Lectern and Pulpit: The Continuous Appeal of the Commedia's Public Exposition and Dante's Religious Reception before the Sixteenth Century

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In the past, some Dante scholars claimed the *Lectura Dantis* was a short-lived, mostly Florentine affair; the following study demonstrates this to be an inaccurate assessment. Moreover, it suggests the *Lectura Dantis* should be examined as only one manifestation of a multi-faceted public interest in the explication of the *Comedy*. It contends that to understand public interest in such expositions, one must analyze them within the context of Dante's religious reception. The apparent decline in the *Lectura Dantis* in the early fifteenth century, rather than denoting fading interest, demonstrates the *sommo poeta*'s growing association with theology. Dante may have become less relevant for the humanists in the faculty of rhetoric at that time, but he gained a faithful following among theologians and preachers. Indeed, this study demonstrates that during the humanist shift, when ecclesiastics took the baton of the *lectura*, the line between *Lectura Dantis* and sermon blurred. While earlier fourteenth-century preachers quoting Dante as an exemplum or even as an authority are not unheard of, in the early fifteenth century, a new kind of Dantean sermon appears, more heavily reliant on Dante's text, making the *Commedia* the focal point of its argument and even digressing on the *Commedia*'s commentary tradition. The academic *lectura* did not disappear in the early fifteenth century; instead, it evolved and permeated homiletics to serve a religious purpose. Indeed, one cannot understand the continuous appeal of public explication of the *Comedy* without noting that contemporary Italians used Dantean and Pseudo-Dantean texts as sources for theological edification and in their devotional exercises. The continuous demand for public explication of the *Commedia* cannot be severed from the public's conception of Dante's text as more than mere literature.

Keywords: *Lectura Dantis*, Reception Studies, Homiletics, Sermons, Preaching

Introduction

As early as the 1360s, academics such as the humanist Pietro da Moglio (died c.1383) in Bologna and Nofri di Giovanni da

Poggitazzi in Siena lectured on Dante's work between 1369 and 1371.[1] However, they focused on Dante's Latin works, not his *sacrato poema*. In 1373 the first petition for public reading and explication of Dante's vernacular masterpiece was famously made in Florence. This was the inauguration of the practice that would later receive the name *lectura Dantis*. Thus, in October of 1373, the relatively new University of Florence became the first institution to establish a chair of poetry and provide professional lectures on the *Commedia*, with the famed Giovanni Boccaccio as the first *lector*.[2] Hence, the study of Dante's oeuvre received a unique parallel academic venue for a while, contiguous to the official rhetorical curriculum that remained deeply rooted in the classical Latin authors.[3]

Some modern scholars assert that the practice of *lectura Dantis* was sporadic at best and that as early as the late-fourteenth century it fizzled out of existence, arguing that it was, for the most part, a Florentine phenomenon and even that the consensus around Dante was crumbling with the rise of humanism.[4]

The following study will demonstrate that such claims misrepresent the continuous interest in the public explication of the *Commedia* by myopically focusing on official academic lecturers and partially ignoring non-lay lecturers. It will demonstrate how although the frequency of Dante lectures fluctuated and the identity of the speakers changed, public explication of the *Commedia* was a relatively continuous phenomenon from the 1360s to the late fifteenth century. This study will further claim that a shift in Dante lectureship from secular to ecclesiastical hands in the late-

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[1] On Pietro da Moglio, see Paul F. Grendler, *The Universities of the Italian Renaissance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 203. On Nofri's teaching, see Robert Black, *Education and Society in Florentine Tuscany: Teachers, Pupils and Schools, C. 1250-1500* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 81; Paul F. Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy: Literacy and Learning 1300-1600* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 19; Cf. Paolo Nardi, "Appunti sul maestri e gli studi giovanili di San Bernardino da Siena," *Annuario dell'Istituto Storico Diocesano di Siena* I (1992-1993): 204-6. The correction of Nofri's usual *agnomen* "da Siena" to the little-known town of Poggitazzi is in Robert Black, *Humanism and Education in Medieval and Renaissance Italy: Tradition and Innovation in Latin Schools from the Twelfth to the Fifteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 202.

[2] Hastings Rashdall, *The Universities of Europe in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), 2:50.

[3] By the close of the century the *lectura Dantis* was subsumed under "rhetoric and poetry."

[4] Grendler for example produces a partial list of non-Florentine lectures, as well as a partial list of Florentine ones to demonstrate this point. Grendler, *The Universities of the Italian Renaissance*, 203-4; Michael Caesar, ed., *Dante: The Critical Heritage 1314(?)-1870* (London: Routledge, 1989), 9.

fourteenth century, rather than denoting a decline in interest, demonstrates the *sommo poeta's* growing association with theology. This shift will also be interpreted as part of Dante's larger religious reception, specifically within homiletics, catechismal practices, and devotional exercises.

Frequency of the Lectura Dantis

Even if one counts only non-Florentine Dante lectureships, while keeping in mind that data on some *lecturae* may have been lost, one finds a not inconsiderable list of well-documented events.[5] The first proto-*lectura* attested to is Pietro Alighieri's presentation of his summary of the *Commedia* at Verona's Piazza delle Erbe in the late 1340s.[6] Benvenuto da Imola lectured on Dante in Bologna and Ferrara (1375-83); Scuaro de' Broaspini gave a *lectura Dantis* in Verona (1380); Nofri di Giovanni da Poggitazzi also lectured on the *Commedia* in Colle Val d'Elsa (1382), and more than a decade later in Pistoia (1394);[7] Francesco da Buti lectured on Dante in Bologna in 1385; Blasio da Bologna, a teacher of rhetoric, gave a *lectura Dantis* in the same city during the holidays between 1395 and 1396, and Giovanni di Ser Buccio da Spoleto[8] lectured on Dante in 1396 at the University of Siena, perhaps until 1445.[9] According to Rashdall, Gian Galeazzo Visconti changed the curriculum of the

[5] The following list is based on Grendler's partial one, which lists only four *lectores*, complementing it with at least six other lectureships described in Black, Parker, Gilson, Rashdall, Giani, Piana and Grendler himself. See Grendler, *The Universities of the Italian Renaissance*, 203-4; Black, *Education and Society*, 81; Deborah Parker, *Commentary and Ideology: Dante in the Renaissance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 173n13; Simon A. Gilson, *Dante and Renaissance Florence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 53; Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy*, 19; Rashdall, *The Universities of Europe*, 2:37-38; Giulio Giani, "Un lettore di Dante in Prato nel Quattrocento, notizie su Bartolomeo Nerucci", in *Archivio storico pratese* IV (1921): 27; Pier Giorgio Ricci, "Filelfo, Giovanni Mario," in *Enciclopedia Dantesca* [from now on *ED*] (Milan: Mondadori, 2005), 9:81; Celestino Piana, *La facoltà teologica dell'università di Firenze nel quattro e cinquecento* (Rome: Grottaferrata, 1977), 205.

[6] This event was documented in a poem by Moggio Moggi (c.1330-1388) to Pietro. See Moggio Moggi, *Carmi ed epistole*, ed. Paolo Garbini (Padua: Antenore, 1996), xix-xx, 20-8.

[7] See also Agostino Zanelli, *Del pubblico insegnamento in Pistoia dal XIV al XVI secolo* (Rome: Loescher, 1900).

[8] Also known as Giovanni di Ser *Duccio* da Spoleto, and di Ser Bucci da Spoleto, see Cesare Federico Goffis, "Giovanni di ser Buccio da Spoleto" in *ED*, 9:544-5.

[9] On the Sienese lectura, see also Pietro Rossi, *La "Lectura Dantis" nello studio senese e Giovanni da Spoleto maestro di rettorica e lettore della Divina Commedia (1396-1445)* (Turin: Fratelli Bucca, 1898) 1-20.

University of Piacenza in 1398 to include the study of Dante. However, how long these new lectures endured is unknown. Filippo da Reggio taught Dante at the University of Pavia (then at Piacenza) between 1399 and 1400, in 1418 the Veneranda Fabbrica building the Milanese duomo hired an unknown person to lecture on Dante in an effort to raise money for the building,[10] and Bartolomeo di Piero Nerucci da San Gimignano was a teacher of grammar in Prato who gave Dante lectures there in 1434.

In a letter from 1459, the humanist Guinforte Barzizza (1406-1463) related how a student of medicine from Ferrara lectured on the *Commedia* as part of the entertainment provided by Galeazzo Maria Sforza to the visiting Pope Pius II. This testimony demonstrates how *lecturae Dantis* in non-academic civic venues sometimes left little to no paper trail to follow. Barzizza's note also validates that by 1459 the oral exposition of Dante's text was considered appropriate courtly entertainment for a visiting pope.[11] Finally, Giovanni Mario Filelfo (1426-1480), son of the famous humanist and *lector Dantis* Francesco Filelfo (1398-1481), gave regular *lecturae Dantis* during religious holidays in Verona from 1467.

Documentation of the *lectura* outside of Florence focuses on lay lectors. Yet, as we shall see, the appeal of public expositions on the *Commedia* did not wane as the fifteenth century progressed but changed venues in the first quarter of the fifteenth century. The better documented *lectura Dantis* of Florence provides us with richer data on the evolutions of Dante's lectureship. Grendler lists five *lectores* set in six tenures: Boccaccio (1373-1374), Giovanni Malpaghini da Ravenna (1412-1423), Giovanni Gherardi da Prato (1st tenure, 1415-1426; 2nd tenure 1429-1446), Francesco Filelfo (1431-1433), and a "Dominican friar" who "held the post in the early 1440s, but it [the *lectura*] then disappears for good."[12] This list supposedly demonstrates not only how short-lived this practice was but also that there was a rather long vacancy in the *lecturae* between 1375 and 1411. There are several problems with this account.

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[10] Milan, Archivio della Veneranda Fabbrica del Duomo di Milano, reg. 132 (Liber Dati et Recepti 1418): "*Item quos die s(uprascrip)to recepit a civib(us) M(edio)l(an)i qui audiunt lecturam Dantis sup(er) salla magna sita in Camposancto Fab(ric)e, oblatos p(ro) fatien(d)o fieri scalas et transv(er)su(m) sup(er) d(i)c(t)a salla.*"

[11] On this note in his letter, see Adriano Cappelli, "Guiniforte Barzizza maestro di Galeazzo Maria Sforza" in *Archivio Storico Lombardo: Giornale della società storica lombarda* (1894 giugno, Serie 3, Volume 1, Fascicolo 2), 425.

[12] Grendler, *The Universities of the Italian Renaissance*, 204.

A study of the documents of the Florentine *studium generale* reveals that sometimes the scribes elected not to enter the *lectura* explicitly in the registry. Confusingly, they sometimes subsumed it under "rhetoric and poetry." Thus, for example, the documents covering 1320 to 1472 note that Giovanni Malpaghini da Ravenna began teaching "rhetoric, history, moral philosophy, and poetry" in 1397, a tenure that lasted till 1400 and was renewed again in 1402 and many more times up to 1423.[13] However, it is only the entry describing the tenure of 1412 that reveals that "*up to this day, for several years…* he sometimes [taught] the book of Dante,"[14] and only the entry of the 1417 tenure explains Malpaghini "mostly taught Dante" during feast days alongside his teaching of rhetoric.[15] Without this second explicit entry referring back to his past responsibilities decades earlier, a modern scholar might have thought that the first tenure, dubbed "rhetoric," did not include the teaching of the *Commedia* at all. The importance of this habit of lax documentation cannot be stressed enough. Again and again, as will be explained anon, we find *lecturae* that are not marked in the statutes of the university explicitly documented in the fiscal record. One cannot prove the existence of lectureships beyond the extant record. Yet, at the same time, given the lax record-keeping, one is left to wonder how many of these events were not documented as such in the first place and thus will forever elude researchers.

Another issue when reconstructing the list of Dante lectures is that not all *lecturae* were formal university business. As with the case of Barzizza's report, sometimes external testimonies by contemporaries attest to lecturers not mentioned in the extant academic lists, both fiscal and statutes. If one were to modify the abovementioned partial list, fixing the dates and adding omitted lectores, it would become evident that the *lectura Dantis* was quite regular and hardly disappeared in the early 1440s. Rather than five *lectores,* we find ten (or perhaps even twelve); rather than six tenures, we have fourteen tenures (or maybe sixteen if one counts two events that may have been held outside of Florence).

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[13] Alessandro Gherardi and Carlo Morelli, *Statuti dell'Università e studio fiorentino dell'anno MCCCLXXXVII seguiti da un'appendice di documenti dal MCCCXX al MCCCCLXXII* (Florence: M. Cellini, 1881), 369, 377.

[14] The entry of 1412 (no. 127) reads: "hactenus in civitate Florentie pluribus annis legerit et diligentissime docuerit Rethoricam et Autores maiores, et aliquando librum Dantis." See, Gherardi-Morelli, *Statuti*, 388.

[15] The entry of 1417 (no. 133) reads: "rectoricham ac etiam de Auctoricus maioribus, prout sibi videbitur utilius. Et insuper etiam librum Dantis, quem legat diebus festivis." See, Gherardi-Morelli, *Statuti*, 393.

