

*A British Reflection: the Relationship between Dante's Comedy and the Italian
Fascist Movement and Regime during the 1920s and 1930s with references to the
Risorgimento.*

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Fig. 1 Raffaello Sanzio, 'La Disputa' (detail) 1510-11, Fresco - Stanza della Segnatura, Palazzi Pontifici, Vatican.

I dedicate this thesis to my late father who would have wanted me to embark on such a journey, and to my partner who with patience and love has never stopped believing that I could do it.

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ABBREVIATION

FULL NAME

Cv

Convivio

Ep

Epistole

If

Inferno

Mn

Monarchia

Pd

Paradiso

Pg

Purgatorio

VN

Vita Nuova

INTRODUCTION

1. Introduction

Dante completed what was seemingly his last work, doubtlessly his finest testament, the *Commedia*, and Florence came to regret Dante's exile.³ Since then, it was the year 1321, a long line of claimants that stretches through more than seven centuries has sought, in one form or another, an affiliation with the illustrious *fuggiasco*⁴ and his masterpiece.

Centuries later, a foreign power, namely Britain, took a keen interest in matters affecting the Mediterranean basin. By the middle of the nineteenth century, she had helped to create a new nation: Italy. By 1922 the young Italian Kingdom, as it was then, entered a new phase in its short history. Luigi Facta, the Prime Minister at the time, failed to convince King Victor Emmanuel III to sign the declaration of emergency while, in the midst of political turmoil, Benito Mussolini was threatening to take Rome by force. After a few uncertain hours, on 31 October 1922, the Liberal State, that which had helped give birth to the new Italian nation, plainly collapsed. The monarch had formally appointed his new Prime Minister. Benito Mussolini had risen to power. For the next twenty years, Italy was to be ruled by the Fascists.

Thus, how did the Comedy, a medieval work of poetry, a mighty imperial power, and an early twentieth-century totalitarian ideology come to meet? This thesis explores the instrumentalisation of Dante's Comedy in the process of

¹ Vincenzo Botta, *Dante as philosopher, patriot, and poet, with an analysis of the Divina Commedia, its plot and episodes* (New York: Scribner, 1865), p. iii.

² *The Life, Letters and Journals of Lord Byron*, ed. by George Noël Gordon Byron (Baron Byron), Thomas Moore, Walter Scott, George Crabbe (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1860), p. 484.

³ Here for Dante, it is meant Durante degli Alighieri. Hereafter simply referred to as Dante.

⁴ Ugo Foscolo called Dante 'il ghibellin fuggiasco' in his *Sepolcri*.

formation of a certain national identity as a necessary step to then afford the issue of its consequent reemployment, in a more imperialistic and renewed nationalistic fold, during the fascist era. It analyses what seemed an affiliation to the poet's masterpiece not limiting the research to the plane of the creation of a notion of an Italian nation, but also critically seeking to understand, or at least expose, some of the balances of power that characterised that relationship.

This study investigates the role that Great Britain⁵ had in aiding, encouraging, and in some cases, creating a sense of national unity conveyed through, albeit not exclusively, a medieval poet, Dante, and his most celebrated masterpiece: the *Commedia*. It looks at how the engagement with Dante's Comedy interplayed during the *Ventennio*, the twenty years of fascist rule, and how the mediation of Britain, through the means of the Florentine poet, developed during those years. It also offers an extensive analysis of the *Risorgimento* period, as it considers it relevant in the context of the discourse elaborated here.

When speaking of the engagement of the Comedy on behalf of the various agents that this thesis analyses – chiefly Britain and the Fascists but also the Catholic Church, secret societies, and so on - what it is meant is that Dante's last work was used to render more concretely accessible ideas such as, for example, a unified nation of Italy with a shared glorious common history that would befit the imperialistic tones typical of a more Fascist concept of nation, which would have otherwise been either hypothetical or abstract for many in the Italian peninsula.⁶ In other words, Dante, but above all his *Commedia*, were called upon to symbolically support visions of certain ideals that needed endorsement. Among these, for example, some version of *italianità* seen to behove causes, be them those of the Fascists, the Catholic Church, or the British, were advocated through the agency of the Comedy that was made to be perceived as a champion of that given cause.

However, on the how and why Dante's Comedy was made to absolve different roles there is not one commonly agreed view as the various agents of

⁵ The terms - Great Britain, Britain, United Kingdom, UK, England and relative adjectives - are here intended as the United Kingdom of Great Britain (after 1921 – The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland), and are hereafter used interchangeably.

⁶ The term – Italian peninsula - is used here and from now on to indicate the geographical entity that was to become the Kingdom of Italy up to its maximum territorial expansion post World War I.

whom I speak, some of which just named above, in this thesis spread and promoted ideas and theories that at times contradicted one another, as I shall argue later on.

Having said that, it is not only the more intrinsically political message underlying Dante's text such as, for instance, the Papacy and Empire that which has been explored here, but rather a larger conceptual framework. In other words, one that considers the implications that Dante's vision, specifically in the Comedy, had on different planes thus, not only political but also social, albeit with the conscience that most situations can be seen as expressing a political moral value.⁷ I argue that there was an interaction between the agents mentioned so far, above all Britain, and the mores, in a more extended sense than just morality, thus embodying some of the fundamental values of society, contained in the *Commedia* that transcended its mere literary appreciation. It is in this sense that, later on, I affirm that Dante's most renowned work was both a specular index, a sort of mirror able to reflect that which was affecting society, as well as a means in its own right. The Comedy acted on a social plane, representing a sort of moral compass for figures such as, for example, Pope Pious XI, Mazzini, and others who will be profiled here in this Introduction, and later on throughout this thesis. It was, of course, also a model for the many other ordinary people who cannot be individually named here for obvious reasons, but for whom it served as a symbolic example too. They are acknowledged collectively when speaking, for instance, of the presence of the Comedy in the National Curriculum, songs, movies, theatre plays and so on. Thus, in this sense, the Comedy fulfilled a political role as well.

However, to suggest that one straightforward answer, or set of answers, could satisfactorily address the many questions that arise from this interaction would be peculiar. Both, the Comedy and Fascism, to this day, still attract considerable attention from different sources with sometimes very differing opinions. Therefore, if there cannot be a whole encompassing, silver bullet like, solution that cuts through the complexity of this issue and provides an immediate answer, there is nonetheless an attempt here to critically reflect upon those questions. My intention, I would like to

⁷ Cf. Joan M. Ferrante, *The Political Vision of the "Divine Comedy"* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

stress from now, was to highlight the singularity of a string of events that seem to connect Dante's *Commedia* to a heterogeneous body of evidence, which, in turn, derives from the association of different agents with this much-celebrated mediaeval poem.

In other words, from before the creation of the Italian nation, Dante and his Comedy, this study argues, were constructed to become a powerful symbol with which Britain interjected into Italian interests. British influence did not stop during the staunchly nationalistic fascist rule but changed in nature. If during the *Risorgimento* period, and to some extent Liberal Italy, the intervention of Great Britain was comparatively straightforward, during the fascist era it became slyer and thus less immediately attributable to her will. The use, or the abuse, of the Comedy this analysis argues, reflects this evolving British involvement and, in doing so, it also helps to draw a novel picture of fascist Italy.

A united Italy was not a completely spurious concept. At various times in its history, the now unified country experienced various attempts to be reunited. However, the role of Dante and his Comedy as a central tenet in the definition of an Italian identity, itself a cardinal precept, was primarily the work of a cultural elite who especially at the beginning of the nineteenth century began exploring the possibility to unveil the origins of an alleged common Italian culture and civilisation. The historical reasons may be vary, such as for example the Napoleonic invasion and the consequent stern restoration of the old rule which these educated elites considered oppressive and repressive of the possibility of an independent Italy. What counts here, however, it that a united Italy was an aspiration shared to a considerably large extent just by the peninsula's cultural elites.

Calling Italy as little more than a peninsula was epitomised in the words of Prince Metternich who did not hesitate to define it a mere 'geographical expression'.⁸ Despite this quotation being cited *ad nauseam*, as Hearder puts it, it remains an important point as it may reveal the importance of wanting to promote Dante as a symbol of a commonly shared history and tradition and thus a truly national icon for

⁸ Cf. Roger Absalom, *Italy since 1800: A nation in the balance?* (London: Longman, 1995).

the *Risorgimento* was such, once again, but for a handful of educated people scattered across the Italian peninsula.⁹

Thus, a united Italy existed as an ideal that developed through the centuries largely relegated to the works of artists, poets, scholars and so on such as Dante, Petrarch, Leonardo and others. It is here that a common language developed and was commonly shared. This was literary Italian, which was based, at least to a large degree, on Dante's works, above all his *Commedia*. It was they, the representatives of this higher culture, those who started to conceptualise, or 'imagine', the possibility of a united Italian nation.¹⁰

Therefore, the so-called Italian "Risorgimento" of the nineteenth century with its patriots looked back at that which was essentially a literary tradition. They began a process of selection for which certain figures and messages belonging to this "Italian" cultural canon were adopted and promoted to justify the concept of a commonly shared Italian tradition, or in other words *italianità*. Dante and his Comedy featured heavily in the elaborations of those who wished to foster the notion of a nation united in spirit as well as body.¹¹

The importance of Dante and his Comedy in this process, this thesis argues, was not lost on the British establishment who began in earnest their engagement with the Florentine poet in order to advance the notion of *italianità*, as stated before, one of the cardinal canons for the conceptualisation of a united Italy. This, as history has proven, would ultimately best serve their imperial aspirations, as it was they who were largely responsible, as I later discuss, for the Italian reunification.

The British were very likely at least aware that the cause for Italian national independence was chiefly confined to the call of some of the educated elites in the Italian peninsula. The overwhelming majority of the remaining part of the population there, in fact, identified themselves more by referring to their municipality of origin or alternatively to their commonly shared Roman Catholic faith rather than a "foreign" yoke. For instance, the main force behind the uprisings of the 1830s and 1840s in

⁹ Harry Hearder, *Italy in the Age of the Risorgimento, 1790-1870* (London: Longman, 1983), p. 156.

¹⁰ Absalom, op. cit., p. 11.

¹¹ Alberto M. Banti, *La nazione del Risorgimento. Parentela, sanità e onore alle origini dell'Italia unita* (Torino: Einaudi, 2000), p. 30.

the Italian states was largely driven by resentments for the failings of the 1815 territorial rearrangements that tended to disregard the links mentioned above.¹²

The staunchly Catholic South is probably one the most exemplifying of where pre and post unification dynamics generated issues such as the so-called *Questione meridionale* or the “Southern Question”. For example, when Naples annexed Sicily in 1816 the latter suffered the imposition of what they perceived to be essentially foreign customs that hurt the pride and the economy of the island despite these practises being from another Italian state.¹³

The “Southern Question” was in some ways of course connected to the “Roman question”, not least in its religious fold.¹⁴ By which I mean that the allegiance of the much of the Catholic South was still firmly with Papal Rome rather than the more secular newly created Italian state. To add to this, the Kingdom of Italy and the Catholic Church engaged in a fierce battle for who was the true herald of what meant to be Italian, or in other words the legitimate bearer of *italianità*.¹⁵

In his study *Religion and Politics of the Risorgimento*, Raponi clearly states that Britain had a persistent interest in the *Risorgimento* and to consolidate her position in the Mediterranean, Italy was of strategic importance to her. He also further argues that the British were fiercely anti-papal and thus had sound reasons to worry about the outcome of the Roman Question the evolution of which they wanted favourable to their imperial needs.

Raponi, from early on in his study, indicates that the ‘interplay between ideology and foreign policy’ represents one of the key paradigms in the understanding of Anglo-Italian relations.¹⁶ He names Francesco De Sanctis among the many others such as Mario Missiroli, Piero Gobetti, Giuseppe Gangale and so on, who viewed Protestant England as an example to which to aspire and one of the

¹² Adrian Lyttelton, ‘Creating a National Past: History, Myth and Image in the Risorgimento’, in *Making and Remaking Italy: the Cultivation of National Identity around the Risorgimento*, ed. by Albert Russell Ascoli and Krystyna von Henneberg (Oxford: Berg, 2001), pp. 27-74, p. 27.

¹³ Cf. David Laven, ‘The Age of Restoration’, in *Italy in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. by John A. Davis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

¹⁴ Danilo Raponi, *Religion and Politics of the Risorgimento* (London: Palgrave MacMillan: 2014).

¹⁵ The causes and issues related to both questions are many and many are those in the literature who have afforded the issue from various angles. Lucy Riall, for example, reports that when Pius IX and Victor Emanuel II died in Rome both in 1878, three times as many people attended the ceremonies for the pope at St. Peter’s. Lucy Riall, *Garibaldi: Invention of a Hero* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 379. See also: Raponi, op. cit.

¹⁶ Raponi, op. cit., p. 2.

models upon which to base the myth of the Italian national identity. As such, a strong Catholic sentiment in the South of Italy and a possible return to the Bourbon rule would openly contrast those which were British strategic interests in the Mediterranean and Italy. These vested interests varied from economic, such as the reassurance of the solvency of the former Kingdom of Sardinia, of which I speak in Chapter II, to the protection of the routes for the East India Company, to military such as the eradication of a possible conflict with the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, to the containment of the menace that the British elites saw in Catholicism.¹⁷ The “Southern Question” with all its contentions aptly befitted those needs as Italy was kept politically and socially unstable and thus a weak opponent for Britain.

Dante was hurled at the centre of a fiercely anti-papal narrative that was being promoted by, for example, De Sanctis, a Southern Italian by birth, who with his ‘ideale di Dante che oltrepassa l’Italia’ also inspired and advanced a secular and staunchly pro-united Italian state debate.¹⁸ De Sanctis also affirmed

così le due idee più care agl’italiani, che furono l’obiettivo di sforzi secolari dalla parte loro per recarle ad atto, sono per essi il Pensiero di Dante, tutto quel Pensiero: Unità italiana costituita sulla doppia base dell’emancipazione dallo straniero e la emancipazione dal clero.¹⁹

As for the answers of which I was talking earlier, this study does not mean to imply that there have been no previous attempts to address, even if partially, some of the issues so far profiled about the employment of Dante’s Comedy to suit different interests. In fact, De Rooy (2011) maintained that Dante was enlisted by the Fascists who used him and his Comedy to promote their political agenda.²⁰ Albertini

¹⁷ Others have amply commented on what were the imperial needs that Britain had in the Mediterranean. See here: Raponi, op. cit.; *Britain, Ireland and the Italian Risorgimento*, ed. by Nick Carter (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015).

¹⁸ Guido Verucci, *L’Italia laica prima e dopo l’unità 1848-1876: anticlericalismo, libero pensiero e ateismo nella società italiana* (Roma-Bari: Laterza 1981), p. 35.

¹⁹ Francesco De Sanctis, ‘Il pensiero di Dante’, in *Scritti politici di Francesco De Sanctis*, 2nd edn (Napoli: Antonio Murano, 1890), pp. 32-36, p. 35-36.

²⁰ ‘Dante fu costretto ben presto a indossare nuovamente la camicia di forza politicizzata della Nazione unita. Il poeta e la sua opera furono infatti strumentalizzati dai fascisti ed incorporati nella loro religione della nazione.’ Ronald de Rooy, ‘Dante all’insegna dell’Unità,’ in *Incontri. Rivista europea di studi italiani*, vol. 26, no. 2, pp. 64-72 (December 2011), p. 67.

(1996), more specifically, propounded that, during the *Ventennio*, there were two different sets of Dante scholars, a “higher”, and by contrast, a “lower”. It was especially the latter who, according to the Italian academic, held a position of particular relevance in a narrative of appropriation of the Comedy on behalf of the Fascist Movement and Regime.²¹ Albertini, in fact, considers the “higher” intelligentsia as preoccupied with the establishment of a more suitably academically balanced discourse that was largely centred on a comparison of the historical-philological and aesthetic-idealistic traditions, thus remaining mostly within the folds of a more orthodox literary approach.

However, some of these “higher” academics, at times, did not eschew issues such as that of nationalism, which was a central principle in the ideological panoply of Fascism. They expressed, sometimes in stern terms that directly involved Dante and the Comedy, their contrasting views. This was the case, for example, of the polemic exchange of opinions between Giovanni Papini and Ernesto Giacomo Parodi who fiercely debated on how to approach best the *Commedia*. The former worded his disapproval of the *metodo storico* (Arduini, in Audeh & Havelly, 2012) in a somewhat unorthodox fashion.²² He propounded: ‘Quello ch’è più particolare al dantismo, e soprattutto al dantismo italiano, è quella ridicola superbia di essere un segno di grandezza nazionale e una grande officina di alta coltura spirituale.’²³

This ‘ridicola superbia’ expresses the kind of discomfort with which Papini saw the study of Dante being approached by academics like Casini, D’Ovidio, Del Longo, Scartazzini, Torraca, Zingarelli and so on, and his intense dislike for those ‘eccellenti professori’ who contributed to a ‘mentalità dantista’ rather than a ‘mentalità dantesca’. The former unable, according to Papini, to truly capture the “soul” of the Comedy as more preoccupied with the acquisition of titles and jobs.²⁴

²¹ Cf. Stefano Albertini, ‘Dante in camicia nera: Uso e abuso del divino poeta nell’Italia fascista,’ in *The Italianist*, vol. 16, issue 1 (June 1996), pp. 117–142, p. 123.

²² Beatrice Arduini in Aida Audeh, and Nick Havelly (eds.), *Dante in the Long Nineteenth Century. Nationality, Identity, and Appropriation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 76.

²³ Giovanni Papini, ‘Per Dante e contro i Dantisti,’ in *Eresie Letterarie* (Vallecchi, 1932), p. 23. The article was first published with the title *Per Dante e contro i Dantisti* in the Florentine magazine ‘Il regno’, issue II, no. 19, 20 October 1905.

²⁴ The distinction between these two approaches is analysed in Papini’s *Per Dante e contro i Dantisti*. Ibid. See also: Giovanni Papini, *Dante vivo* (Firenze: Libreria editrice fiorentina, 1946).

This study acknowledges what so far proposed by these as well as other scholars. However, as Albertini (1996) also argued, it believes that it is by reasoning with certain interventions, on behalf of lesser known fascist scholars, albeit not exclusively, and the Comedy that they put forward that a profile of those years, based on Dante, can be drawn. To this effect, Albertini maintained: '[la] storia culturale del Regime i libri e gli opuscoli scritti da oscuri professori di liceo o da accademici d'Italia di nomina esclusivamente politica risulteranno forse più significativi dei lavori critici più seri [...]'.²⁵ This notwithstanding, the current research is not limited to minor fascist exponents, even if, at least largely, Chapters II and III focus on some of them, but it includes, as it regards them to be cogent agents, some conspicuous historical figures.

In this study, the Introduction offers a broad overview of the elements examined in this research. Chapter I is dedicated to the application of a theoretical framework that befits the arguments proposed throughout this thesis. Chapter II looks at the *Risorgimento* as it considers it offering a necessary historical background of the events analysed throughout this study. Chapter III examines the issue of Fascism in relation to the Comedy. Chapter IV explores the agency of Britain in Italian affairs complementing, completing, and expanding some of the issues analysed in Chapter III that looks at Fascism.

When this study extends its analysis to a wider range of academics that includes well-known writers, poets, journalists, economists, and politicians, it does so for it promotes the argument that not only did Dante's Comedy offer a multi-specular image of what was happening in those twenty years during which Fascism was the only political force active, or at least legally so, in Italy, but it also reflects how other powers, namely Britain, came to absolve an important role in defining the cultural and, to an extent, political history of the Regime. Peter Hawkins and Rachel Jacoff (2002), and David Lummus (2011), maintain in this regard that 'the modern epoch has found [in Dante and his Comedy] both a mirror with which it might

²⁵ Albertini, op. cit., p. 123.

examine the many vices and perversions that define it and an obscure tapestry of almost fundamentalist punishments that are entirely alien to it.²⁶

For the relationship between the Comedy, the Fascists, and Britain in this study proved to be developing on different planes that transcend that which could be perhaps otherwise considered a central concept for the nationalist cause, which is to say Dante's vision of Empire as the 'giardin dello *impero*' with all that it implied for the nationalist discourse, a single theoretical paradigm would have been somewhat constricting.²⁷ Therefore, in Chapter I, the tenets of Nation and Ideology are explored alongside with that of the role of symbolic representations profiled in the Introduction. Here, the idea for which Dante, and especially his *Commedia*, in the role that came to absolve as a linguistic standard upon which much of Italian "high culture" rested to the point of considering the Florentine poet as the "founding father of the nation", is analysed in connection with the role of symbolism in the narrative of nation building. Consequentially, literature is seen as that through which ideology can be expressed, as in its social position.²⁸ On this account, Eugen Weber observed that:

Nationalism uses intellectual arguments based on more sophisticated ideas like tradition, history, language, and race; it argues a wider community and a common destiny which are not immediately perceptible but whose traces can be found in the past, whose reality can be demonstrated in the present, and whose implications have to be worked out in the future.²⁹

²⁶ Peter Hawkins and Rachel Jacoff (2002), and David Lummus (2011) carry on saying: 'From Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, and Osip Mandelstam in the early twentieth century to Seamus Heaney, W. S. Merwin, and Robert Pinsky at century's end, modern poets of every bent have been drawn to the *Inferno* and to the other two canticles of the Comedy as an example of poetry's world-creating power and of a single poet's transcendence of his own spiritual, existential, and political exile.' Peter Hawkins and Rachel Jacoff, (eds.), *The Poets' Dante: Twentieth-Century Responses* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002), quoted in David Lummus, 'Dante's *Inferno*: Critical Reception and Influence', in Patrick Hunt, *The Inferno, by Dante. Critical insights* (Pasadena: Salem Press, 2011), p. 63.

²⁷ Donna Mancusi-Ungaro, *Dante and the Empire* (New York: Peter Lang, 1987), p. 41.

²⁸ Cf. Dominick LaCapra, *Rethinking Intellectual History and Reading Texts* (London: Ithaca, 1983). "Text" for LaCapra transcends the more conventional usages of the term and embraces that of "signifying practice" intended as a cultural artefact. It follows Derrida's notion of a "general text." Dominick LaCapra, Introduction, in: id., *Soundings in Critical Theory* (London: Ithaca, 1989) pp. 1-10, p. 7; id., 'Canons, Texts, and Contexts', in: id., *Representing the Holocaust. History, Theory, Trauma* (London: Ithaca, 1994) pp. 19-41, p. 23. For a former version of the essay *Canons, Texts, and Contexts*, see: *Intellectual History Newsletter* 13 (1991).

²⁹ Eugen Weber, 'France', in *The European Right: A Historical Profile*, ed. by Hans Roggers and Eugen Weber (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965), pp. 22-23. See also: Eugen Weber, *Varieties of Fascism: Doctrines of Revolution in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton NJ: van Nostrand Reinhold, 1964).

Thus, the chapter dedicated to the *Risorgimento* looks at some of the historical events that preceded the advent of Fascism, such as the creation of a common history and tradition in order to justify then and reiterate later, new expressions of nationalism. In fact, the Middle Ages were viewed, during the *Risorgimento*, as a time when the position of Italy was perceived as one of “primacy”. Studies published in those times, such as, for instance, that of Jean-Charles-Léonard Simonde de Sismondi, with his influential *Historie des républiques italiannes du moyen âge* (the 1st ed. was published in Zurich by Henri Gessner in 1807-08), promoted and engendered among intellectuals scattered across the Italian peninsula the idea that it was the Italian example, in the form of its city-states, that which kick-started a renewed sense of political liberty and European civilisation.³⁰ These canons, along with the myth of the hero who could singlehandedly gloriously free a nation from its oppressors were dear to the *Risorgimento* rhetoric. Perhaps one of the most telling examples in the construction of a legend is that of Giuseppe Garibaldi, which is explored in detail by Lucy Riall in her book *Garibaldi: Invention of a Hero*.³¹ There she clearly states: ‘The nineteenth century became the age of the hero’.³² However, Garibaldi was not the only exploited hero of the *Risorgimento* era. Amid some of the figures that the British historian mentions, the name of Dante is highlighted as being among some of the most influential models of *italianità* in the process of nation building in the Italian peninsula during that period.³³ Dante, and especially his Comedy, with its strong proclivity for the centrality of the individual, accorded themselves well with the Romantic ideal of a national genius, creative and spontaneous.³⁴ As such, there was a renewed sense of interest in Dante, albeit conditioned by the latest trends of the time, not least their novel historiographical methods. This rekindled curiosity for the Florentine author of the *Commedia* generated a wealth of publications, from commentaries to biographies that

³⁰ See also: Lyttelton 2001, op. cit., p. 27.

³¹ Riall, 2007, op. cit.

³² Ibid., p. 63.

³³ Ibid., p. 365.

³⁴ Cf. Jacob Leib Talmon, *Romanticism and Revolt: Europe, 1815-1848* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1967), p. 142.

contributed to the broadening of Dante's readership across Europe.³⁵ Dante as a mystical, occult, fundamentally spiritual force was thus largely a Romantic creation.³⁶ Relevant figures of the time such as the poet Ugo Foscolo, to an extent, Vittorio Alfieri, the political activist Giuseppe Mazzini, as well as the British William Hazlitt, Thomas Babington Macaulay, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, to name but some, helped casting Dante into a mould that was to become the inspirational model for patriots across the Italian peninsula.³⁷ The Florentine poet, and his personal drama with the trouble that befell him, his uncompromising sense of dignity, but above all is much-celebrated pride in the bitter exile that condemned him to a life of wandering, rendered his voice in his most iconic work, the *Commedia*, an emblem for the Italian cause. The objective drama contained within his own personal condition of exile that is intrinsic to his loss of a *patria*, and which prompts Dante to sternly warn:

Tu proverai sì come sa di sale
lo pane altrui, e come è duro calle
lo scendere e 'l salir per l'altrui scale

(*Pd*, XVII, 58-60)

would become a cry that many patriots made their own as they too felt the need for their *patria* to be returned to a condition of liberty and regained dignity. In his study, *The Mind of Dante*, Uberto Limentani, in fact, points to Mazzini who in turn pointed to Foscolo, as the former wrote from the pages of the *Westminster Review* in 1837. 'Foscolo', the Italian scholar declared,

was perhaps the first who undertook the study and the culture of Dante as of a profound patriot. He recognised in Dante more than the poet, - more than the creator of language; he recognised in him the great citizen, the great reformer, the poet of

³⁵ Cf. Joseph Luzzi, 'Literary Lion, Alfieri's Prince, Dante, and the Romantic Self', in *Italica*, vol. 80, no. 2 (summer 2003), pp. 175-194.

³⁶ Aldo Vallone, *Storia della critica dantesca dal XIV al XX secolo*, vol. 4, part 2 (Milano: F. Vallardi, 1981), p. 703.

³⁷ Uberto Limentani, *The Mind of Dante* (Cambridge: University Press, 1965), p. 167.

the religion, the prophet of the nationality of Italy.³⁸

To return to Chapter I, Richard Golsan, back in the 1990s, maintained that the main argument in trying to define the relationship that occurred between Fascism and culture, particularly the artistic and intellectual folds of it, resides in ‘the problem of defining Fascism itself.’ Golsan (1992) further added that a definition of Fascism would need to ‘extend [...] beyond simply locating and classifying its regional and cultural variants. Consensus has never been reached concerning the precise nature of fascist ideology or its intellectual origins.’³⁹

Thus, Chapter I approaches, among other canons, the issue of defining Fascism. It bases it on the need to find a working model intended as an ideological informer. Historians such as De Felice, Bobbio, Gregor, Zunino, and others offered the necessary background upon which to base the historical overview of Fascism, which this thesis then engaged with what mentioned before here about the Comedy. This is to say, Dante’s masterpiece was not only a specular agent of the events that were unrolling during the fascist era, but it was also what I call ‘an intervention in the world’, where not just fascist Mussolini, but also Pope Benedict XVI, Pope Pious XI, Gladstone, Lord Balfour, and several others exemplified throughout this thesis, stated a claim on the Comedy that transcended its being a cultural icon, or symbol, with an artistic autonomy that many (Althusser, Balibar, Macherey, and so on) thought in any case determined by social practices.⁴⁰

As such, this study propounds that the Comedy acted both as a passive agency that was thrown into the cultural, and political, limelight by external events, as well as an active lever able to influence world events with its ability to inspire and

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 164-165.

³⁹ Richard J. Golsan, *Fascism, Aesthetics and Culture* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1992), pp. x-xi.

⁴⁰ Étienne Balibar, Terry Eagleton, and Pierre Macherey have in fact rejected the tenet that the universal function of literature is ascribable to its aesthetic value. Balibar and Macherey put it in plain terms as they affirm: ‘literariness is what is recognized as such.’ Pierre Macherey and Étienne Balibar, ‘Sur la littérature comme forme idéologique: quelques hypothèses marxistes’, in *Littérature*, vol. 13, no. 4 (1974), pp. 29-48; translated by Ian McLeod, John Whitehead, and Ann Wordsworth as ‘On Literature as an Ideological Form: Some Marxist Propositions’, in *Oxford Literary Review*, vol. 3 (1978), pp. 4-12; translated by James H. Kavanagh as ‘Literature as an Ideological Form: Some Marxist Propositions’, in *Praxis: a Journal of Cultural Criticism*, vol. 5 (1981), pp. 43-58; translated by Ian McLeod, John Whitehead, and Ann Wordsworth as ‘On Literature as an Ideological Form: Some Marxist Propositions’, in *Untying the Text: a Post-Structuralist Reader*, ed. by Robert Young (London & Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 79-99; reprinted in *Contemporary Marxist Literary Criticism*, ed. by Francis Mulhern (London: Longman, 1992), p. 82. See also: Étienne Balibar, *Écrits pour Althusser* (Paris: Éditions la Découverte, 1991).

propose itself as an index. All the chapters look at both these tenets and present, as mentioned at the beginning of this Introduction, the argument according to which there is a sort of connection between a heterogeneous series of events, characters, and vested interests during the fascist era that, through the use of Dante's *Commedia*, reflects British interprets in the Italian peninsula.

How and why such relationship existed, as also stated earlier, is not possible to comprehensively define within the constraints of this study that queries, nonetheless, the existence of a vast amount of seemingly unrelated people and events that commonly shared, albeit in different proportions, Italian Fascism, Britain, and Dante's Comedy. This thesis does not consider these points of contact as a sort of historical *hapax legomena*, but rather a part of a wider discourse that, at times organically, interplays with these different agents as part of an intended effect.

The British involvement in Italian affairs started early. How early is difficult to ascertain with absolute precision. However, what it is fair to argue is that Britain, or some in Britain, of whom there is reference in Chapters II, III, and IV of this thesis, seemed interested in informing a new way of thinking constructed and based, but not limited by, the ideas of nationhood (Saglia, 2008) that, as such, would best benefit their imperial gains.⁴¹ Of course, there were those in fascist Italy who saw British imperialism unfavourably as it contrasted on several planes with theirs, not least in its ideological form. This was allegedly based on what Dante had firstly proposed. Emilio Bodrero, for example, argued that in accordance with what the Fascists wanted already expressed by the author of the Comedy, individual nations ought to maintain their individuality, albeit submitting to an almost preordained superiority that gave Italy the divine right to rule over other nations. 'Solo oggi possiamo comprendere l'idea di Dante coincidere con l'idea imperiale che l'Italia sogna', he

⁴¹ Talking about the specific case of women in pre-Victorian England, Mary Waters in Saglia, 'Dante and British Romantic Women Writers: Writing the Nation, defining National Culture', in *Dante in the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Aida Audeh & Nick Havely (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 186, makes an interesting point about the more general idea of nationhood that Britain was experiencing in those years. Thus, there is recognition that national identity is a construct, which may be boosted or otherwise by other constructs. However, crucially they can be understood and as such they are likely to be representations of specific interests. Saglia goes then on to argue the case of the Comedy within this narrative of identity.

maintained.⁴² British imperialism was thus seen as opposed to the Italian version of it on ideological as well as political and military planes. The British, the Italian scholar argued, had a worldview that flattened man and the institution of the nation against a wrecking universal standard.⁴³

The fascist doctrine of empire was a station that regularly employed Dante's representation of it, where Giovanni Forte, Corrado Ricci, and others, distorted that which was essentially a historically medieval view and applied it to their times. Thus, he who had been effectively promoted by the British to cover a role as 'Padre della nazione italiana', could now be used against them as he was made to fulfil a fascist notion of nation and empire.⁴⁴ Dante's Comedy, I argue, reflected those that were at times contrasting interests and it was regularly used by differing sides. The use of the Comedy, as also mentioned before, could, in other words, be said to represent a kind of tool, a sort of specular index, of what was happening in society at large, and here fascist Italy in particular, where the Comedy was also, at least by some, used as a medium to an end. To his effect, Anderson (1983) points out that, at least for what the myth of Nation is concerned, 'nationality [...] as well as nationalism, are cultural artefacts of a particular kind,'⁴⁵ thus expressing the idea that it is culture that which defines a certain sense of belonging to a fabricated sense of identity, be it within the holding of nation, nationalism, or other frameworks.⁴⁶ While Clarke (2008), as this analysis also does, questions the agency of such elaborations and asks, 'who ascribes a cultural identity, to whom and for what reason?'⁴⁷

⁴² Emilio Bodrero, 'Dante, l'Impero e noi', in *Nuova Antologia: rivista di lettere, scienze ed arti*, Series 7, vol. 277 (1931), pp. 188-202, p. 200.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Cf. Giovanni Forte, 'L'ideale di Dante nella sua realtà storica', in *L'ideale di Roma, rivista politica*, no. 24 (Oct-Nov, 1940), p. 370.

⁴⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983), p. 48.

⁴⁶ In talking about an identity that is generated by culture there is, of course, the issue of how culturally coherent the different nations of the world have managed to be. In the famous, *I dannati della terra* (Torino: Einaudi, 1961), the Algerian psychiatrist Frantz Fanon raises the issue of politics and power as well as those who are disenfranchised and remain outside the cultural net created. It is not possible here to enter in depth into the debate that surrounds the concepts of nationalism, culture, and identity. The chapter dedicated to the Theoretical Framework affords these concepts in greater detail.

⁴⁷ Simon Clarke, *Culture and Identity* (New York: SAGE Publications, 2008), p. 510. For other references to the concept of national identity, see: Anderson, op. cit.; Andrew Barry, Thomas Osborne, and Nikolas Rose (eds.), *Foucault and Political Reason: Liberalism, Neo-Liberalism and the Rationalities of Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Zygmunt Bauman, *Thinking Sociologically* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1990); Frank Bechhofer, and David McCrone, *National Identity, Nationalism and Constitutional Change* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Peter Berger, and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (London: Penguin, 1971); Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994); Graham Burchell, *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Vivien

Furthermore, the Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm also conceptualised the nation as an invented ideal. He proposed that national ideologies resourced to the invention of traditions in an attempt to establish a sense of continuity with a befitting, and at times, itself contracted historical past.⁴⁸

1.1 NATION

Thus, if it was possible to use Dante and his Comedy as national symbols this was informed by the contention that nations, and their nationalism intended in the forms in which it was conceptualised during the two centuries preceding the emergence of Fascism, are ideological products. The main principle of the nationalist discourse would have the modern nation as “naturally” deriving from a long historical process, whereas it is instead a relatively novel concept. Ernest Gellner, the influential British-Czech scholar, argued that it is nationalism that makes nations and their states.⁴⁹ He further expanded and noted that nationalism and its growth owes much to the conditioning that the role of linguistic culture in the modern world asserts on it. By proposing that in urban environments, once these were voided of their identity deriving from their tribal or village structures, language (and culture) became the cohesive binding force that held society together, he effectively pointed at the, by now, essential role that the intelligentsia covered. The latter thus became both provider and producer of linguistic cultures. As such, these, in actuality cultural elites, became the driving force behind various nationalist movements. They used the canon of culture to elaborate and construct their idea of the nation.⁵⁰ The use of Dante, and especially his Comedy, in the attempt to construct a unified Italian

Burr, *Social Constructionism* (London: Routledge, 2003); Simon Clarke, *From Enlightenment to Risk: Social Theory and Contemporary Society* (London: Palgrave, 2005); Farhad Dalal, *Race, Colour and the Processes of Racialization: New Perspectives from Group Analysis, Psychoanalysis and Sociology* (London: Brunner-Routledge, 2002); Anthony Elliott, *Concepts of the Self* (London: Polity Press, 2001); Kenneth J. Gergen, *An Invitation to Social Construction* (London: Sage, 2000); Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (London: Polity, 1991); Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (London: Pelican 1968); id., 'The Presentation of Self', in *Everyday Life* (London: Penguin, 1969); George H. Mead, (1934), in Charles W., *Mind, Self and Society*, ed. by Morris (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934). For a specific English case, see: Krishan Kumar, *The Making of English National Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

⁴⁸ Eric Hobsbawm, 'Introduction', to E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 1.

⁴⁹ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), pp. 48-49.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

nation, distinctively reflects an understanding of the idea of nation as the expression of those cultural elites on a social and political plane that well adapts to the development of nation and nationalism in pre and post-unification Italy.

This invented nature of the nation, or “tradition”, is emphasised in the literature by very influential voices such as those of the above-mentioned Eric Hobsbawm, and Benedict Anderson. It stands to reason that Dante and his Comedy represented an important contrivance in the hands of those who had an interest in shaping a certain Italian national identity. Hobsbawm, in fact, further argued in favour of the idea for which nations are a top-down construction that as such can be deconstructed down to their alleged founders along the lines of the narrative of those cultural elites that acted as purveyors. He maintained that once analysed, these national traditions would expose both the needs and the intentions of those elites who resourced to the use of these constructions in order to satisfy their interests. This logically implies that the concept of nation is socially, historically, and locally based, where the self-identification of a given group with the idea of “nation” is predisposed to transformation.⁵¹ The myth of Dante, as mentioned before, reflected this changed perception of what it meant to be “Italian”. This study follows and reports on this genesis of identity arguing that Britain was one of the major players responsible for it.

Part of the argument here is that the British thought it necessary to start stimulating a sense of individual as well as collective self-perception at about the turn of the Eighteenth century and thenceforth.⁵² This was to be connected, and shaped, by that which was the idea of Nation, a ‘writing of the Nation’ (Saglia, 2012), in effect leading to the creation of a cognitive map of national identity.⁵³

⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 7, 10.

⁵² Jen Purcell puts forward an interesting case for the narrative of the self in the discourse of national identity. She states: ‘relatively little research has been carried out that attempts to include individuals in the analysis of national identity. Few have allowed for individual agency in the construction of national identity, failing to ask how individuals negotiated the national rhetoric, constructed their own ideas of nation and viewed their connections with it.’ Jen Purcell, ‘British National Identity and the People: Women’s Ideas of the Nation During the Second World War’, in *University of Sussex Journal of Contemporary History*, no. 11 (Winter 2007), also available online: <https://www.sussex.ac.uk/webteam/gateway/file.php?name=purcell-final-word11&site=15> [Last accessed: 28 December 2014]. See also: Andrew Thompson, ‘Nations, national identities and human agency: putting people back into nations’, in *The Sociological Review* vol. 49, no. 1 (February 2001), pp. 18-32.

⁵³ The issue of building an intellectual structure to serve a specific ethnic identity, and thus talking of ethnonationalism, has been afforded by cultural several anthropologists. See, for example: Claude Lévi-Strauss (see: Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 2008); and Clifford

However, as Hobsbawm is keen to point out a top-down approach to nation and national feelings construction may not always best represent the views of those who are at grassroots level. Thus, how people perceived the process of nation making on behalf of those who found themselves effectively deciding what elements the populace should be made to absorb is, or can be, difficult to ascertain. Therefore, this study, albeit also taking into consideration some of the lesser-known characters who expressed an interest in the Comedy, is not aiming at offering a precise definition of the effectiveness of the role of Dante and his *Commedia* as vehicles of a national and nationalistic agenda. That being said, this analysis further argues that the British did not implement a discourse centred around the notion of nation, culture and identity in Britain alone, but actively engaged in the pursuit of constructing such a notion there where their interests demanded.⁵⁴

1.II BRITAIN AND ITALY

After having “helped” the Italians in their quest to become a united country, the British elites, who had assumed a relevant role in the making of the new Kingdom during the *Risorgimento*, became increasingly apparently more disillusioned with their creation. Lord Salisbury epitomised British attitudes toward the ‘weak,’ ‘corrupted,’ and ‘almost worthless’ Italians by calling them, ‘sturdy beggars.’⁵⁵

Geertz (see: Clifford J. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973). For a cultural and political analysis, see: Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah, ‘The galactic polity in Southeast Asia’, in *HAU, Journal of Ethnographic Theory* vol. 3, no. 3 (Winter 2013), pp. 503–34.

⁵⁴ It may be interesting to note that, as Anderson (1983) points out, the British were not new to drastic political changes as long as these would ultimately serve their needs. The British Empire, Anderson argues, before the military conquest of India, had worked following a fundamentally pre-national “spirit” as the scholar puts it. The East India Company, a commercial enterprise and thus not a nation state, as Anderson is keen to remark, had ruled India until the 1857 Mutiny. Queen Victoria had been on the throne for more than twenty years when she became empress of India. Anderson indicates that the British set out to conquer India not only economically and militarily but also on cultural plane thus indicating a clear shift from those which had essentially that far been pre-national policies. Thomas Babington Macaulay (the British politician who played an essential role in the introduction of the English language in India - see: Stephen Evans, ‘Macaulay’s minute revisited: Colonial language policy in nineteenth-century India’, in *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, vol. 23, no. 4 (2002), pp. 260–281), cited in Anderson, stated that by implementing an educational system that was to be entirely English, the British would create ‘a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinion, in morals and intellect.’ (Anderson, op. cit., p. 91),

⁵⁵ Richard Bosworth, ‘The British press, the conservatives and Mussolini, 1920-34’, in *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 5, no. 2 (1970), pp. 163-82, p. 165. See also: Bolton King, and Thomas Okey, *Italy Today* (London: J. Nisbet. Kornhause, 1901); F.M. Underwood, *United Italy* (London: Methuen 1912); Henry Wickham Steed, *Through Thirty Years 1892-1922* (London: Heinemann, 1924).

However, when Fascism arrived in Italy, the British press, or at least part of it, especially its more conservative faction, was fast in declaring:

The fascists are intensely patriotic ... They stand for a return to the older creative ideals of Italian Liberalism ... Their violence can only be understood as a reaction to the subversive forces which are undermining the independent existence of the nation.

Mussolini was to carry on as a 'successor of heroic Garibaldi', and 'the creative ideas of the *Risorgimento*' were to endure thanks to his political insight.⁵⁶

This renewed sense of approval for Italy's behaviour was not limited to simply the press. His Britannic Majesty King George V felt it necessary to visit Rome in May 1923. This was to be seen as a public endorsement of the new regime that, by now, was in charge of governing the Kingdom of Italy.⁵⁷

For the rest of the 1920s, again judging also from how the press reported it, the Italian foreign policy appeared adequately acceptable to the British. In fact, *The Times*, and a few other newspapers in the United Kingdom, thought that the relations between the British Empire and Italy were rather harmonious.⁵⁸

However, relations with Italy were not always those of complete approval, nor were they straightforward. 'Italy was not England', the British Tories' press warned. What they meant is likely to be that, unlike Britain, which was ruled by a plutocracy, in Italy, as Sir Ronald Graham British Ambassador to Rome from 1921 to 1933 eloquently put it, 'the Achilles' heel of Fascism' rested in the fact that the whole movement relied too heavily on Mussolini, thus making it too much of a 'one-man-

⁵⁶ *The Times*, Editorial of 12 August 1922 cited in, Vv.Aa., *Prague Papers on History of International Relations* (Prague: Charles University- Institute of World History, 2005), p. 232.

⁵⁷ Cf. Harold Nicolson, *King George the Fifth: His Life and Reign* (London: Constable, 1952), p. 374. See also: id., *Diaries and Letters: 1930-1939*, ed. by Nigel Nicolson (London: Collins, 1973); *The Times*, 5 May 1923; *The Telegraph*, 5 May 1923; *The Observer*, 6 May 1923.

⁵⁸ Cf. *The Times*, 10 February 1926, and 7 March 1928; *The Economist*, 13 February 1926 and 3 March 1928; *The Spectator*, 13 February 1926.

show.⁵⁹ This seemed also the position of some British newspapers that maintained that unlike the British, the Italians needed to be ruled in a different fashion.⁶⁰

In turn, others newspapers also often voiced the feeling that Fascism did not suit Britain.⁶¹ However, it was not just popular feelings fuelled by the press those which expressed somewhat discordant attitudes toward Fascism. Recorded history reports that, for example, Mussolini's visit to London of 1925 was repealed, and the attempts of the *Italian Legion of British Fascist* of 1926 and other similar events were also fruitless.

The Fascists, on their part, felt very protective of what they perceived to be the Great Power's stature of Italy and did not take kindly to the criticism that came from Britain.⁶² However, whether this was more of a saving face exercise, a sort of official facade, or otherwise, it must be contrasted with what instead the Fascist Regime allowed in on a cultural plane, this time, seemingly, without much opposition. For, culturally, the influence of Britain was almost certainly felt on several levels and in a lesser contradictory way than otherwise politically, as later profiled in Chapter IV.

Thus, Anglo-Italian relations remained cordial, but ambiguous at least until the Ethiopian crisis.⁶³ However, if this was true on a political plane, once again, culturally the two countries appeared closer, and Dante and his Comedy 'contributed to a wider process of national cultural definition and expansion.' (Saglia in Audeh & Havely, 2012).⁶⁴ To that effect, in fact, Luzzi (2008) argued: 'the turn to Dante became an English literary rite of passage.'⁶⁵ Dante was thus emphatically assigned

⁵⁹ Peter G. Edwards, 'The Foreign Office and Fascism, 1924-1929', in *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 5, no. 2, (1970), pp. 153-61.

⁶⁰ See, for example, *The Times*.

⁶¹ See, for example, *The Observer*, 7 April 1929.

⁶² Haevey expressed himself with these words: 'We are all apt to take a rather contemptuous view of Italy's position as a Great Power ... Italy exhibits in her actions all the effects of adolescence and an inferiority complex – the extreme touchiness, the exaggeration, the lack of self-confidence, the lack of balance.' Edwards, op. cit., pp. 160-161.

⁶³ Cf. Paul W. Doerr, *British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998).

⁶⁴ Diego Saglia, 'Dante and British Romantic Women Writers: Writing the Nation, defining National Culture', in Aida Audeh & Nick Havely (eds.), *Dante in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 184.

⁶⁵ Clarke argues that 'at the crux of a cultural identity: that is, the notion of identity as shaped not just in relation to some other, but to the Other, to another culture. The notion of cultural identity becomes much stronger and firmer when we define our 'selves' in relation to a cultural Other.' Clarke S. 2008, op. cit., p. 511. Luzzi states: 'the turn to Dante became an English literary rite of passage.' Joseph Luzzi, *Romantic Europe and the Ghost of Italy* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008), p. 141. Cf. Maria Giovanna Sarti, 'Gabriel Rossetti e la dantefilia tra Italia e Inghilterra', in *Dante Vittorioso. Il mito di Dante nell'Ottocento*, ed. by Eugenia Querici (Torino: Allemandi & C., 2011).

a position of prominence in Britain. The Florentine poet was set free, or so it seems, to cut across those same barriers of nation or 'other' and 'stranger' (Bauman, 1990; Simmel, 1950) that the British were constructing on a one hand, and bringing down on the other.⁶⁶

This having been said, fascist Italy was, of course, already a nation, albeit created by and large thanks to British intervention. As Del Noce (1993) laconically summarised, Italy is but a page 'dell'imperialismo inglese.'⁶⁷ The notion of nation had served British imperialism well, but it was not an exclusive means through which they insured the preservation of their interests.

British imperialism, as also expressed in the theoretical framework proposed by Anderson (1983), had different ways in which it operated, not least culturally. For example, in its colonial aspect, increasingly more towards the end of the nineteenth, and the beginning of the twentieth century, the state produced "local" intelligentsias who were bilingual, and as such had access to 'models of nation, nation-ness and nationalism.'⁶⁸

1.III LANGUAGE

It was these models, Anderson argues, that combining various aspects, among which that of language, from the colonial to the vernacular, helped producing a local form of nationalism which, however local, derived from the original centre, the imperial power, its inspirational *modus agendi*.⁶⁹ Anderson concludes adding an

⁶⁶ Bauman 1990, op. cit.; Georg Simmel, in *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, ed. and transl. by K. Wolff (New York: The Free Press, 1950). See also: Albert Camus, *L'Étranger* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1946); Alfred Schutz, 'The stranger: an essay in social psychology', in *The American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 49, no.6 (May 1944), pp. 499–507; Rudolf Stichweh, 'The stranger – on the sociology of indifference', in *Thesis Eleven*, vol. 51, no.1 (1997), pp. 1–16.

⁶⁷ Augusto del Noce and his diary cited by Massimo de Leonardis, 'il quadro internazionale del "Risorgimento italiano"', in *Atti del XXI Convegno della "Fedelissima" Civitella del Tronto* (1991). This quotation has since been used in other *fora*. Cf. Luigi Copertino, *Risorgimento?* (Milano: Effedieffe edizioni, 2011), or *Il Sabato*, 19 June 1993. For a more extensive look at Del Noce argument on the *Risorgimento*, see: Augusto Del Noce, *Rivoluzione Risorgimento Tradizione. Scritti sull'Europa*, ed. by F. Mercadante, A. Tarantino, and B. Casadei, (Milano: Giuffrè, 1993). As for a wider discourse of British agency in the construction of the Italian nation, see the chapter dedicated to the *Risorgimento*.

⁶⁸ Anderson, op. cit., p. 140.

⁶⁹ Although lengthy, this passage from Fanon's book calls to mind some of the tenets about imperialism and colonialism expressed by Anderson (1983) and the ethno-cultural dimensions expressed by Foà-Gentili (2010) while also raising further issues such as the social and economic dimension of culture within an anthropological frame. 'L'intellettuale colonizzato aveva imparato dai suoi maestri che l'individuo deve affermarsi. La borghesia colonialista aveva conficcato a colpi di maglio nella mente del colonizzato l'idea di una società di individui in cui ognuno si rinchiude nella sua soggettività, in cui la ricchezza è

extra motive and maintains that it was also thanks to the onset, rise, and growth of the so-called 'print capitalism',⁷⁰ that these intelligentsias were able to propagate their version of 'imagined community' to both literate and illiterate masses by means of *reading* different languages.⁷¹ To which Anderson added that the nation, itself a cultural artefact, could be read, and thus, understood via the cultural artefacts which that nation produced. Thus, the printed word, such as newspapers, magazines, but also books, school texts, letters, and in some cases architecture represented the vehicles through which the imagined community of the nation could come to be represented. Quite well known is the sentence pronounced by Mussolini as he spoke on 2 October 1935 against the conviction to Italy, by the League of Nations, for her attack against Abyssinia. His same quote, 'popolo di eroi, di santi, di poeti, di artisti, di navigatori, di colonizzatori, di trasmigratori', as he referred to the Italians, now stands on the four sides of the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana in Rome. Therefore, this study has accepted and analysed different means through which Dante the hero, the poet, the artist and in some guises even the 'saint' in his prophetic and mystical role, and his Comedy were used as representations of the notion of Italian nation and national feelings. Centuries before the construction of the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana Boccaccio had, in fact, considered Dante not merely as a poet, but almost as a sacred figure, which, in turn, had deeply affected Mazzini's view of the author of the Comedy as 'poeta vate e profeta'.⁷²

quella del pensiero. Ora il colonizzato che avrà la fortuna di seppellirsi tra il popolo durante la lotta di liberazione, scoprirà la falsità di questa teoria. Le forme di organizzazione della lotta gli proporranno già una fraseologia insolita. Il fratello, la sorella, il compagno sono parole proscritte dalla borghesia colonialista perché per essa mio fratello è il portafoglio, mio compagno l'intrallazzo. L'intellettuale colonizzato assiste, in una specie di autodafé, alla distruzione di tutti i suoi idoli: l'egoismo, l'arecrimazione orgogliosa, la scempiaggine infantile di quello che vuol sempre dir l'ultima. Questo intellettuale colonizzato, atomizzato dalla cultura colonialista, scoprirà pure la consistenza delle assemblee di villaggio, la densità delle commissioni del popolo, la straordinaria fecondità delle riunioni di quartiere e di cellula.' Frantz Fanon, *I dannati della terra* (Torino: Einaudi, 1961), p. 42.

⁷⁰ Anderson, op. cit., p. 40.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 140.

⁷² Salvatore Battaglia, 'L'idea di Dante nel pensiero di G. Mazzini', in *Filologia e letteratura*, vol. 12 (1996), pp. 113-123.



Fig. 2 Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana (photo by Nick Kenrick).

In Anderson, the idea of language constitutes yet another important stand. Albeit in forms less obvious than those in the colonies, such as the case mentioned by Anderson of India, which was under direct British rule, there are nonetheless some traceable parallels with the Italian case. Without wanting to open a new conceptual flank based on a linguistic analysis, it should suffice to briefly remember that largely Italy had been, as mentioned already, a creation of Britain. Vernacular Tuscan, or Italian, in some ways, could be fair to say, functioned for the cultural elites of the country, if not as a sort of colonial language, at least as one of the arguments that identified the newly established Kingdom of Italy. Thus, according to what Anderson refers to, Italy too might have come to produce her own model of local nationalism thanks also to the presence of a national language whose 'founding father' was, as he came to be known, Dante.

The *Questione della lingua*, in its many folds, provoked a debate around identity. In Gramsci's elaborations of what he understood of Manzoni's take on the issue in the early 1900s, the former was principally focused on the narrative that Vernacular Tuscan, higher Florentine or otherwise –Italian – entertained with cultural hegemonies.⁷³ In its reflections, Gramsci maintained that Dante's *De vulgari eloquentia* promoted a sort of inter-Italian notion of commonly shared language in the states of the Italian peninsula.⁷⁴ Charging, in so doing, the *Questione della lingua* with a political function as such relevant for the economy of this thesis.⁷⁵

⁷³ Antonio Gramsci, 'Note sullo studio della grammatica', Quaderno 29 (1935), in *Quaderni del Carcere*, ed. by Valentino Gerratana (Torino: Einaudi, 1975), IV vols, Quaderno 29, § 3.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, § 7.

⁷⁵ As an example of how alive the question still is, it might be interesting to read what Violante, who was the President of the 1st Commission for the *Affari Costituzionali della Camera dei deputati*, stated in regards to the role of the Italian language in a discourse of National identity. He argued: 'Nella destra la questione

However, when Dante began in his *De vulgari eloquentia* an analysis of the pro and cons of the use of the vernacular in relation to Latin, thus interjecting the political with the literary, he was alone in doing so. His work, in fact, did not generate enough interest for it to be able to kick-start a comprehensive debate around the question of the language. It will be only a couple of centuries later that with Pietro Bembo's *Le Prose della volgar lingua*, published in 1525, a real debate on which language would be best used in the Italian peninsula really started. It is with Bembo, albeit others like Paolo Cortese, Pico della Mirandola and so on, had somewhat approached the issue just before him, that the precept that the language, even in its spoken variety, should inform itself to an ideal that had Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio at its core started to gain ground. Such a consideration effectively advocated a position of supremacy to a language that was to be entirely based on a high literary and essentially Tuscan canon for it to be considered.⁷⁶ Centuries later Ugo Foscolo affirmed: 'L'italiana è lingua letteraria: fu scritta sempre e non mai parlata.'⁷⁷

della lingua, così come la questione della nazione, del sangue e via dicendo, fa parte di un patrimonio ideale che risale ad una lettura conservatrice del Risorgimento; infatti, il Risorgimento intese le questioni riguardanti la lingua, la nazione e la cultura come elementi di un tutt'uno che però, letti in modo diverso, sono diventati un elemento di conservazione, non di propulsione. Per quanto riguarda la lettura di sinistra [...] Pasolini sottolineò con forza la funzione di koinè della lingua italiana, di grande elemento riunificatore. Infatti, come ci hanno ricordato e spiegato il presidente dell'Accademia della Crusca ed altri illustri linguisti, sentiti in Commissione, la lingua nasce prima della nazione italiana, e nasce prima dello Stato, a differenza di quanto è avvenuto in Francia, dove nasce prima lo Stato, che impone quella lingua. Da noi è stato diverso: è stata la lingua che ha creato la nazione e lo Stato.' (XV Legislature, Italian Chamber of Deputies, (Camera dei deputati) Stenographic report of the Assembly. Assembly Session no. 85 of 12 December 2006), p. 35. Also online: <http://documenti.camera.it/apps/nir/getRiferimentiNormativi.aspx?base=1&blnDea=0&strURL=http://documenti.camera.it/leg15/resoconti/assemblea/html/sed0085/stenografico.htm> [Last accessed: 05 September 2015]. Equally interesting is, for example, the Legge Casati of 13 November 1859 no. 3725, which aimed at establishing and regulating public education. The text of the law is in Italian. The question of the language is still currently debated in Italy. See: the article published on the AIC, the Journal of the *Associazione italiana costituzionalisti* 'Costituzionalizzare" l'italiano: lingua ufficiale o lingua culturale?' Available online at <http://www.rivistaaic.it/costituzionalizzare-l-italiano-lingua-ufficiale-o-lingua-culturale.html> [Last accessed: 29 January 2015]. For a distinction in those days between "cultural nations" and "territorial nations", see: Friedrich Meinecke, *Weltbürgertum und Nationalstaat*, München 1907 (Italian transl.: *Cosmopolitismo e Stato nazionale. Studi sulla genesi dello Stato nazionale tedesco* (Perugia-Venezia: La Nuova Italia, 1930). See also: Giuliano Amato, 'Italy: an old and unfinished nation', Salvemini Lecture, Conference at the Italian Institute of Culture in New York, 17 February 2011) <http://archive.org/page/4125326/2014-06-14/http://www.i-italy.org/multimedia-tags/italian-cultural-institute> [Last accessed: 20 June 2015]. The issue of Italian as a "colonial" language cannot be further explored in this study. We remand to others to further explore the tenets here mentioned.

⁷⁶ See: Maurizio Vitale, *La questione della lingua* (Palermo: Palumbo, 1978) (1st ed. 1960); Claudio Marazzini, *La lingua come strumento sociale. Il dibattito linguistico in Italia dal Manzoni al neocapitalismo*, (Torino: Marietti, 1977); id., 'Le teorie', in *Storia della lingua italiana*, ed. by L. Serianni and P. Trifone, (Torino: Einaudi, 1993), 3 vols, vol. 1; id., *Da Dante alla lingua selvaggia. Sette secoli di dibattiti sull'italiano* (Roma: Carocci, 2009) (1st ed. 1999); Mario Pozzi, *Discussioni linguistiche del Cinquecento* (Torino, UTET, 1988); Paola Manni, *Storia della lingua italiana. Il trecento toscano. La lingua di Dante, Petrarca e Boccaccio* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2003).

⁷⁷ Ugo Foscolo, *Opere edite e postume di Ugo Foscolo*, 4 vols (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1850), vol. 3, p. 200.

Dante, I argue, had been, to use Welle's words, 'resurrected, rehabilitated, and reconstructed' largely thanks to British intervention.⁷⁸ As Welle (1995) also plainly and aptly puts it, 'Dante was rehabilitated first of all outside Italy', where the cult of the "Sommo Poeta" or National Bard had been created. Eventually, the national movements of Liberal Italy, as it is well known, matured into Fascism with its extreme national agenda.⁷⁹

Another valuable scholar who contributed, with his elaboration of the postmodernist view of the nation understood as a cultural and social construct, to this study is the French historian Pierre Nora. In expressing his concept of 'lieux de mémoire', Nora argued that symbolic sites aid the construction of a shared social and cultural memory.⁸⁰ Thus, for the French scholar, it is according to these representations of memories that the tangible nature of national identity, in its structural manifestation, is achieved.⁸¹ Therefore, "memory", in its role of representative station of a past, is what a community uses to imagine itself. However, these memories cannot but be intimately connected with present social and political expressions as they form the basis upon which the latter were constructed and elaborated. The nation, as a symbolic whole, can thus only be understood in light of those representative memories. These 'realms of memory', as Nora puts it, are not fixed but can and are, in his view, adapted and reinterpreted as different generations come to express their identity according to the peculiarity of their time. Therefore, if the importance, or relevance, of the original "memory" is to be appreciated this can and should happen in relation to all the other positions that defined it throughout its historical trajectory. It is this process that which has rendered the association between the Comedy, Fascism, and Britain, a possible and possibly fructuous symbol: from the medieval author of a medieval poem, to father of the nation, to national bard, and ultimately archetypal captivating expression of that which means to be Italian – *italianità* - with all of its incongruous variables.

⁷⁸ John P. Welle, 'Dante in the Cinematic Mode: An Historical Survey of Dante Movies', in *Dante's Inferno*, The Indiana Critical Edition. Trans. and ed. by Mark Musa (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 383.

⁷⁹ For a more extensive analysis on the role that Britain had in Italy, refer to the chapter dedicated to the *Risorgimento*.

⁸⁰ *Les lieux de mémoire*, ed. by Pierre Nora, 3 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1984).

⁸¹ Cf. Lawrence Kritzman, 'Foreword', in *Realms of Memory construction of the French past*, ed. by Pierre Nora (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), pp. ix-xiv, p. x.

Thus, the Comedy served the role of vehicle through which to inform the local, national and international intelligentsias on different planes from the linguistic, to the figurative arts, to an ultimately ideological station. For the '*chefs-d'oeuvre de la littérature*,' to use an expression that was of the famous French artist Paul Gustave Doré, is would not be an isolated case. The use of literature in classic texts as a reference with which to promote one's own interests is expressed, for example, by Gentili (Foà-Gentili, 2010) who proposes that classic texts may be "reemployed." As such, according to the Italian scholar, one can talk of a "nazified" Faust, or a politicised, fascist Dante.⁸²

1.IV POPULAR DANTE

This reemploying texts, and at times re-contextualising, also helped to popularise, and thus strengthened in their symbolic value, those which otherwise might have been seen as an aloof "high culture," in the sense given to the term by Albertini (1996), literary productions, like Dante's Comedy. This sense of detachment, almost discomfort, or disapproval was clearly expressed by, for example, Eliseo Strada who directed his anger at those 'idioti,' namely academics, who, in his view, understood little of the "real" Dante.⁸³

Therefore, Dante was popularised from the top down, but also to an extent, at least, from the bottom up. The use of Dante's Comedy produced some unlikely

⁸² Speaking of the treatment of Goethe in Nazi Germany, Gentili concludes her article by stating: 'La necessità di liberare la tradizione letteraria dall'impronta dei carnefici produrrà un complesso e "obliquo" modo di reimpiegare i classici nei testi scritti delle vittime: ma questa è un'altra, terribile storia' (Sonia Gentili, (2008), 'La legge di san Paolo e la storia del Novecento in Pasolini', in *Lettere Italiane*, LX, 4, pp. 543-76 in *Cultura della razza: alcune strutture concettuali*, in *Cultura della razza e cultura letteraria nell'Italia del Novecento*, ed. by Sonia Gentili, and Simona Foà (Roma: Carocci editore, 2010), p. 35. Also interesting to note is that Gentili speaks of terms of conflict of identities where the collective identity, the national identity of which Anderson talks about, clashes with the individual sense of self. Both afford the issue in similar terms, albeit expressing it differently. There are, in both cases, three layers of identity: indigenous/self, Creole/local community, colonial/national government. Gentili centres her argument more on racial lines, but it is not difficult to see the parallelisms with Anderson's work. Therefore, the contrasts of identity of which Gentili speaks seems to point at a cognitive difficulty in recognising one's own sense of identity: 'Il nostro autore sembra insomma non disporre d'una concezione dell'uomo diversa da quella che combatte'. (Sonia Gentili, *Personaggio letterario e carattere "sopraindividuale"*: T. Mann, G. A. Borgese, V. Brancati in Gentili-Foà, op. cit., p. 249). There the sense of self seems unable to find the cognitive coordinates necessary to define a wider sense of belonging and could be attributed, among other causes, also to a constructed role of the self, which the language, or languages, of imperialism, as in the expressions visited above, produce as a narrative of identity. Anderson justifies the confusion such as that expressed by Gentili, for he establishes that the very core of a communal identity is imagined. It is so, in some cases, also thanks to agency of the empire and its impact on the local structural tissue of the self and communal identity, as seen here.

⁸³ Cf. Eliseo Strada, *Dante Alighieri e l'Italia imperiale* (Milano: Navarrini, 1927), p. 26. See also the chapter dedicated to Fascism.

matches in “popular culture.” To use an example here that transcends the written form, *Maciste all’Inferno* (Maciste in Hell) could be brought to the fore. The latter was a popular Italian movie of 1925. There, the interaction between degrees of culture might be generic, as Colonnese-Benni (1996) argues, but this notwithstanding not any less pervasive, and where elements of one “culture”, which migrated into others, might have done so in ways that are difficult to predict. As Colonnese-Benni aptly points out, the thread that connects various characters from different walks of life may be invisible, but this notwithstanding real and, in our case here, with one shared common denominator: Dante. In this regard, she writes

In fact, around the name and the figure of Maciste, an almost invisible thread stitches [sic] together ancient mythology, the beginning of Italian and international movie kolossals [sic] (like *Cabiria*, for example), Gabriele D’Annunzio’s fantasy, Federico Fellini’s art of filmmaking, Gustave Doré’s rendition of infernal scenes and, last but not least, the background influence of Dante Alighieri’s genius.⁸⁴

It is, therefore, fair to say that it is unlikely that the British were unaware of such intense ability to appeal to such a diverse public, and knew well, having themselves used it throughout the *Risorgimento*, and before, how to direct Dante’s Comedy towards the achievement of their ends.

1.v BRITAIN

Thus, Chapter IV of this thesis starts with the mention of a specific historical event. This was thought to be particularly relevant here on the grounds of it being not an allusive, but a direct forewarning of things to come. As such, it befitted the narrative of this thesis possibly representing an apt starting point insofar that chapter is concerned. For the yet to be born Italian State, the early death in Pisa in 1818 of a prominent Whig leader, Francis Horner, offered Britain the overt opportunity to

⁸⁴ Vittoria Colonnese-Benni, ‘Dante and Maciste: A very improbable couple’, in *Rivista di studi italiani*, vol. XVII n. 2, (June 1999), pp. 150-161, p. 150.

present Italy with an example of 'political virtue.' Britain sought to propose explicitly, if not bluntly, herself to Italy as the model that she ought to strive to 'emulate.'⁸⁵

From then onwards, the thread of events that would eventually lead to the establishment of a united Italian State, its affirmation as a regional power, and consequent descent into totalitarianism, all seem to bear a more or less identifiable British hallmark, which belies, to some extent, some specific British vested interests in Italy.⁸⁶

Thus, the last chapter of this thesis affords the discourse of a British agency in Italian affairs as seen through the lens of the Comedy. It offers an introductory historical overview of the events preceding the advent of Fascism, leaving a more in-depth, and comprehensive analysis of those years to the chapter dedicated to the *Risorgimento*. It then moves on to the twentieth century where it continues to explore different lines of enquiry that interrogate individual events connecting them to a possible outcome hypothesised in this thesis. That is to say, it looks at British politicians, like Balfour, Lloyd George, Baldwin, and others; financiers like the Rothschild family; prominent writers like T. S. Eliot, and minor ones like Jerrold; and numerous artists and scholars, all of whom bore a relationship of choice with Dante and his Comedy. It connects them in light of the hypothesis promoted in this thesis according to which these essentially heterogeneous characters, however different their interests, had one shared point of contact: Dante and his Comedy. The latter, in other words, came to absolve a role of a common currency of choice.

Hence, by arguing for a symbolic role that Dante and his Comedy were made to serve, this thesis partakes, in line with an ampler discourse initiated by intellectual historians, in the debate on the section of historiography that accepts and adopts a culturalist approach. It contributes to the principle according to which the national discourse was engaged through the use of certain narratives. As such,

⁸⁵ Alison Milbank, *Dante and the Victorians* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), p. 12.

⁸⁶ There are, of course, different ways to interpret the relationship between sovereignty and dictatorship. The legal, constitutional, and political theorist, Carl Schmitt, wrote extensively on the subject. See, Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, expanded edition (1932), trans. by G. Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007). For other forms of totalitarianism, see: Achim Siegel, *The totalitarian paradigm after the end of Communism: towards a theoretical reassessment*, (Amsterdam: Rodopi 1998); Carl Joachim Friedrich, Michael Curtis, and Benjamin R. Barber, *Totalitarianism in perspective: three views* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1969); and others, such as: Steven Paul Soper, *Totalitarianism: a conceptual approach* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985).

these must be analysed in order to understand some historical developments, such as Italian nationalism, seen here within the folds of wider British interests.

1.VI Conclusion

Thus, to conclude, Dante's masterpiece is considered here as an instrument with which to braid different and differing vested interests. However, this study does not presume, nor it suggests, that the events connected here necessarily have a univocal and unambiguous course of action. Rather, based on the research conducted, the analysis, the correlation, and the context in which they were found to operate, it highlights the possibility that there might be an association, if not an interrelation, between them. It does so, at times, relying also on some empirical and circumstantial evidence as it profiles the involvement of Britain in Italian affairs through the agency of Dante's Comedy. In other words, that which appeared to be a sort of meaningful relationship expressed through a dialogue of negotiation of interests mediated through a greatly known medieval Florentine poem is expressed here.

This subject has not been addressed, at least in these terms, by previous studies. There have been those who like Albertini (1996), or de Rooy (2011), who decisively affirmed that the Fascist Regime had in one form or another, instrumentalised Dante's Comedy, or those who like Scorrano (2001) felt less inclined to admit an active involvement on behalf of the Fascist Regime with the remarkable mediaeval Florentine masterpiece.⁸⁷ There are also other prominent scholars who have greatly contributed to the general discourse on the formation of Italian identity that, as such, have been particularly fitting for this study. For example, Lucy Riall's understanding of the *Risorgimento* process, or the series of studies conducted by Havely, including his last (Havely, 2014), that offers an accurate account of Dante's reception by the British public through the centuries. These have

⁸⁷ Cf. Albertini, op. cit.; Luigi Scorrano, 'Il Dante "fascista"', in *Il Dante "fascista"* (Ravenna: Longo, 2001); de Rooy, op. cit.

offered persuasive arguments that have been significant for this thesis.⁸⁸ However, unlike Havelly, this study does not focus exclusively on the understanding of Dante, but rather also on the possibility that behind his introduction and diffusion in Britain, and consequentially Italy albeit through a British looking lens, laid other reasons that transcended a more aesthetic appreciation of the Florentine poet.

Thus, the suggestion in this dissertation that the symbolic rendering of Dante embraced a narrative of ideological re-alignment according to those tenets expressed here earlier, as well as those profiled in the chapter dedicated to the theoretical background. To do so, this study has had to negotiate novel associations that branched out in different directions. For instance, Villis (2013) has offered valuable clues with his analysis of the British Catholics and the Fascists. There, he examines the relationship that Catholics in Britain entertained with the Fascist Regime exposing a narrative of mutual influence and ideological borrowings, and as such, useful for this study. Numerous other historians also engaged with the issue of Catholicism and Fascism in Britain. However, most of them, like for example Rawnsley or Aspden, while also arguing that there was a narrative of ideological exchange between Britain and Italy, focused their interests on the issue of a possible appeal that some continental European fascist ideologies had on some sections of the British public, especially British Catholics.⁸⁹ Their approach is too fragmented, and any rate too concentrated on the narrative of Catholicism, to bear direct relevance to this study, which therefore preferred Villis (2013) as a more succinct and coherent account.

Thus, most of these works, while offering an important contribution in their specific fields are, to a degree, complementary to this study, which does not attempt to explain British imperial or colonial policies, Catholicism, Fascism, nationalism or ethnonationalism, but rather expose a possible correlation that Dante's Comedy

⁸⁸ Nick Havelly, *Dante's British Public Readers and Texts, from the Fourteenth Century to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). He has also co-edited with Aida Audeh, two recent volumes of essays: *Dante in the Nineteenth Century: Reception, Canonicity, Popularization* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2011); and *Dante in the Long Nineteenth Century: Nationality, Identity, and Appropriation* (2012).

⁸⁹ Kester Aspden, *Fortress Church: The English Roman Catholic Bishops and Politics 1903-1963* (Leominster: Gracewing, 2002); Stuart Rawnsley, *Fascism and Fascists in Britain in the 1930s: a case study of Fascism in the North of England in a period of economic and political change*: Ph.D. thesis (Bradford, 1982). This material is held at GB 532 Bradford University Library, Reference Number(s): GB 532 BUF.

entertained with these agents in light of the theories already mentioned here, further expanded in Chapter I, and then consequential chapters.

Therefore, in this thesis, the intention is that of talking about Dante and his Comedy not only in terms of exploitation of 'thought and action', as Gilbert (1971) puts it, but also as mentioned elsewhere in this Introduction, as a specular image of the events that surrounded it.⁹⁰ A currency of kind with which to express a sense of self in relation to self and to others (Anderson, 1983; Foà-Gentili, 2010), connecting facts and events of an otherwise unwieldy body of evidence, where often this very massive presence of material, itself leads the Comedy to be approached and appropriated, at times, by seemingly antithetically differing interests. Here, these tenets are explored, and a narrative of relation developed.

⁹⁰ Felix Gilbert, 'Intellectual History: Its Aims and Method', in *Daedalus*, vol. 100, no. 1 (Winter 1971), *Historical Studies Today*, pp. 80-97.

CHAPTER I

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

1. Introduction to the Chapter

The relationship that existed between Dante's Comedy and the Italian Fascist Movement and Regime of the 1920s and 1930s is one which developed on several planes. As such, the theoretical and epistemological profile upon which this thesis is positioned reflects this complexity. Thus, it accepts that historiography in general, culturalist historiography and its approaches to intellectual history in particular, especially in its interplay with literature, may be best suited to provide a rationale for the research design of this study. As Collini (1985) also argues, 'history is ultimately seamless in genre as well as chronology.'⁹¹ Thus, accepting his point here means accepting that intellectual history may lend the argument promoted in this thesis the necessary tools to access dialogues, which embrace a wide range of historical phenomena, without necessarily artificially break them in sub-disciplinary branches. This allows a more comprehensive, and unbreached, view of how the Comedy interplayed throughout history, albeit here just from the *Risorgimento* onwards, with Britain, the Fascist Movement, and the Regime, and why it became one of the favoured symbolic means of promoting a constructed, or "imagined community" (Anderson, 1983), by which this study means Italy.⁹²

Thus, the interdisciplinary approach preferred here follows a long-standing tradition. At the beginning of the twentieth century, James Harvey Robinson suggested that an interdisciplinary approach may be best suited for those who intended to use a theoretical frame based on intellectual history. According to the American historian, a more comprehensive approach to historical research should move away from the more traditional mere economic, political, and military history, and embrace instead an interdisciplinary use of other social sciences.⁹³

This is not to say that intellectual history has been treated here as an

⁹¹ Stefan Collini, 'What is History?', in *History Today*, vol. 35, issue: 10 (10 October 1985), pp. 46-54. It is also accessible online: <http://www.historytoday.com/stefan-collini/what-intellectual-history> [Last accessed: 20 June 2015], or Robert M. Burns, *Historiography* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2006).

⁹² Anderson, op. cit. See also what John P. Welle had to say about the use of Dante, '[Dante] was reconstructed within Italy in order to serve as the prophet and proponent of Italian liberation and national unification. A series of historical events and a variety of cultural and literary currents created the cult of Dante as national bard. This process parallels and is indebted to the development of the cult of Shakespeare as a national poet of England.' Welle, op. cit., p. 383.

⁹³ Cf. James H. Robinson, *The New History. Essays illustrating the Modern Historical Outlook* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1912).

epiphenomenon. Nor it is intended as a revival of some sort of functionalist understanding of historical thought. Both positions have been explored elsewhere.⁹⁴ Here, it served for the advancement and the understanding of a sustained contextual historical thought that might help to throw some light on that which was an intricate relationship. Thus, the elaboration of theory and methodology has, at times, followed different lines of enquiry that would satisfy this need.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Cf. James Harvey Robinson, *An Introduction to the History of Western Europe* (Boston and London: Ginn and company, 1902); id., *An Outline of the History of the Intellectual Class in Western Europe* (New York: The Macmillan company, 1911); id., 'Some Reflections on Intellectual History', in: James Harvey Robinson, *The New History. Essays Illustrating the Modern Historical Outlook* (New York: The MacMillan Company: 1912), pp. 101-131. Early examples of either strand of "intellectual history" may be found in the work of Charles A. Beard, Carl Becker, Vernon L. Parrington, Merle Curti, and Perry Miller. For the contextualist debate, see: Duncan Pritchard, *Epistemic Luck* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁹⁵ See, for example, 'The symposium on Intellectual History in the Age of Cultural Studies', in *Intellectual History Newsletter*, vol. 18 (1996), pp. 3-69; and Drew Faust, Hendrik Hartog, David A. Hollinger, Akira Iriye, Patricia Nelson Limerick, Nell Irvin Painter, David Roediger, Mary Ryan, and Alan Taylor, 'Interchange: The Practice of History', in *Journal of American History*, vol. 90 (Sept. 2003), pp. 576-611, here esp. pp. 588-591; see also Donald R. Kelley, 'Intellectual History and Cultural History. The Inside and the Outside', in *History of the Human Sciences*, vol. 15, no. 2, (April 2002), pp. 1-19.

2. Common imagination

Seven centuries ago, Dante, in his guise of poet, wrote a lengthy poem, the *Commedia*, which, as mentioned in the Introduction, has since come to signify different things for different people in different eras. Hence, Dante has transcended his role of mere poet and has become something of a symbol.⁹⁶ It is in this extensive representative role that this study has looked at Dante and his Comedy in relation to the Fascist Movement, later Regime, and the agency of Britain.

This thesis agrees with the idea that the *Risorgimento* handed over to the Fascists a certain narrative on National identity that hence served as an ideological substratum for their Regime.⁹⁷ Thus, it was during the era toward the end of the Enlightenment, and then the *Risorgimento*, that the role that Dante's Comedy was to have during the twenty years of fascist rule, the so-called *Ventennio*, began to take shape. As this relationship developed, it also effectively established a link between poetry and nationhood (Jossa, 2012), which remained unbroken until the end of Fascism in Italy.⁹⁸

In the early 1800s, Italy did not exist as a nation, albeit arguably it did as a notion, which thus needed to be constructed in order to create its own sense of national identity. Literature, it is propounded here, played a substantial role in this process. As Jossa puts it 'tradition, especially literary tradition, constructs the sense of a nation [...]'.⁹⁹

To construct a tradition is to force together different agents in order to promote, through virtue of an authority real or perceived, a common rhetoric. In other words, it is to "invent" a tradition. To this account, Hobsbawm argues: 'reference to a historic past, the peculiarity of "invented" traditions is that the continuity with it is largely fictitious.'¹⁰⁰

As such, this thesis does not claim that Dante's Comedy did not have a

⁹⁶ Cf. Stefano Jossa, 'Politics vs. Literature, the Myth of Dante and the Italian National Identity', in *Dante in the Long Nineteenth Century: Nationality, Identity, and Appropriation*, ed. by Aida Audeh and Nick Havely (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 31.

⁹⁷ Cf. Chapter II of this thesis.

⁹⁸ Cf. Jossa, op. cit.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 33.

¹⁰⁰ Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) quoted in Jossa, op. cit., p. 33. See also: Hobsbawm, and Ranger, op. cit.

historical precedence that lent it the authority that the Fascists and the British sought to harvest. What it is instead affirmed is that Dante had been 'resurrected, rehabilitated, and reconstructed' thanks to the British who had, it would be fair to argue, an interest in doing so as their vigorous promotion of the Comedy would seem to suggest.¹⁰¹ In this regard, Oelsner, in his essay *The Influence of Dante on Modern Thought*, states: 'we shall only endeavour to sketch rapidly Dante's influence on the various departments of European thought, without attempting to enter into the manifold details which the subject suggests at every step.'¹⁰²

Hobsbawm, the British Marxist historian, further elaborates on the fact that repetition represents an essential element for the successful establishment of a new tradition that seeks its roots in an allegedly commonly shared historical tradition. He affirms: 'in short, they [traditions] are responses to novel situations which take the form of reference to old situations, or which establish their own past by quasi-obligatory repetition.'¹⁰³

As already expressed in the Introduction, this study endorses his point and argues that it is Britain that which started this dual process of invention and repetition. She used Dante's Comedy, among others, to pursue during the *Risorgimento*, her interests to see Italy united. Furthermore, the relationship between the author of the *Commedia* and the Fascist Regime that followed was also characterised by Britain's presence, albeit perhaps in less overt terms.¹⁰⁴

In other words, what is proposed here is that in order to create a common imagination based on a rhetoric that was used to promote the idea and ideal of Italy, thus the concept of nationhood with its commonly shared history, Dante and his symbolic value, whether real or perceived, were enlisted.

As Anderson (1983) points out, the tenets of imagination and nation are concepts that relate to each other in an order of common interdependence. A nation exists in so far as it is possible to imagine it through the ideal of nationhood. Which

¹⁰¹ Welle, op. cit., p. 383.

