

Petrarch pretends to show might be a consequence of his pain and torment for how disappointing his son had been in life, dying young before he could experience a real behavior change, a “mutatio in melius”. Otherwise, this pain, as a philosophical and universal issue, finds space in the dialogical treatise *De Remediis* (II 44); Chines’s investigation, from this standpoint, is summed up with a few final considerations on the importance, for Petrarch and Boccaccio, of focusing the reader’s attention and critical inquiry on multiple issues, looking at the two poets and their texts as a complex system: on the one hand, their entire poetical production and, on the other, their *modus operandi*, their *habitus* as readers themselves, interpreters, editors, and scholars.

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In the year that marks the 700th anniversary of the death of Dante, Fulvio Conti dedicates an exhaustive volume to “the way in which Dante has been used, through the last three centuries, to decline the identity of the nation” (14). From the “revival” of Dante, that dates to the end of the XVIII century, to the “public use” of him in later times, Conti traces a recent his-

tory of the celebration of a figure that more than any other permeates the Italian imagination. Conti begins his journey through the interpretations and uses of Dante at the end of the XVIII century, when the canon of the four Italian poets — Dante, Petrarca, Ariosto and Tasso — is defined. The aversion to Dante at the beginning of the century (one that has its roots in a more general aversion to the poetry and identifies its exception in Giambattista Vico) gives way to a new feeling of admiration for the poet destined to grow in the following century. This change of course is strictly linked to the new political horizons that introduce the Risorgimento. In this context Dante gives voice to new demands and embodies a new civil idea of literature. It is in this period that the poet's tomb is erected in Ravenna in neo-classical style, between 1780 and 1781, and that, in the nineteenth century, will be visited by poets such as Byron and Shelley.

Conti highlights how this renewed celebratory interest in Dante is due to Alfieri and Monti, as Ugo Foscolo, the champion of the rediscovery of the poet, states in the *Discorso sul testo della Commedia di Dante*, published in London in 1825. At the beginning of the century, the author of the *Sepolcri* introduces an interpretation of the figure of Dante, strongly connoted in a political sense, that will influence future interpretations over the century. In this poem, and later in his English essays dedicated to the poet, Dante is the “ghibellin fuggiasco”, in reference to the poet's opposition of excessive papal power. The legacy of Foscolo that encouraged the “process of iconization of Dante as father of the homeland” (26), is carried out by Mazzini, firstly through the article *Dell'amor patrio di Dante*, written in 1827, and, later, through the edition of the *Commedia* with comments by Foscolo.

Throughout the XVIII century a reading of the figure of Dante as a prophet is also affirmed, from Madame de Stael, who defines him as “Homer of modern times” in the novel *Corinne ou l'Italie*, to Byron, whose 1821 poem *The Prophecy of Dante* examines the description of the history of the XIV century made by Dante as an omen of the decline of Italy. Between 1802 and 1803 the debate over the monument that should have celebrated the poet unveiled in Florence. The first project for the statue destined for Piazza Santa Croce, conceived by Luigi de Cambray Digny, was soon abandoned, then resumed again in 1818 — when, for the occasion, Giacomo Leopardi wrote the poem *Sopra il monumento di Dante che si preparava in Firenze* — and finally realized in 1830.

The period of Dante's revival culminates with the celebrations of 1865 that have their dress rehearsal in those made the previous year in Pisa for Galileo but that, differently from these, assume a national connotation, representing the first great celebration of the Kingdom of Italy. In concert,

moreover, with the organization of the sixth centenary of Dante's birth, a debate over the monument that should have been dedicated to the poet results in Enrico Pazzi's 1865 Statue of Dante Alighieri. First conceived for a site in Ravenna, the statue is located in Piazza Santa Croce, a choice that represents both the sign of espionage by the Florentines for the exile inflicted on the poet and the introduction to the Basilica di Santa Croce, which was seen as temple of Italian glories (57).

The organization of the celebration immediately juxtaposed those who intended to keep it in the footsteps of tradition and those who deemed it appropriate to open it to a wider audience. The three days dedicated to the celebration in Florence registered wide participation. On the one hand, the 1865 celebration of the figure of Dante intertwined with the aspiration of the completion of the national unification and confirmed the consecration of the poet as symbol. On the other hand, the event also reopened the Florentines' attempt to bring the ashes of the poet back from Ravenna. This request, however, was denied: only years later, during the works on the area around the tomb, a wooden box holding *Dantis Ossa* was discovered.

The celebrations of 1865 represent a milestone in the fortune of the public use of the figure of Dante, which continued with vigor in the following decades, between the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. Thus, Dante was confirmed as an icon of national identity. In those same decades Dante societies were born: the Deutsche Dante-Gellschaft was founded in 1865, the Oxford Dante Society was founded in 1876, the Dante Society of America followed in 1880, chaired by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, translator of the *Commedia*, and the Società Dantesca Italiana was founded in Florence in 1888 and boasted such founders as Ruggero Bonghi, Cesare Cantù, Giosuè Carducci, Alessandro D'Ancona e Angelo De Gubernatis and Pasquale Villari. Since the beginning the Società dantesca was dedicated to supporting work on the critical edition of the *Commedia*, the publication of the "Bullettino", a journal dedicated to Dante studies, and the institution of the *Lectura Dantis*, first held in April 1899 by Guido Mazzoni that underlined "the link between the cult of Dante and myth of the Risorgimento" (82).