A corrected list would start with Boccaccio (1373-1374), followed by the Franciscan Antonio Piovano da Firenze, who gave a *lectura Dantis* in 1381,[16] and Filippo Villani who lectured between 1391 and 1405.[17] After a short hiatus, the tradition becomes relatively continuous. As noted above, Giovanni Malpaghini da Ravenna lectured on Dante between 1397 and 1403.[18] If the Franciscan Bishop Giovanni Bertoldi da Serravalle's lectureship of 1406 was held in Florence, then it preceded Malpaghini's second lectureship (1412-23).[19] Giovanni Gherardi da Prato's first lectureship (1415-1425) comes next,[20] followed by two tenures by the Franciscan theologian Antonio di Cipriano Neri d'Arezzo (1st tenure, 1429-30; 2nd tenure, 1432).[21] This lectureship again demonstrates the challenges of this field; there are no extant records in the statutes

[16] This lecture is not mentioned in the statutes of the university. It is attested in a sonnet of the Florentine poet Franco Sacchetti, which states Antonio Piovano da Firenze was an "excellent dantista and *lector Dantis*" (*eccellente dantista e lettore di esso Dante*) around 1381. This Antonio should not be confounded with the three other Franciscan *lectores Dantis* named Antonio, who operated many years later. See Luigi Berra, "Antonio da Firenze," in *Enciclopedia Cattolica,* 12 vols. (Vatican City: Ente per l'Enciclopedia Cattolica e per il Libro Cattolico, 1949-1954), 1:1543-1544. On the sonnet and Antonio's identification, see Francesco Saverio Quadrio, *Della storia e della ragione d'ogni poesia* (Milan: Francesco Agnelli, 1741), 2:192; Giovan Mario Crescimbeni, *Comentarj del canonico Gio. Mario Crescimbeni custode d'Arcadia, intorno alla sua istoria della Volgar Poesia* (Rome: Antonio de' Rossi alla Piazza di Ceri, 1710), 2:2:116.

[17] Umberto Marchesini, "Filippo Villani pubblico lettore," *Archivio Storico Italiano* 5, seria 16 (1895), 273-79; Gherardi-Morelli, *Statuti*, 382.

[18] Gherardi-Morelli, *Statuti*, 369, 388.

[19] Gherardi-Morelli, *Statuti*, 388, 393-4.

[20] The extant statutes of the *studium* only mention May 1417 as the beginning of Gherardi's tenure, a date repeated by the *Enciclopedia Dantesca* and Gilson. The fiscal record, provided by Park, clearly describes the *lectura Dantis* as beginning in either December of 1415 or January of 1416. Grendler, following the fiscal record, gives the dates 1415-1426, however since the tenure began around New Year's Day, it seems 1415-1425 would be the most accurate description of its timeframe. See Gherardi-Morelli, *Statuti*, 395-6; Pier Giorgio Ricci, "Gherardi, Giovanni," in *ED* 9:466; Gilson, *Dante and Renaissance Florence*, 76; Katharine Park, "The Readers at the Florentine Studio According to Communal Fiscal Records (1357-1380, 1413-1446)" *Rinascimento* 20 (1980), 206, 274; Grendler, *The Universities of the Italian Renaissance*, 204. Grendler states that "after a three year hiatus" Gherardi's lectureship "was renewed in 1429 as a holiday lectureship that lasted, with brief interruptions through 1446." I was unable to substantiate this claim. The statutes and fiscal record do not mention them. Gilson notes that Gherardi gave only one tenure before returning to Prato; see Gilson, *Dante and Renaissance Florence*, 76.

[21] This Antonio d'Arezzo, dean of the faculty of theology, should not be mixed with another Antonio di messer Giovanni Roselli d'Arezzo, who taught medicine and natural and moral philosophy contemporaneously to him, or with a third Antonio di messer Rosello Roselli d'Arezzo, who taught civic and canon law at the *studium* as well. See Gherardi-Morelli, *Statuti*, 402, 414, 441, Park, "The Readers at the Florentine Studio," 274-92.

mentioning Antonio d'Arezzo's *lectura* before 1432. Yet the fiscal record reveals he gave such lectures on feast days for two whole years between the academic years 1428/29 and 1429/1430.[22] This fact is further collaborated by an independent external source, a note in a contemporary manuscript mentioning Antonio's Dante lectures in 1430.[23]

Antonio d'Arezzo's lectureship was followed by the *lectura* of the famous anti-Medicean Francesco Filelfo (1431-1433),[24] which was paralleled and then followed by the many tenures of the secular priest and Medici partisan Lorenzo da Pisa (1st tenure, 1431; 2nd tenure 1434-1437; 3rd tenure 1442-1443, 1445).[25] The tenure of the "Dominican friar" (referring to the Dominican Girolamo di Giovanni), mentioned in Grendler, ought to be corrected from the early 1440s to the more accurate twelve-year period the friar lectured (1439-1451).[26] To this one needs to add the lectureship of

[22] Park, "The Readers at the Florentine Studio," 284, 286. For more on Antonio d'Arezzo's biography, see Piana, *La facoltà teologica*, 133-34, 249 n.15; Franco Mancini, "Antonio d'Arezzo" in *ED*, 1:309-10. Antonio's second tenure is attested to in Gherardi-Morelli, *Statuti*, 424.

[23] The external source is Florence, BRF, Riccardiano 1036 (O.I.5); first quarter of the 15th century, f. 179r. The author mentioning Antonio's 1430 lecturship is Meo (Bartolomeo) Ceffoni, who described a painting of Dante that was commissioned by Antonio d'Arezzo for the nave of Santa Maria del Fiore. For a full transcription of the text, see footnote 56. On Meo Ceffoni, see Saverio Bellomo, *Dizionario dei Commentatori Danteschi: L'Esegesi della Commedia da Iacopo Alighieri a Nidobeato* (Firenze: Olschki, 2004), 207-8.

[24] Even though the extant statutes give 1432 as the end of Filelfo's tenure and tell Filelfo only taught "rhetoric and poetry" in 1432, the fiscal record clarifies his term extended to 1433, and that all three years of his tenure included lectures on "Dante and moral philosophy." If one were to include years in which the record does not mention Dante explicitly, but only rhetoric, his tenure would begin as early as 1428. See Gherardi-Morelli, *Statuti*, 245, 424; Park, "The Readers at the Florentine Studio," 284-5, 287-8, 290. Some scholars claim Filelfo was replaced by Lorenzo da Pisa as early as 1432, but the fiscal record contradicts this opinion, see Pier Giorgio Ricci, "Filelfo, Francesco," in *ED*, 9:80; cf. Franco Mancini, "Antonio d'Arezzo," in *ED*, 5:477.

[25] The first tenure is documented in both statutes and fiscal records, however, only one year (1435) of the second tenure is mentioned in the statutes. Luckily the fiscal record reveals that the second tenure lasted four full years (1434-1437). The only extant source on the third tenure, lasting three years, is the fiscal record. See Gherardi-Morelli, *Statuti*, 415, 441; Park, "The Readers at the Florentine Studio," 292-295, 300-301, 303. For more on Lorenzo, see Giacomo Ferrau, "Lorenzo di Giovanni da Pisa," in *ED,* 10:602.

[26] Piana, *La facoltà teologica*, 136-7; 248-9; Stefano Orlandi O.P. *Necrologio di S. Maria Novella* (Florence: Olschki, 1955), 1:221-2; On Piana's and Venchi's dating of Girolamo's *lectura* using the payment registers of the *Studium*, see Innocenzo Venchi, "Girolamo di Giovanni," in *ED*, 9:571; Piana, *La facoltà teologica*, 248-9. Kaeppeli gives a slightly different date here as well: 30th of October 1439; Thomas Kaeppeli O.P., *Scriptores Ordinis Praedicatorum Medii Aevii*, vol. II (G-I) (Rome: S. Sabinae,

another Dominican, Domenico da Corella (1469-1470),[27] and possibly also that of the Franciscan Antonio de Marchia (1483).[28] Finally, the Dante course Cristoforo Landino taught around 1481 seals the list.[29]

The Shift of the Lectura Dantis: The Humanistic Challange

The most striking feature of this corrected list is the ever-growing number of lectors who are men of the cloth – with Landino as an exception to this trend. As Ricci noted, there seemed to be a shift in the responsibility for the Florentine *lectura Dantis*, from the faculty of rhetoric and ethics to the faculty of theology, from the hands of lay lectors to the hands of ecclesiastic ones.[30]

The shift in the academic *lectura Dantis* in the 1430s should be understood within the context of Dante's religious reception, separately from his intellectual, civic, and patriotic receptions. The latter receptions are beyond the scope of this contribution and are already superbly researched in previous studies, the most noteworthy of which are Simon Gilson's and Deborah Parker's.[31]

As the second half of the fourteenth century progressed and humanism was becoming increasingly in vogue with the intelligentsia, Dante's scholastic worldview, vernacularism, and poetics seemed to have become out fashioned and obsolete. By the end of the fourteenth century, the primacy of Latin was so great among humanists that even the elderly Boccaccio –Dante's greatest partisan in the fourteenth century– confessed Dante should have written

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1975), 248. See also Gherardi-Morelli, *Statuti*, 445; Park, "The Readers at the Florentine Studio," 297, 299, 303.

[27] On Domenico's lectureship, see Gherardi-Morelli, *Statuti*, 475-76; Orlandi, *Necrologio di SMN*, 1:189.

[28] The source on Antonio della Marchia is from the *Annales* of the Franciscan order, however these do not clarify whether this *lectura* was held in Florence or in Ravenna. Indeed, it may even be that it refers to a written glossary and not to an actual lecture, see Luca Waddingo Hiberno, *Annales Minorum seu Trium Ordinum A S. Francisco Institutorum – Tomus XIV (1472-1491)* (Florence: Ad Claras Aquas, 1933), 407.

[29] For more on this *lectura*, see Vittorio Rossi, "Dante nel Trecento e nel Quattrocento," in *Scritti di Critica Letteraria: saggi e discorsi su Dante* (Florence: Sansoni, 1930), 330; Carlo Dionisotti, "Landino, Cristoforo," in *ED*, 10:415.

[30] Pier Giorgio Ricci, "Domenico da Corella" in *ED*, 8:267. Ricci places the shift as late as 1439, explaining it as an effect of the concept of poet-theologian popular in the Lorenzo the Magnificent's Florence. His thesis does not explain how the roots of this phenomenon could exist long before the Medici came to power. A future study will analyze the difference between the Dante-theologian of the humanists and the dissimilar 'scholastic' Dante-*Theologus* of some ecclesiastic writers.

[31] Gilson, *Dante and Renaissance Florence,* passim, esp. 97-160; Parker, *Commentary and Ideology*, passim, esp. 50-88.

the *Commedia* in Latin and lamented his own choice to write his commentary in the vernacular.[32] Yet, as we shall see, even as Dante somewhat lost ground with humanists, his appeal to the general public was undiminished. The *Commedia* met the changing needs of both church and laity: Mendicants adopted it as a useful homiletic tool, and the unlearned laity found its accessible theological explanations beneficial. This cross-class popularity famously caused Petrarch to confess he did not envy Dante's popularity among lowly "fullers, innkeepers, wool merchants, and others."[33]

By the 1430s, humanist antagonism to Dante was peaking with the second generation of Coluccio Salutati's (1331-1406) students,[34] who agreed the *Commedia* was "a poem for cobblers and bakers," a poem that "ought to be given to apothecaries to be used as paper wrapping, or even better, to food-vendors to wrap their salted fish in it."[35] Yet, one ought to remember that such negative exclamations are part of a conscious move of humanists to establish their own authority over their predecessors, the medieval *auctoritates.* Indeed, such statements attest that Dante was counted among past giants like Thomas Aquinas, whom Niccolò de' Niccoli brazenly judged as lacking genius and culture.[36]

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[32] Boccaccio, *Inf.* Prologue: "*Non dico però che, se in versi latini fosse, non mutato il peso delle parole volgari, ch'egli non fosse più artificioso e più sublime molto, per ciò che molto più d'arte e di gravità ha nel parlare latino che nel materno*." See *Dante. The Critical Heritage*, Michael Caesar, ed. (London: Routledge, 1989), 12 [from now on *DtCH*]. On the discrediting of Dante in humanist circles regarding his understanding of language, see Gianfranco Folena, "Volgarizzare e tradurre" in *La traduzione, saggi e studi* (Trieste: LINT, 1973), 96-100. On the categorization of Dante within the Renaissance and Petrarch, see Eugenio Garin, "Dante nel Rinascimento," *Rinascimento,* 2ªs, VII (1967), 6-7.

[33] Francesco Petrarca, *Familiares* 21.15.22: "fullonum et cauponum et lanistarum ceterorum." Francesco Petrarca, "Epistola XV, Franciscus Petrarca Iohanni de Certaldo," in *Francisci Petrarchae Epistolae De rebus Familiaribus et variae*, ed. Giuseppe Fracassetti (Florence: le Monnier, 1863), 3:114.

[34] Gilson, *Dante and Renaissance Florence*, 60.