¹⁰² Herman Oelsner, *The Influence of Dante on Modern Thought* (London: T. F. Unwin, 1895), p. 8. On Saturday 25 May 1861, page 5, *The Morning Post*, published in London, an article entitled *Spread of Protestantism in Italy* in which they suggested Dante led a sort of reversed Albigensian Crusade.

¹⁰³ Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) quoted in Jossa, op. cit., p. 33.

¹⁰⁴ See: Chapters II, and IV of this thesis.

is to say, the construction of the idea of nation is a commonly social expression that uses the agency of perception, and thus imagination, of a shared identity rooted in the common belonging to a group of choice to establish itself.

Anderson's theory befits the argument of this thesis for the latter maintains that Italy was but a construction that needed to establish a sense of identity for which the binding force of the idea of nationhood was thus employed, albeit along other related canons such as that of a national language, for example. The various chapters of this thesis, as also mentioned in the Introduction, explore at length these notions and connect them to the agency of the Comedy, which this study argues, was one of the instruments through which to establish the then newly "constructed" Kingdom of Italy.

Furthermore, according to Castoriadis,¹⁰⁵ the social imaginary would pose as an homogenising factor since all significations in a society, what he calls 'central imaginary significations', be it religion or God, the family, the nation, or what Thompson (1984) generally defines as "the creative and symbolic dimension of the social world, the dimension through which human beings create their ways of living together and their ways of representing their collective life,"¹⁰⁶ is that which holds society together.

Thus, it is this set of central representations that which informs the collective understanding of the self and the community, where ideology may come to be the one possible variant of the social imaginary.¹⁰⁷ The Comedy, this study propounds, provided that essential sense of belonging to a community, a *Volksgeist*, a shared physical as well as ideological place that came to be with the creation of the Kingdom of Italy.

The postulated idea of a *Volksgeist*, a German loanword allegedly firstly uttered by the philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder, but in reality coined by Hegel in

¹⁰⁵ Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, trans. by Kathleen Blamey (Cambridge: Polity P, 1997), p. 3.

¹⁰⁶ John B. Thompson, *Studies in the Theory of Ideology* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984; and Berkeley: University of California Press), p. 6

¹⁰⁷ Castoriadis, op. cit., pp. 359 - 64.

1801,¹⁰⁸ also used by Wilhelm Wundt, indicates the existence of a “group soul”, or otherwise a *Volkseele*.¹⁰⁹ The idea of this collective spirit, individually expressed by each person of a given nation, also identified in anthropological and social studies such as that of Gustave Le Bon¹¹⁰ with its three conceptual tenets of language, local historical tradition and national genius, stretches back into the previous century with its view of history and the role of civilisation, to which the Romantic tradition owes much.¹¹¹

In this thesis, the specific case of the formation of an Italian identity is thus afforded as a corpus. Identity here is intended as a shared common value that was central to the *Risorgimento*, as seen in the chapter dedicated to it as well as in the Introduction. To this effect Banti (2000) argues that in the symbolic, intellectual, and political arsenal of the time, which forged representations of an “imagined community” as intended by Anderson (1983), the issue of the origin of the construction of the Italian national identity, before the proclamation of the new state in a period stretching from 1796 to 1861, is also seen as a continuum.

However, as Banti (2000) further notes, there was a transformation of the semantic field of the term “nation”. This is relevant for the economy of this thesis, as the term became part of the new revolutionary lexicon used by *Patrioti*, such as Filippo Buonarroti, and absolved an increasingly important role in the political discourse of the time where the idea of a pre-existing Italian nation justified the claim for an Italian unitary state.¹¹² It is so that in the early nineteenth century the theme of the nation became a literary cultural space.¹¹³ Within this narrative, the use of Dante

¹⁰⁸ Joxe Azurmendi, *Volkgeist Herri Gogoa: Ilustraziotik Nazismora* (Bilbo: Elkar Argitaletxea, 2007), p. 138.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. H. Scott Gordon, *The History and Philosophy of Social Science* (London: Routledge, 1993).

¹¹⁰ Cf. Gustave Le Bon, *La Psychologie des Foules* (1895), translated into English in 1896 with the title: *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1896).

¹¹¹ Cf. Paola Gambarota, ‘The Syntax of Passions: Vico and Bouhours (Vico, and the Genius Of The Nation)’, in *Romantic Review*, vol. 97, no. 3/4; (May-Nov 2006), pp. 285-307.

¹¹² It should be noted that the issue of an “Italian” identity is still under considerable scrutiny and will not be discussed here as there are other more appropriate *fora* where it is possible to reflect on what constitutes being Italian. Among the many possible sources, see: Giulio Bollati, *L’italiano* (Torino: Einaudi, 1983); Remo Bodei, *Il noi diviso* (Torino: Einaudi, 1998); Alberto Asor Rosa, *Genus italicum* (Torino: Einaudi, 1997); and id, ‘La storia del “romanzo italiano”? Naturalmente, una storia “anomala”’, in *Il romanzo*, ed. by F. Moretti, vol. III (Torino: Einaudi, 2002); Stefano Jossa, *L’Italia letteraria* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2006); Silvana Patriarca, *Italianità. La costruzione del carattere nazionale* (Roma-Bari: Laterza 2010). Also on identity, see: Zygmunt Bauman, *Intervista sull’identità* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2003), and Francesco Remotti, *L’ossessione identitaria* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2010).

¹¹³ Banti, op. cit., p. 27.

and his Comedy, as Jossa (2012) also propounds, 'played a key role.'¹¹⁴ It did so because, as Banti also argues, during the *Risorgimento* the ideas, and at times ideals, thus in brief the narrative of nation and patriotisms, were moulded around symbols, such as the Comedy, and symbolic rituals that would occasionally made to be perceived as mythological.¹¹⁵ The articulation of such a discourse around those canons was promoted in an attempt to render a united Italian identity a more acceptable, accessible and tangible reality.

This study further argues that nineteenth-century Britain (and then in the twentieth century) was not only aware of what described so far, but she was also actively taking steps in order to ensure that her "project" – *Italy* - would succeed. That is to say, to unite Italy and exercise on her a certain degree of control thereafter not least through the agency of the Comedy. For example, Britain made sure she would endorse Italy's position among other nations by making one of delegates at the newly created League of Nations commenting on the Dante's centenary of 1921. The *Corriere della Sera* was quick to pick up the speak that was duly reported in its pages. In reference to Dante, the British delegate affirmed: 'sulla soglia di un'era nuova...ha avuto la visione di uno Stato universale ed ha espresso l'idea della solidarietà del genere umano'. Here Dante's thought about a universal empire was readapted to suit the needs of the moment and uphold an ideal of international harmony to which Italy was made to partake.¹¹⁶ Even as late as 1942 the English were still adfirming that 'In the next phase of Anglo-Italian relations we may expect that once again English influence will be exceedingly strong.'¹¹⁷

What came after the *Risorgimento*, or for some as a consequence of it,¹¹⁸ in other words – *Fascism* - was therefore also, in a certain measure, in debt, as it were, to the agency of the British. The Comedy, once again, this study suggests, reflected this state of affairs.

¹¹⁴ Jossa, op. cit., p. 31.

¹¹⁵ Another example of nationalist memorialisation is the figure of King Victor Emanuel II. See: Umberto Levra, *Fare gli italiani: memoria e celebrazione del Risorgimento* (Torino: Comitato di Torino dell'Istituto per la storia del Risorgimento italiano, 1992).

¹¹⁶ 'Dante celebrato all'Assemblea delle Nazioni', *Corriere della Sera*, 15 September 1921, p. 5.

¹¹⁷ 'The English and the Italians', in *the Tablet*, 24th January 1942, p. 3.

¹¹⁸ See, Chapter II of this thesis.

In simpler words, as the sense of national identity matured from the *Risorgimento* to the extremes to which Fascism took it, Britain ensured that she would have a say, if not control or at least some degree of influence, in directing the Italian state during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by helping creating and promoting a sense of belonging to a united Italian nation conveyed through the participation in the nationalistic cult of Dante, and above all his Comedy as profiled throughout this study.

However, as a brief excursus, the issue of national identity is not always a straightforward tenet as expressed in this Introduction and demonstrated, for example, in the specific case of women in pre-Victorian England. Mary Waters in Saglia, *Dante and British Romantic Women Writers: Writing the Nation, defining National Culture*, makes an interesting point about the more general idea of nationhood that Britain was experiencing in those years. Quoting her, Saglia states that:

The fact that women critics from [the eighteenth century] consistently addressed the understood national identity and character as historically and culturally determined constructs. Englishness or Britishness of the literary heritage demonstrate[s] that they understood national identity and character as historically and culturally determined constructs.¹¹⁹

Thus, there is recognition that national identity is a construct, which may be boosted, or otherwise, by other constructs, such as the Comedy. Moreover, crucially, they can be understood, and as such they are likely to be representations of specific interests. The Comedy had been placed within this narrative of identity, as Saglia (2012) also argues, albeit describing the ambivalence that still existed in approaching Dante.

¹¹⁹ Mary Waters in Saglia, 'Dante and British Romantic Women Writers: Writing the Nation, defining National Culture', in *Dante in the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Aida Audeh & Nick Havely (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 186.

This notwithstanding, the medieval poet remained at the centre of a cross-cultural model that promoted, or helped doing so, a certain national identity that found confirmation through ‘the glories of the national (literary) genius[es].’¹²⁰

When eventually the Fascist Regime came to power, it considered the three conceptual tenets of language, local historical tradition, and national genius, not only important for their means, but as Gambarota (2011) argues, it was even, to a certain degree, unable or unwilling to break away from a culturally and linguistically homogeneous model of nation, and its linguistic nationalism, born of a tradition that long preceded the *Risorgimento* of the nineteenth century.¹²¹

It is not difficult to see how Dante and his Comedy could be considered, in light of what thus far argued, an important keystone in the process of national identity formation that the British had, long before the Fascists, understood and exploited.

Furthermore, that of the language had been, ever since Italy was unified, a cardinal principle in the rhetoric of national identity (De Mauro, 1986). Liberal Italy pursued various methods of implementation of linguistic policies that were, at times, heavy-handedly enforced. Dante’s role, here too, was equally paramount. In fact, it seems almost universally accepted, even in today’s Italy, to affirm that Dante is the father of the Italian language.¹²² A language itself in need of constructions as it appears, for example, in the report commissioned by the then Minister of Education Broglio to Alessandro Manzoni in 1868, where the issue of a national language featured heavily. The Minister, in fact, proposed means and ways to unify the language from the top down ‘in tutti gli ordini del popolo’. He wanted the adoption of a single dictionary that would serve all and all purposes, to which end it is interesting to revisit, even if by simply re-positing the question as to why the Boccaccio’s *Decameron*, or Petrarch’s *Canzoniere*, which enjoyed a wider European public than

¹²⁰ Diego Saglia, ‘Dante and British Romantic Women Writers: Writing the Nation, defining National Culture’, in *Dante in the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Aida Audeh & Nick Havely (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 186.

¹²¹ Paola Gambarota, *Irresistible Signs: The Genius of Language and Italian National Identity* (University of Toronto Press, Toronto – Buffalo – London 2011).

¹²² The Italian linguist Tullio De Mauro affirms that about 90% of the basic modern Italian words were already present in the Comedy. Cf. *Grande Dizionario Italiano dell’Uso*, ed. by Tullio De Mauro, 6 vols (Torino: Utet, 1999-2007).

the *Commedia*, and had been favoured by Bembo, had not, despite this, been preferred.¹²³

The dogma of Dante's authorship of the Italian language has several historical reasons. Here it should suffice to mention that in the Comedy Dante wrote:

Così ha tolto l'uno a l'altro Guido
la gloria de la lingua; e forse è nato
chi l'uno e l'altro caccerà del nido.

(Pg, XI, 96-99)

where he is asserting his will to 'la gloria della lingua' that needs to move away from Guido Cavalcanti and Guido Guinizzelli, and thus embrace a language that speaks of a higher Love, and in so doing it takes on the mantle of something sacred.

The *Convivio* might help to further understand Dante's intentions. There, he held the Christian view of a world history that was universally Christian and essentially Roman. Dante repeatedly reasserts the prophetic mission of Rome announced by Virgil in the Aeneid, which was considered the pinnacle of the Greek-Roman world before the revelation.¹²⁴

It seems fair to say that is not difficult to see the points of contact with the fascist rhetoric of the time. Besides the myth of Rome, in fact, if during the 1920s Fascism had adopted a softer, so to speak, approach to the enforcement of a uniform language, in the 1930s the by then Regime became almost obsessed by the idea of 'nationalising' and preserving the purity of Italian.¹²⁵ Giuseppe Bottai wanted Italians to speak "Fascist" with the same degree of fluency with which they spoke their native tongues.¹²⁶ Thus, Dante and his Comedy, in their roles of "Father" of the language, could not but assume a central role that interplays with the notion of

¹²³ Cf. Pietro Bembo, *La prima stesura delle Prose della volgare lingua*, ed. by Mirko Tavosanis (Pisa: ETS, 2002).

¹²⁴ Among the wide choice of possible texts, see the very informative: Noemi Ghetti, *L'ombra di Cavalcanti e Dante* (Roma: L'Asino d'oro edizioni, 2010). See also: Chapter III for a more extensive discourse on the position of Dante and his Comedy within the narrative of a unified and unifying Italian language.

¹²⁵ Marie-Ann Matard-Bonucci, 'Lingua, fascismo e razza. Considerazioni su un disegno totalitario', in *Cultura della razza e cultura letteraria nell'Italia del Novecento*, ed. by Sonia Gentili, and Simona Foà (Roma: Carocci, 2010), p. 166.

¹²⁶ Matard-Bonucci, op. cit., p. 170.

symbolism, earlier mentioned here. For example, albeit not directly referring to Dante's role as "Father" of the Italian language, this nonetheless the writer, poet and politician Ettore Janni, who will later distance himself from the Fascist Regime, wrote in regard to Dante and his reception in Italy, 'Dante ... un altro e più fiero modo di dire Italia'.¹²⁷ This belies a symbolic conceptualisation of the author of the Comedy that is directed toward an understanding of a construction of a certain idea of the Italian nation.

Therefore, to talk in terms of *Volkseele*, or national genius as intended by Herder, without entering into an anthropological debate that looks at the issue of race, like for example Foà-Gentili's study, poses the question raised by the late Ernst Cassirer (1946) of the role of myth. That of symbolic myth, it is worth reiterating, is a principle central to this debate that sees Dante's Comedy used, or handled as such, in ways that are not always linear. By which it is meant, for instance, the use of myth in Joyce's Dante with his vision of history as an ever changing, never pure, event.¹²⁸

However, to talk in terms of symbolic myth is also to accept that others have argued the possibility of contrasting forces at play in the shaping of such. For example, the philosophy of history expressed by Herder in his last book, *The Myth of the State*, postulates a sort of irrationality that the latter sees in the historical evolution of human thought. There, the role of myth, upon which the Romantic idea of nation is largely based, and thus relevant for this study, gradually gives way to a more rational and science-based society.

Yet, myth has a dark side. The 'darkness of myth' unless kept in check by 'by superior forces,' 'intellectual, ethical and artistic,' will again return to dominate 'man's cultural and social life' as they so violently did during the first half of the twentieth century (Cassirer, 1946).¹²⁹ Therefore, whereas this study partially agrees

¹²⁷ Extract from Ettore Janni, *In piccoletta barca* (Milano: Alpes 1921), in 'Dante', *Popolo d'Italia*, 4 August 1921, p. 3.

¹²⁸ Cf. Roy K. Gottfried, *The Art of Joyce's Syntax in Ulysses* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1980); *New Light on Joyce from Dublin Symposium*, ed. by Fritz Senn (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1972). Joyce, in his relationship with Dante, the role of myth, and his contrasting vision, in relation to the fascist understanding and use of such, with its images of purity and nationalism; the role of Britain and that of the Comedy seen from British shores, is afforded more in depth in the last chapter of this thesis.

¹²⁹ Ernst Cassirer, *The Myth of the State* (Yale University Press, 1946), p. 298.

with Herder for it accepts that the myth of Dante and his Comedy were used as an instrument of domination as agents of different and differing stakes, namely those of the Fascist Regime and Liberal Britain, it also maintains that the division between “good” and “evil” forces was not a distinct clear cut.

In the argument promoted here, Herder’s checking “intellectual, ethical and artistic” forces were engaged, differently from what he proposes, that is to say on both sides of the fence, so to speak. Dante as a myth was being used to pursue, like in the case of Eliot, Joyce, and Pound explored in the last chapter of this thesis, interests that could appear contrasting at a first glance.

Cassirer might help to better define theoretically the tenet expressed here. He conceptualises a “fact of science” and a “fact of culture” expressed in his philosophy of symbolic forms. Religion and art stem from mythical thought whereas theoretical science is born out of natural language. Cassirer too almost creates a dichotomised reality of opposing forces, “good” and “evil,” which might have been of appeal to the Romantics, where the historical and meta-historical planes intersect in his vision of the subjective. Thus, every “cultural object”, by which he means to include also a literary text, occupies a specific and individual space, in historical as well as geographical (and therefore cultural) terms. This notwithstanding, Cassirer’s “cultural object” cuts through the singular historical and cultural meaning acquiring, therefore, a transcending value, which places it over on beyond the historical and locally defined cultural.

His argument seems to consonant with the role of the Comedy in this study, for which this so widely celebrated medieval poem was used as a trans-cultural, meta-historical, and locally undefined and indefinable object. For instance, to bring forward one of the examples cited in this thesis, an interest that cut through the cultures and transcended the mere literary plane started in earnest, as a token of things to come, around the figure of Dante and his Comedy, in England, in the guise of the poet Henry Francis Cary, to name but one.¹³⁰ The latter was helping

¹³⁰ Several other examples are provided throughout this thesis.

promoting Dante and his Comedy,¹³¹ prompting Saglia (2012) to go as far as to affirm that London was, by now, Dante's 'newly found cultural capital'.¹³²

That of the relevance of on an English reading of Dante with their 'conception of the nation as a linguistic and cultural continuum linking past and present'¹³³ that so well interplayed with a *Risorgimento* first, and later with the fascist era, are in fact canons explored all throughout this thesis.

However, Britain, this study maintains, must have been well aware of the power that possible interpretations of the Comedy would have if orchestrated in pre-determined directions that cut through time and space. In other words, it is through an act of constant interpretation that allows the self, in relation to the "reading" of the other, to be itself re-written or re-interpreted, that essentially each time a new form of interaction is produced. What reunites *Naturwissenschaften* (science of nature) and *Geisteswissenschaften* (human sciences), effectively bringing together the two distinct sides of Kant's original synthesis, is the very element which keeps reoccurring, expressed each time in a different way, thus creating an ever-lasting process of re-elaboration. As also exemplified in the Introduction, it is this process of historical and cultural interpretation of symbolic meanings that which is truly universal as neither time nor space can claim it, at least not entirely (Cassirer, 1942), and, as such, that which allowed for different and differing readings of Dante's Comedy.¹³⁴

From this derives the possibility that the individual subject owes much of his/her identity to a trans-historic process. In his book, *The Myth of the State*, Cassirer refers to a mythical Romantic view of history, intended as historicist in nature, where it is the past that which informs the myth of subjectivity. Herder's *Historismus* (or Vico's for that matter), Cassirer argues, envisages a collective spirit, which is but the myth of history.

¹³¹ [To Anna Seward, 7 May 1792; on early poets.], *Memoir of the Rev. Henry Francis Cary, M.A., Translator of Dante. With his Literary Journal and Letters*, ed. by Henry Francis Cary, and Henry Cary, 2 vols (London: E. Moxon, 1847).

¹³² Saglia, op. cit., p. 191.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ernst Cassirer, *Zur Logik der Kulturwissenschaften* (Göteborg: Göteborgs Högskolas Årsskrift 47, 1942), translated as *The Logic of the Humanities* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961). See also: Jonas Hansson, and Svante Nordin, *Ernst Cassirer: The Swedish Years* (Bern: Peter Lang International Academic Publishers, 2006).

To speak of a collective founding origin of men's identity helped to support, in the first half of the last century, nationalistic movements such as Fascism and Nazism, which were, as it is well known, willing, and determined to exploit its potentialities. That is to say, a concept of national genius, such as that of Dante, where the individual and the nation are engaged in a certain relationship. There, traditional essentialist theories (be them anthropological or cultural studies) see human beings as "cultural" units who bear the signs of the culture to which they belong. This, if expressed in geographical space, recalls to mind the concept of nation, which at once defines them as it differentiates them from all others.¹³⁵ Fascism, as it universally accepted, heavily promoted the idea and ideal of nation, along those of a movement that was both political and spiritual, the cult of the leader, the concept of hierarchy, the glorification of the concept of heroism, the exaltation of work, and the superiority of the "Italian race".

Traditionally in the history of what constitutes a nation, there are two distinct approaches. One looks at naturalistic, racial, or ethnic communities who allegedly belong to a predestined land; whereas the other looks at what famously expressed by Ernest Renan who affirmed: 'the desire to live together, the desire to continue to invest in the heritage that we have jointly received.'¹³⁶ This is to say, there is a will to look at the unifying power of a shared common cultural heritage with its established institutions.

In the specific case of Italy, both conceptual tenets found a historical outlet. During the *Risorgimento*, Mazzini expressed his ideal of Nation as a *Patria*. Primarily, he intended it as 'una associazione' where its members lived in a

¹³⁵ This study cannot look into anthropological theories in detail. Here is only a small sample of what has been said in this regard. See: Marc Augé, *A Sense for the Other: The Timeliness and Relevance of Anthropology* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999); Étienne Balibar, and Immanuel M. Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (London: Verso, 1991); Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994); Robin Fox, and Nicholas B. King, Introduction: Beyond Culture Worry, in R. Fox and B. King (eds.), *Anthropology Beyond Culture* (Oxford: Berg, 2002); Gellner 1983, op. cit.; id., *Culture, Identity and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Hobsbawm, and Ranger 1983, op. cit.; *Conceptualizing Society*, ed. by Adam Kuper (London: Routledge, 1992); Adam Kuper, *Culture, the Anthropologists' Account* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999); Jeffrey C. Pratt, 'Italy: Political Unity and Cultural Diversity', in R. Grillo, and J. Pratt (eds.), *The Politics of Recognizing Difference: Multiculturalism Italian-Style* (Basingstoke: Ashgate, 2002); Verena Stolcke, 'The "Nature" of Nationality', in *Citizenship and Exclusion*, ed. by V. Bader (London: Macmillan, 1997); Susan Wright, 'Politicisation of "Culture"', in *Anthropology Today*, vol. 14, no. 1 (1998), pp. 7-15.

¹³⁶ Ernest Renan, 'What is a Nation?', text of a conference delivered at the Sorbonne on 11 March 1882, in Ernest Renan, *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?* Translated by Ethan Rundell (Paris: Presses-Pocket, 1992). (Available online at: http://ucparis.fr/files/9313/6549/9943/What_is_a_Nation.pdf [Last accessed: 29 June 2015].

'comunione di liberi e d'uguali'.¹³⁷ For Mazzini the human community was to live free from ancient privileges and imperial aspirations. Certainly, it was not so for fascist Italy according to which the idea of nation was to be firmly rooted in an authoritarian, and State-based, understanding of the community that eventually led to a form of racially motivated principles akin to those of Nazi extraction.

As early as 1914 Alfredo Rocco celebrated nationalism in term of race. He proclaimed: 'Il nazionalismo è attaccamento alla nazione, alla razza e affermazione della propria razza.'¹³⁸ He was echoed in his views by many others like the futurist poet Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, or the nationalists Enrico Corradini, and Luigi Federzoni. Especially Rocco, the fascist minister who, it is worth remembering for the economy of what argued here in relation to the Comedy, and as expressed by Visser (1992), was a keen promoter of the cult of *Romanità* of which the other chapters of this thesis speak at length.¹³⁹

Dante and his Comedy found themselves at the centre of a net of interests where, for example in Milan on 28 October 1935, Cardinal Alfredo Ildefonso Schuster, in the course of the solemn mass celebrated that day, stated: '... È la perpetua missione dell'Italia cattolica e di quella Roma dantesca onde Cristo è Romano,'¹⁴⁰ unafraid, it would seem, to use one of the most favoured expressions in fascist quarters as Carlo Galassi Paluzzi and his Istituto di Studi Romani made amply clear.¹⁴¹

As for the individual, on whom the State is founded in the form of *Volkseele*, of national genius, the fascist doctrine was fundamentally different from traditional Western essentialist anthropological principles, be them Aristotelian or Christian. The latter, as well as other systems such as the liberal and the

¹³⁷ Giuseppe Mazzini, 'Doveri dell'uomo. V I doveri verso la patria', in *Scritti editi ed inediti*. Reale Commissione per l'edizione nazionale degli Scritti di Giuseppe Mazzini (Imola: Cooperativa tipografico-editrice P. Galeati, 1906).

¹³⁸ Alfredo Rocco, 'Che cosa è il nazionalismo e che cosa vogliono i nazionalisti (Padova, 1914)', now in 'Scritti e discorsi politici di Alfredo Rocco', vol. 1, in *La lotta nazionale della vigilia e durante la guerra (1913-1918)*, (Milano: A. Giuffrè, 1938), p. 87.

¹³⁹ Cf. Romke Visser, 'Fascist Doctrine and the Cult of the Romanità', in *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 27, no.1 (1992), pp. 5- 22.

¹⁴⁰ Schuster's speech can be found in: Renzo De Felice, *Mussolini il Duce, gli anni del consenso (1929-36)* (Torino: Einaudi, 1974), p. 264.

¹⁴¹ Cf. *L'istituto di Studi Romani per la celebrazione del bimillenario augusteo* (Roma: Istituto nazionale di studi romani, 1937), p. 15; id., 'La Roma di Cesare e la Roma "onde Cristo è romano"', in *Roma "onde Cristo è romano,"* vol. I (Roma: Istituto nazionale di studi romani, 1937), pp. 37-45 [Conference held on 21 March 1936 at the Corsi Superiori di Studi Romani].

democratic, see the individual as central to their set of beliefs. Fascism, however, as Giovanni Selvi emphasised, regarded the collective entity, or society, as its centre. Much as an organism in which all parts harmonically contribute to the wellbeing of the whole, Fascism reduced individual liberties hierarchically submitting them under the yoke of authority necessary to the unity of the National community. Ultimately, the latter too had a scope to fulfil the accomplishment of its imperial fate.¹⁴²

When it came to the empire, Dante was often named, by design or coincidence, by Fascists and Catholics alike. They both made ample use of the sentence, 'Roma dantesca onde Cristo è Romano'.¹⁴³ Fascist doctrine and fascist spirituality in a way converged, or rather muddled up. Both doctrine and fascist mysticism are problematic objects of study, not least because of the blurred boundaries in which the Regime's ideology kept them. However, if by and large, the former may be said to be more regulatory and pragmatic, the latter has a certain character of "spirituality".¹⁴⁴

The clash, on many planes, not least "spiritual," between the Fascist Regime and other forces, became progressively more evident as in the example of Cardinal Schuster offered before. He who, just a short few years earlier, had boldly allied his Church with the Fascists' cause, by now saw how the latter aimed at claiming the very essence of divinity that underpinned the legitimacy of the Catholic Church. The Cardinal uttered words that were impregnated with indignation and rejection, and perhaps even fear:

¹⁴² Cf. Giovanni Selvi, 'Le basi naturali della dottrina fascista', in *Quaderni dell'ideologia fascista*, no. 26 (1926). See also: Giovanni Selvi, *La dottrina fascista dello Stato*. Conference to the officers of the garrison of Piacenza December 2, 1933 (Piacenza: Tip. Porta, 1933).

¹⁴³ Schuster's speech quoted in Emilio Gentile, *I giorni di Roma* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2007), p. 267. 'Cooperiamo pertanto con Dio in questa missione nazionale e cattolica di bene; soprattutto in questo momento, in cui sui campi d'Etiopia il vessillo d'Italia reca in trionfo la croce di Cristo, spezza la catene degli schiavi, spiana le strade ai missionari del Vangelo! Coltiviamo in noi e negli altri questa buna volontà e Dio darà il premio della pace... quella pace, dico, che dalla Città dei sette Colli già consacrati dal sangue di Pietro e Paolo, a guisa di fertile fiumana, ormai da venti secoli promulga nel mondo quel verbo che abolisce la schiavitù, rischiarla le tenebre dalla barbarie, dona Dio ai popoli, inonda di civiltà religiosa e vero bene. È la perpetua missione dell'Italia cattolica e di quella Roma dantesca onde Cristo è Romano.' However, it must also be added that Pope Pius XI, himself a great admirer of Dante, as reported through this thesis, was secretly opposed to the Ethiopian wars. See: Lucia Ceci, *Il papa non deve parlare* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2010).

¹⁴⁴ To engage in an attempt to capture the essence of what the Fascist Regime meant its doctrine to be would go over and beyond the scope of this study. The former was never truly approached as a coherent corpus and had, as it still does, many who contributed to its conceptual tenets of principles and values. It was already as early as the 1920s that numerous Italian intellectuals, such as Benedetto Croce, Piero Gobetti, Antonio Gramsci and Palmiro Togliatti, began to take a critical stance in regard to the nature of a coherent fascist approach to its ideology. It is thus left to the several entries throughout this thesis, or to other studies, to better define the conceptual demarcation that occurs between fascist doctrine and fascist mysticism.

[...] Di fronte ad un credo apostolico e ad una Chiesa cattolica di origine divina, abbiamo dunque un credo fascista ed uno stato totalitario il quale, appunto come quello hegeliano, rivendica per sé degli attributi divini. Sul piano religioso il Concordato è vaporizzato [...] ¹⁴⁵

Therefore, if the essence of a national genius unfolds in history, intended as destiny, the question of race, especially in Nazi based ideologies, can be said to be present. Even if the issue of race eventually engulfed the majority of those who thought that it was based on an essentialist approach to the essence of the human spirit, it is not possible here to engage in an anthropological discussion on it. Therefore, its mention, albeit brief, will need to suffice. ¹⁴⁶ The discussion as to why the concept of national genius, intended as a sort of fate of a whole nation, and how this was saturated at one point with racial tones would, in fact, open a new conceptual flank on what already is a vast undertaking, thus rendering this project simply too wide in scope.

In addition to what said above, Fascism in itself was ideologically inconsistent despite its many attempts to define its doctrinal plane, such as, for example, in the pages of the *Enciclopedia italiana* (1932) under the entry *Fascismo* in volume XIV. ¹⁴⁷ Therefore dwelling on a kind of nationalism rooted in the racial

¹⁴⁵ 'Tra noi, la Chiesa cattolica oggi si trova di fronte, non tanto ad un nuovo stato fascista, giacchè [sic] questo esisteva già nell'anno del Concordato, ma di fronte ad un imperante sistema filosofico-religioso, nel quale, per quanto non lo si dica a parole, è implicata la negazione del Credo apostolico, della trascendenza spirituale della religione, dei diritti della famiglia cristiana e dell'individuo. [...] Di fronte ad un credo apostolico e ad una Chiesa cattolica di origine divina, abbiamo dunque un credo fascista ed uno stato totalitario il quale, appunto come quello hegeliano, rivendica per sé degli attributi divini. Sul piano religioso il Concordato è vaporizzato [...] Il cristianesimo è essenzialmente soprannaturale, ed è spirito. Codesto Stato hegeliano, invece, è forza materiale ed è tutta cosa politica. Il cristianesimo vuole amare, temere e servire Dio; codesta forma invece di statolatria usurpa i diritti di Dio e a lui si oppone [...] Nello Stato fascista... c'è un unico, assoluto, totalitario, interamente sovrano il quale non fa posto ad altri, né cede lo scettro ad alcuno. È lo Stato, il quale penetra negli stessi spiriti e nelle coscienze.' Cit. in Emilio Gentile, *I giorni di Roma*, op. cit., pp. 267-268.

¹⁴⁶ There are many who expressed their thought in this regard thus, it would not be viable to mention them all. However, the great Italian thinker, Antonio Gramsci, and his stand against fate and a possible immanent destiny of human life should be at least mentioned. See: Antonio Gramsci, *Lettere dal carcere*, ed. by S. Caprioglio, and E. Fubini (Torino: Einaudi, 1965). For an approach to 'war ideology', see: Thomas Mann, 'Culture and Socialism' (1927), in *Past Masters and Other Papers*, translated by H.T. Lowe-Porter (Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1968), pp. 201-14; and Domenico Losurdo, *Hegel, questione nazionale, restaurazione. Presupposti e sviluppi di una battaglia politica* (Urbino: Università degli Studi di Urbino, 1983); id., *La comunità, la morte, l'Occidente. Heidegger e l'ideologia della guerra* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 1991); id., *Hegel e la Germania. Filosofia e questione nazionale tra rivoluzione e reazione* (Milano: Guerini e associati, 1997).

¹⁴⁷ The entry was by Mussolini himself. It was published and referenced several times during the twenty years of fascist rule in Italy. This encyclopaedic entry may help to better refine how fascist doctrine

aspect, or any other for that matter, more than it is possible here, would unbalance this research that instead wants to look at the connection that was established between the Comedy, Fascism, and the agency of Britain.

However, to return to the previous point, De Felice found the pre-fascist period to be essential for an understanding of the fascist era and denied its ideological system any originality. The Italian historian interpreted Fascism as a continuation of the Liberal experience to which, he claims, elements of socialism and Mussolini's personal political experience were added.¹⁴⁸

There are, of course, those who disagree with De Felice, like Gregor (1969) who maintained that the fascist ideology, especially in reference to its doctrine, could not be said to have a matrix, which was exclusively nationalist, or futurist.¹⁴⁹ Pier Giorgio Zunino, even if not agreeing with De Felice, does not entirely disagree either. He maintains that once a certain number of concepts, already present on the political and intellectual Italian scene, that is to say primarily values and ideas inherited from the Liberal system, were recovered, Fascism moved into a new phase. Having to break away from the tight niche of a reactionary movement, Fascism started to create new myths, such as those mentioned here, that would help it define its uniqueness (Zunino, 1985).¹⁵⁰

It is so that, as early as 1922, Mussolini could afford giving speeches that started approaching the idea of myth from a specific fascist angle. He stated:

Noi abbiamo creato il nostro mito. Il mito è una fede, è una passione. Non è necessario che sia una realtà. È una realtà nel fatto che è un pungolo, che è una

wished to promote itself and it might also reveal the propensity to resolve to spirituality that Fascism so often expressed. Within this entry, there is a section called 'Doctrine' and this is followed by a 'History of the Fascist movement' by Gioacchino Volpe. The entry was divided into two parts: 'Fundamental ideas' by Giovanni Gentile, and 'Political and Social doctrine' by Mussolini, albeit with some possible collaboration with the former. The section on Political and Social doctrine was considered so important to have been used as a premise the statute of the National Fascist Party in 1938. Cf. Benito Mussolini, Fascismo, in *Enciclopedia italiana Treccani*, XIV (1932), pp. 847-884.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. Renzo De Felice, 'Mussolini il fascista', vol. I, in *La conquista del potere (1921-1925)* (Torino, Einaudi, 1966); id., 'Mussolini il fascista', vol. II, in *L'organizzazione dello Stato fascista (1925-1929)* (Torino: Einaudi, 1968); De Felice 1981, op. cit.; id., 'Mussolini il Duce', vol. II., in *Lo Stato totalitario (1936-1940)* (Torino: Einaudi, 1981). On De Felice's understanding of fascist ideology, see also: Renzo De Felice, *Breve storia del fascismo* (Milano: Mondadori, 2002).

¹⁴⁹ Anthony James Gregor, *The ideology of fascism: the rationale of totalitarianism* (New York: Free Press, 1969).

¹⁵⁰ Cf. Pier Giorgio Zunino, *L'ideologia del fascismo. Miti, credenze e valori nella stabilizzazione del regime* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1985).

speranza, che è fede, che è coraggio. Il nostro mito è la Nazione, il nostro mito è la grandezza della Nazione! E a questo mito, a questa grandezza, che noi vogliamo tradurre in una realtà completa, noi subordiniamo tutto il resto.¹⁵¹

Having claimed the nation for themselves, fascist rhetoric, to use the words of the fascist captain Iacopini, was quick to associate Dante's work with the fascist quest. Iacopini declared that Dante was, without doubt, Fascist and added: '... soprattutto lo dimostra la sua Divina Commedia...'.¹⁵² Thus, above all other works of literature, for Iacopini and some of the Fascists akin to him, it was Dante he who showed the outmost commitment to the ideal of nationhood and Italian fatherland.

However, fascist ideology lacked any formal coherence, as Emilio Gentile argued. The Italian scholar, in fact, recognised its unique trait in that which derived from the rejection of any form of rationalism and intellectualism.¹⁵³ Thus, as the sources tend to disagree, the objective here, as Emilio Gentile points out in his reading of Fascism, is to keep in mind that there are a variety of components that constitute the ideological makeup of the Movement and then Regime. As said before, this current study has striven to relate some of those components to the use that was made of Dante's Comedy. However, it acknowledges that is impossible to speak at length of, or to cover all, those single individual concepts that were expressed in fascist ideology. Therefore, even the distinction between the two wider components of Fascism, which is to say its doctrinal ideology and its sense of spirituality, are engaged not with the intention to offer a comprehensive overview of Fascism, as that would go beyond the intended boundaries of this thesis, but rather, whenever possible, with the aim to highlight the interplay that occurred between Italian Fascism, Britain, and Dante's Comedy.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ Benito Mussolini, *Scritti e discorsi di Benito Mussolini* (Milano: U. Hoepli, 1934), here the speech at the San Carlo Royal Theatre at Naples, 24 October 1922. Also quoted in English in Herman Finer, *Mussolini's Italy* (New York: Henry Holt, 1935), p. 218; quoted in *Main Currents of Western Thought*, ed. by Franklin Le Van Baumer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), p. 748, 'We have created our myth. The myth is a faith, it is passion. It is not necessary that it shall be a reality. It is a reality by the fact that it is a good, a hope, a faith, that it is courage. Our myth is the Nation, our myth is the greatness of the Nation! And to this myth, to this grandeur, that we wish to translate into a complete reality, we subordinate all the rest.'

¹⁵² Pietro Iacopini, *Dante e il Fascismo nel canto di Sordello* (Roma: Tip. Agostiniana, 1928), p. 1.

¹⁵³ Emilio Gentile, *Le origini dell'ideologia fascista* (Bologna: il Mulino, 1975).

¹⁵⁴ Speaking of fascist ideology and spirituality Mussolini affirmed: 'Se ogni secolo ha una sua dottrina, da mille indizi appare che quella del secolo attuale è il fascismo. [...] Il fascismo ha oramai nel mondo

Thus, returning to Emilio Gentile, in his book *Le origini dell'ideologia fascista*, the Italian historian quotes Norberto Bobbio who is in turn commenting on the Italian scholar Vilfredo Pareto and his theory of cyclical social change when the latter speaks of “deviance.”¹⁵⁵ The two scholars believe that man produces a series of more or less rational reasons. These are supposed to justify certain behaviours of the self as well as society. However, according to Pareto, it is not possible to universalise “deviant” behaviours, which are by their nature relative to frameworks of social expectations.¹⁵⁶ In this sense, the Fascists insistence on a somewhat intrinsic sacral nature that they wanted rooted in spirituality represents a reference to the main planes on which fascist ideology saw itself belonging.

Dante’s Comedy, this study maintains, became, albeit obviously not by choice, a specular agent of one’s aspirations whether realised and realisable or otherwise, which is to say “deviant”, in other words. Lummus (2011), has earlier commented, pointed out that Dante’s Comedy is, in fact, a specular agent of modern society.¹⁵⁷ The mirror of which Lummus talks, could be said to be the place where society can look at itself and identify those ‘vices and perversions,’ or in other words, that which society deems to be acceptable and laudable, and that which is much demonised and rejected as Greenblatt (1995) also argued.

The Comedy, however, in the opinion of who writes as well as Lummus (2011), went one step further. As a mirror, it would have been but a representation of a passive space, able to merely reflect and not condition the world. This is not what the founding of this study revealed it happened. The Comedy had a much ampler role in society, which was understood by both the Fascists and Britain. Lummus (2011), in fact further argues that Dante’s masterpiece, much as Fascism, set out to not only ‘represent’ but also ‘reform’ the world.¹⁵⁸

That of reforming the world was, of course, one of the “missions” Fascism believed to have. Gentile’s actualism, albeit not entirely, was particularly close to

l’universalità di tutte le dottrine che, realizzandosi, rappresentano un momento nella storia dello spirito umano.’ Benito Mussolini, ‘Fascismo’, in *Enciclopedia italiana Treccani*, XIV (1932), p. 850.

¹⁵⁵ E. Gentile 1975, op. cit., p. 43.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. *Encyclopedia of Social Deviance*, ed. by Craig J. Forsyth, and Heith Copes (New York: Sage, 2014), p. 652.

¹⁵⁷ David Lummus, ‘Dante’s Inferno. Critical Reception and Influence’, in *Critical Insights: Dante’s ‘Inferno’*. (Pasadena: Salem Press, 2011), p. 63.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

some of the quasi-religious tenets that Fascism expressed, and the latter owed the former an ideological debt. De Begnac, the famous *Duce's* biographer, saw in fact, much of the fideistic system elaborated by Mussolini being based on Gentile's actualism.¹⁵⁹ Others fascist intellectuals too, such as Balbino Giuliano, Giuseppe Bottai, and to an extent Alfredo Rocco, were close to Gentile's actualist idealism.¹⁶⁰

Much as the latter, fascist idealism saw to reform the entire cognitive perception of the Italians, remoulding their political and religious understanding in what Emilio Gentile referred to as a 'political theology', or 'teologia politica'.¹⁶¹

In the panoply of concepts that made up fascist ideology, the concept of "razza italiana" also had a place, albeit controversial, especially since the Nazi ideologists were, during the 1930s, producing an impressive, as much as aggressive, body of research meant to define the *Herrenrasse*, the master race. This was to be, according to the taxonomy of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the so-called Aryan race, which was allegedly a racial group under which umbrella Northern Europeans would loosely fall.

There were obvious problems with such a concept, as it would hierarchically place Rome and her empire, so central a principle to fascist ideology, a step under the conceptualised superiority of the German race. However, as Italy politically progressively moved towards Germany that which had originally been mostly a spiritual sense of race became a more biologically inspired ideology eventually culminating in the Racial Laws of 1938.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ Yvon De Begnac, *Palazzo Venezia. Storia di un regime* (Roma: La Rocca, 1950), p. 212.

¹⁶⁰ Cf. Gregor, op. cit. For Rocco's contribution to fascist ideology, see: Henry Siltou Harris, *The Social Philosophy of Giovanni Gentile* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1960), p. 189.

¹⁶¹ Gentile E. 1975, op. cit., p. 350.

¹⁶² For fascist racism, see: Eucardio Momigliano, *Storia tragica e grottesca del razzismo fascista* (Milano: Mondadori, 1946); Luigi Preti, *I miti dell'impero e della razza nell'Italia degli anni Trenta* (Roma: Opere nuove, 1965); Roberto Maiocchi, *Scienza italiana e razzismo fascista* (Scandicci: La nuova Italia, 1999); Riccardo Bonavita, Gianluca Gabrielli, and Rossella Ropa (eds.), *L'offesa della razza. Razzismo e antisemitismo dell'Italia fascista* (Bologna: Patron, 2005). For spiritual racism, see: Julius Evola, *Il mito del sangue* (Milano: Hoepli, 1937).

3. Fascism and the Comedy

When commenting on fascist aspirations Zunino, as mentioned earlier, believed that the recovery of a specific set of myths, beliefs and values aided Mussolini's Movement to enter the Italian political and social arena no longer as a reactionary outsider, as the left-wing of Italian politics saw it, but as an "insider". That is to say, Fascism was to be an element of stability albeit with revolutionary ideas. In his study, Zunino argued that towards the middle of the 1930s the creation of one of the last and most important fascist myths, that of empire, coincided also with a period of "maturity" for the regime.¹⁶³

As it is known, in Dante's idea of empire, the role of Rome was central as this was to oversee that earthly life be peaceful in order to guarantee the conditions for the fulfilment of a spiritual existence. Dante largely reinforced his convictions about what the empire ought to be around the years 1310 and 1313 approximately. This was the time when the Roman Holy Emperor, Henry VII of Luxemburg planned his descending into the Italian peninsula to claim his throne. Before that date, no emperor had, since 1250, ruled over the Roman Holy Empire. This void was quickly filled in by the Roman Church that, especially with Pope Boniface VIII, began pursuing its own aggressive form of imperialism.¹⁶⁴ However, as the historical importance of Dante's vision of empire is not the object of this study, what matters here is the myth that of him was created from the nineteenth century onwards. This manipulation of Dante's understanding of empire found its reasons in political ends. Dante, it should be reasserted, became a symbol of the Italian nation only in the modern era, which in turn was the time when the idea of nation was being conceptualised. In this regard, Gellner, already cited in the Introduction, asserted that it was nationalism that which informed nations.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ Cf. Zunino, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

¹⁶⁴ Mancusi-Ungaro, *op. cit.*, p. 41. For the idea of a universal Roman empire and Divine Providence as a guide for history as one of the main historical sources for Dante's ideas on these tenets, see also: Paolo Orosio, *Historiarum libri septem adversus paganos* (Thorunii, 1857), especially, *Hist.* II, III 5. Dante alludes to him in *Pd X*, 118-120.

¹⁶⁵ Gellner, *op. cit.*, pp. 48-49.

However, not everyone agreed with Zunino's understanding of Fascism. There were those, like Zeev Sternhell, who saw it more as a sort of anti-materialist and anti-rationalist reading of Marxism, 'un sistema ideologico completo, radicato in una visione totale del mondo, che possiede la propria filosofia della storia e i propri imperativi per l'azione immediata.'¹⁶⁶

Thus, once again, besides the specific questions of definition, Fascism strived at producing a fascist doctrine that could move on the Regime from its early more "spiritual" approach to a more solid ideological plane. In 1922, at the very dawn of Mussolini's takeover of power, with the founding of the magazine *Gerarchia*, the Italian dictator (albeit not yet such in 1922) meant to clearly spell out the intentions of his Movement and the necessity of acquiring an ideology that would define a unique fascist identity. He stated: 'veramente storico, così fedelmente assolto, di preparare il clima spirituale e culturale nel quale le forze della rivoluzione dovevano marciare sullo Stato liberale, in un primo tempo, e andare verso la costruzione dello Stato fascista in un secondo tempo.'¹⁶⁷

As it is known, fascist identity followed a process of homologation of society for fascist Italy might be said to have occurred in that "spiritual" format that the Regime postulated as its mission. Therefore, Fascism did not seek to uniform society on a mere political or educational plane, but it sought to get to the core of society. In other words, getting to its spiritual essence Fascism wanted to mould the very fabric of reality, thus not simply stopping at the norms that regulate social life, but that which ultimately determined such norms. In their words, Fascism did not intend to 'rifare le norme della vita umana', but instead act on 'il contenuto, l'uomo, il carattere, la fede.'¹⁶⁸

Thus, going back to the role of literature, and hence Dante's Comedy, these were able, or enabled in their symbolic value discussed here earlier, to serve different and differing roles that would ultimately aid the fulfilment of the Fascists intentions to redefine the boundaries of sacred, even if that meant blurring

¹⁶⁶ Zeev Sternhell, *Né destra né sinistra. La nascita dell'ideologia fascista* (Napoli: Akropolis, 1984), p. 258.

¹⁶⁷ Filippo Caparelli, 'La dottrina fascista nel decennale', in *Gerarchia*, XI (1932), 7, p. 883.

¹⁶⁸ *Enciclopedia italiana Treccani*, XIV (1932), p. 847.

distinctions. For example, as Ceci (2013) succinctly summarised, in the 1930s Fascism was becoming progressively more Catholic and Catholicism progressively more Fascist.¹⁶⁹ The Lateran Pacts of 1929 are a well know historical event that attests the veracity of the claim of the Italian scholar, but perhaps lesser known is the speech (cited here earlier) by Cardinal Alfredo Ildefonso Schuster on 28 October 1935. There, Dante's Comedy came to act as the connector between two different dominant ideologies, namely those expressed respectively by the Catholic Church and the Italian Fascist State.

The sacral role that Fascism was progressively assuming in the course of the 1930s and the contradictions of a dichotomised position such as that expressed by Guido Manacorda saw the role of the Catholic Church as not adversary but rather complementary, at least in some cases. The Church, according to Ostermann (2010), in fact, had conferred Fascism a further sacral role through an ideological realignment of words that reflected cardinal fascist tenets. Among these, there were: faith, empire, and mysticism.¹⁷⁰ This apparent dichotomy was echoed also in Britain where, as a matter of example, from the British very Christian Dante of Edward Caird,¹⁷¹ and the corrupt but important role of the Church in Ford Madox Ford's Dantean Paolo and Francesca,¹⁷² to the fascist Dante of Lando Ferretti,¹⁷³ and the "homage" of the Holy See 'con l'approvazione della Santa Sede, si assunse il compito di invitare i cattolici ad onorare il Divino Poeta,' Dante was used by opposing sides.¹⁷⁴ Thus, the "Divine Poet" seems to be able, with his Comedy, to express the will of different ideologies, and in so doing generating differing and subjective readings of the "real" thanks to the symbolic value that rendered Dante's Comedy in itself something "sacred".

Historically Karl Marx, and Hegel before him, established a connection

¹⁶⁹ Lucia Ceci, *L'interesse superiore. Il Vaticano e l'Italia di Mussolini* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2013).

¹⁷⁰ Patrick Ostermann, 'Contro l'antisemitismo tedesco, per la lotta dell'ebraismo. Il concetto cattolico-fascista di razza', in Foà-Gentili, op. cit., p. 44.

¹⁷¹ Cf. Edward Caird, *Essays on Literature and Philosophy*: vol. I, pp. 1-63 (London: A. D. Innea & Co., 1895). For a more extensive account of the relationship between Dante's Comedy and the Catholic Church, see the other chapters of this thesis, which offer several examples.

¹⁷² Ford Madox Ford, *The Good Soldier* (London: John Lane, 1915).

¹⁷³ Cf. Fausto Pettinelli, Giampaolo Grassi, and Lando Fettetti, *Il giornalista di Mussolini* (Pontedera (Pisa): Bandecchi & Vivaldi, 2005).

¹⁷⁴ Cf. 'Bollettino del Comitato cattolico per il sesto centenario dantesco', in *La Civiltà cattolica*, year 69, vol. 2 (1918), p. 357.

between ideas in general, and thus philosophies, and the concrete social structures in which they emerged. Marx, as it is well known, focused on the ways in which ideas interplayed with social positions, particularly class positions. As such, for Marx knowledge is a social product, which is to stay so until man exists.¹⁷⁵ Karl Mannheim the famous sociologist and founder of the sociology of knowledge affirmed:

[Marx's] undertaking . . . could reach its final goal only when the interest-bound nature of ideas, the dependence of "thought" on "existence," was brought to light, not merely as regards certain selected ideas of the ruling class, but in such a way that the entire "ideological superstructure" ... appeared as dependent upon sociological reality. What was to be done was to demonstrate the existentially determined nature of an entire system of *Weltanschauung*, rather than of this or that individual idea.¹⁷⁶

However, one should be careful in putting too much emphasis on the concept of the development of ideas as abstractions through time in a chronology that may be accidental, and temporary, as the label 'history of ideas' may suggest in line with a certain German tradition of *Geistesgeschichte* or *Ideengeschichte* that much owes to the history of philosophy in general and Hegel in particular. Bavaj (2010) backs the argument that both *Geistesgeschichte* and *Ideengeschichte* are, in fact, terminologically ambiguous.¹⁷⁷

The Comedy, with its seven centuries-long history, might, in actuality, tempt one to consider it as somewhat intrinsically able to journey through time and that only a random act, or acts, might have rendered it accessible to certain minds. Such suggestion might be seen as encouraged by the above-cited German tradition. However, this is not true. Earlier on this study made a point to exemplify how the Comedy was being reconstructed out of a precise will that prompted the British to intervene in a certain manner, and direction, without presupposing a kind of

¹⁷⁵ Cf. Coser Lewis A., *Masters of Sociological Thought: Ideas, Historical and Social Context*, 2nd ed. (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1977).

¹⁷⁶ Karl Mannheim, *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1952), p. 143.

¹⁷⁷ Riccardo Bavaj, *Intellectual History*, Version: 1.0, in: Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte, 13. 9.2010, available: http://docupedia.de/zg/Intellectual_History, p. 2 [Last accessed: 2 April, 2015].

teleological cultural pattern that would ultimately allow knowledge, or self-knowledge of the individual, but rather the opposite.

This notwithstanding, Mannheim defined an ideological profile, at least for those who belonged to a Catholic version of Fascism, and identified their dispositional conservative political thought as they rejected a more bourgeois rational narrative. Furthermore, as their idea of tradition was essentially fascist thanks to the role of Rome, that which Mannheim had expressed found a clear echo in Pennisi's thought. The latter declared: 'Il Fascismo è Tradizione in quanto riprende l'idea di Roma e si oppone irriducibilmente a tutto il mondo sorto dai cosiddetti immortali principi del 1789 [...]'.¹⁷⁸

Both canons, that of Rome and tradition, found in Dante's Comedy a resourceful outlet as explored throughout all the chapters of this thesis. However, especially in Chapters II and IV, the role of Dante's Comedy is analysed in relation to the agency of the British who, it is worth remembering, some in fascist Italy considered as some kind of "Northern Jews", adding, therefore, a somewhat racial dimension to the otherwise more merely political discourse. Both Papini and Pennisi spoke in such terms, and the latter considered the declaration of war of 1940 a sort of fascist Crusade against British plutocracy.¹⁷⁹ On his account, Papini had also assumed a controversial stand for what regards Dante and those who attempted to study him. He declared:

Quello ch'è più particolare al dantismo, e soprattutto al dantismo italiano, è quella ridicola superbia di essere un segno di grandezza nazionale e una grande officina di alta cultura spirituale. Superbia non del tutto ridicola in quanto superbia, ma in quanto è sproporzionata alla misura delle piccole anime dei professori che si occupano di cose dantesche.¹⁸⁰

The issue raised by Papini of academic inadequacy for what regards

¹⁷⁸ Pasquale Pennisi, 'Appunti per la dottrina fascista della razza', in *Gerarchia*, 7 (1942), pp. 286 – 299, p. 288.

¹⁷⁹ Pasquale Pennisi, *Allegato*, Program prepared by Pennisi for the magazine *Imperialità* (February 1941 - XIX), ACS, SPD-CO, Envelope 1921, no. 520.713.

¹⁸⁰ Giovanni Papini, 'Per Dante e contro i dantisti', in Firenze in *Il Regno*, 20 October 1905.

Dante's studies can be extended to that sense of consensus, or acquiescence, toward Fascism that characterised the relationship between Fascism and Culture during the 1920s and 1930s. The communist academic and politician Concetto Marchesi spoke of 'libidine di assentimento' to profile that interplay.¹⁸¹ The issue of the tacit, or in some cases explicit, compliance on the account of a certain class of Italian scholars is one which is also discussed in Chapter III.

However, as clearly expressed in the various chapters of this thesis the issue of how a certain class of Italian academics chose to behave in relation to Fascism, albeit here acknowledged, is left to others to be discussed.

¹⁸¹ Concetto Marchesi, in *Rinascita. Rassegna di politica e di cultura italiana*, ed. by Palmiro Togliatti, year I (Roma: Ist. Pol. dello Stato, 1945).

4. Empire of the Future

Along a symbolic use of the Comedy in the establishment of an Italian identity, this study hypothesises a degree of influence exerted by the British, which was not in opposition, thus as an external, extraneous and ultimately alien force, but exerted also, albeit not exclusively, from within, so to speak, the texture of the Fascist Regime and their own country via the means of Dante's Comedy. This ambiguity, as the more general history of the Anglo-Italian relations suggests, and of which Chapter IV of this thesis speaks at length, are reflected in the ways in which the Comedy was handled, for instance, by the Modernist poets of the time. In fact, it is argued here, as also mentioned before expanding on what Welle has propounded, that Dante had been 'resurrected, rehabilitated, and reconstructed' largely thanks to British intervention.¹⁸² In this regard, Welle (1995) clearly states: 'Dante was rehabilitated first of all outside Italy' where the cult of the "Sommo Poeta," or National Bard, had firstly been created.

From quite early on, in fact, England became 'the empire of the future'¹⁸³ whereas Italy was but a 'ruined dream',¹⁸⁴ where the role of Britain remained paramount for what the Comedy was concerned. To this effect, Oelsner stated: 'our English culture has here been instrumental in spreading Dante's influence abroad.'¹⁸⁵

Thus, it was an essentially, and practically exclusively, English patronage that which gave the Comedy a much wider European public. The British needed a recognisable prophet for the new nation-to-be: Italy. Welle (1995) had this to say: '[Dante] was reconstructed within Italy in order to serve as the prophet and proponent of Italian liberation and national unification. A series of historical events and a variety of cultural and literary currents created the cult of Dante as national

¹⁸² Welle, op. cit.

¹⁸³ Alison Milbank, *Dante and the Victorians* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), p. 13.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Herman Oelsner, *The Influence of Dante on Modern Thought*, Le Bas Trize Essay, 1894 (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1895), p. 90. Dante's position within Italy was, of course, not due exclusively to the agency of the British although, as argued here, they were accountable for a great deal of that which was to do with the cult of Dante. See: Adrian Lyttelton who referred to what already stated by Dionisotti (Carlo Dionisotti, *Geografia e storia della letteratura italiana* (Torino: Einaudi, 1967), pp. 258-68). His position is further explored in Chapter IV of this study.

bard. This process parallels and is indebted to the development of the cult of Shakespeare as a national poet of England.¹⁸⁶

In Britain, Thomas Stearns Eliot, Joyce, and his revolutionary use of language, as well as many others of whom Chapter IV speaks, developed a relevant relationship with Dante's Comedy. They were featured in the British literary magazine *Criterion*. This particular instance may offer a revealing example of how ideas penetrated the fascist cultural fabric from Britain into Italy in a way that, albeit not immediately recalling that duality internal-external, which this study previously mentioned, it nonetheless required a certain normative approach to cultural identity.

The complex relationship that exists between culture and identity is constructed by a series of factors that come to have an integral connection. As such, language and other cultural patterns, be social structures, gender orientation, or others, all have an important role.¹⁸⁷ It is not feasible here to enter the vast debate that still goes on between the postmodern and traditional understanding of culture.¹⁸⁸ It should suffice to mention, and draw this chapter to a close, the negotiation of a cultural identity that occurred between the Fascist Regime (and Movement) and Britain, which had Dante's Comedy at its centre. For example, Enzo Ferrieri, who was the editor of the Italian magazine *Il Convegno*,¹⁸⁹ at least up until 1939, entertained a close working relationship with the British *Criterion*. The latter acted as a sort of gateway through which, after 1920, English Modernism almost literarily flowed, and eventually flooded, into fascist Italy. Not long after, Enrico Somarè's *L'Esame*, Cesare Vico Ludovici's *Il Quindicinale*, and the important *La Fiera Letteraria* that was born in Milan in 1925, also appeared on the Italian cultural scene.

¹⁸⁶ Welle, op. cit., p. 383.

¹⁸⁷ Mary Jane Collier, and Milt Thomas, 'Cultural Identity: an Interpretive Perspective', in *Theories in Intercultural Communication* (Kim and Gudykunst eds.). International and Intercultural Communication Annual, vol. XII (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1988), pp. 99-120.

¹⁸⁸ See, for example, Norman K. Denzin, 'Postmodern Social Theory', in *Sociological Theory*, vol. 4 (1986), pp. 194-204; Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); Mike Featherstone, 'In Pursuit of the Postmodern: An Introduction', in *Theory, Culture, and Society*, vol. 5, nos. 2-3 (June 1988), pp. 195-216; Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972); Jurgen Habermas, 'Modernity versus Postmodernity', in *New German Critique* vol. 22 (1981), pp. 3-14; Douglas Kellner, 'Postmodernism as Social Theory: Some Problems and Challenges', in *Theory, Culture and Society*, vol. 5, nos. 2-3 (1988), pp. 239-270; Michael Ryan, *Culture and Politics: Working Hypotheses for a Post-revolutionary Society* (London: Macmillan, 1989); and others.

¹⁸⁹ Aron Ettore Schmitz, known as Italo Svevo, lived in London for a period and was the inspiration for Leopold Bloom, the protagonist of Joyce's *Ulysses*. He was an also a habitual guest at Enzo Ferrieri's wife salon as well as Sonarè's. Cf. Philip Nicholas Furbank, *Italo Svevo: The Man and the Writer* (University of California Press, 1966), p. 141.

They all retained a lively exchange of ideas.¹⁹⁰ To this regard, Cattaneo (2007) affirmed: 'È in quest'ambito che i grandi modernisti inglesi ottengono il loro primo riconoscimento italiano: è il caso di Joyce, di Yeats e, appunto, di T.S. Eliot.'¹⁹¹

In conclusion, the choice of a theoretical background that was informed by the canons of intellectual history was almost dictated by the complexity of this project. As expressed at the beginning of this chapter, the analysis conducted on the role of Dante's Comedy in the evolution of the geopolitical Anglo-Italian relations from the *Risorgimento* to the late 1930s necessarily needed a certain degree of flexibility, which was offered by adopting a more interdisciplinary approach.

The elaboration of ideologies that interplayed with different agents to serve their different needs, from imperial Britain to Fascist Italy, the Catholic Church and so on, could be traced in the footsteps of the forced legitimisation of the symbolic role to which Dante and his Comedy were confined.

Thus, as a figurative symbol, the employment of the Comedy, on behalf of those who turned to this much celebrated ill-fated poet to engage and justify their different and differing affiliations, required a variety of orchestrated contextual historical, ideological, be it social or philosophical, approaches in order to critically engage the narrative presented here with the literature on the subject from such different fields of enquiry.

The nineteenth century with its panoply of national ideologies, some of which founded fertile ground in the *Risorgimento*, will therefore mark, following a historically chronological analysis, the beginning of this investigation into the role of Dante's Comedy in those years.

¹⁹⁰ Cf. Laura Caretti quoted in Arturo Cattaneo, 'Elio, Montale e Praz: affinità (e) riviste', in *Chi stramalediva gli inglesi: la diffusione della letteratura inglese e americana in Italia tra le due guerre* (Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 2007), p.112.

¹⁹¹ Cattaneo, op. cit., p. 112.

CHAPTER II

THE RISORGIMENTO AND THE COMEDY: FROM THE EARLY 1800S TO THE EARLY 1900S

1. Introduction to the Chapter

This chapter looks at the *Risorgimento* as a time during which a certain kind of national identity was firstly given shape and hence, later on, inherited by the Fascist Regime. It considers the formation of national identity from different viewpoints. It specifically focuses on Britain as it examines how the United Kingdom had an instrumental role in determining a national ipseity that eventually came to be expressed in the formation of a unitary Italian national identity. Thus, this chapter aims at highlighting the possible association that existed between the forces behind the *Risorgimento* movement and Dante's Comedy. It links the medieval Florentine poet and his masterpiece with the interests of well-known *Risorgimento* agents, such as the Royal House of Savoy, Giuseppe Mazzini, secret societies and others, as well as namely global British strategic economic and political pursuits. This chapter argues that Great Britain saw in Dante, and the Divine Comedy, a potential means with which certain vested interests in the United Kingdom could be preserved and advanced. It maintains that the relentless promotion of the Florentine poet as a champion of all things Italian was born out of strategic interests that were thus reflected in the choice of popularised, and in some instances propagandised, pieces of literature such as the Comedy. Corroborative evidence is used to back this argument also when approached from other angles, such as, for example, that of the economy or geopolitical strategies. The chapter concludes with the suggestion that the Fascists hence partially inherited a certain disposition towards the Comedy directly from the *Risorgimento* movement and its agents in which Great Britain featured prominently.

This said, this chapter is not meant as a whole encompassing account of the dynamics that brought Italy to be unified. It is acknowledged that many other European powers, such as France and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, also had a role to play in the formation of Italy as a national united state and that they too had a certain influence on literary matters. However, they will not be taken into consideration here as the main argument focuses and develops on Britain as the

main agent. Thus, if events are cited, it is in order to highlight their possible relationship with Dante's Comedy during the *Risorgimento*, and, eventually, their trajectory towards Fascism in relation to British interests. Furthermore, largely, this chapter agrees with the revisionist historians who have so far tended to critically evaluate key players such as Camillo Benso of Cavour, Giuseppe Garibaldi and King Victor Emmanuel II of Savoy, to name but some. It shares the conviction that the debate around the so-called Southern Question (Questione Meridionale) seems closer in style to a form of colonisation than a voluntary unification of a torn nation. Dante and the Comedy, this study argues,

Therefore, this chapter does not further engage issues already widely discussed by historians elsewhere.¹⁹² The elaboration on how the Fascists further advanced the use of Dante and the Comedy for political needs is left to the chapter dedicated to Fascism.

¹⁹² For historiographical *Risorgimento* related issues, the following authors may be helpful: Denis Mack Smith, *Cavour and Garibaldi, 1860. A study in Political Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2nd edn, 1985); Denis Mack Smith, *The Making of Italy 1796-1870* (New York: Walker and Company, 1968). For a more general view of economic history and international relations, see: Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York: Random House, 1987). For a more in-depth analysis of Austria's Italian policy, see: William A. Jenks, *Francis Joseph and the Italians, 1849-1859* (Charlottesville, Va.: University Press of Virginia, 1978). For a more accommodating view of Count Cavour by the British Historian, see: Dennis Mack Smith, *Cavour* (New York: Knopf Doubleday, 1985). For post-*Risorgimento* revisionist studies, see: Christopher Duggan, *Francesco Crispi, From nation to nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). For an Italian revisionist approach, see: Piero Bevilacqua, *Breve storia dell'Italia meridionale dall'ottocento a oggi* (Roma: Donzelli, 1993). For an earlier example Pasquale Villari published in 1875 for the daily 'L'Opinione' his *Lettere meridionali* (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1878), whilst Leopoldo Franchetti and Sidney Sonnino also conducted a study called: *La Sicilia nel 1876*. Later, Antonio Gramsci, *La questione meridionale* (L'Aquila: REA, 2011); Antonio Gramsci, *Il Risorgimento* (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1971); Francesco Saverio Nitti, *L'Italia all'alba del secolo XX* (Torino-Roma: Casa Editrice Nazionale Roux e Viarengo, 1901); Francesco Saverio Nitti, *Nord e Sud* (Torino-Roma: Casa Editrice Nazionale Roux e Viarengo, 1900); Francesco Saverio Nitti, Domenico De Masi, *Napoli e la questione meridionale* (Napoli: Guida, 2004). For an early account of the dynamics of post *Risorgimento* emigration, see: Francesco Saverio Nitti *L'emigrazione italiana e i suoi avversari* (Torino: Casa Editrice Nazionale Roux e Viarengo, 1888). For a contemporary review of Gaetano Salvemini, see: Norberto Bobbio, *La non-filosofia di Salvemini* in *Maestri e compagni* (Firenze: Passigli Editore, 1984); and Gaetano Quagliariello, *Gaetano Salvemini* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2007). For a more narrative account of the *Risorgimento*, see: Hearder, op. cit. For a brief, but comprehensive revisionist study, see: Lucy Riall, *The Italian Risorgimento. State, society and national unification* (London-New York: Routledge, 1994). For the debate between Liberals and Marxists an introduction to the formation of the Italian national market, the policy of the Right, capitalism in the countryside and the formation of an agricultural proletariat mass, see: Emilio Sereni, *Il capitalismo nelle campagne (1860 - 1900)* (Torino: Einaudi, 1971); Rosario Romeo, *Risorgimento e capitalismo* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1959).

2. Dante and the Comedy in Britain

As the eighteenth century came to a close, Dante increasingly became the subject of patriotic ideals as well as Romantic studies. This was particularly true in the United Kingdom. Lord Holland was a freemason and member of the Whigs, the liberal English party. He regularly used his secretary John Allen to communicate between Francis Jeffrey, who was the editor of the *Edinburg Review*, one of the most influential British publications of the 19th century, and the Venetian poet Ugo Foscolo. Francis Jeffrey keenly invited the artist to write about Dante in a way that would re-ignite interest in the author of the Comedy after the relatively hostile period of the Enlightenment.¹⁹³ Dante was thought to represent perfectly the figure of the exiled that would so well befit the Romantic idea of displacement. In this regard, Enza Lamberti writes:

La centralità di un lavoro critico come quello su Dante è connessa all'emblematica posizione che l'esule medievale assume nei primi decenni dell'Ottocento, vera e propria figura di esule moderno; ma, oltre alla solidarietà dell'esule con l'esule, fu inizialmente l'invito di Francis Jeffrey a ridestare l'attenzione e a fargli incontrare il sommo poeta nell'articolo da pubblicare sull' "Edinburgh Review".¹⁹⁴

In her article Lamberti (2008) also maintains that English intellectuals were rediscovering medieval culture, and thus felt the need to have better access to the Comedy and his Catholic author Dante. She notes that it was in Paris in 1816 that an early article on the medieval poet was, if not published, at least, conceived. In doing so, she suggests that there was a renewed Anglo-French interest in Dante. From the French capital, in fact, Giosafatte Biagioli sent Foscolo a "manifesto" with his commentary on Dante. However, it was the English and not the French who, in the persons of John Allen and Francis Jeffrey, insisted to bring Dante to the

¹⁹³ Voltaire famously said: 'On ne lit plus le Dante dans l'Europe.' Voltaire (François-Marie Arouet), *Lettres philosophiques ou Lettres anglaises*, ed. by Raymond Navis (Paris: Garnier, 1964), p. 255.

¹⁹⁴ Enza Lamberti, *Il Dante "europeo" di Foscolo*, (XII Congresso nazionale dell'ADI: Salerno, 2008), p. 1; available: <http://www.italianisti.it/fileservices/Lamberti%20Enza.pdf> [Last accessed: 10 October 2013].

Edinburg Review, and, therefore, London and the whole of the English-speaking world.¹⁹⁵

This keen interest, this ‘final push’ as Lamberti (2008) describes it, seems at odds with what the *Edinburg Review* stood for. As a Whigs’ magazine, one would have reasonably expected them to better serve the rhetoric of their party. The Whigs advocated liberal ideas and were firmly opposed to the Roman Church. They perceived Catholicism as a force standing against liberty. The Right Honourable William Pitt, 1st Earl of Chatham, known as William Pitt the Elder, once said: ‘The errors of Rome are rank idolatry, a subversion of all civil as well as religious liberty, and the utter disgrace of reason and of human nature.’¹⁹⁶ Thus, as the literary arm of the Whigs, it is conceivable to admit, at least theoretically, that the *Edinburg Review* magazine might have been expressing an interest in Dante that was not exclusively literary.¹⁹⁷

It is a well-known fact that Dante in many occasions praises the Roman Church; while in others he is far less accommodating of it. In the last cantos of Purgatory, he describes a mystical procession that he sees parading in the earthly Paradise. Dante places at its centre a chariot drawn by a griffin. This is an allegoric symbol of the Church and Christ upon which it is founded as well as a ‘vehicle for clarifying the art of the Commedia itself’.¹⁹⁸ Furthermore, this is also the place where Dante expresses his own construing of the relationship between God and man as he, the Florentine poet, approaches the Bible with his own interpretative code. Dante uses the procession to converge and thus reassert one of the founding canons of the Comedy where the universal and the singular meet eschatologically.¹⁹⁹ The role

¹⁹⁵ Enza Lamberti also notes that in Art.IX. *Dante*, with a new Italian Commentary, by Giosafatte Baglioli, Paris 1818. The Vision of Dante, translated by the Reverend Henry Francis Cary, A. M., 3 vol. 18 (London 1814). Cf. *EN IX*, I, p. XXV; Ugo Foscolo, *Studi su Dante* (Edizione Nazionale delle Opere IX, I), ed. by G. Da Pozzo (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1979).

¹⁹⁶ Basil Williams, *The Whig Supremacy: 1714–1760* (Oxford: Oxford (at the Clarendon Press), 1949), p. 75.

¹⁹⁷ The Roman Church was well aware of the influence Dante could have. In the encyclical *In praeclara summorum*, of 30 April 1921, pope Benedict XV declared ‘l’intima unione di Dante con la Cattedra di Pietro.’

¹⁹⁸ Teodolinda Barolini, *The Undivine Comedy: Detheologizing Dante* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), p.158. See also: Roberto Mercuri, *Semantica di Gerione: il motivo del viaggio nella "Commedia" di Dante* (Roma: Bulzoni, 1984).

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

the Catholic Church is not disputed. Dante, however, is not afraid to describe the same institution as 'la puttana' in some of the verses in *Purgatorio*.²⁰⁰

It is conceivable that this proclivity might not have been lost in Protestant and liberal England. Records show that the English used Dante's fierce disposition towards the institution of the Papacy as early as 1566 to promote their own Protestant agenda.²⁰¹ After the publication in 1570 of *Ecclesiastical History Contayning the Actes and Monuments* by John Foxe, Boswell (1999) affirmed: 'Dante's role as a proto-protestant was sealed.'²⁰² Crucial is also the fact that he maintains that the tenure of Dante as a supporter of the Protestant faith is vastly underestimated by contemporary scholars.²⁰³ Boswell puts forward an impressive collection of data as evidence for his claim. However, given the enormous academic interest in Dante, it seems surprising that so few studies have been attempted on the primary source materials indicated by Boswell (1999), and that even fewer have tried to investigate the reasons why such an obvious role has been allowed to go unexplored. While this chapter will leave to others to further expand on the possible significance of this oversight, it nonetheless accepts it and interplays it with a number of events and characters to support the argument that Britain was actively planning, building and deploying her interests in the Italian peninsula thanks to the agency, albeit not exclusive, of the *Commedia*.

Furthermore, Dante also helped the strengthening of the notion of British national culture. Diego Saglia (2012) argues that by around 1819 the Florentine poet came to enjoy an almost cult-like status in Great Britain where 'the turn to Dante became an English literary rite of passage.'²⁰⁴ Saglia brings forward evidence that suggests that the great medieval Florentine poet entered the English political arena

²⁰⁰ Pg XXXII 109-60, and XXXIII 31-51.

²⁰¹ The Oath of Supremacy was a requirement for anyone wishing to take a public or church office in England. It involved having to swear allegiance to the monarch as Supreme Governor of the Church of England. The controversy between John Feckenham and Bishop Robert Horne, about the oath, prompted the latter to write '*An Answere*'. He was the first, in England, to use Dante as a source of authority with which to back his argument. Bishop John Jewel, in 1567, published a *Defence of the Apologie of the Churche of England*, where citing both Petrarch and Dante, he called the Roman Church: 'the whore of Babylon'.

²⁰² Jackson Campbell Boswell, *Dante's Fame in England, References in printed British Books 1477 – 1640* (London: Associated University Press, Inc., 1999), p. xv.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. xvi.

²⁰⁴ Luzzi (2008), cited in Diego Saglia, 'Dante and British Romantic Women Writers: Writing the Nation, Defining National Culture', in Aida Audeh and Nick Havelly (eds.), *Dante in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 184.

in various forms. Starting with Anna Seward in her role of 'mother of the nation',²⁰⁵ Saglia (2012) notes that women like her clearly understood the importance of constructs such as national identity and character 'as historically and culturally determined'.²⁰⁶ Her work has been frequently accessed by twentieth century scholars who used her epistolary references to Dante to validate the argument of his importance and presence in the culture that characterised the Romantic period.²⁰⁷

A cross-cultural interest that transcended a mere relevance in literature was gradually taking shape around the figure of Dante and another English poet, Henry Francis Cary, was helping promoting it.²⁰⁸ Saglia (2012), in fact, boldly but befittingly affirms that London was now Dante's 'newly found cultural capital'.²⁰⁹ The importance of on an English reading of Dante with their 'conception of the nation as a linguistic and cultural continuum linking past and present'²¹⁰ played extremely well, as we will see, with a *Risorgimento* first and then later fascist ear.

It is Saglia (2012) again to argue that Dante was key to and instrumental in the English attempt, promoted by Seward, to start a paradigmatic view of a dialectic vision of inclusion-exclusion in the form of national and foreign.²¹¹ A few years later, in 1818, another famous English poet, Felicia Hemans, came into contact with Foscolo's essays on Dante and was by these inspired.²¹² She then published in the same magazine, the *Edinburg Review*, her translation of six Italian sonnets, the title of which was *Patriotic Effusions of the Italian Poets*. Saglia (2012) notes that this

²⁰⁵ Saglia, op. cit., p. 186. Anna Seward was the daughter of Reverend Thomas Seward, Rector of Eyam, in Derbyshire, Prebendary of Salisbury, and Canon Residentiary of Lichfield. Anna was born in Eyam in 1747. She was an English Romantic poet. Sir Walter Scott, 'Biographical Preface', in *Poetical Works of Anna Seward* (Edinburgh: Ballantyne, 1810), 1:iii-xxxix.

²⁰⁶ Mary Waters cited in Saglia, op. cit., p.186.

²⁰⁷ Saglia, op. cit., p. 186

²⁰⁸ Cary, op. cit.

²⁰⁹ Luzzi (2008), cited in Saglia, op. cit., p. 191.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² 'Felicia Dorothea Hemans, née Felicia Dorothea Browne (born 25 September 1793, Liverpool—died 16 May 1835, Dublin) was an English poet who owed the immense popularity of her poems to her talent for treating Romantic themes, nature, the picturesque, childhood innocence, travels abroad, liberty, the heroic, with an easy and engaging fluency. *Poems* (1808), written when she was between 8 and 13, was the first of a series of 24 volumes of verse; from 1816 to 1834 one or more appeared almost every year. At 19, she married Capt. Alfred Hemans but they separated seven years later; her prolific output helped to support her five children. She became a literary celebrity, admired by famous older writers such as William Wordsworth, and Sir Walter Scott. Often diffuse and sentimental, she has been chiefly remembered for her shorter pieces, notably: *The Landing of the Pilgrim Fathers*, *Dirge*, *Casabianca* (*The boy stood on the burning deck*), and *The Homes of England* (*The stately homes of England*), but was perhaps at her best in her sequence of poems on female experience, *Records of Women* (1828)'. *Encyclopaedia Britannica* available online: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/260695/Felicia-Dorothea-Hemans> [Last accessed: 20 October 2013].

was in line with what had become a 'tradition of politicized verse that originated [...] with Dante and Petrarch.'²¹³

The national sensitivity of the English was being reaffirmed and the *Edinburgh Review*, evidence would seem to suggest, played a crucial role in this. It was they who, once had brought Dante to English shores, compared him with Shakespeare, thus elevating the Florentine poet to the status of a national bard. Records show that this created affinity would strike such a deep cord into English sensitivity that in October 1820 Hemans, after having attended a performance by Edmund Kean in *Richard III* and *Othello*, passionately announced: 'I felt as if I had never understood Shakespeare till then.'²¹⁴ Dante was by now clearly being used to directly ignite an English national sense of pride, and thus his role well transcended that of a poet and embraced a function that was political in essence.

The signs of an awakened Romantic interest in Dante were strengthened when in 1825 Ugo Foscolo published the *Discorso sul testo della Commedia di Dante*. This was then posthumously followed by the *Prefazione alla Commedia di Dante Alighieri illustrata da Ugo Foscolo* published in 1842 with the help of Mazzini.²¹⁵ There it is stressed the relief of the human figure of Dante and his mission within both nation and history.²¹⁶ 'La Commedia di Dante è immedesimata nella patria, nella religione, nella filosofia, nelle passioni, nell'indole dell'autore; e nel passato, e nel presente e nell'avvenire de' tempi in che visse.'²¹⁷

Like Foscolo, also Mazzini, a prominent figure of the *Risorgimento* and member of the *Carboneria*,²¹⁸ operated from London.²¹⁹ While there were also

²¹³ Salga, op. cit., p. 192.

²¹⁴ Felicia Hemans, *The Works of Mrs. Hemans; with a Memoir of her life, by her Sister*, 7 vols (Edinburg: William Blackwood; London: Thomas Cadell, 1839), vol. 1., pp. 7-8.

²¹⁵ Almost a century earlier Giambattista Vico established a kind of relationship between an irrational barbaric age and heroic poetry. He recognised in the work of art an autonomous creative moment and, in doing so, he became a point of reference for the future Romantic criticism. See: Giambattista Vico, *Scienza Nuova* (1725); id., *Lettera a Gherardo degli Angioli*; id., *Giudizio sopra Dante* (1729).

²¹⁶ Mazzini's edition of Dante's *Commedia* illustrated by Foscolo, *La 'Commedia' di Dante Alighieri Illustrata da Ugo Foscolo*, was first published in London by Rolandi, in 1842. The *Discorso* occupies volume one. Volume two (1842) contains the *Inferno*, while volume three (1843) contains Purgatory and Paradise, IV (1843) and the chronology of the events, details of codes and editions, and an index of words, names, and historical events.

²¹⁷ Dante Alighieri, *La Commedia di Dante Alighieri illustrata da Ugo Foscolo*, vol. 1 (London: Pickering, 1825), p. 13.

