

INTRODUCTION
MISSILES FOR THE FUTURE: DANTE AND DH

ELIZABETH COGGESHALL, Florida State University
AKASH KUMAR, University of California, Berkeley

We are delighted to introduce this cluster of articles and notes that explore the intersection between Dante and digital humanities. The idea for the cluster was initially presented to us by the Italian editors of the nascent journal *Aldus 2.0* as a way to commemorate the seventh centenary of Dante's death. While that collaboration did not work out, we are grateful to the editors for their forward-thinking vision and especially grateful to *Bibliotheca Dantesca* for generously providing us with a new venue. This background represents the risks and rewards of digital work: it pushes the envelope; requires incredible amounts of coordination, labor, and institutional support; and sometimes may well lead to projects and initiatives that do not pan out. Yet, the digital urges us to innovate, to reconfigure our long-held habits of mind and approaches to our field. It asks us to embrace Osip Mandelstam's vision of Dante's cantos as "missiles for capturing the future."

For our part, we have both been engaged in digital work for some years now, respectively focusing on Columbia University's [*Digital Dante*](#) and the cross-institutional collaborative endeavor [*Dante Today*](#), now hosted by Johns Hopkins University. We have cultivated an awareness of how the intersection of Dante and the digital can lend itself to new research, pedagogy, and a public face for Dante studies that serves to move us beyond the traditional confines of the academy.

The contributions here gathered represent a full range of approaches, meditations, and methodologies that innovate considerably on the existing landscape while also showing a keen awareness of the long-standing relationship between Dante and the digital world. Indeed, as we might see in Danielle Callegari's note, this history of engagement stretches back to the digitizing of commentaries in the [*Dartmouth Dante Project*](#) in 1988. As she reflects, this venerable age does not point to obsolescence but rather to a tradition of inclusivity made all the more global and accessible because of its simple interface and gathering of continually useful

commentaries that demonstrate a still vibrant approach to reading the *Commedia*.

Along these lines, we showcase essays that embrace traditional approaches with the verve and vitality that is empowered by the digital. In the first contribution, Jacob Blakesley insightfully applies distant reading methods and analyzes data sets with regard to translations of Dante across the globe, in order to nuance oft-repeated claims of Dante as a world author. Blakesley's qualification of this global readership offers up an important opportunity to reflect on the ideal of digital humanities to democratize knowledge and welcome more people in to the "big tent" that the digital can provide.

The welcoming impulse of digital methodologies animates Laura Ingallinella's essay, which describes her innovative pedagogical project *WikiDante*. Ingallinella's project empowers students to intervene in the space of Wikipedia with focus on gender, and her teaching of students to cite, edit, and create with integrity makes for vital participation in a very public-facing digital resource. It is a collaborative enterprise that represents the best of digital humanistic practices.

Yet, digital resources are not equally shared and access is by no means possible everywhere. Much like the field of DH work, Dante studies has struggled with this ideal, as a field that is open to innovative and interdisciplinary approaches, yet notoriously insular and resistant to change. In this regard, it is salutary to take a step back and consider the view, as Matteo Maselli does in conceiving his project *Database Allegorico Dantesco* within the larger confines of the many Dante projects on the web and combining philological acumen with best practices of access and rigor in digital humanities.

In a similarly rigorous vein, Julie Van Peteghem takes up the intertextual relationship between Dante and Ovid in [Intertextual Dante](#). Van Peteghem uses the digital to craft a resource that dynamically visualizes intertextuality and empowers its user to make their own connections across two bodies of poetry. The interventions of Maselli and Van Peteghem are both theoretical and pragmatic, historically contextualized and oriented toward creating resources that serve the neophyte and refined reader alike.

Empowerment and access, indeed, emerge as a connective thread between the preceding projects and Elizabeth Coggeshall's intervention on crowdsourcing and Dante's global cultural heritage. Stemming from her work on [Dante Today](#) and returning to the central question of Blakesley's contribution, Coggeshall's essay interrogates the limits of the digital to fulfill its democratizing promise, mindful of the publics that are called in and those that remain at the margins.

As new publics and new configurations of collaborative research are established, we are confident that Dante and digital humanities will remain tied together in the best of ways. This is not just a matter of creating resources, but also enlivening conversations across disciplinary and hierarchical boundaries. This cluster shows how it is possible to form new perspectives on Dante's global presence, on gender and marginalization, on intertextuality and allegory, on cross-cultural and transmedia adaptations through the digital. We are confident that these and other contributions to come will continue to aim Dante's missiles to capture the future beyond.