[35] The first quote is the famous barb of Niccolò de' Niccoli's (1364-1437) literary figure in Bruni's *Dialogi ad Petrum Histrum*. See Leonardo Bruni, "Ad Petrum Paulum Histrum," in *Prosatori latini del Quattrocento*, ed. Eugenio Garin (Milan: Ricciardi, 1952), 70. Cf. Parker, *Commentary and Ideology*, 53, 56, and 70; Rossi, "Dante nel Trecento e nel Quattrocento," 293-296. On the *Dialogi* and Niccoli's character's arguments, and on the character's relation with the historical Niccoli, see Gilson, *Dante and Renaissance Florence,* 83-85.The second quote is from a letter by the notary Domenico da Prato describing humanist preferences (c. 1389-c. 1433). The letter survived in Florence, BML, Pluteo 41, cod. 31, 1v: "et altri di loro dicono il libro di Dante ess(er) di(!) dare ad li spetiali(!) p(er) farne cartocci, o vero più tosto ad li piççicagnoli p(er) porvi dentro il pesce salato, p(er)ché vulgarmente scripse." It was published in a slightly modernized version in Giovanni da Prato, *Il Paradiso degli Alberti*, Alessandro Wesselofsky, ed. (Bologna: Gaetano Romagnoli, 1867), I.2, 322.

[36] Garin, "Dante nel Rinascimento," 15-16.

Parallel to such antagonism, there were other, more lenient, voices in the humanist camp, finding redeeming qualities in Dante's work.[37] Salutati referred to Dante as unparalleled in knowledge, an *auctor* worthy of a *lectura*. He utilized Dante's works authoritatively in his *De Tyranno* (c. 1400).[38] Poggio Bracciolini (1380-1459) noted in his *De infelicitate principum* (1440) that "Dante, if he had only written his book in Latin, would not have been inferior to the ancient poets in anything."[39] Only in the late fifteenth century did humanists finally somewhat revise their antiquarian antagonism to Dante's vernacular and medieval thinking as the patriotic importance of the Florentine dialect grew. It was this civic change that brought about Cristoforo Landino's late lectureship mentioned earlier.[40]

Caesar's statement that "by the middle of the fourteenth century, the consensus… around Dante is crumbling"[41] is evidently misleading. Humanism did not significantly hamper Dante's reception as its criticism was impeded by undercurrents of nascent patriotic zeal and by Dante's religious reception. Only at the close of the sixteenth century would Dante lose some of his readerships, with the seventeenth century being the first to see no significant *Commedia* commentary produced. In the fifteenth century, the consensus around Dante was still relatively stable. Dante may have been less trendy with the humanist intelligentsia but not necessarily so with most of his readership.[42]

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[37] Cf. *DtCH*, 18-20; Gilson, *Dante and Renaissance Florence*, 4; Rossi, "Dante nel Trecento e nel Quattrocento," 306.

[38] Salutati, *Epistle* 3.84; For examples and an explication of Salutati's positive appraisal of Dante, despite his vernacular choices, see Gilson, *Dante and Renaissance Florence*, 56-69; Carlo Dionisotti, "Salutati, Coluccio," in *ED,* 14:173-4; Garin, "Dante nel Rinascimento," passim, esp. 11-3; Leon Jacobowitz-Efron, *Dante Alighieri the Secular Theologian: Reception, Authority and Subversion 1320-1483* (Unpublished Ph.D. diss. Tel-Aviv University, Israel, 2010), 144, 166-8.

[39] Poggio Bracciolini, *De infelicitate principum*, ed. Davide Canfora (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1998), 40; see also Rossi, "Dante nel Trecento e nel Quattrocento," 306.

[40] More than half a century after Landino, in the 1540s, a revival of public lectures on the *Commedia* took place, but this is beyond the timeframe of the present study. See, Anna Pegoretti, "Early Reception until 1481" in *The Cambridge Companion to Dante's 'Commedia,'* Zygmunt Guido Barański and Simon Gilson, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 253.

[41] *DtCH*, 9.

[42] Indeed, Caesar himself writes shortly after that "a new spate of commentaries and *lecturae* during the last quarter of the fourteenth century point to a continuing interest in his work apparently undeterred by the alternative route mapped out for Italian culture by Petrarch and the humanists." *DtCH*, 14.

By constantly associating Dante's poem with the inferior tastes of cobblers, fullers, innkeepers, wool merchants, and bakers, humanist anti-Dantean rhetoric inadvertently establishes how widespread Dante's fame was among most Florentines. This love of Dante among the less learned *popolani* and *popolo minuto* is also attested to in the anecdotal stories of Franco Sacchetti, who famously described a blacksmith and a wagoner singing Dante's *Commedia* in the street.[43]

The statistics of Florentine library registries from this period concur. Dante as an author retained a respectable fifth place in popularity. The *Commedia* remained well-liked throughout the fifteenth century, especially among the merchant classes who profusely paraphrased it in their correspondences, and up to 1481 "demand for manuscript copies of the poem remained constant."[44] Thus, Dante's reception at that point was a dual reception – what Carducci termed "*la varia fortuna di Dante.*"[45] On the one hand, the intellectual milieu was uneven in its perception of the poet and less inclined to invest precious creative energy in Dante's 'outdated' poem. On the other hand, most of the population, from magnates to lowly cobblers, were still very much involved in Dante's classic and its interpretation.[46] Dante's 'fan base,' if one may use a modern colloquialism, was loyal and keen.

Since public Dante lectures were fueled by this continuous appeal to the inclusive multitudes, *not* necessarily to the exclusive intelligentsia, it is only natural that this practice would not wane even as the literati of the faculty of rhetoric and poetry became less involved in it. Instead of dying out, the *lectura Dantis* evolved to fill the novel requirements of a new age. Ecclesiastics, and specifically mendicant preachers with the Franciscans at the forefront of this trend, were always on the lookout for popular vernacular

[43] See Franco Sacchetti's *novelle* 114 and 115; Franco Sacchetti, *Il trecentonovelle*, ed. Valerio Marucci (Rome: Salerno Editore, 1996), 345-50; Rossi, "Dante nel Trecento e nel Quattrocento," 326.

[44] Statistics on Florentine libraries were gathered by Bec's monumental work, and are summarized in Parker and Caesar. See Christian Bec, *Les livres des Florentins (1413-1608)* (Florence: Olschki, 1984), 26-7, 33-4, 44-5, 49-50, 61-2; See also Christian Bec, *Les marchands écrivains: Affaires et humanisme à Florence 1375–1434* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1967), 394-6, 409-10; Parker, *Commentary and Ideology*, 125, 216-7 note 67; *DtCH*, 15. The quote is from Gilson, *Dante and Renaissance Florence*, 21.

[45] Giosuè Carducci, "Della Varia Fortuna di Dante," in *Studi Letterari* (Leghorn: Franu Vigo, 1880), 237-365.

[46] Most cobblers did not own books. However, library registries attest to the *Commedia's* cross-class popularity from the poorest book owners' collections to the bigger libraries of the magnates. See Bec, *Les marchands écrivains*, 409-410.

sources that could be utilized to convey moral points, and Dante's text was perfect for this purpose.

The Commedia as Spiritual Edification

As early as 1328, Bosone da Gubbio (died c. 1349) expressed the notion that the *Commedia* has a moral and religious value as an inspirational and didactic piece that "fortifies the Christian faith" (*fortificando la cristiana fede*).[47] Such notions are, in turn, based on the *Commedia's* claim to be of practical value to the world (*Purg.* 32.103-105: "*in pro del mondo*").[48] More importantly to our topic, the same purpose was expressed in the petition for the first *lectura Dantis* on 9 August 1373. The petition framed the new practice as motivated by a civic agenda, a public service to acculturate the Florentine citizens by exposing them to a linguistic model of vernacular eloquence. Yet, the petition also argued that the *lectura* has a spiritual dimension and purpose. The *Commedia* is said to be beneficial to "citizens aspiring to virtue" (*civibus aspirare desiderantibus ad virtutes*), those who are not literate in Latin and would like to "shun vice and acquire virtue" (*in fuga vitiorum, quam in acquisitione virtutum*).[49] Thus the reading of "il Dante," as the petitions call the *Commedia*, is framed in favorable virtuous terms, an association also evident in subsequent statutes for specific tenures, which refer to it as "the moral canti" (*cantillas morales*), or repeat the notion that its explication causes the audience to "seek after virtue and detest vice" (*capescendas virtutes et vitia detestenda*).[50] Thus the purpose of the *Commedia's* public oral

[47] For Bosone's text, see Carlo del Balzo, *Poesie di Mille Autori Intorno a Dante Alighieri*, vol. I. (Rome: Forzani, 1889), 394: "Adunque noti chi lui bene intende, / Che speculando queste cose vede, / Et cosí tucto il dicer suo si prende, / Fortificando la cristiana fede."

[48] Nicolò Maldina, *In pro del mondo: Dante, la predicazione e i generi della letteratura religiosa medievale* (Rome: Salerno, 2017), 31, 119 passim.

[49] Gherardi-Morelli, *Statuti*, 161-2: "Pro parte quamplurium civium civitatis Florentie desiderantium tam pro se ipsis, quam pro aliis civibus aspirare desiderantibus ad virtutes, quam etiam pro eorum posteris et descendentibus, instrui in libro Dantis, exquo tam in fuga vitiorum, quam in acquisitione virtutum, quam in ornatu eloquentie possunt etiam non grammatici informari; reverenter supplicatur vobis dominis Prioribus artium et Vexillifero Justitie populi et comunis Florentie…"

[50] The term "moral canti" is used in relation to Giovanni Gherardi's lectureship, see Gherardi-Morelli, *Statuti*, 404-5; the mention of virtue and vice is made in relation to Filippo Villani's lectureship, see *Utiliter edoceri: Atti inediti degli ufficiali dello Studio fiorentino (1391-96)*, Enrico Spagnesi ed., (Milan: Giuffré, 1979), 145; cf. the first petition's "fuga vitiorum, quam in acquisitione virtutum," in Gherardi-Morelli, *Statuti*, 161-2.

explication is similar to the preaching program of the mendicant orders as expressed in article nine of the *Regula Bullata*, which states that sermons are "for the utility and edification of the people, announcing to them the vices and virtues, punishment and glory with brevity of words" (*ad utilitatem et hedificationem populi, anuntiando eis vitia et virtutes, penam et gloriam cum brevitate sermonis*).[51]

Moreover, the medieval mindset and scholasticism expressed in the *Commedia*, which made it obsolete or repugnant to some humanists, made it relevant and valuable to the ecclesiastics and preachers at the faculty of theology. There is a rough correspondence between how long lay-secular Dante lectureship persisted in Italian academies (Florentine and non-Florentine alike) and how long humanism was held at bay from Italian academia. In Italy, a strong antagonism existed to changes in the curriculum of the universities. Thus, until 1425 the *studia humanitatis* were taught mainly at the pre-university level and entered the academic curriculum only in the late 1420s.[52]

Around the time humanism finally entered academia, lay-secular academic interest in the *Commedia* waned while ecclesiastic Dantean pursuit grew in earnest. Not only did the responsibility for reading Dante's "virtue-inspiring" text shift, as noted, from the faculty of rhetoric and poetry to the faculty of theology, but around this period, some preachers began utilizing the *Commedia* in novel ways, referencing it as a central element or even basing whole cycles on Dante's masterpiece.[53]

The Public's Dante: Pulpit as Lectern

Because churches served as community centers, it is no surprise that since Boccaccio's first *lectura Dantis* in the Badia Fiorentina, *lecturae* were usually held on hallowed ground. The religious ambiance of these lectures, coupled with the subject matter of the text,

[51] Francesco d'Assisi, *Scritti*, ed. Carlo Paolazzi (Grottaferrata: Biblioteca Francescana, 2009), 334. The similarity between the objectives of both *Commedia* and sermons was noted in Pietro Delcorno, "'Et ista sunt scripta Dantis': Predicare la *Commedia* in Quaresima," *Memorie Domenicane* 48 (2017): 130; Maldina, *In pro del mondo*, 49–60.

[52] Rashdall, *The Universities of Europe*, 1:265, 268; Grendler, *The Universities of the Italian Renaissance*, 205-14; Black, *Humanism and Education*, 202.

[53] Pietro Delcorno, "La *Commedia* nella predicazione dei frati minori (1365-1500)," in *Dante, Francesco e i frati minori, Atti del XLIX Convegno internazionale Assisi, 14-16 ottobre 2021* (Spoleto: Fondazione Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, 2022), 264.

the state of the souls after death, seemed to have contributed over time to the gradual association of Dante and his poem with the spiritual and to a calendrical change of the *lectura Dantis* as well. The original petition of 1373 clearly stated that the public reading of Dante should "*not* be made on feast days" (*diebus non feriatis*) and should be performed "on consecutive days" (*continuatis diebus… per continuatas lectiones*). They were akin to university courses open to the public rather than special celebrations on the civic calendar. By the close of the fourteenth century, many *lecturae* were becoming special events, and the demarcation between religious and civic function was being blurred. The ecclesiastics Antonio Piovano da Firenze (1381), Giovanni Bertoldi da Serravalle (1406), Antonio di Cipriano Neri d'Arezzo (1429-30; 1432), Lorenzo di Giovanni da Pisa (1431; 1434-1437; 1442-1443, 1445), Girolamo di Giovanni (1439-1451), Domenico da Corella (1469-1470) and Antonius de Marchia (1483) all gave their lectures specifically on major feast days (*diebus festivis*). Even non-ecclesiastics like Giovanni Mario Filelfo, who lectured on the *Commedia* in Verona (1467), did so specifically on feast days.