²¹⁸ Cf. Giancarlo Elia Valori, *Il Risorgimento oltre la storia* (Milano: Excelsior 1881, 2011).

²¹⁹ Some scholars believe this secret society was born in Sicily around 1799, thus still under the Bourbon's rule. Cf. Gian Marco Cazzaniga, *Società Segrete e la Massoneria nell'età della Restaurazione e del Risorgimento* (Torino: State Archives, conference of 23 October 2009).

others²²⁰ in Italy in the first half of the nineteenth century like Carlo Troya and Cesare Balbo who showed a politically motivated interest in the Comedy, it is with Mazzini that Dante moves more decisively from the British to the Italian political arena.²²¹

Mazzini clearly states his ideological allegiance with Dante when he affirms:

Volete voi, Operai Italiani, onorare davvero la memoria de' vostri Grandi e dar pace all'anima di Dante Allighieri? [sic] Verificate il concetto che lo affaticò nella sua vita terrestre. Fate una e potente e libera la vostra contrada. Spegnete fra voi tutte quelle meschinissime divisioni contro le quali Dante predicò tanto, che condannarono lui, l'uomo che più di tutti sentiva ed amava il vostro avvenire, alla sventura e all'esilio, e voi a una impotenza di secoli che ancor dura. Liberate le sepolture de' vostri Grandi, degli uomini che hanno messo una corona di gloria sulla vostra Patria, dall'onta d'essere calpeste dal piede d'un soldato straniero. E quando sarete fatti degni di Dante nell'amore e nell'odio — quando la terra vostra sarà vostra e non d'altri — quando l'anima di Dante potrà guardare in voi senza dolore e lieta di tutto il santo orgoglio Italiano — noi innalzeremo la statua del Poeta sulla maggiore altezza di Roma, e scriveremo sulla base: al profeta della Nazione Italiana gli Italiani degni di lui (*Dante*, in *Scritti editi ed inediti*, vol. XXIX, pp. 14-15).

As Hinkley (1970) is keen to stress, Mazzini saw himself, and was viewed by others, as closely affiliated to Dante. However, even if influential, Mazzini did not operate in isolation, but was connected and in some cases backed and financed by different groups that, albeit heterogeneous, shared his interest in seeing Italy finally unified into a national state. These groups of interest included international powers, international financiers, like the Rothschild dynasty to name but one, and various

²²⁰ Eugène Aroux published a study, in 1854, entitled: *Dante hérétique, révolutionnaire et socialiste: Révélations d'un catholique sur Le Moyen Age* (Paris: J. Renouard et cie, 1854) where he proposes the thesis that the works of Dante are socialist, revolutionary, and heretical. Dante Gabriel Pasquale Giuseppe Rossetti (1783-1854) was an active member of the Carbonari secret society and a Rosicrucian. He went into exile first to Malta and then to England for his support to the liberal uprisings of 1820. He was the father of the pre-Raphaelite poet and painter Dante Gabriel Rossetti. His publications include: *Sullo spirito antipapale che produsse la Riforma e sulla sua segreta influenza ch'esercitò nella letteratura d'Europae specialmente d'Italia, come risulta da molti suoi classici, massime da Dante, Petrarca, Boccaccio, Disquisizioni* (London: [s.n], 1823), *Commento analitico alla Divina Commedia* (London: [s.n], 1826-27); id., *Il mistero dell'Amor platonico nel Medioevo* (5 vols, published in 1840), and id., *Ragionamenti sulla Beatrice di Dante* (1842).

²²¹ Carlo Troya wrote, *Il Veltro allegorico di Dante* (Firenze: G. Molini, 1826), and Cesare Balbo wrote, the *Vita di Dante* (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1853).

secret societies the role of which cannot be underestimated and it is thus explored throughout this chapter.²²²

The links between Mazzini and secret societies was already well established in the late nineteenth century. Edith Starr Miller, later followed by William Guy Carr, claimed that between 1885 and 1897, Giuseppe Mazzini was in correspondence with Albert Pike. To back their claim they cited Cardinal Caro y Rodriguez of Santiago, Chile, who wrote *The Mystery of Freemasonry Unveiled*. In *Pawns in the Game*, Carr maintained that proof of this correspondence was on display in the British Museum.²²³ Gabriel Jogand-Pagès, better known as Léo Taxil, on 19th April 1897 admitted in Paris that he and Domenico Margiotta had forged the cited letter.²²⁴

Although allegedly little more than just a hoax, what is more telling is the fact that this “joke” succeeded at all. It seems reasonable to argue that the public in both the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries did not consider as too far-fetched the possibility of an involvement of Mazzini with the most radical fringes of secret societies for it seems still necessary in the twenty first century for the official voice of one of the Grand Lodges to issue a public document where great care is given to try to rectify this issue.²²⁵ What is also notable is the fact that despite the reputation of both Edith Starr Miller and William Guy Carr as “conspiracy theorists”, no other claim of theirs, as far as Mazzini is concerned, seems to have been rebutted or rejected despite some of their assertions being extreme.²²⁶

Thus, the association between the Italian national hero-to-be, Mazzini, and the *Edinburg Review* seemingly went beyond, it is reasonable to argue, the simple literary appreciation of Italian poetry. For example, in one of its numbers, *The*

²²² The question of such a powerful private interest and their Masonic associations with British affairs is discussed in Arthur B. Keith, *The King and the Imperial Crown: The Powers and Duties of His Majesty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936).

²²³ William Guy Carr, *Pawns in the Game* (Third edition: 1958), here at: Introduction, p. 8. The full text is available at: https://archive.org/stream/PawnsInTheGame/Carr.-Pawns.in.the.Game.international.conspiracy.exposed.1958_djvu.txt [Last accessed: 15 October 2013].

²²⁴ ‘The Confession of Léo Taxil’ (Conference held at the: *Geographic Society* on 19 April 1897), published in Paris: *Le Frondeur*, on April 25, 1897), transl. by Alain Bernheim, A. William Samii, and Eric Serejski. Also available: S. Brent Morris, *Heredom* (Transactions of the Scottish Rite Research Society, 1996), vol. 5, pp. 137-68.

²²⁵ http://freemasonry.bcy.ca/anti-masonry/anti-masonry_faq.html [Last accessed: 1 November 2013].

²²⁶ ‘In 1834 the Italian revolutionary leader Gussèpi [*sic*] Mazzini was selected by the Illuminati to be director of their revolutionary programme [*sic*] throughout the world. He held this post until he died in 1872’. Carr 1958, op. cit. p. 6.

Spectator published an article on the *Edinburg Review*.²²⁷ There the qualities of “national personality” are discussed. What is most interesting to note, at least for what this study is concerned, is that among the various possible choices that existed the magazine elected to quote Mazzini.²²⁸

Therefore, it is arduous to accept that the political convictions and associations of this Genoese exile were unknown to both the *Edinburg Review* and *The Spectator*. Mazzini also published several articles on the political and social situation of the English working class. He actively collaborated with the *London and Westminster Review*, the magazine edited by John Stuart Mill, the *Monthly Chronicle*, the *British and Foreign Affairs*, the *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine*, and the much more radical *People's Journal*. In the latter, he published a series of important essays titled *Thoughts upon Democracy in Europe*. There he traced the origins of the various utilitarian utopian movements of the time.

Also well documented is the 1848 return of Mazzini to Italy where, after the Rome insurrection, he took on the role of triumvir in the short-lived Roman Republic. When this collapsed, he returned to London at once and resumed his continuing efforts to educate the British about the conditions in which Italy laid.

Mazzini was a republican who collided with those moderates who sought to tie Italy to the Kingdom of the Savoy dynasty. In 1860, he published his major work *The Duties of Men*. There he outlined his economic, social, and political view for Italy and Europe. He urged the working class to abandon the materialistic doctrines such as Marxism and instead fully embrace the Christian commandments in regards to God, people, and nation. Mazzini firmly placed Dante at the centre of his cosmology and wrote:

Mille trecento anni dopo le parole di Gesù ora citate, un uomo, Italiano, il più grande fra gl'Italiani, ch'io conosca, scriveva le verità seguenti: Dio è Uno; l'Universo è un pensiero di Dio; l'Universo è dunque Uno esso pure. Tutte le cose vengono da Dio. Tutte partecipano, più o meno, della natura divina, a secondo del fine pel quale sono

²²⁷ *The Spectator*, 27 July 1901, p. 22

²²⁸ Mazzini was reported to have said: 'nations are the citizens of humanity.' Ibid.

create. L'uomo è nobilissimo fra tutte le cose: Dio ha versato in lui più della sua natura che non sulle altre. Ogni cosa che viene da Dio tende al perfezionamento del quale è capace. La capacità di perfezionamento nell'uomo è indefinita. L'Umanità è Una. Dio non ha fatto cosa inutile; e poiché esiste una Umanità, deve esistere uno scopo unico pur tutti gli uomini, un lavoro da compiersi pur opera d'essi tutti. Il genere umano dovrebbe dunque lavorare unito sì che tutte le forze intellettuali diffuse in esso ottengano il più alto sviluppo possibile nella sfera del pensiero e dell'azione. Esiste dunque una Religione universale della natura umana". Quell'uomo aggiungeva che questa Religione universale, questa Unità del mondo doveva avere chi la rappresentasse: e accennava a Roma, la Città Santa, le di cui pietre, Egli diceva, erano meritevoli di riverenza...L'uomo che scriveva quelle idee aveva nome DANTE [sic].²²⁹

In the late 1850s and early 1860s, Mazzini befriended several well-known English poets. Besides their literary interests, these men seemed to be tied also by a common narrative of stealth. They all belonged, or were in some form affiliated, to a secret society of choice. However, most of these men also displayed distrust, or at times downright aversion, towards the various established Christian faiths and professed and promoted their alternatives.

Mazzini met the much younger Algernon Charles Swinburne who was an Etonian and a freethinker.²³⁰ The latter attended Oxford University, but never graduated. Swinburne soon turned away from Christianity and showed a marked propensity towards paganism. His literary production was quite varying. Swinburne was at the time known for his risqué style rich with sexually charged innuendos and, at times, blatant sexual perversion. However, between 1856-1857, his production expanded to a more overtly political tone and he wrote his *Ode to Mazzini*. He later

²²⁹ Giuseppe Mazzini, *Doveri dell'uomo*, introduction of Giano Accame (Milano: ASEFI Editoriale Srl - Pubblicazioni Terziaria, 1995), p. 51.

²³⁰ Algernon Charles Swinburne (1837–1909), the poet and critic, was the grandson of the freemason Sir John Edward Swinburne, 6th *Bt*, *MP*, *FRS* [26 Feb 1818] *FSA* (6 March 1762–26, Sept. 1860), of Capheaton, Northumberland, an antiquary; succeeded to the title, 2 Nov. 1786, on the death of his father, Sir Edward Swinburne, 5th *Bt* (b. 1733). Freemasons and the Royal Society Alphabetical List of Fellows of the Royal Society. Accessible online http://www.freemasonry.london.museum/os/wp-content/resources/frs_freemasons_complete_jan2012.pdf [Last accessed: 3 November 2013].

also composed a poem in favour of the cause of Italian independence. The poem was published in 1867 with the title: *A song of Italy*.

The English novelist George Meredith, whose fame was at the time compared to that of Charles Dickens, came to be featured in the *New York Times*. The latter published an article, in 1910, where Meredith was said to be: 'As in all mysterious orders, there was, in the case of Meredith an inner circle of illuminati [...]'.²³¹ Although the *New York Times* alluded to a literary secretive tendency and intense disdain for the general public displayed by Meredith, the American paper was not afraid to use very strong language and reiterated the theme of secret societies by referring to the English poet as a 'Rosicrucian', albeit of literature.²³²

Meredith too was fascinated by paganism and even wrote a poem to celebrate his creed. The poem was entitled *Ode To The Spirit Of The Earth In Autumn*. However, one should be careful in appreciating the importance that Christianity held in these men's minds for its ways, other than the expression of religious faith, found an outlet of choice. In the case of Meredith his long letters, and the depicting of his characters, speak of a man with an intensely complex relationship with Christianity.²³³ Thus, it is conceivable to accept that Dante and his

²³¹ *The New York Times*, 22 January 1910.

²³² *Ibid.*

²³³ 'You must bear in mind that Christianity will always be one of the great chapters in the History of Humanity; that it fought down brutishness, that it has been the mother of our civilization; that it is tender to the poor, maternal to the suffering, and has supplied for most, still supplies for many, nourishment that in a certain state of the intelligence is instinctively demanded. St. Bernard checked Abelard, it is true. But he also stood against the French Barons, rebuked them and controlled them. The Church was then a Light. Since it did such a service to men, men, I think, should not stand out against it without provocation. You speak, my dear Fred, of the deepest questions of life. They are to be thought over very long and very carefully before they are fought over. I cannot think that men's minds are strong enough or their sense of virtue secure enough to escape from the tutelage of superstition in one form or another just yet. From the pagan divinity to the Christian, I see an advanced conception, and the nearer we, get to an abstract Deity – e.g. the more and more abstract, the nearer are men to a comprehension of the principles, morality, virtue, etc., than which we require nothing further to govern us.' George Meredith, and Arundell James Kennedy Esdaile (eds.), *Letters of George Meredith* (London: Constable and Company, 1912), p. 170. He also added seven years later in a letter addressed to his son, Arthur: 'What you say of our religion is what thoughtful men feel; and that you at the same time can recognize its moral value is matter of rejoicing to me. The Christian teaching is sound and good; the ecclesiastical dogma is an instance of the poverty of humanity's mind, hitherto, and has often in its hideous claws and fangs shown whence we draw our descent. Don't think that the obscenities mentioned in the Bible do harm to Children. The Bible is outspoken upon facts and rightly. It is because the world is pruriently [*sic*] and stupidly shamefaced that it cannot come in contact with the Bible without convulsions. I agree with Frommen that the book should be read out, for Society is a wanton hypocrite, and I would accommodate her in nothing; though, for the principle of Society, I hold that men should be ready to lay down their lives. Belief in religion has done and does this good to the young; it floats them through the perilous sensual period when the animal appetites most need control and transmutation. If you have not the belief, set your- self to love virtue by understanding; that it is your best guide both as to what is due to others and what if for your personal good. If your mind honestly rejects it, you must call on your mind to supply its place from your own resources. Otherwise you will have only half done your work, and that is always mischievous. Pray attend to my words on this subject. You know how Socrates loved truth. Virtue and Truth are one. Look for the truth in everything, and follow it, and you will then be living justly before God. Let nothing flout your sense

expressed, dogmatic approach to religion did not necessarily provide an obstacle, especially since both Christianity and paganism see in man something divine. The theological difference that separates the two systems, one believing in the sacred man, the other in sacred men, will not be discussed here, but is highlighted as one of the points of contact with Dante and the Comedy.

Mazzini was also in friendly contact with the famous English poet Robert Browning. The latter wrote, and then published, a poem entitled *The Italian in England*. It followed, in 1840, the narrative poem *Sordello*, based on the Sordello da Goito, mentioned in Canto VI of Dante's *Purgatorio*. Browning's poem seems to echo Meredith's elitist style and it is notoriously difficult to read for it is convoluted and obscure. Yet, years later, Ezra Pound found it to be, 'one of the finest marks ever presented.'²³⁴ The poem explores the narrative of relationship between author and readership expressed through Sordello's efforts.²³⁵ Froula (1985) argues that there is a rejection of the Judeo-Christian logos and the poem engages with the issue of poetic authority that transcends the Christian and Romantic ideas of poetry.²³⁶

Beyond all the other possible elicitations that can derive from the reading of Browning's *Sordello*, what is relevant here is the very choice of subject lifted directly from Canto VI of *Purgatorio* and the passionate homage that Browning pays to Dante. Such recognition of the medieval poet 'tinges admiration'.²³⁷ It is a decisive apostrophe to the greatness of the Florentine author of the Comedy, and the language used, besides the convoluted grammar, seems rich in Masonic symbolism, expressly naming objects such as the orb and the star.

Sordello, thy forerunner, Florentine!

of a Supreme Being, and be certain that your understanding wavers whenever you chance to doubt that he leads to good. We grow to good as surely as the plant grows to the light. The school has only to look through history for a scientific assurance of it. And do not lose the habit of praying to the unseen Divinity. Prayer for worldly goods is worse than fruitless, but prayer for strength of soul is that passion of the soul which catches the gift it seeks.' (Ibid., pp. 236-237).

²³⁴ Christine Froula, 'Browning's Sordello and the Parables of Modernist Poetry', in *ELH*, vol. 52, no. 4 (Winter, 1985), pp. 965-992, p. 966. The Johns Hopkins University Press, is also available: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/i352868> [Last accessed: 4 November 2013].

²³⁵ Ibid., p. 967

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Ibid., p. 968

A herald-star I know thou didst absorb
Relentless into the consummate orb
That scared it from its right to roll along
A sempiternal path with dance and song

(Sordello, 1.348-52)²³⁸

This may be a coincidence, but if so it is quite a befitting and buffering coincidence as these very symbols are then directed and used to create a dialectical stance with Dante, 'Sordello's star burns on in Dante's with no "disenfranchised brilliance."²³⁹ The use of symbolism becomes itself a way to express what is otherwise quite obscure in *Sordello*.

In 1842, Richard Hengist Horne affirmed: '*Sordello* ... is a modern hieroglyphic and should be carved on stone... It abounds in things addressed to a second sight, and we are often required to see *double* in order to apprehend its meaning.'²⁴⁰ *Sordello*, who uses his light, again maybe a random coincidence, but still nonetheless a Masonic symbol, corrects Dante's affinity from the 'imperialist aspects of Christianity' redefining the borders of poetic authority and thus almost "cleansing" Dante from those elements which more clearly identify him with Catholic theology.²⁴¹

However, Dante's Christian faith seems itself a defining issue with which to encapsulate the great artistic genius of the Florentine author of the Comedy. In praising him, William Butler Yeats levered not on his poetic merits but rather on his faith, and called him 'the chief imagination of Christendom'.²⁴² Whatever other message *Sordello* is trying to convey to the reader is beyond the scope of this thesis. It is, however, reasonable to argue that it is yet Dante and his Comedy who seem to provide a link for these many men. The Florentine poet acts as a sort of prismatic mirror in which to endeavour different, and at times differing, worldviews.

²³⁸ Robert Browning, *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics: And Sordello*. By Robert Browning. With an Introductory Note By E. Dixon, (1840-1845), ed. by William Sharp (London: Walter Scott, ca 1898), p. 127.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Richard Hengist Horne cited in Foula, op. cit., p. 965.

²⁴¹ Foula, op. cit., p. 965.

²⁴² William Butler Yeats, 'Ego Dominus Tuus', in *W.B. Yeats: the poems*, ed. by Daniel Albright (London: Dent, 1945), p. 210.

The American dissident poet Ezra Pound, who was notoriously opposed to secret societies of any sort, went as far as declaring that *Sordello* was 'the best long poem in English since Chaucer.'²⁴³

Ezra Pound, as it is widely known, wrote his *Cantos* having been inspired by Dante's Comedy. Ezra Pound might have refused to overtly associate himself with established secret societies, but he nonetheless was among those who, in Europe, belonged to a more mystical undercurrent where a source of spiritual gnosis derived from a deeply esoterically oriented thought. Tryphonopoulos (1990) argues that Pound went to London in the hope to gain a better understanding of the notoriously esoteric Irish poet William Butler Yeats. The latter was known to be part of *The Esoteric Order of the Golden Dawn*. Eventually, Pound and Yeats befriended each other.²⁴⁴ *The Second Coming*, arguably Yeats' most read poem, heavily draws from Dante's *Inferno*, which comes to serve as a backdrop for Yeats lyrics and where the latter 'incorporates Dantean elements to a far greater degree than has been observed to this point', as Cane (2007) argues in his thesis.²⁴⁵

Once more, Dante seems to be at the centre of a debate with a secretive and somewhat esoteric core. In relation to Yeats, Cane states: 'Dante Alighieri occupies a central position'.²⁴⁶ The meta-text of the Comedy appears to provide 'sotto il velame de li versi strani' (*If IX*, 63) a kind of inter-textual exchangeability unafraid of oxymoronic positions for Dante's dogmatic Christianity, as also briefly touched upon earlier, could at least potentially, set the Florentine poet on a collision course with the work of art he created. Yet, T. S. Eliot had no doubts when it came to praising the goodness and greatness of Dante's artistic abilities. He once said: 'Dante and Shakespeare divide the modern world between them. There is no third.'

I am not going to delve too deeply into the exegetical paths that in the centuries have been rendering the Comedy either as a prophetic text or a work of poetry and, as such, exploratory of the boundaries of art. Many saw in Dante and the

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Cf. Demetres Tryphonopoulos, 'Ezra Pound's Occult Education', in *Journal of Modern Language*, vol. 17, no. 1, (Summer 1990), pp. 73-96.

²⁴⁵ David Cane, 'The Falcon, The Beast and the Image: Dante's Geryon and W. B. Yeats' *The Second Coming*' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Department of Romance Languages Chapel Hill 2007), p. iii.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 2.

Comedy an element of deep renovation while others considered him and his work the last vestiges of a bygone era entrenched in dogmatic certainties in a time of profound changes. Among the former Ezra Pound who saw in Dante the last dynamic true user of the language after whom 'la lingua Italiana totale' had become 'progressivamente rammollita dal giorno che Dante morì'.²⁴⁷

Already in medieval times, scholars such as Benvenuto da Imola preferred to support Dante's *opus* on a poetic rather than moral basis. Sources, as authoritative as Giovanni Boccaccio, seem critical of Dante the man while keen to extol Dante the artist. In his *Vita di Dante*, also known as the *Trattatello in Loda di Dante*, Boccaccio offers a portrayal of a man whose love for life and its pleasures seem undiminished.²⁴⁸ Lust is the term used by more than one commentator. In his *Liber de Theleutologico*, Sebastiano da Gubbio stated: 'Haecilla (luxuria) est, quae Dantem Alighierii, vestii temporis poetam, tuae a teneria annis adolescentiae praecepto-rem, inter humana ingenia naturae dotibus coruscantem et omnium inorimi habitus rutilantem, adulterinis amplexibus venenavit'.²⁴⁹

However, scholars like Charles S. Singleton inferred that in reading the Comedy one must draw a necessary distinction between Dante the poet, as the authorial voice narrating the story, Dante the pilgrim, or the person who lives through the story, and the historical Dante Alighieri. While this is true of critics in part of the twentieth century, some of the British Romantics like Byron, Coleridge, Keats, Shelley and others, rarely focused on the Comedy as a whole, but rather preferred to concentrate their efforts on the aesthetic quality of Dante's verse, and on the *fabula* that those verses provided. In this, they were in line with much of nineteenth century reading of the Comedy even if some of these poets themselves are difficult to categorise as "Romantics". Among these, Lord Byron, who toying with the idea of

²⁴⁷ Letter to Ubaldo degli Uberti, 4 August 1940 (YCAL MSS 43, b. 12, f. 555). For the correspondence Pound/degli Uberti, see: Luca Gallesi, 'Ezra Pound, Ezra Pound, l'ammiraglio degli Uberti e "Marina Repubblicana"', in *Storia Contemporanea*, XXVII (1996), pp. 309-26.

²⁴⁸ Giovanni Boccaccio, *Vita di Dante* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1888).

²⁴⁹ Sebastiano da Gubbio between 1316 and 1328, dedicated to Prince Charles of Calabria. This book is located in the Laurentian code Pl. XIII, no. 16. Boccaccio affirmed: 'Tra cotanta virtù, tra cotanta scienza, quanta dimostrato so è di sopra essere stata in questo mirifico poeta, trovò ampissimo luogo la lussuria, e non solamente nel giovani anni, ma ancora nel maturi; il qual vizio, come che naturale e comune e quasi necessario sia, nel vero non che commendare, ma scusare non si può degnamente ...' Giovanni Boccaccio, *Vita di Dante*, Critical Text edited by Francesco Macri-Leone (Firenze: Sansone, 1888), pp. 61-62.

paganism, once famously said: 'there is something Pagan in me that I cannot shake off. In short, I deny nothing, but doubt everything.'²⁵⁰

In an ever-changing maze of ideas there seems to be circumstantial evidence that appears to point at a theme of secrecy, paganism and esoteric powers where Dante's Comedy figures prominently and centrally. It is not just in the nineteenth century, with Ugo Foscolo, Gabriel Rossetti and Mazzini that the Florentine poet is attributed an esoteric role, but also earlier with Giovanni Mario Filelfo and Antonio Maria Biscione. Giosuè Carducci, Giovanni Pascoli, Luigi Valli, and René Guénon, to name but some of the best-known names, in the twentieth century also argued that Christianity itself was in Dante allegorical of something else. Much of the academic world, or at least, that with a more marked clerical background, has discharged these allegations, and indeed, they should not be further discussed here. What is more relevant however is the fact that they seem to fall in line with a long string of other affinities, whether coincidental or otherwise, but nonetheless present.

Thus, Dante, it would seem, is brought to an arena where the theological debate of the platonic Christian civilisation's belief that man is in the image of God interplays with poetic allegiances to a syncretic theoretical framework that intersects between the centrality of man with that of men. The, albeit vast, implications of such an act shall not be further explored here, as they would transcend the scope of this research. In other words, the issue of Dante being part, or otherwise, of a sort of Rosicrucian or *Fedeli d'Amore* sect with an encoded cryptic language that makes him sway in and out of Christianity is not at the centre of this debate. It is, however, relevant in the measure in which others access it to perceive Dante's involvement with a metaphysic discourse that transcends the limits of Christianity and paganism by embracing them both.

Things such as the famous medallions kept in Vienna where the letters F.S.K.I.P.F.T (Fidei, Sanctae, Kadosch, Imperialis, Principatus, Frater, Templarius) are engraved and the placing of St. Bernard of Clairvaux, who inspired the order of

²⁵⁰ George Gordon Byron, Baron Byron, *Famous in My Time*, ed. by Leslie Alexis Marchand, vol. 2, 1810-1812 (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1973), p. 136.

the Knights Templar, may suggest, along other elements in the Comedy, that this might be an initiatory text with which Dante codified his knowledge. The initiatory trajectory described by the poet, where the man ventures in search of his origins, is telling of a homecoming there where all things began.

The language adopted is rich in symbolisms and allegories that some would want as hiding secret elements of initiation. It is not difficult to see how the guides needed for the transmutation of the soul could be hinting at a world where precise rules of initiation are enforced. Thus, the traveller necessarily requires the need to have a guide who will enlighten the road ahead without whom the journey is doomed to fail. What just profiled above is expressed in the initial verses of Dante's most celebrated poem in which the "I" and the "we" interject one another:

Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita.

Mi ritrovai per una selva oscura,

Che la diretta via era smarrita

(*If*, I, 1-3),

thus rendering the Comedy an iconic symbolic guide.

3. The issue of unity – historiographical approaches

The dynamics of the process of unification, as stressed in Introduction of this thesis, offer an opportunity to understand the need for a certain kind of national rhetoric that tapped into a repertoire of national myths, such as Dante, not just to construct a united and homogenous national identity, but also to justify it. Valori (2011) states: 'senza la Massoneria [...] non solo non vi sarebbe stato il Risorgimento, ma non vi sarebbe stata alcuna omogeneità della classe dirigente italiana, durante e dopo il Risorgimento e il raggiungimento dell'unità nazionale.'²⁵¹ It is during the first years of the *Risorgimento* movement, in fact, that an important shift takes place. During the *Risorgimento* that expressed in literary terms and that expressed in political terms came to coincide as clearly conveyed in Mainenti (2003), 'Nei primi anni dell'Ottocento avvenne la fusione tra Risorgimento letterario e Risorgimento politico: un tema costante della cultura italiana nei primi decenni del secolo.'²⁵²

Notably, Giovanni Gentile, arguably the more influential among fascist philosophers, believed Fascism to be a "continuation" and a "fulfilment" of a whole series of values that went from love for personal freedom to sense of duty, and national unity, to a vision of independence, and identified in the *Risorgimento* in general and in Mazzini in particular, the forefathers to Fascism.²⁵³

By 1861, the united Kingdom of Italy had been founded. Its unity was achieved at the expense of the pre-existing independent States, which transferred their sovereignty to the Sardinian crown. This became the newly formed united Italian monarchy, namely the Royal House of Savoy. Some saw in this the climatic event crowning the long *Risorgimento* struggles.²⁵⁴ Others, however, critically questioned the "vision" of national unity or expressed concerns that were more pragmatic in nature about the process that led an essentially heterogeneous country

²⁵¹ Valori, op. cit., p. 36.

²⁵² Fernando Mainenti, 'Il colonnello Beneventano del Bosco', in *Agorà* XI-XII (year III-IV, Oct.-Dec. 2002 / Jan.-Mar. 2003). Also available at: <http://www.editorialeagora.it/rw/articoli/96.pdf> [Last accessed: 4 November 2013].

²⁵³ In the essay *Politica e Cultura* (quoted in Sasso, 1998) there are some clear examples and illustrations of the progress of the historical-political axiology of Gentile.

²⁵⁴ Cf. Roberto Martucci, *L'invenzione dell'Italia unita: 1855-1864* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1999).

to be united within a relatively short period.²⁵⁵ Even Count Cavour seemed cautious in his rejoicing, 'Il mio compito è più complesso e faticoso che in passato. Fare l'Italia, fondere assieme gli elementi che la compongono, accordare Nord e Sud, tutto questo presenta le stesse difficoltà di una guerra con l'Austria e la lotta con Roma.'²⁵⁶ Count Cavour knew then that, apart from a North-South divide, other forces were at play, namely the imperial might of the Austrians, other international powers and the physical presence of the Roman Church with its political, moral and religious weight.

Thus, this newly formed state seemed a somewhat fragile construction, culturally, politically and socially divided. In fact, it was not until after War World I that the Catholic Church started shifting its politics in regards to the Kingdom of Italy, as Valori (2011) maintains,

Almeno fino ad oltre la fase della Prima Guerra Mondiale, il Vaticano legge l'unità nazionale italiana come una fase transeunte, e fragile, e tale da essere destrutturata da una correlazione tra Santa Sede e il sistema degli Imperi Centrali o dal nesso, paradossale ma operativo, tra la Chiesa di Roma e una potenza esplicitamente massonica, la Francia. Il Papato non crede che l'Italia Unita durerà [...]²⁵⁷

When looking at the issue of Italian unity, there are different conceptual alignments that should be taken into account. On one side, a certain historiography

²⁵⁵ The Congress of Vienna, in 1815, decreed new territorial and dynastic arrangements. The domination of the Austrians on the Italian peninsula appeared quite pronounced. Almost all the rulers of the ten states in which Italy was divided were directly or indirectly related to Royal House of Habsburg in Austria. Some had become an integral part of the Austrian Empire as the Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia, whereas others were ruled by imperial princes related to the Royal House of Habsburg. The Papal States and the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies were tied to Austria on the basis of diplomatic and military agreements. The remaining smaller states of the centre-north such as: the Duchy of Parma went to Maria Luisa of Habsburg-Lorraine, the former Empress of the French and daughter of the Emperor of Austria; the Duchy of Modena went to Francis IV of Austria-Este, the Grand Duchy of Tuscany went to Ferdinand III of Habsburg-Lorraine, younger brother of the Emperor; the old Republic of Lucca was transformed into a Duchy ruled by Maria Luisa of Bourbon-Parma, and the Duchy of Massa and Carrara was given as annuity to Maria Beatrice Cybo d'Este, mother of Francis IV. Between 1815 and 1829, the Duchy of Massa and Carrara was incorporated into the Duchy of Modena. Furthermore, as agreed by specific clauses, upon the death of Marie Louise of Austria, in December 1847 the Duchy passed to the Bourbons of Parma, who previously had the Duchy of Lucca and consequentially the Duchy of Lucca was ceded by Charles Louis de Bourbon and annexed to the Grand Duchy of Tuscany. Cf. Gilles Pécout, *Il lungo Risorgimento. La nascita dell'Italia contemporanea (1770-1922)*, ed. by R. Balzani (Milano: Mondadori, 1999).

²⁵⁶ Cavour, letter dated March 1861 in Giuseppe Vottari, *Storia d'Italia (1861-2001)* (Milano: Alpha Test, 2004), p. 31. Cf. Robert William Seaton-Watson, *L'Italia dal liberalismo al fascismo, 1870-1925* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1973).

²⁵⁷ Valori, op. cit., p. 38.

may tend to accept, and present, the *Risorgimento* movement as a providential convergence of democratic and liberal forces with the people under the mediation of the Savoy monarchy.²⁵⁸ While on the other, a different kind of historiography may highlight the essentially compositional balance between the Sardinian dynasty and a democratic movement with a popular base which was simply too narrow to realistically hope for a bottom-up operation, or revolution. For the latter, one should also consider that on a pragmatic, empirical note, the Royal House of Savoy was the head of a state too weak to unify the country exclusively with its own forces. Moreover, in both cases, the newly formed country still lacked democratic structures after its unification was achieved.

However, it is important to stress that whichever prescribed course of action one chooses to adhere to, as Riall (2006) points out, the *Risorgimento* has played a central role in shaping Italian history. It is for good or ill ‘the period when Italy becomes a “nation” and enters in the modern “world”’.²⁵⁹

Seen from a transmutable perspective, the term *Risorgimento* would seem to serve a defining purpose, but if one attaches a functional relevance to it, the debate could fall on a more controversial plane that dichotomously develops along the lines of a functional, as opposed to intentional, debate.²⁶⁰ The risk of validating certain historical facts using a whole encompassing terminology is, generally, a realistic one. Both Liberal and Marxist historiography resourced, at least to an extent, to the acceptance of terms such as “bourgeoisie”, “industrialisation”, “revolution”, the definition of which was not tightened to certain “fixed” parameters.

Revisionist historiography sought to overcome this and broadened the analytical base of their historical reading of the *Risorgimento*. However, there too one could still occasionally come across other kinds of accepted generalisations, or otherwise evocative abstractions, which could discount at least some validity from

²⁵⁸ Cf. Adolfo Omodeo, *Storia del risorgimento italiano*. Ninth revised edition with a profile by Benedetto Croce (Napoli: ESI, 1965); Alfredo Oriani, *La lotta politica in Italia. Origini della lotta attuale (476-1887)*, (Firenze: Libreria della Voce, 1913); Riall 1994, op. cit.

²⁵⁹ Riall 1994, op. cit., p. 1.

²⁶⁰ Timothy Mason has intended his Intentionist vs. Functionalist historical debate to develop around the policies of the Holocaust. This does not prevent however the theoretical implant underpinning the theory to be exported to other areas.

the original analysis. For example, Riall (2006) commented on Cavour, Mazzini, and Garibaldi. She called them the “founding fathers” of the modern Italian state.²⁶¹

Riall (2006) is exploring an intermediate position where neither the Liberal nor the Marxist approach to history is fully adopted, but both ‘revised’ in the light of new historical sensitivities that allow the narrative to expand and admit into the historical discourse previously unexplored factors.

Thus, no approach, it would seem, remains completely free, at least to a certain degree, of expressions that albeit conceptually somewhat flawed, help to render an essence otherwise difficult to conceptualise. Riall (2006), in fact, writes: ‘politicians have squabbled, from 1861 onwards, over the Risorgimento’s political legacies.’²⁶²

To this day, the political legacy of the *Risorgimento* has not been completely disclosed, and some attempts, like the one this chapter is endeavouring to, may incur into some involuntary *bona fide* assumptions. Thus, if too much weight is given to those who endorse the mythological rhetoric of unity of national spirit in its territorial expression, one would perhaps be considered as upholding positions close to the Historic Right (*Destra Storica*) as opposed to that predicated by Antonio Gramsci on the left of the political spectrum.²⁶³

As a Marxist, Gramsci saw in the class struggle the principle engine firing the *Risorgimento*, which he defined as a “passive revolution”, where the conservative liberals had the upper hand over the republican democrats (or revolutionary liberals). This fact resulted in the failure to properly address the issue of large landowners who kept vast parts of Italy in a feudal-like state. In dichotomising the debate along those lines, post-1945 historiography, as Riall (2006) notices, brought forward a narrative of idealism and materialism. These two distinct historical approaches come to clash face to face, so to speak, in the political arena.

²⁶¹ Riall 1994, op. cit., p. 1.

²⁶² Riall 1994, op. cit., p. 1.

²⁶³ As expressed in: Benedetto Croce, *Storia d'Italia dal 1871 al 1915* (Bari: Laterza, 1928) published in English as, *History of Italy, 1871-1915*, trans. C.M. Ady (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1929). See also: Antonio Gramsci (1949), *Il Risorgimento*, op. cit.; id., *Letteratura e vita nazionale* (Torino: Einaudi, 1950); id., *Il materialismo storico e la filosofia di Benedetto Croce* (Torino: Einaudi, 1949); id., *Gli intellettuali e l'organizzazione della cultura* (Torino: Einaudi, 1949).

In the discourse that followed, a certain generic terminology was adopted and a narrative of “progress” versus “backwardness” was developed. The two terms of this discourse are vague and non-descriptive, thus opened to criticism.

Revisionist historiography has attempted to reconcile the two positions over a spectrum where the political balance has come to be occupied by a type of historiography that has transcended the two polar aspects of the argument. Neither position has been fully rejected, but partially reconciled with more accurate explanations that can now attempt to better justify the outcomes of the *Risorgimento*. This has also resulted in the revision of some of the terminology used so far. The elements that tend to favour certain preconceived categories, such as the ones already named here, and others such as “progress”, for the Liberal historians, or the search for a democratic alternative to the “passive revolution” for the Marxist side, came under scrutiny.

It became apparent that there was a need to revisit some concepts that were used as the foundation for one’s argument. We have seen that there is a risk in resorting to some occasional paradigmatic contradictory assumptions. However, the collocational context in which these assumptions are embedded should not always be dismissed as assumed involuntary. Occasionally, they could be symptomatic of a conscious will intended to attempt to invert or distort the dynamics of cause effect. In other simpler words, calling certain things in a certain way could help influencing the perception of those things. These could come to be seen not as an informing agent but rather as the informed one.

In the specific case of the *Risorgimento*, the use of terms such as “progress” or “passive revolution” and others, could represent an *aliud et idem*, a constituent of a journey of identity formation where the labels applied have a sort of cognitive developmental role that in turn has an impact on the identity formation process. Italy, in other words, would shape her identity thanks to the application of such terms and thus, these terms would not be a derivative of an Italian identity, but informative of the identity of Italy, as Valori (2011) seems to suggest,

Proprio la vasta rete delle organizzazioni culturali [...] frequentate anche da Lorenzo Stecchetti fino a Giovanni Pascoli, da Andrea Costa fino a Costantino Nigra, da Edmondo De Amicis fino a Pellegrino Artusi, in tutte le fasi della costruzione dell'identità nazionale, rappresentano quel sistema che permette la formazione di un *idem sentire* italiano che sarà forte e diffuso [...]²⁶⁴

Thus, a certain class of historians, whether to the left or the right of the debate, appears preoccupied with presenting an essentially teleological argument in which some of the identifying terms of their thesis, such as “bourgeoisie” and “industrialisation”, to mention but a few, presented clearly accountable values.

However, a measurable benchmark against which to validate these terms was not established. A whole series of definitions were therefore appended to a wider European norm, assumed fully applicable to the Italian case as well without the need for, at least, a moulding revision that would help to better befit an Italian reality.²⁶⁵ Thus, again as Riall (2006) points out, ‘in both accounts [Marxist and Liberal], modern Italy’s “deviation” from a more general bourgeoisie-democratic (and European) norm is assumed and explained.’²⁶⁶

The reasons, for which a generalisation²⁶⁶ is allowed to be charged with a universally accepted message could, however, as already briefly discussed, have *raison d'être* of their own. They could be in themselves telling of a need and, as such, they should be subjected to a theoretical framework able to measure their regularisation within a specific narrative. This should help seeing more clearly the forces behind the creation of a certain assumption, generalisation, myth or symbol

²⁶⁴ Valori, op. cit., p. 36. See also: Alan Warde, ‘Consumption, Identity-Formation and Uncertainty’, in *Sociology*, vol. 28, no. 4 (Nov. 1994), pp. 877-898; Alexander Wendt, ‘Collective Identity Formation and the International State’, in *The American Political Science Review*, vol. 88, no. 2 (June 1994), pp. 384-396; Charles Arthur Willard, *Liberalism and the Problem of Knowledge: A New Rhetoric for Modern Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Catherine F. Schryer, Philippa Spoel, ‘Genre Theory, Health-Care Discourse, and Professional Identity Formation’, in *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, vol. 19, no. 3 (Jan. 2005), pp. 249-278.

²⁶⁵ Cf. Gino Luzzato, ‘La vigilia e l’indomani dell’unità italiana’, in *Orientamenti per la storia d’Italia nel Risorgimento* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1952); and Rosario Romeo, *Dal Piemonte sabauda all’Italia liberale* (Torino: Einaudi, 1963).

²⁶⁶ Riall 1994, op .cit., p. 4.

such as the role of Britain with her patronage of the Comedy within the narrative of an Italian unification.²⁶⁷

In our case, this would account to entering the confines of those groups of interest, chiefly the British this thesis argues, who firstly manufactured what later came to be seen as a norm, for example, Dante's paternity of the Italian language, or others explored here, and as such almost "necessarily" uncritically made to be accepted by the wider public, and even academics. For instance, a contemporary scholar, Paulo Peluffo, in 2011, seemed to be at ease with some of the tenets profiled here as critical. He affirmed: 'ma nell'anno del 150° [anniversario] dell'Unità d'Italia bisogna pur dire che ogni italiano, per essere davvero italiano, deve aver letto almeno una volta nella vita la Commedia.'²⁶⁸

As seen earlier on in the Introduction, the many parties with an interest, or a potential interest, in unifying Italy, and thus, plausibly, interested in promoting their own agenda, from the British to Mazzini to the different patriots also through the possible agent of accepted generalisations, or symbolic myths, such as a medieval poet, Dante, as the father of an "imagined community" (Anderson, 1983), or nation - Italy.²⁶⁹

Just as a brief excursus, generalisations may thus become a useful tool in the hands of those who accept to look at them in their transitional form. The shift from normative to positivist should take cognizance of the logical difference between these two statements and state of thinking. Without structuring this argument too deeply into structural functionalism, which would transcend the scope of this research, it is useful to note that the social structure is the network of statuses connected by associated roles, the agency of which can be delegated to a concept or a generalisation.²⁷⁰ As seen here, this, in summary, is what Britain set out to do with the Comedy.

²⁶⁷ See: Chapter I and the Introduction of this thesis for a more extended analysis on this tenet.

²⁶⁸ Paolo Peluffo, 'Un secolo nel nome di Dante', in *Dante vittorioso. Il mito di Dante nell'Ottocento*, ed. by Eugenia Querci (Torino – New York: Allemandi & C., 2011), p.18.

²⁶⁹ Anderson, op. cit.

²⁷⁰ For a similar issue of association established in the Network-Related Personality and the Agency Question, between opinion and social clusters, see: Albert Bandura, 'Social Cognitive Theory: An Agentic Perspective', in *Annual Review of Psychology*, vol. 52, no. 4 (Feb. 2001), pp.1-26; James S. Coleman, 'Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital', in *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 94, Supplement: Organizations and Institutions: Sociological and Economic Approaches to the Analysis of Social Structure

For a generalisation to be symbolically effective it would need to rely on a positive evaluation and recognition, firstly by a network structure, for example, the historians' community, and then by the general public by and large, for instance in Britain and then Italy. However, behavioural and cognitive variables, quite clearly, bear a correlation with the concept of authority. A generalisation can successfully work if a number of agents converge synergistically. In other words, if an authoritative source within a network, for example, historians or politicians, or any other social network, are perceived to be relevant to the issue in question, the proxy agency of that authority in the vests of a broker, could likely propagate, for self-interest or other reasons, part or all of the summary statement originating from the point of authority recognised to be the source of the "generalisation". The latter ceases to be questioned and begins to be accepted, by virtue of repetition (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983), as also profiled in the Introduction.²⁷¹ Thus, the case, cited here earlier of Peluffo (2011), who acted as a proxy agent of an authoritative source which had an interest in rendering Dante's Comedy a rite of passage for those who wanted to prove their "Italianness". In other words, Peluffo became himself a broker of a certain behavioural norm that had been fixed long before him.

In his works concerning the social structure of competitive advantage, Burt (2012) states, 'there are likely to be behavioral norms for successful brokerage. Given behavioral norms for successful brokerage, it follows that behavioral predispositions have implications for success as a network broker.'²⁷² Furthermore Burt (2012) also argues that, 'network-relevant personality can be used to test for agency in the association between achievement and network advantage,' by which one can deduct that several variants are at play, not least one's personality, in the

(1988), pp. S95-S120; Leon Festinger, Stanley Schachter, and Kurt W. Back, *Social Pressures in Informal Groups* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1950); Elihu Katz and Paul F. Lazarsfeld, *Personal Influence* (New York: Free Press, 1955); Nan Lin, *Social Capital* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

²⁷¹ Eric Hobsbawm, and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

²⁷² Ronald S. Burt, 'Network-Related Personality and the Agency Question: Multirole Evidence from a Virtual World', in *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 118, no., 3 (Nov. 2012), pp. 543-91, p. 550.

propagation of a concept and its consequent sedimentation in the form of an acceptable generalisation.²⁷³

This *modus operandi* of vast sections of the Italian intelligentsia is translatable on the plane of reception of the Comedy within the discourse of national rhetoric. This conceptual station ties in with what explored in the first part of this chapter, the Introduction and the Theoretical Background where literary brokerage behavioural norms also seem to have associated a plethora of individuals who could otherwise be considered quite different in nature and style.

3.i The issue of unity – groups of interests

Let us now briefly move forward and analyse the rhetoric of the *Risorgimento* from the point of economic and political interest.

It is conceivable to argue that there might have been other interests besides the achievement of a political and geographical union of the Italian peninsula. These might have gone beyond the rhetoric of Nation so heavily promoted by the liberal historiography. The latter propounded that the class struggle witnessed in the new Kingdom was the product, or the by-product, of an allegedly ill-orchestrated unitary movement. In addition, the failure of liberal Italy that eventually led to Fascism could stand between an incidental and idiosyncratic event where correlation does not necessarily equate to causation. By this, this study means here a multidimensionality of intents, where progressively different dimensions are focusing on actions or events. As a second ascription dismisses an entire class interest, an entire social-ideological agenda, meaning the neglecting of a systemic intent directed towards certain underexplored forces, maintaining that Italy was united because Italians wanted so, feels like an epistemological *a post hoc, ergo propter hoc* where the thing one is supposed to explain is taken as evidence of the thing that needs to be explained. However, the scope of this research does not allow for an in-depth study

²⁷³ Ibid., p. 553.

of knowledge and its propositional object. Thus, necessarily some concepts, albeit cardinal, are only briefly touched upon.

Within the *Risorgimento* narrative, Gaetano Salvemini saw the whole Italian unification as a compromise based on endemic corruption that he called, 'camorre amministrative'.²⁷⁴ He believed, among other things, that the Italian elections were little more than some kind of bartering of votes for favours. His defined point of view was intended to address and thus denounce a system. This puts him on a frontal opposition to the dominant political establishment, but not necessarily confines him to the socialist camp, or at least not completely. This notwithstanding, Salvemini could probably be somewhat defined as a reformist socialist in so far as he advocated reforms, applied to Southern Italy, in essence divergent from the more urban and socially advanced Turati's reforms of Northern Italy.²⁷⁵

It is perhaps on the front of the economy that it might be easier to ascribe a somewhat less "volitional" broader systemic analysis.²⁷⁶ Such analysis should be able to translate in quantitative terms, at least to a degree, qualitative descriptions such as "miracle" or "forced event" issued by historians in relation to the newly founded Kingdom of Italy, and thus better understand the possible implications of Britain, and the role of the Comedy, in the unification of the country.²⁷⁷ Tanzi (2012) affirms that 'to claim that the unification originated from the Kingdom of Sardinia mainly to spare its creditors from the harm of a default is perhaps a bold assertion, but it cannot be said to be entirely wrong'.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁴ Gaetano Salvemini, 'Un programma per i socialisti del sud', in *I socialisti meridionali*, in *Movimento socialista e questione meridionale* (Torino, Einaudi, 1955), p. 139. The paper was originally published in the "Avanti!" on 1 December 1902.

²⁷⁵ Gaetano Salvemini, 'Riforme sociali e riforme politiche', in id., *Scritti sulla questione meridionale (1896-1955)* (Torino: Einaudi, 1955), p. 205.

²⁷⁶ There are currently several publications that deal with the issue of "oppression" of the South as described by Salvemini. See among others: Carlo Alianello, *La Conquista del Sud* (Milano: Rusconi Libri, 1972); Ludovico Bianchini, *Le finanze del Regno di Napoli* (Firenze: Ed. Marzocco, 1993); Alessandro Bianco di Saint Jorioz, *Il brigantaggio alla frontiera ponticia dal 1860 al 1864* (Milano: Daelli G. e C. Editori, 1864); Antonio Ciano, *I Savoia e il massacro del Sud* (Roma: Grandemelò, 1996); Edoardo Spagnuolo, *La Rivolta di Carbonara* (Napoli: Edizioni Nazione Napoletana, 2005).

²⁷⁷ Luciano Cafagna, *Cavour, l'artefice del primo miracolo italiano* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1999), p. 29.

²⁷⁸ Vito Tanzi, *Centocinquanta anni di finanza pubblica in Italia/A Century and a Half of Public Finances in Italy*. Prefazione di/ Foreword by Nicola Rossi. Commenti di/Comments by Andrea Monorchio, and Gianni Toniolo (Torino: IBL Libri, 2012), p. 23.

It is known that the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies at the time of the Italian unification 1861 had no relevant balance deficit.²⁷⁹ On 7 September 1860, Garibaldi victoriously entered Naples. These events were to cost the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies the sum of 55,248,618.79 lire, while the Kingdom of Sardinia, in the same year, increased its debt of another 150 million lire.²⁸⁰ The following year, in 1861, the Kingdom of Italy was inaugurated in Turin. Its debt amounted to 500 million lire. This figure must be added to the deficit, which from 7 September 1860 to 31 December 1861 was accumulated by the provisional governments of Garibaldi first, and Eugenio Savoia-Carignano Lieutenant-general of the realm of the Royal House of Savoy later. The total amounted to 127,496,812 lire. On balance, it is estimated that by the end of 1861, the public debt had reached the 2000 million lire mark.²⁸¹

This sum is a very substantial, if not outright astronomical, amount for a Kingdom as small as Piedmont was at the time. This data must also be confronted with the average resident population of the two Kingdoms.²⁸² In 1860, the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies had 6,970,018 inhabitants and Piedmont 4,282,553 inhabitants. The per capita debt was equal to 59.03 lire for a Neapolitan and 261.86 lire for a Piedmontese, thus standing at a ratio of 1 to 4.²⁸³ Furthermore, it is also relevant to note that the circulation of currency in the South, which had one-third of the total Italian population, was twice the rest of Italy put together as already noted at that time.²⁸⁴

This substantial disparity was well known even at the time of unification. Giacinto de' Sivo, a senior official of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, once said, '...Torino fe' debiti per 24 volte più di noi... e Torino, più non avendo da mangiare,

²⁷⁹ Giacomo Savarese, *Le finanze napoletane e le finanze piemontesi dal 1848 al 1860, 1862*, ed. by Aldo Servidio and Silvio Vitale (Napoli: Controcorrente, 2003).

²⁸⁰ Expressed in *Lire*, the currency of the newly formed Kingdom of Italy.

²⁸¹ Savarese, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

²⁸² From the *lectio* dedicated to Marco Minghetti, held by liberal economist Vito Tanzi (former director of the Department of Public Finance of the International Monetary Fund from 1981 to 2000, World Bank consultant and Economy Undersecretary 2001-2003), 25 October 2011 at the Fondazione CRT in Turin on '150 years of public finances in Italy', see: *Il Giornale*, 26 October 2011; Cf. Martucci, *op. cit.*

²⁸³ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁴ Francesco Saverio Nitti was a politician and economist, as well as Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Italy from 23 June 1919 to 15 June 1920. Francesco Saverio Nitti, *Principi di scienza delle finanze* (Napoli: L. Pierrò, 1903), p. 292.

venne a mangiar Napoli.²⁸⁵ These events mark the birth of the so called “questione meridionale”, which has since haunted Italy. Gaetano Arfè, in fact, affirmed that

il nodo dei problemi che andava sotto il nome di questione meridionale, diventava la condizione pregiudiziale per la trasformazione dell'Italia in un paese civile, ed il banco di prova quindi dei partiti che si ponevano come partiti di audace rinnovamento o rivoluzione.²⁸⁶

Thus, as Salvemini also noted, even if the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies had heavily contributed to the finances of the newly born Kingdom of Italy, there seemed to have been in place a system which exacerbated fiscal differences and penalised the South, ‘faceva sì che l'Italia settentrionale, la quale possedeva il 48% della ricchezza del paese, pagava meno del 40% del carico tributario, mentre l'Italia meridionale, con il 27% della ricchezza pagava il 32%.²⁸⁷

In addition to an unfair system of taxation, the South also had to deal with an infrastructure network that favoured the North not only being more extensive, but also unfairly priced so to disadvantage the commerce that came from the primarily agricultural South.²⁸⁸ This amounted to a system of taxes and duties on agricultural products that was several times higher than that imposed on manufactured products, typically coming from the North.²⁸⁹ The outlet of international markets for products from the South was also cut off by the tariffs put in place in 1887 that clearly favoured the industrial North.²⁹⁰

Up until the first half of 1860, the government bonds issued by the Two Sicilies were sound. In fact, on the *Bourse de Paris* they were quoted 20% more than their nominal value, whilst those for the public debt of the Kingdom of Sardinia were quoted on average 30% less. There was a spread equal to about 50

²⁸⁵ Giacinto de' Sivo, *Storia delle Due Sicilie dal 1847 al 1861* (Roma: Tipografia Salviucci, 1863), here at vol. II, p. 15.

²⁸⁶ *Introduzione a Movimento socialista e questione meridionale*, ed. by Gaetano Arfè, in Gaetano Salvemini, *Opere IV*, vol. II (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1968), p. XIII.

²⁸⁷ Giuseppe Bedeschi, *La fabbrica delle ideologie* (Roma-Bari: Laterza 2002), p. 30.

²⁸⁸ See also: Salvemini, *op. cit.*, p. 284.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 286. Salvemini talks of a ratio of 1 to 10. Salvemini further adds: ‘così noi assistiamo allo spettacolo che i limoni si pagano cinque a soldo a Messina e due soldi l'uno a Firenze, e un litro di vino costa venti centesimi a Barletta e cinquanta a Lodi.’ *Ibid.*, p. 284.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 285.

percentage points between the Two Sicilies at 120% and Piedmont at 70% of their nominal value. The margin of difference gives the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies a substantial advantage.²⁹¹

Furthermore, the Kingdom of Sardinia between 1849 and 1858 had contracted debts for 522 million, equal to four years of tax revenue, almost exclusively from the British banker James Rothschild, in part at least, to finance the Crimean War of 1858. However, at the time of the annexation, the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies possessed 443,200,000 lire-gold. All other pre-unification States together had 225.2 millions. The Kingdom of Sardinia had 27,000,000 lire-gold with gold reserves that could only ensure one-third of the paper-money supply, thus dangerously financially exposing the small Kingdom, leaving it little possible leeway in case of internationally hostile financial manoeuvres. By contrast, the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies had 443,200,000 lire-gold that guaranteed much of the paper-money supply. Moreover, silver and gold coinage was in circulation and the issuing of paper currency was limited and amply covered by the reserves, rendering international financial speculations on the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies more difficult to enact.

These data are not meant to affirm that the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies had no issues to solve. It is merely comparing the situation synoptically in order to draw some empirical conclusions backed, it would seem, also by direct observations conducted in situ at that time. Count Alessandro Bianco di Saint Jorioz was a Captain of the Army General Staff of the Kingdom of Sardinia. In 1863, he was stationed in the former Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, which had, by now, been absorbed into the Savoy's newly created State, the Kingdom of Italy, when he noted that the general conditions of the people under the Bourbon dynasty were overall satisfactory. Food, commerce, agriculture, education, and some of the prevailing morals are all highlighted in Servidio (2002) where he argues that:

²⁹¹ Cf. Savarese, *op. cit.*

[...] Il 1860 trovò questo popolo (ndr. Quello delle Due Sicilie) del 1859 vestito, calzato, industrie, con riserve economiche. Il contadino possedeva una moneta. Egli comperava e vendeva animali; corrispondeva esattamente gli affitti; con poco alimentava la famiglia, tutti, in propria condizione, vivevano contenti del proprio stato materiale. Adesso è l'opposto [...] La pubblica istruzione era sino al 1859 gratuita, cattedre letterarie e scientifiche in tutte le principali città di provincia. Adesso [...] ²⁹²

His testimony is interesting but could, of course, be bias and, either in excess or defect, embellishing or otherwise distorting the truth, if it were not for the peculiar, and thus telling, fact that the Savoyard authorities felt compelled to withdraw his diary and forbid its printing and circulation. ²⁹³

It must be remembered that the Bourbon Kingdom was steeply entrenched in Catholicism and that the dynasty meticulously observed the devotional practices of the Catholic religion. ²⁹⁴ It should also be mentioned that especially in Italy, the term "Bourbon", in line with what exemplified above (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983; Burt, 2012), has since managed to acquire a somewhat negative connotation, as attested in Vittorio Messori's book *Le cose della vita*. ²⁹⁵

More recent historiography is, however, starting to rebalance what appears to have been a campaign initiated by the new ruling dynasty of Italy, the Royal House of Savoy, to morally discredit and bankrupt the Bourbon Dynasty of Naples. In the 1960's a southern scholar, Michael Topa, published in the Naples daily, *Il Mattino*, a series of articles, which are the result of non-conformist, thus somewhat revisionist, approach to the Bourbon dynasty. Topa (in Messori, 1995) also alludes

²⁹² Aldo Servidio, *L'imbroglione Nazionale. Unità e unificazione d'Italia (1860 – 2000)* (Napoli: Alfredo Guida Editore, 2002), p. 57.

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ Cf. Michelangelo Schipa, *Il regno di Napoli al tempo di Carlo di Borbone* (Napoli: Luigi Piero e figlio, 1904); Carlo III di Borbone, *Lettere ai Sovrani di Spagna*, ed. by Imma Ascione, vol. I-III (Roma: Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali, 2000-2002); Filippo Russo, *Ferdinando II di Borbone, il grande re* (Verona: Fede & Cultura, 2007).

²⁹⁵ "Borbonico", si sa, è un termine ingiurioso: è sinonimo di oscurantismo, inefficienza, ottusità, malaffare. Questi significati sono recenti e sono propri solo della lingua italiana. In Spagna, ad esempio, la gente di ogni convinzione politica sembra soddisfatta del suo Juan Carlos, che è un re borbonico, discendente dalla antica, ramificata dinastia che prese origine da modesti feudatari del castello di Bourbon. Proprio in Francia, una delle glorie nazionali è un altro Borbone, quel Luigi XIV significativamente chiamato "il re Sole"; e sono in molti ancora a piangere la fine dell'ultimo della dinastia, Luigi XVI, il sovrano ghigliottinato, che, pure, ebbe il solo merito di riscattare con il dignitoso coraggio in morte le fiacchezze e gli errori della vita.' Vittorio Messori, *Le cose della vita* (Milano: Paoline, 1995), p. 304.

to an international dimension of interests, primarily British, to see the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies dismantled.²⁹⁶

Thus, this brief overview of the economic and social dynamics at the time of unification has identified a few issues that point to a practical need that the Kingdom of Sardinia had for foreign support. To these, that of the large landowners with their ancient dynasties should also be added.

In the South of Italy, *Latifondieri*, or landowners, represented a social class able to overcome various regime changes while remaining largely untouched by the historical drama of the befalling of various eras and the institution of a new *ordo*, namely now, the institution of the new Kingdom of Italy under the rule of the Royal House of Savoy.

In doing so, they helped to add a somewhat meta-historical spin that is partially absent in the Gramscian narrative of class struggle. As the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies came to pass, the landed gentry ensured that 'il Risorgimento risultasse nel Mezzogiorno non una rivoluzione, ma una corbellatura, ed [era] e sarà pronta sempre a vestire nuove livree pur di difendere il suo potere fino all'ultimo sangue.'²⁹⁷

This passage is important on several planes, not last for its overt admission to a revolution initiated by the forces of the *Risorgimento*, and its implicit granting of success to the North. If this is to be true, it is acceptable to argue that, like Salvemini too, albeit indirectly, there is redistributing along geographical zones that also re-assigns general assumptive concepts such as "progressive" and "reactionary". Thus,

²⁹⁶ Molti manuali di storia presentano Ferdinando II come un mostro, un boia incoronato, un tiranno senza freni, alla testa di un governo che era la negazione di Dio. Queste falsità furono orchestrate e diffuse da inglesi e piemontesi con fini machiavellici; ma poi furono sconfessate dagli stessi autori. Gladstone ritrattò, affermando che le sue lettere erano false e caluniose, che era stato raggirato e che "aveva scritto senza vedere". Settembrini, autore di un infame libretto, confessò che fu "arma di guerra". Ferdinando II, in realtà, secondo lo storico, fu un re onesto, intelligente, capace, galantuomo, profondamente amante del suo popolo. Il regno fu caratterizzato da benessere, fioritura culturale, artistica, commerciale, agricola e industriale. Poche le tasse, la terza flotta mercantile d'Europa, una delle più forti monete, il debito pubblico inesistente, l'emigrazione sconosciuta. Il miracolo economico del Sud Italia fu elogiato nel Parlamento inglese da lord Peel. L'industria era all'avanguardia, con il complesso siderurgico di Pietrarsa, che riforniva buona parte d'Europa, e il cui fatturato era dieci volte rispetto all'Ansaldo di Sampierdarena. Oltre al primo bacino di carenaggio d'Europa, Napoli ebbe la prima ferrovia d'Italia. 120 chilometri raggiunsero presto i 200 ed erano già pronti i progetti per estendere la ferrovia in tutto il regno. I prodotti come la pasta e i guanti erano esportati in tutto il mondo. Prima del crollo, il Regno delle Due Sicilie aveva il doppio della moneta di tutti gli Stati della Penisola messi insieme. Sono significative alcune cifre del primo censimento del Regno d'Italia: nel Nord, per 13 milioni di cittadini, c'erano 7.087 medici; nel Sud, per 9 milioni di abitanti, i medici erano 9.390. Nelle province rette da Napoli gli occupati nell'industria erano 1.189.582. In Piemonte e Liguria 345.563. In Lombardia 465.00'. Michele Topa, cited in Messori, op. cit., p. 304.

²⁹⁷ Marco Rossi-Doria, 'Gaetano Salvemini', in *Gli uomini e la storia*, (Roma-Bari Laterza, 1990), pp. 37-38.

there is also a translation to a different conceptual plane of the idea of class struggle towards a dialectical relationship that contains one extra variant take from the analysis delivered by the Marxists whilst they both adopt quite rigid economic categories that seem comfortable with the assumption that the governments of pre-unitarian Italy, or Restoration governments, must have been reactionary in nature.

Because of this argument, it is logical to conclude that only classes such as the urban, commercial bourgeoisie were perceived as being liberal and ultimately able to start the process of industrialisation. However, it was known, in fact as early as Salvemini, that this was not true for the South where 'I due alleati [ed. Landowners and the bourgeoisie] si distribuiscono, da buoni amici, il terreno da sfruttare', thus in contrast with the Marxist identification of the *Risorgimento* with the bourgeoisie.²⁹⁸ According to Salvemini, in the South, at least two classes shared a common interest in maintaining the *status quo* despite the what, in modern terms, goes under the name of "regime change", which is to say the systematic intention to bring down the old Royal House of Bourbon.

Gino Luzzato in the 1950s, also argued against the Marxist ideological position and reading of the *Risorgimento*. Luzzato (1952) believes that before 1860 the bourgeoisie did not develop, or did not do so at a speed comparable to other European countries, due to the underdeveloped Italian industrial structure and infrastructure. Conversely, Romeo (1959) suggests that to speak of an agrarian revolution led by the bourgeoisie of the South for the South would be unsound.²⁹⁹ In his opinion in fact, had they succeeded, they would have substantially hurt the commercialisation of agriculture in the North and thus slowed or halted altogether the process of industrialisation of that region.³⁰⁰

According to Salvemini, the power of the large landowners would remain strong because it was able to leverage the support of the petty bourgeoisie with whom they successfully created a strong bond of cooperation. It would therefore appear that if in the rest of Italy the landed nobility had lost old privileges, in the South there was a conscious attempt by those autochthon forces not to relinquish

²⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 38.

²⁹⁹ Romeo 1959, op. cit.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

them. Badeschi (2002) argues that 'se i grandi proprietari non erano oppressi dalle tasse, in compenso essi e soltanto essi si giovavano dei dazi di importazione sul grano, che costituivano un grosso tributo annuo pagato dai consumatori al loro dolce far niente.'³⁰¹

However, if this bond existed, it benefitted almost exclusively the upper echelons of Southern society, namely the landed nobility, leaving the bourgeoisie and the other lower social classes to fence for themselves in an Italy determinately oriented towards the favouring of the emancipation, on planes that included the social and economic, of the North of the country, as Lelio Basso (1959) suggests in his book.³⁰²

However, this is not to say that the North of Italy was devoid of any problems. Gobetti (1991), in fact, highlights tensions that deeply affect the relationship among social classes in the North, so much so as to affirm that Italy was on the brink of a revolution as the first factory occupations and the birth of the "workers' councils" marked the events of the so-called "*Biennio rosso*".³⁰³

In doing so, Gobetti (1991) tells us that the North had reached a level of industrialisation sophisticated enough to generate deep social tensions. Albeit not overtly, this admits that what Salvemini and others maintained about the exploitation of the South in favour of the industrialisation of the North was not without foundation.

However, an analysis based exclusively along the trajectories of class struggle, amply explored by Marxist historiographers, or one solely based on the mythological rhetoric of the *Risorgimento*, equally vastly enquired into, would fail to recognise that there were other agents at play, such as the one mentioned several times here: Britain. To this account, Riall (2006) states that the teleology of both approaches has now somewhat being surpassed and a new class of "revisionist" historians have opened new lines of enquiry, with Franco Rizzi at the forefront.³⁰⁴

Historical research in Italy has thus come to include other possible actors defining the agency of unity including gender, history of the family, the role of the

³⁰¹ Badeschi, op. cit., p. 31.

³⁰² Lelio Basso, *Gaetano Salvemini socialista e meridionalista* (Manduria (TA): Lacaita, 1959), p. 60.

³⁰³ Pietro Gobetti, and Anna Gobetti Marchesini Prospero, *Lettere 1918 – 1926* (Torino: Einaudi, 1991), pp. 375-376.

³⁰⁴ Riall 1994, op. cit., p. 6.

Catholic Church, international players, regional rather than national perspectives and others as accepted in Riall (2006). This is to admit that previous historiographies, with their methodological preoccupation with the Marxist/Liberal interpretations, had neglected to properly, or satisfactorily, address some of the underlying factors leading to unification in 1860/61. This is something that this study hopes, if not rectify, at least, add its voice for what the narrative of this thesis is concerned.

4. British interests

Having looked at the evidence so far, and having analysed different theoretical positions, the question of who best befits the profile of a receptor as well as a possible driver of this process, it is argued here, points at Great Britain.

This chapter acknowledges that, as Armstrong (1973) argues, in an analysis of knowledge, three conditions must be present: truth, belief, and justification, where it is necessary to ensure that justification is not true merely because of luck.³⁰⁵ There currently is a debate between two different schools of thought: *evidentialism* and *reliabilism*. They do not agree on the role of justification. However, neither of them denies the need for this third term of comparison to be present in the analysis.

However, there are cases, known as *Gettier-cases* where both evidence and origination in reliable faculties may not guarantee that a belief is not true merely because of luck.³⁰⁶ This notwithstanding, if one assumes it is not luck, or random events, to drive this process but a sort of will of choice, the question of why Dante was so heavily employed by the British to promote an idea of national Italian state, seems to interlock with that of defined British interests in the Mediterranean region. Thus, a united Italy does not appear as an invention, as Martucci (1999) claims in his book, or at least not in those terms. It was more a process that started with the choice of promotion of Dante and his Comedy, among others, back in London throughout the nineteenth century in order to create a cultural space that was to aid and ultimately inhabit a physical space, imagined as a community (Anderson, 1983) in the shape of the new Kingdom of Italy, because so wanted by the British, but not invented as such, unless understood as fabricated or devised.

The British, as it is known, helped to finance the Italian enterprise that, has seen earlier here, would not have been able otherwise to execute with its own

³⁰⁵ David Malet Armstrong, *Belief, Truth, and Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973).

³⁰⁶ The Gettier problem, instead, refers to the solving of the problem thus introducing a fourth condition where, at least according to some theorists, the concept of reliability must be readdressed according to the perception the subject has of the environment. Whereas others think justification is not necessary for knowledge. Thus, the term "justification" should be clearly semantically agreed upon as well as that which makes beliefs justified. This definition employs the notion of obligations. Alternative definitions can be given employing other members of the family of deontological terms, such as requirement, duty, permission, or prohibition. Yet, further definitions are still possible when one widens the range of relevant concepts, employing notions such as responsibility, being in the clear, and blameworthiness. Cf. Edmund Gettier, 'Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?', in *Analysis*, vol. 23 (1963), pp. 121–123.

means, be them economic, military, or cultural, the unification of the country.³⁰⁷ Notably, Augusto Del Noce called the *Risorgimento* 'una pagina dell'imperialismo inglese'.³⁰⁸ From the extensive corruption of the Bourbon army to the protection of the Royal Fleet to the Garibaldi mission, and ultimately, in the case analysed here, at least, to the employment, if not the drafting of the Comedy, the footprint left behind by the British, points at a strategic need to see displaced the old Restoration order and bring in a kingdom that would serve British interests in a way the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies would not or could not.³⁰⁹

The British contrived, or were heavily involved in, a creation of a new state that could serve their different geopolitical and economic strategic needs in the Mediterranean. They acted on several different fronts. Newspapers like: *Daily News*, *The Times*, *Morning Herald*, *Morning Post*, and others, prepared their public opinion to an invasion of the Kingdom of The Two Sicilies.³¹⁰ The British warship *Amsterdam*, the American *Washington* and *Franklin*, where Garibaldi crossed the Strait of Messina, were deployed in order to aid and smooth Garibaldi's expedition that would be recorded as the *Spedizione dei Mille*. British and local money had been used to corrupt the Bourbon army. Under orders from Garibaldi, Giuseppe La Masa was despatched to contact influential people, or in the Italian: 'gente di rispetto' with its clear undertones.³¹¹ Industrialists like Ignazio Florio and the banker don Vincenzo Favara di Mazara, offered Garibaldi 100.000 gold lire. Stefano Triolo, baron of St. Anna, organised a 350 strong army.³¹² Garibaldi entered the Kingdom of The Two Sicilies not just with the blessing, but the backing from the imperial might of Britain. Italy was to be made and Dante and his Comedy were part of this project. They, the Florentine poet and his most celebrated masterpiece, helped in the creation of that cultural space that has been thus far profiled.

³⁰⁷ Cf. Savarese, op. cit.; Zitara, 'L'unità truffaldina', op. cit.; Lecture dedicated to Marco Minghetti, Tanzi op. cit.; Cf. Martucci, op. cit.

³⁰⁸ del Noce, op. cit.

³⁰⁹ Cf. Nicola Zitara, *L'invenzione del Mezzogiorno* (Napoli: Jaka Books, 2011).

³¹⁰ Cf. Mainenti, op. cit.

³¹¹ "Gente di rispetto" è tipica espressione nel mondo e nel gergo della "mafia". Paul Clavier, and Edmondo Coccia, *Lessico dei valori morali per i cittadini del XXI secolo* (Roma: Armando Editore, 2008), p. 27.

³¹² Mainenti, op. cit.

What follows is a brief account by Domenico Nicoletti, who was assigned to the command headquarters,

Per ordine di S.E. il Luogotenente del Re, il generale Lanza, rimanete qui, poiché la rivoluzione è battuta e sottomessa; evitiamo gli orrori di una città presa d'assalto: in breve entrerete nel resto di Palermo, ma per ora rimanete qui. Signori ufficiali, impedito ai soldati che si avanzino più oltre.”³¹³ Shortly after Nicoletti is reported to have spoken with the brigadier Lukas von Mechel to whom he said: “Ho detto ai soldati che la rivoluzione è sottomessa, ma a voi debbo comunicare gli ordini di S.E.: il Luogotenente del Re ha conchiuso un armistizio con Garibaldi, sarebbe slealtà militare continuare le ostilità. Date quindi ordine alla truppa, che si trova alla Flora, di cessare il fuoco e di ritirarsi.”³¹⁴

The Kingdom of the Two Sicilies had been attacked from within by corrupting its army and from outside by overt military intervention. However, the British did not act only on a political, economic, or military plane, as mentioned earlier, but were also busy winning what in today's terms one would call “hearts and minds”. They elaborated a vision where Dante and the Comedy served as tools to define an identity that needed to be national in both a divisive and non-divisive guise. Italy had to be constructed from scratch and the constituent previous kingdoms amalgamated into a coherent new structure. A form of territorial nationalism had to be created, backed, financed, and ultimately dispersed throughout the territories of the Italian peninsula.

However, this form of nationalism had to then be somewhat brought under control and turned into a more manageable and coherent form if Italy were to have a chance of survival, and accomplish the role for which it had been brought into existence.

³¹³ Giuseppe Buttà, *Un viaggio da Boccadifalco a Gaeta* (Milano: Bombiani, 1985), p. 56.

³¹⁴ Ibid. For more information on Lukas von Mechel and a personal touch on the struggles for the Italian unification, see also: Alessandro Marra, *Pilade Bronzetti: un bersagliere per l'unità d'Italia: da Mantova a Morrone* (Milano: F. Angeli, 1999).

In fact, the peril of Italy disintegrating has been well documented. Massimo d'Azeglio expressed his thoughts in quite a forbidding fashion and did not shy away from harsh, stern terms that suggest little propensity to be united: 'in tutti i modi la fusione coi Napoletani mi fa paura; è come mettersi a letto con un vaiuoloso!'³¹⁵ Catch sentences such as 'Fatta l'Italia bisogna fare gli italiani', allegedly uttered by d'Azeglio, expressed a need to move from a form of territorial nationalism that had been unforgiving to a cultural nationalism that proved to be just as uncompromising.³¹⁶ This is consistent, for example, with what Professor Mahnaz Yousefzadeh found out about the celebrations of Dante in Florence in 1865. She maintains that the centenary was a platform upon which a new form of Italian national identity was emerging. She claims that the festival aimed to resist the bureaucracy of Piedmont.³¹⁷ This, in other words, would mean a shift from Piedmontese territorial nationalism to Florentine cultural nationalism, in her own words.

It is conceivable to argue that the British, already so compromised in the whole process of Italian unification, must have been aware of the need for such a shift and allowed, encouraging in some cases despite their earlier backing of the Kingdom of Sardinia, those who would help to promote the cause of a culturally and politically united Italy.

Thus, the close link between Dante and nationalism was to be reasserted also in performances such as those at the Teatro Pagliano, where the actors Gaetano Gattinelli, Adelaide Ristori, Ernesto Rossi, and Tommaso Salvini on 16 May 1895 recited excerpts from the *Commedia*. In the audience sat the King, Victor Emanuel II, alongside members of the government, foreign ambassadors, and various other dignitaries.³¹⁸ Michael Caesar and Nick Havely (Audech & Havely,

³¹⁵ Letter to Diomede Pantaleoni, 17 October 1860, in M. d'Azeglio and D. Pantaleoni, unpublished correspondence, 1888, in Claudia Petraccone, *Le due civiltà: settentrionali e meridionali nella storia d'Italia dal 1860 al 1914* (Bari-Roma: Laterza, 2000), p. 31.

³¹⁶ Simonetta Soldani, and Gabriele Turi, in the introduction to: *Fare gli italiani. Scuola e cultura nell'Italia contemporanea* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1993) maintain that this motto was coined in 1886 by Ferdinando Martini 'in an attempt to translate the political sense'. See also: Giuseppe Fumagalli, *Chi l'ha detto?* (Milano: Hoepli, 1921), p. 208.

³¹⁷ Cf. Mahnaz Yousefzadeh, *City and Nation in the Italian Unification. The National Festivals of Dante Alighieri* (London-New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

³¹⁸ Michael Caesar and Nick Havely, *Politics and Performance in Dante in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 132.

2012) stress that not many in the literature have really understood, or fully appreciated what happened in that theatre that May night almost 150 years ago. They report that when Salvini came to the point where Dante symbolises the Roman curia in the image of a wolf, in his rendering of the *Inferno*, this is what happened when he uttered the following lines:

Molti son gli animali a cui s'ammoglia

E più saranno ancora, finche l'veltro

Verrà che la farà morir di doglia!

(*If, I, 100-102*)

In the words of Salvini himself,

The audience caught the allusion on the instant, and a storm applause burst out as if it would never stop. I believe that Victor Emanuel at that moment would have preferred to be at the hunt than at the theatre. The people persisted in their applause and in crying "Viva il Re! Viva l'Italia!". His Majesty did not understand or did not wish to understand...³¹⁹

There are several implications to such an event. It denotes that in 1865, in Florence at least, and among those educated enough to seek to attend to a play, Italy and the Savoy dynasty were becoming an interchangeable currency. This, however, was not apparent to the very top of the establishment who was hesitant to recognise the crowds' acknowledgment. This hesitance on the account of the monarch could be attributed to the clear anti-Papal message contained in that event, which his Majesty might not have wanted to endorse, or at least not so early on. Speculatively, it could, however, also be attributed to the Royal House of Savoy little warmth towards the idea and ideal of National Unity. The Savoy dynasty had, after all, saved their Kingdom from total insolvency and bankruptcy and might not have

³¹⁹ Ibid.

been too keen to face an upwards struggle that would ultimately result in a compromise with a land, Italy, that they ultimately regarded as utterly foreign.³²⁰

However, as it appears, Dante, the Comedy, the House of Savoy, the British and the quest for national unity had become entangled, and the crowds saw little wrong in using the medieval poet to address what were clearly political issues. As this thesis argues, London was never too far away when it came to using Dante for political gains, even if controversially or apparently contradictorily. The Venetian actor and patriot Gustavo Modena, to whom Salvini owed much of his professional life, in fact, his very existence as a popular actor, was active in the British capital between the 1830s and 1850s.³²¹ He was a close friend of Mazzini and a fervid believer in an armed revolution.³²² For him performing had a double value expressed in one action, 'Rivoluzione [...] significava una sola cosa: insorgere. E, ogni volta che i tempi lo consentivano, Modena chiudeva il sipario e prendeva il fucile.'³²³

³²⁰ Cf. Family archive of Baron Pietro Benevento del Bosco at the The Palazzo Beneventano del Bosco, at Syracuse, Sicily. See also: Romeo 1963, op. cit.; Leonardo Sciascia, *La corda pazzo* (Torino: Einaudi, 1970); Indro Montanelli, *Garibaldi* (Milano: Fabbri Editori 1962); Giuseppe Cesare Abba, *Da Quarto al Volturmo* (Roma: Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato, 1956); Alianello, op. cit.; Lorenzo Del Boca, *Maledetti Savoia*, (Milano: Piemme 1998); Ciano, op. cit.; Gianandrea De Antonellis, *Non mi arrendo* (Napoli: Controcorrente, 2001); Venero Girgenti, *Un ufficiale garibaldino in Sicilia* (Catania: Edizione La tecnica della scuola 1970); Buttà, op. cit.; Angelantonio Spagnoletti, *Storia del Regno delle Due Sicilie* (Bologna: Il Mulino 1997); Denis Mack Smith, *Vittorio Emanuele II* (Milano: Mondadori, 1994); Tina Whitaker, 'Sicily and England' (London, 1907), in Antonio Panizzi, *Scholar and patriot*, ed. by Constance Brooks (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1931). For political emigration to England, see also: Alvin R. Calman, *Ledru-Rollin après 1848 et les proscrits français en Angleterre* (Paris: F. Rieder, 1921); Pasquale Villari, *Mezzogiorno e contadini nell'età moderna* (Bari: Laterza, 1961); id., *Le lettere meridionali e altri scritti sulla questione sociale in Italia*, ed. by F. Barbagallo (Napoli: Guida, 1979); Rosario Villari, *Mezzogiorno e contadini nell'età moderna* (Bari: Laterza, 1961); *Il Sud nella storia d'Italia. Antologia della questione meridionale*, ed. by Rosario Villari (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1978); id. *Mezzogiorno e democrazia* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1979); Friedrich Vochting, *La questione meridionale* (Napoli: Longo, 1975).

³²¹ 'La "santissima trinità" del grande attore italiano, costituita da Adelaide Ristori, Ernesto Rossi e Tommaso Salvini, non si può spiegare senza Gustavo Modena'. Roberto Alonge, *Teatro e spettacolo nel secondo Ottocento* (Bari: Laterza, VI edition 2002), p. 23.

