intermediary between the final phase of Virgil's guiding role in the *Purgatorio* and Beatrice's assignment as principal guide during the ascent to the heavenly spheres.

Tracing the allegorical significance of Matelda, who is located in the place of primordial happiness, Di Franco asserts the metaphorical primacy of Dante's journey into the otherworldly realm as an exemplum of the 'itinerarium mentis in Deum'. As the Pilgrim ascends the cornices of the mountain, he is undergoing an inner transformation and expiation, wherein the journey of self-discovery commences from the place where 'la diritta via era smarrita', in order to arrive at a condition of spiritual growth in the 'lumen gratiae'.

The radiant Matelda, ever-graceful and in constant motion, is depicted as a less austere figure than Beatrice and as an allegorical representation of the active life. Though speculating on her historical identity, which has never been proven definitively, for Di Franco the historical identification of Matelda is not granted prominence and the central focus is on Matelda's connection with a state of innocence and perfect inner harmony.

Matelda serves to effect the important *transitus* for the Pilgrim from the Terrestrial Paradise to the celestial realm in order to enable and complete his divinely-

ordained mission on behalf of the living. The author evokes the idyllic nature of the Terrestrial Paradise and its perfect harmony as a place from which Dante will commence his transhumanised journey to the heavenly rose and conclude his journey with a vision of God.

Emma Louise Barlow investigates the theme of suicide, as developed by Dante in the Wood of the Suicides in *Inferno* 13, and the subsequent reconceptualisation of suicide by writers during the Italian Renaissance in her article, "'scuri boschi, in luoghi strani e inculti': The Literary Afterlives of Dante's Wood of the Suicides in the Italian Renaissance". As Barlow observes, although this legacy has not been widely explored in the corpus of literary endeavour and commentary, nevertheless it occupies a significant place:

> The scope of the implementation of Dante's peripheral sylvan geography of suicide in later narratives of the Italian tradition is testament to the enduring power of the symbols Dante has created in exploring the concept of suicide.

Barlow's critical analysis of the 'arboreal imaginary of suicide' and Dante's specific use of metaphors and images associated with the Suicides in *Inferno* 13 considers the engagement of the literary Italian Renaissance (from Boccaccio up to Epicuro's *La Mirzia* of 1528), with Dante's symbols in the Seventh Circle, such as the sterile woods and the gnarled, hybrid figures who are tormented by the Harpies and inhabit its dark recesses. The Renaissance writers of prose and poetry demonstrate the ways in which these nuanced symbols and images are open to transformative elements. As Barlow comments:

> for later writers in the Italian tradition, the forest and the hybrid figures often become more general symbols that can be used to hint to the reader that a character is about to meet an untimely end, or can be transformed into didactic tools that present an even stronger message regarding the perils of suicide to one's soul.

The author also discusses ways in which the creation of more productive dialogues and narratives about the taboos, literary depictions and complexities of suicide could assist in addressing and even dissolving those taboos.

Flinders University **Diana Glenn**
Emeritus Professor of Italian