By the fifteenth century, the public readings of Dante's virtue-inspiring masterpiece became "courses in moral theology."[54] In direct contrast to the original petition's model, they were intentionally transformed into ecclesiastically sanctioned spectacles complementing the high liturgies of Easter and Christmas and, most of all, the Lenten services and sermon cycles.

When the academic authorities bestowed the title of *lector Dantis* on the Franciscan theologian Antonio d'Arezzo in 1432, mendicants already considered the position an accolade.[55] Brother Antonio also commissioned the first painting of Dante to be hung in Santa Maria del Fiore's nave. That painting, now lost, served as a kind of theatrical backdrop to the spectacle of the *lectura*.[56] The

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[54] Bert Roest, *A History of Franciscan Education (c. 1210-1517)* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 49 and 49n179. Cf. Piana, *La facoltà teologica*, 36, 133, 249.

[55] For the perception of the *Commedia* among Franciscans, see Mancini, "Antonio d'Arezzo," 5:477; Santa Casciani, *Dante and the Franciscans* (Leiden: Brill, 2006); Nicholas R. Havely *Dante and the Franciscans* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[56] For the description of the painting's commission and the text written on it, see Riccardiano 1036 (O.I.5), f. 179r.: "La Mano: 'Onorate l'altissimo Poeta che nostro è, e tienlosi Ravenna perchè di Lui non è che n'abbia pieta.' Dantti(!): 'Se l'alto posse, che dispone il tutto, fiorenza, volsse, che tti fosse luce, che del tuo ventre so' maturo frutto?' Il Vechio(!): 'O lasso vechio(!), ome q<u>anto(!) e chupito la tua virtù sì alta esser (ms. assar) famata, per dingno(!), sengno(!) nel fiorentte(!) sito ma or da' cieli, veggo (ms. vecho) nu(n)ziata mia giusta volia(!) en cielo redimito, ch'anchora in marmo la farà traslata.' Questi 13 verssi(!) q<u>i di sopra, sono q<u>elli, che ssono

portrait's presence in that sacred space made the "*lectura Dantis in ecclesia*" appear natural and permanent. When it was finally replaced by Domenico di Michelino's (1417-1491) painting in Dante's bicentenary (1465), the new depiction's use of saintly iconography further blurred the lines between the literary and the religious aspects of the *lectura*.

As noted before, in the last quarter of the fifteenth century, there was a re-emergence of interest in Dante in humanist cycles involved in the pursuit of a national vernacular.[57] Parallel to this renewed draw among secular intellectuals, the ecclesiastical *lecturae* disappeared. Yet this should not be interpreted as a sign of declining interest in the public explication of the *Commedia*. The *lectura Dantis*, the official publicly sponsored spectacle, was only one possible manifestation of communal interest in the *Commedia's* oral exposition. Although the official *lecturae* were no longer thought to be the proper site for considering the spiritual value of Dante's work, that value was continuously discussed elsewhere via a different conduit and in another format that of preaching. It is important to underscore that we are not discussing the written explication of Dante's masterpiece, which too—to some extent—underwent changes at this time. My claim is that there is a specific 'itch' among the Italian public for a distinctly oral explication of the poem, a form of exegesis that is accessible to non-literates and literates alike, one that becomes associated with ecclesiastics and migrates from under the civic aegis to the ecclesiastic one. For this reason, the sermonary genre is discussed, while the written commentaries of ecclesiastics are not."

As early as the 1360s and perhaps even earlier, well before the shift in Dante lectureship and before the *lectura Dantis* was

dipi(nti) e scritti nella dipintura, dov'è dipinto dantte(!) in santa liperata, o ver santa maria del fiore, dove si lege(!) al presentte(!) il dantte(!) per maestro anttonio(!) frate di san francescho, 1430. el detto maestro anttonio(!) fece fare la detta dipintura, per richordare a' cittadini, che facciano arrechare l'ossa di dante a firenze, e farli(!) onore chome è meriterebbe, in degno luogo." The above text was originally transcribed by Altrocchi; however, that transcription is not without inaccuracies, both of spelling and folio number. See Rudolph Altrocchi, "Michelino's Dante," *Speculum* 6 (1931): 16-7. The above text is my own and faithfully transcribed from the manuscript. On the painting's iconography, see Jacobowitz-Efron, *Dante Alighieri the Secular Theologian,* 232-6. See also Altrocchi, "Michelino's Dante," 15-59; Maurizio Bonicatti, "Domenico di Francesco," in *ED*, 2:551.

[57] Gilson analyzes the genealogy of Dante's reception by Florentine humanists culminating in the vernacular humanism of Lorenzo the Magnificent's Florence, and its reappropriation of Dante. See Gilson, *Dante and Renaissance Florence*, 132-160. On the cultural shifts of that period, see Mario Martelli, *Letteratura fiorentina del Quattrocento: il filtro degli anni sessanta* (Florence: Le Lettere, 1996).

officially established, mendicant preachers harnessed the *Commedia's* popularity to their homiletic arsenal. From Sicily in the south to beyond the Alps, Franciscans, Dominicans, Augustinians, and Servites incorporated Dantean verses in their sermons.[58]

The attraction of ecclesiastics to the *Commedia* has many possible reasons. From its inception, Dante's text was conceived to be studied seriously, with homiletics in mind, making it a ready thesaurus of sermonary rhetorical devices.[59] The text's popularity among Italian audiences, its eloquent vernacular, and the mnemonic ease with which its *terza rima* sticks to mind made it ideal for the oral transmission of ideas.[60] Most importantly, its theme of penance, its profuse straightforward use of biblical and classical *exempla*, and its many digressions on matters theological all made it ever relevant to preachers.[61]

A partial list of the preachers to have referenced the *Commedia*, by no means exhaustive, begins with Ruggero da Eraclea OFM (d.1383), whose Lenten sermons (written in Messina in 1367 and delivered in Naples in 1368) preceded the Florentine *lectura Dantis* by five years, seemingly prefiguring this practice.[62] It might

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[58] The notion, expressed by Mordenti, that the *Dantismo dei predicatori* was a Romano-Tuscan phenomenon limited to northern Italy, was utterly debunked by finds from the libraries of southern friaries as well as by the preachers mentioned anon, a number of which were Sicilians. See Oriana Visani, "Citazioni di poeti nei sermonari medievali," in Ginetta Auzzas, Carlo Delcorno, Giovanni Baffetti, eds., *Letteratura in forma di sermone: i rapporti tra predicazione e letteratura nei secoli XIII-XVI: Atti del Seminario di studi (Bologna, 15-17 novembre 2001)*, (Florence: Olschki, 2003), 124, passim.

[59] Nicolò Maldina, "Dantean Devotions: Gabriele Barletta's 'Oral' in Brian Richardson, Massimo Rospocher, Stefano Dall'Aglio, eds., *Commedia* in Context" in *Voices and Texts in Early Modern Italian Society*, (London: Routledge, 2016), 186-7; Justin Steinberg, *Accounting for Dante: Urban Readers and Writers in Late Medieval Italy* (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 20; Carlo Delcorno, "Dante e il linguaggio dei predicatori," *Letture classensi* 25 (1996): 53-4; Zane D. R. Mackin, *Dante Praedicator: Sermons and Preaching Culture in the Commedia* (Unpublished Ph.D. diss. Columbia University, New York, 2013).

[60] Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 104-5, 165-7 passim; Lina Bolzoni, "Dante o della memoria appassionata," *Lettere italiane* 60 (2008), 169–93; Maldina, "Dantean Devotions," 185-6.

[61] Maldina, "Dantean Devotions," 187, 190-1, 197n41; Nicolò Maldina, "Dante tra i predicatori del Quattrocento," *Filologie medievali e moderne* 18 (2018): 241-2.

[62] Also known as Rogerio da Sicilia, Rogerius de Heraclia, de Sicilia. de Platea, or de Phaleriis. On his biography, see Giuseppe Palumbo, "Il Codice 492 della Biblioteca di S. Francesco nella comunale di Assisi," *Dante e L'Italia Meridionale, Atti del Congresso Nazionale di Studi Danteschi* (Ottobre 1965): 466-7. Palumbo misdated the sermons to 1336. The dating was corrected by Cesare Cenci and Carlo Delcorno. See Palumbo, "il Codice 492," 467; Cesare Cenci, "Il quaresimale delle scuole di fr. Ruggero da Eraclea" *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* 88 (1995): 272-5, 291; Delcorno, "Dante e il linguaggio dei predicatori," 52n4. The copy of Ruggero's sermons

even be possible that Agostino Trionfo d'Ancona OSA (c.1243-1328) cited Dante in his sermons as early as the 1320s, however this is uncertain.[63] It is only at the turn of the fifteenth century that Dantean references appear in datable sermons.[64] The fifteenth century begins with Andrea Pace OFM (d. 1410), active in Sicily,[65] and the anonymous Friars Minor who wrote the *Quadragesimale virgilianum* and the *Quadragesimale peregrini cum angelo* (bef. 1420).[66] The list continues with Marco da Sommariva del Bosco OFM (first half of the fifteenth century) and his Lenten cycle *Bonum Quaternarium*,[67] Bernardino da Siena OFM (1380-1444),[68] Girolamo di Giovanni OP (c.1387-1454) mentioned earlier as a *lector Dantis*, and Bartolomeo da Colle Val d'Elsa OFM (1421-

with the most citations from Dante is the codex 492 from Assisi, analyzed by Palumbo; Palumbo, "il Codice 492." Another manuscript containing these Lenten sermons is a codex from BML, Plut. 24, cod. 5. The version appearing in it dates to 1392-1395 according to Cenci's estimate. See, Cenci, "Il quaresimale," 283. It is possible some of these Dantean citations are the work of Stefano di Atella OFM (fl. 1400), see Delcorno, "La *Commedia* nella predicazione dei frati minori," 268.

[63] This claim is from Pegoretti, who provides no details to substantiate it. One assumes these citations are from his *Sermones de sanctis* and *Sermones dominicales* conserved today in MS. 158 of the Biblioteca Angelica di Roma. See Pegoretti, "Early Reception until 1481," 250. Note that Agostino was also a hierocrat who wrote the anti-imperial *Summa De ecclesiastica potestate* (1324-1328) for John XXII, not to be confused with Agostino di Favarone de' Favaroni da Roma OSA (1360-1443) who wrote the *Tractatus de principatu Papae et potestate Summi Pontificatus quam Christus reliquit in terris Petro et successoribus eius*. See, Biagio Ministeri, "Agostino, d'Ancona" in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, 1960; Ugo Mariani OESA, *Chiesa e stato nei teologi agostiniani del secolo XIV* (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1957), 187-98.

[64] Cf. Delcorno, "La *Commedia* nella predicazione dei frati minori," 268-9.

[65] Pietro Delcorno, "Hidden in a European Bestseller: The *Quadragesimale* of Gritsch/Grütsch and the Reception of Dante's Commedia in Sermons," in *Medieval Sermon Studies* 65 (2021), 43, 54n27; Delcorno, "La *Commedia* nella predicazione dei frati minori," 269-70.

[66] Delcorno, "Hidden in a European Bestseller," 44-5, 55n86-89; Pietro Delcorno, "Preaching Dante's *Commedia* in the German World," in Timothy Johnson, Katherine Shelby, John Young, eds., *Preaching and New Worlds* (London: Routledge, 2018, 163-84; Id., "La *Commedia* nella predicazione dei frati minori," 296-301. The title *Quadragesimale virgilianum* is Delcorno's, see Delcorno, "La *Commedia* nella predicazione dei frati minori," 297.

[67] Alessandro Vitale-Brovarone, "Per la fortuna di Dante in Piemonte. La testimonianza di Marco da Sommariva," *Studi Piemontesi* 4 (1975): 322-4; Delcorno, "Hidden in a European Bestseller," 43; Id., "La *Commedia* nella predicazione dei frati minori," 270-1; Jacobowitz-Efron, *Dante Alighieri the Secular Theologian,* 276-80.