³²² Cf. Alonge, op. cit.

³²³ *Ibid.*, p. 52.



Fig. 3 Modena: *Inferno of Dante*, Her Majesty Theatre playbill, 17 May 1839.

Following the uprisings of Bologna in 1831, Modena was exiled on the following grounds: ‘aver declamato “non poche poesie allusive alla rivolta, e in odio alla Santa Sede.”’³²⁴ Modena was not new to the use of the stage as an instrument of political propaganda to address an audience. In Padua, in 1829, he brought to it an uncensored representation of *Francesca da Rimini*, where again Dante and the Comedy were used to challenge the issue of Italy as a united nation.³²⁵

It is however after having met Mazzini that Modena stepped up his political involvement and it is in 1841 that he presented his *Lectura Dantis* as fundamental to his political commitment. Just three years earlier, he had had his debut in London in 1839.³²⁶ Mazzini was instrumental in Modena’s life and when in 1853 the former came to be more tolerant of the idea of the Royal House of Savoy as leaders in the process of the Italian unification, the actor eschewed Mazzini and entered a decade, 1850-60, of crisis.

³²⁴ Claudio Meldolesi, *Profilo di Gustavo Modena. Teatro e rivoluzione democratica* (Roma: Bulzoni, 1971), p. 52.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*

As stated by Nicholas Havelly and Amilcare A. Iannucci (in part III) in the book edited by Antonella Braidà and Luisa Calè *Dante in the Visual and Performing Arts*, accepting to stage Dante in the ways Modena did, represented a clear political message for the Florentine poet was being promoted as a hero of *italianità* a cardinal notion for the cultural elites of the *Risorgimento*.³²⁷

The British establishment, as amply already discussed, had sound reasons to see that the Italian unification would be successful and the lending of the stage of the Queen's Theatre in London was just one of the ways they used to reach their goal. Eventually, as the two scholars argue, the reception of Modena was so successful, thanks to his rhetorical nationalistic overtones allowed by the British staging of his plays, that it even inspired the Milano films *Inferno* of 1919.³²⁸

Thus, Dante is still the chain that once united the two men as they both pointed, albeit later in different directions, at the medieval poet to gain legitimacy for their own personal condition.³²⁹ Modena's rendering of Dante's Count *Ugolino*, in canto XXIII of the Comedy, resonated with the activists of the *Giovine Italia e Giovine Europa*, founded by Mazzini and thus some of the cultural elites that promoted the idea of a united Italy.³³⁰

However, what was more remarkable about Modena's success in London was the fact that he made it all. Michael Caesar and Nick Havelly in Audeh & Havelly (2012) report that Modena's act was disadvantaged at least in two ways for it came at the end of the theatre season and it was recited in Italian. They also, interestingly, add that the event was propitious thanks to a very special combination '[the] conjunction of Dante [and] England'.³³¹ They carry on and further elaborate on this link. They explain that upon his death in 1861, at his obituary, a close friend of Modena, Francesco Dall'Ongaro, exclaimed that despite his successes back in Italy, it was in England that Modena 'found an unexpected passport: the name of

³²⁷ *Dante in the Visual and Performing Arts*, ed. by Antonella Braidà, and Luisa Calè, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2007).

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

³²⁹ Caesar, and Havelly in Audeh, and Havelly, op. cit., p. 115.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*

³³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 121

Dante'.³³² London, it seems, had offered Modena the possibility to engage Dante re-interpreting the medieval poet in a liberal key, free to be fiercely anti-Papal, much as Modena himself was. Michael Caesar and Nick Havely in Audeh & Havely (2012) are convinced that Dall'Ongaro was certain of the importance played by an "English" Dante in the year of unification.

Thus, *Beatrice*, *Francesca* and *Ugolino*, were part and parcel of Modena's repertoire, worth remembering a revolutionary, who had been allowed on a famous London stage. Of course, before Modena, a long string of names, a 'golden chain' in the words of Michael Caesar and Nick Havely in Audeh & Havely (2012), from Forscolo, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, to Mazzini and others, had introduced Dante and the Comedy to British shores.

However, it is reasonable to assume, I argue, that it is not a coincidence, but there was a defined political will that bestowed through the means of agents, such as the *Edinburg Review*, a Dante fit not just for exiles but a Dante befitting a movement fixated on national territorial unity first and on national cultural unity then. The long arm of the British establishment, with the Comedy never far from the centre of attention, thus acted as the true power behind, as a sort of *éminence grise*.

It was not just the Italians in London who came to see Modena. Illustrious names like those of the Scottish Thomas Carlyle were part of Modena's audience in Her Majesty Theatre in London and again it was England that felt not only 'sicura' but also and perhaps more tellingly, 'ospitale' for those who intended to use Dante's Comedy to define their political, as much as cultural, trajectory.³³³

Thus, it is conceivable to argue that the British establishment were all too aware of this fervour around Dante and his Comedy, and if supposedly they were not actively promoting it, they certainly did little to stop it. For the British, a united Italy under Savoy rule meant dealing with a state that presented several benefits. It was secular in nature, unlike the profoundly devoted Catholic dynasty of the Royal House of Bourbon, fact that befitted protestant anti-Catholic England. The Kingdom of the Two Sicilies was also a formidable adversary in the Mediterranean, occupying

³³² Meldolesi, in Audeh, and Havely, op. cit., p. 121.

³³³ Salsilli, in Audeh, and Havely, op. cit., p. 122.

a geographically strategic position, and having the third strongest Navy after that of Britain and France. The Bourbon kings also had control of the Sicilian sulphur mines, which in the nineteenth century, was considered one of the most sought after raw materials employed, among other uses, to produce gunpowder, essential for any military power such as Britain.

5. The Catholic Church, the Comedy and Secret Societies

This section of the chapter only very briefly touches upon the Catholic Church as one of the agents of the *Risorgimento*. The position of the Church is examined in greater detail in the chapter dedicated to Fascism. Thus, the Church too is seen there, as here, in relation to Dante, the Comedy, and the role that secret societies played in the process of unification.

When referring to the Church, Dante usually saw it as two distinct institutions: one as strictly religious and the other as an ecclesiastical hierarchy.³³⁴ Thus, for the former, the Church is directly derived from an act of God's will (*Mn* III xiii 2), founded upon Christ (*x* 7), indefectible and holy (*Pr* iii 137 and *passim*), and one (*Ep* xi 13). As such, she is Christ's bride (*Ep* xi 6 and 26, *Mn* III iii 12, *Cv* II v 5, *Pd* x 140, xi 32, xii 43, xxvii 40, xxxii 128). The Church is also seen by Dante as the garden of Christ (xii 72 and 104, xxvi 64) which one must assist in times of peril and travails (vi 95, xii 107, xxvii 63). The Church as a *Mater piissima* (*Ep* viii 15) had to be revered and obeyed. It could have been, in its temporal vest, militant (*Ep* xi 5, *Pd* xxv 52). However, there is no separation with the Church that is cathartic as it represents the mystical body of Christ (*Mn* III xiv 3).

The Church for Dante was a sacred institution that Christ himself had commanded Peter to found and his successors to perpetuate (*Ep* vi 3, *Pg* xxxii 129, *Pd* xi 119-120, xxxii 124-126, *Mn* III viii) and, as such, the Church was the Pope's bride (*If* xix 57, *Pg* xxiv 22).

Dante saw the Church as an apostolic monarchy (*Ep* vi 8, *Pd* xviii 122-123). Its seat was in Rome (*If* ii 24, *Pg* xvi 127) and its mission was that of helping the poor and the disposed (*Mn* II x 1, 2 and 3, III x 17, *Pd* x 108, xxii 82). The Church had to be pious, but it had real powers that allowed it to have the ability to pass laws, decree or dissolve excommunications, and order the blessed in the Empyrean. The Dantean Church could also fight the infidels and the heretics (*Cv* II iii 10, v 5, III vi 2, IV xxiii 15, *Pg* iii 137, *Pd* iv 46, v 35 and 77, ix 126, xv 144, xxvii 130-132).

³³⁴ Cf. Paolo Brezzi, *Lecture dantesche di argomento storico-politico* (Napoli: Editrice Ferraro, 1983).

The Church for Dante is as much a physical place as it is spiritual. This is expressed in *Fiore* xcvi 2 and clxiv 10 as well as *If* xxii 14 and *Pd* xvii 113.

These *ad litteram* references, as Brezzi (1983) points out, are copious but not enough to exhaust the ecclesiastical issue in Dante. However, as he expresses in his book *Lecture dantesche di argomento storico-politico*, ecclesiology was not regarded in the times of Dante as a discipline on its own. It was widely accepted that the term 'ecclesia', and all it stood for, was not exclusive. It did not indicate just the Catholic community, but it was inclusive of the whole human race in a sort of *christiana republica*.³³⁵ Political leaders, such as Charlemagne, enjoyed the title of *rector ecclesiae*, for politics absolved a kind of missionary function, and religion could also have a temporal role to play in so far as this would serve to absolve to a spiritual need.

Brezzi (1983) maintains that it was indeed this kind of worldliness of the Church that rendered the ecclesiastical institution subject to a moral code. Dante, like many others during the thirteenth century, ventured into issues such as the condition of utter poverty that the Church ought to have followed. In entering into a discourse laid out in mundane terms, claims of different nature, from social to political, could affect the temporal autonomy of the Roman Church. Some, Brezzi (1983) argues, indeed entered into such quarrels. Dante however, never questioned the clerical substance of the Church, nor did he set off to undermine the hierarchical structure of the Church of Rome. Above all, Dante never questioned the need for a "king" like figure. Much as Christ the King, the Popes were Vicars of Christ and, therefore, kings in their own divine right. There were, of course, those who argued that Christ was a humble king, and thus the Popes ought to follow that example. This study shall not enter here into an in-depth ecclesiastical analysis, as this is well beyond the scope of this chapter and indeed this thesis. It will, however, briefly touch upon a few more concepts to help better elucidate Dante's position in relation to what argued here.

³³⁵ Ibid, p. 163.

St. Thomas Aquinas had a profound influence in clarifying what were the boundaries of the Catholic Church in relation to the supernatural sphere versus that which was human.³³⁶ Dante, as it is known, also divided the natural and human from what was supernatural. He mentions so in *Mn* III xv 7. However, as Vinay stresses, man is capable on his own of actuating his nature.³³⁷ Thus, the Church's role is that of a sort of administrator, minding God's gifts to humanity. The Church is therefore not to take the place of man, nor is it to guide him as he finds himself in life. Rather the Church is there to reveal to man the eternal truths and the ways reason can be directed. Vinay argues that the Church is not there to be 'guida politica, [...] levatrice e punitrice, ma annunziatrice delle promesse eterne e luce di amore perfetto [...]'³³⁸

However, Dante's position is not quite like this, especially in his *Comedy*. The lack of certain dates of composition for both the *Commedia* and the *Monarchia* renders the resorting to biographical data a necessary step in order to determine what was Dante's position in relation to the Roman Church. The latter presence in the *Comedy* is pervasive. However, an ideal more in-depth analysis would require an ampler access to biographical notes. This will be left to other studies, as the wealth of different interpretations for what concerns Dante's position in relation to the Catholic Church could constitute the subject of an entire research project, thus transcending the scope of the present one. It should suffice the mention developed here, albeit briefly, that to the current day, the debate about Dante's relation to the Church is still being explored.

On 30 April 1921, Pope Benedict XVI issued an Encyclical letter, *In praeclara Summorum*, where he unmistakably stated Dante's allegiance to the Holy See. Benedict submitted to Christianity the following: 'Dimostrare ancor meglio

³³⁶ Cf. Brian Davies, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); Nicholas M. Healy, *Thomas Aquinas: Theologian of the Christian Life* (London: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2003); Ralph M. McInerney, *Aquinas Against the Averroists: On There Being Only One Intellect* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1993). For those who read Italian, see: Maria Cristina Bartolomei, *Tomismo e Principio di non contraddizione* (Padova: Cedam, 1973); Giuseppe Barzaghi, 'La Somma Teologica di San Tommaso d'Aquino', in *Compendio* (Bologna: Edizioni Studio Domenicano, 2009); Gilbert Keith Chesterton, *Tommaso d'Aquino* (Napoli: Guida Editori, 1992). See also: Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Tommaso d'Aquino. L'uomo e il teologo* (Casale Monferrato: Piemme, 1994). For those who read French, see: Étienne Gilson, *Realisme Thomiste et Critique de la Connaissance* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1947); id., *Saint Thomas Moraliste* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1974).

³³⁷ Vinay in op. cit., *Lecture dantesche di argomento storico-politico*.

³³⁸ Ibid., p. 166.

l'intima unione di Dante con questa Cattedra di Pietro', and in regards to the Comedy he specifically added:

Infatti tutta la sua Commedia [...] ad altro fine non mira se non a glorificare la giustizia e la provvidenza di Dio [...] Quindi in questo poema, conformemente alla rivelazione divina, risplendono la maestà di Dio Uno e Trino, la Redenzione del genere umano operata dal Verbo di Dio fatto uomo, la somma benignità e liberalità di Maria Vergine Madre, Regina del Cielo, e la superna gloria dei santi, degli angeli e degli uomini [...]. Ed emerge che una sapientissima mente governa in tutto il poema l'esposizione di questi e di altri dogmi cattolici [...] Per la verità, l'Alighieri ha una straordinaria deferenza per l'autorità della Chiesa Cattolica e per il potere del Romano Pontefice, tanto che a suo parere sono valide tutte le leggi e tutte le istituzioni della Chiesa che dallo stesso sono state disposte.

(*In praeclara summorum*', 30 April 1921, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, 1921).³³⁹

His words leave no doubt about where the Holy See stood in relation to Dante and the Comedy. The medieval poet and his masterpiece, in Benedict's words, glorified the Roman Church, the power of the Pontiff, and the ecclesiastical and curial aspect of the institution.

Albeit later than the *Risorgimento* period, this document is still relevant as it states a need, expressed by the Holy See, to clarify the position of Dante and his Comedy. In doing so, the Catholic Church, albeit indirectly, recognised that the issue of Dante's allegiance to the Roman Church was all but certain.

This kind of uncertainty, as transpires through the need to issue such statement, it is reasonably arguable, played well with protestant Britain, which could thus access a grey area where neither resolution would clearly betray an anti-Catholic stance, for the British could point at Dante's own unclear position when it

³³⁹ This encyclical is also available in: Ugo Bellocci, *Tutte le encicliche e i principali documenti pontifici emanati dal 1740: 250 anni di storia visti dalla Santa Sede* (Città del Vaticano: Libreria editrice vaticana, 2000), p. 468.

came to matters of the Roman Church.³⁴⁰ An example of how the British establishment was careful not to openly reveal its distrust in Catholicism occurred at the times of the “Roman Question”. Cardinal Manning asked Gladstone for assistance. He wanted to reassure the pope that Britain was ready to help, should he wish her to intervene. Within days of Manning’s request, the warship *Defence* arrived at Civitavecchia ready to rescue the pontiff.³⁴¹

The Church on its part played a fundamental shaping role in the *Risorgimento*. Scarpino (2005) points at the Catholic Church, accusing it of supporting acts of *brigantaggio* in the newly united Italy. The Papal State, according to this scholar, did therefore, at least, two things: it backed the deposed Bourbon dynasty against the new ruling Savoy family, and it aligned itself with the peasants against the power of the landowners and their bourgeoisie acolytes.³⁴²

In doing so, the Church assumed a third position, so to speak, where France and Britain played major roles as military powers. Their influence hung in a balance that was also provided by a sort of Masonic mediation as Valori (2011) argues. The Holy See, in fact, was opposed to the administrative, economic, and political unification of Italy, in line with an attitude of fragmentation that saw a political and cultural environment centrifugal in nature. This despite the attempts of unification, also on a Masonic plane, where under the *Gran Maestranza Lemmi*, Turin, Naples, Palermo, and Florence formed a united *Grande Oriente Italiano*.

Fundamentally, Masonic movements had been radical, republican, and secular in nature. However, they eventually became aware that to come to a united Italy, the different movements scattered throughout the Italian peninsula had to, as much as possible, unite and accept to collaborate with the Savoy elites, and thus, albeit indirectly, with those who helped the Kingdom of Sardinia, which is to say the British. In so doing, Masonic movements had to tread carefully so not to be too openly anti-clerical, for the Roman Church was still hoping to use the Austro-

³⁴⁰ For the vast debate on Protestant and Catholic relations between Britain and Italy, see, for example, Tom Villis, *British Catholics and Fascism. Religious Identity and Political Extremism Between the Wars* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) and Raponi, op. cit.

³⁴¹ David I. Kertzer, *Prisoner of the Vatican: The Popes, the Kings, and Garibaldi’s Rebels in the Struggle to Rule Modern Italy* (Boston, Ma: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2006), p. 38.

³⁴² Salvatore Scarpino, *La guerra “cafona”. Il brigantaggio meridionale contro lo Stato unitario* (Milano: Boroli, 2005).

Hungarian Empire against the Kingdom of Sardinia. This equilibrium of different tensions would eventually find an expression in the Lateran Pacts of 1929.³⁴³

Yet, Valori (2011) maintains that David Levi, who was a fervent supporter of Mazzini, was convinced that a unified action against the Church of Rome was desirable. Levi represents another piece of the puzzle where the Jews too interlock with the Savoy house, the issue of unity, secret societies and Dante's Comedy. However, this aspect will be further explored in the following chapter dedicated to Fascism.

Thus to conclude this chapter, the *Risorgimento* was primarily the work of some of the exponents of the cultural elites in the Italian peninsula. Backed by the might of the British empire which acted in accordance to its strategic needs in the region – the Mediterranean basin – the Royal House of Savoy was able to create a new state which comprised many of the other states of the Italian peninsula. This new Kingdom of Italy was a country geographically reunited but still possessing quite distinct regional identities.

The issue of a national identity that was meant to speak literally with one language and was wanted to be culturally homogeneous was one which had preoccupied many of the agents responsible for the reunification of the country. This chapter argues that the British, above all else, were responsible for the success of such enterprise and Dante and his Comedy were held to be the symbols that would represent and give credibility to a fundamentally constructed idea of nation, which, as such, was in need of a united expression of nationalism.

The myth of Dante as father of this newly created nation, as he who would epitomise that which meant to be Italian, was exploited on different levels and by those who looked at him for support. Dante spoke the language of this at long last “reunited” country and represented in the centuries the glories of an “Italian” cultural tradition. However, he was also seen, or made to be seen, as the champion of the Catholic faith and some of the secret societies of the continent did not eschew his engagement too.

³⁴³ Cf. Valori, op. cit.

In brief, the ability to be adapted while remaining a fixed national icon rendered Dante and his Comedy a desirable ally in the construction of a united Italy.

CHAPTER III

DANTE'S COMEDY AND ITALIAN FASCISM

1. Introduction to the Chapter

In what way did a medieval work of poetry come to be related to an early twentieth century totalitarian movement? How did Dante's Comedy appeal to the Italian Fascist Regime of the 1920s and 1930s? Why was there an affiliation whether wanted or unwanted in the first place? There is no single, straightforward answer to these questions, and indeed, some need to be filtered through the agency of yet another set of vested interests, those of Britain, or better yet, those of some in Britain, as seen in the previous chapter and expanded in the one following.

In truth, little more can be added to the fact that Dante's Comedy has been vastly discussed over the years. Centuries of commentators, critics, scholars and so on, expressing their opinion on the Florentine poet and his works, have issued an impressive body of literature. Similarly, albeit arguably on a smaller scale, Fascism has generated a great degree of interest on the part of many, laymen and not.

This chapter examines the relationship that came to be established between Dante's Comedy and the Italian Fascist Regime of the 1920s and 1930s focusing on the first thirty years of the twentieth century, thus leaving its previous historical basis to different chapters. It utilises a wide variety of data from local and international researchers. It aims at highlighting this interplay as a case study and relies on a contextual approach to intellectual-historical discourse analysis.³⁴⁴ As such, it only touches upon what others have abundantly discussed elsewhere on Fascism, its

³⁴⁴ The use of the term "discourse" would require in itself an in-depth analysis, which cannot be afforded here. It should suffice the mention that the term "discourse" is being adopted more and more as a projection of a mode of enquiry operating on several planes. David Howarth, and Yannis Stavrakakis in their introduction to David Howarth, Aletta J. Norval and Yannis Stavrakakis (eds.), *Discourse Theory and Political Analysis: identities, hegemonies and social change* (Manchester: M.U.P., 2000), p. 1, talk of 'new discursivity'. Their intention is that of providing certain social contexts and disciplinary fields with that which constructs meaning, be them languages or entire elaborative systems. Posed in such terms this kind of approach to "discourse" has somewhat problematised the practice of yet another term - representation - in post-analytical philosophy, post-Heideggerian phenomenology, post-Saussurian linguistics and some elements of post-modern theory. In brief, "representation" as that which offers the objective world meaning, has in itself been questioned. For an approach to the historical interpretation of ideas, see: Mark Bevir, *The Logic of the History of Ideas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). For an in-depth overview of discourse theory in a post-structuralism debate with Marxism for categories such as "ideology", "subjectivity" and questions of class identity, see: Jacob Torfing, *New Theories of Discourse: Laclau, Mouffe and Zizek* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), and Anna Marie Smith, *Laclau and Mouffe: the radical democratic imaginary* (London: Routledge, 1998). For Laclau and Mouffe develop their argument through the Gramscian concept of hegemony, see also: Antonio Gramsci, *Selection from the Prison Notebooks*, trans. Q. Hoare, and G. Nowell-Smith (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971). For concepts of hegemony, power, and exclusion, see: Henry Staten, *Wittgenstein and Derrida* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984).

origin, and ideology.³⁴⁵ It accepts, albeit not exclusively, the viewpoint of the Italian historian Renzo De Felice. Furthermore, for the nature of the hypothesis promoted here, as it necessarily relies on an interdisciplinary approach, this chapter occasionally extends its scope to a range of comparative disciplines, in line to what expressed in Chapter I of this thesis. However, it does so cautiously, in the awareness that it would otherwise transcend the breadth of this study and become an overambitious project. Thus, albeit aligning itself with what proposed by other intellectual historians who reject the constraints of a univocal approach and instead embrace the endeavours of attempting to understand past human experience with the help and support of different means (Collini, 1985), it does so keeping in mind the limitations that arise in adopting such an approach.³⁴⁶

Therefore, the results of the enquiry of this chapter support the argument that national, international, personal and group vested interests have all contributed to the creation of a net of wills, which have not always been convergent, and have not always agreed on the means necessary to achieve their goals. As Anderson (1983) points out in his *Imagined Communities*, the creation of a conceptual cognitive map can serve different agents as well as be generated by different agencies.³⁴⁷ It is in this twilight that the Comedy somehow stands: a great feast of literature that has long attracted the attention of many sometimes for the interests of few. The Dantean Comedy, as a kind of litmus test, has reflected this web of wills. In

³⁴⁵ Useful for an interpretation of Fascism is the point of view of Renzo De Felice, which is also the one that has been preferred here. See: Renzo De Felice, *Le interpretazioni del fascismo* (Bari: Laterza, 1969); id., *Intelletuali di fronte al fascismo. Saggi e note documentarie* (Roma: Bonacci, 1985); De Felice (1966), *Mussolini il fascista. La conquista del potere 1921-1925* op. cit.; De Felice (1966), *Mussolini il Duce: Lo Stato totalitario (1936-1940)*, op. cit. For a transcendental, in historical terms, definition of Fascism that has attempted a comprehensive historical and philosophical understanding of Fascism as an "epochal phenomenon", see: Ernst Nolte, *Der Faschismus in seiner Epoche* (München: Piper, 1963), It. transl., *I tre volti del fascismo* (Milano: Sugar, 1966). For a critic on Fascism and its relationship with Marxism, and a refusal to see Fascism as a reactionary movement, see: Augusto Del Noce, *Giovanni Gentile. Per una interpretazione filosofica della storia contemporanea* (Bologna: il Mulino, 1990); Augusto Del Noce, *Fascismo e antifascismo: errori della cultura* (Milano: Leonardo, 1995). For other definitions of Fascism refer to the various footnotes throughout this chapter. For an overview on ideology focusing on the works of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, who are central to an understanding of the concept of hegemony, and thus that of authoritarian regimes worldwide, see: Smith, op. cit. For Laclau and Mouffe's approach to ideology, see: Ernesto Laclau, *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory: Capitalism, Fascism, Populism* (London - New York: Verso Books, 2012, first published 1977); Chantal Mouffe, and Ernesto Laclau, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London - New York: Verso, 1985). For further readings on ideology, see: Louise Philips, and Marianne Jorgensen, *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method* (London: Sage, 2002). For a specifically European view on ideology, see: David Howarth, and Jacob Torfing (eds.), *Discourse Theory in European Politics* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2005).

³⁴⁶ Stefan Collini is a well-known academic who has widely researched the relation between literature and intellectual history. He argued that all history is 'part of the attempt to understand past human experience.' Cf. Collini, in Burns, op. cit., p. 13.

³⁴⁷ Anderson, op. cit. For a more extensive analysis on what Anderson proposed, see Chapter I, Theoretical background, and Chapter IV dedicated to Britain in Italy, as well as parts of the Introduction.

the words of David Lummus, the Stanford humanist, Dante in general, and the Divine Comedy in particular, have had a profound impact that has been recognised by many across the centuries and more recently, in the early twentieth century, by writers and poets as disparate as Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, and Osip. As also stated in the Introduction: 'The modern epoch has found [in Dante and his Comedy] both a mirror with which it might examine the many vices and perversions that define it and an obscure tapestry of almost fundamentalist punishments that are entirely alien to it.'³⁴⁸ Dante and his Comedy have thus served as a mirror, and at times an agent in its own right, with which to examine what Lummus calls 'vices and perversions' of the modern era.

Thus, in this chapter, Fascism is interpreted as a movement dynamically in search of an underlying and binding ideology the trajectory of which will lead it to eventually mature into a regime. Firstly, an analysis of the problematic need for a conceptual inspirational fascist ideological model opens the chapter, preceded by a parenthesis that introduces the link of Dante and his Comedy to the issues mentioned. The dichotomised approach that tends to split "Movement" from "Regime" serves here as a substratum on which to apply some of the arguments presented in this chapter. Dante and his Comedy offer a cue to help to position the debate here that seeks to analyse the interplay between the mediaeval poem with Italian Fascism according to different stations of enquiry. The first is that of the logic of a *model* to be established for the latter, and provided by the former in ways that are discussed later in this chapter.³⁴⁹ This necessarily required a deeper look into

³⁴⁸ Peter Hawkins, and Rachel Jacoff (eds.), *The Poets' Dante: Twentieth-Century Responses* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002), quoted in Lummus, op. cit., in Patrick Hunt, *The Inferno, by Dante. Critical insights* (Pasadena: Salem Press, 2011), p. 63.

³⁴⁹ Of course, the term model itself could be said to be a system in need of a representative definition. Without wanting to further expand into a field that the constraints of this paper would not allow to satisfactorily address, given its limitations, I will use a quote to point out how arduous it could be to sum up briefly the meaning ascribed to the term "model". Patrick Suppes stated that: 'the meaning of the concept of model is the same in mathematics and the empirical sciences.' Patrick Suppes, *Studies in the Methodology and Foundations of Science* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1969), p. 12. Even if to a degree, such a claim could be said to contrast with other cognitive models, in short, I have wanted to mean "model" as an example to both follow and to which aspire. As for the role that symbols may have in achieving the realisation of a model, this was outlined elsewhere. Here should suffice the mention that the Model Theory representation was acknowledged. I am aware that there are very different meanings ascribable to the term "model", as from the Model Theory mentioned, and that the latter is especially used in mathematics. However, in a broader sense, as the plane onto which the disciplines of mathematics and philosophy overlap by promoting arguments that often interplay, such as for example that of a theory of logical consequence, or in the semantics that of natural languages, it was here regarded. There is a vast bibliography on the subject. The recommended readings are here but a suggestion for further readings. For introductory text, see: Kees Doets, *Basic Model Theory* (Stanford: CSLI Publications, 1996).

some issues related to the various interpretations of Fascism. Secondly, this chapter looks at the role of Rome as a myth to which to look at for inspiration, and that of Dante's Comedy as a source from which to draw symbols or myths. This intertwines with the previous arguments of modelling and symbolism. Thirdly, the chapter moves to analyse the apparent, and contradictory, loss of interest that the Regime displayed towards the Comedy. In particular, the role of the school and its reform is examined for it is considered as an indicator of the conflictual interplay that developed between the Fascist Regime and the Comedy. Notably, the role that Giovanni Gentile had in his guise of Minister of Education and primary fascist philosopher is analysed and discussed. However, not all of the approaches to the Comedy are taken into consideration. When it does, this chapter focuses mostly on those sources that Albertini (1996) defines as "secondary", in the sense of not established, in an academic sense, Dante scholars. That is to say, it does not look at the position of more orthodox academics as these, fascist or anti-fascist, tended to be more neutral in their approach to the Comedy (Albertini, 1996; Scorrano, 2001). As also highlighted in the Introduction to this thesis, Albertini (1996), in fact, argues that 'in una storia culturale del Regime i libri e gli opuscoli scritti da oscuri professori di liceo o da accademici d'Italia di nomina esclusivamente politica risulteranno forse più significativi dei lavori critici più seri...'³⁵⁰

Furthermore, not all the primary sources such as the several fascist publications are examined, as the main argument is developed on a qualitative rather than quantitative paradigm. Finally, there is a concluding brief discussion that reminds to the one analysed in the Introduction on Chapter I of the role of symbolisms in the Comedy with its possible use on behalf of foreign powers, by which this study primarily means Britain.³⁵¹ The latter had a compelling impact on the relationship between Dante's masterpiece and the Italian Fascist Regime of the 1920s and 1930s, of which this thesis speaks at length, especially in the chapter dedicated to it.

³⁵⁰ Albertini, op. cit., p. 123.

³⁵¹ Cf. Albertini, op. cit.

2. Models

Dante set an example for all other poets. It was, in other words, a symbol. T.S. Eliot said: 'Dante and Shakespeare divide the world between them. There is no third.'³⁵² Thus, he is the one who has the will and the power to change the world through the vigorous might of his visionary poetry. However, as amply discussed in the Introduction and the chapter dedicated to the theoretical framework, such a discourse should be set into a context in which Dante's centuries-long history lends credibility to a kind of narrative of authority. In doing so, one should not stop at the mere interpretation of the sources, but rather indicate the interplay that occurs between different bodies of knowledge within the broader cultural, and thus social, context in which they are embedded. Putting it differently, this means recognising the various links that connect language with politics, knowledge with society, and history with its intellectual development, of which there are examples later in this chapter.³⁵³ Lummus (2011), in fact, believes such connections to be significant to what he calls 'the poetic receptions of [Dante's] *Inferno*' that would begin to manifest themselves from the sixteenth century onwards.³⁵⁴

Of course, the calls for a commentary on the Comedy began much earlier than that. Probably as early as 1314 when the first copies of the *Inferno*'s manuscript appeared, readers of the Comedy felt the need for some kind of clarification. Dante's masterpiece generated from its very start substantial interpretative challenges.³⁵⁵

Besides the individual, albeit several, critics who have in one form or another tried to come to terms with Dante and his poem, what matters more, at least

³⁵² Thomas S. Eliot, 'Dante', in *Selected Essays* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1950), pp. 199-237.

³⁵³ Cf. Ellen Doyle McCarthy, *Knowledge As Culture: The New Sociology of Knowledge* (New York, and London: Routledge, 1996); Ronald J. Brachman, Hector J. Levesque with a contribution by Maurice Pagnucco, *Knowledge Representation and Reasoning* (San Francisco, CA: Morgan Kaufmann Publishers – Elsevier, 2004). For an earlier account of sociology of knowledge, see: Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge, Selected interviews and other writings*, ed. by Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984).

³⁵⁴ Cf. Lummus, op. cit., pp. 63-79.

³⁵⁵ The scope of this study does not allow for an exhaustive listing of all critical treatments of possible commentaries. For some of the most recent ones in the English language, see: Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, transl. by Allen Mandelbaum, notes by Peter Armour (New York: Everyman, 1995); id. *The Divine Comedy: Inferno and Purgatorio*, translation and commentary by Robert M. Durling and Ronald L. Martinez (New York: Oxford UP, 1996, 2003); id., *Inferno* (New York: Doubleday, 2000); id., *Purgatorio* (New York: Doubleday, 2002); id., *Paradiso*, transl. by Jean Hollander and Robert Hollander (New York: Doubleday, 2006). For an online list of a full-text database containing more than seventy commentaries on Dante's Divine Comedy, see: <http://dante.dartmouth.edu/>. See also: Deborah Parker, in Amilcare A. Iannucci, *Dante: Contemporary Perspectives* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997).

for what this study is concerned, is how some recognised in the medieval Florentine poet and his masterpiece what Lummus (2011) describes as a “model”, or more plainly: a symbol. It is this singular capacity of representation, so extensively exploited in and by the Comedy, which in many ways, albeit not exclusively, attracted the attention of yet another system in search of a model: Fascism. For both the Comedy and Fascism sought to ‘represent and reform the world.’³⁵⁶ However, as much as it is fascinating, a more in-depth analysis of Dante’s masterpiece should be left to others to offer. Here the focus shall remain, as much as it is appropriate to do so, on the attention that the fascist era bestowed on Dante and his Comedy. However, the analysis conducted here, by virtue of comparison of some events, and some characters, should be expanded upon by other studies that wish to have a more quantitative approach to the issue.

As for Fascism, there have been, of course, several attempts to define a model that best befits it.³⁵⁷ However, from very early on this has proved to be a somewhat arduous endeavour for even the way in which one chooses to approach the issue of defining Fascism may itself vary. Eatwell (1992), for example, is useful as he commented on the vast academic literature on Fascism and concluded that this can be divided into two approaches: conceptual and theoretical.³⁵⁸ The former, he maintains, could be seen as an attempt to explain Fascism from the inside, that is to say, it approaches its ideology. The latter, instead, looks outside and tries to explain its support. According to Eatwell (1992), the theoretical has enjoyed much more attention than the conceptual approach. He argues that there seems to be a kind of common, albeit at times tacit, consent on the fact that fascist ideology tends to be incoherent, and that in order for a model to be identified or at least perceived to be more “scientific”, this has to be more support-based. Eatwell (1992) goes on

³⁵⁶ Hawkins, and Jacoff, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

³⁵⁷ This chapter could not afford to exhaustively analyse the several other angles of approach that exist in the current literature. Thus, suggested readings are indicated when appropriate.

³⁵⁸ For further references to Fascism, see Chapter I of this thesis, which explores its theoretical background.

reasoning that the result of such a dichotomised approach has forced the two different conceptual stations of “Movement” and “Regime” to coexist as one.³⁵⁹

It was, of course, the well-known Italian historian Renzo De Felice who, roughly twenty years before Eatwell, had already spoken of a necessary distinction that had to be drawn between Fascism as a Regime and Fascism as a Movement. In his highly (at the time) controversial book *Mussolini il Duce. Gli anni del consenso, 1929-1936*, published in 1974, De Felice makes plain the distinction between the two stands asserting that the former was essentially conservative in nature, whereas the latter was characterised by some strong innovative aspirations.³⁶⁰

De Felice also introduced a somewhat revolutionary new concept, at least for the 1970s, as he argued that the Fascist Regime enjoyed an extraordinarily wide popular support and it did so for a quite extended period. Due to this, the quest for a befitting overarching fascist model was further complicated for the idea of a wide popular support somewhat eschews that of dictatorship. Today, Fascism’s broad popular base tends to be a more accepted fact, but back in the 1970s, De Felice had to endure accusations, almost an *éclat* of a great achievement in negative, of *filofascismo*, of being pro-fascist.³⁶¹

Although that of a popular consent is not an easy issue to discuss even today, it is nonetheless necessary here as it helps, at least partially, to throw some light on the steps that led to the relationship that Dante’s Comedy and the Italian Fascist Regime at one point entertained. De Felice argues that Fascism seemed to

³⁵⁹ Roger Eatwell, ‘Towards a New Model of Generic Fascism’, in *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, vol. 4, no.2 (April 1992), pp. 161-194.

³⁶⁰ Renzo De Felice, *Mussolini il Duce. Gli anni del consenso, 1929-1936* (Torino: Einaudi, 2007 (first published 1974)).

³⁶¹ The wide hostile reception of this book led to the publication of an interview that could be accessible to all and would synthetically summarise his thought. Vito Laterza proposed the idea, which proved to be a great success, unusual for a volume of this kind. The interviewer was the American Michael Arthur Ledeen, a student of the German-American Nazi historian George Mosse, and at that time just a young “visiting professor” at the University of Rome. For the text, see: Michael Ledeen, *Intervista sul fascismo*, ed. by Giovanni Belardelli (Roma-Bari: Laterza [1975], 1997), or: Maurice Bardèche, *Sei risposte a Renzo De Felice* (G. Volpe, 1976). De Felice was not new to controversy. This is an extract of a conversation in response to the publication on a biography on Mussolini published earlier in 1965. It reads: (Norberto Bobbio to Giulio Einaudi) ‘avete pubblicato un volume su Mussolini, quello del De Felice, che acqua al mulino del fascismo ne porta parecchia.’ (Franco Venturi) ‘Quel volume non è mai stato discusso in riunione. Si è discusso De Felice e non il libro che è stato letto dopo che si era deciso di farlo. Confermo comunque che se l'avessi letto l'avrei approvato.’ (Einaudi) ‘Era un libro ordinato per contratto, non proposto dall'autore. Quindi bastava che un membro del consiglio lo leggesse ed approvasse, come infatti è avvenuto.’ (Venturi) ‘Sono proprio curioso di vedere quando il Mussolini di De Felice diventerà una canaglia: finora non sembra avviato su questa strada.’ For a copy of the minutes of the editorial meeting that led to the publication, see: Pasquale Chessa, ‘Renzo De Felice e il volume sugli ebrei italiani sotto il fascismo. Genesi e sviluppo di una ricerca storiografica’, in *Nuova Storia Contemporanea*, no. 2 (March-April 2002), pp. 113-132.

have enjoyed a wide popular support. However, this does not necessarily mean that the State bestowing it is going to exercise the political translation of such support in a democratic way that manages it. Even those who traditionally stand, or support, a more right-wing approach to Fascism, tend to agree that for the Fascists, as Tessitore (2000) affirms, 'la sovranità non è del popolo, ma dello Stato.'³⁶² This hardly makes for a representative, democratic concept of government. Such a State would, therefore, need to rely on some sort of levers to ensure that some kind of popular support is accorded. Fascism looked in many directions and was unafraid to use different means to obtain its end. Among these, there was the use of works of art such as that of Dante and his Comedy.

2.i MODELS

Albeit the concept of an ethical state, present in people's life from cradle to grave, acting as some sort of supreme being in which each individual has to find full realisation, was a concept common to both the right and the left of political spectrum in the late nineteenth century, it is with the ultra-nationalist Neapolitan fascist jurist Alfredo Rocco that it acquired a more sinister fold. As he set out to reform the legal codes of the Fascist Regime, Rocco had little regard for a system, that of Liberal Italy, which he viewed as fundamentally inept.³⁶³ Addressing the Parliament in 1926 Rocco made it clear that the old parliamentary system, which stood as a gonfalon of Liberal Italy, had to go. Parliamentary democracy, 'parliamentary cretinism', as

³⁶² Giovanni Tessitore, *Fascismo e pena di morte: consenso e informazione* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2000), p. 132.

³⁶³ The British Establishment largely shared this view. See: Chapter IV.

Karl Marx famously dismissed it,³⁶⁴ and its imperfect representative model was to be replaced by the State, in his view, of course, Fascist.³⁶⁵

On that account, for all its Manichean, reductive and essentially simplistically oppositional dichotomising vision so far held by many on Fascism, De Felice went on arguing that despite its many negative aspects, Fascism had nonetheless achieved something positive. According to the Italian historian, the Fascist Movement had managed to develop the foundations that allowed a new ruling class to emerge. Thus, De Felice proposed that to identify an element that distinguishes Fascism from other regimes, be it conservative or reactionary, represented a fundamental position in historiography. Fascism had achieved the mobilisation, and participation, of the masses, whereas Liberal Italy had all but failed.³⁶⁶

It is relevant to reiterate, at this point, the sophistication of the generic paradigmatic models proposed by Roger Eatwell or Renzo De Felice, Roger Griffin, and other historians of Fascism. These historians aimed at identifying something of a working *model* as earlier defined. A model, an example, along the lines of that which De Felice, quite intuitively, perceived Fascism to be: a popular mould of both the individual and society. In other words, Fascism offered a model to follow in so far as one of its aims was to build a solid base of support and thus perpetuate its grip on power. In order to achieve this goal, it was ready to go to great lengths, even to ensure that “culture” be controlled and channelled towards that end.³⁶⁷

³⁶⁴ The famous sentence was written by Marx shortly after the *coup d'état* in France by the French President, who called himself “Louis Napoleon.” Karl Marx, *Der achtzehnte Brumaire des Louis Bonaparte (1851 – 1852)* (The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte); Chapters 1 and 7 are translated by Saul K. Padover from the German edition of 1869; Chapters 2 through 6 are based on the third edition, prepared by Engels (1885), as translated and published by Progress Publishers (Moscow, 1937); First Published: First issue of *Die Revolution* (1852). Online Version: Marx/Engels Internet Archive (marxists.org) 1995, 1999 at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/>; Transcription/Markup: Zodiac and Brian Baggins. Proofed: and corrected by Alek Blain (2006), Mark Harris (2010). For those who can read Italian see: Karl Marx, and Friedrich Engels, *Rivoluzione e controrivoluzione in Germania* (Roma: Edizioni Rinascita, 1949).

³⁶⁵ ‘Lo Stato fascista è lo Stato veramente sovrano, quello cioè che domina tutto e tutte le forze esistenti nel paese e tutte le sottopone alla sua disciplina. Se, infatti, i fini dello Stato sono superiori, anche i mezzi che esso adopera per realizzarli debbono essere più potenti di ogni altro, la forza di cui esso dispone sovrachante sopra ogni altra forza (...).’ Tessitore, op. cit., p. 132.

³⁶⁶ In his interview with Ledeen (1975) De Felice stated: ‘Il principio è quello della partecipazione attiva, non dell’esclusione. Questo è uno dei punti cosiddetti rivoluzionari; un altro tentativo rivoluzionario è il tentativo del fascismo di trasformare la società e l’individuo in una direzione che non era mai stata sperimentata né realizzata.’ Bardèche, op. cit., p. 77.

³⁶⁷ In 1922, the newly installed Fascist Party set the Ufficio Stampa del Capo del Governo. It was a Press Office that was to be in charge of providing both national and international official news. Shortly after, on 9 August 1923 Mussolini, determined to fight anti-fascist propaganda, transformed the agency from a divulging, or publishing Press Office, to one in control of the contents of the news themselves. Cf. Philip V. Cannistraro, *La fabbrica del consenso: fascismo e mass media* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1975). The following institutions were also created: *Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche* (1923), of which Guglielmo

It is in Griffin & Feldman (2004) that a pragmatic answer to the dichotomous division of “Movement” versus “Regime” could perhaps be found, at least partially. Griffin promotes the argument for which a movement will never become a regime unless it acquires power. In other words, it is a regime that which controls a country.³⁶⁸

Whereby it is fair to argue that once the Italian Fascist Movement translated into Regime, its attitude towards the various means that helped it achieve its goals must have also somewhat changed. As the relationship between Fascism and Dante’s Comedy cannot be said to have started at a specific time, but it was rather somewhat “inherited” from the *Risorgimento*, the use of Dante’s masterpiece reflects this difference in status on the account of the Fascist Regime, at least, up to a certain degree.

It should be noted, however, that the events taken to back the argument of such claim, could not always be neatly divided into a *pre* and *post* Regime phase. Many are intertwined, or simply make better sense when presented in a different logical order. For a different logical order does not mean the absence of such, but simply the adoption, albeit *pro tempore*, of a different paradigm. In other words, Dante’s Comedy fulfilled different roles at different times during the genesis of Italian Fascism while, however, maintaining an overall constant presence justified by the needs of the Regime (and the Movement) to access mythological figures and the power of symbolisms. Among these are those of ancient Rome, and the reassertion of what it meant to be Italian in relation to an omni-present, all-powerful, and self-fulfilling idea of Fatherland.

Dante, as seen in the chapter dedicated to the *Risorgimento*, had been widely acclaimed as a cast model of the archetypical Italian. Much was done and said for his celebrations of 1865. However, for those of 1921, the writer and

Marconi was president from 1928; *Istituto Nazionale del Dramma Antico*, R. D. 7 August 1925; *Istituto italiano di Diritto Internazionale*, inaugurated by its president Giovanni Gentile on 19 December 1925; *Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana*, founded in 1925 by Giovanni Treccani with the name *Istituto Treccani*, as suggested by Giovanni Gentile, then *Enciclopedia italiana di scienze, lettere ed arti*. Mussolini turned into a *Ente di finalità nazionale* (Reale Decreto 669/24 June 1933); *Reale Accademia d'Italia*, Reale Decreto 7 February 1926; *Istituto Italiano di Studi Germanici*, inaugurated by Mussolini on 3 April 1932; *Centro Italiano di Studi per le Scienze Amministrative*, April 1934; *Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente*, made into *Ente morale*, Reale Decreto 7 February 1939;

³⁶⁸ Roger Griffin, and Matthew Feldman, *Fascism: The “fascist epoch”* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 259.

journalist Antonio Baldini, who wrote for Luigi Albertini's *Corriere della Sera*,³⁶⁹ commented on the possibility that the centenary of the medieval poet could offer an excuse for an excessive use of rhetoric, thus indicating that Dante could, at least potentially, be manipulated for political means.³⁷⁰

Baldini probably had good reasons to fear that. A mere twelve years later, in Milan, on 28 October 1935 the Catholic Church, albeit on behalf of one of its Cardinals, and the Italian Fascist State came together reunited in and by the name of Dante. Cardinal Alfredo Ildefonso Schuster, who Pope John Paul II beatified in 1996, celebrated a solemn mass. During his speech he stated: '[...] È la perpetua missione dell'Italia cattolica e di quella Roma dantesca onde Cristo è Romano.' Rome, so clearly at the centre of interests for it defined Italy as well as Christ himself, was to be "Dantean" and thus, in turn, defined herself in the name of the mediaeval Florentine poet who had been the original author of the famous phrase 'Roma onde "Cristo è Romano"'.³⁷¹ Thus, Dante and his Comedy took central stage in a delicate balance of powers, the Church, and her allies on one side, the Regime, and its allies, on the other.

That mass celebrated, among other things, the anniversary of the march on Rome, and came just before the planned and impending fascist invasion of Ethiopia. The stakes were high for both parties, the Catholic Church and the Fascist Regime. However, as described by Ceci (2013), it is arduous to neatly separate those which were the interests of the two agents.³⁷² Both the Vatican and the Fascist State were becoming increasingly intertwined in a process, which despite the many tensions that it entailed saw Fascism becoming progressively more Catholic and Catholicism becoming progressively more fascist. The Catholic Church, which did not wish to see the Lateran Treaty, or Pact, of 1929 be revoked, endorsed, or at least, did not oppose, the expansionist and colonialist program of the Italian Fascist State.

³⁶⁹ Luigi Albertini was the editor in chief of the *Corriere della sera*. Cf. Paolo Murialdi, *Storia del giornalismo italiano* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1996).

³⁷⁰ Antonio Baldini wrote: 'Si sentono i primi tuoni e cominciano le prime avvisaglie del Centenario dei centenari, del Centenarissimo, del Centenarione. Si comincia a non capire dove finiscano le parole e cominci la musica, dove finisca la commemorazione del poeta ed entri il Movimento dei forestieri, dove arrivi la politica e cominci il Piedigrotta. Il tiro di aggiustamento è cominciato. Prima che finisca il 1920 tutte le quote nominate da Dante avran cominciato a bollire sotto i colpi.' Antonio Baldini, *Un sogno dentro l'atro*, ed. by G. Baldini (Milano: Mursia, 1965), pp. 229-230.

³⁷¹ *Pr XXXII*, 102.

³⁷² Lucia Ceci, *L'interesse superiore. Il Vaticano e l'Italia di Mussolini* (Bari: Laterza, 2013).

As Baudendistel (2006) so accurately, and poignantly describes, it was a well-known fact, even then, that Mussolini's regime gave orders for a massive use of gas to be unleashed on the civilian population of Ethiopia.³⁷³ The Church, albeit pressed by the international community, still found it possible to declare that the fascist actions stood, rather conveniently, as a sort of new Crusade that would bring the "Cross of Christ" over to Africa.³⁷⁴ Dante, as Baldini had predicted, even if perhaps not intentionally, became an instrument through which to express propagandised rhetoric. In other words, it was *also* in the name of that Dantean Rome that fascist Italy moved an invading army against a sovereign, independent and innocent nation.

Thus, if one considers an event, such as Baldini's *Centenario dei centenari* (and others later) as one side of a multi-faced dimension where thought and social context come into being as in a relationship, one might be looking at the effects that prevailing ideas have on societies in accordance to what is theoretically predicated by sociology of knowledge.³⁷⁵ As outlined in the chapter dedicated to the theoretical framework, as a case study that relies on a contextual approach to intellectual-historical discourse analysis, multiple disciplines may intervene in the structuring narrative that describes the relationship between Dante's Comedy and the Fascist Regime.

Hence, the *Centenario dei centenari* as described by Baldini now and others later, becomes a condition upon which different possible analyses, be it philosophical, theological, political, and so on, may be applied.³⁷⁶ It does so as it represents a concrete structure of society, this having been a celebration, which interplays with a form of knowledge, Dante and his masterpiece. The interpretations of reality that are generated within the folds of different social contexts become a mirror for their conditions and specific problems.³⁷⁷ Thus, in expressing his fears that Dante's celebrations would in some ways degenerate into a kind of blatant abuse of

³⁷³ Rainer Baudendistel, *Between Bombs and good intentions. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Italo-Ethiopian war, 1935-1936*, with a Foreword by Angelo Del Boca (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2006).

³⁷⁴ Cf. Ceci, op. cit.

³⁷⁵ Cf. McCarthy, op. cit.

³⁷⁶ Baldini, op. cit.

³⁷⁷ Cf. McCarthy, op. cit.

the medieval Florentine poet, Baldini expressed and captured the mood of his time. Baldini's sceptical tenure was probably well founded on several accounts, not least, for the fact that the event itself required no less than an act of parliament to come into being.³⁷⁸

It was the influent Hungarian-born sociologist Karl Mannheim who argued that the function of sociology of knowledge develops along two different planes: theoretical and historical. As a theory, it aims to analyse the relationship between knowledge and existence. However, it is not in the scope of this study to further discuss theoretical sociological issues, other than what already done so far.³⁷⁹ What should be however highlighted, albeit risking repeating oneself, is that as historical sociological researches demonstrate, one 'si sforza di rintracciare le forme che tale rapporto ha assunto nello sviluppo intellettuale dell'umanità.'³⁸⁰ As such it is relevant to note that when speaking of social structures, one aims at identifying certain codified modes of behaviour that bare a direct correspondence with the material characteristics of a given environment and its resources. These social codes, these *modi operandi*, tend to become stratified and consolidated. This propensity, in time, tends to affect future social behaviours. Structures, in turn, are themselves largely a cultural product and are inclined to represent society through the brokerage of mediations that may be symbolic and normative as more amply exemplified in the Introduction and Chapter I of this thesis.

Thus, in our specific case here, this is expressed by the need to legally involve the parliament and, therefore, the interest of the State, in order to establish celebrations that should have had, at their core, the achievements of literature and not those of politics. It is, in fact, through the mediation of literature that the symbolic

³⁷⁸ Paolo Boselli: 'Mi onoro di presentare alla Camera la relazione sul disegno di legge: 'Celebrazione del sesto centenario della morte di Dante', Camera dei Deputati, Acts of Parliament - XXV Legislature, 1st Session - Discussions - Session of Friday, February 11, 1921 – Chair President De Nicola, p. 7584.

³⁷⁹ There are certain circumstances in which one's formative processes of thought is affected by extra-theoretical factors, as described by Mannheim in 1936. The interpretative results achieved through such processes might, at times, help to determine social behaviour by defining those collective goals that could be pursued. They propose concrete practical models that establish themselves as an active force of transformation of the very structures of society. It is so that clearly the cognitive and/or biological factors constitute the extra-theoretical, which are not part of an individual "historical-social-situation." The debate has been amply developed elsewhere and hence will be left here just as a note. For the concept of structure in society, see: Nicholas Abercrombie, Stephen Hill, and Bryan S. Turner, 'Social structure', in *The Penguin Dictionary of Sociology*, (London: Penguin, 2000, 4th edition); Charles Crothers, *Social Structure* (London: Routledge, 1996). For the agent of structure in sociology, see: Chris Barker, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice* (London: Sage, 2005).

³⁸⁰ Karl Mannheim, *Ideologia e utopia* (Bologna: Il Mulino 1999), p. 267.

link with politics is established and different sorts of agents become embedded into the narrative of celebrations.³⁸¹ Let us, in fact, remember how Baldini mentions in his speech how commercial, foreign, political, and popular interests all intertwine with the *Centenario*. This specific mediation, but otherwise more generally mediations, defines roles and positions within the frame of this specific given social system, namely here – Italy - just before the outset of Fascism, and help fixing its current institutions.³⁸²

It is yet another mediation again employing Dante and his Comedy this time not during the Movement phase, but rather well within the frame of the Fascist Regime (the Fascists had by then been in power for 11 years), and already mentioned here before, which might offer another example of what so far discussed for the Baldini case. In 1936, the *Istituto di Studi Romani* (I.S.R.) founded by the fascist, Neapolitan born, Carlo Galassi Paluzzi on 21 March 1925, started a series of radio broadcasts for the *Corsi Superiori di Studi Romani*. In the *Introduzione* Paluzzi makes plain the importance of such an event. This accounts for a kind of manifesto of what the *Istituto* stands for. As reflected in the choice of the title, *In Roma “Onde Cristo è Romano,”* the Regime’s popular culture policy after the Lateran Pacts resonates with the mediation of Rome and Dante.³⁸³ The underlying fascist-clerical

³⁸¹ Baldini was not alone in commenting on Dante’s VI centenary. Lando Ferretti, who was described as Mussolini’s journalist, was, in fact, invited by the Dante Alighieri Society to give a speech at the Condomino Theatre in Gallarate on 21 April 1921. Cf. Fausto Pettinelli, Giampaolo Grassi, and Lando Fattetti, *Il giornalista di Mussolini* (Pontedera (Pisa): Bandecchi & Vivaldi, 2005). The Catholic Church was also keen to be seen as an active stakeholder in the praising of the medieval poet. The following is an extract from the II VI centenario dantesco: Bollettino del Comitato cattolico per l’omaggio a Dante Alighieri ‘con l’approvazione della Santa Sede, si assunse il compito di invitare i cattolici ad onorare il Divino Poeta’. The full text is available online http://archive.org/stream/ilvicentenario14comiuoft/ilvicentenario14comiuoft_djvu.txt [Last accessed: 05 January 2015]. More recently, it is also possible to read about how a historian such as Indro Montanelli commented on events related to the centenary. In an article appeared in the *Corriere della Sera*, in Milan on 23 July 1999, at p. 1 entitled: *Somme ceneri polveri italiane Dante senza pace e un certo nostro costume*.

³⁸² Franco Crespi, *Manuale di sociologia della cultura* (Bari: Laterza, 2006).

³⁸³ In Vv.Aa, ‘Roma “Onde Cristo è Romano”’, in *Introduzione*, vol. I (Roma: Istituto di Studi Romani, 1937), p. IX, Carlo Galassi Paluzzi stated: ‘L’Istituto di Studi Romani – che nel clima storico creato dal Fascismo, e nella rinnovata coscienza che gli italiani stanno riprendendo della loro missione, si è assunto il compito di promuovere una rinascita dello spirito romano e latino, e di contribuirvi rivalutando scientificamente tutte le glorie di Roma – ha inteso sin dall’inizio che, a voler procedere scientificamente, e a considerare quindi Roma nella sua mirabile unità, bisognava tener presenti così le glorie della Roma dei Cesari, come della Roma Cristiana, come della Roma Sabauda e Littoria... Nell’ora grande e solenne che l’Italia, nel nome di Roma, ha vissuto sostenendo, come nei giorni della maggiore gloria, lo scatenamento delle rabbiose forze antiromane, L’Istituto ha voluto, come faceva tutto il popolo italiano, raddoppiare i suoi sforzi e intensificare in ogni settore la esalazione delle glorie immortali di Roma. Aveva inizio così, tra i molti sforzi già esistenti, quel ciclo di conferenze radiotrasmesse che vengono qui raccolte in volume; ciclo di singolare rilievo per l’alta autorità dei partecipanti, e che, per essere dedicato più particolarmente a rammentare la grandezza di Roma cristiana (di quella Roma cattolica e apostolica cui il Duce, sin dal 1921, nel suo mirabile discorso alla Camera, rivendicava le altissime glorie anche civili) veniva intitolato a ‘quella “Roma onde Cristo è Romano.”’ The Institute of Roman Studies sponsored a

ideology lent credibility to those in Italy who were in favour of colonial wars in general and, in particular, that of Ethiopia. It also helped to strengthen calls against the powers, namely Great Britain, who were seen as “anti-Roman” in essence, despite Eliot’s claim that England was a “Latin” country.³⁸⁴ Furthermore, it reaffirmed that “ideal” match between the regime and the Catholic Church, which Mussolini had already expressed in his speech to the Lower House of Parliament back in 1921, and it was now referenced again.

To that regard, Dante and the Comedy are the focus of an embarrassing, but quite telling accusation. Carlo Galassi Paluzzi found himself having to justify his arbitrary, or otherwise unjustified, use of the medieval poet’s phrase in his *Introduzione* speech for the I.S.R of 1936. His answer is indicative. Galassi Paluzzi replied that it was not he who had firstly done so, but a rather more authoritative, and perhaps unexpected, source before him. Pope Pius XI, in fact, back in 1926 on 23 March, speaking of the Spanish martyr Daciano, had implicitly defended the use of Dante, so much so that Galassi Paluzzi felt obliged to affirm:

Ora noi si è sempre pensato, e si continua a pensare, essere romanamente saggio il non posare a più realisti del Re e a più papisti del Papa, e si è pensa, o perciò, che se un Papa – per giunta dottissimo e saggissimo come quel Papa che aveva pronunciato quel discorso – riteneva di poter usare la frase dantesca per indicare la terrestre Roma cristiana, si poteva fare, da parte di semplice Istituto di Studi Romani, per lo meno altrettanto.³⁸⁵

Without necessarily casting any judgment of value, it appears that Dante and his Comedy are well-established players in a debate that sees Church and State competing for his allegiance. The exalted medieval poet and his masterpiece thus become a codified shared cultural model as earlier highlighted. In other words, they

series of conferences on ‘Roma onde Cristo è Romano’ in order to revive the traditional values of ancient Roman civilization in favour of the new fascist policies. Cf. Pietro De Francisci, *Civiltà romana* (Roma: Istituto Nazionale di cultura fascista, 1939).

³⁸⁴ Cf. T. S. Eliot in *Context*, ed. by Jason Harding (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 54-55.

³⁸⁵ Carlo Galassi Paluzzi, in ‘Introduction’ to *Roma “onde Cristo è Romano”*, op. cit., p. X.

become a cultural conceptual system, and as such a means to organise, and thus possibly manipulate, knowledge. For their function can be seen as classificatory, and as relations among meaning, they tend to have two essential qualities. They are both as widely shared and as stable as possible within society.³⁸⁶

Furthermore, as Kronenfeld (2008) affirms, they are also ‘what the mind knows and/or what we want to communicate to others – rather than about what is actually encountered in the experiential world.’³⁸⁷ As such, they can quite flexibly be applied to the experiential world and thus accommodate a number of different and differing interests. However, the resulting assertions that they come to make about the relationships within the external world may result being both sharp and distinct in the words of Kronefeld.

It is of course, much before Kronefeld that, albeit still in Germany, a long debate on historical-social-sciences had taken place from about the last decades of the XIX century. The conclusion of which is that knowledge always starts from a particular point of view.³⁸⁸

This debate is articulated complexly and it is not the function of this chapter to further elaborate on it.³⁸⁹ It is only touched upon to make a point on the use the Comedy as a cultural model or ‘capital’ as Ascoli (2008) defines it.³⁹⁰ As such, therefore, if there were a somewhat detectable sense of embarrassment in Galassi Paluzzi’s words, this would only come to confirm that Dante and the Comedy were indeed able to serve different masters with different needs to the point of almost

³⁸⁶ Cf. David B. Kronenfeld, *Culture, Society, and Cognition: Collective Goals, Values, Action, and Knowledge* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008).

³⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 166.

³⁸⁸ Going against the Hegelian dialectical vision of history, Wilhelm Dilthey had established that each historical era has its own individuality and as such it must be approached and understood in its unicity. It was, thus, important for the German philosopher to take into account these particular social-historical conditions in order to understand historical events. This, in other words, corresponds to acknowledge the importance of *Verstehen*, understand, rather than *Erklären*, explain, historical events. Cf. [Wilhelm Dilthey, 1883] - *Historical Perspectives on Erklären and Verstehen*, ed. by Uljana Feest (Heidelberg: Springer, 2010). Max Weber then added to the debate reiterating that it was impossible to achieve total objectivity of knowledge, as Marx univocal economical reading of the world would have wanted in that tradition. Cultural dimensions and structural dimensions interact. In a nutshell, this moves forward the concept of rationality. Adorno and Horkheimer, in turn, also further elaborated on such concept, ushering a negative connotation to Western cultural tradition, and thus establishing the foundations for a new critical sense of rationality. Cf. Crespi, op. cit.

³⁸⁹ Many are those who contributed to this debate, and it would impossible to be fair and name them all. Thus, in no particular order, I can name but a few leaving the abundant rest to further studies: Althusser, Durkheim, Vilfredo Pareto, Georg Simmel, Max Scheler, Norbert Elias, Michel Foucault the Frankfurt School, and more recently Barry Barnes, David Bloor, Mary Hesse, and others.

³⁹⁰ Ascoli states: ‘Moreover, the historical destiny of the name “Dante” and the works to which it is attached over the intervening centuries of Western culture illustrates perfectly how a writer is turned into an Author, how a text is institutionalized and thereby converted into “cultural capital.”’ Albert Russell Ascoli, *Dante and the Making of a Modern Author* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 28.

prompting an apology of sorts on behalf of one of the interested parties. Despite this, or perhaps because of this, Dante and his Comedy retained their mighty ability to communicate a wide social message that sought to justify itself through the authoritative medium of a pre-existing, well-affirmed, shared cultural model.

Such is the position of Dante and the Comedy, as a granted cultural model, that many others remark on the use of the medieval poet as if it were just without question to do so, a granted exercise free of access. For example, the Italian philosopher and historian Lorenzo Braccesi argues that there were many in the Fascist Regime for which it was customary to look at Dante when the need to bring forward a point was felt. In reference to the previous expression here examined - *Roma "onde Cristo è Romano"* – talking of a speech that Cardinal Ildefonso Schuster gave in Milan in 1937 to mark the bimillenary of the Roman Emperor Augustus, the former stated: 'Dantesca è l'espressione ... espressione ampiamente inflazionata in ambiente fascista...'³⁹¹ Braccesi does not seem to question the use of Dante and implicitly accepts it. Yet, the issues at stake are of enormous historical significance. The events here named belong to a series aimed at consolidating what Braccesi calls a *connubio*, a strong Italian word for union, marriage, bond, between the Italian Fascist State and the Catholic Church. Of which, even Pope Pious XI seemed happy to mediate through the agency of Dante and his Comedy.

Alberto Guasco in *Il "nuovo Costantino" Fascista* makes a clear point. As he talks of the speech that Schuster gave in Milan, he explains that the rhetoric employed unfolded along three major planes that used the symbolism of: Augustus and Constantine; the historical parallel with the *Duce*; and Dante. Of the latter, Guasco clearly states that there is an abuse of not only on the part of the Fascist Regime but also by the ecclesiastical authorities who seem happy to "share" Dante with the Fascists and see him cited in many public speeches given by Cardinals and Popes, among whom pope Pious XI.³⁹²

³⁹¹ Lorenzo Braccesi, *Roma bimillennaria: Pietro e Cesare* (Roma: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 1999).

³⁹² Alberto Guasco, 'Il "nuovo Costantino" fascista. Immagini e utilizzi dell'imperatore tra chiesa cattolica e regime', in *Costantino I. Enciclopedia costantiniana sulla figura e l'immagine dell'imperatore del cosiddetto Editto di Milano 313-2013*, vol. 3 (Roma: Treccani, 2013), pp. 469-480, p. 475.

Guasco (2013) also notes how the Church was using Dante's Comedy to mediate events that marked the providential birth of Christ. Jesus was obviously born under the rule of another providential power, the Roman Empire, and as such linked to Emperor Augustus. Rome, inextricably intertwined with the figure of Jesus Christ, again emerges as a *topos* not just for a narrative that is to be exclusively fascist, but shared also by the Catholics.³⁹³

The Catholic Church would not have been short of sources to further highlight the prominent position of Rome as the seat of the Vicar of Christ. However, among the various options, it is again the Comedy that which provides the apparently necessary gravitas. This time, it is in the words of Guasco (2013) who himself cites Dante's *Inferno*, II, 23-24 'loco santo/ U' siede il successor del maggior Piero',³⁹⁴ to refer to Rome's singular status.³⁹⁵

2.ii MODELS

However, let us return, albeit extremely succinctly so to then move on, to the previous point raised for the question of how Fascism achieved such a wide popular consent and how it managed to keep it, at least until the onset of World War II, still needs addressing, at least as far as its relationship with Dante's Comedy is concerned.³⁹⁶

Many differing avenues have been explored and many others have been offered as an alternative since the birth of the Fascist Movement. Thus, my interpretation does not seek to displace others but aims at viewing some of them in a

³⁹³ Cf. Guasco, op. cit., 'Mediata attraverso Dante era peraltro anche la concezione tradizionale secondo cui, obbedendo a un piano provvidenziale, la nascita di Gesù di Nazareth s'era verificata al tempo dell'impero pacificato di Augusto', p. 479.

³⁹⁴ Ibid, p. 473.

³⁹⁵ However, Guasco is not alone in his use of the Comedy as an authoritative source. So strong seems to be the pull of Dante in general, but the Comedy in particular, that even modern scholars, in a somewhat astonishing flush of patriotism, feel it appropriate to name the medieval poet and his masterpiece in highly politicised tones. In 2011, Paolo Peluffo exclaimed: 'Ma nell'anno del 150° [anniversario] dell'Unità d'Italia bisogna pur dire che ogni italiano, per essere davvero italiano, deve aver letto almeno una volta nella vita la Commedia.' Paolo Peluffo, 'Un secolo nel nome di Dante', in *Dante vittorioso. Il mito di Dante nell'Ottocento*, ed. by Eugenia Querci (Torino – New York: Allemandi & C., 2011), p.18.

³⁹⁶ The list of cases envisaging the Comedy being used by the powers that be, thus far cited, is by no means exhaustive. More examples will follow as this chapter further develops. To this account, however, it should be noticed that it would be arduous, if not to an extent somewhat superfluous, to name all the events that saw the Comedy being used in the course of the twenty years during which Fascism was in power in Italy. I have chosen the ones I felt were more exemplifying leaving the many others to those who wish to further expand on this project.

different light. In fact, the intention is not that of providing an answer as such, albeit conscious that there is no one simple, unequivocal solution, but that of, in line with the aim for which this chapter was born, analysing the interplay that occurred between the Regime and the Comedy. This is also seen in relation to Fascism's need for a wide popular base. In other words, it is an attempt to address, or in some cases readdress, the issues of the popularity of the Fascist Regime through the mediation of the popularity of Dante's Comedy with the focus on the fact that, as expressed at the beginning of this chapter, the Comedy did not exclusively serve only this purpose.³⁹⁷

³⁹⁷ The concept of popularity, as a social phenomenon, is an issue that would warrant a study for itself. Thus, if fully examined, it would clearly transcend the scope of this study. However, it is here acknowledged that it can be determined by social influences as theorised by social scientists. In the field of physiology, Morton Deutsch and Harold Gerard described two needs that may bring the individual to conform to the expectations of others. See: Herbert Kelman, 'Compliance, identification, and internalization: Three processes of attitude change', in *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol. 2 (March 1958), pp. 51-60; Salomon E. Asch, *Social Psychology* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1952); Morton Deutsch, and Harold B. Gerard, 'A study of normative and informational social influences upon individual judgment', in *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, vol. 51 (1955), pp. 629-636. Furthermore, more specifically, Robert Cialdini, in *Influence: Science and practice* (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 2011, 4th ed.) talks about "weapons of influence". He identifies six different categories – Reciprocity, when a need to return a favour is felt; Commitment and Consistency: when the need not be self-contradictory is felt; Social Proof: when the individual or individuals are more likely to commit to doing certain things when they see others doing them; Authority: when the individual or individuals feel a need to obey authority figures. In this case, the Comedy could be a well-established authority with its seven or more centuries of history and moral influence (for a quick overview of the question of authority in Dante, see: Ascoli 2008, op. cit); Liking: the individual or individuals are more likely to be influenced by things or people they tend to like; Scarcity: a made to perceive scarcity of whatever sort will generate increased demand. It was Max Weber who talked firstly of charismatic authority, also known in sociology as charismatic domination and charismatic leadership. See: Christopher Adair-Toteff, 'Max Weber's Charisma', in *Journal of Classical Sociology*, vol. 5, no. 2 (2005), pp. 189-204. For Weber charismatic authority is 'resting on devotion to the exceptional sanctity, heroism or exemplary character of an individual person, and of the normative patterns or order revealed or ordained by him', Max Weber, *The Theory Of Social And Economic Organization* (Originally published in German in 1920) (London: Simon and Schuster, 2009), p. 328. In his: *The Theory Of Social And Economic Organization* in the chapter: The Nature of Charismatic Authority and its Routinization, Weber describes the characteristics that apply to the term "charisma" as being the foundation of that which possesses the ability to be perceived as being exceptional, above the norm, and in some cases supernatural or superhuman. There is an establishment of a sort of priesthood, such as that which Dante might represent, and as far as politics, the charismatic rule, which may be often found in authoritarian states, autocracies, dictatorships, and theocracies, such as that assumed by Mussolini. The latter, in trying to maintain his charismatic authority, established a personality cult, which was linked to the charismatic, or symbolic (see the Introduction here), stand that Dante and the Comedy offered. As already mentioned, the issue here is quite vast and, therefore, I remand the reader to further studies on the subject.

3. Fascism

Fascism was officially born in Milan on 23 March 1919.³⁹⁸ Mussolini coined the term *fascismo* although the word *fascio* had been widely in use well before 1919.³⁹⁹ During a public meeting held under the leadership of Benito Mussolini, approximately one hundred individuals, from different walks of life, gathered to give birth to the new movement. They came, mostly, from the interventionist Left. Republicans, former socialists, soldiers, Futurists, revolutionary union members, anarchists, and students, produced a program, which contained a variety of proposals. Zigzagging the political horizon in search of support the then newly born Fascist Movement addressed different issues. Some proposals were democratic, libertarian, or radical, others looked at syndicalism asking, for example, for a workday of eight hours, a minimum wage, the reformation of the *latifondi* issue, the redistribution of war profits, and so on.

On such a basis, this new movement appeared, at first, more of an anti-party than a party itself. With its strong pragmatic component, it felt an initial ingrained hostile opposition to ideology. For example, albeit proposing progressive elements, it was not in favour of the Bolsheviks. During these early stages, it had a strong patriotic flair that was, only later, to develop into fully-fledged nationalism. It was anti-capitalist, but looked with favour to technical progress, and wanted the industrialisation of, at least, one part of Italy.

With this wide heterogeneous political platform, the Fascist Movement had high political hopes. It started developing an ideological construct, on which the political movement was based. This relied on the need to keep, and engage, a vastly diverse catchment area, or 'masses' as De Felice called them, where both symbolism and aestheticism played a part.⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁸ Robert O. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005), p. 4.

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁴⁰⁰ For an ampler discourse on politics and aesthetics as a result of a historical process see: Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle: the Aesthetics of Power in Mussolini's Italy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Wladyslaw Tatarkiewicz, *History of Aesthetics*, ed. by J. Harrell, C. Barrett and D. Petsch (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2006 – First published 1970).

The concept of aesthetic politics was firstly conceptualised by Walter Benjamin with his insight on the role of the work of art in the modern era and explored in his 1936 essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*.⁴⁰¹ The Italian, Oxford-based scholar, Caprotti (2005) also argues that fascist politics have an essential aesthetic component, which in turn is itself rooted in ideology.⁴⁰² While Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi (2000), according to whom, Mussolini and Fascism adopted a kind of “expressive means” through which it was possible to apply their idea of ideology through aesthetics, seems more inclined to completely endorse the concept of aesthetic politics. For her, the regime formulated its identity and produced its power thanks to aesthetic manifestations. In other words, Fascism had an idea of Italian society that was to be dictated by the rules of aestheticism. A disciplined and organised society depicted by what the Italian scholar calls an ‘artist politician’, or in other words the *Duce*, Mussolini.⁴⁰³ Laden with symbolism and rituals these rhetorical tropes and figures held contemporary and historical connections with Fascism. The latter was ‘sculpturing’, in the words of Falasca-Zamponi, an entire society making use of these kinds of tools, which at their core needed to appeal, and thus lever on the wider population. This latter tenet well befits the narrative of fascist enticement proposed by De Felice.

The issue of the interplay between aesthetics and politics is discussed by Walter Benjamin in his famous *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*.⁴⁰⁴ There he

⁴⁰¹ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. by Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1985).

⁴⁰² Federico Caprotti, ‘Italian Fascism between Ideology and Spectacle’, in *Fast Capitalism*, vol. 1, no. 2 (2005), pp. 1-44. http://www.uta.edu/huma/agger/fastcapitalism/1_2/caprotti.htm [Last accessed: 08 January 2014].

⁴⁰³ Falasca-Zamponi, op. cit.

⁴⁰⁴ Zudeik (1987) interestingly reports that Walter Benjamin chose himself to use, among the many he could have chosen from, Dante to make a point during one of his hashish experiments. Here is the full text in the original German: ‘Die ‘letzten Wimpel der Freundschaft’ zwischen Bloch und Lukács wehten also Anfang der 20er Jahre nur mehr schwach, so daß Walter Benjamin eine für Bloch recht schmerzliche Lücke füllte, auch was gemeinsame Unternehmungen nicht philosophischer Art betrifft. 1928 beteiligten sich beide an Haschisch-Experimenten, die ärztlich überwacht und später in der Zeitung für Neurologie’ ausgewertet wurden. Der heutige Rausch verhält sich zu vorigen wie Calvin zu Shakespeare,’ notiert Bloch bei der Sitzung vom 14. Januar 1928. Benjamin: Der erste Rausch machte mich mit dem Flatterhaften des Zweifels bekannt; das Zweifeln lag also schöpferische Indifferenz in mir selber. Der zweite Versuch aber ließ die Dinge zweifelhaft erscheinen.’ Michael Landmann, mit dem Ernst Bloch ausführliche Gespräche geführt hat, erzählt von dieser Begebenheit so: Benjamin sah alsbald Dante und Petrarca im Gespräch, an dem er sich beteiligte. Bloch reif dazwischen: ‘Seit wann kannst du so gut italienisch?’ Benjamin machte eine Handbewegung, so also ob das das Dümme sei, was einer überhaupt sagen kann.’ Bloch soll sich insgesamt also ungeeignetes Versuchsobjekt entpuppt haben, weshalb er auch an späteren Sitzungen nicht mehr teilnahm: ‘Statt in andere Welten entrückt zu werden, sprach er höchst diesseitig dem kalten Buffet zu, das die Ärzte, da Haschisch Appetit erzeugt, aufgebaut hatten.’ Benjamin notiert seine Reaktion, also er aufgefordert wird zu essen: Nein, ich nehme nichts. Selbst wenn Sie sich

concluded that the 'logical result of Fascism is the introduction of aesthetics into political life.'⁴⁰⁵ Falasca-Zamponi added to the work of Walter Benjamin, for whom Fascism had somewhat contributed to perpetuating a sort of mystical distance between the work of art and its audience, thus inhibiting some critical interaction between the two. The Italian scholar, in fact, in looking at fascist discourse is interested in its speeches and therefore its linguistic aspects, but also images, and symbols - thus the non-linguistic - and the way in which these shaped and formed Fascism.

While useful for this study, especially when focused specifically on the myth of Rome, as this offer a clear link with Dante's Comedy, Falasca-Zamponi's study is not without some faults. It may be too emphatically promoting the role of symbols in the formation of fascist identity without considering the dichotomy movement-regime, earlier discussed here. It may also not consider some Marxist-inspired arguments on images and symbols.⁴⁰⁶ However, it is not possible to place further qualifications on these views for the constraints of this current study do not allow it. The comment, albeit brief, to a symbolic dimension of Fascism, should here suffice as it permits to strengthen the argument that sees Fascism as in search of models through which and with which to establish a certain identity.

However, this study does not support the argument that it was only the Comedy, or other symbolic representations, to have exclusively shaped and determined a certain fascist identity, but believes that they were, nonetheless, co-agents in that formative process. Various examples of this symbolic use of the Comedy on behalf, and in support, of Fascism are provided throughout this chapter, and indeed the rest of this study.

To return to the issue of political representation, and position Dante's Comedy within that narrative, it is necessary to look at the genesis of Fascism in order to draw some conclusions. Therefore, let us look at some historical facts. The

zu diesem Zweck Jamben vorbinden, werde ich nicht essen.' Peter Zudeik, *Der Hintern des Teufels: Ernst Bloch, Leben und Werk* (Bühl-Moos: Elster Verlag, 1987), p. 108.

⁴⁰⁵ Benjamin, op. cit., p. 241.

⁴⁰⁶ For those who can read Italian, for the concept of spectacle, see: Guy Debord, *La società dello spettacolo* (Milano: Baldini Castoldi Dalai editore, 2008). For an analysis of politics and art, see: György Lukács, *Coscienza di classe e storia. Codismo e dialettica* (Roma: Edizioni Alegre, 2008).

Fascist Movement was defeated in the elections of 16 November 1919. Turning into a popular party proved, for the Fascist Movement, more difficult than they might have anticipated. They failed to sway significant masses from the then strong and revolutionary socialist party. However, as 1919 turned into 1920, the political fortunes of Fascism also started to change. If initially the Movement had predominantly favoured a typically urban narrative topically engaged with issues removed from those rooted in the land, it was at about this time that a shift started. Fascism began moving away from its Jacobin-revolutionary core and engaged in a policy of rapprochement with more conservative echelons of society. It started seeking the support of small landowners, and it began its move toward the more conservative political right.

On an ideological, as well as pragmatic plane, this meant that the Fascist Movement started resorting to the implementation of violence as a means of political propaganda. The use of armed groups, mainly composed by what Fascism probably considered as some kind of social debris left behind by World War One: former soldiers, dissidents, dissatisfied fringes of society, among whom the young unemployed, gave birth to the *squadristi*. These were violent men, recruited, and unleashed against any political adversary that dare stand in the way of the new Movement. Socialists and Catholics were particularly targeted.

As De Felice argued, Fascism had opened a new chapter in Italian political history becoming a mass political movement. However, the means through which this was achieved could also be said to be a novel albeit, fair to say, unwelcome innovation. Thanks to the use of intimidation, brute force, and cunning, if opportunistic, sense of Italian society, rooted above all in the country areas of the Po Valley and Tuscany, the Fascist Movement began their political colliding trajectory that was to eventually clash with the Italian established Liberal, if not at least in part democratic, multi-party system. The fascist political program acquired strong nationalist, as well as progressively more authoritarian, methods.⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰⁷ Henry Ashby Jr. Turner, *Reappraisals of Fascism* (New York, NY: New Viewpoints, 1975), p. 162, states fascism's 'goals of radical and authoritarian nationalism.'