In this context the importance assumed by Dante's celebrations is highlighted by private initiatives within the residences of those who were fascinated by the figure of the poet. Conti mentions the case of the Count Gian Giacomo Poldi Pezzoli who commissioned to Giuseppe Bertini a reduced version of the stained-glass window *Il trionfo di Dante* (*The Triumph of Dante*) that the artist had presented at the Great Universal Exhibition of London in 1851, destined for the Studiolo dantesco of his Milanese palace. The realization of the Studiolo dantesco, that takes place between

1853 and 1856, refers to the patriotic sentiment that marks the path of the Count that had participated in the Risorgimento. As Conti points out, the use of the figure of Dante in a more popular way begins in this phase. An example of this is represented by the edition of the *Commedia* known as the “Dantino”, published in Milan, and the illustrations of the *Commedia* by Gustave Doré on a collection of matchboxes, commissioned by the industrialist Luigi Baschiera of Venice to the lithographic company of the Doyen brothers of Turin. All these initiatives are part of the phenomenon that Conti calls “dantomania”, to which are also attributable the establishment of places dedicated to the celebration of the poet and the creation of monuments of him, such as those in Mantua, Naples, and Trento. The last one, in particular, realized in 1896 by the sculptor Cesare Zocchi, is linked to irredentism as the main supporter of the project was the irredentist Guglielmo Ranzi, who set up a promotion committee and raised a significant amount of money for the construction of the monument.

Between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the cult of Dante has its epicentre in Ravenna, where the congress of the Italian Dante Society is held in 1902, followed in 1908 by a ceremony, distinguished by religious elements. In the same period, Conti underlines, despite the critics of the avant-garde towards the phenomenon of the “dantismo”, both popular cult and philological research mark the path of the fortune of Dante. And in 1911, the highly successful film *L'Inferno* with scenes inspired by Gustave Doré's illustrations and the short-movie with the same title were screened. The other important stage was the sixth centenary of 1921, which, as Conti points out, saw greater government participation than the celebrations of 1865 and was based on a restoration plan involving the towns linked to the poet but that identified Ravenna as the central site. These celebrations were also characterized by the participation of the Catholic world, which set up a committee in Ravenna devoted to the publication of a bulletin.

Many initiatives were organized for the sixth centenary both in Italy, such as the two films, both made in 1921 — the first, conceived by the entrepreneur Giovanni Montalbano, focused on Dante's life (*Dante nella vita e nei tempi suoi*) and the second, entitled *La mirabile visione*, that was ultimately withdrawn — and abroad, particularly in the United States, where the architect Bel Geddes conceived the idea of a theatre devoted to performances of the *Commedia*, a project known as the Divine Comedy Theater. But the project that saw the light of day was the creation of a statue dedicated to the poet and erected in Manhattan.

But there is another significant step linked to the 1921 celebrations and that is the recognition of Dante's mortal remains by two important anthro-

pologists, Professor Giuseppe Sergi and Professor Fabio Frassetto. Frassetto's publication of the work *Dantis Ossa* and his collaboration with the sculptor Alfonso Borghesani Frassetto, who presented a bronze bust of the poet with his likeness according to the studies he had carried out, were essential contributions. The celebrations of 1921 confirm the figure of Dante as a symbol of national identity and anticipate its use by the Fascist regime. Mussolini, in fact, mentioned Dante several times in his speeches and several manifestations of the cult of Dante took place during that regime, including the inauguration of the Dante tribune in the National Central Library in Florence in 1929, which was to have housed Dante's memorabilia and an envelope containing the poet's ashes, later lost, and found in 1999 — and the construction of the Danteum, a temple dedicated to the poet, designed by Giuseppe Terragni but never realized.

The last part of the path outlined by Conti coincides with the second half of the 20th century, when Dante is confirmed as one of the symbols of the Italian cultural tradition and as a global icon, as highlighted by the choice of Dante's portrait for the 2 euros coin and the philatelic series dedicated to him. And it is with the global mobilization that took place on the occasion of the 1965 celebrations that Dante becomes a universal symbol. Committees for celebrations of Dante were set up in many countries all over the world. In New York and Lugano, for example, there exhibitions showing illustrations of the *Commedia* by Robert Rauschenberg and Salvador Dalí. Even the Church states the centrality of Dante within the Catholic world through the apostolic letter *Altissimi cantus*.

As demonstrated in the celebrations of 1965, there are many cases of the use of Dante's figure in a popular way. Dante inspires comedy (e.g., *L'Inferno di Topolino* and Go Nagai's *Commedia*), influences cinema (e.g., Ron Howard's *Inferno*, based on Dan Brown's novel), and even touches the industry of advertising (e.g., *Olio Dante*). In more recent years the public readings of the cantos of the *Commedia*, performed by Roberto Benigni, have also met with great success, a sign of a global recognition that has recently culminated in the institution of a commemoration day, the *Dantedì*, set for 25 March.

Through his volume Conti highlights how the cult of Dante, which spans the centuries, is deeply affected by the historical and political context of Italy and how, moreover, in all eras, Dante succeeds in being a paramount cultural reference subject to a virtually infinite range of readings.

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