[68] For examples of Bernardino's usage of Dante, see *Prediche Senesi 1427*, 42.17; 23.101-102; Bernardino da Siena, *Prediche volgari sul Campo di Siena 1427*, ed. Carlo Delcorno (Milan: Rusconi, 1989), 676, 1234; *Prediche Fiorentine 1425*, 17; Bernardino da Siena, *Le prediche volgari inedite, Firenze 1424, Siena 1425* (Siena: E. Catagalli, 1935), 304-5, 311-2. See also, Casciani, *Dante and the Franciscans*, 86-87, note 10; Delcorno, "La *Commedia* nella predicazione dei frati minori," 271-2.

c.1478).[69] Giacomo della Marca OFM (c.1390-1479), not to be confused with the *lector Dantis* Antonius de Marchia,[70] and Gabrielle da Barletta OP (fl. 1472) follow. Barletta was an exceedingly popular preacher who created a homiletic genre systematically referring to vernacular poetry. He used Dante to such an extent that the printed editions of his sermons' translated into French and German include Dante in their titles, bespeaking the value of these Dantean references as a selling point.[71] The list continues with Cherubino da Spoleto OFM (1414-1484),[72] Paolo da Teramo OFM (fl. Mid-fifteenth century),[73] and Michele Carcano OFM (1427-1484), who wrote the *Sermonarium de paccatis* (1476).[74] Next is Pietro

[69] Marco Arosio, *Bartolomeo da Colle di Val d'Elsa, predicatore dell'Osservanza francescana. Uno studio storico filosofico*, ed. Andrea Nannini (Canterano: Aracne editrice, 2017); Giacomo Mariani, *Roberto Caracciolo da Lecce (1425-1495): Life, Works, and Fame of a Renaissance Preacher* (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 241n15.

[70] P. Renato Lioi O.F.M., "S. Giacomo della Marca studioso di Dante," *Studi Francescani* 61 (1964): 26-67; Visani, "Citazioni di poeti nei sermonary medievali," 133-4; Delcorno, "La *Commedia* nella predicazione dei frati minori," 273. Giacomo's utilization of the *Commedia* is much more systematic than his predecessors. An idea of the scope to which Giacomo used the *Commedia* is given by a partial list produced here: A sermon on the vanity of women cites *Purg*. 6.76-78; on perseverance cites *Par*. 5.73-84; on Sodomy cites *Purg*. 26.79-84, 133-135; *De partialitate* cites *Par*. 22.16-18; on Christ's name cites *Par*. 9.7-9, 33.115-117 and *Purg*. 13.19-21; *De excellentia et utlitate sacre religionis* cites *Inf*. 4.73-75, 85-90, 109-114, 121-123, 130-135; a sermon on Heaven cites *Par*. 23.28-33, 70-75, 82-84, 97-102, 109-111, 118-126, 130-138, 32.133-135, 27.7-9; a sermon on Hell cites *Purg*. 19.115-126, 20.82-84, *Inf*. 6.10-12, 3.64-69, 22-27, 103-105, 82-87, 5.28-33; *De obidientia et religione* cites *Par*. 5.19-24, 11.82-84; in a sermon about the Tree of Life he cites *Par*. 33.52-54, 23.31-33; and another sermon on the fruits of redemption cites *Par*. 7.115-120, 9.10-12, *Purg*. 14.148-151, 15.67-75, etc. See, Lioi, "Giacomo della Marca," 41-60. On usage exceeding the stylistic and rhetorical, see Jacobowitz-Efron, *Dante Alighieri the Secular Theologian,* 275-6.

[71] Gabriele Barletta, *Sermones fratris Gabrielis Barelete ordinis predicatorum tam quadragesimales quam de sanctis noviter impressi. Et ubi prius fuerunt interposita carmina Petrarche et Dantis in eorum vulgaris*, tr. Joannes Antonij (Lyon: Jacobum myt, 1524). Delcorno, "Hidden in a European Bestseller," 43, 46, 55n80; Delcorno, "La *Commedia* nella predicazione dei frati minori, 286; Maldina, "Dante tra i predicatori," 231-46; Maldina, "Dantean Devotions," 158-99. On Barletta's popularity, see Thomas M. Schwertner, "Gabriel Barletta," in *Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: The Encyclopedia Press, 1913), 2:297.

[72] Visani, "Citazioni di poeti nei sermonary medievali," 124.

[73] Carlo Delcorno, Rosa Maria Dessì and Oriana Visani, "Notizie di manoscritti: Inventario dei manoscritti di prediche volgari inedite (Roma, Napoli, Città del Vaticano, Francia, Inghilterra)," *Lettere Italiane* 54 (2002), 384; Visani, "Citazioni di poeti nei sermonari medievali," 124.

[74] Delcorno, "Hidden in a European Bestseller," 43, 54n78; Delcorno, "La *Commedia* nella predicazione dei frati minori," 280.

da Mogliano OFM (c. 1435-1490)[75] and Paolo Attavanti OSM (d. 1499), who cited no less than 1254 verses by "*divinus vates noster imo etiam philosophus et theologus Dantes*"[76] in his *Quadragesimale de reditu peccatoris ad Deum* (1479), earning this collection the title *Quadragesimale Dantesco*.[77]

Next are Francesco Vaccari di Argenta OFM, active in Ferrara and Venice (1486-1487),[78] and Anselmo Cacia OFM, who creatively recast Dantean themes and drew on the *Commedia* when defining his mission and identity as a preacher. Anselmo even composed his own *terza rima* prayer *alla dantesca*.[79] Bernardino Tomitano da Feltre OFM (1439-1494), whose Lenten sermons (Pavia, 1493) refer to Dante,[80] and Bernardino Amici da Fossa OFM (1420-1503), follow. This partial list ends with Bernardino Busti OFM (d. 1513),[81] and Lorenzo da Villamagna OFM (1476-1535).[82]

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[75] Ippolito Brandozzi, *Il beato Pietro da Mogliano, minore osservante (1435c-1490). Con due sermoni inediti e tredici tavole fuori testo* (Rome: Edizioni francescane, 1968), 145–201; Visani, "Citazioni di poeti nei sermonary medievali," 124.

[76] The phrasing is from Attavanti's dedication to the Prior General of the Servite Order, Innocenzo Romano: Paolo Attavanti, *Quadragesimale de reditu peccatoris ad Deum* (Milan: Leonardus Pachel and Uldericus Scinzenzeler, 1479), f. 3r, PhiloBiblon: The Dante Collection, accessed March 2, 2024, http://www.dantecollection.com/index.php?id=1496&tx_ttnews5Bcat%5D=23231&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=6575. See Maldina, "Dante tra i predicatori," 238.

[77] See Agostino Bartolini, *Il Quaresimale dantesco di Paolo Attavanti dei Servi di Maria* (Rome: Filippucci, 1907), and Delcorno, "Hidden in a European Bestseller," 43, 54n79. On the similarities of Attavanti's to Barletta's sermons and on the likely existence of a common source to both, see Maldina, "Dante tra i predicatori," 233-7.

[78] Delcorno, "Hidden in a European Bestseller," 43, 54n78; Delcorno, "La *Commedia* nella predicazione dei frati minori," 273-4.

[79] Delcorno, "La *Commedia* nella predicazione dei frati minori," 274-7.

[80] Bernardino da Feltre, *Sermoni del beato Bernardino Tomitano da Feltre: nella redazione di Fra Bernardino Bulgarino da Brescia*, Carlo Varischi da Milano ed. (Milan: Cariplo, 1964) 1:56-67, 76-8. Delcorno, "La *Commedia* nella predicazione dei frati minori," 277-80.

[81] Delcorno, "Hidden in a European Bestseller," 43, 54n78; Delcorno, "La *Commedia* nella predicazione dei frati minori," 280.

[82] Visani, "Citazioni di poeti nei sermonari medievali," 124. This list does not mention allusions to the *Commedia* that are not direct citations, nor does it include Dante references added to sermons for personal use. An example for such Dantean allusions is the 22nd Lenten Sermon (first Sunday of Lent) of Giovanni Dominici OP (1356-1419), the famous anti-humanist, which references *Inferno* 1. See, Jacobowitz-Efron, *Dante Alighieri the Secular Theologian*, 151; Florence, BNCF, Riccardiano 1301, ff. 69r-72v. For a transcription, see Nirit Ben-Aryeh Debby, *Renaissance Florence in the Rhetoric of Two Popular Preachers: Giovanni Dominici (1356-1419) and Bernardino da Siena (1380-1444)* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001), 263-72; See also Visani, "Citazioni di poeti nei sermonary medievali," 135.

Homiletic reception is a vast ever-growing field of study that, despite large swaths of it having been plowed, still, for the most part, remains untilled. New studies constantly fill many of the gaps. Yet, there remains a manuscript corpus of unknown size to be considered when reconstructing Dante's broad religious reception, and the more we find, the more complex the image revealed becomes.[83]

It is important to stress that the emphasis of the following analysis is not the complexities of Dante's impact on homiletics, a subject masterfully analyzed in other publications.[84] Our main point is that the *lectura Dantis* and sermonary references to the *Commedia* were two components of the same trend. Both practices were deemed morally beneficial; both dwelt on Dante's text, explicating it publicly orally, and both were accessible to a non-literate audience who could not necessarily read Dantean commentaries. Both profited from its established popularity, contributed to its reception as a masterwork of spiritual value, and promoted Dante's reception as an icon of orthodoxy.

Preachers of previous generations used the sixth book of Virgil's *Aeneid* as a source on the geography of the afterlife but once a Dantean Christian topography became available, despite its vernacularism, it mostly replaced Virgil in that role, or was combined with Virgilian topography. Moreover, the *Commedia* became the only vernacular homiletic source to elicit digressions on the commentary tradition of the text itself.[85]

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[83] Delcorno, "La *Commedia* nella predicazione dei frati minori," 273, 280, 307; Pietro Delcorno, "Un pellegrinaggio nell'inferno dantesco: Il Quadragesimale peregrini cum angelo," in Giovanni Strinna e Giuseppe Mascherpa, eds., *Predicatori, mercanti, pellegrini: L'Occidente medievale e lo sguardo letterario sull'Altro tra l'Europa e il Levante* (Mantua: Universitas Studiorum, 2018), 222-3.

[84] The ways in which Dante was influenced by, as well as affected influence on, the preaching movement are much studied. The following is a very partial list of these publications: Innocenzo Taurisano. O.P., "Il culto di Dante nell'Ordine Domenicano," *Il VI° Centenario Dantesco Bulletino del Comitato Cattolico per l'Omaggio a Dante Alighieri* 1-2 (1917): 28-39; Tania Basile, "Un sermone francescano e frammenti della *Commedia* in un manoscritto della Biblioteca Nazionale di Napoli," in *Dante nel pensiero e nella esegesi dei secoli XIV e XV, Atti del Convegno di Studi realizzato dal Comune di Melfi, 27 Settembre – 2 Ottobre 1970* (Florence: Olschki, 1975), 315; Piana, *La facoltà teologica*; Delcorno, "Dante e il linguaggio dei predicatori," 51-74; Visani, "Citazioni di poeti nei sermonary medievali"; Jacobowitz-Efron, *Dante Alighieri the Secular Theologian,* 239-300. Maldina, *In pro del mondo*; Maldina, "Dante tra i predicatori," 231-46; Delcorno, "La *Commedia* nella predicazione dei frati minori," 265-6.

[85] Maldina, "Dantean Devotions," 186n13, 187; Id., "Dante tra i predicatori," 232. On the use of Virgil in sermons, see Jacques Berlioz, "Virgile dans la littérature des exempla (XIIIe-XVe siècles)," in *Lectures médiévales de Virgile: Actes du Colloque*

How Dante scholars and scholars of homiletics interpret the many mentions of the *Commedia* in sermons differs significantly. Some citations are ornamental, utilizing Dante's captivating rhetoric, using the *Commedia* as an *exemplum*, or even using it to create rapport with a lay audience.[86] These are of lesser importance to us as they do not engage with the narrative and are distant in structure from the *lectura*. Sometimes, however, preachers do engage with the *Commedia* as a dependable vernacular repository for discussing theological and ethical topics – even synthesizing different verses and rewriting them to make a new point.[87] Such syntheses could be superficial, attributing non-Dantean verses to Dante or making minor stylistic modifications.[88] Yet sometimes, they have profound implications, entailing an authoritative standing or making Dante's verses the crux of a certain point, going as far as mentioning different ways to interpret the poem and even borrowing from and alluding to the *Commedia's* commentary tradition. The pulpit mid-sermon could become an impromptu university lectern for a short *lectura Dantis*. It is this kind of usage transmitted orally to a general audience interested in the *sacrato poema* that is of interest to us.

An excellent demonstration of the blurring of the line between a sermon and a Dante lecture is found in one of the versions

organisé par l'École Française de Rome (Rome, 25–28 octobre 1982) (Rome: École Française de Rome, 1985), 65–120. Preachers also used Ovid either directly or via the *Ovidius moralizatus* by Pierre Bersuire (d. 1362). However, this usage did not vie with Dante's role as a source on the geography of the afterlife. See Maldina, "Dante tra i predicatori," 232n6; Id., "Dantean Devotions," 187; 197n31; Delcorno, "Hidden in a European Bestseller," 35, 43; Id., "'Hoc est tempus ascendendi'. Il quaresimale a stampa di Vicent Ferrer: note su un bestseller europeo," *Arxiu de textos catalans antics* 33 (2020/21): 185-186n55. On the mixing of Dantean and Virginlian visions of the afterlife, see Pietro Delcorno, "Enea, la Sibilla e Dante: primi appunti su un quaresimale virgiliano," *Cahiers d'études italiennes* 29 (2019): 2.