Dante kept an important place in fascist rhetoric and was mentioned in the very same Parliamentary session of November 1922 that gave Mussolini his mandate to rule Italy. In the transcripts of that day is reported:

Quando infatti nel 10 ottobre 1903 io commemorai Dante a Trento, e fui espulso dall'Austria, Cesare Battisti era accanto a me, e ad un operaio austriacante, che gridava Viva l'Austria, sputò in faccia, rispondendo, con la visione dell'avvenire, Viva l'Italia! {Applause}.⁴⁰⁸

However, it must be noted that authoritarian does not correspond to dictatorial. The Fascist Regime, as Griffin (2005) argues, 'was authoritarian, not totalitarian.'⁴⁰⁹ This has relevant consequences for how it, the Regime, handled culture. Once the Movement had finally secured power, through what both De Felice and Griffin seem to agree, and identify in a base with a real "participatory and active" popular consensus, and as such a legitimated institution or party, it started its transition towards becoming a Regime. Once established, it certainly retained a monopoly on power, but it showed itself to be much more flexible in other areas, allowing economic and cultural diversity.⁴¹⁰ This was the case, for example, of a series of magazines such *Il Convegno*, *L'Esame*, *Il Quindicinale*, the important *La Fiera Letteraria* and others, through which the Regime allowed new ideas to pour into fascist Italy, primarily, and interestingly, from Britain.⁴¹¹

It is worth remembering how Dante and the Comedy were perceived by the Regime. Dante in general, but the Comedy in particular, were treated in quite different ways: from the mostly neutral scholars, such as Michele Barbi, Giulio Bertoni, Bruno Nardi, Luigi Pietrobono, or Nicola Zingarelli, who despite being a fascist, expressed quite balanced opinions; to the historian Francesco Ercole's mild attempt to link the Comedy to Fascism; to the several overtly aligned "minor"

⁴⁰⁸ Camera dei Deputati, Acts of Parliament - the Chamber of Deputies - Legislature XXVII - Debates - Session of 17 November 1922, p. 8460.

⁴⁰⁹ Roger Griffin, *Totalitarianism Movements and Political Religions* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 76.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹¹ For a more detailed analysis, see the chapter dedicated to Britain.

authors, as Albertini (1996) calls them.⁴¹² They could ultimately do so, by which this study means approaching the Comedy from quite different and differing angles, because the Fascist Regime allowed this diversity of opinions to exist, as Albertini clearly states in his article.⁴¹³

Such difference of approach did not depend just on someone's political point of view, thus, whether fascist or otherwise, but also on one's cultural stand, by which this analysis means to refer to the division between "high" and "lower" Dante scholars indicated by Albertini in his study. For example, in the preface to *Dante e il fascismo nel canto di Sordello*, written by an obscure fascist captain by the name of Iacopini in 1928, what is perhaps more interesting than the book itself is the reaction to it by the then fascist Minister Italo Balbo. The latter seems not to completely agree with his subordinate, albeit still fellow party member, on how to approach Dante's Comedy. For the former had, according to the minister, somewhat being too enthusiastic in his appropriation of Dante's Comedy in favour of the Regime. Iacopini had stated: 'che Dante sia fascista lo dimostrano tutte le sue opere.'⁴¹⁴

In fact, as early as 1928 the Regime felt, as history confirms, confident enough. Politically that meant the constitutionalisation of the Grand Council of Fascism, on 9 December 1928, and the definitive consolidation of the dictatorial

⁴¹² During the fascist era, Michele Barbi published the following works: *Dante: vita, opere e fortuna* (Firenze: G.C.Sansoni, 1933); id., *Problemi di critica dantesca prima serie* (Firenze: G.S. Sansoni, 1934); id., *La nuova filologia e l'edizione dei nostri scrittori. Da Dante al Manzoni* (Firenze Le Lettere, 1994 (reprint of the 1st edition – Firenze: Sansoni, 1938); id., *Problemi di critica dantesca seconda serie* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1941); id., *Con Dante e coi suoi interpreti* (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1941). The linguist, literary critic and philologist Giulio Bertoni, published: *Dante – Profili* - no. 27 (Roma: A. F. Formiggini, 1921). Pietro Misciattelli uttered the following words: 'Il fascismo è una religione, religione che ha trovato il suo Dio', in his, 'La mistica del fascismo', in *Critica fascista* (15 July 1923), p. 62. The writer, literary critic, and lexicographer, Alfredo Panzini, published: *Dante nel sesto centenario. Per la gioventù e per il popolo* (Milano: Trevisini, 1921). The historian, jurist and Minister of Justice of the Mussolini government Arrigo Solmi, published: *Il pensiero politico di Dante* (Firenze: La Voce, 1922). The archaeologist Vittorio Spinazzola, albeit critic of Mussolini, was however in friendly relationship with Gabriele D'Annunzio and received a generous grant from the then Minister to the Treasury, De Nava. Cf. Filippo Delpino, 'Vittorio Spinazzola. Tra Napoli e Pompei, tra scandali e scavi', in *Pompei Scienza e Società*, Convegno internazionale, Napoli (25-27 November 1998), pp. 73-79; see also: *Pompei Scienza e Società*, ed. by Piero Giovanni Guzzo (Milano: Pompei scienza e società, 2001), pp. 51-61. See also: Vittorio Spinazzola, *L'arte di Dante*, (Napoli: Ricciardi, 1921). Outside Italy, the controversial Russian poet and writer Dmitrij Merežkovskij dedicated to Mussolini an essay entitled: *Dante* (Bologna, Zanichelli, 1939).

⁴¹³ 'Se il dibattito all'interno della critica "alta" avvenne indubbiamente grazie al confronto della tradizione storico-filologica con quella estetico-idealistica, non si può ignorare che ai fini di una storia culturale del Regime i libri e gli opuscoli scritti da oscuri professori di liceo o da accademici d'Italia di nomina esclusivamente politica risulteranno forse più significativi dei lavori critici più seri che vengono consultati ancora oggi con profitto dai dantisti. La lettura di questi testi minori, spesso ripetitivi e scontati, ma a volte anche brillantemente argomentati e fantasiosi offre un'idea di come la retorica fascista si fosse appropriata dell'opera di Dante dandone un'interpretazione nazionalista ed imperialistica, quando non fascista tout court.' Albertini, op. cit., p. 123.

⁴¹⁴ Pietro Iacopini, *Dante e il Fascismo nel canto di Sordello* (Roma: Tip. Agostiniana, 1928), p. 1.

Fascist State.⁴¹⁵ Here, for what this study is concerned, that confidence was reflected by the way in which Dante's Comedy was being, by now, approached. Balbo's comment (and Albertini's argument) seems to point at a need that came to pass, or at least, it did so partially. It became inversely proportional to the growth in confidence of the Regime. With it, the pressing need to associate Dante and his Comedy with certain fascist ideologies such as "Italianness", as well as others, withered, or at least, became less audaciously overt than the tones used by Iacopini. The struggle that the Regime once faced in addressing these issues, which otherwise are vehemently promoted in Iacopini's book, are in fact, softened and underplayed by Italo Balbo. The fascist minister used the word *trapasso*, a strong term in Italian to indicate that the transition from Dante's Comedy to fascist days, appears to him 'un po' forte,' a little strong. Thus, if indicating an acceptance of Iacopini's work, this nonetheless, came with some reserve.⁴¹⁶

This notwithstanding, by now, it would seem, Dante was a fully-fledged Fascist despite what Scorrano (2001) states, 'Il regime non guardò con molto interesse a Dante.'⁴¹⁷ de Rooy (2011) in fact, in stark contrast, affirms: 'Dante fu costretto ben presto a indossare nuovamente la camicia di forza politicizzata della Nazione unita. Il poeta e la sua opera furono infatti strumentalizzati dai fascisti ed incorporati nella loro religione della nazione.'⁴¹⁸ These two contrasting positions might point at the possible divide between Movement and the Regime with their contradictory approaches to Dante's Comedy. On the one hand, there was almost an expressed "higher" academic indifference on behalf of Dante's scholars to the themes of Roman mythology and Italian race. This was largely constant throughout the two phases of Fascism, as we will see during the course of this chapter.

⁴¹⁵ Cf. De Felice (1996), 'Mussolini il Fascista', in *L'organizzazione dello Stato fascista (1925-1929)*, op. cit.

⁴¹⁶ In the preface to Iacopini's *Dante e il fascismo nel canto di Sordello*, one can read: 'Egregio Capitano, Ho letto con molto interesse il Suo studio su "Dante e il fascismo nel canto di Sordello." Veramente il trapasso dall'alto spirito del Poeta italico (che senza timore d'anacronismo può dirsi fervido del medesimo amore della stirpe e della stessa dinamica volontà di miglioramento umano che animano il Fascismo) fino alle contingenze [sic] della vita quotidiana nel periodo oscuro nel quale il Fascismo dovette lottare contro tutte le forze avverse è un po' forte. Avrei preferito che nel Suo studio questi ricordi fossero tralasciati, chè ormai, le codardie di quegli anni, nel trionfo del Regime Fascista, possono dirsi dimenticate. Tuttavia riconosco che non è male di tanto in tanto ricordare agli italiani in quale baratro stavano per cadere, e per questo, il Suo studio è utile e lodevole e credo che Ella faccia bene a darlo alle stampe. Cordialmente BALBO.' Pietro Iacopini, *Dante e il fascismo nel canto di Sordello* (Roma: Tip. Agostiniana, 1928), here at the preface.

⁴¹⁷ Luigi Scorrano, *Il Dante "fascista"* (Ravenna: Longo Editore, 2001), p. 90.

⁴¹⁸ de Rooy, op. cit., p. 67.

However, on the other hand, there was an aggressively vociferous set of “minor” academics who sworn on Dante’s allegiance to Fascism. In other words, Dante and his Comedy were progressively institutionalised and no longer revolutionary as in the words of Iacopini, but interwoven in an ideological fascist mesh as this progressively matured from Movement to Regime.

However, returning to the violence professed by the *squadristi*, this should not be seen exclusively as physical. Some, among the men who were part of these fascist militias, today we would call men of letters. Of them, the Florentine journalist, politician and writer Alessandro Pavolini who was also Minister for Popular Culture and Secretary of the Republican Fascist Party. The infamous Republic of Salò minister had famously declared: ‘lo squadristo è stato la primavera della nostra vita, e chi è stato squadrista una volta lo è per sempre,’ thus openly accepting that a violent approach to the political fabric of Italy was not only necessary but downright enjoyable.⁴¹⁹

This minister, so keen on the use of force, also showed an equally, almost obsessive interest in Dante. On 14 April 1945 at Villa Feltrinelli at Gargnano in a meeting with Graziani, Filippo Anfuso, the Nazi Allgemeine SS General Wolff, the Minister for Internal Affairs Zerbino, colonel Dollmann and others, while busy arranging vital provisions for the survival of the Republic (such as entrenchments and the excavation of bunkers), Pavolini still found the time to issue orders to fetch and relocate Dante’s ashes. Pavolini wanted to transform the Alps into a kind of symbolic altar of culture and “Italianità” where the symbolism of the Veltro, in the Comedy, interacted with Feltre and Montefeltro, which approximately marked the boundaries of The Republic of Salò. By now, the grandiose, yet symbolically expressed tones contrast with the coarse force of Iacopini’s language in an exchanged, more allusive rendering of Dante.

⁴¹⁹ Cf. *I verbali del Consiglio dei Ministri della Repubblica Sociale Italiana*, ed. by Francesca Romana Scardaccione (Ministero per i Beni e le attività Culturali. Direzione Generale per gli Archivi, 2002); Massimiliano Soldani, *L'ultimo poeta armato: Alessandro Pavolini segretario del Partito fascista repubblicano* (Cusano Milanino (Milano): Barbarossa, 1999). See also: The minutes of the Congress of Verona, ‘The speech of Alexander Pavolini,’ (14 November 1943); and Renzo De Felice, *Mussolini l'alleato: La guerra civile (1943-1945)* (Torino: Einaudi, 1997).

Thus, Dante, it would seem, was still not to be left behind on both an ideological as well as physical plane. However, Alessandro Pavolini is but one of the examples of contradictory, or selective, fascist policy towards the illustrious medieval poet. For instance, the former must have been aware of the treatment that Dante reserved to one of his historical antecedents, the bloodthirsty medieval lord Ezzelino III da Romano. In the Comedy, his soul is consigned to the Seventh Circle of Hell where Dante encounters him in the First Ring: the Violent against their Neighbours, and describes him 'quella fronte c'ha 'l pel così nero, | è Azzolino' (*Inferno*, XII, 109). Ezzelino set an example of brutality and barbarity, as noted by Burckhardt already in 1860, thus well before the onset of Fascism.⁴²⁰ The use of force to advance one's political interests exercised by Ezzelino cannot have been lost on Pavolini, and the Fascists in general, who rather obviously, albeit conveniently, and contradictorily, elected to ignore Dante's stern condemnation of the brutal medieval ruler, and kept acclaiming the Florentine poet and his masterpiece as their unquestioned and unquestionable, champions.

In 1919, a young Giuseppe Bottai participated with several others to the foundation of the *Fascio di combattimento* in Rome.⁴²¹ Giuseppe Bottai is also a controversial figure in the already eclectic pantheon of fascist authorities. He was the Governor of Rome, Minister for National Education and Minister of the Corporations.⁴²² He too used the Comedy to advance his own political agenda. Piero Barghellini quoted Bottai when the latter said: 'nella città di Dante dove l'arte è in

⁴²⁰ Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* [1897], authorised translation from the 15th ed. by S. G. C. Middlemore (London, G. Allen & Unwin, Ltd.; New York, The Macmillan Company, 1914, now: Courier Corporation: 2012). First published in German in 1860 as: *Die Cultur der Renaissance in Italien* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications inc., 2010). Speaking of Ezzelino, Burckhardt stated: 'Here for the first time the attempt was openly made to found a throne by wholesale murder and endless barbarities, by the adoption in short, of any means with a view to nothing but the end pursued', p. 4.

⁴²¹ After the battle of Caporetto, Marinetti, Mario Carli, and Settimelli founded two newspapers: *Roma Futurista* and the *Fasci Politici Futuristi* (that would become *Fasci di combattimento* under Fascism). Others collaborated in various Italian cities; in Rome: Mario Carli, Fabbri, Calderini, Businelli, Scaparro, Piero Bolzon, Enrico Rocca, Volt, Beer, Rachella, Calcaprina, Balla, Giuseppe Bottai, Crescenzo Fornari, Verderame, Formoso, Scambelluri, Auro D'Alba, Marchesani, Giacobbe, Santa Maria, Gino Galli, Silvio Galli, Remo Chiti; in Milan: Marinetti, Mazza, Buzzi, Natali, Pinna, Cerati, Somenzi, Macchi, Luigi Freddi, Bontempelli, Gigli; in Florence: Nannetti, Settimelli, Spina, Ottone Rosai, Marasco, Gorrieri, Mainardi, Marmi; in Perugia: P. P. Carbone, Madia, Dottori, Presenzini-Mattoli; in Turin: Azzari; in Bologna: Nanni Leone Castelli; in Messina: Jannelli, Nicastro, Carrozza; in Fiume: Nanni Leone Castelli; in Palermo: Alioto, Sortino-Bona; in Genoa: De Gasperi, Depero, Alessandro, Forti, Sciacaluga, Ferraris, Santa Maria, Pellizzari, Tami, Gigli, Carlo Bruno, Guglielmino, Cavagnetto; in Ferrara: Crepas, Gaggioli; in Naples: P.P. Carbonelli; in Piacenza: Giuseppe Steiner; in Stradella: Masnata. The sources for this list are many. Among the vast literature available, see: Renzo De Felice, *Breve storia del fascismo* (Milano: Mondadori, 2002); id., *Storia degli ebrei italiani sotto il fascismo* (Torino: Einaudi, 1993); Giorgio Fabre, *L'elenco: censura fascista, editoria e autori ebrei* (Torino: Zamorani, 1998); Arrigo Petacco, *Storia del fascismo*, 6 volumes (Roma: Curcio, 1982).

⁴²² Cf. Alexander De Grand, *Bottai e la cultura fascista* (Bari: Laterza, 1978).

grandissima parte di ispirazione religiosa [...] com'è possibile commentare la Divina Commedia o interpretare il Cappellone degli Spagnuoli [sic], essendo digiuni di teologia?"⁴²³ What Bottai meant, albeit in 1941, was to show the Church the goodwill of the Fascists. Dante, once again, was used as an intermediary of choice, where the function of his Comedy is not longer employed in the same viral terms of nationalism, but rather those that reflected the current state of a mature Regime.

I shall return to this fascist figure later on as he was the agent who imposed, or at least, helped to establish a powerful, as well as capillary, propaganda machine in a country whose political elites sought it necessary to rethink, or distort, its history to make it befit their party needs.⁴²⁴

On its part, the young Fascist Movement, however incoherent in its use of symbolism, did not shy away from it. As earlier discussed, it made use of several symbols and institutions, ancient Rome having been the most prolific inspirational source. To stay on the topic of the formation of the *squadristi*, it is a well know historical fact that during the Second Samnite War, between 321 BC and 315 BC, Rome needed soldiers and thus doubled its legions from two to four. Each was divided into 30 Maniples (from the Latin: *manipulus*, literally meaning "a handful"). These were tactical units, which according to tradition, were introduced by Marcus Furius Camillus who pronounced the famous sentence 'non auro, sed ferro Romam servabimus!'⁴²⁵ Benito Mussolini himself made a direct reference to the concept of *manipulus* in his first speech as Prime Minister to the Chamber of Deputies on 16 November 1922, shortly after he had marched to Rome.⁴²⁶ The direct link with

⁴²³ Piero Barghellini, 'Bottai a Firenze' (p. 34) in Giuseppe Bottai, Giuseppe De Luca, *Carteggio 1940-1957, Epistolari, carteggi e testimonianze*, ed. by Renzo De Felice, Renato Moro (Roma: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1989), p. cxiv.

⁴²⁴ There are, of course, those who reject this point. For example, on 14 December 1986 the Movimento sociale italiano (MSI) in an article published in its official organ, the *Secolo d'Italia*, stated that Fascism became a dictatorship by force of circumstances, rather than through inclination. It went on arguing that Fascism was theorised a posteriori, but was not programmed by the fascist-movement.

⁴²⁵ 'Galli, saevus barbarum populus, Galliam Transalpinam incolebant; neque agrorum nec mercaturam exercebant, sed crebra bella cum populis finitimos gerebant spoliisque atque rapinis vitam sustenebant. Olim Brennus, Galorum dux, avidus gloriae ac praedae, barbarorum catervas per Italiam usque ad Latium perducit; hic asperum proelium apud Alliam fluvium committit Romanorumque copias fundit atque fugat. Mox etiam Romam capit, sed romanis vitam salvam promittit pro mille auri libris. Dum autem Romani aurum congerunt atque pendunt, repente ab oppido propinquo supervenit Camillus, vir strenuus ac belli peritus, cum magno sociorum numero et auxiliis; in barbaros irruit et: 'romani', exclamat, "non auro, sed ferro Romam servabimus!". Tum universi romani ad arma concurrunt, Gallos fundunt graviterque concidunt.' Giuseppe De Micheli, *Lingua Mater* (Milano: Hoepli, 2008), p. 84.

⁴²⁶ 'Potevo fare di quest'Aula sorda e grigia un bivacco di manipoli: potevo sprangere il Parlamento e costituire un Governo esclusivamente di fascisti. Potevo: ma non ho, almeno in questo primo tempo, voluto.' Benito Mussolini, Discorso alla Camera dei Deputati, known also as "Discorso del bivacco" to the

ancient Rome was thus established on grounds that seem to excuse and endorse the use of violence as a historical precedent. Similarly to Pavolini, Mussolini showed great interest in Dante and his works so much so that Domenico Venturini wrote an entire book dedicated to the relationship between the two men. It was entitled: *Dante Alighieri e Benito Mussolini*.⁴²⁷

In Venturini's book Amilcare Rossi, the President of the *Associazione Nazionale Combattenti* makes, albeit perhaps not overtly, a clear reference to at least two of the issues so far explored in this chapter. Firstly, he informs us of that there are a number of articles or speeches that talk about the relationship between Dante and Mussolini. Secondly, he adds that, like Iacopini and unlike Balbo's feelings for a more subtle approach, a more forceful and decisive link such as the one established by Venturini between Dante and Mussolini, is not only desirable but also necessary. He, in fact, talks of a "lacuna", a gap, in modern Italian literature that Venturini successfully, in his opinion, fills in.⁴²⁸

Chamber of Deputies of the Kingdom of Italy, 16 November 1922. Benito Mussolini, *Scritti E Discorsi Di Benito Mussolini*, vol. 3 (Milano: U. Hoepli, 1934), p. 7.

⁴²⁷ Domenico Venturini, *Dante Alighieri e Benito Mussolini* (Roma: Casa Editrice Nuova Italia, 1927).

⁴²⁸ 'Più e più volte, in questi primi anni dell'Era Fascista, in orazioni ed articoli, si è accennato, al parallelo storico tra il Dux vaticinato dall'Alighieri e Benito Mussolini. Ma questi raffronti storici hanno avuto generalmente sapore di improvvisazioni retoriche e pochi hanno sentito la passione critica, unita alla fede di una convinzione esegetica di approfondire, con amore ed intelligenza. Il rapporto ideale ed etico tra le due grandi figure: una delle quali ha campeggiato nella concezione politica della "Commedia" mentre l'altra, a vaticinio compiuto, informa di sè [sic] e della sua opera il presente momento storico in Italia e fuori. Domenico Venturini ha voluto e saputo mirabilmente colmare questa lacuna...' Amilcare Rossi in Venturini, op. cit., here at the preface.

4. Cognitive map

Venturini promotes a highly idealised vision of the Comedy that becomes a powerful means of an assertion of racial superiority. His language is punctuated by references to purity and impurity. 'Salviamo dalla invalidatrice corruzione questa nostra antica gloria,' he says in regards to the Comedy.⁴²⁹ He also uses Dante's masterpiece as a weapon against those who dare criticise the superiority of the Italians, 'lo studio adunque della Divina Commedia è il più valido mezzo a richiamare sul retto sentiero coloro che dissenatamente si affaticano con le loro scritture a vilipendere la bontà e la bellezza della italiana letteratura.'⁴³⁰

As a heuristic concept of "cognitive polyphasia", the myth of Dante as a model with which to express a certain form of nationalism was not new, or exclusive, to Fascism.⁴³¹ In his *Politics vs. Literature: The Myth of Dante and the Italian National Identity*, Stefano Jossa talks at length of the creation of such myth during the course of the nineteenth century, and indeed so do others in *Dante the Long*

⁴²⁹ Venturini, op. cit., p. 11.

⁴³⁰ Ibid., p. 11.

⁴³¹ The French social physiologist Serge Moscovici argued that a state of cognitive polyphasia is reached when different, and sometimes contradictory, modes of thinking come to co-exist in relation to one issue. Cf. Serge Moscovici, *La psychanalyse son image et son public* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1976). For more definitions of cognitive polyphasia, see: Sandra Jovchelovitch, *Re-thinking the diversity of knowledge: cognitive polyphasia, belief and representation* (London: LSE Research Online, 2002), available at: <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/2628> [Last accessed: 14 January 2014]. As for the notion of "myth", a number of general conceptual frameworks intervene in attempting its definition including those dimensional models of articulating social representations and collective cultural memory. Myths can be of various forms, from cosmogonic narratives to narratives of a sacred nature. Certain paradigms such as for example functionalism have rationalised myths as being formative narratives reflective of social order and/or values within a given culture. Myths may also support a representative discourse within a certain epistemology or a paradigmatic view of Nature, and the organisation of thought. For example, structuralism distinguishes "bundles" (the term having been used by the structuralist Claude Lévi-Strauss) of dualities (or polar opposites like cold versus hot) as central to myths. The narratives of myths may also include the figure of the 'hero' (such as for example proto-humans, super humans, demi-gods or gods) who intervene in the process of mediation for certain dualities that either reconcile us to our realities, or establish the patterns of transformation that help us recognising reality as we perceive it. For the nature of this current study, it is not possible to further elaborate on the different approaches that exist to the issue of "myth". It will suffice to say that when necessary this study will refer to a particular use of the term specifying it. Here are some suggested readings on the topic: Ernst Cassirer, *Language and Myth* trans. Susanne Langer (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1946); id., *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, vol. II, trans. R. Manheim (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press 1955); David Adams Leeming, *The World of Myth* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Myth and Meaning* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995); id., *The Naked Man: An Introduction to a Science of Meaning*, vol. 4 (New York: Harper and Row, 1971); id., *The Raw and the Cooked: Mythologiques*, vol. 1, trans. by John and Doreen Weightman (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1969); id., *The Savage Mind*, trans. George Weidenfeld and Nicholson Ltd. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 1966 (originally published in French 1962)); id., *Structural Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1963); id., 'The Structural Study of Myth', in *Myth: A Symposium*, ed. by Thomas Sebeok [1955] (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1974); Bronislaw Malinowski, *Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays* (Prospect Heights, Ill: Waveland Press, Inc., 1992); Alasdair MacIntyre, 'Myth', in *Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, ed. by P. Edwards (ed.), vol.5 (New York: Macmillan, 1967), p. 435; John McDowell, 'From "Perspectives" on "What is Myth,"' in *Folklore Forum*, vol. 29, no. 2 (1998); Gregory Schrepf, and Hansen William, *Myth. A New Symposium* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002); Barbara C. Sproul, *Primal Myths: Creating the World* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1979); *Malinowski and the Work of Myth*, ed. by Ivan Strenski (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

Nineteenth Century, which has already been mentioned in this study in the chapter dedicated to the *Risorgimento*.⁴³²

Known as “palingenetic ultranationalism” after the British political theorist Roger Griffin had coined the term, this expresses a core tenet of Fascism. According to such notion, Fascism represents a model in which an ideology is drawn from what or who came before them. Their image is clearly expressed apologetically. The concept of rebirth, be it of a state, a nation, an empire, or all of them, is combined as a regenerative event (*παλιγγενεσία* or palingenesis) to the notion of political authority based on earlier ancestral preceding examples.⁴³³

Dante and his Comedy, as this chapter shall later further comment, and has also done before in reference to the difference needs and modes of expression between the Movement and the Regime, became part of this “palingenetic ultranationalism” that looked at the past to find reaffirmation of itself in the present, according to a narrative of symbolism. Quite well known is, in fact, the attitude that the Fascists displayed towards Imperial Rome. The latter was, among other things, one of the sources for an eschatological view of history.⁴³⁴ There, the myth of an

⁴³² Aida Audeh, and Nick Havely, *Dante the Long Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁴³³ Cf. Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism*, 1st edition (Great Britain: Printer Publishers Limited, 1991). See also: Roger Griffin, *Staging The Nation's Rebirth: The Politics and Aesthetics of Performance in the Context of Fascist Studies* (1994), available online at <http://www.libraryofsocialscience.com/ideologies/docs/staging-the-nations-rebirth/index.html> [Last accessed: 12 February 2014].

⁴³⁴ The *Popolo d'Italia* on 21 April 1922, no. 95 published the following discourse pronounced by Mussolini, where the latter reaffirms the consecration of the foundation of Rome, in contrast to the Socialist May 1st (“Discorso di Bologna” of 21 April 1921). ‘Passato e avvenire: Il Fascismo italiano si raccoglie, oggi, attorno ai suoi mille e mille gagliardetti, per celebrare la sua festa e quella del lavoro nell'Annuale della fondazione di Roma. La manifestazione riuscirà severa e imponente, anche nei centri dove è stata vietata dalla polizia dietro ordine di un Governo che non sa e non vuole scegliere tra forze nazionali e forze antinazionali e finirà per morire di sua lacrimevole ambiguità. La proposta di scegliere quale giornata del Fascismo il 21 aprile, partì da chi traccia queste linee e fu accolta dovunque con entusiasmo. I fascisti intuirono la significazione profonda di questa data. Celebrare il Natale di Roma significa celebrare il nostro tipo di civiltà, significa esaltare la nostra storia e la nostra razza, significa poggiare fermamente sul passato per meglio lanciarsi verso l'avvenire. Roma e Italia sono infatti due termini inscindibili. Nelle epoche grigie o tristi della nostra storia, Roma è il faro dei naviganti e degli aspettanti. Dal 1821, dall'anno in cui la coscienza nazionale si sveglia e da Nola a Torino il fremito unitario prorompe nell'insurrezione, Roma appare come la mèta suprema. Il grido mazziniano e garibaldino di “Roma o morte!” non era soltanto un grido di battaglia, ma la testimonianza solenne che senza Roma capitale non ci sarebbe stata unità italiana, poiché solo Roma, e per il fascino della sua stessa posizione geografica, poteva assolvere il compito delicato e necessario di fondere a poco a poco le diverse regioni della Nazione. Certo, la Roma che noi onoriamo non è soltanto la Roma dei monumenti e dei ruderi, la Roma dalle gloriose rovine fra le quali nessun uomo civile si aggira senza provare un fremito di trepida venerazione. Certo, la Roma che noi onoriamo non ha nulla a vedere con certa trionfante mediocrità modernistica e coi casermoni dai quali sciamano l'esercito innumerevole della travetteria dicasteriale. Consideriamo tutto ciò alla stregua di certi funghi che crescono ai piedi delle gigantesche querce. La Roma che noi onoriamo, ma soprattutto la Roma che noi vagheggiamo e prepariamo, è un'altra: non si tratta di pietre insigni, ma di anime vive: non è contemplazione nostalgica del passato, ma dura preparazione dell'avvenire. Roma è il nostro punto di partenza e di riferimento; è il nostro simbolo o, se si vuole, il nostro Mito. Noi sogniamo l'Italia romana, cioè saggia e forte, disciplinata e imperiale. Molto di quel che fu lo spirito immortale di Roma risorge nel Fascismo: romano è il Littorio,

Italian supremacy in various fields of knowledge among which stood that of literature, with Dante and the Comedy quite firmly at its helm, was clearly present.⁴³⁵

For some, like Guido De Giorgio, Rome was a fundamental canon upon which to base the argument of universal Fascism. Writing from the pages of the magazine *La Torre*, De Giorgio (and Evola) envisaged a sort of Fascism that was almost sacred in nature. In one of his editorials called *Mercuriales Viri*, De Giorgio overtly spoke of the universalisation of Fascism as a sacred mission and said: 'noi insorgiamo contro lo pseudo fascismo di coloro che vogliono amputare, mutilare la Romanità.' In his book, *La Tradizione romana* (1973), which he gave to Mussolini as a typewritten document in 1939, De Giorgio dedicated to Dante his entire Chapter 9 - *Dante e la culminarità sacra della Tradizione Romana*.⁴³⁶

Other esoteric writers, among whom the French René Guénon, of whom this study speaks in the chapter dedicated to the *Risorgimento*, preferred to see in Dante the advancement of the Ghibellines' cause. However, as Alessandro Giuli also argues, this was but of marginal importance for Fascism. Thus, what instead was not peripheral was the use of Dante within a fascist narrative. The Italian scholar, in fact, propounded: 'Dante fu poeta del fascismo? Probabilmente sì [...]'⁴³⁷

There will be several other examples throughout this chapter of a fascist interplay with the Comedy based on the myth of ancient Rome. Meanwhile, on a brief note that remands to Chapter IV of this thesis, Britain, during the period of the Edwardian era, albeit somewhat distant from general continental European patterns of economic, political and social crises that some defined as a sort of 'golden age'

romana è la nostra organizzazione di combattimento, romano è il nostro orgoglio e il nostro coraggio: "Civis romanus sum". Bisogna, ora, che la storia di domani, quella che noi vogliamo assiduamente creare, non sia il contrasto o la parodia della storia di ieri. I romani non erano soltanto dei combattenti, ma dei costruttori formidabili che potevano sfidare, come hanno sfidato, il Tempo. L'Italia è stata romana, per la prima volta dopo quindici secoli, nella guerra e nella vittoria: dev'essere — ora — romana nella pace: e questa romanità rinnovata e rinnovantesi ha questi nomi: Disciplina e Lavoro. Con questi pensieri, i fascisti italiani ricordano oggi il giorno in cui duemilasettecentocinquantesette anni fa — secondo la leggenda — fu tracciato il primo solco della città quadrata, destinata dopo pochi secoli a dominare il Mondo.' Benito Mussolini, *Scritti E Discorsi Di Benito Mussolini*, vol. 2 (Milano: U. Hoepli, 1934), p. 277.

⁴³⁵ Cf. Venturini, op. cit.

⁴³⁶ Cf. Guido De Giorgio, *La Tradizione Romana* (Roma: Edizioni Mediterranee, 1973). De Giorgio starts his Chapter 9 with these words: 'L'aurea vena tradizionale di Roma nell'unità vivente delle due forme integranti in perfetto combaciamento ed equilibrio, si ritrova tutt'intera in Dante che per primo ha rivelato il mistero della Romanità Sacra giungendo alla sintesi creativa degli elementi contenuti nell'antica e nella nuova tradizione per cui egli può essere chiamato il Vate della Cattolicità fascista nel senso assoluto dell'espressione [...] Dante è poeta e la Commedia è poema sacro, veicolo di verità divine e sforzo supremo il più alto forse che sia stato mai compiuto [...]', p. 310. De Giorgio then goes on to explain that it is the Comedy that which unites Rome to the old and the new. As such, the Comedy is truly universal.

⁴³⁷ Alessandro Giuli, in *Esoterismo e fascismo: storia, interpretazioni, documenti*, ed. by Gianfranco De Turreis (Roma: Edizioni Mediterranee, 2006), p. 51.

due to its relative social stability, began itself experiencing some of those new trends that were swiping the nearby continent. Thus, Britain proved to be not as immune to Fascism as previously thought.⁴³⁸

4.i COGNITIVE MAP

From a historical and sociological point of view, Fascism can be said to be firstly a belief. In a speech given in Naples in 1922 Mussolini defined it as a myth. He stated:

Noi abbiamo creato il nostro mito. Il mito è una fede, è una passione. Non è necessario che sia una realtà. È una realtà nel fatto che è un pungolo, che è una speranza, che è fede, che è coraggio. Il nostro mito è la Nazione, il nostro mito è la grandezza della Nazione! E a questo mito, a questa grandezza, che noi vogliamo tradurre in una realtà completa, noi subordiniamo tutto il resto.⁴³⁹

The Fascists argued that the State transcended any specific social conflict. Their aim was to bring all social classes under a common umbrella of the common good, thus promoting the political over the personal. This was to be achieved through the silencing of any political opposition that could express aversion, or opposition, to the aims set by Fascism for its realisation. In pragmatic terms, this equated to restricting the freedom of speech. During the Regime phase, opposition, both political and personal, to Fascism was outlawed, and penalties established for those who did not play by the fascist set rules. Of course, the Regime also sought to prevent future opposition and established a complex apparatus for the indoctrination

⁴³⁸ For an account on National movements in Britain at the turn of the nineteenth century, see: Geoffrey R. Searle, *The Revolt from the Right in Edwardian Britain*, in Paul Kennedy and Anthony Nicholls (eds.), *Nationalist and Racialist Movements in Britain and Germany before 1914* (London: Macmillan, 1981), pp. 21-39. For an account on Edwardian Britain, see: James B. Priestley, *The Edwardians* (London: Heinemann, 1970).

⁴³⁹ 'Noi abbiamo creato il nostro mito. Il mito è una fede, è una passione. Non è necessario che sia una realtà. È una realtà nel fatto che è un pungolo, che è una speranza, che è fede, che è coraggio. Il nostro mito è la Nazione, il nostro mito è la grandezza della Nazione! E a questo mito, a questa grandezza, che noi vogliamo tradurre in una realtà completa, noi subordiniamo tutto il resto.' Mussolini, *Scritti e Discorsi di Benito Mussolini*, vol. 2, op. cit., p. 345, "Discorso di Napoli", speech at the San Carlo Royal Theatre at Naples, 24 October 1922. Also quoted in English in Herman Finer, *Mussolini's Italy* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1935), p. 218, quoted in *Main Currents of Western Thought*, ed. by Franklin Le Van Baumer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), p. 748:

of the youth, in particular, and the rest of the population in general. The intervention of the Fascist State in personal, social, or economic matters was heavy-handed and centred, once again, on the belief that the State is at the heart of a nation, and it alone can accomplish all that the individual is interdicted from or incapable to.

Thus, a Fascist State could not tolerate differences but firmly promote unity on all planes, that which Thompson (1991) called political “conservatism”.⁴⁴⁰ The people and the population in a Fascist State stood on two planes that had to coincide so to eliminate all that did not lead to the permanent establishment of a homogeneous society. The Italian Fascist State promoted cultural, linguistic, physical, or social characteristics that would come to identify their nation with their State, thus giving birth to a nation-state superior to other nations, in their view, in so far as some or all of its attributes were superior to those of other nations.

Violence, as seen, continued to be the drug of choice especially during the Movement phase and then the early years of the Regime. Coercion, being the call of populist *squadristo* (the paramilitary institution to which the *squadristi* belonged) with its “grassroots” origins, would operate on the side of institutionalised police forces. What expressed above, except for a distinction between the Movement and the Regime, is skilfully epitomised by Mann (2004), ‘Fascism is the pursuit of a transcendent and cleansing nation-statism through paramilitarism.’⁴⁴¹

This obsessive behaviour in search for purity, as expressed by Paxton (2004), lead Fascism out of the restraints of the ethical, or legal, and set it free to develop its maniacal, and somewhat incongruent, pursuit. On one side, there was to be the elimination of cultural and social pollution, while on the other a certain degree of tolerance for those who did not accept this kind of intellectual purge was exercised.⁴⁴²

⁴⁴⁰ Doug Thompson, *State Control in Fascist Italy: Culture and Conformity, 1925-43* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), p. vii.

⁴⁴¹ Michael Mann, *Fascists* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 13.

⁴⁴² For those interested in modern cultural anthropology, see: Mary Douglas’ *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. She makes an interesting introductory reading. It is readily available online at http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/cas/his/schloesser/HS041-042/fall/w04/resources/DOUGLAS_Purity-Danger.pdf [Last accessed: 20 February 2014]. For Robert Paxton, see: Paxton, op. cit., here p. 218. Also, both Mann and Paxton, albeit quite accurate for certain aspects that define Fascism, are not without criticism, at least from those with a more sceptical cast of mind. For example, the Australian scholar Bosworth (2006) points out that on Paxton’s account, the Italian Fascist Regime, once it came to power, did not set out to destroy point blank the legal structure of the

This notwithstanding, many in Italy gradually became increasingly inclined to, at least, support the idea of Fascism, albeit some perhaps not able, or simply unwilling, to fully understand what Fascism was. The distinguished British writer, George Orwell, captured this uncertainty and once said: 'it will be seen that, as used, the word "Fascism" is almost entirely meaningless.'⁴⁴³

However, George Orwell was not the only Englishman who followed Italian events in an attempt to grasp what Fascism was. The British establishment too, in fact, firstly pursued an ambivalent policy toward the Italian Liberal regime, to then share some of the fascist disdain for the corrupted political elites of that era. Once again, the Comedy, or rather its use in both fascist Italy and Liberal Britain reflected this ambivalence.⁴⁴⁴

country. In fact, the court system that it had inherited from Liberal Italy was left largely intact. As for the Catholic Church, the Fascists were more accommodating than other regimes had been, or actually, still might be. As for Mann, Bosworth (2006) appears equally somewhat critical. The latter disagrees with the notion that Italian Fascism "killed democracy". In the light of this, Bosworth (2006) considers these measures hardly indicative of a State 'without ethical or legal restraints.' He observes that in order for Fascism to kill democracy, this should have been alive in the first place. In other words, democracy should have already been somewhat exercised in pre-fascist Liberal Italy, which in his opinion, it was not. Cf. Richard J.B. Bosworth, *Mussolini's Italy: Life Under the Fascist Dictatorship, 1915-1945* (London: Penguin Press, 2006). Furthermore, as a brief disquisition, it should be noted that some, like Laqueur (1999), argued that in order for Fascism to take root and flourish one needs two preconditions: a country with a weak democracy, such as Liberal Italy was, and a strong nationalist movement, such as the one the Fascist Movement so vehemently promoted. Cf. Walter Laqueur, *Fascism Past Present Future* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 16. He argues that a strong sense of nationalism acts as a magnet for those who already have some sort of incline for Fascism's ultranationalist goals. Furthermore, for Laqueur (1999), a "weak democracy" can mean two things: incompetence and unresponsiveness. For Laqueur, if both these tenets are present, Fascism might then have a chance to flourish. In other words, these represent some ideal conditions, some fertile ground upon which to root, but not necessarily an indication of Fascism itself. Unable, or unwilling, to perform as a democracy, a weak democracy alienates its citizens who progressively become increasingly disenchanted with it and are thus unwilling to fight for its preservation therefore accepting the possibility of the rule of a different regime. However, a weak democracy might also be a way to refer to a young democracy, as one that is simply still establishing its conceptual basis. Walter Laqueur, op. cit. *Fascism Past Present Future*, p. 16. Fascism, or indeed another predatory regime, would thus find it easier, in relative terms, to debase the weak system and establish itself in its place. However, these preconditions are not in themselves proof of dictatorial tendencies. In the specific case of Italian Fascism, these conditions can be said to best befit the political and social situation of post-World War Italy. In fact, at the eve of the Treaty of Versailles, national resentment in Italy (and Germany) was strong. For an account of post-World War I Italy, see: John M. Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Howe, Inc. 1920) Library of Economics and Liberty <http://www.econlib.org/library/YPDBooks/Keynes/kynsCP6.html> [Last accessed: 03 March 2014]. Many in Italy saw, or at least perceived, their national pride as having been humiliated. In Italy, there were those who felt that their country had not been awarded the territorial gains it had fought for. Cf. Francis L. Carsten, *The Rise of Fascism*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), p. 49. Thus, the Fascist (and later the Nazi in Germany) party became an appealing choice for some because of their drumming national propaganda that heralded the restoration of a strong nation able to do its citizens justice and regain that sense of pride perceived, or made to be perceived, by many as lost at the negotiations' table. It is worth remembering that nationalism, especially that expressed through the myth of ancient Rome, was one of the points of contact between Italian Fascism and the Comedy and, therefore, central to the argument of a relationship between these two agents. It also worth mentioning again that Italy, at that time, was undergoing profound social and ideological upheavals. The relatively young, and weak, Italian democratic traditions, and the country's inefficient and corrupt parliamentary system, proved unable, or perhaps unwilling, to deal with the incoming post-World War One economic crises and the worrying rise in unemployment. Cf. Carsten, op. cit., p. 54.

⁴⁴³ George Orwell, *What is Fascism?* (First published in London: Tribune, 1944). Reprinted: 'The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell' (1968).

⁴⁴⁴ See chapter IV.

This notwithstanding, Bosworth (2006) does not resist the temptation to succumb, or perhaps submit, to a succinct definition of Fascism. In other words, he tries to define a working model with which encapsulate Fascism.⁴⁴⁵

However, a definition of Fascism of some sort is still needed for it offers one of the points of reference against which to gauge the use of the Comedy in both the Movement and Regime phases. Thus, I would personally agree with Bosworth, at least up to a certain point, that the more sophisticated a system is, albeit if only just intended as a definition, the lesser capable it becomes to sustain variants to its core hypothesis. However, Bosworth's argument should be further discussed elsewhere as it may become a sort of a *cum hoc ergo propter hoc*, and as such not satisfactory for those whose main intention is the study of Fascism. Briefly here, Bosworth asserts that because two events - the definition of fascism now too elaborate, and Mussolini informing Franco that he should aim at establishing an "authoritarian", "social" and "popular" Regime - may be sufficient to define Fascism.

However, those who were closest to Mussolini may contradict such claim. In fact, despite what the *Duce* might have told the *Caudillo de España* (the Leader of Spain), as Franco was also frequently referred to in state and official documents, the prominent fascist philosopher Giovanni Gentile in his attempt to encapsulate Fascism stated: 'now to understand the distinctive essence of Fascism, nothing is more instructive than a comparison of it with the point of view of Mazzini to which I have so often referred...'.⁴⁴⁶ A comparison with Mazzini means having to deal with the whole of the *Risorgimento*, and thus, contrary to what Bosworth seems to suggest, it would offer a solving formula the terms of which are considerably more elaborated than those proposed by the scholar.

Gentile was not alone in quoting and referring to Mazzini and the *Risorgimento* when proposing his definition of Fascism. Alfredo Rocco, the

⁴⁴⁵ Bosworth, op. cit., p. 564, states: '...it might be argued that the quest for definition of fascism has become absurdly laboured. Why opt for a long list of factors or paragraph of rococo ornateness when Mussolini, on a number of occasions, informed people he regarded as converted to his cause that Fascism was a simple matter? All that was needed was a single party, a *dopolavoro* ["after work", a social leisure time organization], and, he did not have to add, a *Duce* (with a *Bocchini* to repress dissent) and a will to exclude the foe (somehow defined). To be still more succinct, as Mussolini told Franco in October 1936, what the Spaniard should aim at was a regime that was simultaneously 'authoritarian', 'social', and 'popular'. That amalgam, the *Duce* advised, was the basis of universal fascism.'

⁴⁴⁶ Giovanni Gentile, 'The Philosophic Basis of Fascism', in *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 6, no. 2 (Jan., 1928), pp. 290-304, p. 299.

Neapolitan jurist cited earlier, one of the main architects of the Fascist State, with his philosophy of history and his principles of organisation and individuality, affirmed that Fascism was a 'strictly Italian phenomenon' and it was firmly rooted in the *Risorgimento*.⁴⁴⁷ According to him, it is during the *Risorgimento* that Italy was able to raise to an age of organisation thanks to her ability of exploit the liberal and democratic ideas of that era. Liberal Italy had then lost this principle of organisation only to regain it with the fascist revolution that advocated a comeback to authoritarian and hierarchical structures, especially those, albeit not exclusively, based on the ancient Roman model.⁴⁴⁸

Thus, as so far seen, it is not easy to describe Fascism and encapsulate its essence in a satisfactory whole encompassing definition that would serve as a model. From Eatwell (1992), to De Felice (1975), who argued for a formula that would see Italian Fascism first as a Movement and then a Regime with the related issues of ideology and support, to Bosworth (2006) who prefers to draw an image of an Italian Fascism reluctant to completely break away from its liberal predecessor, the picture that emerges seems at best fluid and at worst murky and subjective.

Therefore, the task of identifying the points of contact between the Italian Fascist Movement and then Regime of the 1920s and 1930s, and the Comedy, somewhat reflects this difficulty. Different people interpreted Dante and his Comedy differently. As a sort of specular image of the disagreement that characterises the sources when it comes to defining Fascism, the Comedy in general, and in particular in its relationship with Fascism, has attracted different and differing interests. Ascoli, in fact, states: 'no author of a literary work in the western tradition had solicited more critical attention and learned commentary than the Dante Alighieri of the Divina Commedia.'⁴⁴⁹

On the one hand stand those who belong to a category of fascist exponents who tend to express themselves with certain rawness as in the example of the

⁴⁴⁷ Alfredo Rocco, in a conference by the title: 'La dottrina politica del fascismo', in Perugia 30 August 1925. The full text can be found in Renzo De Felice, *Autobiografia del fascismo: antologia di testi fascisti, 1919-1945*, pp. 230-247 (Bergamo: Minerva Italica, 1978).

⁴⁴⁸ Cf. Giulia Simone, *Il Guardasigilli del regime. L'itinerario politico e culturale di Alfredo Rocco* (Milano: Franco Angeli Edizioni, 2012).

⁴⁴⁹ Albert R. Ascoli, 'Dante's rhetoric of authority in *Convivio* and *De vulgari eloquentia*', in *The Cambridge Companion to: Dante* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 45.

obscure party official quoted earlier, Pietro Iacopini, who in a not too hieratic style, perhaps even straightforward boldly overweening, stated: 'che Dante sia Fascista lo dimostrano tutte le sue opere.'⁴⁵⁰ Having claimed that all of Dante's work was clearly fascist, as also profiled earlier, he went on declaring that it is the Comedy above all that shows how Dante possessed a strong sense of nationhood and deep love for the Italian fatherland.⁴⁵¹

Another secondary figure of the Fascist Regime, Eliseo Strada, perhaps more humbly than Iacopini in that he recognised that there were those who were more educated than him, was nonetheless quick to show bitter disdain for all men of letters. He believed that ultimately, from their aloofness, they were unable to grasp what Dante really stood for and they failed to recognise the obvious, according to him, true nature of the Comedy, which is a poem 'National' in essence.⁴⁵² Eliseo Stada, in fact, affirmed: 'noi, senza essere dotti del pari, concludiamo invece che a certi idioti dovrebbe essere severamente proibito di avere per le mani la Divina Commedia.'⁴⁵³

On the other hand, stand those intellectuals who were more orthodox, or refined, so to speak. They also argued that the Fascist Regime was indebted to Dante and his Comedy. However, whenever this happened, it did not tend to involve traditional Dante scholars, as they remained mostly neutral, but more writers or journalist of a certain stand. One example of this could be the somewhat iconic Leo Longanesi. The latter was an eclectic figure on the Italian cultural scene. He was the one who created the well-known apophthegm: 'Mussolini ha sempre ragione.'⁴⁵⁴

⁴⁵⁰ Iacopini, op. cit., p.1.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid.

⁴⁵² Cf. Albertini, op. cit., p. 125.

⁴⁵³ Eliseo Strada, *Dante Alighieri e l'Italia imperiale* (Milano: Navarrini, 1927), p. 26. As also noted elsewhere, especially in the chapter dedicated to the *Risorgimento*, Italian Fascism had an illustrious predecessor in the XIX century movement that eventually led to the unification of Italy. For example in: Antonio Cavagna Sangiuliani, conte di Gualdana, *Il Fiorentino Istruito nelle cose della sua Patria. Calendario* (Firenze: G. Benelli [etc.], 1844-1854), p. n.114, the book cites Dante's attachment to the fatherland referencing to *Pd XVI* (136-138) 'La casa di che nacque il vostro fieto/per lo giusto disdegno che v'ha morti/e puose fine al vostro viver lieto'. *Il Fiorentino Istruito* also adds that the Comedy is by far the poem that best describes he who wishes to be Italian: 'Le sue tre cantiche Inferno, Purgatorio e Paradiso, le quali intitolò Commedia, lo costituiscono il maggior poeta d' Italia, e non sono lontano dall' affermare quel che altri disse e ripeté 'di non trovarsi verun' altro poema nel mondo che possa alla Commedia di Dante paragonarsi' ed affine di renderli tal giustizia, di studiarlo e ben intenderla fa d'uopo, riportarsi a quei tempi in cui fu scritto ed essere italiano per non invidiarlo', p. 86. It is interesting to note that it then goes on citing Dante 54 times (in total) while it only cites the word patria, for which it presumably was created, 49 times.

⁴⁵⁴ Cf. *La sabbia e il marmo: la Toscana di Mario Tobino*, ed. by Giulio Ferroni (Roma: Donzelli Editore, 2012), p. 80.

Longanesi also founded the lettered weekly magazine *L'Italiano* that together with Mino Maccari's *Il Selvaggio*, and Curzio Malaparte's *L'Arcitaliano*, were part of a literary and cultural movement, albeit rival, called *Strapaese* and *Stracittà*.⁴⁵⁵ In the first few lines of the first program of the magazine, *Programma di italianità*, signed by the editor Cassini, in 1926 during the Movement phase, or rather towards its end, the name of Dante is used with a clear pro-nationalist flair: 'L'Italia ha il sole, e col sole, non si può concepire che la Chiesa, il classicismo, Dante, l'entusiasmo, l'armonia, la salute filosofica, il fascismo, l'antidemocrazia, Mussolini.'⁴⁵⁶

It would be impossible to quote the many who expressed themselves in favour of Dante's Comedy in the brief space of this study. Therefore, this thesis chose to use a comment by the writer and journalist Ugo Ojetti to exemplify the tone common at that time. The latter states: 'avrei gran voglia di dire che, per onorare questi seicento anni dalla morte del Poeta, niente s'è fatto o almeno si è veduto che valga quest'opera, il piccolo principio di quest'opera grande.'⁴⁵⁷

⁴⁵⁵ See chapter IV for a more detailed analysis of *Strapaese* and *Stracittà*.

⁴⁵⁶ Gherardo Casini, 'Programma di italianità', in *L'italiano*, vol. 1, no. 1 (14 January 1926), p. 2.

⁴⁵⁷ Ugo Ojetti, in Salvatore Gotta, 'La civiltà fascista a Dante Alighieri: lettera aperta al podestà d'Italia', in *Rivista mensile municipale* [Torino] vol. 8, n. 4 (Apr. 1928), pp. 177-178, p. 177, mentions several well established authors and poets: Leonardo Bistolfi, Giacomo Boni, Antonio Cippico, Filippo Crispolti, Gabriele D'Annunzio, Tommaso Gallarati Scotti, Ugo Ojetti, Isidoro Del Lungo, Pompeo Molmenti, Francesco Pastonchi, Corrado Ricci, and Adolfo Venturi who were "judges", using his own words, for the inauguration of the exhibition of the first *Imagini dantesche* by Amos Nattini for His Majesty the King in Tor degli Anguillara. To offer a fully comprehensive list of all those who named Dante in relation to Fascism would represent an arduous task and one which does not belong to this current study. What follows here is a representative sample, which may function as an invitation to further reading. See, for example: Giacomo Franchi, *Dante e l'Italia fascista*, Conference pronounced in the Municipal Theatre 14 November 1926, year 4, in Teramo at the invitation of the Committee of the Dante Alighieri Society (Teramo: G. Fabbri, 1927). Aldo Vallone has studied in depth the swinging fortunes of Dante and the Comedy throughout its long history. See: Aldo Vallone, *Storia della critica dantesca dal XIV al XX secolo*, I-II (Milano: Vallardi, 1981); and also: id., 'Bibliografia dantesca, 1940-46', in *Antico e nuovo*, vol. III (1947), pp. 109-116; id., *Gli studi danteschi dal 1940 al 1949* (Firenze: Olschki, 1950); id., *La critica dantesca contemporanea* (Pisa: Nistri-Lischi, [1953] (1957)); id., *La critica dantesca dell'Ottocento* (Firenze: Olschki, [1958] (1975)); id., *La critica dantesca nel Settecento e altri saggi danteschi* (Firenze: Olschki, 1961); id., *Aspetti dell'esegesi dantesca nel Settecento attraverso testi inediti* (Lecce: Milella, 1966) (it also reprints the essays 'Trifone Gabriele e Bernardino Daniello dinanzi a Dante' (1962); id., *Un momento della critica dantesca nel tardo Cinquecento*, II, "FL", IX, 1 (1962-63); id., 'Progresso o dicasi "processo" della "Disputa sopra la Commedia di Dante"', in *Studi danteschi*, vol. 40 (1963), pp. 361-409 (1963); id., *La linea esegetica Benvenuto, Landino, Vellutello* (1966); id., 'Minori aspetti dell'esegesi dantesca nel Settecento attraverso testi inediti', in *Filologia e letteratura XII* (1966), repr. in *Ricerche dantesche* (Lecce: Milella, 1967); id., *Dantismo romagnolo nel secondo Ottocento attraverso testi inediti* (Ravenna: Longo, 1966); id., *Capitoli pascoliano-danteschi con inediti* (Ravenna: Longo, 1967); id., *L'interpretazione di Dante nel Cinquecento* (Firenze: Olschki, 1969); id., 'Il tema Dante nel XIV secolo', in *Annali della Facoltà di Lettere dell'Università di Napoli*, vol. V (1974-75), pp. 109-121; id., 'Guido da Pisa nella critica dantesca del Trecento', in *Critica letteraria*, III (1975) pp. 435-469; id., 'Buti nella critica dantesca del Trecento', in *Accademie e biblioteche d'Italia*, XLV (1977), pp. 428-437; id., 'Coluccio Salutati e l'umanesimo fiorentino dinanzi a Dante', in *Zeitschrift für romanisches Philologie*, XCIV (1978), pp. 69-82; id., *Problemi e profili del dantismo otto-novecentesco* (Napoli: Liguori, 1985) (repr. the essays on 'Studi di Dante in Puglia' (1966); id., *De Sanctis e Dante* (1983); id., *Croce e Dante* (1985). See also: Carlo Dionisotti, 'Varia fortuna di Dante', in *Geografia e storia della letteratura italiana* (Torino:

Albertini (1996) agrees that a great many affirmed scholars paid homage to both Fascism and Dante. The former maintained that among all the poets to whom the Fascist Regime accorded its favour, it was Dante he who received the most attention. This argument is reflected in what Gotta, who wrote, as also seen later, the words of the official fascist anthem *Giovinezza*, said about Dante, 'Il Fascismo, che è azione e conquista e considera [Dante] come il suo Poeta profetico.'⁴⁵⁸

The reception of Dante, as also briefly mentioned in the Introduction, varied across the centuries. From the famous Cristoforo Landini's commentary of 1482 that was illustrated by Sandro Botticelli (see fig. 5), to the period of classism that was largely sceptical of the Florentine poet. In 1783, Antoine de Rivarol published what was to become an important translation of the *Inferno* as it contributed to a shift in attitudes.⁴⁵⁹ In fact, it was with the emergence of the Romantic movement that the fortunes of the Comedy changed. It was they who began a process of re-evaluation of the medieval period that eventually led to the appropriation of Dante and his Comedy by the nationalist movement of the Italian *Risorgimento*.⁴⁶⁰ The Florentine poet received much attention as he was made to become one of the cornerstones in the construction of a united Italian cultural identity thanks also to the works of historians like Jean-Charles-Léonard Simonde de Sismondi, also cited earlier in the Introduction.

Vittorio Alfieri first and then Ugo Foscolo and Giuseppe Mazzini began a process for which Dante was been made into one of the patriots who were striving for the independence of Italy and her reunification. Foscolo proclaimed: 'Sulla tua urna, Padre Dante! ...'⁴⁶¹ thus rendering the Florentine poet the predecessor to all those patriots who like him had been forced into exile and like Dante fought against oppression.

As a reflection of how Dante's perception was changing, thanks also to Foscolo's efforts, a manifesto published in Florence in 1818 eulogised the medieval

Einaudi, 1967); Zygmunt G. Baranski, 'The Power of Influence: Aspects of Dante's Presence in Twentieth-Century Italian Culture', in *Strumenti critici*, vol. 1, no. 3 (Sept. 1986), pp. 343-376.

⁴⁵⁸ Gotta, op. cit., p. 177.

⁴⁵⁹ Jelens O. Krstovic, and Zoran Minderovic, *Classical and Medieval Literature Criticism* (Farmington Hill, Mi: Cengage Gale, 1989), p. 3; see also: Barbi, op. cit.

⁴⁶⁰ Lyttelton 2001, op. cit.

⁴⁶¹ LETTERE A

poet for with his Comedy he created a monument, which would last longer than any other made of marble and bronze.⁴⁶² However, later on, 24 March 1830, those who had been responsible for the manifesto actually managed to erect a monument to Dante. Stefano Ricci designed a cenotaph that was then the source of inspiration for the ill-fated poet Giacomo Leopardi who in 1818 wrote *Sopra il monumento di Dante* and *All'Italia sopra il monumento di Dante*.⁴⁶³

However, it was Mazzini he who was the main *Risorgimento* force behind the construction of the myth of Dante, as amply discussed elsewhere in this thesis. Through his approach to the Florentine poet and his celebrated Comedy, Mazzini accomplished to initiate a discourse on God and man that saw the poetic genius of Dante at his centre. In his essay, *Ai poeti del secolo XIX* of 1832, the Genovese exile wrote: 'L'avvenire è l'UMANITÀ - il mondo individuale - il mondo del medio evo è consunto. Il mondo sociale, l'era moderna è al suo primo sviluppo – e la coscienza di questo mondo occupa il Genio.'⁴⁶⁴ This had, of course, been already expressed, in Boccaccio's thought as seen here earlier.

The aristocratic Cesare Balbo with his Dante as 'il più italiano fra gl'italiani'⁴⁶⁵ and the politically active priest Vincenzo Gioberti with his *Del primato morale e civile degli italiani*⁴⁶⁶ also contributed to the creation of the myth of the Florentine poet as a powerful symbol of the Italian nation to be.

The reception of Dante as an almost sacred figure did not change much immediately after unification if not for the fact that for the first time his name could be openly used to celebrate the coming of being, at long last, of a united nation. The Florentine G. B. Giuliani, a prominent Dante scholar at the time, in his speech at Santa Croce rhetorically proclaimed: 'L'Italia appar già grande, della grandezza del sentimento che si la verifica; e nell'umiliarsi a Dante, esalta sé stessa.'⁴⁶⁷ Authors like Gino Capponi, Giosuè Carducci, Terenzio Mamiani and Niccolò Tommaseo

⁴⁶² Melchiorre Missirini, *Delle memorie di Dante in Firenze e della gratitudine de' fiorentini verso il divino poeta*, 2nd edn (Firenze: Tip. Calasanziana, 1830), p. 47.

⁴⁶³ See: Cristina La Porta, 'History and the poetic vocation in *Sopra il monumento di Dante*', in *Rivista di Studi italiani*, issue 16, no. 2 (Dec. 1998), pp. 359-75.

⁴⁶⁴ Giuseppe Mazzini, 'Ai poeti del secolo XIX', in *Scritti letterari di un italiano vivente*, vol. 2 (Lugano: Tip. della Svizzera italiana, 1847), p. 111.

⁴⁶⁵ Balbo, op. cit., p. 3.

⁴⁶⁶ Vincenzo Gioberti, *Del primato morale e civile degli italiani* (Brussels: Meline, Cans & Co., 1845).

⁴⁶⁷ 'Cronaca Fiorentina', *La Nazione*, 16 May 1865, p. 2.

were included in the volume *Dante e il suo secolo XIV Maggio MDCCCLXV* copies of which were presented to the king of Italy, Victor Emanuel II, Garibaldi and other dignitaries, kings, emperors, generals and so on present at the 1865 Dante's celebrations.⁴⁶⁸

During the Liberal period, Giosuè Carducci, Francesco De Sanctis and Pasquale Villari, of whom I speak elsewhere in this thesis, contributed to the profiling of Dante and his Comedy in a nationalistic key.⁴⁶⁹ For example, Carducci portrayed the Florentine poet as the ultimate symbol of *italianità* in the wider narrative of Italian independence.⁴⁷⁰

Of course, there were also those who held pro-clerical views of Dante. For example, a Neapolitan Jesuit, father Curci, founded a journal dedicated to the study of the Florentine author of the Comedy called *Civiltà Cattolica* where Dante was made to engage in a narrative of endorsement of the Catholic faith.⁴⁷¹

Dante was also used by the irredentist movement which was motivated by the conception that the *Risorgimento* was somewhat incomplete as the 'terre irredente' were still under Austrian rule thus depriving Italy of her right to complete national unity.

The concept of what constituted Italy was fluid and one of the identifying factors that the Italian establishment used in their rhetoric was the canon of the Italian language of which Dante had long been made a champion.⁴⁷² To that effect, in 1889, Salvatore Barzilai, Enrico Tolomei, Giacomo Venezian from the Trentino region founded in Rome the *Società Dante Alighieri*.

After D'Annunzio's expedition in Fiume, Fascism was by then just around the corner and the "mission" of Dante featured strongly in a speech given by who

⁴⁶⁸ Vv. Aa., *Dante e il suo secolo XIV Maggio MDCCCLXV* (Firenze: Cellini, 1865).

⁴⁶⁹ Cf. Alberto Asor Rosa, 'La cultura', in *Storia d'Italia*, vol. 4 *Dall'Unità a oggi*, part 2 (Torino: Einaudi, 1975), pp. 821-1664.

⁴⁷⁰ Cf. Giosuè Carducci, *La Divina Commedia nel commento di Pietro Fraticelli*, 3 vols (Firenze: G. Barbera, 1852).

⁴⁷¹ See, for example, 'Concorso internazionale per il centenario della morte di Dante Alighieri', in *Civiltà Cattolica*, vol. 4 (1914).

⁴⁷² Giovanni Sabbatucci, 'Il problema dell'irredentismo e le origini del movimento nazionalista in Italia', in *Storia Contemporanea* (1970), pp.467–502. P. 469.

was to be the first fascist mayor of Florence, Antonio Garbasso, as the *Corriere della Sera* duly reported.⁴⁷³

Some other “minor” intervention on behalf of lesser-known fascist exponents might be able to best exemplify the relationship that came to be between the late Movement and earlier Italian Fascist Regime and Dante’s Comedy (Albertini, 1996).⁴⁷⁴ According to Albertini, these lesser-known Fascists were those who emphatically demanded an undeniable ideological belonging of Dante, and his Comedy, to the Fascist Regime. They tried to motivate their claims by calling the attention of the reader on those parts of the works of the poet that made clear reference to Rome, Italy and the Fatherland. In other words, they expressively referred to the political aspects of the works of Dante, and they seemed unafraid to exploit them.

Thus, the more orthodox Dante scholars, those who Albertini (1996) calls “higher” critics, and who were, albeit some just in name, aligned with the regime, and whose arguments appeared somewhat neutral, as stated at the beginning of this chapter, are not discussed, if not when needed to critically propound an argument, or offer an occasional example.

Of course, there are those like Scorrano (2001) who feel that in the relationship that the Fascist Regime enjoyed of Dante and his Comedy there is nothing of real relevance and that when there was a point of contact this was largely coincidental or irrelevant.⁴⁷⁵ Scorrano rejects the idea that during the fascist era there was a particular interpretive reading of Dante, there where it appears to be a talk of absorption of the poet and his works into the Regime’s ideological fabric. However, Scorrano’s position could be questioned, and a different interpretive analysis offered. As Albertini (1996) notes, there are distinct fascist approaches that one should consider when looking at how the Movement, and then the Regime, handled the Comedy. Therefore the traditional, or canonical, scholarly position that

⁴⁷³ ‘Le rievocazioni dantesche a Firenze tra il plauso del popolo e alla presenza del re’, *Corriere della Sera*, 18 September 1921, p. 1.

⁴⁷⁴ ‘La lettura di questi testi minori, spesso ripetitivi e scontati... offre un’idea di come la retorica fascista si fosse appropriata dell’opera di Dante dandone un’interpretazione nazionalistica ed imperialistica, quando non fascista tout court.’ Albertini, op. cit., p. 123.

⁴⁷⁵ Scorrano, op. cit.

was largely neutral, should not simply be dismissed as if neutrality in itself were not indicative of a chosen position as Valloni (in Albertini, 1996) seems to be suggesting. He states: 'i dantisti sembravano vivere sotto una campana di vetro che li isola dalla realtà, senza essere sfiorati in qualche misura dalla politica culturale del regime.'⁴⁷⁶

However, what Valloni might really be implying is not just the fact that those who were involved in Dantean studies would isolate themselves from the reality of their time, but that they could do so. Both the Movement and the Regime seemed to have acted in a contradictory way: tolerating, at least as far as Dante and his Comedy are concerned here, those who did not expressly align themselves with the Party's cultural policy, while also supporting and promoting those who instead did.

However, holding such an ambivalent position, in regard to a poet and a poem that had, by then, acquired a considerable amount of notoriety, would seem odd, at best and, in any case, clash with the intentions of the fascist 'revolution' as Cannistraro (1972) defines it. He states: 'the fascist revolution, [...] would promote progress by changing men's ideas and spirit.'⁴⁷⁷ The revolution needed to reshape and reformulate Italian past as one of the earliest theorists of the movement, Camillo Pellizzi, had argued.⁴⁷⁸ Cornelio Di Marzio, president of the Confederation of Professionals and Artists, also maintained that culture must have solid national precedents.⁴⁷⁹ The Comedy would seem to be a befitting candidate with its vast repertoire of political and religious contents. It is thus fair to argue that it is baffling, if nothing else, that it was left to "amateur" scholars to carry out the revolution through which Fascism intended to change the "ideas and spirit" of the nation.

⁴⁷⁶ Albertini, op. cit., p. 122-23.

⁴⁷⁷ Philip V. Cannistraro, 'Mussolini's Cultural Revolution: Fascist or Nationalist?', in *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 7, no. 3/4 (Jul. - Oct., 1972), pp. 115-139; p. 118.

⁴⁷⁸ Cf. Camillo Pellizzi, 'Tradizione e Rivoluzione', in *Gerarchia* (May 1927).

⁴⁷⁹ Di Marzio's article, 'Cultura', 1935, ACS, Carte Di Marzio, I V., b. 24, f. 6. In the famous article, 'Dottrina politica e sociale del fascismo', in the *Enciclopedia Italiana*, XIV (Milan 1932), p. 850, Mussolini asserted that: "nessuna dottrina nacque tutta nuova, lucente, mai vista. Nessuna dottrina può vantare una "originalità" assoluta..."

4.II COGNITIVE MAP: A CRITICAL ISSUE

The relationship that the Fascist Movement and then Regime had with the Comedy, it is reasonable to contend, was not linear or even rational and coherent. In fact, just as the Movement was growing, Mussolini admitted that Fascism owed much to some very prominent writers like Enrico Corradini, Alfredo Oriani, Giosuè Carducci, Filippo T. Marinetti, and Gabriele D'Annunzio. These had, during the years that led to War World I, powerfully promoted what was to become dear to the Fascist Movement and then Regime. These men can hardly be said to be secondary figures, yet they somewhat bequeathed the myth of Rome as well as that of the superiority of the Italic race in the hands of those who saw the need to promote a strong national agenda using, among others, Dante's Comedy. By this, the current study does not mean to say that they were not interested in the Comedy or in ideas of nationalism and the myth of Rome. On the contrary, they produced remarkable works on Dante's masterpiece and a great deal of political ideology based on the tenet of national identity. What this thesis proposes is that, albeit debating issues akin to those of the fascist ideology, like for instance nationalism, they tended to gravitate more toward a kind of orthodox approach to Dante and his Comedy than those other secondary figures mentioned here.⁴⁸⁰ An example could be the case of Giovanni Papini who, albeit in terms that transcend the boundaries of a fair academic disagreement, objected to those Dante scholars in terms that were later dismissed by Ernesto Giacomo Parodi. The latter stated: 'ma finiamola colle logomachie italiane sul metodo storico e sul metodo estetico le quali sono esse stesse un indizio della

⁴⁸⁰ For example, see: Michele Barbi who edited the *Bullettino della Società Dantesca Italiana* (Firenze), and, in 1920, founded another Dante magazine called: *Studi Danteschi*. He also wrote several books on Dante: id., *Studi sul Canzoniere di Dante* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1915); id. 1933, op. cit.; id., *Problemi di critica dantesca prima serie* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1934); id., *Problemi di critica dantesca seconda serie* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1941); id., *Con Dante e coi suoi interpreti* (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1941); Vittorio Bartocetti, *Dante canonista?* (Città di Castello: Tipografia Orfanelli S.Cuore, 1928). Bartocetti is also mentioned several times in Giuseppe De Luca, and Fausto Minelli, *Carteggio*, vol. I (Roma: Ed. di Storia e Letteratura, 1999); Giacomo Bottini, *Breve prologo e postille alla "Divina Commedia" con notizie sulla durata dell'azione* (Firenze: Perrella, 1922); Fernando Cento, *Il pensiero educativo di Dante* (Milano: Giuseppe Morreale, Editore, 1925); Enrico Corradini, *Tre canti danteschi* (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1921); Giovanni Federzoni, *Studi e dipinti Danteschi* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1935); Ernesto Giacomo Parodi, 'Il fiore e il detto d'amore', in the appendix to *Le opere di Dante: testo critico della società dantesca italiana* (Soc. Dantesca Italiana, 1922); Giovanni Papini, Vv.Aa., *La leggenda di Dante. Motti, facezie e tradizioni dei secoli XIV-XIX* (Lanciano: Carabba, 1911); Giuseppe Lando Passerini, *La Vita di Dante (1265-1321)* (Firenze: Vallecchi, 1929), and others.

povertà della nostra cultura, intollerante perché superficiale e di pochi.⁴⁸¹ Papini had previously said:

Quello ch'è più particolare al dantismo, e soprattutto al dantismo italiano, è quella ridicola superbia di essere un segno di grandezza nazionale e una grande officina di alta coltura spirituale. Superbia non del tutto ridicola in quanto superbia, ma in quanto è sproporzionata alla misura delle piccole anime dei professori che si occupano di cose dantesche.⁴⁸²

The debate there developed along planes kindred to a more traditional, so to speak, approach to Dante and his Comedy even if it skirted on the hem of nationalism and Rome, and was expressed in quite brutal terms. Eugen Weber observed that:

Nationalism uses intellectual arguments based on more sophisticated ideas like tradition, history, language, and race; it argues a wider community and a common destiny which are not immediately perceptible but whose traces can be found in the past, whose reality can be demonstrated in the present, and whose implications have to be worked out in the future.⁴⁸³

As such, also those better-known writers, poets, or generally more established academics, could be said to have had a part in the debate that surrounds the creation of myth in the fascist era via the agency of the Comedy. If they did so, however, it seems that it was largely not intended as such, as the words of Papini and Parodi indicate, or those of Alarico Buonaiuti who said about the use of Dante:

⁴⁸¹ Parodi, op. cit., p. 37.

⁴⁸² Giovanni Papini, 'Per Dante e contro i dantisti', in *Il Regno*, 20 October 1905.

⁴⁸³ Eugen Weber, quoted in Matthew Feldman, *Fascism: Fascism and culture* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2004), p. 185. See also: Eugen Weber, *Varieties of Fascism: Doctrines of Revolution in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton NJ: van Nostrand Reinhold, 1964).

Sulle piazze? ai confini della patria? proprio Dante il simbolo umano più acconcio a rappresentare la gloria d'Italia, la entità della patria italiana? Si può rispondere in modo sbrigativo, che ogni segno vive del senso che gli viene convenzionalmente attribuito. Le verghe con l'ascia littoria ebbero un valore diverso per l'Alfieri della Virginia, per i repubblicani della Rivoluzione Francese, per Napoleone e per Benito Mussolini.⁴⁸⁴

According to Bonaiuti, those who look at Dante as a national stated symbol are wrong. So is too for Arturo Pompeati, '[è] un errore storico vedere in D.[ante] l'assertore dell'unità italiana.'⁴⁸⁵

Thus, once again it seems fair to propose a kind of reasonable speculative enquiry, and be puzzled as to why the Comedy and Dante came to be featured considerably more conspicuously in those minor scholars than they actually were among more accredited aligned academics, at least in the terms so far explored here. Equally confounding is the apparent rejection on behalf of the Regime to make full use of the Comedy for the promotion of a range of tenets that would suit fascist ideals. Dante's masterpiece seems to have undergone a genesis that could reflect that of Fascism, but was to it somewhat inversely proportional, as we will see in last part of this chapter.⁴⁸⁶

⁴⁸⁴ Alarico Buonaiuti, *Dante mostrato al popolo* (Milano: F.lli Traves Ed. Tip., 1921), p. 119.

⁴⁸⁵ Arturo Pompeati in Buonaiuti, op. cit., p. 119.

⁴⁸⁶ For example, the famous verse 'il giardin de lo 'mperio' from *Pr* VI-105 of a canto already politically charged was not lost on Goethe who used it to create a stylised and idealised image of Italy as a kind of lucky country where the gardens show how generous the land is especially when compared to the rest of the continent. Goethe asked himself: 'Perché l'Italia viene definita un giardino? La risposta a questa domanda è assai breve: perché in molti luoghi l'aspetto generale, per miglia e miglia, è quello di un giardino. La via usueta per l'Italia è caratterizzata come segue. A entrambi i lati vi sono campi coltivati a cereali, in particolare grano. Su questi campi do cereali si trovano orientati in modo regolare dei viali di cosiddetti pioppi bianchi su cui si aggrappano a loro volta delle viti. Questa vista lascia stupiti gli stranieri e induce in loro un'idea di una grande prosperità. In altri Paesi si può notare un triplice rendimento del terreno solo in giardini egregiamente coltivati. Inoltre, anche il bosco di pioppi rado e regolare presenta la somiglianza con un giardino in quanto, unito con le viti, è paragonabile ad una gran quantità di alberi da frutto. Non vi è dunque da stupirsi se l'Italia viene chiamata "il giardino d'Europa." Elena Agazzi, *Il prisma di Goethe: letteratura di viaggio e scienza nell'età classico-romantica* (Napoli: Guida, 1996), p. 95. Goethe used a bucolic scene to make a political statement on the state of the Nation, so to speak. Gustav Nicolai instead wanted to turn on its head that which had been a fundamentally politically positive image of Italy in Germany, and he too commented on the "garden" that Italy allegedly was. However, this time, the comments were to be negative. For example, he mentioned the sadness of the cypresses and the dull and depressing view of the brown Tuscan countryside made to undermine what Goethe had meant to promote. Cf. Agazzi, op. cit. The *Duce*, in the speech of 18 April 1934 declared: 'Dopo la Roma dei Cesari, dopo quella dei Papi, c'è oggi una Roma, quella fascista, la quale con la simultaneità dell'antico e del moderno si impone all'ammirazione del mondo', and Marseaglia in his speech of 1941 mentions Italy as the 'giardin de lo 'mperio' but the concept seems to have had the same political strength that it did for the poets of the Grand Tour. This is peculiar for a propaganda machine accustomed to glorifying Italy and her achievements irrespective of the means used. One possible explanation lies in the fact that, by now

As Cannistraro notes, Mussolini was quick to seize ideas that strongly promoted nationalism, be it expressed through the exploitation of the myth of Rome, or the argument of Italian racial superiority. He imported them into a still shaping fascist doctrine. In so doing, Mussolini was able not only to exercise a lever on those who were lesser educated but also on a considerable part of Italian intellectuals, albeit in different modes, as seen before. By 1923, the National Party had been all but absorbed into the Fascist Movement, and the sense of *Italianità* was beginning to be a hallmark of Fascism. Marinetti, at the head of the Futurists movement, aided this thrust, and in 1923 presented Mussolini with a Manifesto in defence of *Italianità*. He and the Futurists wanted the Fascist Movement to march along with them in asserting the indisputable, in their view, superiority of the Italian cultural heritage. Fascism, they hoped, would “rejuvenate” Italian intellectual life, by which they meant to bring back vitality to what they considered having been a sclerotic and long-dying system in need of national renovation.⁴⁸⁷

However, between 1922 and 1925, Mussolini was still managing the transition that eventually saw his Movement becoming a Regime. In order to do this, he necessarily had to subordinate his cultural policy to politics.⁴⁸⁸ During a gathering in Bologna, the Congress of Fascist Intellectuals, which was held on 29 - 31 March 1925, many prominent cultural figures made a move and openly supported Mussolini’s government. Many newspapers, and notably the *Il Popolo d’Italia*, having been the first, published the manifesto produced in Bologna. They called it *Manifesto degli intellettuali fascisti* (Manifesto of Fascist Intellectuals). This document was to represent the first ideological consensus expressed by a part of the Italian cultural elite of that time who had joined, or intended to join, the Fascist Regime. It was the

(1934), the Regime felt that it had a firm grip on the country. As such, it no longer needed to be tamed as Dante instead suggests. The image of the country as a horse that must be tamed is the same in this canto (mentioned above) as the one used in *Monarchia* (III, 15) and in *Convivio* (IV, 9). There, Dante also argued that the temporal power had, as one of its most important tasks, that of ensuring compliance with the law. Perhaps it is the long debate about the thorny issue of imperial authority mentioned also in *Pg* XVI and *Pd* VI, XIX, and XX or maybe the Curial corruption that the canto condemns that the Fascists were trying to avoid not to upset the balance achieved with the Catholic Church. However, as Icopini had shown in his book (mentioned in this study) this would have been a relatively easy obstacle to overcome had the Regime had the will to further exploit the Comedy for its own needs.

⁴⁸⁷ Cf. Ezra Pound’s position in Chapter IV.

⁴⁸⁸ Cf. Cannistraro 1972, op. cit.

brainchild of the fascist philosopher Giovanni Gentile, who saw the fascist revolution unfolding along the lines of cooperation between culture and politics.⁴⁸⁹

If however, this gathering of minds had produced a document that was to all effects a declaration of allegiance with Fascism as it endorsed its cultural policy, it had also proved that there was an issue that needed to be contended with. What direction cultural theories should go was yet to be fully addressed by both the Regime and the intellectuals backing it.⁴⁹⁰ During its genesis to power, and then absolute power, the Fascist establishment looked at Dante in general and his Comedy in particular in different ways. These, once again, could be said to reflect, on the one hand, the tolerance showed toward scholars of different ideological tenure, as the Comedy was, as seen here, used in different guises, and on the other the more pragmatic approach to how the Fascist Regime intended to centrally divulge the Comedy. By this, I mean the trajectory that the latter was to have in the classrooms of fascist Italy where the average citizen was being educated. This, in fact, might tell a story of an increasingly confident Regime.

However, before further tracing a synoptic map of Fascism and Comedy, let us spend a few more words on Fascism. The latter can be fair to argue, was mostly an authoritarian regime, which was characterised by the coexistence of a plethora of ideological planes each reflecting the interests, or views, of its different supporting stakeholders. Albeit just loosely, some keywords might help circumscribe Fascism: nationalism, imperialism, patriotism, militarism, intertwining of political and religious rhetoric, unifying causes (generally the identification of a person or a group as a scapegoat), corporative interests, international interests, and others (Paxton, 2005).⁴⁹¹

Imperfect as they might be in detailing, and characterising, what Fascism is, these words, drawn from what so far explored, may help tracing a profile active on

⁴⁸⁹ Cf. 'Manifesto degli intellettuali fascisti', in *Il Popolo d'Italia*, 21 April 1925. A few days later the same Roman newspaper published the list of all those who had signed the Manifesto. Cf. 'Il manifesto degli intellettuali. L'elenco dei principali firmatari', in *Il Popolo d'Italia*, 23 April 1925, p. 3. For a copy of the original manuscript, see: E. Gentile, *Le origini dell'ideologia fascista*, op. cit., pp. 459-466. The 'Fondazione Gentile' in Rome also holds a copy.

⁴⁹⁰ Cf. Cannistraro 1972, op. cit.

⁴⁹¹ 'Fascism was revolutionary in its radically new conceptions of citizenship, of the way individuals participated in the life of the community. It was counterrevolutionary, however, with respect to such traditional projects of the Left as individual liberties, human rights, due process, and international peace.' Paxton, op. cit., p. 147.

different planes of enquiry, on the kind of relationship that existed between Fascism (first as a Movement and then as a Regime) and the Comedy. For example, both Dante's masterpiece and Fascism had a somewhat unyielding unifying cause that served as a theoretical foundation. Both believed that they had, or have (in the case of the Comedy), a providential role to serve, where the *Duce*, Mussolini, was clearly ascribed a mystical if not downright religious as well as a political role, much as the one Dante advocated for himself. So mighty was the cult of the *Duce* that even recently, in January 2013, in the Spiegel, Hans-Jürgen Schlamp wrote an article, translated in Italian for *Spiegel Online* entitled *Il culto di Mussolini in Italia – Ciao Duce*. One of the subheadings reads, 'sei l'unico Dio' in reference to the *Duce*.⁴⁹²

In both systems, the Comedy and Fascism, Imperialism and the advocacy of a political union are strongly promoted. For example, in the former, the three cantos V of *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso* are all linked symmetrically by a political overarching sequential narrative where Dante explains his global vision of a universal power. Mussolini, *il Duce*, in his attempt to bring back imperial prestige, and thus glorify Italy by giving her back her Roman Empire, also used a kind of universal vision that he profiled into a sort of mirrored version of the Ten Commandments.⁴⁹³ In the course of the years, several canons were issued. These were called Decalogues, although some may have in fact eleven points, and imparted brief, sharp, orders, similar in their format to those of Biblical mysticism.⁴⁹⁴

The Comedy is a complex mystical poem the meaning of which is often not found in its immediate literal reading. Its essentially eschatological message requires

⁴⁹² 'Il culto di Mussolini in Italia – Ciao Duce', in *Spiegel Online* <http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/souvenirs-bearing-fascist-dictator-mussolini-popular-in-italy-a-876390.html> [Last accessed: 20 March 2014].

⁴⁹³ Cf. De Giorgio, op. cit.

⁴⁹⁴ Leo Longanesi published a Decalogue in 1926. It was followed by the *Decalogo del Milite Fascista* (1928) then also adopted by Renato Ricci's *Opera Nazionale Balilla*. With the transition from the *Opera Nazionale Balilla* to the *Gioventù italiana del littorio* (Italian Fascist Youth), in 1937 commissioned by Achille Starace also the Decalogue was redrafted and remained in this form until the end of the Regime. However, after Leo Longanesi first published his Decalogue a few others followed and it became a popular type of instrument. Here are some examples: the Secretary of the PNF (Partito Nazionale Fascista) Giovanni Giuriati was published in the journal of the *Gioventù fascista* (the Fascist Youth) in 1931. It aimed at reaching young people and contained references to the Christian faith and to God. Another one was published in the Turin GUF (Gruppo Universitario Fascista) magazine called *Vent'anni*, founded by Guido Pallotta, in October 1932, in honour of a visit that Mussolini paid to the city of Turin. Other examples are by the fascist illustrator Gino Boccasile who depicted one, and Niccolò Giani who inspired by Arnaldo Mussolini published another one in December 1939 in the fascist magazine *Dottrina fascista*. Cf. Tomas Carini, *Niccolò Giani e la scuola di mistica fascista 1930-1943* (Milano: Mursia, 2009); Emilio Gentile, *Il culto del Littorio. La sacralizzazione della politica nell'Italia fascista* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1993). For a contemporary account, see also: Gioacchino Volpe, *Lo sviluppo storico del Fascismo* (Palermo: Sandron, 1928)

an epistemological approach on planes that cannot stop at the philosophical and theological, but extend further, including the political, and not excluding the esoteric, if one would wish to explore some of the overlapping ideologies which occurred at various stages and times between the Comedy and the Fascist Regime (and Movement). Giovanni Gentile, for instance, one of the most revered fascist philosophers, imprinted a firm immanent, or actual, idealism take on the regime. This could appear to uncomfortably sit with Dante's essentially transcendent view of the world. Giovanni Gentile, saw literature as '[un] opera di civiltà' (Sasso, 1998), thus bringing into the narrative of *avant la letter* transmuted symbolism concepts such as moral exemplum and authority, as noted in Sasso.

Giovanni Gentile was a great Dante admirer. He cited the medieval poet and his main poem the Comedy enlisting them as some kind of crucial exegetical example. A reference to this can be found in his *The Theory of Mind as a Pure Act*, which was first published in 1916.⁴⁹⁵ There Dante and the Comedy are used to make a fundamental point of his philosophy of being.⁴⁹⁶ For Gentile faith and reason stand in a dialectic balance at the edge of an abyss.⁴⁹⁷ This abyss, for Gentile, represents the distance that separates human from Divine nature, which however marked does not disdain reason and thus accepts that the spiritual needs that which is rational.⁴⁹⁸

However, if it would seem that the fascist philosopher is attempting to endorse reason and faith, he is, in reality, criticising the position of reason in the Comedy almost accusing Dante of pushing the boundaries well beyond that which

⁴⁹⁵ According to what elaborated during the 40s and 50s by the "Giovanni Gentile Foundation for Philosophical Studies," vol. III of the *Opere Sistematiche* (Systematic Works), after 1916 another six editions of *The Theory of Mind as a Pure Act*, were realised, the last being in 1942. In 1922, it was translated into English and in 1925 into French. The *Teoria generale dello spirito come atto puro* was first published in Florence by the publishing house Sansoni (1916) and then by Casa Editrice Le Lettere. Giovanni Gentile, *Teoria generale dello spirito come atto puro* [1916] (Firenze: Le Lettere, 1998).

⁴⁹⁶ To better explain his take on actualism Giovanni Gentile stated: '...do we not distinguish the Divine Comedy from Dante its author and from ourselves its readers? We do; but then even in making the distinction we know that this Divine Comedy is with us and in us. It is in us despite the distinction; in us in so far as we think it. So that it, the poem, is precisely we who think it.' He further enlisted the help of Dante to make plain his position in regard to the will - 'We should want a second will to judge the first, and a third to judge the second, and still to quote Dante: 'lungi sia [sic] dal becco l'erba.' This is a singular choice as the verse is notoriously obscure in meaning, albeit its collocation within the wider frame of *If XV* might be more directly linked to a discourse on universalism and choice. G. Gentile 1922, op. cit., p. 12, and then p. 272. It is also interesting to note that Gentile only names the great medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas at p. 5, p. 63 and p. 70, but never quotes him and he also never quotes any other poet, other than Dante, in this work.

⁴⁹⁷ Gentile affirms, speaking of Dante, 'Quell'eterno vivere senza speme in disio, è l'espressione più profonda dell'abisso che nel pensiero di medievale divide la ragione e l'uomo e la natura da Dio.' G. Gentile 1965, op. cit., p. 65.

⁴⁹⁸ '[Dante] ha con Tommaso fiducia nella ragione, e non s'abbandona subito coi Francescani all'estasi dell'amore ascetico [...] non si spoglia della ragione per darsi alla fede. La sua teologia non è visione, ma raziocinio...' Iddid., p. 65.

was accepted by Thomas of Aquinas.⁴⁹⁹ Gentile seems to be going to great lengths in his attempt to rescue reason from this apparent ancillary position to which Dante relegates it in his Comedy.⁵⁰⁰ In his *Dante nella storia del pensiero italiano*, Gentile seems to be re-arguing the very foundations of metaphysical thought re-elaborating the distance between object and subject, so central for the Dantean journey of men towards God.

However, returning to *The Theory of Mind as a Pure Act*, as shown in the Preface to the first edition, this book contains the lectures given during the academic year 1915-16 at the University of Pisa, where having succeeded his predecessor Donato Jaja, Gentile taught Theoretical Philosophy at the Faculty of Arts. It is probably the best-known theoretical work of the fascist philosopher. In it, Gentile explores, in an organic presentation, his take on actual idealism with its key developmental issues.

There, Gentile reconsiders Berkeley's subjectivism of and Kant's transcendental ego. The fascist philosopher promotes an argument in which he maintains the actuality of every spiritual fact for which the object is resolved in the subject. The process of knowledge is reduced to the overcoming of otherness, as the "other" is but a moment through which to pass so that thought is resolved in a process of universalisation, thus assuming an ethical dimension.

It follows that the reality of the spirit is a performance. As such Gentile's dialectic of thought into action is exercised both through the criticism of the Aristotelian doctrine of the individual, and through a reform of the Hegelian dialectic. The planes of "reality" sway and the ideal is made real while the real becomes ideal. According to such a view, the individual is not for itself, but it coincides with an actualising universal. The spirit, in fact, while remaining one, is also divided into several in space and time. Thus, whatever takes place within a spatial-temporal frame cannot but perish. True immortality belongs only to the spirit, which continues to actualise itself. Therefore, the "reality" of the individual is not established by the individual himself but rather as the time within which the spirit operates.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid, p. 197.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid, p. 30.

Consequently, the individual has the moral and civil duty to go beyond its own singularity or individual particularity.

Gentile treats the great themes of life: art, history, philosophy, religion, science and so on in accordance with his actual idealism. Thus, the wrong, the passively encoded, the affirmation of particularity are ascribed as being evil. However, as thought is self-creation, it is act in action and, as such, it exceeds all abstract intellectualism. Reality is therefore only that which is thought in action.⁵⁰¹

Thus, the fascist thinker forces to breaking point the boundaries of traditional scholastic philosophy and with the help of Dante's *Monarchia* manages to sway the theological dogmatism of the Comedy towards a station where reason is absolute. For Gentile, Dante

si affranca da ogni sovranaturalismo; e dentro alla forma medievale del suo trattato è lecito scorgere uno spirito nuovo, che è lo spirito dell'umanismo, dell'uomo studiato e spiegato nella natura umana e con la natura umana. La *Monarchia* è il primo atto di ribellione alla trascendenza scolastica.⁵⁰²

Therefore, as reason is independent of revelation and transcended faith, for Virgil is not in need of Beatrice to realise itself. According to Gentile, the emperor is as absolute and independent as the liberated reason the fascist philosopher elaborated.⁵⁰³ In essence, Gentile took Dante's Empire to be his modern Fascist State. From there, it is not difficult to imagine how the centrality of such concept for fascist propaganda, intending to use or abuse Dante's political views, could be distorted to favour specific Regime needs.

Whether Gentile was successful or unsuccessful in reconciling Dante fundamentally transcendent take on the world with his own staunch, whole encompassing actualism is not for this study to determine. What is more relevant is to note that there is yet another significant side to the relationship between Dante's

⁵⁰¹ Cf. Gennaro Sasso, *Le due Italie di Giovanni Gentile* (Bologna: il Mulino, 1998).

⁵⁰² G. Gentile 1965, op. cit., p. 50.

⁵⁰³ 'Tutto è prodotto della ragione, di un Virgilio che non aspetta nessuna Beatrice nel fondo del suo limbo per largire all'uomo i suoi "philosophica documenta.'" Ibid., p. 50.

masterpiece and the Italian political establishment during the 1920s and 1930s. That is to say, the complex interplay between politics and religion that in some ways characterised the twentieth century and that so prominently features in the Comedy too. As Ciampi (2009) argues, the political and religious dimensions in the first part of the last century stood in a somewhat conflictual balance that tried to reconcile a prerogative of precedence over the other that both systems, Catholic Church and Fascist Regime, considered important. This, in a way, accounted for the establishment of a kind of definition for what, or how far, totalitarianism could go.⁵⁰⁴

Achille Ambrogio Damiano Ratti was elected pope in 1922 and took the name of Pius XI. In 1929, he became the first Sovereign pope of the newly created Vatican City thanks to the Lateran treaty that put an end the “*Questione romana*,” which had come to be in 1870 with the Italian invasion and annexation of Rome.⁵⁰⁵ Up until 1927, the pope tried to maintain a friendly attitude towards the Italian authorities, albeit with some difficulties at times.⁵⁰⁶ Even if the treaty had normalised, in some ways, the relationship between the Italian State and the Catholic Church, the latter never ceased to feel uneasy about the progressively more authoritarian or totalitarian tendencies shown by the Fascist Regime. In the encyclical letter *Non abbiamo bisogno* of June 29 1931, promulgated not in Latin but in Italian, Pope Pius XI issued a stern defence of the Italian Catholic Church warning the Fascists not to attempt an attack on such a sacred institution. Pius XI clearly went straight to the core of the issue and declared: ‘[il fascismo è] vera e propria statolatria pagana non meno in pieno contrasto coi diritti naturali della famiglia che coi diritti soprannaturali della Chiesa.’⁵⁰⁷

According to Gian Franco Lami, in the preface to Ciampi (2009), the dichotomy that opposed State and Church was reflected, albeit somewhat contradictorily, between that which polarised poetry and philosophy during the first

⁵⁰⁴ Cf. Op. cit., Ciampi.

⁵⁰⁵ There is a digital version of the Lateran Treaty available online at: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/secretariat_state/archivio/documents/rc_seg-st_19290211_patti-lateranensi_it.html [Last accessed: 02 April 2014]. The text is also accessible in, Francesco Pacelli, *Diario della Conciliazione*, ed. by Michele Maccarrone (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1959).

⁵⁰⁶ Cf. Lentini, op. cit., p. 37. See also: Stella Giordano, *Pio XI. Il papa dei concordati* (Milano: Gribaudi, 2009).

⁵⁰⁷ *Non abbiamo bisogno*, encyclical of Pius XI, 29 June 1931, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, vol. 23 (1931), pp. 285-312, p. 285.

part of the twentieth century. Here the philosopher Adriano Tilgher, and his stand on “old” and “new”, is used as an example of dominant aesthetics in the last century. The issue of Italian superiority and “Italianness” are not only discussed, but also entrusted with a political endorsement that would favour and prefer a certain author to others. Dante with his role as “father” is said to be an iconic figure around which many expressed their opinions, as so far seen.

The complex issue of the relationship between practical versus contemplative sciences should be left to other studies, what is however more relevant here is to note that, as Lami in Ciampi (2009) argues, the artistic and intellectual *avant-garde* in the earlier part of the twentieth century are informed by a similar approach. To this, they apply a historical and existential experience that unfolds on a common plane where aesthetics can be seen to mix with ethics and politics, ‘l’arte [si trasforma] in politica e la politica in arte, [si fa] filosofia alla maniera degli antichi poeti.’⁵⁰⁸

This kind of refusal to consider one field ancillary to another was not lost on Giovanni Gentile. The medievalist Gustavo Vinay is, in fact, certain that Dante operated a sort of “sacralisation” of the Empire, fact this that lends continuity between the two conceptual understandings of earthly and divine power. It is Reason that which manages to balance the two otherwise seemingly irreconcilable stands, as it is Reason that which removes obstacles to faith.⁵⁰⁹

The Empire in Dante thus becomes in itself a cosmological symbol central for the salvation of the single as well as humanity as a whole. The considerable implications that follow, and the differences between Augustinian Platonism and Aristotelian Thomism, have been more than amply discussed elsewhere in the literature, as well as those concerning the possible misnomer that a temporal Church would bring.⁵¹⁰ The issue could perhaps be, obviously not resolved, but in some measure summarised in the words of the great American Dante exegete Charles

⁵⁰⁸ Ciampi, op. cit., here at the preface.

⁵⁰⁹ Cf. Gustavo Vinay, *Interpretazione della “Monarchia” di Dante* (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1962).

⁵¹⁰ Among the many possible exegetes who expressed themselves on this matter, here is but a suggestion of a few, as a general reading on the issue rather than an exhaustive list: Ferrante, op. cit.; see also: John Freccero, *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion* (Cambridge: Harvard U. P., 1986).

Singleton who said: 'the fiction of the Divine Comedy is that it is not a fiction.'⁵¹¹ By which this study means to see what the American scholar affirmed in relation to Dante's Comedy. This is to say that in it, if and when, there are categories, be them classical, political, philosophical or else, and in this case the Empire, these work thanks to an underlying idea that bridges the gap between that which is and that which is over and above. Perhaps the words of Etienne Gilson could further help explain and qualify what here attempted.

Se il genus humanum di Dante è la prima forma nota dell'idea moderna di Umanità, e par proprio che lo sia, si può dire che l'Umanità si è offerta dapprima alla coscienza europea nient'altro che come una copia laicizzata della nozione religiosa di Chiesa.⁵¹²

The role of philosophy, as Gilson maintains, is undeniably central to an argument that promotes earthly virtues in order to achieve the ultimate goal of soul redemption and salvation. The eschatological discourse that Dante promotes passes therefore from a centre that is both real and fictitious.⁵¹³ That brings us back to the concept of ethics that meets politics, which in turn meets religion.

However, it is simply impossible to exhaustively approach, let alone, tackle satisfactorily the issue of Church and Empire in Dante in the brief space that this study allows. Equally arduous would be to endeavour into the subtle, but nonetheless present in the Comedy, subordination of the Emperor to the Pope, which links back to the issue of immanentism versus transcendentalism where some looked at Dante axiologically as a sort of father of modernity, whereas others thought of him as the last bulwark of a fast collapsing medieval world.⁵¹⁴ Here it

⁵¹¹ Charles S. Singleton, *Dante Studies I: Elements of Structure* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1954), p. 62.

⁵¹² Etienne Gilson, *Dante e la filosofia* (Milano: Mondadori, 1987).

⁵¹³ Cf. *Monarchia*, III, 15.

⁵¹⁴ For an overview, see: Anthony James Gregor, *Giovanni Gentile: Philosopher Of Fascism* (N.J: Transaction Publishers 2004 first published in 2001). For the position held by Giovanni Gentile in regards to immanentism at that time, see: Amato Masnovo, 'Il professor Gentile e il Tomismo italiano', in *Rivista di filosofia neoscolastica*, vol. 4 (Roma, 1912); Francesco Olgiati, 'Analisi d'opere, Gentile e Croce', in *Rivista di filosofia neoscolastica* (Roma, 1913), pp. 641-645; Luigi Borriello, 'La pedagogia di G. Gentile', in *Rivista di filosofia neoscolastica* (Roma, 1916); Luigi Di Rosa, 'L'idealismo contemporaneo da Kant a Gentile', in *Rivista di filosofia neoscolastica* (Roma, 1918); id., 'Gentile e la Teoria generale dello spirito

should suffice to accept that Fascism, or some representatives of it, seized the opportunity to delve into the mythology of Empire that so prominently featured in Dante leaving to other scholars of Dante's Comedy the issue of the interpretation of man in Dante's masterpiece and his being an ethical-political or ethical-religious thinker.⁵¹⁵

come Atto Puro', in *Rivista di filosofia neoscolastica* (Roma, 1918); Fr. Mariano Cordovani, Idealismo e rivelazione, in *Rivista di filosofia neoscolastica* (Roma, 1922); id., 'Il pensiero cristiano nella filosofia dello spirito', in *Rivista di filosofia neoscolastica* (Roma, 1923); Raimondo Calcaterra, 'Una critica dell'idealismo di Gentile', in *Rivista di filosofia neoscolastica* (Roma, 1923); Amato Masnovo, 'La teoria generale dello Spirito come Atto Puro', in *Rivista di filosofia neoscolastica* (Roma, 1923). Nicola Abbagnano, *Introduzione all'esistenzialismo* (Milano: Bompiani, 1942); Giovanni Gentile, *La filosofia di Marx* (1899), ed. by Vito A. Bellezza (Firenze: Sansoni, 1974); id., 'Il concetto attualistico di Dio', in *Annali dell'Università di Lecce*, vol. I (Lecce: Milella, 1965); id., *L'esistenzialismo positivo di Giovanni Gentile* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1954); id., *La riforma spaventiano della dialettica hegeliana gentiliana* (Napoli: Morano, 1970); Fortunato Brancaleone, 'Ontologismo, Attualismo e dialettica hegeliana', in *Archivio di Filosofia* (1939); Pantaleo Carabellese, 'La nuova critica e il suo principio', (Roma: Istituto di studi filosofici, 1940), 22 pp., in *Archivio di filosofia*, year X, issue II (1940); id., 'Cattolicità dell'Attualismo', in *Giornale critico della filosofia italiana*, vols 1-2 (1947), now, in Vv.Aa., *Giovanni Gentile. La vita e il pensiero*, ed. by Fr. Di Giovanni, vol. XII, pp. 127-144 (Firenze: Sansoni, 1967); id., *L'idealismo italiano* (Napoli: Loffredo, 1938); Armando Carlini, *Cattolicesimo e pensiero moderno* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1953); id., *Studi gentiliani* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1958); Enrico Castelli, 'Esistenzialismo cristiano?' in *Esistenzialismo*, notes from the *Archivio di filosofia* (1946); Fr. Emilio Chiochetti, *La filosofia di Giovanni Gentile* (Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 1922); Benedetto Croce, 'Perché non possiamo non dirci cristiani', in *La Critica* (20 November 1942), and in *Discorsi di varia filosofia*, vol. I (Bari: Laterza, 1945); Vincenzo Gioberti, *Riforma cattolica*, ed. by G.B. Crivelli, introd. of G. Gentile (Firenze: Vallecchi, 1924); Augusto Guzzo, *Idealismo e cristianesimo* (Napoli: Loffredo, 1936); id., 'L'idealismo non hegeliano', in *La filosofia contemporanea in Italia* (Asti: Arethusa, 1958); Galvano Della Volpe, 'Il concetto di contraddizione e il concetto di sostanza prima in Aristotele', in *Rendiconto delle sessioni dell'Accademia delle scienze dell'Istituto di Bologna* (Accademia delle scienze dell'Istituto di Bologna Accademia delle scienze dell'Istituto di Bologna, 1938); Enzo Paci, 'Una metafisica dell'individualità a priori del pensiero', in *Logos* (1938), issue I; Vincenzo La Via, *L'idealismo attuale di Giovanni Gentile. Saggio di esposizione sistematica* (Trani: Vecchi, 1925); id., 'L'Attualismo come principio dell'autocritica dell'idealismo', in *Teoresi*, no. 20 (1965), pp. 29-52; Cesare Luporini, *Critica e metafisica nelle filosofia kantiana* (Roma: Bardi, 1935); id., 'Idealismo e immanentismo', in *Giornale critico della filosofia italiana* (1940), issue I; and following argument with Bontadini, *ibid.* (1942), issue II; Fausto Materno Bongianini, 'Unità e relazione', *Agostino*, in *L'attualità dei filosofi classici* (Milano: Bocca, 1942); Francesco Mercadante, 'Ontologismo critico e assoluto realismo nei rispettivi fondamenti metafisici', in *Teoresi*, no. 1 (1946), pp. 85-100; Pietro Mignosi, *L'idealismo* (Milano: Athena, 1927); Michele Federico Sciacca (MA Raschini) G. Natoli, 'The actualism of G. Gentile and its critique', in *Giornale di Metafisica: Rivista Bimestrale di Filosofia* 31 vol. 4 (1976), p. 772; Giuseppe B. Saitta, *La libertà umana e l'esistenza* (Firenze: Sansoni 1940); Ugo Spirito, *L'idealismo italiano e i suoi critici* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1930); id., *L'attualismo di Giovanni Gentile e il problematicismo*, in *La filosofia contemporanea in Italia* (Asti: Arethusa, 1958); id., *Giovanni Gentile* (Firenze Sansoni, 1969); Carlo Arata, *Lineamenti di un ontologismo personalistico* (Milano: Marzorati, 1955); id., 'La metafisica della Prima Persona', in *Rivista di filosofia neoscolastica*, LXXXI (Roma, 1989), pp. 181-200; Gustavo Bontadini, *Saggio di una metafisica della esperienza* (Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 1938, 2nd ed. 1979); Benedetto Croce, *Logica come scienza del concetto puro* (Bari: Laterza, 1958); Giovanni Gentile, *Opere filosofiche*, ed. by E. Garin (Milano: Garzanti, 1991); id., 'Teoria generale dello Spirito come atto puro', (1. ed., 1916), in *Opere*, 65 vols (Firenze, Sansoni); id., *Idealismo e cristianizzazione in Italia*, in *Frammenti di filosofia*, cit.; id., 'Le origini della filosofia contemporanea in Italia', in *Storia della filosofia italiana*, ed. by E. Garin, 2 vols (Firenze: Sansoni, 1969), vol. II; id., *Sistema di Logica come teoria del conoscere* (Firenze: Le Lettere, 2003); id., *La Riforma della Dialettica hegeliana* (Firenze: Le Lettere, 2003); id., *Discorsi di Religione* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1969); id., *Rosmini e Gioberti* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1969); id., *Genesi e struttura della società* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1969). For neoclassic studies, see: Vv.Aa., *Giovanni Gentile, La vita e il pensiero*, ed. by Fondazione G. Gentile (Firenze: Sansoni, 1948); Luporini 1993, op. cit., pp. 280-281; Vittorio Sainati, 'Il ritorno dell'identità nel "Sistema di logica" di G. Gentile', in Croce e Gentile un secolo dopo. Saggi, testi inediti e un'appendice bibliografica 1980-1993', in *Giornale critico della filosofia italiana* (Firenze: Le Lettere, 1994); Alberto Caracciolo, 'La religione di G. Gentile', in Vv.Aa., *Giovanni Gentile. La vita e il pensiero*, ed. by P. Di Giovanni, vol. XII (Firenze: Sansoni, 1967); Sasso 1998, op. cit.; Gennaro Sasso, 'Gentile e carabellese sulla potenza e l'atto (a proposito di Rosmini)', in *La potenza e l'atto. Due saggi su Giovanni Gentile* (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1988), pp. 101-132.

⁵¹⁵ For the concept of a providential Roman Empire, see: *Convivio* (IV iv-v), the first two books of *Monachia* and throughout the Comedy. For an example of how the past is idolised in the Comedy, see: *If* VI 77-82, XVI 73-75; *Pg* XIV 97-123, XVI 115-20 e 121-23; *Pd* XV 97-129. For earthly and eternal happiness, see: *Pg* XVI 106-08; *Pd* VI 22-27. For an example of the city political conduct, see: Genoa, *If* XXXIII 151-57; Arezzo, *Pg* XIV 46-48; Pisa, *If* XXXIII 79-90 and *Pg* XIV 52-54; Siena, *If* XXIX 121-39; Pistoia, *If* XXV 10-12; the casertinesi, *Pg* XIV 43-45; Bologna, *If* XVIII 58-63; Faenza and Imola, *If* XXVII

5. The Comedy on a Fascist School Desk

Let us now look at the role of education in relation to the interplay that occurred between Dante's Comedy and the Italian Fascist Movement and Regime. However, this study's enquiry is limited to some specific points of such interconnection, for the constraints of this research do not allow for a more extensive approach. This notwithstanding, it tries to connect theoretical and operational practical dimensions, having taken care not to thrust them into each other. This, in the opinion of who writes, demands integrating different perspectives of reading with respect to the specific issue of the relationship between education, pedagogy, and philosophy, and the space that Gentile occupied in each of these three dimensions with its reflection in schools, universities, cultural institutions, publishing, and so on.

Earlier on, this chapter, albeit briefly, overviewed the genesis of theoretical philosophy in Gentile's vision of Dante. Concerning the former, speaking of the rational and historical basis of Fascism, Gregor (1969) argues:

Lo studio del pensiero di Gentile è di importanza cruciale. Anche se i tentativi di gentiliani di riforma dell'educazione, ad esempio, furono frustrati dal Regime, ed anche ammesso che molti fascisti si opporessero all'identificazione del Fascismo col sistema filosofico gentiliano, le tesi gentiliane riappaiono in continuazione in tutti i

49-51; Ravenna and Cervia, *If* XXVII 40-42; Forlì, *If* XXVII 43-45; Rimini, *If* XXVII 46-48; Cesena, *If* XXVII 52-54; the romagnoli, *If* XXVII 37-39, *Pg* XIV 97-126. For the theory of the two Suns, see: *Pg* XVI 97-114 and *Mn* (III iv e xv). For the denunciation of greed, the 'wolf', providential intervention and salvation of the 'Umile Italia', see: *If* I 49-54, 88-111 and *Mn* I xi 11-19. For the providential election of Rome as the seat of the Empire, see: *If* II 13-33. For the avarice of the popes and condemnation of the Donation of Constantine, see: *If* XIX 90-117, and for the subsequent confusion between the two powers (Church and Empire) that gave rise to the corruption of the Church and the ruin of the world, see: *Pg* XXXII 124-29, *Pd* VI 1-3, XX 55-60, *Mn* III x. For the decadence of the Church and the responsibility it had in fomenting wars among Christians, the story of Guido da Montefeltro, see: *If* XXVII 85-120, and for its speculative correspondent, see: *Pg* III 112-41. For the arbitrary use of excommunication for political purposes by the Church, see: *Pg* III 112-41 and *Pd* XVIII 127-29, and related to it: *If* XXVII 85-120. The, For the very famous execration of the bitter conditions prevailing in an "servant" Italy, and the meeting with Sordello from Goito and the culprit inertia of imperial authority (in particular, that of Albert I of Austria), see: *Pg* VI 76-151. For all the men of the Church and lords of Italy who hindered imperial authority, see: *Cv* IV ix 10 e *Mn* III xv 9. In particular for the condemnation of the city of Florence, see: *If* VI 49-50, 61, 73-75, XV 61-69, 73-78, XVI 73-75, XXVI 1-12; *Pg* XI 112-14, XIV 49-51, XXIII 96, XXIV 79-81; *Pd* IX 127-32. For the issue of the free will of man and the responsibility of civil and social corruption in the weakness of the Empire in the contestation with Marco Lombardo, see: *Pg* XVI 97-114. For the metaphor, which indicated the Papacy in the sun and the Empire in the moon, see: *Ep* V 30 and VI 8.

tentativi ufficiali fascisti di spiegazione dell'azione politica del Regime. Gli argomenti gentiliani si dimostrano essenziali per gli apologeti del Fascismo.⁵¹⁶

By 1923, a year into the beginning of the fascist era, which had started on 31 October 1922, in his role as Minister of Public Education for the government of Benito Mussolini, Gentile had set out to reform the Italian educational system. Before the years 1925-26, the Fascist government launched a campaign aimed at the creation of a newly educated class of citizens. Their goal was to completely reform and reshape the school system. The Comedy featured prominently, but as this chapter will further comment, it is the way in which it slowly declined as a subject in the classrooms of the Kingdom that is telling of how the Movement was actually maturing into a Regime.

In his capacity of Minister of Education, Gentile instituted the "Riforma Gentile" in which he also reformed the study of the Comedy that as Albertini (1996) notes, 'venne esteso in maniera sistematica a tutti gli ordini di scuola superiore esclusa quella professionale.'⁵¹⁷ This is an event in itself telling as it highlights the importance that Dante was to have in the new Italy that was being constructed on school desks. The school in fact, could go there were newspapers and magazines could not. For example, in a letter of Ezra Pound to the editor, journalist, and writer, Giambattista Vicari, the former expressed his belief that in Italy papers and magazines followed a North/South divide, and as such they were unable to unite the country under one common banner, be it Dante's Comedy or else. Pound wrote, 'MANCA [sic] un centralino. Nel sud i lettori non vedono i giornali del nord italia [sic] e qui non vengono i giornali di Roma.'⁵¹⁸

⁵¹⁶ Anthony J. Gregor, *The ideology of fascism: the rationale of totalitarianism* (New York: Free Press, 1969); id., *L'ideologia del fascismo* (Roma: Edizioni del Borghese, 1974); reprint, *L'ideologia del fascismo: Il fondamento razionale del totalitarismo*, ed. by Marco Piraino (Roma: Lulu, 2013), p. 39.

⁵¹⁷ The reform of the educational system came into force by a series of Royal legislative decrees. *Gazzetta Ufficiale del Regno d'Italia* - 04 April 1923 no. 79, Regio decreto no. 1679; 17 August 1923 no. 193, Regio decreto no. 1753; 03 June 1923 no. 129, Regio decreto no. 1054; 08 October 1931 no. 233 revising Regio decreto 30 September 1923, no. 2102; 24 October 1923 no. 250, Regio decreto no. 2185.

⁵¹⁸ Ezra Pound quoted in Domenico Scarpa, 'Poeti, eroi e mascalzoni. Forster, Pound e il linguaggio italiano', in *UNA d'arme, di lingua, d'altare / di memorie, di sangue e di cor*, ed. by Giancarlo Alfano, Andrea Cortelessa, Davide Dalmas, Matteo Di Gesù, Stefano Jossa, and Domenico Scarpa (Palermo: duepunti edizioni, 2013), p. 78.

Thus, by 1923, the whole *Commedia* became an exam subject. Giovanni Gentile largely favoured Dante and his Comedy over all others, as Albertini (1996) also argues. As it was Giovanni Gentile he who influenced more than any other the curriculum at that time, he can be said to be responsible for the way in which Dante's Comedy was made to be perceived by students of all grades in the whole of Italy. There, the theme of *Italianità* featured prominently, much as it had, in similar ways, in Carducci, for example. Dante was studied not only in his role of poet but also on an ideological as well as philosophical plane. The political dimension, of course, also received attention.⁵¹⁹

Dante was not to lose its prominent position, at least in the terms so far explored, until the end of the fascist experience. As stated elsewhere here, the Comedy acted as a specular station in the genesis of Fascism. The Movement and then Regime, as also mentioned before, started to institutionalise Dante and his Comedy, and, as they did so, the Comedy progressively lost its more radical voices and began a process of assimilation into the ideological fabric of Fascism. By 1941, the Ministry of National Education, speaking of Dante, affirmed that the aim of such studies was to:

rievocare e rivivere nel poema sacro di Dante i palpiti dell'anima italiana, che nel travaglio di una età quanto mai tempestosa e battagliera anela a una realtà di potenza e di pace che si ammanti nel Giardino dell'Impero della luce benefica di Cristo e di Cesare, e in questo studio, e fra tanto splendore di lingua e di dottrina, d'arte e di poesia inebriarsi e sentirsi più fieramente italiani con Dante.⁵²⁰

The language here is still imbued with a significant amount of classical fascist rhetoric and features a range of keywords from power, soul, pugnacious, Christ and Empire to art and poetry and national pride, and so on. However, the

⁵¹⁹ Cf. Albertini, op. cit.

⁵²⁰ M. Marseaglia, 'Gli insegnamenti delle singole discipline: Italiano', in *Ministero dell'Educazione Nazionale, Direzione generale dell'ordine superiore classico. Dalla Riforma Gentile alla Carta della Scuola* (Firenze: Vallecchi, 1941), p. 236. Cf. Albertini, op. cit. See also: Giovanni Gentile, *La riforma dell'educazione* (Bari: Laterza, 1920); id., *Educazione e Scuola Laica* (Firenze: Vallecchi Editore, 1921); id., *Discorsi di religione* (Firenze: Vallecchi, 1924); id., *Filosofia dell'arte* (Milano: Treves, 1931); id., *La filosofia dell'arte in compendio, ad uso delle scuole* (Firenze: Brossura Editoriale, 1942).

cruder tones, such as those of Iacopini, or Strada, seem to have, by now, softened into a more accepted view of Dante as simply “naturally” Italian, Roman and, as an assumption, fascist.

As early as 1926, thus, barely a year after Mussolini made the transition to almost absolute power, and the Fascist Movement was by then a Regime, the introduction of a variation to Gentile’s reform by Pietro Fedele moved towards a more clearly nationalistically inspired vision of history promoted by a progressively more fascist school. The latter was intended to aid the consolidation of the Fascist Regime-building. As it was taking shape, the Regime seized control of the general structures of the State and the Fascist Party. Slowly the “fascistation” of man went through stations that were beyond the school doors as, for example, the institution of the *Opera Nazionale Balilla* (O.B.N.).

The O.B.N. resembled, to all effects, a kind of paramilitary structure and a useful instrument with which and where to apply a sort of formative propaganda aimed at the creation of the perfect Fascist.⁵²¹ The historian Renzo De Felice called the years between 1925 and 1929, ‘the years of the organization of the fascist state.’⁵²² They roughly coincide with an apparent institutional diminishing interest in Dante’s Comedy. The study of Dante’s masterpiece was slightly reduced and brought to one full cantic with a remaining, at least, twenty-five cantos from the other two canticas. This, despite the *Duce* great interest in education both as a tool to control the population, and a means to secure to the fascist cause the teaching profession.⁵²³

To that effect, in 1925 Mussolini dissolved all teachers’ organizations (UNM-FNISM) and replaced them with the National Association of Fascists Teachers

⁵²¹ Cf. See: Act 3 April 1926: instituting the *Opera Nazionale Balilla*: the organization for the care and physical and moral education of the youth (*Ente Morale per l’assistenza e l’educazione fisica e morale della gioventù*). From 1928 with two Royal decrees, the Fascist Regime had ordered that all non-fascist organisations would come under the umbrella of the *Ordine Nazionale Balilla* (O.N.B.) Regio decreto, in *Gazzetta Ufficiale del Regno d’Italia*, 9 January 1928, Regio decreto no. 25, and 9 April 1928 Regio decreto no. 696.

⁵²² Cf. De Felice 1995, op. cit.

⁵²³ ‘Il Governo esige che la Scuola si ispiri alle idealità del fascismo, esige che la Scuola non sia, non dico ostile, ma nemmeno estranea al fascismo, esige che la Scuola in tutti i suoi gradi e in tutti i suoi insegnamenti educi la gioventù italiana a comprendere il fascismo, a rinnovarsi nel fascismo a vivere nel clima storico creato dalla rivoluzione fascista.’ Benito Mussolini, Address to the Congress of the *Corporazione fascista della scuola*, December 1925, in Benito Mussolini, *Discorsi* (Milano: Alpes, 1926), pp. 247-248.

(ANIF), in the fascist association for Schools (AFS), under the umbrella of which all sectors of education, from primary school to university, were organised.⁵²⁴

Although it is true to say that the Fascist Regime had intended to create a class of students who could fulfil the obligation of school and also get a practical training where more academic subjects were dropped in favour of vocational ones,⁵²⁵ this still appears to contrast with what others, and Mussolini himself, had said of Dante and his Comedy in relation to Fascism.⁵²⁶ For example, it is worth remembering that those who intended to appeal, with formulas easy to understand, to a formally lesser educated public often associated Mussolini and Dante. Domenico Venturini stated: 'Il Dux, messo di Dio vaticinato da Dante, identificato ai nostri tempi nella personalità del duce magnifico della nuova Italia', where the role of the Italian leader was prophetic both by the word of God and that of Dante.⁵²⁷

Furthermore, in the version of the *Fasci di combattimento* of the tune *Giovinetta* adopted as an official hymn of the Italian National Fascist Party, Regime, and army, Dante and Benito Mussolini are the only two actual people who get a mention. *Giovinetta* became so popular as to be adopted as the unofficial national

⁵²⁴ Jürgen Charnitzky, *Fascismo e scuola. La politica scolastica del regime (1922-1943)* (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1996), pp. 293-303.

⁵²⁵ Cf. Luigi Ambrosoli, 'La scuola secondaria', in *La scuola italiana dall'Unità ai nostri giorni*, ed. by G. Cives (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1990).

⁵²⁶ Speaking of the introduction of a new textbook for primary education instituted by the Act of 7 January 1929, no. 5, Mussolini declared the importance that academic subjects had for the moulding of a new kind of Italian citizen who would be educated from an early age to adhere to the fascist ideal. He stated: 'il libro di testo di Stato, dello Stato fascista, dovrà essere un capolavoro didattico e tecnico; il suo contenuto deve educare gli adolescenti nella nuova atmosfera creata dal fascismo e plasmare loro una coscienza consapevole dei doveri del cittadino fascista e di quello che l'Italia è stata nella storia, nelle lettere, nelle scienze, nelle arti, di quello che essa può diventare in un domani del quale tutti desideriamo essere attori...' Benito Mussolini's speech to the Council of Ministers, 1 November 1928, in Francesca Ferratini Tosi, Gaetano Grassi, and Massimo Legnani, *L'Italia nella seconda guerra mondiale e nella resistenza* (Milano: Istituto nazionale per la storia del movimento di liberazione in Italia Franco Angeli, 1988), p. 384. It must also be noted that the introduction of that textbook was seen as the end of an independent school system with a fair and balanced pedagogical and moral teaching. In a letter dated 15 November 1928, Lombardo Radice wrote to Gentile, 'Proprio in questi giorni è crollata la riforma della scuola elementare voluta da te, con il decreto del libro unico, che svuota quel tentativo nostro di organizzazione della scuola, che pur nominalmente continua a sussistere come cosa tua che rimane... [La riforma] ora è ferita a morte. È inutile attenuare la cosa. È stato l'ultimo colpo dopo tanti altri gravissimi, anche se meno appariscenti...'. Anna Ascenzi, and Roberto Sani, *Il libro per la scuola tra idealismo e fascismo* (Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 2005), p. 3. It is fair to argue that such event could have given *carte blanche* to those who wanted to manipulate Dante for their own means without being seen as undermining or diminishing the reading of the Comedy. These textbooks contained most of the usual fascist rhetoric and among the favourite themes, the love for the Fatherland, the greatness of Rome, and so on, that featured prominently, there was also an appeal to the great heroes of the *Risorgimento*. As seen before, the *Risorgimento* and Dante's Comedy enjoyed that which could be considered as a privileged relationship. For a more in-depth look at these textbooks, see: Oronzina Quercia Tanzarella, *Sillabario e prime letture* (per la prima classe); id., *Il libro della II classe elementare*; Grazia Deledda, *Il libro della III classe elementare*; Angiolo Silvio Novaro, *Il libro della IV classe elementare*; Roberto Forges Davanzati, *Il Balilla Vittorio. Libro della V classe elementare*.

⁵²⁷ Venturini, op. cit., p. 299.

anthem of Italy between 1924 and 1943.⁵²⁸ In Salvatore Gotta's version, there is a clear reference to Dante and his vision, *la vision dell'Alighieri*, where Dante is used to make a point about some territorial claims that concerned the Istrian peninsula.⁵²⁹ What appears clear, once again, is the fact that the only other person who is mentioned along with Mussolini is Dante. *Giovinezza* thus establishes, albeit indirectly, a sort of connection, or bridge, between the two men that could not have been lost on those who sang it.

Moreover, what also seems puzzling is that, despite the fact that by 1929 the Regime had settled the contentious issue with the Catholic Church that was born at the time of the invasion of Rome, and its consequent annexation to the Kingdom of Italy back in 1870, the study of Dante, so praised as we have seen here by the Roman Curia, kept this notwithstanding diminishing in the schools of the Kingdom. The then minister for Education Giuseppe Belluzzo moved to implement, also on an ideological plane, what the Act no. 810 of 27 May 1929, Art. 36, had established, 'l'Italia considera fondamento e coronamento dell'istruzione pubblica l'insegnamento della dottrina cristiana secondo la forma ricevuta dalla tradizione cattolica.'⁵³⁰

This was effectively the end, in many ways, of the original reform started by Giovanni Gentile. Giovanni Giarrizzo, in fact, stated: 'il Concordato segna la vera sconfitta di Gentile e della scuola gentiliana.'⁵³¹ If Gentile had been defeated, the Catholic Church gained considerably by the "fascistation" of the Italian school that started with what became known as the "counterreformation" to Gentile's reformation of the school.⁵³²

⁵²⁸ Nicholas Farrell, *Mussolini: a New Life* (New York: Sterling Publishing Company, 2005), p. 238.

⁵²⁹ Richard J. B. Bosworth, *Italy and the Wider World 1860-1960* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 154.

⁵³⁰ The *Concordato per i rapporti tra Chiesa e Stato*, Act no. 810 of 27 May 1929, Art. 36 reads: 'L'Italia considera fondamento e coronamento dell'istruzione pubblica l'insegnamento della dottrina cristiana secondo la forma ricevuta dalla tradizione cattolica. E perciò consente che l'insegnamento religioso ora impartito nelle scuole pubbliche elementari abbia un ulteriore sviluppo nelle scuole medie, secondo i programmi da stabilirsi d'accordo tra la Santa sede e lo Stato. Tale insegnamento sarà dato a mezzo di maestri e di professori, sacerdoti o religiosi, approvati dalla autorità ecclesiastica e successivamente a mezzo di maestri e professori laici, che siano a questo fine muniti di certificati di idoneità, da rilasciarsi dall'Ordinario diocesano. La revoca del certificato da parte dell'Ordinario priva senz'altro l'insegnante della capacità di insegnare. Del detto insegnamento religioso nelle scuole pubbliche non saranno adottati che i libri di testo approvati dall'autorità ecclesiastica'.

⁵³¹ Giovanni Gentile, *La pedagogia, la scuola: atti del Convegno di pedagogia* (Catania, 12-13-14 December 1994) e *altri studi*, ed. by Giuseppe Spadafora (Roma: Armando Editore, 1970), p. 72.

⁵³² Cf. Dina Bertoni Jovine, *La scuola italiana dal 1870 ai giorni nostri* (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1975). There, Bertoni Jovine clearly expresses that the process of reforming Italy according to fascist principles did not allow the Gentile reform to reap its rewards. She states: 'La controriforma [...] incominciò dunque assai prima che la riforma potesse dare, attraverso un adeguato periodo di sperimentazione, la misura della sua validità', p. 298.

By 1936, Cesare Maria de Vecchi had further reduced the study of the Comedy to fifteen cantos per cantica.⁵³³ This again seems to contrast the omnipresent, self-congratulatory rhetoric of Fascist Regime propaganda slogans so common in all the Italian school classrooms that had previously celebrated Dante as a man as great as Mussolini himself. Furthermore, de Vecchi, one of the veterans of the Regime, was not new to concepts, and events, that involved Dante and his Comedy. Yet, despite his ‘bonifica fascista’ full of easy to consume fascist rhetoric, de Vecchi seems to almost purposely ignore Dante and the themes so dear to the Regime that the Comedy contained.⁵³⁴

Thus, when de Rooy argues that Dante is a kind of litmus test of the health of the Italian nation, this should be measured against what just mentioned above. If Dante and his Comedy are to represent what he calls ‘luogo di memoria’, a sort of repository from which was possible to draw what was needed, so to speak, to create a national tradition, then it seems legitimate to look at these reforms in a critical light.⁵³⁵

⁵³³ Cf. *La storia contemporanea tra scuola e università*, ed. by G. Bosco, C. Mantovani (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino Editore, 2004), and Albertini, op. cit.

⁵³⁴ Cesare Maria de Vecchi, Earl of Val Cismon wrote about some of the themes that could have easily been, as they had before, linked to Dante and his Comedy. Mario Attilio Levi, *La politica imperiale di Roma*, ed. by C. M. de Vecchi (Torino [etc.]: G. B. Paravia, 1936); Cesare Maria de Vecchi, *Il “senso dello stato” nel risorgimento* (Roma: Proja, 1933); Cesare Maria de Vecchi, Don Bosco, Giovanni Lanza, *Nuovi documenti sulla questione della temporalità dei vescovi dopo il 1870* (Torino: Chiantore, 1934). For what concerned politics and religion de Vecchi also wrote about Sebastiano Valfrè. Cesare Maria de Vecchi, *Vittorio Amedeo II ed il beato Sebastiano Valfrè* (Roma: La libreria dello stato, 1935). For those who might be interested: Giovanna Olgiatei, *Il Beato Sebastiano Valfrè, d. O. Sua azione sociale e politica* (Torino: Congregation of the Oratory of St. Philip Blacks (in the title), Unione Ex allievi e Fratelli dell'Oratorio di Torino, sine data but 1966). de Vecchi also wrote about Paolo Solaroli who was to come in contact with the British Diplomat Sir James Hudson in the 1850s. Sir Hudson was known to be ‘more Italian than the Italians themselves’ (Lord Malmesbury, (1888); *Memoirs of an ex-Minister* (Adamant Media Corporation (2001)), vol. 2, p. 169, and he was an authority on Dante. Sir Hudson gave many lectures on Italian literature and history. He is the author of a large number of articles on Italian subjects in the Encyclopaedia Britannica (1857-1860), and an edition of Benvenuto da Imola's Latin lectures on Dante delivered in 1375; he cooperated with Lord Vernon in the latter's great edition of Dante's *Inferno* (London, 1858-1865), and he compiled a catalogue in four volumes of the duke of Devonshire's library at Chatsworth (London, 1879). The book on Paolo Solaroli in mission to visit sir Hudson is: Cesare Maria de Vecchi, *Paolo Solaroli a Londra nel dicembre 1860* (Torino: Chiantone, 1934); id., *Del generale Paolo Solaroli del re Vittorio Emanuele II, di una missione segreta nel 1958 e di altre cose ancora* (Torino: Chiantore, 1934). de Vecchi also edited a book about Costantino Nigra. The latter had been an Italian ambassador but also one of the 183 subscribers who commissioned the printing of the an important work on Dante's Comedy: *Il Codice Cassinese della Divina Commedia “Il codice cassinese della Divina Commedia per la prima volta letteralmente messo a stampa per cura dei monaci benedettini della badia di Monte Cassino* (Tipografia di Monte Cassino 1865). The book is: Costantino Nigra, *Un capitolo inedito dei ricordi diplomatici*, ed. by Cesare Maria de Vecchi (Roma: Società anonima La nuova antologia, 1934), and previously also: Cesare Maria de Vecchi, *Un grande diplomatico: Costantino Nigra* (Roma: Corriere diplomatico e consolare, 1928), de Vecchi commented on Delfino Orsi who had written about Dante and his Comedy in, *Le laudi del Piemonte, raccolte e pubblicate dai dottori Ferdinando Gabotto e Delfino Orsi* (Bologna: Romagnoli dall' Acqua, 1891). The comments appear in, Delfino Orsi, a commemoration held in Turin at Palazzo Madama, 21 November 1932, by invitation of the *Gazzetta del Popolo* (1932), and the Municipality of Turin.

⁵³⁵ de Rooy, op. cit., p. 64. For the creation of tradition, see: Eric Hobsbawm, and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

Thus, this argument deserves to be expanded. The contextual interplay that came to be between Dante's Comedy and the Fascist Regime represent a dynamic narrative where discourse, text, and context are at different degrees of specificity interwoven with each other. The use of a medieval text such as Dante's Comedy by a dictatorial regime seven centuries its junior is thus further explored in the chapter dedicated to the theoretical framework and the Introduction to which I remand.

However, de Rooy also makes another significant point. He notes that during the period that went from the unification in 1861 to the advent of Fascism in 1922, the reverential and almost pedantic handling of Dante changed. The Romantic and *Risorgimento* notion of the Florentine poet seen as a great patriot, father to the newly created nation, a bard of an almost religious stand, gave way to a more informal and playful approach exemplified by the poetry of Guido Gozzano,⁵³⁶ followed by some vitriolic comments by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti⁵³⁷. If it is true, as de Roy himself argues, that the myth of Dante as a patriotic poet is strongly questioned by the Futurist Marinetti, it seems equally fair to note that this paved the way for others, other than academics, to feel that approaching Dante was not a matter exclusive to scholars. de Roy believes this to be contradictory as Dante is then reinstated in his patriotic role by the Fascist Regime, or some in it.

However, contradictory this is not, or at least not entirely. It allowed the Movement and then Fascist Regime, to move forward from the *Risorgimento* and permitted a much wider audience to access Dante and his Comedy to then, however gradually, during the Regime phase, reduce this audience once Dante and his Comedy had become the object of more popular scrutiny. Thus, it could be argued that the Regime probably felt it had, by then, a solid grip on Italian society, and had therefore become a more established power.

⁵³⁶ 'Ma né dolcezza di figlio, né lagrime, né pietà del padre, né il debito amore per la sua dolce metà gli spensero dentro l'ardore della speranza chimerica e volse coi tardi compagni cercando fortuna in America... Non si può vivere senza danari, molti danari...Considerate, miei cari compagni, la vostra semenza!' Guido Gozzano, 'L'ipotesi (Poesie sparse)', in *Tutte le poesie*, ed. by A. Rocca (Milano: Mondadori, 1980), p. 271.

⁵³⁷ Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, 'La "Divina Commedia" è un verminaio di glossatori', in *Teoria e invenzione futurista*, ed. by L. De Maria (Milano: Mondadori, 1968), pp. 228-229. However Marinetti also used a chapter with the same title in: Filippo Tommaso Marinetti: *Guerra sola igiene del mondo* (Milano: Edizioni Futuriste di "Poesia", 1915).

However, Dante continued to fascinate the Regime, which kept allowing popular approaches to the great Florentine poet and his masterpiece. Arguably, one of the most telling examples of how the Comedy represented a repository from which to draw figurative fascist rhetoric, albeit now outside the realm of schools, is the *Danteum* by Giuseppe Terragni. The latter meant to encapsulate into a building the complex numerical symbolism that is typical of the Comedy. He planned to celebrate that which was becoming a prophetic couple Dante-Mussolini with symbolisms such as the *veltro*, and numeric representation of the Latin name that Mussolini had given himself, *Dux*, as also DXV or five hundred ten and five.⁵³⁸ Dante and his Comedy had moved on from their revolutionary roles of the early Movement to an institutionalised position within the folds of fascist power and the swift made visible in the format of an architectural message.

⁵³⁸ Cf. Peter Eisenmann, *Giuseppe Terragni: Transformations, Decompositions, Critiques* (New York: The Monacelli Press, 2003); Thomas L. Schumacher, *The Danteum. Architecture, Poetics, and Politics under Italian Fascism* (London: Triangle Architectural Publishing, 1993). For more generic texts on art and Fascism, see: Igor Golomostok, *Totalitarian Art* (London: Collins Harvill, 1990); Sergio Luzzatto, *The Body of Il Duce: Mussolini's Corpse and the Fortunes of Italy* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2005); James A. Mangan, *Shaping the Superman. Fascist Body as a Political Icon* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 1999); Emily Brown, *Mario Sironi and Italian Modernism: Art and Politics under Fascism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2000); Borden W. Painter Junior, *Mussolini's Rome. Rebuilding the Eternal City* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2005).

6. The Secret Comedy

Besides the contradictory policies towards the audience that the Comedy was to enjoy during the fascist era, and the consequent plethora of minor critics that sprung all over Italy, such as the ones Albertini (1996) made reference to, and were in part earlier cited here, there is another further fold to be added to the relationship between Dante's Comedy and the Italian Fascist Regime: the esoteric approach with its appeal to secret societies.

Dante, as it is known, divided his Comedy according to a specific numeric grid that, like the content itself, was meant to carry meaning, and thus deliver a message. Boccaccio was the first to comment on this "secret" side of the Comedy and was soon followed by other commentators. During the nineteenth century, Eugene Aroux wrote an extravagant account in which he made a number of strong claims, of which some were based on what Gabriel Rossetti had expressed before him.⁵³⁹ René Guénon with his *The Esoterism of Dante (L'ésotérisme de Dante, 1925)* continued along the lines of secrecy and mysticism that would see the Comedy heavily involved in political affairs that link it with secret societies and obscure powers. As such the symbolism of the Comedy seemed powerful, and not just only in its relationship to the Rose, the Cross and the Eagle that united formulas close to the *Fedeli d'amore*, thus Christ, man, the Cross and Rome to enigmatic figures like, for example, the almost oracular Gustavo Rol.⁵⁴⁰ The latter, as it is known, had been contacted by various eminent figures among whom Mussolini and allegedly even Hitler. Rol had expressed a deep interest in Dante's Comedy, as indeed had the Italian Fascist dictator many times before, to the point of affirming: 'il più alto genio della poesia, con Dante'.⁵⁴¹ More recently, Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke mentions Dante in his *Black Sun: Aryan Cults, Esoteric Nazism, and the Politics of*

⁵³⁹ For Gabriel Rossetti, see: Dante Alighieri, *La Divina Commedia di Dante Alighieri con commento analitico di Gabriele Rossetti*; six volumes, vol. 2 (John Murray, 1827); for Eugene Aroux, see: Eugene Aroux, *Dante hérétique, révolutionnaire et socialiste. Révelations d'un catholique sur le Moyen Âge and Clef de La Comédie Anti-Catholique de Dante Alighieri: ... Donnant L'Explication Du Langage Symbolique Des Fideles D'Amour Dans Les Compositions Lyriq.* First published in 1853 (Charleston, South Carolina: Nabu Press, 2014).

⁵⁴⁰ Gianfranco De Turris, *Esoterismo e fascismo: storia, interpretazioni, documenti* (Roma: Edizioni Mediterranee, 2006), p. 93.

⁵⁴¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 56.

Identity.⁵⁴² The Oxford-educated scholar says that the staunchly radical Italian mystical aristocrat, Baron Giulio Cesare Andrea Evola, also known as Julius Evola, lauded Dante's political vision, thus linking Dante and his Comedy with a net of wills that did not have their centre in Italy, but elsewhere.⁵⁴³ In fact, Goodrick-Clarke argues that there was something suspicious about Fascism, and especially Fascism in Britain. In fact, the rise of Oswald Mosley, it was thought, had been architected to discredit Fascism in the eyes of the British people rather than appeal to them.⁵⁴⁴ Catholicism, and conversely anti-Catholicism, engendered power concepts, racial superiority and more would thus find in the Comedy a fertile ground upon which to grow different and differing views. However, this has been left to be discussed in the chapter dedicated to Britain, the Comedy, and Fascism.

⁵⁴² Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun: Aryan Cults, Esoteric Nazism, and the Politics of Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 2002).

⁵⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

⁵⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

CHAPTER IV

BRITAIN, THE COMEDY, AND FASCISM

1. Introduction to the Chapter

Britain, fascist Italy, and Dante's Comedy. What could appear at first sight as a heterogeneous troika is treated in this chapter, as in the rest of this thesis, as a narrative that entices hidden, partially concealed, and overt, agencies. The discourse follows a path that is traceable in the footprints, so to speak, left by those who approached the Comedy in Britain as well as Italy. Thus, it is the former that which offers and unlikely insight into the considerable amount of statesmanship that characterised the Anglo-Italian relationships, from the *Risorgimento* and onwards, until the advent and demise of Fascism.

In tracing back those footsteps, this chapter aims at further highlighting the role that Britain had in shaping Italian affairs even during that which some consider an era that the Fascists had intended to seal in their ambition of both αὐτόξ and ἄρχω, self-sufficiency, or αὐταρχία, state of self-rule. Dante's peculiar state as both defender and offender of the Roman Church as well as an instrument through which the laic Fascist State promoted the author of the Comedy - the philosopher, the patriot, and poet – might thus make more sense if framed within a context that ultimately accepts the presence of Britain.

Eliot's fusion of politics and religion, to name but one of the many examples that this chapter offers, adds with Dante, through the agency of the Comedy, yet other dimensions to the already complex geopolitical stage that characterised the first part of the twentieth century. It is the Comedy that which facilitates, at least for the elements that this study has afforded, an interexchange between parts that would otherwise have seemed as distant, contrasting, or, at times, adversary.

2. The British Century: From the Risorgimento to Fascism.

The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had not been particularly sympathetic towards Dante and his Comedy. In fact, as it is known, Voltaire once famously declared: 'On ne lit plus le Dante dans l'Europe.'⁵⁴⁵ However, in the nineteenth century, through the patronage of Foscolo, a political protégée of the Whigs, Dante and his Comedy burst into, not only the literary and political scene of Britain but also that of Italy. For Foscolo, who was fleeing from the might of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, a great power with its own interests in the Italian peninsula, England, as mentioned earlier, was to be 'the empire of the future'⁵⁴⁶ whereas Italy or, at least, Italy as it was before unification, all but a 'ruined dream.'⁵⁴⁷

With Foscolo and through Foscolo, as also mentioned in the chapter dedicated to the *Risorgimento*, the Whigs began to show an interest in Italian literature that thanks to the patronage of the *Edinburg Review* transcended the mere artistic fold and acquired political significance.

As Milbank (2009) affirms, before being employed by the influential *Edinburg Review* to which Foscolo had been introduced by Lord Holland, and his secretary George Allen, Foscolo worked at Woburn Abbey, the residence of the Duke of Bedford whose subsidiary title, created in 1694, was Marquess of Tavistock.⁵⁴⁸ Herbrand Russell's son, Hastings Russell, Lord Tavistock the 12th Duke of Bedford, it should be here briefly mentioned as a reminder of how politics were never too far from the minds of these patrons, was the one for whom Rudolf Hess flew to England during War World II in an attempt to end that conflict. The Duke was also an active supporter of the extreme right British Peoples Party founded in 1939. Many of its members came from the dissolved British Union of Fascists led by Oswald Mosley.⁵⁴⁹

⁵⁴⁵ Voltaire, *Lettres philosophiques ou Lettres anglaises*, ed. by Raymond Navis (Paris: Garnier, 1964), p. 255.

⁵⁴⁶ Milbank, op. cit., p. 13.

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 13.

⁵⁴⁸ Burke's Peerage 107th Edition, p. 455.

⁵⁴⁹ The Russell family, from whom the Duke is descended, is one of the most prominent aristocratic families in Britain. They first rose to power and consequentially obtained a peerage with the rise of the Tudor dynasty. John Russell, 6th Duke of Bedford was the great-grandfather of Herbrand Russell and Bertrand Russell. The latter descended from John Russell's third son, Bertrand's grandfather, John

Francis Jeffrey, Lord Jeffrey, editor of the *Edinburg Review*, commissioned Foscolo to begin writing a series of articles on Italian literature where Dante was to be prominently featured. Lord Jeffrey asked Sir James Mackintosh to execute a translation into English. The latter was the husband of Catherine Stuart, whose brother Daniel was the editor of *The Morning Post*. This London newspaper published several articles on Dante and the Comedy, some of which had a clear political tone. Arguably one of the most interesting, published in 1895, was about an essay by Hermann Oelsner who had won Le Bas prize essay 1894.⁵⁵⁰ There, Oelsner describes how Dante had a direct impact on thought. In fact, the former called his essay: *The Influence of Dante on Modern Thought*.⁵⁵¹ He states: 'we shall only endeavour to sketch rapidly Dante's influence on the various departments of European thought, without attempting to enter into the manifold details which the subject suggests at every step,'⁵⁵² thus, clearly avowing the position that the Florentine poet and his masterpiece were to occupy on several planes.⁵⁵³

The chapter dedicated to the *Risorgimento* talks in more detail about what is here just briefly noted as an introduction. However, it should be added that, in England, Dante and his Comedy often came to absolve a critical role, which could,

Russell, 1st Earl Russell who was twice Prime Minister in the 1840s and 1860s. The 11th Duke of Bedford Herbrand Russell, Marquess of Tavistock, lent his name to the renowned Tavistock Institute of which he was the main benefactor. The Dukes of Bedford was the title inherited by the influential Russell family, one of the most prominent aristocratic families in Britain. Herbrand Russell and arch-conspirator Bertrand Russell shared the same great grandfather, John Russell, 6th Duke of Bedford. Bertrand Russell was descended from John Russell's third son, Bertrand's grandfather, John Russell, 1st Earl Russell, who served twice as Prime Minister in the 1840s and 1860s. Cf. Chris Cook, and Brendan Keith, *British Historical Facts: 1830-1900* (London: Macmillan, 1975); and David Butler, and Gareth Butler, *Twentieth Century British Political Facts* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000 - 7th edition).

⁵⁵⁰ Herman Oelsner graduated at Cambridge University. He wrote to Oscar Browning (1894-1897), the British historian and reformer, nine letters now at Cambridge University, King's College Archive Centre, Reference OB/1. The latter cofounded with Henry Sidgwick the Cambridge University Day Training College Dante. Browning also had an interest in Dante and in 1891 wrote: *Dante; Life and Works* (London: Macmillan & co., 1891). Major Oliver Papworth was the secretary of Cambridgeshire Masonic Charity Association and also held an intense epistolary connection with Oscar Browning.

⁵⁵¹ On Saturday 25 May 1861, p. 5, *The Morning Post*, published in London, an article entitled: *Spread of Protestantism in Italy*, where it was suggested that 'Dante led a sort of reversed Albigensian Crusade "... the Albigensian emancipation; in Italy they were gathered under Ghibelline standards, and the great Florentine poet, Dante Alighieri, ...'. Furthermore, the newspaper also allowed voices, such as that of Antonio Gualberto de Marzo, to be heard in England. On Saturday 03 July 1869, on p. 6, *The Morning Post* reported that the Italian de Marzo was to deliver a series of lectures on Dante. Gualberto de Marzo had written a book entitled: *La Croce Bianca in Campo Rosso Vaticinata Nella Divina Commedia Pel Risorgimento D'Italia*. There, he affirms that it is Dante in his Comedy to announce that Italy was to be governed under the banner of a white cross on a red background, the coat of arms of the Savoy family. In his book, Gualberto de Marzo also visits several other tenets such as Imperial Rome and the providential role of Italy in history.

⁵⁵² Oelsner, op. cit., p. 8.

⁵⁵³ Ibid., here at the Preface. Later at p. 14, he states: 'he [Dante] also saw that the modern spirit required a great work to be of infinite range, that everything must be included in it [the Divine Comedy] — the past, the present, and the future, politics.' The stress should be placed on future politics and how these can and should be subjected to the influence of Dante and his Comedy.

quite fluidly, advance both sides of a differing argument. In other words, the Comedy could serve as the language of empire, nation, religion, and so on, thanks to its ability to benefit the many without necessarily expressing a binding allegiance to any. This means that different identities could still benefit its ideological embrace.

It is again telling what Iannucci had to say concerning this issue. The former, in fact, refers to the ability of the Comedy to serve different functions for different audiences, and thus he reflects on the role of text.⁵⁵⁴ Iannucci says that the Comedy, referring to what Umberto Eco and Roland Barthes have said before him, is not a 'writerly' text, by which he means "open", nor it is a 'readerly' or close text. What he is saying is that the Comedy is 'multiple, difficult, self-reflective, designed for the refined reader',⁵⁵⁵ thus ultimately an open text. However, it is also easily accessible and with a wide popular appeal, thus in that sense closed.⁵⁵⁶

Therefore, let us start with religion, and the religious concerns of opposite factions, as these were among those set of interests that commonly claimed ownership of Dante. The latter, if praised by Catholics, was also often eulogised by Protestants.⁵⁵⁷ Oelsner is quite clear about the role that the medieval Florentine poet was to absolve. He affirms: 'in turning to the religious revival in England, which culminated in the Oxford movement, we are at once struck by the fact that some of the great leaders were ardent students of our poet [Dante].'⁵⁵⁸

The Oxford movement attracted much interest and involved many scholars and men of letters. In 1906, the Royal Commission on Ecclesiastical Discipline admitted, or perhaps submitted, to one of the main tenets of the Roman Catholic Church and recognised 'the doctrine or fact of Apostolic Succession.'⁵⁵⁹ The Royal Commission spoke in terms of 'ecclesiastical continuity' stressing that the

⁵⁵⁴ See the chapter on the theoretical background for a more in-depth analysis of the role of text.

⁵⁵⁵ Iannucci, 'Introduction', in *Dante: Contemporary Perspectives*, op. cit., p. xiii.

⁵⁵⁶ This is what Iannucci had to say in this regard: 'Dante's poem is more like what Fiske in *Television Culture* calls a "producerly" text. A producerly text is polysemous and combines the easy accessibility of the readerly with the complex discursive strategies of the writerly. These peculiar textual qualities allow the poem to produce meaning and pleasure in audiences which run the gamut from the uneducated to the most sophisticated and discerning.' *Ibid.*, pp. xiii-xiv.

⁵⁵⁷ Cf. Jackson Campbell Boswell, *Dante's Fame in England, References in printed British Books 1477 – 1640* (Associated University Press, Inc., 1999).

⁵⁵⁸ Oelsner, op. cit., p. 90.

⁵⁵⁹ The Royal Commission on Ecclesiastical Discipline (1906), p. 54.

connection between the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church was 'intimate and unbroken'.⁵⁶⁰

Thus, let us now introduce politics to this analysis. England had, and perhaps still has, a long tradition of religion and political conflation.⁵⁶¹ As many prominent men of that time seemed to enjoy a threefold connection centred on religion, politics, and Dante, it is again Oelsner he who sounds words relevant for the economy of this thesis. He stated: 'our English culture has here been instrumental in spreading Dante's influence abroad.'⁵⁶² This meant that Dante and his Comedy owed their rekindled global interest to that which was to all effects a seemingly exclusive English patronage.⁵⁶³

Dante and his Comedy thus appear to be linked to British interests. In line with Perry G. E. Miller's compelling take on the human and historic panorama, the Comedy it is not to be seen as a "simple" piece of literature, albeit acclaimed as it is, but rather more like a dynamic force of interaction that, as such, is able to define "historical knowledge".⁵⁶⁴ Furthermore, the fame of the Comedy is an important issue to be reckoned with as one may easily be tempted to interpret elements of it by

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid. See also: Charles George Herbermann et al. (eds.), *The Catholic encyclopedia: an international work of reference on the constitution, doctrine, discipline, and history of the Catholic church*, Volume 11 (Universal Knowledge Foundation, 1913), p. 370.

⁵⁶¹ For an analysis of the relationship between England (later Britain) and the wider world as a global economic, military and cultural predominant power, see: Wilfred Prest, *Albion Ascendant: English History, 1660-1815* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); for the role of sir William Blackstone, the famous London lawyer, see: David A. Lockmiller, *Sir William Blackstone* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1938); for how usury aided the rise of capitalism in Protestant England, see: Joyce Appleby, *The Relentless Revolution: A History of Capitalism* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton, 2010). The latter comes with a warning for those who are seeking a history of capitalism. *The Relentless Revolution* may not fully engage on that plane with some previous studies on the subject. It is however cited here for it makes a clear reference to the political, religious, social, and cultural particularities of England. For the history of military, political, and religious institutions in England in the eighteenth century, see: Isser Woloch, *Eighteenth-century Europe, Tradition and Progress, 1715-1789* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton, 1982).

⁵⁶² Oelsner, op. cit., p. 90.

⁵⁶³ Dante's position within Italy was, of course, not due exclusively to the agency of the British, although as argued here, they were largely accountable for much of the cult of Dante. Adrian Lyttelton, referring to what already stated by Dionisotti (Dionisotti, op. cit.) in fact affirms: 'in the age of nationalism, poets enjoyed a peculiarly privileged role as the guardians and even creators of national identity. Nowhere was this truer than in Italy. After all, Dante was the founding father of the Italian language. The diffusion of the Italian language had been the work of a literary and humanistic elite, unassisted by a powerful central state, as in France, or by a vernacular reformation, as in Germany. Dante and the other great poets of the past were elevated to the status of patron saints in the national revolutionary cult.' Lyttelton 1983, op. cit., p. 72.

⁵⁶⁴ Cf. Robert Middlekauff, and Perry Miller, in Marcus Cunliffe, and Robin W. Winks (eds.), *Pastmasters, some essays on American Historians* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), pp. 167-90. It should be noted that this statement comes with certain limitations as well as further expansions on the idea. These tenets have been examined in the Introduction and the chapter dedicated to the theoretical framework to which this note remands.

referring to a frame that may be meta-historical in essence, such as that expressed by Gordon (1985).⁵⁶⁵

However, differently from how Havelly (2014) seems to approach his exposition and narration of Dante's reception by the British public, this current study agrees with what already stated in 1872 by Arthur John Butler. The latter found the intense interest in Dante and his Comedy altogether remarkably strange given the political and cultural climate of England at the time. He states: 'the vogue with which the study of Dante enjoys at the present time is a phenomenon somewhat difficult to explain.'⁵⁶⁶ Isba (2006) also reports that many scholars 'failed to see evidence' of a nineteenth century expressed British more general interest in Italian literature, and she regards the attention dedicated to Dante as a somewhat extraordinary event.⁵⁶⁷

Yet, if seen through the lenses of a political rather than simply literary interest, Isba (2006) agrees that in the context of Italian unification the interest in Dante can be justified, thus effectively shifting on to a different plane, seemingly that of geopolitical strategies, the approach to Dante and his Comedy on behalf of the British establishment. Thus, the latter appeared to be engaged in the advancement of the Florentine, by now promoted Italian, medieval poet and his great masterpiece not simply for its artistic value but also for other ends, which will be later explored here.

Britain, as seen in more detail in the chapter dedicated to the *Risorgimento*, was heavily involved with the creation of the Kingdom of Italy. This was to be ruled by the Savoy Royal Family who Oelsner dutifully regards as "liberators" using, as his inspiring model, Dante's Comedy.⁵⁶⁸ Italy had to be united 'at any price' in his own words.⁵⁶⁹

⁵⁶⁵ Cf. Peter E. Gordon, *What is Intellectual History? A frankly partisan introduction to a frequently misunderstood field* (1985). <http://history.fas.harvard.edu/people/faculty/documents/What%20is%20Intell%20History%20PGordon%20Mar2012.pdf> [Last accessed: 15 February 2015].

⁵⁶⁶ 'The vogue with which the study of Dante enjoys at the present time is a phenomenon somewhat difficult to explain. It is not part of any general interest in the Italian language and literature; which in England at all events, still suffers under the "deplorable and barbarous neglect" perceived and lamented by Mr Gladstone a quarter of a century ago.' Karl Federn, *Dante and his time*, trans. A. J. Butler, London 1872, introduction at p. vii, in Anne Isba, *Gladstone and Dante: Victorian statesman, medieval poet* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2006), p. 31.

⁵⁶⁷ Isba 2006, op. cit., p. 31.

⁵⁶⁸ 'The chord of Liberty that the great Italian [Dante] had struck with such admirable results in Italy.'

Oelsner, op. cit., p. 93.

⁵⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

It appears, therefore, legitimate to ask oneself, as Del Noce (1993) also does, why was the Italian unity so precious to Britain that this was willing to accept almost any price in order to achieve it. However, more to the point here is the question of why would the British, and Oelsner, use Dante and his Comedy to convey the instancy of their needs through his voice, thus forcing the Florentine poet to share their same sense of urgency.

If this has, by and large, been addressed in the chapter dedicated to the *Risorgimento* as a necessary comprehensive historical background aimed at presenting a continuity of scope that spanned across a few centuries, it functions here also as a useful preamble for British interests in Italy and Dante with his Comedy, as argued thus far, did not end abruptly with the creation of a new Italian united state. It serves here as a necessary reminder of why the British establishment wished so strongly to promote British culture, politics, and religion as, at times intimately, interconnected with Dante and his Comedy in an otherwise general environment of relative disinterest for Italian literature.

This tenet is not exclusive to my own personal thinking but had already been expressively worded as far back as 1895. Oelsner, who is here used to represent a certain kind of interests in Britain, put it plainly: 'without going further into these details, let us consider the more important of the religious and political changes of modern Europe, and see whether it is possible to connect Dante with some of them.'⁵⁷⁰ As the Faust of which Gentili talks (Foà-Gentili, 2010), here there is a conscious act of association that seeks the agency of literature to convey and support a political and religious message. The chosen messenger is Dante and his Comedy the means with which to deliver it. To this effect, talking about the British, Welle (1995) had this to say:

[Dante] was reconstructed within Italy in order to serve as the prophet and proponent of Italian liberation and national unification. A series of historical events and a variety of cultural and literary currents created the cult of Dante as a national bard. This

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 40.

process parallels and is indebted to the development of the cult of Shakespeare as a national poet of England.⁵⁷¹

However, Dante and his Comedy, it seems, still needed some adjusting before they could possibly be linked to certain European events. As Isba (2006) noted, in the nineteenth century, for example, Dante's Comedy was used as a Romantic projection of a medieval work that would oppose tyranny and would warn against the intrusion of Popes, and thus the Catholic Church, in political affairs. It would speak from its past in a contemporary language understandable to an audience of that specific time. Thus, the reference to the policies of the Pope at that the time, Gregory VII, is there reported in a frame that interplays politics with religion.⁵⁷²

The importance of language, it is legitimate to argue, is something that the British establishment must have understood well.⁵⁷³ The need to offer a context in which language can operate is also paramount as Pococok (1987) suggests.⁵⁷⁴ Thus, Dante and the Comedy receive a linguistic collocation the language of which is adapted to the needs that are put forward to validate certain experiences, be it of identity of the self, common, imagined, or otherwise (Anderson, 1983). Therefore, these also appear as having to be uncovered to discover a certain historically expressed political thought.⁵⁷⁵

Thus, having established that the idea that Dante and his Comedy could serve different and differing masters is not new, it should also be added that such concept could be in itself telling. For to regard Dante and his Comedy in ways in which may be instrumental to a specific set of interests, such as for example to define Dante as a 'Philosopher, Patriot, and Poet', where the word "patriot" is freely

⁵⁷¹ Welle, op. cit., p. 383.

⁵⁷² Isba 2006, op. cit., p. 31.

⁵⁷³ Brett (In Cannadine, 2002) argues that the social world is constructed, influenced or even shaped by language. Based on Skinner's behaviouralist concept of intentionality, she maintains that there is a duality of agency in language. This can both express how things are as well as influence their being. Annabelle Brett, 'What is Intellectual History Now?', in David Cannadine, *What is History Now?* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 116.

⁵⁷⁴ John G.A. Pocock, 'The Concept of a Language and the Métier d'Historien: Some Considerations on Practice', in *The Languages of Political Theory in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by A.R.D. Pagden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

⁵⁷⁵ A more in-depth analysis of structuralism, and the Cambridge school, is not possible here. I remand it to other studies.

associated with other more orthodox roles in which Dante can be recognised, calls to mind a similar issue faced by intellectual historians.⁵⁷⁶ That is to say an issue of structure, agency and evolution of ideas where the “categories” of which Gordon (2007), and likewise European structuralist theories of language stretching possibly as far back as Emanuel Kant, talk about are again here possibly consciously exploited (as supposed as unconsciously) to suit a set of vested interests.⁵⁷⁷

Thus, as also mentioned before, saying that Dante and his Comedy are many disparate things it equates to saying that they are nothing in particular and thus malleably applicable to numerous different interests. The resulting narrative of relation between thought and action that defines an idea in its historical development is therefore somewhat both simplified and complicated at the same time.⁵⁷⁸

This conceptual twilight, with its variable ebb, is probably where some British interests wished to push the Comedy in order to fully exploit its potential as the vast receptacle of knowledge that it is. In trying to draw the web of agencies that surround Dante it is, however, necessary to contend also with the issue of outlying the significance of the meta-historical (as mentioned before) where, as Gordon (1985) suggests, it is important to be wary of ideas that transcend the historical chronological narrative.⁵⁷⁹ This is relevant for the *how* (different agents with differing interest using the Dantean poem in their selected *fora*) the Comedy came to be used and the *why* (the language of empire, nation and identity) it was used should interplay with each other. The latter could help identify the need to recognise commonalities in thought despite possible dissimilarities in context.

As I also state in the chapter dedicated to the theoretical framework, this helps in reducing the risk that one’s reading would enter a Platonic world of ideas

⁵⁷⁶ Botta, op. cit., p. iii.

⁵⁷⁷ The linguistic aspect as an agency of construction, influence or even creation, should also be noted as a relevant tenet here. Cf. Brett, op. cit. There are other issues that could be explored. We remand those to other studies.

⁵⁷⁸ As Gilbert (1971) argues, in his attempt to theoretically define intellectual history, the relation that occurs between thought and action might not appear immediately identifiable. As such, the idea itself might be therefore pointing at an interplay that may or may not be readily associated or conceptualised. If the starting idea has a mode of operation that can be swayed one way or another, such as the free association of the Comedy to different and differing vested interests, this can both simplify the identification of a narrative of association, as its conceptualisation can be freely adapted to the tenets it recalls, or complicate its reading as the social context in which that idea is embedded refers to a set of different bodies of knowledge and cultural arenas thus making the interplay that links them more problematic to identify (Rossi, 1999). Cf. Paolo Rossi, *Un altro presente. Saggi sulla storia della filosofia* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1999); and, Gilbert F., op. cit.

⁵⁷⁹ Cf. Gordon P., 1985, op. cit.

where the *how* that is visible in the historical narrative may prevent the questioning of the idea of an internal logic independent of the *why* a certain idea came to be.

The existence of a conceptual twilight it is not confined to Dante and his Comedy, but embraces a larger phenomenon that characterised British society roughly starting from the Victorian era and onwards. As Madigan (2009) suggests, Britain was undergoing a profound change of attitude towards religion and science, the so-called Victorian Crisis of Faith.⁵⁸⁰ This, fundamentally, forced society to reconsider the boundaries of morality. The latter did not longer enjoy exclusive access to religious prescribing dogmas and was increasingly challenged by the advances of science. Among the people who contributed to this shift, was William Kingdon Clifford, a British mathematician, who was in the words of Madigan (2009) 'an ardent admirer of the Italian revolutionary Giuseppe Mazzini, who helped to unify the Italian states by challenging the temporal holdings of the Catholic Church.'⁵⁸¹

Furthermore, the interplay of religion and politics via the mediation of a commonly shared interest, namely Dante's Comedy, for the achievement of the differing interests within the common frame of dominance, also poses a number of other problems. The reconstruction of that which could look and feel like as a plexus of writers into a "community", the common denominator of which is Dante's Comedy in so far as it absolves its role of language of identity, would require the definition of the extent to which these often disparate characters actively felt part of that community (Grimley, 2004).⁵⁸²

However, as also expressed by Villis (2013) with his attempt to define a Catholic intellectual community, where the narrative of identity through the agency of religion is one of the principles analysed in his study, this is not always a univocal process.⁵⁸³ One must be careful as there might be a temptation to 'overplay the cohesiveness of a group for sake of artistic or intellectual unity.'⁵⁸⁴ The alternative,

⁵⁸⁰ Timothy J. Madigan, *W. K. Clifford and "The Ethics of Belief"* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009).