[86] Delcorno, "La *Commedia* nella predicazione dei frati minori," 267-8; Id., "Un pellegrinaggio nell'inferno dantesco," 221. The latter type of usage is best manifested by Bernardino da Siena's use of the phrase "your poet Dante" (*vostro poeta Dante*) when speaking to Florentines. See, *PF 1425* 17: Bernardino, *Le prediche volgari inedite*, 311-2.

[87] For an example of the latter usage, see Maldina, "Dante tra i predicatori," 239-41. Jacobowitz-Efron, *Dante Alighieri the Secular Theologian,* 261, 299-300; cf. Basile, "Un sermone francescano," 308. Compare with the anonymous Franciscan *Quadragesimale peregrini cum angelo* (bef. 1420) and Gabriele Barletta's recasting of Dantean themes, see Delcorno, "Et ista sunt scripta Dantis," 142; Maldina, "Dantean Devotions," 191-4; Delcorno, "La *Commedia* nella predicazione dei frati minori," 270-80, 282-3, 288-90, 292-5,297, 303-5; Delcorno, "Un pellegrinaggio nell'inferno dantesco," 230, 235-46.

[88] On the wrong attribution of Dantean verses, see Maldina, "Dante tra i predicatori," 232-3n8. On the superficiality of such usages, see Delcorno, "La *Commedia* nella predicazione dei frati minori," 280-1.

of Ruggero da Eraclea's sermon for the second Monday of Lent, dealing with Original Sin as the source of "second death" (i.e., damnation). The Franciscan preacher expectedly quotes the verses from *Inf.* 1.116-117 mentioning this term, and then digresses into a meta-discussion on Dante's motivations and whether the poet erroneously believed non-being was better than existence in a state of damnation ("dicunt etiam aliqui quod poeta vulgaris fuit istius secundae oppinionis, cioè melius esse nihil quam damnatum"). For a moment, Ruggero's opinions on the *Commedia's* commentary tradition become the subject under discussion, and the defense of Dante against this flawed interpretation of *Inf.* 1.116-117 becomes the focus.[89] Such off-topic moments demonstrate how literary analysis can overtake a sermon with a Dantean theme and how far the *Commedia's* legitimacy extended to as early as the 1360s. By the early fifteenth century, Bernardino da Siena's sermon on Lucifer's fall quoted Dante and borrowed a thought experiment from the *Commedia's* commentary tradition.[90] By 1496, an anonymous Franciscan friar whose sermon was transcribed by Ambrogio Varisco da Rosate, secretary of Ludovico il Moro (Duke of Milan 1494-1499), interpreted the meaning of Dante's depiction of the three steps at the Gates of Purgatory (*Purg.* 9.75-105) mid-sermon, making the exegesis of that scene a central point in his argument about contrition, confession, and satisfaction.[91]

A much more explicit example of such literary influences is the anonymous Franciscan *Quadragesimale peregrini cum angelo*

[89] Cf. Palumbo, "il Codice 492," 468-9; Assisi 492, ff. 46v; 137r-v. "dico ego tamen quod praedictus auctor (Dante) non accipit ipsam mortem per annihilationem sed per iterum mori ut taliter sit intellectus quod quilibet vellet libenter reintegrari corpori non obstante quod iterum sentiret penam mortis, quae maxima est, quia talia opera faceret quod sibi caveret a dapnatione."

[90] For examples of Bernardino's usage of Dante, see *Prediche Senesi 1427*, 42.17; 23.101-102; Bernardino da Siena, *Prediche volgari sul Campo di Siena 1427*, 676, 1234; Id., *Prediche Fiorentine 1425*, 17; Id., *Le prediche volgari inedite,* 304-5, 311-2. See also Casciani "Bernardino: Reader of Dante," 86-7n10. Bernardino's thought experiment seems to engage with similar ones in *L'Ottimo*, *Inf.* 34.68-69; *Bambaglioli*, *Inf.* 34.68-69; *Anonimo Selmiano*, *Inf.* 34.76-81; *Anonimo Fiorentino*, *Inf.* 34.78-80 and others. See, Leon Jacobowitz-Efron, "The Dantean Origins of a Bernardinian Thought Experiment," in *Electronic Bulletin of the Dante Society of America,* (30 June 2010), https://www.princeton.edu/~dante/ebdsa/efron063010.html.

[91] Delcorno, "Dante e il linguaggio dei predicatori," 51-52; Domenico Ronzoni, "Per la storia della 'fortuna di Dante nel quattrocento'," *Giornale Dantesco* VII, 3ª s., III (1899): 172-3. For similar homiletic usage of the same scene, see Delcorno, "Preaching Dante's *Commedia* in the German World," 175; Vitale-Brovarone, "Per la fortuna," 324; Girolamo di Giovanni, Florence, BNCF (originally from Santa Maria Novella), G.I.400 (II.IX.3); 15th century, ff. 98v-99r. These themes are recurring in sermons, see Delcorno, "La *Commedia* nella predicazione dei frati minori," 270, 297.

(bef. 1420), mentioned earlier. This Lenten cycle was written in Italy and circulated as far as Germany. Structured within a fictional visionary narrative describing a pilgrim's journey into the regions of the *aldilà,* it is an example of a sermon cycle closely and systematically engaging the *Commedia* in both form and content.[92] The penitential themes of Dante-Pilgrim's journey and the many catechismal verses of the *Commedia* were apt for the needs of a Lenten cycle. The author of *Quadragesimale peregrini* took full advantage of this, unashamedly plucking verses and complete descriptions of punishments and topography from the *Commedia,* commenting on them, and using them in his own visionary narrative. The most blatant example of this literary appropriation is the *Quadragesimale peregrini's* depiction of the Gate of Hell, complete with the recognizable inscription quoted word for word from the *Commedia*.[93]

This illustrates the large-scale, overt, and meaningful attention some preachers gave to the *Commedia*. Not unlike Bernardino mentioned earlier, *Quadragesimale peregrini* even appropriates portions from Dantean commentary tradition, such as Mino d'Arezzo's *Esposizioni* and possibly Pietro Alighieri's commentary, to explain parts of its own imaginative description![94] Moreover, I find it meaningful that a copy made in 1437 by the scribe Gioacchino di Visso was mutilated, having had its first ten days of the Lenten cycle removed. This removal of the first ten non-Dantean sermons by a later reader might indicate that some readers enjoyed this cycle mainly for its Dantean intertextuality.[95]

The Dominicans Girolamo di Giovanni da Firenze (c.1387-1454) and his successor Domenico da Corella (1403-1483) epitomize the stage in which academic lectures by ecclesiastics and Dantean sermons were fully conflated, with the same churchmen simultaneously serving as official *lectores Dantis* and as mendicant preachers. Girolamo, who was both an extremely popular *lector*

[92] Delcorno, "Hidden in a European Bestseller," 44-5, 55n86-89; Id., "Et ista sunt scripta Dantis," 128-9 passim; Id., "Preaching Dante's *Commedia* in the German World," 163-84; Id., "Un pellegrinaggio nell'inferno dantesco," 219-50, esp. 222.

[93] See, Delcorno, "Preaching Dante's *Commedia* in the German World," 166-70; Id., "Et ista sunt scripta Dantis," 131-4, 140; Id., "Un pellegrinaggio nell'inferno dantesco," 226, 228-30, 246; Id., "La *Commedia* nella predicazione dei frati minori," 270.

[94] Delcorno, "Preaching Dante's *Commedia* in the German World," 167; Id., "Et ista sunt scripta Dantis," 133; Id., "La *Commedia* nella predicazione dei frati minori, 290; Id., "Un pellegrinaggio nell'inferno dantesco," 226, 228, 252.

[95] This is a single copy of the 16 manuscripts reviewed by Delcorno. Rome, Biblioteca Angelica, MS 805, 1437, ff. 59r-95v (old folio numbers). Delcorno, "Preaching Dante's *Commedia* in the German World," 165; Id., "Un pellegrinaggio nell'inferno dantesco," 221-2, 225.

Dantis, serving for twelve years in this capacity (1439-1451), as well as a preacher whose sermons were propagated as far as Swabia,[96] serves to demonstrate the types of homiletic usage a *lector Dantis* might employ some eighty years after Ruggero da Eraclea.[97] Girolamo's sermons remain unedited. For our examples, we will focus on Girolamo's Lenten sermons from Codex G.I.400 (II.IX.3), which include seven folios citing the *Commedia*.[98]

Girolamo primarily uses the *Commedia* as a theological thesaurus in the vernacular and as an authority on certain topics alongside the authorities of the Church Fathers, Aquinas, and others. Thus, for example, a sermon on Providence and predestination (f. 134r.) bases himself on the authorities of Aquinas, Pseudo-Dionysus Areopagite, and forgoes citing Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* in lieu of Dante's rendering of the same idea in *Par.* 17.37-38; 40-42.[99] Another sermon, on Absolution (ff. 98v.-99r.), cites Dante's explication on contrition from *Purg.* 31.37-42. Only then

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[96] Delcorno, "Hidden in a European Bestseller," 45.

[97] Girolamo is also known as Hieronymus de Florentia. He was a *Magister actu regens* at the *studium* of San Domenico in Bologna (c.1418), and prior of Santa Maria Novella (1419-22, 1440-2 and 1444). These dates are from the Orlandi, *Necrologio di SMN*, 1:219-23. Kaeppeli gives slightly different dates: "1419-21, 1440-2, 1444-5, superior 1449"; Kaeppeli, *Scriptores Ordinis Praedicatorum*, 248-9. Girolamo was also Procurator of the Dominican order, Provincial of Greece, a member of the College of Theology Doctors at the Florentine University, and was also honored with giving a speech at the Council of Florence. Biographical information on Girolamo di Giovanni is taken from: Venchi, "Girolamo di Giovanni," 9:571; Piana, *La facoltà teologica*, 136-7, 248-9; Orlandi, *Necrologio di SMN*, 1:219-23.

[98] Girolamo's sermons survived only in two unpublished manuscripts. Florence, BNCF (originally from Santa Maria Novella), G.I.400 (II.IX.3); 15th century, contains sermonaries from three preachers bound together: by Leonardus de Florentia OP (ff. 1r.-72v.); by Girolamo di Giovanni OP (*Magister Jeronimi de Florentia*, ff. 73r.-156r.); and by the Bartholomeus de Pisis OFM (157r-226r). As each source has its own page numeration, the page numbers used here are the running modern ones at the bottom of the page. The second one is Florence, BNCF (originally from Santa Maria Novella), Conventi Soppressi C.8.1024 (III.D.8), 15th century, which contains a mixture of *sermones de sanctis* and *de festis* in no particular order. Girolamo's sermonary is on folios 1v.-262v., and includes three Dantean citations: f. 81r. (citing *Par.* 17.37-42); f. 136r. (citing *Par.* 15.112-114, 67-75); f. 306r.-v. (citing *Par.* 12.55-115) – the last citation is a later addition. Further information on the sermonary is found in Gabriella Pomaro, "Censimento dei manoscritti della Biblioteca di S. Maria Novella," *Memorie Domenicane nuova serie* 13 (1982): 241 and Orlandi, *Necrologio di SMN*, 1:226-7. The *Necrologio* of Santa Maria Novella lists four references on folios 79r; 103v; 141r; 143r. On top of these I found seven unrecorded references on folios 85r; 99r; 108v; 125r; 134r; 148r; 149v. Orlandi, *Necrologio di SMN*, 1:224. Note Orlandi uses the old pagination ff. 7r; 31v; 69r; 71r. The citation from f. 79r. (7r.) could not be found. Some of these references are rhetorical and thus less pertinent: one on Envy (f. 103v.), cf. Palumbo, "Il Codice 492," 471, another (125r) citing *Purg.* 8.70-81, describing the supposed lack of loyalty in women.

[99] Cf. Boethius, *De consolatione philosophiae*, Book 5, Poem 1.

does it cite Aquinas's take on the same argument: that grace is sufficient for the remission of sins, although penitence expiates one's temporal punishment. Through Aquinas, Girolamo arrives at the description of the Keys of St. Peter as the source of the confessor's power to absolve, and here again, he turns to Dante's description of the angelic gatekeeper of Purgatory and of the confessional power of St. Peter's Keys (*Purg*. 9.115-132).[100]

Dante's authoritative conception is further exemplified by the red ink annotation added by later readers to codex G.I.400, all of which single out citations from ecclesiastical authorities such as Augustine and Gregory, as well as those of '*Dantes*.' However, Girolamo's usage exceeds the above examples and veils the primacy of the literary text over theological accuracy.

In his sermon on the Crucifixion (143r), Girolamo cites Dante's less-than-orthodox description of the Neutral Angels (*Inf*. 3.22-42). Instead of justifying Dante's poetical license, by loosely associating Dante's angels with the unrelated "spirits dwelling in the air" and "unholy spirits" (*immundi spiritus*) of such ecclesiastical authorities as Chrysostom, Gregory, and Aquinas, he implies Dante's depiction is theologically sound, an orthodox continuation of legitimate sources.

It would seem that for Girolamo, the *Commedia* is not a text needing a doctrinal defense or a redemptive interpretation; it is a legitimate source for exegesis that may be used to explicate a theological issue and to gloss Scripture, as in the case of this sermon on the Crucifixion (148r), which glosses John 3.14. For this reason, Girolamo can unashamedly quote Virgil's evocative description of the Harrowing of Hell from *Inf*. 4.46-63 in another sermon (149r-149v) while ignoring the elephant in the room: that this is a quote of a pagan literary figure taken from a heterodox representation of Limbo as a gloomy haven for righteous Muslims and pagans.[101]

Where early commentators requested their readers to take Dante's deviations from doctrine with a pinch of salt, invoking a

[100] Other examples include a sermon explaining the need to curb human cravings (f. 108v.) in which Girolamo cites St. Gregory on the disciplining of children, as well as *Purg*. 16.88-96 (which the manuscript miscites it as canto 18). The *Commedia* is used here in a manner identical to Gregory's text. A different sermon on the collective blame of the Jews for the Crucifixion (f. 148r.), references Aquinas's argumentations from the *Summa Thelogiae* 3.47.6. and Dante's *Par*. 7.40-48, while a sermon on vows (ff. 140v.-141r.) cites *Par*. 5.55-63, and 5.64-84.

[101] Amilcare A. Iannucci, "Dante's Limbo at the Margins of Orthodoxy," in James Miller, ed., *Dante & the Unorthodox: The Aesthetics of Transgression*, (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005), 67.

'poetical' reading ("loquitur non theologice sed poetice"),[102] the Dominican prior and *lector Dantis* endorses Dantean heterodoxies as valid interpretations of religious truth. In accounting for the heterodox context of his quote, Girolamo could have ignored the source of the quote, thereby displacing the quotation as many sermons do. Yet instead, he chose to mention Dante by name, and even give the source of the citation ("loquebatur vulgaris poeta Dantes in primo capitolo 4"). Furthermore, Virgil's moving description of the Harrowing of Hell and of the descent of the one "crowned with the sign of victory" (*Inf.* 4.54) is contextualized for the audience by the quote of Dante-Pilgrim's question to Virgil (*Inf.* 4.46). Thus, one can only resolve Girolamo's choice by accepting the implication that Dante's Limbo is not heterodox.

As early as Ruggero da Eraclea's sermons, preachers sometimes questionably implied Dante's fiction could be taken seriously. A sermon by Ruggero mentions St. Paul's doubt whether his rapture "was in the body or out of the body" (II Cor. 12:2). He then articulates this confusion using Dante's neologistic eloquence of *Par.* 1.73-75.[103] By doing so, Ruggero implies that Dante's fictional journey and Paul's true revelation are comparable. At best, the side-effect of such license is the imbuing of Dante with apostolic authority (a move Dante himself aimed for in this verse and famously in *Inf.* 2.32). At worse, a lay audience, misunderstanding, would assume the preacher believed Dante Alighieri of Florence was, like Paul of Tarsus, raptured in the flesh. Usage akin to Ruggero's will gradually become the norm after the turn of the fifteenth century and paralleling the shift in the *lectura Dantis*, bringing with it the opposition of some ecclesiastics averse to the supposed hermeneutic dangers such usage poses.

On 22 June 1451, Giovanni da Capestrano OFM (1386-1456), preaching in faraway Vienna, advised that one should shun Dante's topography of the afterlife as un-theological.[104] He then

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[102] The quote is from Guido da Pisa (1327-1350), *Comm. Inf.* 4.82-84; Guido da Pisa, *Expositiones et Glose super Comediam Dantis*, ed. Vicenzo Cioffari (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1974), 71. A very partial list of such excuses includes Graziolo de' Bambaglioli (1324), Jacopo della Lana (1324-1328), and *L'Ottimo Commento* (1333-1340). See Bambaglioli, *Comm. Inf.* 7.67-98; 13.94-108; Jacopo della Lana, *Comm. Par.* 33, nota; Guido da Pisa, *Comm. Inf.* 1.91; Guido da Pisa, *Expositiones et Glose*, 30-31; *L'Ottimo Comm. Inf.* 13.103-108. All references to the early commentators use the Dartmouth Dante Project as a source. Cf. Parker, *Commentary and Ideology*, 31; *DtCH*, 117.

[103] Palumbo, "Il Codice 492," 470 (Assisi 492, 62v).

[104] This sermon is mentioned by Lioi based on Hofer. Lioi, "Giacomo della Marca," 37-9; cites Johannes Hofer, *Johannes von Capestrano: ein Leben im Kampf um die*

enumerated Dante's various heterodoxies, which he feared might be replicated and propagated as truths via the irresponsible homiletic free rein of certain preachers of the likes of the author of *Quadragesimale peregrini*. The hopelessness of such antagonism is evident in the fact that both Capestrano's teacher, Bernardino da Siena, and Capestrano's protégé, Bernardino Amici da Fossa, referenced the *Commedia* in their sermons. The latter even dedicated a unique exegetical sermon centered on *Paradiso* 33, *Super laude ad beatam virginem in trigesimotertio cantico paradisi Dantis,* despite his superior's position.[105]

As this practice of using Dante in sermons reached beyond the Alps, from German-speaking territories to Aragon, similar concerns were expressed by Transalpines.[106] Vincent Ferrer OP (1350-1419) repeatedly criticized Italian preachers' penchant for citing the *Commedia*, and in 1535, Erasmus of Rotterdam lamented the same trend in his *Ecclesiastes sive de ratione concionandi* (1535).[107]

The most high-ranking antagonist to this practice was Antoninus of Florence OP, the famous Archbishop of Florence. Although he approved of using Dante as a stylistic tool in the

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Reform der Kirche (Tyrolia Verlag: Innsbruck, 1936). Note that Lioi refers to the writer as G. Hofer, rendering Johannes as Giovanni.

[105] Published in Bernardino Amici, *Super Laude ad beatam virginem in trigesimo tertio cantico paradisi dantis Alighieri* (Florence: Tipografia Di Enrico Ariani, 1896); Delcorno-Dessì-Visani, "Notizie di manoscritti," 385. See also, Delcorno, "Hidden in a European Bestseller," 44, 55n83; Id., "La *Commedia* nella predicazione dei frati minori," 281-3.

[106] See Delcorno, "Preaching Dante's *Commedia* in the German World," 171-6; Id., "La *Commedia* nella predicazione dei frati minori," 266. On the odd propagation of Dantean passages independently of Dantean attribution (identifying the author only as "*quodam sapiente*"), and independently of its cultural-linguistic context via a Latin translation, see Id., "Hidden in a European Bestseller," 34-61; Id., "La *Commedia* nella predicazione dei frati minori," 264-5, 284-6.

[107] Delcorno, "Hoc est tempus ascendendi," 184; Francesc J. Gómez, "Dante e Pietro Alighieri nell'opera teologia del minorita catalano Joan Pasqual," *Studi danteschi* 80 (2015): 269; Delcorno, "La *Commedia* nella predicazione dei frati minori," 266n5. Concerning the Valencian Dominican's remark, it is worth noting that the fifteenth century saw not less than seven Catalan and Castilian translations of Dante poem. Pegoretti, "Early Reception until 1481," 254. The lasting interest in such usage among Iberians is attested to in Jaime Ferrer, *Sentencias catholicas del diví poeta Dant florentí compilades per la prudentíssim mossèn Iaume Ferrer de Blanes* (Amorós: Barcelona, 1545). Desiderius Erasmus, *Ecclesiastae*, 3.145: "Nonnulla pars dabatur Danti aut Petrarchae, quorum rhythmi voce canora plinique ut aiunt, tibiis et insigni corporis gesticulatione pronunciabantur" in *Opera omnia: Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami – tomus quintus*, ed. Jacques Chomarat (Amsterdam: Elsevier Science Publishers, 1994), 14; Delcorno, "Hidden in a European Bestseller," 56n100. The mention of the exaggerated pathos and gesticulations of preachers quoting Dante indicates Erasmus sees this practice as disingenuous pandering.

composition of vernacular sermons,[108] he avoided endorsing Dante as a source for content. While the likes of Bernardino da Siena and the Dominican anti-humanist Giovanni Dominici set the *Commedia* apart from other secular literature as a text worthy of study "among other holy books" (*qualunque altro santo libro*),[109] Antoninus took a different stand. In the fifth chapter of his *Chronicon*, titled "Dante the Florentine poet and his errors" (*Dantes poeta Florentinus et eius errores*),[110] Antoninus lists Dante's heterodoxies and decries that the *Commedia* "[because] it is written in the vernacular, it is read mostly by the uneducated and by the laity, who, because of its sweetness of rhymes and elegance of words, know not how to distinguish between fiction and the truth of the matter; [thus] they can easily believe that the state in the afterlife is such, which the faith of the Church rejects."[111]

The idea that the *Commedia's* powerful allure can ensnare unsuspecting readers and lead them astray was expressed as early as the prologue to Guido Vernani's (d. a.1344) *De reprobatione Monarchiae* (1328).[112] Though Antoninus avoids speaking of ecclesiastics infected with this allure, homiletic use of the *Commedia* was rampant by his time. Indeed, more and more Italians were familiarized with theological discussions via the verses

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[108] Antoninus of Florence, *Summa* 1.1.2, par. IV, col. 23a-d (emphasis mine): "*Forte libros composuisti[…] et, ut dicis, aliquid fecisti, ordinasti eos partibus, catenasti connexis veritatibus, replesti, adornasti floribus, sanctorum rationibus colligasti, ut B. Thomas, Albertus[…]* novitatibus decorum adumbrasti, et colorasti figures, et dulci cursu sermonis*, ut Lactantius, Alanus [de Insulis], Dantes, Franciscus Petrarcha et alii*." Text from Peter Francis Howard, *Beyond the Written Word: Preaching and Theology in the Florence of Archbishop Antoninus 1427-1459* (Florence: Olschki, 1995), 239-40.

[109] Giovanni Dominici, *Lucula Noctis* 10.4; 45.5. Iohannes Dominici, *Lucula Noctis*, ed. Remi Coulon O.P. (Paris: Alphonse Picard & Fils, 1908), 94-5, 411. *Prediche Fiorentine* 1425, 17: Bernardino, *Le prediche volgari inedite*, 304-5, 311-12.

[110] Antoninus, *Chronicorum Tertia Pars,* tit. XXI, capitolo v, §2, 306-7. column 2 to column 2:

[111] Antoninus, *Chronicorum Tertia Pars,* tit. XXI, capitolo v, §2, 306, 2e-2f: "*liber ille fit in vulgari compositus te a vulgaribus frequentata lectio eius, et idiotis propter dulcedinem rythmorum et verborum elegantiam, nec sciant discernere inter fictionem et veritatem rei; facile possunt credere esse talem statum in alia vita, quem fides Ecclesiae reprobat*."

[112] Guido Vernani, *De reprobatio Monarchiae*, prologus; Nevio Matteini, *Il più antico oppositore politico di Dante: Guido Vernani da Rimini* (Milan: Cedam, 1958), 93; For an English translation, see Anthony K. Cassell, *The Monarchia Controversy: An Historical Study with Accompanying Translations of Dante Alighieri's Monarchia, Guido Vernani's Refutation of the "Monarchia" Composed by Dante, and Pope John XXII's Bull Si fratrum* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2004), 174-5.

of the *Commedia*, whether directly by reading Dante's masterpiece or indirectly by hearing it elaborated on by preachers.

From Ruggero da Eraclea OFM to Girolamo di Giovanni OP up to Giacomo della Marca OFM and onwards, the above examples demonstrate how the so-called *dantismo dei predicatori* was not merely motivated by preachers' desires to gain points with their lay audiences by mentioning a best-selling piece of literature. Often, sermons engage with the *Commedia* as a proper authoritative source, either concordant or one that needs to be reconciled with other authorities, one that is useful for its doctrinal erudition and not merely because of its accessible vernacular. And often they focus on verses of the *Commedia* to such an extent as to warrant a comparison of the sermon with the *lectura Dantis*. Indeed, Lorenzo de' Medici's praise of the *Commedia* for its expression of theological subjects proves such a comparison is not anachronistic (emphasis mine):

> Considering especially what Dante has up to now treated in his works, I think that it is not only useful but also necessary for the profound effects that they convey, that his verses be read. *This is demonstrated by the example of the many commentaries on his Commedia made by very learned and renowned men and by the frequent quotations that one hears every day in the public sermons of eminent holy men.*[113]

The *Commedia*'s commentary tradition, its explication in writing, and presumably in public are conceived along the same lines as its homiletic use by eminent ecclesiastics.[114] However, the oral nature of sermons and lectures sets them apart from the written commentaries, impenetrable to the non-literate and sometimes even to the non-Latin-literate. The accessible oral nature of the sermon is precisely why some feared the dangers of ecclesiastics citing Dante. Had Capestrano and Antoninus believed the *Commedia* was merely used decoratively, they would not have minded this practice.