⁵⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁵⁸² For an interesting study of the idea of community and its role in religion and politics in Britain and Europe, see: Matthew Grimley, *Citizenship, Community, and the Church of England Liberal Anglican Theories of the State Between the Wars* (Oxford: Clarendon Press Oxford, 2004).

⁵⁸³ Cf. Villis, *op. cit.*

⁵⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

however, as defined by Villis, could be too restrictive resulting in the identification of “periodical communities” simply to narrow in scope.⁵⁸⁵

This having been said, what suggested by Villis, who argues that relationships between religion and politics in Britain need to be refocused on the question of identity, has been taken on board and expanded upon, by linking it, in general, to the previous research on the methodology of intellectual history here and elsewhere named, and in particular to the aggregating nucleus offered by the association, albeit at times apparently loose, to Dante’s Comedy.

In doing so, this study further accepts, albeit partially, another argument that Villis puts forward. He maintains that the political attitudes of thinkers, writers, politicians, poets, and so on, may simply sway too much, even within the fold of their more extreme wings, in order for them to be associated exclusively on political grounds. Villis proposes that Catholicism, in his opinion, is the aggregating force, the binding commonly shared element able to expose the reasons for either an endorsement of Fascism or conversely its rejection on behalf of a certain group of vested interests.

This point is accepted here insofar as the aggregating limitations of a political credo alone and the role of the Catholic Church have. As such is, in some ways, applied to Dante’s Comedy and its relationship to Britain and Fascism. This analysis also accepts that the interplay between Fascism and the Catholic Church is to be considered relevant. However, at least as far as this study is concerned, thus in the opinion of who writes, it is too limited in scope. In fact, this analysis, as elsewhere mentioned in this thesis, seeks to expose Dante’s Comedy as a binding element behind a scope of interests that is wider than that which may be otherwise identified exclusively by the relationship between Fascism and the Catholic Church.

It is, however, impossible to fully develop the arguments proposed by Villis (2013) or (Grimley, 2004) and others on community, religion, and fascism here,

⁵⁸⁵ This takes us back to what already mentioned in the chapter dedicated to the theoretical framework of this thesis. There the notion of overlapping methodological approaches as expressed by Gilbert (1971), Bavaj (2010), Gordon (2008), and others, suggests that conceptual stipulations of different scholarly fields that interplay on a historical plane, either by focusing on the scholar, the event or the method of an area of knowledge, are necessary when wishing to rationalise heterogeneous attitudes. See: Bavaj op. cit.; Gilbert F., op. cit.; Gordon, P., 1985, op. cit.

given the constraints of this present study. It is therefore left to follow on studies to further pursue the arguments exposed here.

3. A Century Turns

As the century turned, personalities like the aloofly aristocratic Lord Arthur Balfour and Bertrand Russell continued to exemplify the rift that British society was experiencing. The former held somewhat paradoxical views of religion⁵⁸⁶ and was generally perceived to be an ambivalent character.⁵⁸⁷

If Balfour's political ability was the cause of debate, to the extent that the houses of Parliament believed him to owe his position to rank rather than merit, his authority in the field of theology was hardly challenged.⁵⁸⁸ He was the only British Prime Minister to have had the honour ever to deliver the prestigious Gifford Lectures in Natural Theology. The latter would appear to befit Britain rapidly changing views on religion with their accommodating stand over the need to derive the evidence of God from our commonly shared humanity.⁵⁸⁹

Despite delivering three successful lectures, Balfour skilfully managed never to mention Dante or his *Comedy*. Furthermore, Lord Balfour was one of the members of the *Cambridge Apostles*, the intellectual secret society founded at Cambridge University in 1820.⁵⁹⁰ As Lubenow (2007) points out, many of the

⁵⁸⁶ Cf. Timothy Madigan, 'The Paradoxes of Arthur Balfour', in *Philosophy Now*, no. 81 (October/November 2010).

⁵⁸⁷ In his role as Foreign Secretary he was responsible for The Balfour Declaration of November 1917. Writing to Walter Rothschild, 2nd Baron Rothschild, Lord Balfour decreed, in name of his Britannic Majesty, the 'establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people.' *The Balfour Declaration* (the British Library, Add. 41178, f.3, Filename: 013028).

⁵⁸⁸ The UK's government official website states: 'Arthur James Balfour succeeded his uncle, Lord Salisbury, who had been his political mentor and champion. However, his initial interests were not political. He enjoyed music and poetry, and was first known as a renowned philosopher, publishing 'A Defence of Philosophic Doubt', 'The Foundations of Belief' and 'Theism and Humanism' [...] It was thought that Balfour was merely entertaining himself with politics – indeed the House did not take him quite seriously. Members looked upon him as just a young member of the governing classes who remained in the House because it was the proper thing for a man of family to do.' <https://www.gov.uk/government/history/past-prime-ministers/arthur-james-balfour>. [Last accessed: 29 November 2015]. The British governmental source is echoed in, Eugene L. Rasor, *Arthur James Balfour, 1848-1930: Historiography and Annotated Bibliography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998), and further expanded in Kenneth Young, *Arthur James Balfour: the happy life of the politician, prime minister, statesman, and philosopher, 1848-1930* (London: G. Bell, 1963), for example at p. 11 where the author speaks of the 'gaiety' of Balfour's character, or p. 113 where there is mention of his relationship to the House, as summarised in the brief extract above.

⁵⁸⁹ On August 21, 1885, Lord Gifford signed his will in which he established a series of lectures to be held at Scottish Universities in order to 'promote, advance, teach and diffuse the study of Natural Theology in the widest sense of the term—in other words, the knowledge of God.' The Gifford Lectures database <http://www.giffordlectures.org/Browse.asp?PubID=TPPHAT&Volume=0&Issue=0&ArticleID=2>. [Last accessed: 31 March 2015]. See also: Paul Carus, *The Monist*, vol. 4 (Chicago: Open Court, 1894), p. 464.

⁵⁹⁰ Between 1820 and 1914, the Apostles elected to be members of the Cambridge Conversazione Society, as the Cambridge Apostles were also known, were a total of 255. Among others, there were: John Frederick Denison Maurice, John Sterling, John Mitchell Kemble, Richard Trench, Fenton Hort, James Clerk Maxwell, Henry Sidgwick, Lytton Strachey, Edward Morgan Forster, and John Maynard Keynes. Cf. William Cornelius Lubenow, *The Cambridge Apostles, 1820-1914: Liberalism, Imagination*,

Apostles, like Arthur John Butler, Sir William Frederick Pollock, and Henry Yates Thompson, 'were dedicated Dante scholars.'⁵⁹¹ This is baffling, or perhaps in line with Wittgenstein's thought, in itself telling given the fact that Dante and his *Comedy* are rich in references commonly used in philosophical and theological language.⁵⁹² The Florentine poet and his masterpiece contain several canons of natural philosophy, Aristotelian logic and theology, the thought of Albert the Great and the teachings of Thomas Aquinas plus, of course, a vast knowledge of classical literature.⁵⁹³

and *Friendship in British Intellectual and Professional Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁵⁹¹ Lubenow, op. cit., p. 239.

⁵⁹² A more extensive analysis of Wittgenstein should be found in other studies.

⁵⁹³ One of the most influential figures in Dante's early poetry was Guido Cavalcanti. Cavalcanti was a poet, as well as a natural philosopher or, at least, a man with a great knowledge of it. He deals with ideas of "radical Aristotelianism" or "Averroism" in his canzone 'Donna me prega', where he describes the experience of love with 'naturale dimostramento' thus displaying a firm grasp of philosophical tenets. Cavalcanti believes that between the sensory and intellectual aspects of the response to a loved object there is a discontinuity. There is an issue that separates the image of the object, once this becomes an abstracted form, in the possible intellect. Then, it is separated from the diletto of the anima sensitiva (21–28). Such a position would seem to suggest an Averroist view of the intellect as a separate, universal entity (Maria Corti, *La felicità mentale. Nuove prospettive per Cavalcanti e Dante* (Torino: Einaudi, 1983), pp. 3–37). Furthermore, in lines 30–56, Cavalcanti affords the idea that the virtue of the sensitive soul supersedes reason, the place which it now occupies. The will has to contend now with a reckoning object of desire. Intellectual contemplation (57–68) has to contend with the forces at the base of the essentially aristocratic vocation of the troubadours: love. Cavalcanti acknowledges that noble spirits are inflamed by it in their quest to prove themselves worthy. However, there is but a darkness, for the light of their intellectual contemplation (57–68) is extinguished by the force that moves them. The result of this is a canzone so centred on the tenets of "natural philosophy" and biological necessity that it appears clear how consciousness itself may not be considered. There clearly is an ethical dimension where a blind love challenges reason and where "Nobility" is expressed through an action of self-control. The love dimension thus afforded presents an ephemeral happiness. Of course, Dante moves away from Cavalcanti's narrative of love revealing a conception of poetry and love, which not only differs fundamentally from that of his friend Guido, but also starts acquiring more and more a typical Dantean approach to the thematic of love. In the *Vita nuova*, Dante begins to gradually shift his focus [VN, c. 18.4–6]. In the canzone, 'Donne ch'avete intelletto d'amore' inspired by Cavalcanti's poetry but by now far from it, where the pursuit of a lady's favour acquires the contours of a test above all of virtue and not only, or just, nobility. Beauty, in its most perfect state, becomes an example of how nature reveals that which God expresses as creative love. Thus, as Dante's poetry matures, the exalted Florentine poet sees himself engaged in the study of philosophy as mentioned in Cv 2.12.7. It is very likely that the Dominican school at Santa Maria Novella offered Dante the possibility to study logic and natural philosophy. It is plausible that he knew Fra Remigio de' Girolami whose theology derived from that of Thomas and Aristotle (See: Charles Till Davis, *Dante's Italy and Other Essays* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984, pp. 198–223)). Remigio and Dante viewed Thomas as the author of the *Summa contra Gentiles* and the commentary on the *Ethics*. Aristotle, before them, applied himself to showing how human reason was the way to truth. Dante was strongly influenced by Albert the Great when it came to his taste of philosophy as Bruno Nardi has suggested. (Bruno Nardi, *Saggi di filosofia dantesca*, 2nd edition (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1967), pp. 63–72). Albert offered Dante the possibility to be exposed to natural science, Aristotelian natural philosophy and a form of neo-Platonism that owed much to the Islam and its philosophers with their *Liber de Causis*, but equally to the Christian Neo-Platonic Pseudo-Dionysius tradition. Dante was keen to keep philosophical and religious knowledge separate and held them in a balance of equal dignity, by which this study means he saw them as equals albeit separate. Dante is not afraid to part ways with the teachings of Thomas for what regards the cosmic *sostanze separate* in the *Convivio* (Cv 2.4–5; Bruno Nardi, *Dal "Convivio" alla "Commedia"*, 2nd edition (Roma: Istituto storico italiano per il Medio Evo, 1992), pp. 47–62). Dante also has his own vision of how life develops in the womb. The human embryo is for Dante a continuous operation of a single *virtus formativa*. Such evolution Albert sees as similar to the *prima intelligentia* in the soul (*De intellectu et intelligibili* 2.2). It is thus possible not only for the a human to come into existence fully, but also to be reunited with that which is to be seen as an external *anima intellectiva* (Patrick Boyde, *Dante Philomythes and Philosopher: Man in the Cosmos* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 270–79; Bruno Nardi, *Studi di filosofia medievale* (Roma: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1960), pp. 9–68; Nardi 1967, op. cit., pp. 67–70). From what said, it would appear that Dante's philosophy and theology might have been influenced by the twelfth-century Muslim commentator of Aristotle Averroes via the teaching of Albert. However, Dante was probably aware that Albert and Thomas

Even Russell, who as Madigan (2014) puts it, was in many respects a sort of anti-Balfour, took the time to, at least, mention Dante, albeit negatively.⁵⁹⁴ Russell affirmed: ‘the universe of Thomas Aquinas or Dante is as small and neat as a Dutch interior.’⁵⁹⁵

Other prominent figures, such as Hannah Arendt, Karl Barth, Niels Bohr, Étienne Gilson, Rodolfo Amedeo Lanciani, William Ramsay, Steven Runciman, William Temple, Paul Tillich, to name but a few, all gave lectures at the universities of Edinburgh, St. Andrews, Glasgow and Aberdeen as part of the Gifford Lectures. While it is true that not all of them entertained a direct kind of relationship with Dante and his Comedy it is, however, fair to say that most did.⁵⁹⁶

fundamentally differed in their vision of the theology of grace and revelation as Thomas’ *Summa contra gentiles* attests in several chapters. As for Dante’s own position, this is not always straightforward. While Dante, the author of the Comedy, agrees with Thomas that it is philosophy that which prepares the mind for faith (*Pd* 4.118–32; 29.13–45), he also embraces Albert’s position on natural understanding. However, how far Dante strains from Thomism it is not for this study to determine and as such it is best left to others. Here it will suffice to mention that it is likely that Dante was also aware of a “radical Aristotelianism” and masters such as Siger of Brabant and Boethius of Dacia with their views of reason. Of course, Dante talks at length of human happiness in his works and the possibility to achieve it through natural means. However Dante’s Comedy stands as a stern reminder that philosophy can only go so far in achieving a sort of “earthly paradise.” For paradise is for Dante at the end of a very specific journey with its very defined spaces. The melancholy of the Limbo, where a lonely castle is home to the great “philosophic family”, it is certainly not a place where philosophy has achieved eternal happiness, but a place where eternal desire is forever stripped of the hope that faith brings (*If* 4.111–20, 130–44, Iannucci 1997, op. cit.). See also: Patrick Boyde, *Dante Philomythes and Philosopher: Man in the Cosmos* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); id., *Human Vices & Human Worth in Dante’s Comedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Maria Corti, *Dante a un nuovo crocevia* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1981); id., *La felicità mentale. Nuove prospettive per Cavalcanti e Dante* (Torino: Einaudi, 1983); Charles Till Davis, *Dante and the Idea of Rome* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957); id., *Dante’s Italy and Other Essays* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984); Etienne Gilson, *Dante and Philosophy*, tr. David Moore (New York: Harper and Row, 1949); Simon A. Gilson, ‘Rimaggiamenti danteschi di Aristotele: “gravitas” e “levitas” nella Commedia’, in *Le culture di Dante: studi in onore di Robert Hollander*, ed. by Michelangelo Picone, Theodore J. Cachey, Jr., and Margherita Mesirca (Firenze: Cesati, 2004), pp. 151-77; Amilcare A. Iannucci, ‘Dante’s Philosophical Canon’ (*Inferno*, 4. 130–44), in *Quaderni d’italianistica*, vol. 18, (1997), pp. 250–60; id., ‘Dante’s Theological Canon’, in the *Commedia*, in *Italian Quarterly*, vol. 37, (2000), pp. 51–56; Bruno Nardi, *Nel mondo di Dante* (Roma: Istituto Grafico Tiberino, 1944); id., *Dante e la cultura medievale*, 2nd edition (Bari: Laterza, 1949); id., *Studi di filosofia medievale* (Roma: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1960); id., *Saggi di filosofia dantesca*, 2nd edition (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1967); id., *Dal “Convivio” alla “Commedia”*, 2nd edition (Roma: Istituto storico italiano per il Medio Evo, 1992); Emilio Panella, *Per lo studio di fra Remigio dei Girolami* (Pistoia: Memorie domenicane, 1979).

⁵⁹⁴ Cf. Madigan 2010, op. cit.

⁵⁹⁵ Bertrand Russell, *Our Knowledge of the External World as a Field for Scientific Method in Philosophy*. First published in 1914 by The Open Court Publishing Company. Reissued by George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1922. Here lecture one, *Current Tendencies*. In A. *The Classical Tradition*.

⁵⁹⁶ Here is the list of lectures given from 1899 to 1941. Further down also a selected list of those who bore some connection with Dante’s Comedy. Oskar Kraus, *New Meditations on Mind, God, and Creation* (Edinburgh, 1940–1941); Arthur Nock, *Hellenistic Religion - The Two Phases* (Aberdeen, 1939–1940); John Laird, *Mind and Deity* (Glasgow, 1939–1940); Richard Kroner, *The Primacy of Faith* (St. Andrews, 1939–1940); Joseph Bidez, *Eos; ou, Platon et l’Orient* (St. Andrews, 1938); Karl Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (Edinburgh, 1938–1940); John Laird, *Theism and Cosmology* (Glasgow, 1938–1939); William George De Burgh, *From Morality to Religion* (St. Andrews, 1937–1938); Charles Sherrington, *Man on His Nature* (Edinburgh, 1937–1938); Karl Barth, *The Knowledge of God and the Service of God according to the Teaching of the Reformation* (Aberdeen, 1937–1938); William Hocking, *Fact and Destiny* (Glasgow, 1936–1937); Werner Jaeger, *The Theology of the Early Greek Philosophers* (St. Andrews, 1936–1937); Herbert Henson, *Christian Morality* (St. Andrews, 1935–1936); William Ross, *Foundations of Ethics* (Aberdeen, 1935–1936); William Dixon, *The Human Situation* (Glasgow, 1935–1937); Albert Schweitzer, *The Problem of Natural Theology and Natural Ethics* (Edinburgh, 1934–1935); Edwyn Bevan, *Holy Images* (Edinburgh, 1932–1934); William Temple, *Nature, Man and God* (Glasgow, 1932–1934); Edwyn Bevan, *Symbolism and Belief* (Edinburgh, 1932–1934); Robert Ranulph Marett, *Faith, Hope and*

Among those who delivered The Gifford Lectures, some were also involved with a particular form of idealism. In fact, the roots of British idealism, as Boucher (1997) states, are to be found in Scotland and Oxford.⁵⁹⁷

Edward Caird, Bernard Bosanquet, Henry Jones, William Wallace, William Sorley, and John Watson are all among the “founding fathers” of this philosophy. They all gave lectures at the Universities as part of the Gifford Lectures.⁵⁹⁸

Charity in Primitive Religion (St. Andrews, 1930–1932); id., *Sacraments of Simple Folk* (St. Andrews, 1930–1932); Nathan Söderblom, *The Living God* (Edinburgh, 1930–1931); Étienne Gilson, *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy* (Aberdeen, 1930–1932); John Smith, *The Heritage of Idealism* (Glasgow, 1929–1931); Charles Gore, *The Philosophy of the Good Life* (St. Andrews, 1929–1930); John Dewey, *The Quest for Certainty* (Edinburgh, 1928–1929); Alfred Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (Edinburgh, 1927–1928); Ernest Barnes, *Scientific Theory and Religion* (Aberdeen, 1927–1929); Alfred Taylor, *The Faith of a Moralist* (St. Andrews, 1926–1928); Arthur Eddington, *The Nature of the Physical World* (Edinburgh, 1926–1927); John Haldane, *The Sciences and Philosophy* (Glasgow, 1926–1928); Friedrich von Hügel, *Essays and Addresses on the Philosophy of Religion* (Edinburgh, 1924–1926); Lewis Farnell, *The Attributes of God* (St. Andrews, 1924–1925); William Mitchell, *The Place of Minds in the World* (Aberdeen, 1924–1926); William Paterson, *The Nature of Religion* (Glasgow, 1923–1925); James Frazer, *The Worship of Nature* (Edinburgh, 1923–1925); Arthur Balfour, *Theism and Thought* (Glasgow, 1922–1923); Conwy Lloyd Morgan, *Emergent Evolution* (St. Andrews, 1921–1922); Andrew Pringle-Pattison, *Studies in the Philosophy of Religion* (Edinburgh, 1921–1923); id., *The Idea of Immortality* (Edinburgh, 1921–1923); Ernest Hobson, *The Domain of Natural Science* (Aberdeen, 1920–1922); Henry Jones, *A Faith That Enquires* (Edinburgh, 1919–1921); George Stout, *God and Nature* (Edinburgh, 1919–1921); Lewis Farnell, *Greek Hero Cults and Ideas of Immortality* (St. Andrews, 1919–1920); George Stout, *Mind and Matter* (Edinburgh, 1919–1921); Clement Webb, *Divine Personality and Human Life* (Aberdeen, 1917–1919); id., *God and Personality* (Aberdeen, 1917–1919); William Inge, *The Philosophy of Plotinus* (St. Andrews, 1917–1919); Samuel Alexander, *Space Time and Deity* (Glasgow, 1916–1918); William Ramsay, *Asiatic Elements in Greek Civilization* (Edinburgh, 1915–1916); John Thomson, *The System of Animate Nature* (St. Andrews, 1914–1916); William Sorley, *Moral Values and the Idea of God* (Aberdeen, 1913–1915); Henri Bergson, *The Problem of Personality* (Edinburgh, 1913–1914); Arthur Balfour, *Theism and Humanism* (Glasgow, 1913–1914); James Frazer, *The Belief in Immortality and the Worship of the Dead* (St. Andrews, 1911–1913); Andrew Pringle-Pattison, *The Idea of God in the Light of Recent Philosophy* (Aberdeen, 1911–1913); John Watson, *The Interpretation of Religious Experience* (Glasgow, 1910–1912); Bernard Bosanquet, *The Principle of Individuality and Value* (Edinburgh, 1910–1912); id., *The Value and Destiny of the Individual* (Edinburgh, 1910–1912); William Ridgeway, *The Evolution of Religions of Ancient Greece and Rome* (Aberdeen, 1909–1911); William Fowler, *The Religious Experience of the Roman People from the Earliest Times to the Age of Augustus* (Edinburgh, 1909–1910); Andrew Bradley, *Ideals of Religion* (Glasgow, 1907–1908); James Ward, *The Realm of Ends or Pluralism and Theism* (St. Andrews, 1907–1909); Hans Driesch, *The Science and Philosophy of Organism* (Aberdeen, 1906–1908); Simon Laurie, *On God and Man* (Edinburgh, 1905–1906); James Adam, *The Religious Teachers of Greece* (Aberdeen, 1904–1906); Emile Boutroux, *Science et religion dans la philosophie contemporaine* (Glasgow, 1903–1905); Henry Melvill Gwatkin, *The Knowledge of God and Its Historical Development* (Edinburgh, 1903–1905); Richard Haldane, *The Pathway to Reality* (St. Andrews, 1902–1904); Edward Caird, *The Evolution of Theology in the Greek Philosophers* (Glasgow, 1900–1902); Archibald Sayce, *The Religions of Ancient Egypt and Babylonia* (Aberdeen, 1900–1902); William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (Edinburgh, 1900–1902); Rodolfo Amadeo Lanciani, *New Tales of Old Rome* (St. Andrews, 1899–1901), also in id.: *New Tales of Old Rome* (Houghton Mifflin, 1901). Here is just a selection of some of those who bore some connection with Dante’s Comedy. For Hannah Arendt, see: Seyla Benhabib, *Politics in Dark Times: Encounters with Hannah Arendt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). For Karl Barth, see an interesting lecture given at the meeting of the Karl Barth Society of North America in Toronto, Spring 1974: ‘Scripture as Realistic Narrative: Karl Barth as Critic of Historical Criticism’, in Hans W. Frei, *Unpublished Pieces*, ed. by Mike Higton (New Haven: Yale Divinity School Library, 2004), p. 35, also at: <http://www.library.yale.edu/div/Freitrancripts/Frei02-Narrative.pdf>. For Niels Bohr, see an interesting comment he made on Dante’s Comedy and its arrangement of the Angels: Samuel A. Nigro, *The Soul of the Earth: Condensed Version of Everybody for Everybody* (New Hope, KY: St. Martin de Porres Lay Dominican Community, 2012), p. 457. For Étienne Gilson, see: Gilson, E. 1949, op. cit., and the bibliography already mentioned throughout this thesis. Steven Runciman wrote an epic book: *The Great Church in Captivity: A Study of the Patriarchate of Constantinople from the Eve of the Turkish Conquest to the Greek War of Independence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) where he too manages never to mention Dante or his Comedy despite the obvious opportunities. However, later on in his: *The Sicilian Vespers: A History of the Mediterranean World in the Later Thirteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), Dante and the Comedy are clearly a very strong presence. In Rodolfo Amadeo Lanciani’s lecture *New Tales of Old Rome 1899–1901*, there is a very brief mention to Dante. However, more can be found in his: *Pagan and Christian Rome* (Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1892).

⁵⁹⁷ *The British Idealists*, ed. by David Boucher (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

British idealism while essentially opposed to the idea of extreme individualism, where society would form as the sum of each of its constituent parts, did not nonetheless entirely eschew doctrines that promoted self-interest. It simply put forward an argument where the state was the means through which humanitarian justice should be administered.⁵⁹⁹ It is not difficult to see how the ethics of nationality could be brought to clash against those of ethical universalism, cosmopolitanism and international justice.

It is, however, useful to bring it up insofar as, at least to a certain degree, this interplayed with Gentile's fascist actualism idealism.⁶⁰⁰ However, maybe more to the point, it crucially also intersects the Comedy on several other planes, including "philosophical hermeneutics", such as that expressed by Gadamer as he elaborates it on the original concept expressed by Heidegger.⁶⁰¹

Robin George Collingwood, a British idealist like William Ritchie Sorley, MacKenzie, MacCunn, Jones, Watson, A. C. Bradley, and Haldane expressed his political views where an ethical rather than legal code had to oversee relations between nations. British idealism, which in reality might be better described as a proponent of analytic philosophy, understood law to be 'an expression of the will of an organised sovereign community, enforceable by its agents.' The former especially believed that there was not a specific group of people who were in charge

⁵⁹⁸ Edward Caird, *The Evolution of Religion* (St. Andrews 1890–1892); Bernard Bosanquet, *The Principle of Individuality and Value* (Edinburgh, 1910–1912); Henry Jones, *A Faith That Enquires* (Edinburgh, 1919–1921); William Wallace, *Lectures and Essays on Natural Theology and Ethics* (Glasgow, 1892–1894); William Sorley, *Moral Values and the Idea of God* (Aberdeen, 1913–1915); and John Watson, *The Interpretation of Religious Experience* (Glasgow, 1910–1912).

⁵⁹⁹ Cf. Boucher 1977, op. cit.

⁶⁰⁰ Boucher and Vincent argue that in reality Collingwood, from very early on, disagreed with Gentile. As they note, his disagreement was based on a divergent view of how history comes to be. For Gentile, it was an eternal present that which was the creative force of an actualised past, whereas Collingwood viewed this as a mere abstraction. Gentile's idealism was, according to Collingwood, somewhat subjective and based on the self. However, whatever disagreement there might have been between the two philosophers, these were still both arguing about different facets of Idealism thus sharing overlapping views on several other tenets. Cf. Boucher 1977, op. cit., p. 64.

⁶⁰¹ On the plane of the hermeneutics and hermeneutical traditions, the focus is directed towards the meaning of a thing. Once there, the issue of one's understanding of the world emerges in its interplay between one's own temporal contextual understanding of it and the meaning of the world itself of which the interpreter is an active part himself. In other words, that which appears meaningful to the individual, it actually ontologically stands as the meaning of that thing despite the temporal limitations and finite understanding of the interpreter. Gadamer described these tenets as the dialectic that expresses true understanding where meaning is created as the act of individual interpretation of the world takes place. Therefore, the object of hermeneutics cannot but be a dialectical unity of self and other. Cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*. 2nd rev. edition, transl. J. Weinsheimer, and D. G. Marshall (New York: Crossroad, 2004).

of the execution of international law, but when this was violated, alliances were formed to force into compliance those who did not respect it.⁶⁰²

Besides international politics, Collingwood also addressed the tenet of literature, in what Gadamer describes as dialectic of understanding, and as such 'any text can address the reader if the reader allows the text to matter to him.'⁶⁰³ The British philosopher, it is worth remembering, was a great Dante admirer so much so that he taught himself to read Dante as he himself admitted.⁶⁰⁴

Collingwood was an accomplished academic who wrote extensively. Among some of his writings is the essay entitled: 'The Devil in Literature' that he wrote as he was still just a schoolboy. There he discusses at length the treatment of Satan in Dante, as well as Milton and Goethe.⁶⁰⁵ Collingwood negotiation with history and thought is interesting as he describes processes of acceptance and denial. On the one hand, he declared: 'historical knowledge is the re-enactment of a past thought incapsulated [sic] in a context of present thoughts which, by contradicting it, confine it to a plane different from theirs.'⁶⁰⁶ On the other he stated '[t]o re-enact the past in the present is to re-enact it in a context which gives it a new quality. This context is the negation of the past itself.'⁶⁰⁷ While it is not possible to dwell on Collingwood's take on history and further comment on it, if not in relation here to a brief analysis on Dante's Comedy, of which there is mention in the next paragraph, it is relevant however to note that Collingwood also said: 'for Dante the *Commedia* was his whole world. For me the *Commedia*, is at most half my world, the other half being all those things in me which prevent me from literally becoming Dante.'⁶⁰⁸

⁶⁰² David Boucher, and Andrew Vincent, *British Idealism: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2011).

⁶⁰³ Christine O'Connell Baur, *Dante's Hermeneutics of Salvation: Passages to Freedom in the Divine Comedy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), p. 136. Also, at the same page Collingwood affirms: 'Historical knowledge is the knowledge of what [the] mind has done in the past, and at the same time it is the redoing of this, the perpetuation of the past acts in the present. Its object is therefore not a mere object, something outside the mind which knows it; it is an activity of thought, which can be known only in so far as the knowing mind re-enacts it and it knows itself as so doing. To the historian, the activities whose history he is studying are not spectacles to be watched, but experiences to be lived through his own mind; they are objective, or known to him, also because they are also subjective, or activities of his own.'

⁶⁰⁴ 'I taught myself to read Dante...' Robin George Collingwood, in *The Devil in Literature*, in R. G. Collingwood: *An Autobiography and Other Writings: With Essays on Collingwood's life and work*, ed. by David Boucher, and Teresa Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 435.

⁶⁰⁵ Cf. Boucher 2013, op. cit., p. 435.

⁶⁰⁶ Robin George Collingwood, in 'An Autobiography', Boucher 2013, op. cit., p. 322.

⁶⁰⁷ Boucher 2013, op. cit., p. 322.

⁶⁰⁸ Robin George Collingwood, in 'The Idea of History', in Boucher 2013, op. cit., p. 322.

Whilst it is difficult to say with absolute precision why Collingwood saw himself in a world that was half Dante's and not someone else, and yet because of that double that of the eminent Florentine poet, it can be argued that there is a narrative of meaning and truth that Collingwood is exploring.⁶⁰⁹ Thus, let us, as said before, take a brief look at the Comedy and how Dante views truth and history.

Dante uses his Comedy to promote a narrative where the journey exemplifies the growing of awareness of the dialectic relationship between the pilgrim/interpreter and the world. This rising of self-awareness interplays with the world around that thus become more meaningful at every step of the journey itself. The temporal limitations and finite understanding of the interpreter acquire an eschatological meaning, which intersects that of the whole journey in and of a world that, in turn, exists out of time.⁶¹⁰ This allows Dante the pilgrim, and those who read the Comedy, to access a degree of self-awareness, which bestows freedom proportional but inverse to the finitude of the interpreter of such world.

Thus, the truth of the Comedy does not reside in its temporal, or historical accuracy, both internal to the poem and external in the form of the successions of readers each in their time and each with their historical truths, but rather in the risen awareness of the self as an act of will representative of a choice. This is informed not normatively, by which it is meant by an external force or dogma, but as a response to an existential call that the poem does not impose but only helps to address in the form of a guide, much as Dante the pilgrim was guided.⁶¹¹

⁶⁰⁹ There is a wealth of studies on Collingwood, from William Herbert Dray, Giuseppina D'Oro, Rex Martin, to Jan van der Dussen and others. It is not possible to list them all here. For an interesting reading on the subject, see: Heikki Saari, 'R. G. Collingwood on the Identity of Thought', in *Dialogue: Canadian Philosophical Review*, vol. 28, (1989), pp. 77–89.

⁶¹⁰ Cf. Christine O'Connell Baur, *Dante's Hermeneutics of Salvation: Passages to Freedom in the Divine Comedy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007).

⁶¹¹ Cf. Erich Auerbach, 'The Structure of the Comedy', in *Dante, Poet of the Secular World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961); id., *Studi su Dante* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1967); John Freccero, *Dante: the Poetics of Conversion*, ed. by Rachel Jacoff (Cambridge MA, London: Harvard University Press, 1986); John Freccero, *Pilgrim in a Gyre*, Freccero 1986, op. cit.; Domenico Comparetti, and Jan M. Ziolkowski, *Virgil in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997); Gianfranco Contini, 'Dante personaggio', in *Un'idea di Dante: saggi danteschi* (Torino: Einaudi, 2001); Maria Corti, *Scritti su Cavalcanti e Dante: la felicità mentale; Percorsi dell'invenzione e altri saggi* (Torino: Einaudi, 2003); Robert Hollander, *Il Virgilio dantesco: tragedia nella 'Commedia'* (Firenze: L.S. Olschki, 1983); Michelangelo Picone, 'Dante come autore/narratore della Commedia', in *Nuova rivista di letteratura italiana* II, vol. 1 (1999), pp. 9-26; Vittorio Russo, 'Descriptio personarum e maschera del personaggio', in *Il romanzo teologico: sondaggi sulla Commedia di Dante* (Napoli: Liguori, 1984); id., 'Virgilio 'autore' di Dante', in *Il romanzo teologico* (Napoli: Liguori, 2002); Ruth S. Scodel, and Thomas Richard F., 'Virgil and the Euphrates', in *The American Journal of Philology* 105, no. 3 (1984), p. 339; John Alfred Scott, 'Dante's Admiral', in *Italian Studies*, vol. 27 (1972), pp. 28-40; 'Servius, and Vergil', in *Commentarius in Uergilii Aeneidos libros*, ed. by Georg Thilo, and Hermann Hagen. 3 vols, vols 1-2, 'Servii Grammatici qui

The whole Comedy is thus “true” in so far as it presents a specific and finite journey of self-knowledge: that of Dante the pilgrim in his re-enactment of the journey itself. It is his specific interpretation of the world as it unfolds before him that which frees the reader from any objectivity, or authorial intentions, necessarily tied to the historical moment during which the events took place given that the account itself, the journey, is but a fiction. The specificity of the Dantean journey of interpretation allows its universalisation in the form of each re-enactment in history on behalf of each reader’s own interpretative journey, thus rendering Collingwood remarks, given the latter’s view of an intensional and extensional truth applied to Dante’s Comedy somewhat baffling if not equivocal.⁶¹²

However, this also takes us back to the issue, approached here earlier, of the notional importance of language as understood by Brett (in Cannadine, 2002) but also in the discourse promoted by Anderson (1983) in the dynamics of language and empire, thus closing the circle started earlier by the mention of Idealism and the notions of self in relation to self and the other.

The founding fathers of British Idealism were, by and large, connected to Dante and his Comedy. Edward Caird wrote: *Essays on Literature and Philosophy*, where he discusses Dante’s Comedy ethical and metaphysical stand as well as the role of theistic philosophy, science and determinism in relation to it. The issues of individualism and universalism are featured all throughout that essay where Caird expressively names: Lotze, Kuno Fischer, Eduard Zeller, Renouvier, Dr James

feruntur’, in *Vergilii carmina commentarii* (Lipsiae: B. G. Teubner, 1881); Charles S. Singleton, *Journey to Beatrice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958); Richard F. Thomas, ‘Virgil’s Ecphrastic Centerpieces’, in *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, vol. 87 (1983), pp. 175-84; Richard F. Thomas, ‘From *Recusatio* to Commitment: The Evolution of the Virgilian Program’, in *Reading Virgil and his texts: studies in intertextuality* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999); Richard F. Thomas, ‘A Trope by Any Other Name: “Polysemy”, Ambiguity, and Significatio in Virgil’, in *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, vol. 100 (2000), pp. 381-407; Jan M. Ziolkowski, and Michael C. J. Putnam, *The Virgilian Tradition: the First Fifteen Hundred Years* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

⁶¹² For Collingwood, see: Robin George Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994). Among the several commentaries to Dante’s Comedy and the notion of journey, see: Gianfranco Contini, ‘Dante come personaggio-poeta della *Commedia*’, in *L’approdio letterario* (1958). Reprinted in *Varianti e altra linguistica* (Torino: Einaudi, 1976); Emile Benveniste, ‘Le langage et l’expérience humaine’, in *Problèmes de linguistique général*, vol. 2 (Gallimard, 1966), pp. 67-78; Enzo Noè Girardi, ‘Dante personaggio’, in *Cultura e Scuola* vol. 4, no. 13-14 (1965), pp. 332-42; Limentani, op. cit.; Edward Moore, *The Time-references in the Divina Commedia, and their Bearing on the Assumed Date and Duration of the Vision* (London: D. Nutt, 1887); James Nohrnberg, ‘The Autobiographical Imperative and the Necessity of ‘Dante’: ‘Purgatorio’ 30.55’, in *Modern Philology*, vol. 101, no. 1 (2003), pp. 1- 47; Emilio Pasquini, *Dante e le figure del vero: la fabbrica della Commedia* (Milano: Mondadori, 2001); Jeffrey T. Schnapp, *The Transfiguration of History at the Center of Dante’s Paradise* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986); John Took, ‘S’io m’intuassi, come tu t’inmii’ (‘Par.’, IX. 81): Patterns of Collective Being in Dante’, in *The Modern Language Review* vol. 101, no. 2 (2006), pp. 402-13.

Martineau, Professor William James, the Right Hon. A. J. Balfour, Professor Upton, Professors Andrew and James Seth, and Professor Schiller, thus directly enlisting Dante and his Comedy upon the stage of the latest political debate of the time.⁶¹³

Thus, as touched upon earlier, politics and religion often interplay. It is interesting to note how Caird, albeit indirectly, remarked on how Dante was made to serve interests the polarity of which could stand at the opposite end of a scale. Caird affirms: 'Call the mind of Dante what you will, you cannot make it other than Christian.'⁶¹⁴ For which he seems to, once again, suggest that there were those who profited from the possibility of declaring a kind of allegiance with Dante and questioned, for whatever interest they might have had, even the very Christian foundations of the Florentine poet.

⁶¹³ Cf. Edward Caird, *Essays on Literature and Philosophy*, vol. I, pp. 1-63 (London: A. D. Innea & Co., 1895).

⁶¹⁴ James Lindsay, *Essays Literary and Philosophical* (Edinburgh-London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1896), p. 15.

4. England's Bewildering Comedy

Luigi Villari, the Italian historian and diplomat who Lloyd George seemed to admire in his *War Memoirs* calling his work 'fascinating,'⁶¹⁵ was an instrumental connecting figure between the English and Italian speaking worlds.⁶¹⁶ Villis (2013) maintains that Villari was also a fascist propagandist under direct orders from Mussolini.⁶¹⁷ The former, as Villis points out, wrote several articles for the *English Review*, and according to MI5, the British domestic intelligence service agency, was in active correspondence with many literary and political circles in order to promote Fascism in the United Kingdom.

Ford Madox Ford, born Ford Hermann Hueffe, was the first editor of the *English Review* and later *The Transatlantic Review*. In 1915, he published the novel *The Good Soldier*. There, for Dowell, one of its characters, the Catholic Church occupies an important, albeit corrupt and corrupting, presence.⁶¹⁸ Along with a narrative of Catholic decadence, Ford also introduces a moral note in his work. It is difficult not to see the parallel that he seems to have established between 'the shifty thing that is human nature' of which he talks in his *The Good Soldier*, and shifty nature of "love" in Canto V of *Inferno* where Dante introduces the story of Paolo and Francesca. In fact, at the 25th Anniversary Conference of the Joseph Conrad Society (U.K.), July 8-12, 1999, University of Kent at Canterbury, in his paper *Borrowed Desire in Ford Madox Ford's The Good Soldier*, Cousineau argues that albeit never expressively mentioned, Dante and his Comedy feature strongly in Ford's mind.⁶¹⁹

That of religion is a thorny issue at best, but when mixed with politics and a seemingly reversing tide of action, becomes also a murky and elusive issue. Thus,

⁶¹⁵ David Lloyd George, *War Memoirs* (Watford: Odhams Press Limited, 1938), here at Chapter XLVIII, Psychology and Strategy.

⁶¹⁶ See, for example, *East and West*, ed. by Giuseppe Tucci (Roma: Istituto italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1958), vols 9-10.

⁶¹⁷ Villis, op. cit.

⁶¹⁸ Cf. Piers Paul Read, *Alec Guinness: The Authorised Biography* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011), p. 275. The following is a revealing quote: 'Perhaps Roman Catholics, with their queer, shifty ways, are always right. They are dealing with the queer, shifty thing that is human nature.' Ford Madox Ford, *The Good Soldier* (London: John Lane, 1915), p. 285.

⁶¹⁹ 'Is there any terrestrial paradise where, amidst the whispering of the olive-leaves, people can be with whom they like and have what they like and take their ease in shadows and in coolness.' Tom Cousineau, 'Borrowed Desire', in Madox Ford, op. cit., p. 273.

what follows is an attempt to establish from evidence and inference, logical conclusions from the premises examined.

If Dante and his Comedy had been, for the good part of a century now, used to mould a certain cognitive map of identity outside Britain, with the *English Review* that trend seemed to have been reversed. Dante, who was by then largely known, at least to a certain British audience as so far seen, was now being used to influence the British public and ease the cause of Fascism in the British Isles while also influencing fascist Italy with new views, as we will later see.

Villis (2013) argues that, albeit not successful on the count of a readership, which was always modest, the *English Review* was nonetheless an influential voice of the British Tory party much as the *Edinburg Review* had been for the Whigs.

Douglas Francis Jerrold directed the *English Review* from 1931 to 1935. He was outspoken in its support of Fascism in Italy and held some interesting correspondence with various characters some of which were directly or indirectly related, or relating, to Dante's Comedy. For example, it is relevant to point out how two prominent poets of the time, Sir Francis Meredith Wilfrid Meynell and Francis Thompson who, as it is well known, had both converted to Catholicism, interplayed with Jerrold and shared a common interest in Dante's Comedy.⁶²⁰ In his poem: *The Hound of Heaven* the opening lines describe Francis running away from God. The narrative developed by Thompson, allusive of a conflict between man's nature tendency to love himself, and thus eschew God, unless and until God calls, is similar to that of the Comedy. It is not difficult to see how the issues of religion, politics and poetry come to be into contact through the agency of the Comedy.⁶²¹

⁶²⁰ Cf. Francis Meynell, 'Compositions about Alice and Wilfrid Meynell and their circle', in *Papers of correspondence relating to the poems of Francis Thompson* (Hollis & Carter 1947) (Cambridge University Library: MS Add.9813/A3/3). Francis Meynell, his second wife Vera Mendel, and David Garnett were the founders of the Nonesuch Press in London in 1922. Dante featured prominently and was considered among some of the best editions published. Cf. John Dreyfus, *A History of the Nonesuch Press* (Cambridge: University Press, 1981), and Dante Alighieri, *La Divina Commedia Or The Divine Vision of Dante Alighieri In Italian and English* (London: Nonesuch Press 1928), of which there are 1475 printed copies. Through David Garnett and his lover Duncan Grant, there was also an association with The Bloomsbury Group or Bloomsbury Set. Among the members of the set was John Maynard Keynes, the eclectic and influential British economist. Cf. Frances Spalding, *The Bloomsbury Group* (London: National Portrait Gallery Publications, 2013).

⁶²¹ Cf. Kathryn Ann Lindskoog, *Dante's Divine Comedy* (Macon, GE: Mercer University Press, 1998). She quotes Mark Musa who notes the origins of the metaphor in Dante's *Paradiso* XXVI: 46-51 – 'Per intelletto umano/e per autoritadi a lui concorde/d'i tuoi amori a Dio guarda il sovrano/Ma di' ancor se tu senti altre corde/tirarti verso lui, si che tu suone/con quanti denti questo amor ti morde', where Dante, temporarily blinded, speaks of Love. She is bewildered in noticing how all other Dante's commentators had failed to

The connection of which I talk can be summarised by the words of one of the most prominent economists of the twentieth century, John Maynard Keynes, here below depicted with Dante in the work of Tansey who brilliantly captures the this inversion of polarities in his painting *Land Fall*. The former incidentally, was also connected via the Bloomsbury Set to Douglas Francis Jerrold.⁶²² Talking about morality, business and religion the former affirmed: ‘we may no longer keep business and religion in separate compartments of the soul.’⁶²³



Fig. 4 Mark Tansey, *Land Fall*, 2007⁶²⁴

notice that: ‘St. John is referring to the ministrations of a sheepdog, which nips at the animal it is herding in order to guide it safely to the right direction’, p. 168. Had they noticed this, the correlation with Francis Thompson’s 1893 poem: *The Hound of Heaven* would have been striking. The opening lines of Thompson’s poem, in fact, read: ‘I fled Him, down the nights and down the days/I fled Him, down the arches of the years/I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways/Of my own mind; and in the midst of tears/I hid from Him, and under running laughter./“Ah, fondest, blindest, weakest,/I am He Whom thou seekest!”’ (Francis Thompson “The Hound of heaven”).

⁶²² John Maynard Keynes was also in contact with Thomas Stearns Eliot whose *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* owes a great deal to Dante’s Comedy. Cf. Eugene Hollahan, A Structural Dantean Parallel in Eliot’s ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’, in *American Literature: A Journal of Literary History, Criticism, and Bibliography* vol. 1, no. 42 (March 1970), pp. 91–93. In his poem Eliot, albeit not mentioning religion, nonetheless develops a narrative of disillusionment with the society of the moment. Cf. Roger Mitchell, On ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’, in Myers, Jack and Wajah, David (eds.), *A Profile of Twentieth-Century American Poetry* (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991). Eliot’s poem was published in June 1915 in the magazine *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*. Thomas Stearns Eliot, ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’, in *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, ed. by Harriet Monroe (June 1915), pp. 130–135. Ezra Pound was also involved in the publication. For more details on both authors, see the chapter dedicated to the *Risorgimento*. For the letter of Eliot to Keynes, see: Thomas S. Eliot, Valerie Eliot, Faber & Faber Ltd and, John Haffenden, *The Letters of T.S. Eliot: Volume 3: 1926-1927* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2012), p. 395.

⁶²³ John Maynard Keynes, *Essays in Persuasion* (London: Macmillan, 1931), p. 308.

⁶²⁴ Mark Tansey, *Land Fall 2007*. December 10, 2009 - January 23, 2010. Gagosian Gallery, 6-24 Britannia Street, London WC1X 9JD. ‘At the top of the mountain are classical economists such as David Hume, Adam Smith, and John Stuart Mill while the heterodox economists such as Karl Marx, Joseph Stalin, and John Maynard Keynes are at the base. In a parallel narrative, Dante and Virgil stand in the lower half of this painting, a reversed image of the mountain. In The Divine Comedy Virgil guides Dante through Hell and Purgatory while Beatrice guides him through Heaven. Tansey incorporates similar reversals in other works, such as *Land Fall* which presents two distinctly different scenes of a group of beachgoers as a mirror image, disrupting the possibility of determining a fixed meaning in this painting.’ Press realise, available online at <https://www.gagosian.com/exhibitions/december-10-2009--mark-tansey> [Last accessed: 20 April 2015].

Wyndham Lewis, a modernist painter and author, who was in contact with Ford Madox Ford of *The English Review*, and similarly Ezra Pound as one of the co-founders of the *Vorticism* movement,⁶²⁵ and others, described Jerrold as the 'brains of the English right.'⁶²⁶ Lewis believed that the truth administered to European politics, described with the metaphor of 'castor oil', was Fascism.⁶²⁷

In 1928, Wyndham Lewis used Dante's *Comedy* to serve his own modernist narrative transfiguring it into his *The Childermass*.⁶²⁸ There, Dante and his *Comedy* become entangled with Fascism through the promotion of the heroic, as well as somewhat fascist character, Hyperides.⁶²⁹

The issue of morality, business and religion, it would seem, thus played an important defining role. Douglas Francis Jerrold pointed at those as being the agent through which it was possible to identify a certain kind of national identity. He was convinced that England was in the midst of what he perceived to be a dangerous 'secularisation of political culture.'⁶³⁰ However, it was not just the secularisation of politics that worried Jerrold. He also saw another socially and politically disintegrating menace in the form of internationalism, to which this chapter will come back later.

Above all, he seemed convinced that England, or Britain, lacked a credible argument with which to contrast these perilous, in his view, forces that were pulling English society apart. England needed, according to him, the formidable might of an institution such as the Catholic Church. The only one, he maintained, able to offer a real viable alternative.⁶³¹

⁶²⁵ Cf. Shearer West (general editor), *The Bullfinch Guide to Art History* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 1996).

⁶²⁶ Villis, op. cit., p. 136.

⁶²⁷ David Lafferty, 'Castor Oil for Conservatives: Wyndham Lewis's *Count Your Dead: They Are Alive!* and "Bolsho-Tory" Politics, David Lafferty', in *Journal of Modern Literature* vol. 36, no. 2, (Winter 2013), pp. 25-43.

⁶²⁸ Brian Stableford (Jon Woronoff, Series Editor), *Historical Dictionary of Fantasy Literature. Historical Dictionaries of Literature and the Arts*, no. 5 (Lanham, Maryland; Toronto; Oxford: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2005), p. 246.

⁶²⁹ Cf. Frederic Jameson, *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979).

⁶³⁰ Villis, op. cit., p. 139.

⁶³¹ Cf. Villis, op. cit.

However, Jerrold also believed that the 'British were separated from the European tradition, not by Protestantism, but 'by a crude and naïve materialism.'⁶³² In doing so, he shifted the axis of the extreme right political narrative, from an exclusive dual argument based on the tenets of politics and religion to one where the cultural element also played a key role.

Thus, the *English Review* acted as the upholder instrument of the conservative right that regarded British parliamentary liberal democracy as a sort of middle-class sham. As Villis (2013) points out in his study, the battle that Jerrold was fighting on behalf of the most conservative right that he represented was one that could not be defined in a narrow political sense, but one which was to be fought also on a cultural plane.

However, Jerrold, as Joseph Hilaire Pierre René Belloc, Gilbert Keith Chesterton, his younger brother Cecil Edward Chesterton, and Alfred Richard Orage once had wanted, was above all, and despite his views on materialism, to bring back Catholicism to the shores of England. Jerrold and Belloc were two influential figures behind the development of distributist theory.⁶³³ The former was adamant in affirming that Protestantism had failed, at least in Britain, to prevent 'excess and disruption' in the country and thus, he wanted it replaced.⁶³⁴

The distributist theory owed a great deal to the teachings of different popes among whom Pius XI.⁶³⁵ However, the latter was notably different from his predecessors. In his 1933 encyclical *Dilectissima Nobis*, he declared that the Church did not favour any specific form of government, thus effectively rendering the

⁶³² Ibid., p. 139.

⁶³³ It is impossible here to further afford the issue of distributionism as this would transcend the scope of this study. Here, it will suffice to mention that, as Allitt (2000) argues, distributionism is essentially an economic ideology promoted in Europe towards the of the nineteenth century and the start of the next. Such ideology is formed around the principles of the Catholic social teaching, especially the teachings of Pope Leo XIII as expressed in his encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, 'Rerum Novarum: De conditione opificum', 15 May 1891, in *Acta Sanctae Sedis*, vol. 23 (1890-91), pp. 641-670; and Pope Pius XI, 'Quadragesimo Anno', encyclical of 15 May 1931, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, vol. 23 (1931), pp. 177-228. It is worth remembering that under the pontificate of Ambrogio Damiano Achille Ratti, Pope Pius XI, numerous important concordats were signed. Among these, there were the Reichskonkordat with Germany and the Lateran Treaty with Italy. See: Michael Coulter, *Encyclopedia of Catholic Social Thought, Social Science and Social Policy* (Scarecrow Press, 2007), p. 85; Patrick Allitt, *Catholic Converts: British and American Intellectuals Turn to Rome* (Cornell University Press, 2000), p. 206.

⁶³⁴ Villis, op. cit., p. 139.

⁶³⁵ See also how Pope Leo XIII addressed the disparity between the rich and the poor in his 1891 encyclical 'Rerum Novarum', and then Pius XI 'Quadragesimo Anno', op. cit.

institution more amicable to the possibility of collaboration with different regimes.⁶³⁶ Two years earlier Pius XI had argued, in *Quadragesimo Anno*, that economic and political life should be built on the basis of religious values. In his encyclical, Pope Pius XI also expressed a rather negative view of capitalism, especially that of the anonymous international finance markets.⁶³⁷

It is not difficult to gauge the importance of this figure on both the national and international planes and the influence that some of his actions must have had on the international order. Pope Pius XI, with his third way of economic ordering, also had an extensive knowledge of Dante's *Divine Comedy*. While it is difficult to ascertain to what extent and in what format he might have been influenced by the teachings of Dante, it is known that he certainly reputed Dante's masterpiece as one of the most important works ever to have been written. He was so fond of the Florentine poet that he 'learned Dante's *Divine Comedy* by heart.'⁶³⁸

Moreover, Pope Pius XI always kept a pocket edition of the *Divine Comedy* on his desk next to his Bible, some of Manzoni's works and the poetry of a relatively unknown poet, father Giacomo Zanella. This is relevant given that Pius XI was strongly influenced by the thought of the latter especially in the fields of 'poetry [...] faith, patriotism and science.'⁶³⁹ It is interesting to note that Vincenzo Botta, cited here in Herman Oelsner, had defined Dante in a very similar way calling him a 'Philosopher, Patriot, and Poet.'⁶⁴⁰

Thus, as so far seen, there seems to be a will, or if not at least an ease, in the sealing of the allegiance of Dante and his *Comedy* to causes that prominently featured the narrative of nation alongside to that of a thinker and promoter of values on the plane of the philosophical and theological as a great defender of choice. It is, therefore, legitimate to argue that Dante and his *Comedy* played an important role in the life of this pope. This is not just the opinion of this study, but also that of Aradi

⁶³⁶ See: 'Dilectissima Nobis', encyclical of 03 June 1933, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, vol. 25 (1933), pp. 261-274.

⁶³⁷ See encyclical: 'Quadragesimo Anno', op. cit.

⁶³⁸ Zsolt Aradi, *Pius XI. The Pope and the Man* (New York, Garden City: Hanover House, 1958), p. 32.

⁶³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

⁶⁴⁰ Oelsner, op. cit., p. 39.

(1958) who states: 'Dante's Divine Comedy had a great appeal to Achille Ratti as a guide to the philosophy of history.'⁶⁴¹

This chapter already spoke of the dichotomous relationship that Church and State entertained, remanding more to the chapter dedicated to Fascism. Thus, there will be no further mention of that issue here. However, it is useful to recall that back in Italy the acclaimed fascist philosopher Giovanni Gentile was rather sceptical of the Catholic Church. He used the same guide, who Pius XI considered so important, that is to say Dante, enlisting him to actualise a conceptual shift that would translate into a direct attack to the authority of the Church. In Gentile what had been the role of the Emperor for Dante, was now that of the State. Gentile stated: 'nel dispregio onde il dualismo paolino di spirito e carne aveva avvolto la natura e tutte le istituzioni mondane che nella natura hanno base. Dante rialza la città eterna, che Agostino aveva abbattuta.'⁶⁴² The criticism to political Augustinianism seems clear in his words. Dante thus stands as he who 'italianizza e conclude' scholastic thought. He does so also through the means of the vernacular, which therefore contributes to the assertion of "italianità". A clear stand against the Church that for centuries tried to deny Italy her identity. Gentile, speaking about the Church, further stated: 'che allora e poi sempre per secoli avrebbe avversato tra noi, piantata nel cuore stesso d'Italia, ogni regolare sviluppo della nostra costruzione politica, ogni naturale espansione della nostra libertà interiore.'⁶⁴³

Therefore, Dante and his Comedy are placed in a somewhat odd position as both defender and offender of the Church as well as a paladin of a fundamentally laic Fascist State and promoter of a despairing set of vested British interests. These

⁶⁴¹ Aradi, op. cit., p. 45. In turn, Zanella had been influenced by Dante's Comedy. The former stated: 'lo la mia estetica l'ho trovata da un pezzo nel vecchio Omero. Il cantore sia libero; la materia che prende a trattare sia possibilmente nuova e resa amabile dalla bellezza del verso. Ecco il canone supremo, immortale dell'arte.' Giacomo Zanella, 'La poetica nella Divina Commedia', in *Scritti Vari* (Firenze 1877), pp. 3-4. According to Aradi (1953), Zanella was 'in excellent terms with the men who later created Italian unity.' *Ibid.*, p. 44. At the same page, Aradi further argues that Zanella had influenced Pope Pius XI in matters of faith, poetry patriotism and science.

⁶⁴² Giovanni Gentile, *La profezia di Dante*, in *Studi su Dante*, ed. by Vito A. Bellezza (Firenze: Sansoni, 1965), p. 30.

⁶⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 39. As for the issue of the realignment of thought, see the Introduction and the chapter dedicated to the theoretical background.

tenets all intersect on the plane that could be defined, borrowing some of Gentile's words, as a "dialectic of thought."⁶⁴⁴

In the interim, in Britain, the *English Review* kept supporting Mussolini cause. Sir Charles Petrie regularly wrote in the British magazine, along with Lady Houston. Lady Lucy Houston was a fervent patriot apparently unafraid of direct clashes with the government of the time. *The Saturday Review* in 1935 in fact said: 'The Government fear Lady Houston because she tells the truth and defies them.' From the same pages of *The Saturday Review* there is almost a eulogy to her dedication to the British cause, 'Lady Houston has demonstrated her love for her country and, because their every action shows they have no patriotism, she is the object of the Government most bitter hostility.'⁶⁴⁵

Thus, as seen so far, the influence of Dante and his Comedy on British thought was considerable. Famous writers, who famously struggled with the idea of Christianity, Catholicism, Protestantism, capitalism, nationalism, and their British identity, often referred to Dante's Comedy to state or consolidate their point. Among them was Evelyn Underhill. She wrote extensively on the subject of mysticism, often quoting Dante's Comedy. She did so also through the medium of some very public *fora*, such as *The Spectator*, the latter being a typical public meeting point for politics and culture.⁶⁴⁶ There, in her article *In Defence of the Faith*, she uses Dante's Comedy to clarify her theological position on that which Baron von Hugel said to be

⁶⁴⁴ Cf. Giovanni Gentile, 'Dante nella storia del pensiero italiano', vol. 13, in *Opere Complete di Giovanni Gentile*, in *Studi su Dante*, ed. by V.A. Bellezza (Firenze: Sansoni, 1965).

⁶⁴⁵ Cf. *The Saturday Review of politics, literature, science, and art*, vol. 160, (1935).

⁶⁴⁶ Evelyn Underhill mentioned Dante's Comedy several times throughout her books and it would be arduous here, given the limitations of this study, to name them all. It will suffice the mention to her book *Mysticism: A Study in Nature and Development of Spiritual Consciousness* (New York: Dutton, 1912), as one of the most crucial works on the subject of Mysticism. In chapter VI: *Mysticism and Symbolism*, for Eckhart famous, 'God needs man', which is to say: 'the homeward journey of man's spirit' in Underhill's own words, the latter makes ample use of Dante's Comedy. This is an important chapter, which deals with 'the whole gamut of symbolic expression; through Transcendence, Desire, and Immanence', apart from the obvious tenets of immanence, occultism and mysticism that greatly attracted the Fascists. Wilhelm Reich declared: 'Fascism has awakened a sleeping world to the realities of the irrational, mystical character structure of the people of the world.' Cf., Wilhelm Reich, *History of the Discovery of the Life Energy, the Emotional Plague of Mankind*, vol. 1: *The Murder of Christ* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1953). For other references to Fascism and mysticism, see: Steven Wasserstrom, *Religion After Religion: Gershom Scholem, Mircea Eliade, and Henry Corbin at Eranos* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1999). See also: Gustavo Benavides, 'Giuseppe Tucci, or Buddhology in the Age of Fascism', in *Curators of the Buddha. The Study of Buddhism Under Colonialism*, ed. by Donald S. Lopez Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

'not an Ought-ness but an Is-ness.'⁶⁴⁷ She quotes: 'the Love that makes us lovely urges me, says St. Bonaventura to Dante...'⁶⁴⁸

Equally fascinated by Roman Catholic mysticism, was Edmund Garratt Gardner, the prominent English scholar whose passion for Italy was well known. He was appointed as Barlow lecturer on Dante at the prestigious University College London, where he worked from 1910 to 1926, and wrote extensively on the subjects of Dante, his Comedy, Italian history, and mysticism.⁶⁴⁹ In his *Dante's Ten Heavens e Dante and the mystics*, Gardner considered Dante to be 'a scholar in theology but a mystic in religion.'⁶⁵⁰

In his *The national idea in Italian literature*, Gardner puts Dante right at the heart of Italian identity and affirms that 'the national idea came to Dante as part of that essential continuity between ancient Rome and modern Italy which is the key to Italian civilisation.'⁶⁵¹ Gardner refers to Dante and his Comedy in several other parts of his book, charging the medieval poet author of the Comedy with the role of creator and protector of not only an Italian sense of nationhood but of cultural and linguistic identity as well. He quotes Mazzini who wrote of Dante: 'L'Italia cerca in lui il segreto della sua Nazionalità; l'Europa, il segreto dell'Italia e una profezia del pensiero moderno',⁶⁵² but adds to this, commenting: 'it is in Dante, so to speak, that Mazzini finds the starting point of his own political creed.'⁶⁵³ These are not light words, for affirming that it is Dante who informed he who so much did for the unification of Italy is a rather strong statement, at best, given the prominent position that Gardner

⁶⁴⁷ Evelyn Underhill, 'In Defence of the Faith', in *The Spectator*, 13 April 1929, p. 7.

⁶⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁹ Edmund Garratt Gardner, *Dante's Ten Heavens. A study of the Paradiso, Westminster 1898, 1900* (London: A. Constable, 1904); id., *Dante* (London: Aldine House J.M. Dent, 1900); Edmund Garratt Gardner, and Philip H. Wicksteed, *Dante and Giovanni del Virgilio* (London: Westminster: 1902); Edmund Garratt Gardner, *The Story of Florence* (London: J.M. Dent & Co., 1900); id., *The story of Siena and San Gimignano* (London: Aldine House J.M. Dent, 1902, 1904); id., *Dukes & poets in Ferrara. A study in the poetry, religion and politics of the Fifteenth and early Sixteenth Centuries* (London: A. Constable and Company, Limited, 1904); id., *The king of court poets. A study of the work life and times of Lodovico Ariosto* (London: A. Constable and Company, Limited, 1906); id., *Saint Catherine of Siena. A study in the religion, literature and history of the fourteenth century in Italy* (London: J.M. Dent & Co.; New York, E.P. Dutton & Co., 1907); id., *The painters of the school of Ferrara* (London: Duckworth and Co.; New York, C. Scribner's Sons, 1911); id., *Dante and the mystics* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons; New York, E.P. Dutton, 1913); id., *The national idea in Italian literature*, (Manchester: The University Press; London, New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1921); id., *Tommaso Campanella and his Poetry* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1923); id., *The story of Italian literature*, (New York, London: Harper & Brothers, 1927); id., *The Arthurian Legend in Italian Literature* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd.; New York: E.P. Dutton & Co. Inc., 1930); id., *Italy. A companion to Italian studies* (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1934).

⁶⁵⁰ Olin H. Moore, 'Edmund Garratt Gardner (1869-1935)', in *Italica*, vol. 12 (1935), p. 200.

⁶⁵¹ Gardner 1921, op. cit., p.12.

⁶⁵² Ibid., p. 37.

⁶⁵³ Ibid.

occupied at the time (incidentally just one year before the official takeover of power on behalf of Mussolini).

Gardner goes as far as saying that Dante was, in some ways, a precursor, a sort of forefather, of the League of Nations as well as a proud herald of Italian superiority in all human fields. Which effectively means that Gardner endorsed the idea that the Italian nation had the 'primato morale e civile' over all other human societies.⁶⁵⁴

Gardner was published, among others, by Joseph Malaby Dent. The latter showed a keen interest in the English scholar.⁶⁵⁵ This publishing house, even if nominally not pro-fascist, did not, however, shy away from accepting works that glorify the Italian dictatorial regime. Baron Bernardo Quaranta di San Severo, a Neapolitan pro-fascist aristocrat, edited a book containing a selection of Mussolini speeches entitled: *Mussolini as revealed in his political speeches*. While the contents of the book may appear obvious, what is interesting is to note that it was dedicated to Senator Tommaso Tittoni.⁶⁵⁶ The latter was the first appointed president of the most important cultural institution in fascist Italy, the Royal Academy of Italy. The Italian Senator declared himself to be a great admirer of Dante who by association reminded him of the British academic, jurist, and historian Lord Bryce.⁶⁵⁷ This is odd as the latter was neither a fascist nor a pro-fascist. He held strong liberal views and was widely acclaimed as somewhat of a 'philosopher in politics,' as *The Manchester Guardian* of 1922 described him.⁶⁵⁸

James Bryce, 1st Viscount Bryce was president of the British Academy from 1913 to 1917. He was close to King George V, who 'regarded [him] as an old friend

⁶⁵⁴ Ibid., Vincenzo Gioberti in Gardner 1921, op. cit., p. 51.

⁶⁵⁵ Cf. Charles Jasper Sisson, and Cesare Foligno, *Edmund Garrat Gardner. A Bibliography of His Publications, with Appreciations* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1937).

⁶⁵⁶ Benito Mussolini, *Mussolini as revealed in his political speeches, (November 1914 - August 1923)*, trans. and ed. by Quaranta di San Severino, Bernardo, baron of (London: Dent & Sons LTD, 1924).

⁶⁵⁷ 'L'associazione delle idee mi conduce da Dante a Lord Bryce. Io sono un antico amico e un grande ammiratore di Lord Bryce la cui vita di scrittore e di uomo di stato fu tutta spesa a sostegno delle idee nobili e generose. [...] ma direte voi cosa c'entra Dante con Lord Bryce? C'entra perché Dante 600 anni fa gli ha anticipatamente risposto. Dante con versi fatidici ha tracciato con precisione i naturali confini d'Italia nei versi [sic] Suso in Italia bella giace un laco/A pie' dell'Alpe che serra Lamagna/Sovra Tiralli ed ha nome Benaco.' *Il Carroccio. The Italian review, Rivista di cultura, propaganda e difesa italiana in America*, vol. 14, no. 2 (New York: 30 August 1921), pp. 118-119.

⁶⁵⁸ 'Death of Viscount Bryce O. M.: Historian & Statesman: The Philosopher in Politics: Interest in the East: The American Commonwealth: The War and After: The Philosopher's Task: Two Appreciations: as Ambassador: In Parliament' (*The Manchester Guardian*, 24 January 1922), p. 20.

and trusted counsellor to whom I could always turn.⁶⁵⁹ Furthermore, Lord Bryce established the National Liberal Club whose members included many Liberal prominent figures such as Prime Minister Gladstone, George Bernard Shaw, David Lloyd George, Herbert Henry Asquith and many other Liberal candidates as well as MPs like Winston Churchill and Bertrand Russell.⁶⁶⁰ It is, therefore, baffling that Senator Tommaso Tittoni should admire a figure, such as that of Lord Bryce, who had apparently little in common with his views if not that of being similar to the Florentine author of the Comedy.

The National Liberal Club was used as a platform by many anti-fascist prominent figures such as that of Gaetano Salvemini. The latter gave in that Club, in 1926, an important lecture on 'Italy and the fascist regime.' As a consequence of this, on 30 September 1926, the Fascist Regime in Italy stripped him of his citizenship.⁶⁶¹ Upon Salvemini's death, the Harvard University Gazette issued a tribute that was to be endorsed by Salvemini closest friends: H. Stuart Hughes, Giorgio La Piana, Renato Poggioli, and Myron Gilmore. There, it was Dante he who offered the point of reference for the calibration of the late professor's moral compass. The tribute said of him that during his life he 'fought with Dantesque disdain against the lukewarm and the neutral...' In the brief space of the tribute, Dante was mentioned twice.⁶⁶² Furthermore, the American actress Ruth Draper, to whom Salvemini owed so much, thanks to her ability to translate from Italian, was also a keen Dante admirer. In the play the "Italian Lesson", Draper makes her character exclaim: 'I can't tell you how excited that we have come to Dante!'⁶⁶³

Why would fascist Senator Tittoni then insist on using Dante and not someone less compromised, on this plane, to sum up the British Liberal Lord Bryce? Albeit, possibly coincidentally, it fair to argue that Tommaso Tittoni in his role of president of Royal Academy of Italy, and fascist diplomat, would have been aware of a possible conflict of interests arising from such bold statement.

⁶⁵⁹ 'Britain offers American President Bust of Lord Bryce' (*The New York Times*, 28 January 1922).

⁶⁶⁰ Cf., 'General Correspondence – Meeting at National Liberal Club – 1914'. Ref No. Dell/2/3. British Library of Political and Economical Science. [Retrieved: 08 October 2014].

⁶⁶¹ Cf. Iris Origo, *A Need to Testify* (New York: Helen Marx Books/Books & Co., 2001).

⁶⁶² For the full text of the tribute, see: Origo, op. cit., p. 242.

⁶⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

However random this coincidence might have been, it is fair to ponder on the fact that in a related context it was once again Dante he who was used to deliver yet another message, albeit perhaps more subtle than that of Senator Tittoni, but nonetheless still telling. In 1922, an article was published in *The Times* of London. It was entitled, *Lord Bryce and Dante*. The contents of the article refer to the discovery of an 'Almanack' [sic].⁶⁶⁴ This gave Lord Bryce the opportunity to respond in kind to Senator Tittoni. In that very public forum, the British Liberal Peer of the Realm praised the Italians and spoke of Dante's influence on English poets thus displaying an impressive knowledge of the Comedy.

British Prime Minister Gladstone, as *The Spectator* reports, had commented on Dante using some extraordinary words that go beyond the praising or mere literary appreciation.⁶⁶⁵ For the former, Dante informed his own very moral and analytical code, which given the position of extreme importance that Gladstone covered, is not something to be taken lightly. His words confirm, once again here, the belief that Dante and his Comedy served a pivotal role for the how thought relates to other expressions of itself thus becoming an instrumental agent of action.⁶⁶⁶

Baron Bernardo Quaranta di San Severo's book also contains another interesting reference. In the dedication page of the book, the Divine Comedy is again used to add value to that which the narrative of the book is seemingly trying to promote. Tommaso Tittoni, who signed himself off as 'Tom Tittoni,' wrote in English almost as an incipit: 'When listening to the words of Benito Mussolini that which Dante says of the stream of Purgatorio is recalled to mind "tutte le acque che son di qua più monde Parrieno avere in sé misura alcuna Verso di quella che nulla nasconde."⁶⁶⁷

⁶⁶⁴ Paget Jackson Toynbee, 'Lord Bryce and Dante', in *The Times* (8 February 1922), p. 20.

⁶⁶⁵ 'You have been good enough to call that supreme poet 'a solemn master' for me. These are not empty words. The reading of Dante is not merely a pleasure, a tour de force, or a lesson; it is a vigorous discipline for the heart, the intellect, the whole man. In the school of Dante I have learned a great part of that mental provision (however insignificant it be) which has served me to make the journey of human life up to the term of nearly seventy-three years. And I should like to extend your excellent phrase, and to say that he who labours for Dante labours to serve Italy, Christianity, the world.' William Ewart Gladstone, 'News of the Week', in *The Spectator* (13 January 1883), p. 1.

⁶⁶⁶ Cf. Federn, op. cit. See the Introduction and Chapter I for a more extensive analysis on the issue.

⁶⁶⁷ Mussolini, *Mussolini as revealed in his political speeches*, op. cit. However, the edition in which Senator Tittoni handwrote his dedication is available online at

According to the renowned Italian Dante scholar Giorgio Petrocchi, in the canto that Tittoni chose to mention as a reminder of Mussolini, Matelda personifies the perfect happiness prior to original sin and the rivers Lethe, and Eunoe, the waters of which erase the memory of sins committed, are powered only by the divine will.⁶⁶⁸ Thus, is Tittoni implying that Mussolini is a kind of new Matelda and in doing so promoting a sort of laic and fascist mysticism rooted in the authority of the Comedy? It would seem so, at least to the author of this thesis. Therefore, could this have escaped Lord Bryce's acute sense of politics, as he was an excellent connoisseur of the Comedy? This sounds highly unlikely and far more improbable than a likely instrumentalisation of the Comedy by different and differing stakes, which could not have been unaware of the different uses Dante's Comedy was been subjected too.



Fig. 5 Sandro Botticelli, *Divine Comedy*, Pg XVIII (drawing, 1485/90).⁶⁶⁹

Yet, another prominent scholar, Ernest Barker, whose contribution 'to the study of classical political thought have remained a benchmark in that field for much of the twentieth century' as Stapleton (2006) maintains, commented extensively on Dante and his Comedy.⁶⁷⁰ Barker was a Liberal and the first to hold the seat of professor of political science (1928-39), endowed by the Rockefeller foundation in

<https://archive.org/stream/mussoliniasrevea00mussuoft#page/n15/mode/2up> [Last accessed: 15 January 2015].

⁶⁶⁸ Cf. Dante Alighieri, *La Commedia secondo l'antica vulgata*, ed. by Giorgio Petrocchi (Milano: Mondadori, 1966–1967).

⁶⁶⁹ Sandro Botticelli capturing the mystical Matelda as she greets Dante and Virgil at the gates of the Heavenly Paradise. http://www.hs-augsburg.de/~harsch/italica/Cronologia/secolo14/Dante/dan_d228.jpg.

⁶⁷⁰ Julia Stapleton, 'Ernest Barker: classic England-Britain and Europe 1906-1960', in *Polis: journal of the Society for Greek Political Thought*, vol. 23, no.2 (2006), pp. 203-221, p. 203.

Cambridge. Cambridge was the place where as David Easton, John G. Gunnell, and Michael B. Stein (1995) quote in their book 'men walk on the razor edge of acute analysis.'⁶⁷¹ There, Barker intertwines the 'Western quest of discovery' with Ulysses' voyage in Dante's Comedy.⁶⁷² As Dante proclaims the importance of knowledge and makes Ulysses say: 'Fatti non foste a viver come bruti/Ma per seguir virtute e conoscenza', Barker embarks in a lengthy analysis of the history of thought.⁶⁷³ His words, in his essay on the importance of the Dantean Ulysses, bring us back to what has already been mentioned about the agency of thought (Gilbert, 1971) and the role that the Comedy had in it. Barker affirms: 'the historian of thought, directing his attention to movement of thought, is naturally concerned with what may be called the intellectual and spiritual recoveries [...]'⁶⁷⁴

Cambridge at the time, it is worth remembering, was also promoting a kind of philosophy of linguistic analysis dominated by Wittgenstein' thought, of whom there was mention before. In Cambridge, unlike Oxford, the term "science" came to be associated with politics for the first time.⁶⁷⁵ Thus, accepting what Barker affirms in regard to the genesis of thought, it is not difficult to gauge the importance of the role of the Comedy in his own narrative of expression.

⁶⁷¹ *Regime and Discipline: Democracy and the Development of Political Science*, ed. by David Easton, and John G. Gunnell, Michael B. Stein (University of Michigan Press, 1995), p. 117.

⁶⁷² Ernest Barker, *Traditions of Civility: Eight Essays* (Cambridge: University Press, 1948), p. 71.

⁶⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

⁶⁷⁵ Cf., Easton D., and M. Stein 1995, op. cit.

5. England is not Italy

If the use of the Comedy, as so far seen, could appear blurring, confusing or altogether mystifying, giving the many agents who accessed it for their different and differing interests, similarly the British and Italian foreign policies, at the time of fascist Italy, were somewhat baffling. For example, before 1935 and the Stresa conference followed by the Abyssinian crisis, Britain together with France had been an ally of Italy. The latter was, by and large at that time, still anti-German. However, the more common view for which it was Mussolini he who compromised the solidity of the anti-German front, has recently been revised. At a closer look, documents reveal that the British Government was, if nothing else, at least, aware of the dangers of conducting an ambiguous policy towards Italy as this could have pushed Mussolini, as history confirms, over the German camp.⁶⁷⁶

This is not to say that Italy was completely exempt from her own faults. In the 1930s, on her part, besides an aggressive colonial agenda, she also tried to implement a policy of linguistic and cultural expansionism. The Fascist government was keen to exercise its influence over the political activity of Italian scholars both in Italy and around the world, thus including those who operated from England, or better yet, Britain. However, their attempt to politically spread Fascism abroad through the promotion of the *Fasci Italiani all'Estero* remains questionable.⁶⁷⁷

Mussolini was aware of the strategic importance of Great Britain and in the aftermath of the Abyssinian annexation on behalf of Italy, the Italian dictator agreed to sign the so-called Gentlemen's Agreement in January 1937 with Britain.⁶⁷⁸ It was in the British government's interests to keep Italy away from Germany despite widespread public indignation at home for what Italy had done. However, the British

⁶⁷⁶ Cf., *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-39*, series.1, vol. 2, Foreign office, ed. by Rohan Butler (H.m.s.o., 1962).

⁶⁷⁷ Cf., Emilio Gentile, 'La politica estera del partito Fascista: Ideologia e organizzazione dei Fasci italiani all'estero (1920 – 1930)', in *Storia Contemporanea*, vol. 26, no. 6. (1995), pp. 897- 956; Claudia Baldoli, *Exporting Fascism Italian Fascist and Britain's Italians in the 1930s* (Oxford: Berg, 2003); Emilio Franzina, and Matteo Sanfilippo (eds.), *Il Fascismo e gli emigrati: La parabola dei Fasci Italiani all'estero (1920 - 1943)* (Roma: Laterza, 2003); Matteo Pratelli, *Il Fascismo e gli italiani all'estero* (Bologna: Clueb, 2010). For the absorption of the Dante Alighieri Society on behalf of the Fascist Regime, see: Beatrice Pisa, *Nazione e politica nella Società "Dante Alighieri"* (Roma: Bonacci, 1995).

⁶⁷⁸ Cf. Christopher Seton-Watson, 'The Anglo-Italian Gentlemen's Agreement of January 1937 and Its Aftermath', pp. 267-282, in *The Fascist Challenge and the Policy of Appeasement*, ed. by Wolfgang J. Mommsen, and Lothar Kettenacker (London: George Allen, 1983), p. 276.

public, albeit outraged, showed very little enthusiasm for military intervention against Mussolini.⁶⁷⁹ A short year later, another pact was then signed on 16 April 1938. With the Anglo-Italian Easter Agreement, Chamberlain hoped that Italy would withdraw its forces from Spain and again not fall within the German sphere of influence.

However, despite her apparent attempts to appease Italy, Britain, in reality, had pursued an ambivalent policy toward that country often acclaiming Mussolini in the press (especially in America by the Anglophile publisher Baron Henry Luce in *Fortune*, *Life* and *Time* magazines). In 1923, then Prime Minister of Italy, Mussolini was even awarded the prestigious British honorific title The Most Excellent Order of The British Empire (GBE), albeit revoked in 1940.⁶⁸⁰

This ambivalence is perhaps again best exemplified by the Stresa Conference where Mussolini and the French were determined to show Hitler that the Locarno pact would have been defended by a united front, which emphatically included Great Britain.⁶⁸¹ However, the equally important question of Abyssinia, Italy was about to attack that country and annex her to her growing colonial empire, which created much to worry about for the Europeans powers and the League of Nations, was surprisingly dismissed as “irrelevant” by the then British Prime Minister MacDonald, as Alexander Werth of the *Manchester Guardian* reported.⁶⁸²

What followed Stresa is well-documented history and should therefore not be discussed here. However what remains confounding, as it eventually helped to push Mussolini to ally Italy with Nazi Germany, is the hostility displayed toward Mussolini by the then Foreign Secretary Lord Avon, Robert Anthony Eden and

⁶⁷⁹ *The Canberra Times* ran an article on page 1, on Monday 11 May 1936 - *More Sanctions. British opinion on public meeting*. There the Australian newspaper reports that crowds more than ten thousand strong, cheered when Lord Cecil, who was chairing the meeting of the League of Nations in London's Albert Hall, declared that the British Government ought 'not only to maintain but if necessary intensify sanctions' against Italy. The language adopted was quite emotional and the same article reports that 'Signor Mussolini as the dictator not only of Italy and Abyssinia, but of the British Empire and the world.' Despite this the Australian newspaper, again in the same article, reported that when Earl Lytton declared: 'We are prepared to take collective action, and also military action, if necessary [against Italy].' Public opinion was not ready to go that far and showed little appetite for war. The article, in fact, carries on saying: 'Many people in various part of the hall protested against this remark.'

⁶⁸⁰ Baron Henry Luce often featured Mussolini. The latter appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine a total of eight times between 1923 and 1943. Some of the articles in *Time* were quite explicit. Among these, in 1923, one called Mussolini the 'patron saint of fascism', while another was enthusiastic about the Italian dictator 'triumphant reforms.' In 1924 on 10th March, the praising was undiluted and the American magazine proclaimed 'Wonderful Benito!' The same magazine also published another article 'Words of High Praise' on 27th April 1925 where influential bankers like Thomas W. Lament, partner of J. P. Morgan are mentioned. See: *Time* historical archives available online at <http://time.com/vault/>. [Last accessed: 12 May 2015].