The belief that the *Commedia* was "worthy of both temporal and spiritual reading" (*degno di temporale espirituale lectura*)[115] and was thus a reliable source of doctrine reached its zenith

[113] Lorenzo de' Medici, *Selected Poems and Prose*, ed. by Jon Thiem et al. (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), 111–2; Lorenzo de' Medici, *Comento de' Miei' Sonetti*, ed. Tiziano Zanato (Florence: Olschki, 1991), 147-9.
[114] Maldina, "Dantean Devotions," 187.
[115] This turn of phrase on the *Commedia's* modes of reading is from the anonymous sonnet *Dante Alighieri son, Minerva oscura* (1477): "el nobil mio volume feci degno di temporale espirituale lectura." Modern scholarship does not accept Lodovico

in the mid-fifteenth century when both in the pulpit and the pews, many saw no obstacle in the dedication of service time to digressions on Dante's *sacrato poema*. And this is what the charismatic Girolamo Savonarola decried in 1494 when he said Holy Scripture was being left in the proverbial dust even as irresponsible preachers preach not about Christ, "but introduce poems, and Dante, and frivolous things" to their sermons (*E su' pergami non si predicava Cristo, ma eranvi introdotte le poesie e Dante e cose frivole*).[116]

The Context of Dante's Religious Reception

Long before both oral traditions, Dantean sermons and *lectura Dantis*, Dante's reception was taking on a new trajectory, external and independent of the reception of the *Commedia* as a literary text. Rather than a purely civic, linguistic, or literary icon, from the 1350s, Dante was becoming a symbol of lay piety and growingly associated with theology. Accounts of his supposed studies in Paris and even claims he was a Franciscan novice or in the Third Order of St. Francis became popular.[117] At the same time, Dante's vision of the afterlife inspired frescoes decorating churches in Tuscany and beyond.[118] A whole sub-genre of pseudo-Dantean

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Dolce's attribution to Boccaccio, from his 1555 edition. Cf. Carducci, "Varia fortuna di Dante," 326; Ausonio Dobelli, "Il Culto di Boccaccio per Dante," *Giornale Dantesco*, V, Quaderno V-VII (1897): 194. The sonnet, first published in a 1477 Venetian *incunabulum*, was probably authored by an anonymous non-Florentine Renaissance author, see Luigi Manicardi and Aldo Francesco Massera, *Introduzione al testo critico del 'Canzoniere' di Giovanni Boccaccio* (Castelfiorentino: Società Storica della Valdelsa, 1901), 13n2, and 23; Ernest H. Wilkins, "The Sonnet 'Dante Alighieri Son…'," *Modern Language Notes* 26, (1911): 137-9.

[116] Girolamo Savonarola, *Prediche sopra Aggeo*, ed. Luigi Firpo (Rome: Belardetti, 1965), 290 (predica 17).

[117] Dedicated studies of both myths are forthcoming. Suffice here to note that these unsubstantiated traditions still haunt modern Dante scholarship to this day. See for example, C. H. Grandgent (1909-13), *Comm. to Inferno* Intro. Nota; Luigi Bennassuti (1864-68), *Comm. to Purgatorio* 16.73; Giovanni Andrea Scartazzini, *Handbook to Dante*, tr. Thomas Davidson (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1887), 49-54; Cassell, *The Monarchia Controversy*, 106; Adolfo Martini OFM, "Dante Francescano," *Studi Francescani* 7, (1921): 71; Pierre Félix Mandonnet, *Dante le théologien: introduction à l'intelligence de la vie, des œuvres et de l'art de Dante Alighieri* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1935), 96-109. Cf. Cristoforo Landino's criticism of these myths, Landino, *Comm. to Inf.* 16.106-111.

[118] Leon Jacobowitz-Efron, "Sulle influenze dantesche nell'arte religiosa," in Rossend Arqués, Laura Pasquini, Silvia Maddalo, eds. *Dante and the Smiling Walls* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2023), 158-67. On Dantean citations in religious art, see also Salomone Morpurgo, "Le epigrafi volgari in rima del 'Trionfo della morte' del Giudizio Universale e Inferno e degli 'Anacoreti' nel Camposanto di Pisa," *L'arte* 2 (1899): 71; Cf. Lina Bolzoni, "La predica dipinta. Gli affreschi del Trionfo della morte e la predicazione

religious poetry in *terza rima* emerged, from rhymed catechisms and devotional hymns to *volgarizzamenti* of canonical texts.[119] Among these pseudo-Dantean creations are hymns on the Virgin Mary, as least two vernacular translations of the seven penitential psalms of David (Psalms 6, 31, 37, 50, 101, 129 and 142), and no less than four poems titled *Dante's Creed*, the most famous of which is Antonio Beccari da Ferrara's.[120]

In the wake of the Plague, the need for personal religious expression, accessible catechisms, and vernacular discussions of doctrine was substantial.[121] There is much evidence to suggest that Italians filled this need using these Pseudo-Dantean texts as well as authentic verses from the *Commedia.* Thus, texts attributed to Dante were used for doctrinal edification and even as part of devotional practices from the late fourteenth century into the fifteenth. Dante's name appears independently of copies of the *Commedia* in compilations of a purely religious nature, used in the private

domenicana" in *Il Camposanto di Pisa,* Clara Baracchini and Enrico Castelnuovo, eds. (Turin: Einaudi, 1996), 104.

[119] *Volgarizzamenti* are the subject matter of Alison Cornish's excellent book, *Vernacular Translation in Dante's Italy - Illiterate Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); see also Carlo Delcorno, "Produzione e circolazione dei volgarizzamenti religiosi tra Medioevo e Rinascimento" in Lino Leonardi, ed. *La Bibbia in italiano tra Medioevo e Rinascimento*, (Florence: Sismel – Edizioni del Galluzzo, 1998), 3-22.

[120] Dante Alighieri, *Il canzoniere di Dante Alighieri annotato e illustrato da Pietro Fraticelli,* ed. Pietro *Fraticelli* (Florence: Barbera, 1861), 308-12, 312-4; 316-8, 318-21, 335-74; Florence, BML, Ashburniano 598; 15th century, includes the other *terza rima* version of the Seven Penitential Psalms, which is not the version usually attributed to Dante (f. 1r.-7r.); On the various versions of Dante's Creed, see Marcello Aurigemma, "Credo" in *ED*, 7:503; Ezio Levi, "Il canzoniere di Maestro Antonio da Ferrara" *Archivio Storico Italiano* 2, (1917): 117; Antonio da Ferrara, *Rime*, ed. Laura Bellucci (Bologna: Commissione per i testi di Lingua, 1967), 61-71; Bosone da Gubbio, Jacopo Alighieri, *Capitoli di M. Bosone da Gubbio e di Jacopo Alighieri sulla Divina commedia di Dante Alighieri: col Credo di questo poeta, e un altro d'incerto autore. E con alcune notizie biografiche su Bosone, con varianti e annotazioni* (Napoli: Dalla Stamperia Francese, 1829), 109-10; Antonio Mainardi, *Un nuovo Credo di Dante Alighieri, pubblicato nella inaugurazione della sua statua in Mantova il giorno xxx di luglio 1871* (Mantua: Tipografia Bartolo Balbiani, 1871), 7-8; Florence, BRF, Riccardiano 1672; 15th century, ff. 108v.-109r.

[121] On the plague's effects on the use of the vernacular, see Joseph Patrich Byrne, *Encyclopedia of the Black Death* (ABC-CLIO, 2012), 206-8; Joseph Patrick Byrne, *The Black Death* (London: Greenwood Press, 2004), 69-70; John Van Engen, *Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life: the* Devotio Moderna *and the World of the Later Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 76-7; 98-101; 156-7; On lay devotion and the Black Death see Joseph Patrick Byrne, *The Black Death*, 75-81; Samuel Kline Cohn, *The Cult of Remembrance and the Black Death* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992); David Herlihy, *Medieval and Renaissance Pistoia: The Social History of an Italian Town, 1200-1430* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967) 241-58.

devotions of men and women, laity and ecclesiastics, individuals, and even religious confraternities.[122]

Conclusion

The common thread between *lecturae Dantis*, Dantean sermons, and the utilization of Dantean material for religious edification and expression is that they all bespeak a popular perception of Dante himself as a laudable and pious person, one whose verses are both beneficial to the spiritual well-being of the laity and worthy of the exegesis of theologians. The *lectura* and sermon have another essential quality in common. Not only were they both public oral practices conducted on hallowed ground, but they were both conducted mainly by a similar demographic from the 1430s onwards. Indeed, in some cases, as we have seen, by the same individuals. The main difference between them was the obligatory nature of attending church and sermon versus the free nature of the *lectura* attendance.

Just how inseparable Dante's literary reception was from his religious reception is patent in a small codex from 1463, now in the Biblioteca Laurenziana and originally from the Franciscan convent of Nemore in the forest of Mugello (today called Bosco ai Frati). Pluteo 90 inf. 43 was written for Brother Cipriano de Marradi da Firenze (*fratrem cyprianum de Florentia vel de marradio*) and later used by other friars.[123] It contains a poem summarizing the *Commedia* by Mino d'Arezzo (ff. 1r.-15r.); *Dante's Creed* (ff. 15r.-20r.); a short *vita* of Dante in rhyme (ff. 20r.-22r.); praise of Dante (ff. 23r.-23v.); two full canti from *Paradiso, Par.* 11 and 33 (ff. 23v.-29r.), both popular among mendicant preachers,[124] and an anthology of "some very notable verses of Dante, compiled from his different books in no particular order" ("Qui di sotto alchuni versi di Dante poeta molto notabili tratti de suoi libri di diversi luoghi non ordinamente" ff. 89v.-91r.). The anthology was distinctly compiled with the verses' theological content and potential

[122] On this religious reception, exceeding homiletics, see, Leon Jacobowitz-Efron, "'Fortifying Christian Faith': Devotional and Doctrinal Use of Dantean and Pseudo-Dantean Texts," *Dante Studies* 140 (2022): 45-69. See also, Delcorno, "Hidden in a European Bestseller," 47, 57n111.

[123] Florence, BML, Pluteo 90 inf. 43; 1463, f. 121v.

[124] Delcorno, "La *Commedia* nella predicazione dei frati minori," 270, 282-3, 283n50, 305n95, 311-2.

homiletic usage in mind.[125] Yet, despite the Dantean biographies included in it, Pluteo 90 inf. 43 cannot be dismissed merely as an expression of literary enthusiasm. Interspersed between the manuscript's Dantean components are devotional and religious texts: a treatise on the virtues and vices (*Virtutum et vitiorum proprietates*, ff. 22r.-23r.); the "form of absolution" (*Forma absolutionum diversarum*, ff. 29r.-31r.); "how the confessor should examine the sinner" (*Come il confessore debbe examinare il peccatore*, ff. 32r.-46r.); a short theological treatise in Italian (*Fioretti della nobile Somma de' Frati Predicatori*, ff. 47r.-57r.); a Franciscan religious work called *Quadriga spirituale* that like *Dante's Creed* is a vernacular catechism (ff. 58r.-89v.); sermons by popes (ff. 93r.-94r.); an anti-Jewish piece (*Epistola Rabi Samuelis Israelite*, 95r-120r), and several ink recipes (ff. 31r.-31v; 92r.-93r; 121v.).[126]

Dante's religious reception is, to some extent, the process of his gradual formation as a religious figure independent from his literary fame and yet inseparable from it. This manuscript physically embodies this inseparability, not unlike Lorenzo de' Medici's comparison of the commentary tradition with the sermons of eminent ecclesiastics. The cult of Dante as a literary figure cannot be separated from the distinct yet conjoined perception of Dante as a paragon of lay religiosity. The *dantismo dei predicatori* coexisted simultaneously with an *omiletica dei dantisti*, a *devozione dantesca*, and a *catechismo dantesco*.

If one is to fully understand the fourteenth-century notion that the *lectura Dantis* had a salutary influence on "citizens aspiring to virtue" and wishing to "shun vice and acquire virtue," if one is to fully understand the growing trend of having ecclesiastics as *lectores Dantis* or the profuse use of Dante in mendicant sermons into the fifteenth century, one must look at the broader framework of Dante's religious reception.

Dante's semi-independent reception as an icon of lay religiosity, evident in the invention of biographical anecdotes making Dante a university theologian, a saintly figure, or an ecclesiastic, and in the use of Dantean poetry in religious contexts, is critical. The continuous demand for public explication of the *Commedia*, be it via *lectura* or sermon, cannot be accounted for without the

[125] The verses listed in order of citation are: *Par.* 27.1-9; *Par.* 30.40-42; *Par.* 11.1-12; *Par.* 1.22-24; 64-66; 70-72; 76-78; *Par.* 2.1-6; 22-36; 43-48; *Par.* 3.23-57; 64-75; 79-90; 94-96; 100-123; *Par.* 5.7-9; 16-30.

[126] For the catalogue entry of this manuscript, see Angelo Maria Bandini, *Catalogus codicum Latinorum Bibliothecae Mediceae Laurentianae sub auspiciis Petri Leopoldi* (Florence: np, 1778), column 452.

understanding that the audiences coming to these events viewed the subject matter as more than literature, as a morally beneficial text that may fortify one's faith.