⁶⁸¹ Cab. 63/50. DBFP.

⁶⁸² Cf. Robert Dell, *The Geneva racket, 1920-1939* (London: R. Hale limited, 1941).

Chamberlain's acquiescence, or rather the way in which the latter chose to come to terms with fascist Italy.

However, before Stresa, the British establishment had also proven to be flirting with Italian Fascism in ways that almost contradicted British plutocratic tradition of rule. For example, the conservative press and party, the *Tories*, during the 1920s and 1930s mostly praised fascist Italy, her leader Mussolini, and both his domestic and foreign policies.⁶⁸³ However, this was not done without some peculiar interventions. Neville Chamberlain, who from 1929 until his death in late 1940 had chaired the Conservative Research Department, deemed it unnecessary to inform his Foreign Secretary, Eden, of his connections with fascist Italy. The Prime Minister, in fact, maintained regular communications with Mussolini, as one may expect leaders of different nations to do.

However, Chamberlain did not always use conventional routes. In February 1938, President Roosevelt's proposal was dismissed in favour of what Chamberlain described as a 'wonderful chance to coming to terms about the future of the Mediterranean.'⁶⁸⁴ Eden came to know that Sir Joseph Ball, as Grandi reported to Count Ciano on 19 February 1938, was one of the routes into and from fascist Italy.

Segretario generale del Partito Conservatore, uomo di fiducia di Chamberlain e che dal mese di ottobre u. s. funziona da collegamento diretto e "segreto" fra me e Chamberlain. Sir Joseph Ball col quale dal 15 gennaio [1938] sono in contatto si può dire quasi giornaliero mi ha detto di essere incaricato da Chamberlain [...]⁶⁸⁵

Eden resigned on 20 February that same year.

⁶⁸³ Cf. Charles Keserich, 'The British Labour Press and Italian Fascism, 1922-25', in *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 10, no. 4 (October 1975), pp. 579-590.

⁶⁸⁴ Robert C. Self, *Neville Chamberlain: A Biography* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006), p. 281.

⁶⁸⁵ Report by Ambassador Grandi to the minister Ciano (Rapporto dell'ambasciatore Grandi al Ministro Ciano), London, 18th February 1938 – XVI N. 1023/466. Ministero degli Affari Esteri Commissione per la pubblicazione dei Documenti Diplomatici, i Documenti Diplomatici Italiani. Ottava Serie: 1935-1939, vol. VIII (Roma: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato Libreria dello Stato P.V., 1999), pp. 221-222. See also: Galeazzo Ciano, *Diario 1937-1943* (Roma: Rizzoli, 1946).

I should not further discuss British foreign policy, but simply reiterate that Britain's puzzling attitude toward the fascist Italian leader is somewhat reflected in how Dante's *Comedy* was being used in the United Kingdom. Despite this political turmoil Britain, in fact, remained an important presence for Italy on different planes and continued to assert, whether directly or indirectly, her influence over the country she had helped to create. For example, when Margherita Sarfatti, the *Duce's* mistress and adviser in the 1920s, published what is perhaps the most important biography on Mussolini, the book came out in London, under the title of *The life of Benito Mussolini* and only a year later, in 1926, in Italy with the title *Dux*.⁶⁸⁶

Margherita Sarfatti was many things to Mussolini both the person and the dictator. She held for him some important public roles. She probably, but not exclusively, owed some of her public profile to her personal relationship with the *Duce*. As an able journalist in her own right, she was responsible for the press, and provided information to the foreign press, especially in the English-speaking world.⁶⁸⁷

Margherita Sarfatti's other very significant relationship was with Dante and his *Comedy*. So important she felt the *Comedy* was that she treated the latter as a sort of oracle.⁶⁸⁸ Zanotti (2013) maintains that Sarfatti was instrumental for the works of one of the most celebrated English-speaking writer and poet: Ezra Pound. According to the Italian scholar, Margherita Sarfatti's *Dux* provided extensive "mytho-biographical" passages about Mussolini that the American poet then used as an unidentified source for his *Cantos*, here the 41st.⁶⁸⁹

⁶⁸⁶ Cf. Richard Lamb, *Mussolini and the British* (London: John Murray, 1997); Margherita Sarfatti, *Dux* (Milano: Mondadori, 1926).

⁶⁸⁷ Cf. Alessandra Leone, *La madre ebrea del fascismo: Margherita Sarfatti*. <http://www.archivioflaviobeninati.com/2013/03/la-madre-ebrea-del-fascismo-margherita-sarfatti/>. [Last accessed: 14 May 2015].

⁶⁸⁸ 'Dei classici che Fradeletto le faceva leggere apprezzò veramente solo Dante e la Divina Commedia che avrebbe consultato come un oracolo rivelatore nei momenti importanti della sua vita...' Ilaria Tremolanda in Alessandra Leone, *La madre ebrea del fascismo: Margherita Sarfatti*. <http://www.archivioflaviobeninati.com/2013/03/la-madre-ebrea-del-fascismo-margherita-sarfatti/>. [Last accessed: 14 May 2015]. See also: Victoria De Grazia who suggests that Sarfatti 'wielded immense personal power through her capacity to bring together intellectuals, artists, and the political personnel of the regime.' In Catherine E. Paul, and Barbara Zaczek, 'Margherita Sarfatti & Italian Cultural Nationalism', in *Modernism/modernity*, vol. 13, no.1 (January 2006), pp. 889-916, p. 889. For a more specific view of women under Fascism, see: Victoria De Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy, 1922-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992). For a firsthand account, see: Margherita Sarfatti, *My Fault: Mussolini As I Knew Him*, ed. by Brian R. Sullivan (New York: Enigma Books, 2014). There at p. XXIV, a comment reads: 'She did acquire a deep, lifelong love of Petrarch, Shakespeare, and above all Dante.'

⁶⁸⁹ Serenella Zanotti, 'Pound and the Mussolini Myth: An Unexplored Source for *Canto 41*', in *ROMA/AMOR, Ezra Pound, Rome, and Love*, ed. by William Pratt, and Caterina Ricciardi (New York:

As Falasca-Zamponi (in Zanotti 2013) suggests, Ezra Pound was, in turn, instrumental in trying to counter-promoting an image of Mussolini which a German writer, Emil Ludwig, had previously heavily promoted in his world-wide instant best seller *Talks with Mussolini*. There, Ludwig 'constructed a romantic, heroic image of the *Duce* - an admiring portrait of his exceptional personality.'⁶⁹⁰

However, as Zanotti (2013) points out, Pound wanted Mussolini to be portrayed as a 'genius' and 'a man of intelligence', thus far from the Ludwig's account of a sort of 'phenomenon.'⁶⁹¹ In his indignation, Pound wrote to Sarfatti and sought her help in trying to publish his book *Jefferson and/or Mussolini*.

This is a telling event on different planes. Besides the obvious acknowledgment of the power that Sarfatti wielded over certain matters, such as the publication of a book, what it is interesting to note is that Pound's *Jefferson and/or Mussolini* had been thus far consistently rejected by the British and American publishers, as Zanotti (2013) acutely mentions.⁶⁹²

If it is true that in *Jefferson and/or Mussolini* Pound, like Zanotti also argued, is certainly not kind to Hitler as he addresses the latter as a hysterical fool,⁶⁹³ and he has the Vatican as 'howling for the restoration of temporal power,'⁶⁹⁴ he is also typically highly critical of another power: the bankers. The last words of his book, in fact, approach the issue in quite brutal terms. Pound writes: 'These things being so, is it to be supposed the Mussolini has regenerated Italy, merely for the sake of reinfesting [sic] her with the black death of the capitalist monetary system?'⁶⁹⁵

Indeed, the title of the book is, in fact, suggestive of a parallel between Jefferson, as president of the United States and paladin of certain liberties, and the Italian dictator Mussolini. Pound probably intended them both as fighting a war

AMS Press, Inc., 2013). See also: *The Ezra Pound Encyclopedia*, ed. by Demetres P. Tryphonopoulos, and Stephen J. Adams (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2005), p. 33.

⁶⁹⁰ Zanotti 2013, op. cit., p. 68.

⁶⁹¹ Ibid., p. 68.

⁶⁹² Zanotti seems contradictory when arguing that the book had been suppressed by Mussolini. This seemingly feared it contained some compromising views on Hitler and the Vatican, but yet, according to the Italian scholar, was perfectly aligned with fascist propaganda.

⁶⁹³ Pound talks of 'hysterical Hitlerian yawping.' Ezra Pound, *Jefferson and/or Mussolini* (London: Stanley Nott Ltd., 1935), here in the conclusion at p. 48.

⁶⁹⁴ Pound 1935, op. cit., p. 12.

⁶⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 48.

against, among others, the power of the international financial system, which he regarded as evil.

As it is known, President Jefferson is reputed to have declared that 'I sincerely believe, with you, that banking establishments are more dangerous than standing armies; and that the principle of spending money to be paid by posterity, under the name of funding, is but swindling futurity on a large scale.'⁶⁹⁶ Thus, perhaps if the bankers that Mussolini was being careful not to upset, at least not too directly, were in Pound instead allowed to be taken on quite boldly and the latter seemed unafraid to express anger for 'una nazione che non vuole indebitarsi fa rabbia agli usurai.'⁶⁹⁷

In this regard, Pound is undaunted in his use of Dante's Comedy from which he draws his inspiration for his *Canto* 45, whereas Dante's Comedy is suspiciously

⁶⁹⁶ Thomas Jefferson to John Taylor, May 28, 1816, in 'Thomas Jefferson to John Taylor, May 28, 1816', in *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. by Paul L. Ford, vol. 10 (New York [etc.]: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1892), p. 31. There are however other versions in circulation which are most likely, at least partially, spurious. One reads: 'If the American people ever allow private banks to control the issue of their currency, first by inflation, then by deflation, the banks and corporations that will grow up around them will deprive the people of all property until their children wake up homeless on the continent their Fathers conquered...I believe that banking institutions are more dangerous to our liberties than standing armies... The issuing power should be taken from the banks and restored to the people, to whom it properly belongs.' And another reads: 'If the American people ever allow private banks to control the issue of their currency, first by inflation, then by deflation, the banks and corporations that will grow up around them will deprive the people of all property until their children wake up homeless on the continent their Fathers conquered.' These quotations are often attributed to as being part of a letter sent to the Secretary of the Treasury Albert Gallatin in 1802, which allegedly was later published in *The Debate Over the Recharter of the Bank Bill* (1809). Thomas Jefferson's writings do not show any reference to the first part of the quotation, which goes up until "Fathers conquered." Platt (2003) has it as spurious. She also remarks on a lexical problem that would emerge had Jefferson used the terms "inflation" and "deflation" as these are not historically documented as in use at the time of Jefferson. See: *Respectfully Quoted: A Dictionary of Quotations Requested from the Congressional Research Service*, ed. by Suzy Platt (Washington D.C.: Library of Congress, 1989; Bartleby.com, 2003). In regard to the second half of the quotation, this could have been derived from another statement that Jefferson made in a letter to John Taylor in 1816 and it is the one that has been chosen here as historically documented. See: Ford P. L., op. cit., p. 31. As for the last section of the first quotation reported here ('The issuing power should be taken from the banks and restored to the people, to whom it properly belongs'), it is likely to be based on what Jefferson had reported to John Wayles Eppes: 'Bank-paper must be suppressed, and the circulating medium must be restored to the nation to whom it belongs.' See: Thomas Jefferson to John Wayles Eppes, September 11, 1813, in PTJ:RS, 6:494. It is difficult to establish with certainty which of these versions Pound accepted. It is thought that the earliest known appearance in print was in 1933, the year in which Pound wrote his Preface to his *Jefferson and/or Mussolini*. However, Robertson (1948) argues that some dubious sections of the other quotations might have appeared in printing in 1948. See: Thomas Robertson, *Human Ecology: The Science of Social Adjustment* (Glasgow: William Maclellan, 1948), p. 163. For further sources see: Papers of Thomas Jefferson. 'Jefferson's Opinion on the Constitutionality of a National Bank, 1791' (Yale University, The Avalon Project) <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/bank-tj.asp> [Last accessed: 15 March 2015]. In whichever case, it is most likely that Pound must have accepted at least one of these versions as genuine.

⁶⁹⁷ Ezra Pound in a letter of 13 January 1944 to Gian Gaetano Cabella quoted in YCALL MSS 43, b.7, file 317, in Serenella Zanotti, *Da Dante a Mussolini di Pound in Scrittori stranieri in lingua italiana, dal Cinquecento ad oggi*. Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi, Padova 20-21 Marzo 2009, ed. by Furio Brugnolo (Padova: Unipress, 2009), p. 384.

quiet and unquoted by the Fascist Regime, despite the former's direct treating of the issue.⁶⁹⁸ In fact, Dante wrote:

Ecco la fiera con la coda aguzza, | che passa i monti e rompe i muri e l'armi! | Ecco
colei che tutto 'l mondo appuzza! [...] | E un che d'una scrofa azzurra e grossa |
segnato avea lo suo sacchetto bianco, | mi disse: 'Che fai tu in questa fossa?' [...] |
[...] là v'era 'l petto, la coda rivolve, | e, quella tesa, come anguilla mosse, | e con le
branche l'aere a sé raccolse.⁶⁹⁹

In his book, Pound is equally critic of Britain and especially those who controlled the world economy from the City of London. He directs his anger to those who promote the use of credit and slashes against their "propaganda".⁷⁰⁰ Pound, in line with a century-long tradition that regarded the use and practice of usury as unnatural and as going against the natural, in his view, human instinct to procreate, proclaims: '[charging interest] is a vice, a crime, condemned by all religions and every ancient moralist.'⁷⁰¹

Despite the fascist silence on usury, Pound regarded the political and economic reforms that fascist Italy had implemented as something remarkable. However, he also thought that the language, Italian, was effectively quelling fascist aspirations to become a world movement.⁷⁰² Thus, according to Pound, Italian needed to gain back the strength that once had. He argued that its strength owed much, if not all to Dante, and wrote: 'la lingua totale [si è] progressivamente rammollita dal giorno che Dante morì.'⁷⁰³

⁶⁹⁸ Cf. Michael Alexander, *The Poetic Achievement of Ezra Pound* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Faber & Faber 1979 (cloth); 1981 (paper)); Ronald L. Bush, *The Genesis of Ezra Pound's Cantos* (Princeton: N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976); Robert Casillo, *The Genealogy of Demons: Anti-Semitism, Fascism, and the Myths of Ezra Pound* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1988); Christine Froula, *A Guide to Ezra Pound's Selected Poems* (New York: New Directions Publishing, 1983); Pound and Eliot, in *Ezra Pound among the Poets*, ed. by George Bornstein (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

⁶⁹⁹ *Inferno*, Canto XVII, 1-3; 64-66; 103-105. Alighieri 1966-1967, op. cit.

⁷⁰⁰ 'If they are honest one wonders why the London Gesellites should be touting reemployment in their Sunday propaganda.' Pound 1935, op. cit., p. 3.

⁷⁰¹ Ezra Pound in Alessandro Lanteri, 'The Economic Ethics of Ezra Pound', in *International Centre for Economic Research – Working Papers Series – Working Paper no.: 25/2010*, p. 16.

⁷⁰² Cf. Zanotti 2009, op. cit.

⁷⁰³ Ezra Pound, letter to Ubaldo degli Uberti, 4 August 1940 (YCAL MSS 43, b. 12, f. 555) in Zanotti 2009, op. cit., p. 381.

Pound also added that there was but a handful of other Italians who possessed those which were the great oratorical abilities of the master Poet of the Comedy. Among those, he placed Mussolini, thus establishing a correlation, if not a relationship, between the Italian dictator and the Florentine poet.⁷⁰⁴

Furthermore, Pound was an instrumental figure for the then young Thomas S. Eliot who was introduced to him by another American writer, Conrad Aiken. According to Worthen (2009), it was thanks to Pound that Eliot was able, or enabled, to start his artistic life in London.⁷⁰⁵

Eliot had a deep understanding and appreciation for Dante and his Comedy. The Anglo-American writer reserved for Dante a very special place as he placed him over and above most other contemporary poets. He wrote: 'there has only been one Dante.'⁷⁰⁶

Eliot thought that the author of the Comedy was able to express and produce a kind of philosophy based on that which is perceived and yet not be limited by it, thus not producing a one-dimensional vision of life, but one which reflected life itself. This is what Eliot had to say in his essay of 1921:

Dante, more than any other poet, has succeeded in dealing with his philosophy, not as a theory (in the modern and not the Greek sense of that word) or as his own comment or reflection, but in terms of something perceived. When most of our modern poets confine themselves to what they had perceived, they produce for us, usually, only odds and ends of still life and stage properties; but that does not imply so much that the method of Dante is obsolete, as that our vision is perhaps comparatively restricted.⁷⁰⁷

Albeit conservative, by modern standards, Eliot maintained a kind of partial neutrality towards Fascism or a sort of middle way. From the magazine that he founded, *The Criterion*, or simply *Criterion*, the Anglo-American writer made some of

⁷⁰⁴ Cf. Zanotti 2009, op. cit., pp. 383, and Pound 1935, op. cit.

⁷⁰⁵ Cf. John Worthen, *T.S. Eliot: A Short Biography* (London: Haus Publishing, 2009).

⁷⁰⁶ Thomas S. Eliot, *The Sacred Wood. Essays on poetry criticism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf: 1921), p. 56.

⁷⁰⁷ Thomas S. Eliot, Dante, in op. cit., *The Sacred Wood. Essays on poetry criticism*, p. 155.

his thoughts on Fascism known.⁷⁰⁸ Albeit sceptical toward the movement, Eliot did not eschew it entirely either. He affirmed: 'I am all the more suspicious of fascism as a panacea because I fail so far to find in it any important element [...].'⁷⁰⁹

The Criterion, above all during its first years of life, created a pan-European network of commonly shared cultural interests. Its outlook was distinguishably international and helped to promote Eliot's belief that classicism was a central canon of the European cultural tradition. However, Eliot's classicism, as also discussed here later, was not to be limited to classical antiquity, but embraced a wider breath that saw the importance of the Roman world as instituting the modern. That brought Eliot as far as to affirm that England was a "Latin" country.⁷¹⁰ It was Dante he who provided Eliot with a quintessential model of European culture and in response to Krutch's condemnation of Dante as a bigot, Eliot replied: 'in Dante's time Europe was ... mentally more united than we can now conceive.'⁷¹¹

Eliot was worried about a "deterioration of democracy" yet accepted that the ideas of the French thinker Charles Maurras, an influential voice within the *Action Française*, may have been better suited, albeit with a reflection on centralisation and decentralisation mediated through the concept of competence, to England than Fascism itself.⁷¹² However, he added: 'I end by reflecting that the developments of fascism in Italy may produce very interesting results in the next ten or twenty years.'⁷¹³

Eliot separated politics from the political idea. This would mean, as Chace (1973) argued, that as a logical implication Fascism would have existed as a kind of Platonic ontological idea before its practical implementation, this being a line of thought that Eliot, in the end, however, chose not to pursue.⁷¹⁴ This notwithstanding, he thought it necessary, or advisable, to distinguish the Italian revolution, intended as politics, from Fascism as the political element. This, in turn, would effectively

⁷⁰⁸ Cf. Thomas S. Eliot, 'The Literature of Fascism', in *Criterion*, vol. 8 (Dec. 1928).

⁷⁰⁹ Thomas S. Eliot, 'The Literature of Fascism', in *Criterion*, vol. 8 (Dec. 1928), p. 288.

⁷¹⁰ Cf. T. S. Eliot in *Context*, ed. by Jason Harding (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 54-55.

⁷¹¹ Thomas S. Eliot (*SE*, 240) quoted in Harding, op. cit., p. 56.

⁷¹² Cf. Thomas S. Eliot, 'The Literature of Fascism', in *Criterion*, vol. 8 (Dec. 1928).

⁷¹³ Thomas S. Eliot, 'The Literature of Fascism,' in *Criterion*, vol. 8 (Dec. 1928), p. 290.

⁷¹⁴ William Murdough Chace, *Political Identities of Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot* (Stanford University Press, 1973), p. 144.

mean granting Fascism a true soul, so to speak, a kind of “nobility” in political terms, as Nancy (2003) describes political to be,⁷¹⁵ denied even by the most prominent fascist philosopher Giovanni Gentile.⁷¹⁶

Nevertheless, back in Britain Eliot never really showed an interest in the British Union of Fascists (BUF). Albeit somewhat attracted by Oswald Mosley and his radical manifesto, Eliot soon lost interest. However, he knew personally Harold Nicolson and James Strachey Barnes. Mussolini appointed the latter as Secretary-General of the International Fascist Centre at Lausanne. Barnes was a staunch promoter of Fascism.⁷¹⁷ The former, as seen here, was an important link between fascist Italy and Britain.

It is not possible here to fully explore Eliot’s political thought, which, as such, would be better left to other studies. Let us try instead to connect a few dots from the evidence at hand with the aim of arguing that Eliot was an elusive figure whose particular use of the Comedy benefitted a differing range of interests and thanks to whom the Comedy re-entered fascist Italy under a different guise.

Eliot’s publication *Criterion* was firstly financed by Mary Lilian Share, the Lady Rothermere, wife of the wealthy London-based newspaper magnate Harold Harmsworth, Viscount Rothermere. The latter owned Associated Newspapers, known today as DMG Media, one of the leading multi-channel consumer media companies in the UK. Lord Rothermere’s association with both the Fascists and Nazi cause is well documented by various scholars, recently released classified documents held by MI5, and was even the subject of articles published in some British newspapers.⁷¹⁸

⁷¹⁵ “‘The political’ seems to present the nobility of the thing – which thereby implicitly regains its specificity, and thus its relative separation.’ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Philosophical Chronicles*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), p. 27.

⁷¹⁶ ‘Fascism is not a philosophy. Much less is it a religion. It is not even a political theory which may be stated in a series of formulae... the “real” views of the *Duce* are those which he formulates and executes at one and the same time.’ Giovanni Gentile in ‘The Philosophic Basis of Fascism’, in *Communism, Fascism and Democracy*, ed. by Carl Cohen (New York: Random House, 1962), p. 365, cited in Chace, op. cit., p. 144.

⁷¹⁷ Cf. Harding, op. cit., p. 270.

⁷¹⁸ Cf. Donald Sassoon, *The Culture of the Europeans: From 1800 to the Present* (London: HarperCollins UK, 2006); Richard Norton-Taylor, ‘Months before war, Rothermere said Hitler’s work was superhuman’, in *The Guardian* (1 April 2005, 02.20 BST), available <http://www.theguardian.com/media/2005/apr/01/pressandpublishing.secondworldwar> [Last accessed: 15 April 2015]; Neil Tweedie, and Peter Day, ‘When Rothermere urged Hitler to invade Romania’, in *The Daily Telegraph*, (March 1, 2005, 12:01 AM GMT 01.), available:

Despite this, politically speaking, Eliot did not seem to abandon that “middle way” that characterised his political footage. The Anglo-American writer occupied a mid ideological station between different factions. While conservative in nature, albeit not in literary terms, he probably leaned more toward the Tory party. This was traditionally seen as the party of “God, King and Country” with their strong beliefs in the Divine right of the monarchy, its prerogative, and hereditary succession. They were also staunch supporters of the Anglican Church against Catholics, Dissenters, and Nonconformists.⁷¹⁹ Kirk (1993) says of Eliot: ‘as for English politics, Eliot was a consistent Tory, rather than a regular conservative.’⁷²⁰ Kirk argues that Eliot was influenced in his political thought by Bolingbroke, Burke, Coleridge, and Disraeli. These last three, in turn, having themselves being inspired by Henry St John, 1st Viscount Bolingbroke. He was himself sort of a controversial figure who Disraeli regarded as the founding father of Toryism despite his bitter rivalry with Harley that, in the end, effectively forced the party into a long political exile in Georgian England.⁷²¹

Thus, religion and politics in Eliot occupy a very close space that is difficult to separate with absolute precision. Chase (1973), in fact, argues: ‘[in Eliot] politics and religion are fused.’⁷²² In the edition of *Criterion* of January 1930, Eliot admitted: ‘you must either take the whole of revealed religion or none of it.’⁷²³ Where the role of the Church in general, but that of the Anglican-Catholic Communion in particular, is seen by the Anglo-American writer as being under direct threat. In somewhat stern terms, Eliot propounded: ‘the World is trying the experiment of attempting to form a civilised but non Christian mentality. The experiment will fail.’⁷²⁴ Christianity is thus fused in one ideal community who must be weary of the attacks coming from its flanks.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1484647/When-Rothermere-urged-Hitler-to-invade-Romania.html> [Last accessed: 15 April 2015].

⁷¹⁹ Cf. Stuart Ball, *Portrait of a Party: The Conservative Party in Britain 1918–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁷²⁰ Cf. Russell Kirk, ‘The Politics of T.S. Eliot’, in *The Politics of Prudence* (Bryn Mawr, Penn.: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 1993).

⁷²¹ Benjamin Disraeli, *Whigs and Whiggism: political writings* (New York: Macmillan 1914).

⁷²² Chase, op. cit., p. 148.

⁷²³ [A review of] *God: Being an Introduction to the Science of Metabology*, by J. Middleton Murry, *Criterion* 9 (Jan. 1930), p. 336.

⁷²⁴ Thomas S. Eliot, ‘Thoughts after Lambeth’, in *Selected Essays* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1950), p.342.

A third dimension is then added to politics and religion in the form of the role of literature which itself has felt the consequences of 'the disappearance of the idea of original sin', thus effectively intertwining the first two with the role of the latter.⁷²⁵ Eliot, in fact, famously described himself as a 'classicist in literature, royalist in politics, and Anglo-Catholic in religion.'⁷²⁶ As Deane (1992) argues, this is a critical statement where the terms royalist and Anglo-Catholic might be seen as relatively controversial but the term classicist is of a relevantly more difficult collocation.⁷²⁷ Deane identifies in Eliot's classicist approach to literature a dimension that transcends the plane of literature and embraces that of politics and religion. 'Eliot's understanding of classicism refuses to be contained strictly within the boundaries of literature. "Classicism" may be essentially a literary characteristic, but in Eliot at least it is deeply involved with extra-literary systems of value, with politics and religion.'⁷²⁸

Religion in general and the role of the Church, in particular, are for Eliot cardinal tenets. He was opposed to ideas that would undermine its authority and thus was not sympathetic of Ezra Pound and Wyndham Lewis's unconditioned enthusiasm for Fascism. However, Eliot's congeries of values bring him rather close to advocating a totalitarian theocratic state.⁷²⁹

Eliot's understanding of the role of the artist is that of one who plays an active part on the plane of his or her historical conditions.⁷³⁰ As such, the artistic, political, and religious dimensions are fused in one where the artist occupies a determining role in the shaping of history.

The text for Eliot does not reside on a parallel, and idle, dimension to that of the ever-changing historical time. Eliot shifts the abstraction of art from life through the agency of a complementary notion for which it is the experience of art that which effectively changes life. Eliot does so through the lenses of Dante's Comedy. In his *Poetry and Drama*, the Anglo-American writer uses Dante and Virgil as his cast

⁷²⁵ Thomas S. Eliot, *After Strange Gods* (London: Faber and Faber, 1933), p. 42.

⁷²⁶ Thomas S. Eliot, *For Lancelot Andrews* (London: Faber and Gwyer, 1928), p. ix.

⁷²⁷ Patrick Deane, Rhetoric and Affect: Eliot's Classicism, Pound's Symbolism, and the Drafts of 'The Waste Land', in *Journal of Modern Literature*, vol. 18, no. 1 (Winter, 1992), pp. 77-93.

⁷²⁸ Deane 1992, op. cit., p. 77.

⁷²⁹ Harding, op. cit., pp. 270-272.

⁷³⁰ Cf. Deane 1992, op. cit.

model of interaction between that which is the giver of art, in the form of text, and that which is the receiver of it, in the guise of the reader.⁷³¹

However, as Deane (1992) argues, if Eliot is somewhat vague about the process of interaction between text and reader, his theoretical approach is clearer. There, the role of art becomes an active agent in what is perceived as the process of 'human relief or redemption' where the spiritual and the intellectual, albeit cardinal tenets in a narrative of expiation and salvation, acquire a political dimension in that which is a narrative of journey of the self.⁷³²

Eliot extensively used Dante, and his Comedy, almost as an anchor or a sort of blueprint. For example, in discussing *The Waste Land* 'The Burial of the Dead', Deane (1992) maintains that, at least in the draft version, the poem owes to Dante its very sense of self, or identity of such: 'simply because Dante's "I" can be identified with the speaking.'⁷³³ Of course, the presence of the Comedy can be felt throughout the poem, especially at lines 56-68 where it appears to practically quote Dante's *Inferno* to then compare it to modern life.⁷³⁴

Perhaps even most obvious is Eliot's *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* whose epitaph is a direct quote from Dante's Comedy,

S'io credesse che mia riposte fosse | A persona che mai tornasse al mondo, |
Questa fiamma staria senza più scosse. | Ma perciocché giammai di questo fondo |
Non torno vivo alcun, s'i'odo il vero, | Senza tema d'infamia ti rispondo.

The Anglo-American writer uses lines of *Inferno* XXVII to give voice to his Prufrock whose personal hell resembles that of Dante's Guido da Montefeltro. The damned soul, believing Dante also to be dead and thus unable to report his deceitful acts back to Earth, accepts to tell him his story. This epigraph is fitting, for Dante in his role of narrator, like Eliot, struggles with contrasting feelings of admiration and rejection for what can be considered one of the most relevant archetypal figures of

⁷³¹ Cf. Thomas S. Eliot, *On Poetry and Poets* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957), p. 87

⁷³² Deane 1992, op. cit., p. 78.

⁷³³ Ibid., p. 92.

⁷³⁴ Thomas S. Eliot, *The Waste Land* (New York: Horace Liveright, 1922).

man in *Inferno*, where the skilful deceiver was in the end damned because he himself was deceived. Both Eliot and Dante demonstrate an interest in the tension between expression and perception that both authors consider as a fundamental part of human nature.⁷³⁵ This is a concern that Joyce also shares, as we will see here.

Besides the personal moment of intimate introspection, it fair to argue that the role of Guido da Montefeltro as a vehicle for a bitter ethical–political condemnation of the Church must not have been lost on Eliot and that Eliot’s use of the Comedy to inspire his own sense of perception, rendered through the guises of Guido’s deception, could give way to multiple planes of interpretation by those who wished the Comedy to serve more than one function.

In other words, the Comedy, as a multi-dimensional space, exposed to the influences of culture as much as charged itself with the cultural role of index of choice of patriotic allegiance to Italy (see the chapter dedicated to the *Risorgimento*), where adhering or rejecting the set of beliefs and values of the culture in which a given individual operates, has a profound influence on the way in which one reads or interprets the text (see the Introduction and the chapter dedicated to the theoretical background), is now re-presented via another authoritative voice, namely that of Eliot. However, this time is deeply imbued with those ‘extra-literary systems of value’ of which Patrick Deane was speaking, impregnated now with Eliot’s middle way.⁷³⁶ This is not to say that is was exclusive to Eliot, as for example Joyce’s “plurality”, explored here later on to engage this issue, albeit now through his authoritative voice.

Thus, Eliot was influenced by the artistic movement of the Symbolists, especially the French such as Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Rimbaud, Verlaine, and others, and Dante’s Comedy was never far from the writer’s mind. In fact, if he derived his sense of anti-aesthetic detail, and his capricious and volatile, urban, isolated but at the same time acutely conscious and considerate profile of a man from the former. In short, Eliot owed Dante and his Comedy his vision of Prufrock. The latter, albeit

⁷³⁵ Cf. Alighieri 1966–1967, op. cit.

⁷³⁶ Patrick Deane, *At Home in Time. Forms of Neo-Augustinism in Modern English Poetry* (Montreal & Kingston – London – Buffalo: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1994), p. 31.

unavowed in his guise of poet, as such, nonetheless, becomes a sort of representative of the everyday man. This, in turn, brings to mind the universal representation of the poet in the Comedy almost reminiscent of the diminished role, albeit for the logics internal to the Comedy, which Dante the poet took in *Paradiso*.⁷³⁷

In Eliot, therefore, there are not just aesthetic and philosophical issues at play that expose, so to speak, Eliot's intimate engagement with Dante.⁷³⁸ There is also a vision of that which is history and its sense of world "disintegration" that bear a direct link with the reflections of the Florentine author of the Comedy, coupled with a complex sense of self the consciousness of which develops on several planes of identity, such as the dissociative images of *The Waste Land*, or the somewhat terrifyingly paradoxical "Gerontion."⁷³⁹

Thus, in line with his modernist approach to poetry, Eliot saw in Dante not just a philosophical poet, such as Goethe might have been, but one able to 'replace the philosophy' without falling into the trap of embodying it.⁷⁴⁰ Eliot wanted a vision, that which poetry provided, and not the theoretical speculations of philosophy. Yet, he was aware of the need that poetry had of philosophical support if it truly was to last. Hence, it transpires his fascination with Dante's ability to translate philosophy onto a plane of poetic vision capable of engaging the senses that transport the reader from a place to a state of being.⁷⁴¹

Sultan (1987) maintained that Eliot's vision (but the Modernists in general) of the new was not constrained by it but expanded to what could be remoulded. As Sultan puts it, it was 'innovation but also . . . renovation', thus effectively redefining the role literature for it did not stop to what it had already been.⁷⁴²

It is, in fact, Eliot who in *Tradition and the Individual Talent*, affirms that the most individual expressions of a poet's work are often 'those in which the dead

⁷³⁷ Cf. Thomas S. Eliot, 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, M.H. Abrams et al. (eds.), Fifth Edition, vol. II (New York: Norton, 1986); id., 'The Waste Land', in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, M.H. Abrams et al. (eds.), fifth edition, vol. II (New York: Norton, 1986).

⁷³⁸ Cf. Jewel Spears Brooker, 'Enlarging Immediate Experience: Bradley and Dante in Eliot's Aesthetic', in *T. S. Eliot, Dante, and the Idea of Europe*, ed. by Paul Douglass (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011).

⁷³⁹ Cf. Nancy K. Gish, "'Gerontion" and The Waste Land: Prelude to Altered Consciousness', in *T. S. Eliot, Dante, and the Idea of Europe*, ed. by Paul Douglass (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011).

⁷⁴⁰ T. S. Eliot 1921, op. cit., p. 59.

⁷⁴¹ Cf. Viorica Patea, 'Eliot, Dante and the Poetics of a "Unified Sensibility"', in *T. S. Eliot, Dante, and the Idea of Europe*, ed. by Paul Douglass (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011).

⁷⁴² Stanley Sultan, 'Our Modern Experiment', in *Eliot, Joyce and Company* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality'⁷⁴³. It is, therefore, the 'consciousness of the past' that which allows making the old new.⁷⁴⁴ This narrative of common exchange is rendered possible or, at least, it inspired by Dante's Comedy. Eliot affords the tenet of emotion in poetry, using Dante's scenes of Brunetto Latini, Paolo and Francesca, and Ulysses in Cantos XV, V, and XXVI.⁷⁴⁵ As we will see, Joyce shared with Eliot this view, to the point that some critics argue that he best achieved the goal of making Dante new.

However, before moving on to Joyce, let us return to Eliot's *Criterion* as this is important to understand how from Britain different ideas percolated down into Italy. Enzo Ferrieri was the editor of the Italian magazine *Il Convegno*.⁷⁴⁶ The latter, at least up until 1939, had a close working relationship with Eliot's *Criterion*. Through this, after 1920, English Modernism flowed into fascist Italy. Soon after *Il Convegno*, other magazines followed suit, they were: Enrico Somarè's *L'Esame*, Cesare Vico Ludovici's *Il Quindicinale*, and the important *La Fiera Letteraria* that was born in Milan in 1925.⁷⁴⁷ As already mentioned before but worth recalling again, Cattaneo (2007) argues that 'è in quest'ambito che i grandi modernisti inglesi ottengono il loro primo riconoscimento italiano: è il caso di Joyce, di Yeats e, appunto, di T.S. Eliot.'⁷⁴⁸

In *Il Convegno*, Carlo Linati translated Joyce's *The Exiles*, and in 1926 part of his *Ulysses*. In turn, it was through Joyce that Carlo Linati and Enzo Ferrieri came to know Ezra Pound. Linati, Pound and the group of Italian intellectuals around the above-mentioned magazines, helped cementing the strong bond that *The Criterion* and *Il Convegno* enjoyed over the years.⁷⁴⁹ The importance that this fact had cannot be underestimated as fascist culture was profoundly affected by it as the Italian writer and journalist Giovanni Battista Angioletti recalled in an interview of 11 February 1953 for the Italian newspaper *La Stampa*. There he affirmed:

⁷⁴³ Thomas Stearns Eliot, *Selected essays, 1917-1932* (London: Faber and Faber, 1932), p. 14.

⁷⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁷⁴⁵ *Ibid.* See also: Thomas S. Eliot, *Tradition and the Individual Talent. Critical Theory Since Plato*, ed. by Hazard Adams (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971).

⁷⁴⁶ Aron Ettore Schmitz, known as Italo Svevo. Cf. Furbank, op. cit., p. 141.

⁷⁴⁷ Cf. Laura Caretti quoted in Cattaneo, op. cit., p. 112.

⁷⁴⁸ Cattaneo, op. cit., p. 112.

⁷⁴⁹ Cf. Cattaneo, op. cit., p.113.

Si iniziò in quegli anni la nostra amicizia con l'allora giovane e sconosciuto T.S Eliot [...] con Valery Larbaud e con altri stranieri che dovevano diventare famosi e che confortando il nostro quasi segreto europeismo come noi trovavano nell'arte e nella poesia quanto di meglio potesse offrire il mondo.⁷⁵⁰

Through the agency of Somaré, the English writer Orlando Cyprian ('Orlo') Williams became a regular editor of *L'Esame*. They were instrumental in the spreading, and understanding, of Eliot and his somewhat ancipitous personality, in Italy. In 1924, the before somewhat sceptical Williams embraced Eliot wholeheartedly. Eliot went from being a 'critico soi-disant classicista' to being a defender of classicism whose magazine, *Criterion*, was 'la migliore che esista nel suo genere.'⁷⁵¹ The prestigious *Corriere della Sera* published an article by Carlo Linati on 13 January 1926, that critically introduced Eliot to the Italian public at large. The article eulogised Eliot as a 'Poeta oscuro, critico perfetto.'⁷⁵² It was then followed by many others 'presentazioni al pubblico', as Carlo Linati called them in the Preface to his book *Scrittori Anglo Americani d'oggi*.⁷⁵³ Emilio Cecchi too, from the pages of the *Secolo* and *Corriere della Sera* contributed regular articles on English literature that according to Cattaneo (2007) were so popular as to grant Cecchi more notoriety than his books did.

Albeit with the limitations of Linati's critical abilities as recognised by the influential critic, translator and journalist Mario Praz, these magazines provided an invaluable contribution for the establishing of Eliot, Joyce, Yeats and other English, or English speaking poets in Italy.⁷⁵⁴ Cattaneo (2007) in fact argues that 'la scoperta [di Eliot, ma anche Joyce e Yeats] avviene tutta su riviste, in un gioco incrociato tra

⁷⁵⁰ Giovanni Battista Angioletti quoted in Cattaneo, op. cit., p. 113.

⁷⁵¹ Caretti (1968) quoted in Cattaneo, op. cit., p. 113

⁷⁵² *Corriere della Sera*, quoted in Cattaneo, op. cit., p. 113

⁷⁵³ Carlo Linati, *Scrittori Anglo Americani d'oggi* (Milano: Corticelli, 1932), here at the preface.

⁷⁵⁴ T.S. Eliot knew personally Mario Praz whom he admired. Croce was also among those who appreciated his critical and writing abilities, especially in regard to Praz's *Secentismo e marinismo in Inghilterra: John Donne, Richard Crashaw* (Firenze: La Voce, 1925). Eugenio Montale was in his inner circle friends too. Cf. Mario Praz, *La casa della vita* (Milano: Adelphi, 1979). It is also interesting to remember that it was thanks to the intervention of Giovanni Gentile that Mario Praz was able to obtain his professorship of English Literature at the Roman University "La Sapienza."

Italia e Inghilterra, interessante per la storia come per la sociologia della letteratura.⁷⁵⁵

However, this process of intense assimilation of British culture into its Italian counterpart was not universally welcomed as evidenced by the controversy between *Strapaese* and *Stracittà* and the magazines *Il selvaggio*, *L'Italiano* and *900*.⁷⁵⁶ There were strong fears that Italian culture was under a mortal attack on the part of the Anglo-Saxon speaking world. Magazines like *900* were accused of contributing to the 'propagazione fra di noi di teorie, forme ed attitudini straniera e specialmente nordica e americana,' which were seen as 'contrastanti assolutamente col nostro gusto, con i bisogni della nostra anima, con la realtà in cui viviamo e tendenti a fare dell'Italia una provincia della civiltà teutonica, slava e anglosassone.'⁷⁵⁷

However, whether welcomed or unwelcomed, the influence of Britain in Italy in those years, the 1920s through the 1930s, remains a well-documented reality. In fact, Praz himself, from the pages of the *La Fiera Letteraria*, contributed with his authoritative voice. As Cattaneo (2007) argues, Italy thus became the single European country at the forefront of what was the reception of British contemporary culture. So intense British influence was to be over Italy that Cattaneo (2007) talks of 'contaminazione letteraria'.⁷⁵⁸ Cattaneo also adds: 'si può quasi dire che l'Italia scopra Eliot insieme all'Inghilterra.'

Therefore, albeit it is almost impossible to establish in what measure the Comedy entered Italy via Britain thanks to the agency of these writers and poets and their relationship with Dante, it is nonetheless fair to argue that on the back, so to speak, of their growing reputation and popularity, their views of the Comedy also penetrated, and somewhat affected, fascist Italy.

⁷⁵⁵ Cattaneo, op. cit., p. 111.

⁷⁵⁶ Troisio (1975) explained that *Strapaese* was a imaginary social region where 'gli elementi autoctoni contrapposti a ciò che giunge dalla città, la conoscenza della campagna, della gente contadina, semplice, dell'orgogliosa tradizione agreste mista alla fierezza della gente toscana del contado che ha oscura consapevolezza di una natia autorità culturale, di una antica aristocrazia', (p. 14); and *Stracittà* represented the struggle to get Italy out of her provincialism by bringing her closer to the rest of Europe without, however, becoming elitist in nature. It was not a literary and political movement as such, but more of a sort of *avant-garde* that aimed at supporting the Regime in order to promote new Italian and European cultural trends. See: Luciano Troisio, *Strapaese e Stracittà. Il Selvaggio - L'Italiano - 900* (Treviso: Canova, 1975).

⁷⁵⁷ Orco Bisorco (Mino Maccari) in 'Gazzettino Ufficiale di Strapaese', in *Il Selvaggio*, 30 March, 1927.

⁷⁵⁸ Cattaneo, op. cit., p. 115.

Thus, with this in mind, let us now return to the analysis of what Dante represented for these poets and writers who operated from Britain. Boldrini (2001) argues that both Eliot and Pound were too reverential in their treatment of Dante and thus were never entirely able to achieve “real independence” from him as a literary model. She claims that instead, ‘Dante always remained the standard of excellence to which the modern poet could only aspire.’⁷⁵⁹ Whereas Joyce’s treatment of Dante sways between the serious and the parodies and satirises, he is able to subvert Dante’s work. Joyce reaches a “plurality” of meaning and literary independence that set him apart from other Modernists.⁷⁶⁰

Whatever might have been the treatment that the Modernists had of Dante and his Comedy, the fact remains that Dante eluded, or perhaps because of that, embraced all, allowing poets, writers, politicians and others to fall within his pull but never quite grasp his entirety. In this regard, Yeats said of Dante that he was an “antithetical” personality, ‘the first victory of personality upon a system ...hitherto impersonal’⁷⁶¹ that as such dwarfed even Shakespeare achievements. The latter, in fact, was described as ‘a man in whom human personality, hitherto restrained by its dependence upon Christendom ... burst like a shell.’⁷⁶² Yeats goes on affirming that William Blake, who also had created “universalized systems”, should, in some ways, be compared to Dante. On which account Eliot expressed himself too and said:

What [Blake’s] genius required, and what it sadly lacked, was a framework of accepted and traditional ideas which would have prevented him from indulging in a philosophy of his own ... The concentration resulting from a framework of mythology and philosophy is one of the reasons why Dante is a classic, and Blake only a poet of genius.⁷⁶³

⁷⁵⁹ Lucia Boldrini, ‘Introduction’, in *Joyce, Dante, and the Poetics of Literary Relations: Language and Meaning in Finnegans Wake* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 9.

⁷⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁷⁶¹ Yeates quoted in Lucy McDiarmid, *Saving Civilization: Yeats, Eliot, and Auden Between the Wars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 42.

⁷⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 42.

⁷⁶³ Eliot quoted in McDiarmid 1984, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

Eliot used Dante simply too extensively to make it possible here to render a full account of that which could be defined as an intense relationship. Thus, let us just say that it was Eliot he who heavily promoted Dante's influence on European literature. So instrumental was the Anglo-American poet that Douglas (2011) affirms 'in a sense [Eliot] renovated Dante for modern literature.'⁷⁶⁴

Thus, whatever 'Eliot made of Dante, and what Dante meant to Eliot', through the legacy of Modernism in Eliot's "classicist" roots, what is of relevance here, is that Dante and his Comedy represent a focal point in Eliot's poetry and criticism, and it is through him that they entered fascist Italy.⁷⁶⁵ Which, in turn, if seen in connection to how Eliot was perceived by some in society, especially in conservative circles, can help put in perspective the importance that Eliot's Dante's Comedy had. Many in fact agree on the central role played by Eliot on the world stage. From Robert Giroux and Igor Stravinsky to Alfred Kazin, Eliot represented a role model, which could simply not be ignored, no matter what part of the political and poetic spectrum one spoke from. The influential Canadian literary theorist Northrop Frye stated: 'a thorough knowledge of Eliot is compulsory for anyone interested in contemporary literature. Whether he is liked or disliked is of no importance, but he must be read.'⁷⁶⁶

However, it was not the wider public that with whom Eliot was most preoccupied. He wanted to address a very specific section of society. It is not an unknown fact that Eliot held a conservative view, elitist in nature, of how society had to be ruled. His intended audience was, in fact, composed of selected members of academia and men of power in what Cooper (2008) calls: 'The North Atlantic world' and 'culturally subordinated intelligentsias of colonised nations [...].'⁷⁶⁷ In other words, Eliot was trying to talk to a 'small number of "conscious human beings"' within

⁷⁶⁴ T. S. Eliot, *Dante, and the Idea of Europe*, ed. by Paul Douglass (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), p. xvii.

⁷⁶⁵ Cf. Douglass 2011, op. cit., p. xvii.

⁷⁶⁶ T. K Titus, *Critical Study of T. S. Eliot's Work* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & Distributors, 1997), here at the Preface.

⁷⁶⁷ John Xiros Cooper, *T.S. Eliot and the ideology of Four quartets* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 32.

the mass, which was otherwise made of 'largely unconscious' individuals who lived in a state of spiritual, emotional and political apathy.⁷⁶⁸

The members of this 'mandarinate'⁷⁶⁹ as Cooper (2008) puts it or, at least, large sections of it, were experiencing a period of intense uncertainty during the 1930s, both on a political and on a personal plane that 'almost rendered them incapable of maintaining their traditionally secure and often cosy relationship with the governing élites.'⁷⁷⁰

During the 1930s, a gap was beginning to emerge between the "Mandarins" and the dominant classes. Eliot was acutely aware of this as he thought that this would lead to the dissolution of society as so far known.⁷⁷¹ Thus, as the "Mandarins" gradually lost their privileged position in favour of the political and economic dominant élites, Eliot, and presumably part of his readership, began to worry increasingly more about this leading to a possible fracture that would 'destroy the cultural unity of Europe'.⁷⁷²

The concepts of culture, of which I speak in the Introduction and the chapter dedicated to the theoretical background, intervene here as they seem to be, along with the idea of tradition rooted in a canon of identifying texts, central to Eliot's understanding of national and European cultural identity.

However, whether Eliot was right or wrong concerning this issue is not for this study to discuss. What should be noted here is that the trajectory of the use of the Comedy in Britain gradually reflected this fear of "dissolution". As we have seen in the other chapters, the Comedy was first used by the British to establish a culturally viable Italy that owed Britain part of her identity besides, of course, her geographical unity. The Comedy then stood firmly at the centre of a conceptual system epistemologically and ontologically compact. The ideals of nation national

⁷⁶⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 32.

⁷⁶⁹ The word "mandarin" came to identify a heterogeneous social group who believed they were charged with a 'civilizing mission among the masses' according to the sense that John Hayward meant. The latter was in the inner circle of literary collaborators closest to Eliot during the 1930s. Cf. Cooper, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

⁷⁷⁰ Cooper, *op. cit.*, p. 32. For how Eliot intended the élites to be, see p. 38.

⁷⁷¹ Cf. Cooper, *op. cit.*

⁷⁷² 'A universal concern with politics does not unite, it divides. It unites those politically minded folk who agree, across the frontiers of nations, against some other international group who holds opposite views. But it tends to destroy the cultural unity of Europe.' Quoted in Cooper, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

culture and identity, even language and commonly shared history, were being promoted and Dante elevated to the lofty position of national bard.

As it is known, the British establishment had been also, at least partially, behind the rise of Mussolini who, as the British historian Martland declared in an interview with leading newspaper *The Guardian*, began working for MI5 (or MI1(c) as it was then known)⁷⁷³ in 1917. He was paid the sum of 100 pounds a week.⁷⁷⁴ The reasons behind this may be many, not least the fact that the British government, during the First World War, did not consider Italy to be a reliable ally of the United Kingdom. Mussolini, in his role of editor of the newspaper *Il Popolo d'Italia* was to campaign for Italy to stay in the war. However, why did Sir Samuel Hoare, who is fair to argue, was well aware of Mussolini's credentials, chose him and no others is again a question for others to answer.

In the end, it was Mussolini, as history tells us, he who came to power. In 1922, and progressively after, he consolidated his position and promoted a sort of coup d'état, which elevated him to the role of dictator, until he met his fate with his demise in 1943.

However, for the twenty years during which the Fascists dominated the Italian political scene, the Regime sought to remain the only political agent active on the Italian stage. They stood for everything that was to be politically idle, or rather politically 'conservationist' as historian Doug Thompson argues in his book *State Control in Fascist Italy: Culture and Conformity, 1925-43*. The latter, in fact, says: 'what they [other historians] fail to acknowledge or recognise is that it was the paramount fear of political change and hence the manipulation of the law to prevent it [social and political change] – in other words, political *conservatism* [...]'.⁷⁷⁵

While in Italy the Comedy, as seen in the chapters dedicated to Fascism and the *Risorgimento*, still absolved the more "traditional" role that had, since the early 1800s and onward till about the end of the Liberal period, been assigned to it

⁷⁷³ Cf. The official website of Britain's Secret Intelligent Service, <https://www.sis.gov.uk/our-history/sis-or-mi6.html>. [Last accessed: 20 May 2015].

⁷⁷⁴ Tom Kington, 'Recruited by MI5: the name's Mussolini. Benito Mussolini', in *The Guardian*, 13 October 2009. The article is available online at: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/oct/13/benito-mussolini-recruited-mi5-italy> [Last accessed: 22 May 2015].

⁷⁷⁵ Doug Thompson, *State Control in Fascist Italy: Culture and Conformity, 1925-43* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), p. vii.

mostly, albeit not exclusively, from Britain, of harbinger of the Italian nation and later Fascism, in the United Kingdom it came to serve very different and differing interests. Like the controversial policies that Britain had adopted toward fascist Italy, by and large, once the 'Victorian solidities,'⁷⁷⁶ as Bertrand Russell once put it, of an era firmly in British hands and with firm beliefs had come to pass, Dante's Comedy was also by now absolving a lesser definite and definable role.⁷⁷⁷

If it was political *conservatism* that fascist Italy was seeking, Britain was promoting, or it seemed to be doing so, policies that appeared socially divisive, albeit in essence both nations seemed to aspire to adhere to an ideology that promoted the superiority of the ruling classes. If fascist Italy used brutal force and political *conservatism*,⁷⁷⁸ Britain boasted a ruling class that increasingly more took its distance from that wiser intelligentsia, so central to Eliot. That ruling class became progressively more unconventionally rebellious albeit never quite rebelling.⁷⁷⁹ The plutocratic British power structure was, in fact, traditionally protective of what Cooper (2008) calls her "children", provided that they remain faithful to their "family", no matter how critical or oppositional they would prove to be.⁷⁸⁰ This was profoundly different from the approach fascist Italy had to those who dissented or compromised Italian political *conservatism*. After all, as expressed earlier in this chapter, 'Italy was not England'.

The Comedy in Britain thus took different guises and spoke to those in that country as much as those outside it. What it counts here is not to define the accuracy of such links in the ways as, for example, Ellis (2010)⁷⁸¹ did, for this might be argued endlessly, but to point at the ambitions of a changing Empire, namely the British, and its attempts to culture changing following the footsteps of the Comedy and those who referred to it.

⁷⁷⁶ Bertrand Russell, *The Impact of Science on Society* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1953), p. 57.

⁷⁷⁷ For some of the "strange intersections" of Britain in the nineteenth century, her understanding of history, nationalism, aesthetics and gender, and her strong sense of certainty in relation to the Comedy, see: Milbank, *op. cit.*

⁷⁷⁸ Cf. Thompson D. 1991, *op. cit.*

⁷⁷⁹ Cf. Cooper, *op. cit.*

⁷⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁷⁸¹ Steve Ellis, *Dante and English Poetry Shelley to T. S. Eliot* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

I understand that this would also mean having to look at the interactions between key British governmental offices such as the Foreign Office, the Colonial Office, the War Office, the Admiralty and the Treasury, all of which operated under the stewardship of the prime ministership and his Cabinet and the interests of the City of London. After all, the *Pax Britannica* had long been closely associated with the City and its financial dominance and influence.⁷⁸² However, these aspects cannot be touched upon without risking bulging this study over its limits and their acknowledgment should, therefore, suffice here.

Thus, let us return to the question of how Dante's Comedy could have informed an opinion without apparently directly intervene in it. For example, the Swiss-born English aesthetician who graduated and worked at the University of Cambridge, Edward Bullough, interconnected questions of faith, politics, and poetry. In 1923, he converted to Roman Catholicism as a Dominican Tertiary, and thereafter he was active in the Cambridge University Catholic Association. He published translations of Étienne Gilson, Karl Adam, and Achille Ratti, who was to be Pope Pius XI. He also published three papers on Dante. Uberto Limentani, the anti-fascist Italian scholar who for a period of time worked for BBC Radio London during War Wold 2, seemed to have little or 'no doubt' that Bullough had some kind of affiliation with Fascism.⁷⁸³

In Edward Bullough, again Dante's Comedy is the central element that connects different agents. Speaking of Eliot, Dante, and Italian national achievements, in a statement that sounds and tastes of fascist rhetoric he affirmed:

The 'universality' which Eliot notes in Dante is due not only to the language he uses, not even to the problems he sets forth, but is due – and not only in Dante – to the

⁷⁸² Cf. Raymond E. Dumett, *Gentlemanly Capitalism and British Imperialism: The New Debate on Empire* (New York: Longman, 1999).

⁷⁸³ Uberto Limentani, 'Leone and Arthur Serena and the Cambridge Chair of Italian', 1919–1934, in *Modern Language Review* vol. 92, no. 4 (1997), p. 891. See also, Kenneth England, *Dante Alighieri 165 Success Facts - Everything You Need to Know about Dante Alighieri* (Newstead Brisbane: Emereo Publishing, 2014).

fact that the 'national inheritance' of Italy lies at the same time embedded in the foundations of Europe as far as the Roman-Christian tradition extended.⁷⁸⁴

He goes on arguing of philosophy, law, theology, and, of course, Dante.

However, if Dante's Comedy helped to assert some of the fascist cornerstones, it also did the opposite albeit in trajectories which are not always linear. For instance, the Irish poet Samuel Beckett in his non-fiction essay 'Dante... Bruno. Vico... Joyce', published in 'Our Exagmination Round His Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress' (1929), uses Dante's Comedy to compare James Joyce's treatment of the English language to that of Dante's use of Italian in his masterpiece.⁷⁸⁵

Joyce's use of language is, as it is well known, revolutionary in its inventiveness not only for his mastery of the technique of stream of consciousness (*Ulysses*) but also for his ability to combine languages.⁷⁸⁶ Seldom is language in Joyce pure, much like nature, and in that it is anti-fascist as it rejects the pureness of the concept of a natural race.

Similarly, the use of myth, in Joyce, reveals how his vision of history as an ever-changing event which, as such, is also never pure.⁷⁸⁷ This latter stand contrasts the fascist understanding and use of myth with its images of purity and nationalism.

Furthermore, the fascist use of the "palingenetic myth" as intended by Griffin (1991), is rejected in Joyce's vision of the cyclical nature of life.⁷⁸⁸ In other words the 'same anew'⁷⁸⁹ clashes with the linearity of fascist ideologies in their assertion of everlasting glory: the Eternal Reich in Germany, or the Italian 'sempre più in alto, sempre più avanti'.⁷⁹⁰

⁷⁸⁴ Edward Bullough, *Italian Perspectives* [inaugural lecture] (Cambridge, 1934), p. 56.

⁷⁸⁵ Cf. Samuel Beckett, *Our Exagmination Round His Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress* (New York: New Directions Publishing Company, 1972).

⁷⁸⁶ Cf. James Joyce, *Ulysses* (Paris: Shakespeare & Co., 1922).

⁷⁸⁷ Cf. Roy K. Gottfried, *The Art of Joyce's Syntax in Ulysses* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1980); *New Light on Joyce from Dublin Symposium*, ed. by Fritz Senn (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1972).

⁷⁸⁸ Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London/New York: Pinter Publishers, 1991).

⁷⁸⁹ Cf. David Pierce, *Reading Joyce* (London: Routledge, 2007); Senn, op. cit.

⁷⁹⁰ 'State tranquilli che io vi porterò sempre più in alto, sempre più avanti', Benito Mussolini, *Scritti e Discorsi di Benito Mussolini* (U. Hoepli, 1934), p. 455.

However, it was not just Joyce's voice that which looked at the Comedy to resolve matters of contention. In Pound's phrase, to 'make it new', it is the English writers of the twentieth century those who want to transform Dante's work in a way that would make sense to them and their own understandings of the modern world, thus, once again, bringing the Comedy to the forefront of the political debate,⁷⁹¹ where Joyce's controversial attitude toward religion in general, and Catholicism in particular, could also be said to contrast the fascist view summarised by Antliff (2002).

Too often Fascism's cultural politics are cast in terms of a cynical manipulation of the docile masses, with no allowance made for the appeal Fascism had for the individual...Concepts of secular religion were, for the fascist believer, the agents for the spiritual uplifting and psychological conversion of individuals who could then experience Fascism's redemptive value...⁷⁹²

If it is true that Joyce felt close to Dante on several planes, like for example that detailed in *A Portrait of the Artist*, and to an extent *Dubliners*, where the artistic, political, psychological, spiritual and social paralysis that stifled Irish politics, as for Dante those of Florence, are identified as effects of the movements to restore Irish culture and language, and the Catholic Church; as it has been the case for others in this study, to Joyce Dante and his Comedy must have signified more.⁷⁹³ In fact, despite the similarities in what is a shared bleak despair towards their native countries, Joyce's interest in Dante, is exemplified in the words of his brother Stanislaus Joyce, for whom James's Dante far surpassed Milton. James 'placed

⁷⁹¹ Cf. Boldrini, op. cit. Albeit Boldrini further argues that the Modernists turned to Dante as an example of renewal of the language, which may be a restrictive way to approach the lexicon variety of the Comedy and the intentions of the Modernist poets of the twentieth century.

⁷⁹² Mark Antliff, 'Fascism, Modernism and Modernity', in *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 84, no. 1 (March 2002), pp. 148-69.

⁷⁹³ In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Joyce has the protagonist, Stephen Dedalus, saying: 'When the soul of a man is born in this country there are nets flung at it to hold it back from flight. You talk to me of nationality, language, religion. I shall try to fly by those nets.' James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, ed. by Hans Walter Gabler with Walter Hettche (London: Vintage, 2012), p. 196 (First published: New York: B. W. Huebsch, 1916). For its critical edition see: id., *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man: Authoritative Text, Backgrounds and Contexts, Criticism*, John Paul Riquelme, Hans Walter Gabler, and Walter Hettche (eds.) (W.W. Norton, 2007).

Dante over Shakespeare.⁷⁹⁴ Stanislaus certainly did not seem to share his brother view and dismissed it as 'another heresy',⁷⁹⁵ which is indicative of the intimate connection that James felt for Dante.

The Irish poet Padraic Colum, who was a close friend of James Joyce, knew William Butler Yeats personally and worked with Gregory, Lady Augusta Isabella, and Ezra Pound.⁷⁹⁶ The former claimed that, at least, an earlier Joyce did not have much of an interest in Homer, while instead regarding Dante's Comedy as 'Europe's epic'. Furthermore, Joyce, as quoted in Carrier (1965), is also reputed to have told Alessandro Francini Bruni that Dante was his 'spiritual food, the rest is ballast'.⁷⁹⁷

⁷⁹⁴ Stanislaus Joyce, quoted in Warren Carrier, 'Dubliners: Joyce's Dantean Vision', in *Renascence*, vol. 17, no. 4 (Summer 1965), pp. 211-15, p. 213.

⁷⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 213.

⁷⁹⁶ Annie Horniman, a member of *The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn* allegedly helped to finance the *Irish National Theatre Society*, founded by, among others, Lady Gregory. *The Golden Dawn* (as it is known) not only was preoccupied with Celtic Magical but also had some kind of anti-British fascist sympathisers and possibly collaborators. See: Adrian Frazier, *Behind the Scenes: Yeats, Horniman, and the Struggle for the Abbey Theatre* (Berkeley: University of California, 1990), and Gregory, Lady Augusta, *Our Irish Theatre* (New York and London: Knickerbocker Press, 1913).

⁷⁹⁷ Carrier, *op. cit.*, p. 213.

6. Spiritual Food

To see Dante and his Comedy in terms of 'spiritual food,' as Joyce voiced it, as an agent that stimulates firsthand experiences so deeply rooted in the self, seems to offer a more befitting explanation for the otherwise extraordinary enduring literary influence that Dante has had on so many. To have a firsthand experience guarantees that the Comedy is classified following a personal logical sequence, where information, new or old, is related to one's existing ideas of how the world works. This seems to have allowed the Comedy to combine with various and differing schemes, ideas or sets of belief. When information did not fit pre-existing ideas, these have been changed or new ones have been created. In doing so knowledge has been constructed around one's own interest and represented as concepts or principles. These, in turn, once digested, so to speak, by their firsthand exploring minds, were ready to be presented, also in a symbolic guise, to a wider audience for second-hand experiences of what Dante's Comedy should, would, or could represent, in accordance with specific stakes.

This cyclical approach to Dante and his Comedy, we have seen in this chapter and elsewhere in this thesis, has met with varying fortunes over the centuries. Thus, in drawing this chapter to an end, let us revisit as a few points before concluding.

After Chaucer, Dante was not forgotten but, at least, neglected in England up until the Romantic Movement who, like in George Bornstein's essay 'Yeats's Romantic Dante', were fascinated by Dante's imaginary and his sense of personal and universal tragedy. Thus, the Romantics helped to popularise his works during the Victorian era.⁷⁹⁸ The Anglican divine Edward H. Plumptre was a keen Dante scholar and regarded the Florentine author of the Comedy as a rite of passage for the learned.⁷⁹⁹ In the visual arts, Dante Gabriel Rossetti with his Pre-Raphaelites and their medieval revivalism also focused on Dante and his Comedy.⁸⁰⁰

⁷⁹⁸ Cf. George Bornstein, 'Yeats's Romantic Dante', in *Colby Library Quarterly*, vol.15, no. 2, art. 4 (June 1979), pp. 93-113.

⁷⁹⁹ See: Edward H. Plumptre, *The Divina Commedia and Canzoniere of Dante Alighieri; with Biographical Introduction, Notes and Essays* (London: Isbister & Co., Ltd., 1887-1890). See also: Plumptre quoted in

There were, of course, Ugo Foscolo and Giuseppe Mazzini, and several others mentioned in this chapter. Going forward, to Joyce and Eliot as well as Wystan Hugh Auden, Samuel Beckett, Ezra Pound, Wallace Stevens, and William Butler Yeats, to mention but some of the writers and poets. They all shared a passion for Dante and his Comedy that transcended the boundaries of appreciation and went on to embrace something deeper and fundamentally somewhat contradictory like that 'antithetic' personality of which Yeats talked about. Something that made Dante admired but not equalled.

This rendered, for many, the Florentine poet and his masterpiece a sort of elusive artful object of desire that as such could be used by, at times, antipodal interests. McDiarmid (1984) affirms: 'Dante appears everywhere in their poetry [Auden, Eliot, Yeats]: in quotations in allusions, images and verse forms.'⁸⁰¹ These were three very different personalities with very different agendas, yet shared a common admiration for he, Dante, who they regarded as their inspiring "Apollo", to borrow myself directly from the Comedy. On this regard, Reed Way Dasenbrock has commented: 'one of the ways we could describe an aspiration of virtually all the Modernist writers in English is that they were all trying to write the Commedia of the twentieth century.'⁸⁰²

However, the emphasis falls on the word "try" for they succeeded 'only in fragments of the medieval whole, or ironic echoes of his [Dante] loftiness.'⁸⁰³ McDiarmid (1984) goes on arguing about the inadequacy of some of the greatest talents of the twentieth century to come even close to Dante resulting in, when they tried, in a kind of replica unable to bequeath the strength of the original. She says: 'in their imitations of Dante, Yeats, Eliot and Auden act like fragments they say they

Bornstein, 'no man aiming at literary reputation thought his education complete unless he had read Dante.' Bornstein, op. cit., p. 96.

⁸⁰⁰ See, among others: Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 'Beata Beatrix' (Tate Britain:1864–1870); id., 'Dante's Dream at the Time of the Death of Beatrice' (Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, Merseyside: 1871); id., 'Pia de' Tolomei' (Spencer Museum of Art, University of Kansas, Lawrence: 1868–1880), and others.

⁸⁰¹ Lucy McDiarmid, *Saving Civilization: Yeats, Eliot, and Auden Between the Wars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 43.

⁸⁰² Reed Way Dasenbrock quoted in Lucia Boldrini, 'The Artist Paring His Quotations: Aesthetic and Ethical Implications of the Dantean Intertext', in *Dubliners. Style*, 25.3 (1991): n.p. Rpt. in *ReJoycing: New Readings of Dubliners*, eds. Rosa M. Bollettieri Bosinelli, and Harold F. Mosher Jr. (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1998), pp. 228-46, p. 3.

⁸⁰³ McDiarmid 1984, op. cit., p. 43.

are, and, fulfilling their own prophecies, fail to write an “all-embracing masterpiece” like the *Divine Comedy*.⁸⁰⁴

It is this “diluted” Dante, ‘from the start’ as McDiarmid (1984) puts it, that as also said elsewhere in this thesis, both rendered possible to approach the Comedy from so many different angles as well as instrumentalise parts of it for whichever end it was needed.⁸⁰⁵

In the preface to *Dante Among the Moderns*, Stuart Y. McDougal argues that Dante is the very core structure of those who approach him. He maintains that Dante is present in ‘citation and allusion, imitation, parody, and the development of a host of Dantean literary strategies.’⁸⁰⁶

However, as said above, McDougal (1985) also added that each writer responded to Dante in his or her own way. They found in him, or projected upon him, their own personal and artistic urgency, understanding of the world, their kudos and ultimately their very own set of beliefs.⁸⁰⁷

Dante’s Comedy, as this chapter outlines, was an ever-present motif in British life that having been originally borrowed from Italy was now reversing the tide and it brought back to its birthplace a revisited, reshaped and perhaps renewed and reinvigorated symbolic strength.

⁸⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 43.

⁸⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 44.

⁸⁰⁶ Stuart Y. McDougal, ‘Preface’, in *Dante Among the Moderns*, ed. by Stuart Y. McDougal (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985), pp. ix-xiii, p. ix.

⁸⁰⁷ For example, Yeats adapted Dante’s work for not lesser than ten poems, three plays, and one short story. Dante was also mentioned, as a reference, more than ninety times in his published prose. Dante, for Yeats, came to absolve a role similar to that of the Romantic poets and their quest. He used Dante for his own gains as he proposed himself as the last link to Romanticism (Bornstein 1979, 11-12). Whereas Stevens and Auden, looked at Dante in a more pessimistic guise and approached his theology, emphasising the role of citation and allusion (McDougal xi). Beckett’s approach instead recalls to mind the use that Joyce had of Dante. See: Bornstein G. 1979, op. cit.; McDougal, op. cit.

CONCLUSIONS

In this thesis, I have argued that during the twenty odd years of fascist rule in Italy, the so-called *Ventennio*, Britain, the Fascist Regime (and Movement), and Dante's Comedy entertained a certain kind of relationship. This study has evinced that the way in which this unfolded, in relation to the *Commedia*, was partially a reflection of the many different and differing interests that existed at the time, as well as an agent in its own right. By which I meant an instrument capable, if made to do so, to exercise a degree of influence.

This analysis accepted that vital strategic needs prompted Britain to intervene in Italy. However, this thesis has further proposed that it was primarily the British those who used the Comedy in order to promote the myth of Dante as an iconic figure who would represent the notion of an Italian nation advocated by the cultural elites of the Italian peninsula during the *Risorgimento*. Moreover, this dissertation has also expounded that the Comedy has mirrored, as well as influenced, the changes in Anglo-Italian relations during the period of fascist rule in Italy.

Thus, this study has revealed that from very early on, for those who sought to create an ideal, and to a certain extent the idea, of a united Italy, Dante's Comedy proved to be a valuable and viable instrument. It served as a medium with which to approach the issue of national identity that the British skilfully exploited through the narrative of symbolism.

They had pressing reasons to do so for they regarded a united Italy as having a strategic importance for their interests in the Mediterranean. In fact, it was they who, by and large, started, or kick-started, a dual process of invention and repetition through, among others, Dante and his Comedy. This was necessary, according to the findings of this work, in order for Britain to reshape a new space both physically and conceptually, namely known as Italy. As such, the latter was in need of a binding common imagination or, in other words, an ideological past with sound historical roots to be truly united.

However, British interest in Italy changed in time and her support for that country assumed, at times, tones which could be confusing such as, for example,

their attitude towards Mussolini. This was, once again I argue, reflected in the way the Comedy was being instrumentalised.

However, as evidence has suggested in this study, the Comedy also affected those who approached it, becoming for many a sort of reference, and for some even an enchiridion of choice, able to influence, or in some cases, inform the standards of their moral conduct.

Therefore, within the wider narrative of elaboration of culture as an expression of tradition where the tenet of nationalism was questioned, as were the concepts of myth and symbolism in the creation of tradition, Dante's masterpiece was considered as unique and profiled as a work of art the access to which proved telling, in its specular guise; critical, as it was a crucial means; and controversial, as it appeared to serve the motifs of varying, disparate, and at times, divergent agents. The picture that emerged delivered an interpretation of the Comedy that transcended its role of literary accomplishment and entered instead within the planes of an interaction between a combination of social and political factors. In other words, the Comedy represented the binding element, the leitmotif through which it was possible to relate a cluster of associations ascribing them to a discourse that went beyond the narrative of nation, myth, empire, and essentially the canon of Fascism itself, conditioning them to the agency of a British exertion, but also a model capable to construct identities, be them individual or collective, regardless of nationality. In even more succinct words, Dante's *Commedia* in its symbolic role whose image had been carefully constructed and promoted by the various ideologies examined here helped to lessen the sense of an abstract unity of a constructed nation. It also contributed to justify, and thus normalise, the concept of a united Italian nation with all its future panoply of superiority, and other Fascist canons, the independence of which could then rest upon political as well as historical antecedents, whilst also retaining a remarkable faculty to, in turn, influence those who resourced to it, be it in Italy or in Britain. The latter never ceasing to contribute to a reshaping of the cognitive perception of what meant to be Italian.

Thus, in this thesis, the tenets of nationalism and Fascism were connected to the role of Britain. Fascism was examined in its conceptual fold, which also helped to explain the reasons why this study started at the time of the *Risorgimento*. As much of the current historiography maintains, the pre-fascist period is essential for an understanding of both Fascism and the aspirations that Britain had for Italy. In fact, the ideological system upon which Fascism rested owed a great deal to the *Risorgimento*, which, in turn, as Chapter II of this thesis argued in depth, was greatly in debt to Britain.

However, for the Comedy was not just a specular image of the events that unfolded before it, the research conducted throughout this study pointed at Dante's masterpiece as that which did not "just" represented the world around it, but also reformed it. Thus, the role that Britain and the Fascist Movement, and Regime, had in reconstructing the perception of the Comedy so that this would create a social, political, historical, and cultural paradigm that would befit the interests of its agents, not only as a kind of prescriptive archetypal antetype, had to be profiled analysing several historical figures as well as key events. Dante, notably and consistently through his *Commedia*, came to absolve the role of a model for that which had been constructed into an idealised Italian character. The rhetoric underlying such figuration was accessed by those who wished to promote a certain idea of political culture, nationalism and national destiny, unquestionable right to empire based on a presumed preordained superiority, be it racial, cultural, or both, the British, the Catholic Church, and so on. This was feasible thanks to the ability of the Comedy to project itself (or be made to) as a symbol historically both determined and determinable. It was thanks to this dexterity that the myth of Dante, accessed above all through his *Commedia*, was capable, as a figurative tool, of adapting to the needs of the time and was handed down from the British to the *Risorgimento* and ultimately to fascist Italy.

As for Britain's intervention in Italian affairs, the evidence gathered here came to support the hypothesis for which Britain was not only acting as an external force but also one active from within the system – Italy - that she had helped to

create. In her employment of classical texts, or in some cases their “reemployment”, namely the Comedy, there was a narrative of external-internal exchange, were Britain supported a revised version of *italianità* that percolated into fascist Italy through the pages of cultural magazines, such as *Il Convegno* that closely collaborated with their British counterparts, like the *Criterion*. There, many prominent figures frequently used the Comedy to internalise canons that would be returned to the Italian public in the form of their personal interpretations expressed in their respective works. With them, they helped to shift the contours of the idea of what meant to be Italian. In doing so, they gradually engendered a new sense of identity. Therefore, the fact that the British first introduced and then promoted Dante, once again primarily through the Comedy, as a champion of Italianness was not seen here as coincidental, but rather as a result of a resolute, almost unyielding, will indicative of a compelling strategic endeavour.

However, the agency of the United Kingdom was not seen as exclusive and thus limiting of others. Masonic movements were also scrutinised, as was the role of the Catholic Church. They too represented a sort of “golden chain” that united many different aspects related to the issue of Italian unification and thereafter. The data analysed showed that especially the former acted as a subtle international unseemingly abutting force for the different interests that wanted Italy united. Dante and his Comedy featured regularly among their more notorious members, some of whom were mentioned here.

This uncanny ability, or flexibility, that the Comedy seemed to have, was interpreted here not a weakness but a strength. The Comedy, in fact, could be used as a common currency when common grounds had to be established, without necessarily exposing the agent that engaged it as a clearly supporting agency. Ultimately, however, this primarily served the goals of the British who, more than most other powers, had invested in and advanced a united Italian project. Dante and the Comedy sat, for most, in a comfortably ambiguous position. In fact, it is fair to say that for centuries, exegetes from all quarters have failed to fully claim the medieval poet for their cause, or reason, exclusively. The Comedy, with its great

repertoire of syncretic elements, arguably to this day still escapes ideological contending ascendants. As such, therefore, it was ideally placed in the hands of those who needed ambiguity in order to satisfy both a divisive as well as cohesive policy.

As for the Fascists, during their first initial thrust towards absolute power, the Movement appeared unafraid to use, or abuse, Dante and his Comedy. However, when it later became a Regime, Fascism started a process of stabilisation of sorts. It signed a treaty with the Catholic Church, and its propaganda became gravely more aggressive, as indeed did its foreign policy. Socially and politically, the Fascist Regime became increasingly more pryingly inquisitive like, for example, the heavy-handed treatment of the school system reflected. There was a need, or a will, for the creation of an entirely new class of citizens who had to be moulded into the perfect Fascist.

In conclusion, through the exploratory research conducted in this study, I found that it is reasonable to argue that the Comedy was used to serve different purposes for different agents. Sometimes these would intersect, collide, or simply live side by side, but in most cases, I believe, this was not an arbitrary, unconscious decision, but one which carried a calculated sense of achievement that did not leave much to fluky coincidences. Whilst, it was not possible to determine with absolute precision in what measure Britain contributed to changing the cognitive perception of Italy and the Italians, nor was it feasible to mention what were all the interests that she had in doing so, it seemed fair to argue that Britain and the Comedy, or rather the way in which the latter was made to be perceived, had been a constant, and compelling, presence on the Italian cultural, political, and even religious horizon.

However much remains to be done. It is for other studies to ascertain the validity of British intervention, and for others yet the extent to which they were successful in the more specific areas that saw their mediation not least through the means of Dante's Comedy. This includes the way in which an "English" Dante was able to influence the Fascist Regime. Some others may wish to dispute the role that Britain had in both the *Risorgimento* and fascist Italy, while others may wish to look

into the agency of other powers, or centres of interest, which might have wanted, or prompted, the British to intervene. This might be, for example, the case of the role of secret societies, which were only briefly touched here, and as such could be expanded upon. This is also true of all those who had an essentially economic reason to see the Italian peninsula united for it to then descend, or perhaps be guided, into Fascism. Moreover, fast forwarding to the present day, are these forces still active today? Is the position of Britain changed? Is the Comedy still an instrument with which it is possible to lever on what these days we call “public opinion”? These, and no doubt others are still open questions that arise as a logical consequence of the findings of this thesis and as such could be addressed by future studies.

Thus, drawing to a final close, I argued that the British used Dante’s Comedy as one of their means to exert their influence over Italy to protect and promote their national and international interests. In fact, much of the *Risorgimento* period, which eventually matured into the creation of the nation of Italy, owed a great deal to the agency of Britain. Fascist Italy, in turn, inherited much from the *Risorgimento*. This included Dante’s masterpiece, or the way in which this had been, by and large, perceived or made to be perceived. However, during the fascist *Ventennio*, the influence that Britain had hitherto exercised over Italy, be it directly or indirectly, became more problematically identifiable as her position as an ascertainable centre of power gradually yielded, or appeared to be doing so. This notwithstanding, fascist Italy and Britain developed, or better yet, continued developing a unique relationship that unfolded on several planes, many of which have been explored in this thesis. Ultimately, the perception of Dante’s Comedy reflected that which the community imagined, or was “instructed” to imagine.

However, as said before, how far were the British able to cast their shadow over fascist Italy remains a moot question (not in the American sense of the term), as such open to further investigation. Thus, while it is still simply not possible to overstate the significance of Dante’s epic text of a journey whose story has influenced the many across many centuries, it is its reflecting the ambitious project

that the British had for Italy, especially during an era of seemingly autarchic fascist rule, that which sparked the interest in writing this study. The substantial undertaking that this has proven to be has been similar to that incomparably better-known start at the gates of a much more celebrated shadowed forest. The mystery of one's identity as well as that of humanity seen through the lenses of the self, be collective or individual, or otherwise both, was recreated in Dante's most celebrated work. To see this as a kind of index for yet another layer that would add to the riddle that the Comedy is, celebrating its power to interpret events that saw its involvement specularly, felt at times as a journey through the depths and the heights of the Dantean realms. However, Dante's Comedy was not simply the record of a visionary journey, as it remains the crux of ultimate spiritual exaltation. Its contagious inspiring force has given me, much as it did for some of the historical figures profiled here, the courage to consort tenets the reach of which was, at times, more than daunting. Thus, at the end this analysis, the conviction that fascist Italy could be read through the influence of the British via the mediation of the Comedy has been reinforced by the body of work presented here. The insistence with which Dante's latest and most revered work has appeared time and again to mark world events, as well as prominent figures, as said before, has more to tell than what was possible to achieve here. However, this study's attempt to design the contours of an experience that is somewhat still underexplored, besides wishing to re-discuss the seemingly quasi-schismatic attitude underscored by a longstanding apparent continual obsession for Dante's masterpiece, has also meant to recognise in it a sort of ambiguous anxiety that to this day captivates those who approach the *Commedia*.

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Statement of originality

This is to certify that to the best of my knowledge, the content of this thesis is my own work. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or other purposes.

I certify that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work and that all the assistance received in preparing this thesis and sources have been acknowledged.

Signature

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Keon Esky', with a stylized, flowing script.

Name

Keon Esky