

Roberto Antonelli. Dante poeta-giudice del mondo terreno

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Roberto Antonelli. *Dante poeta-giudice del mondo terreno.* Rome: Viella, 2021. Pp. 276. ISBN 9788833137179.

Of the vast number of texts on Dante inspired by the 700th anniversary of his death in 1321, Roberto Antonelli's *Dante poeta-giudice del mondo terreno* stands out for its seamless combination of creative approaches and traditional methods of inquiry. The book offers an engaging analysis of Dante's *Commedia* with references to its three cantos, examining their overarching themes, linguistic and rhythmic choices, and sources. In its demonstration of the contemporary relevance of the *Commedia*, *Dante poeta-giudice del mondo terreno* opens with a commentary on the work's first lines ("Noi e la *Commedia*") and follows Dante's progression from Hell to Paradise through fourteen chapters, ending with a chapter on Dante's prophetic nature ("Da poeta-giudice a poeta-profeta").

Beginning with its title, Antonelli's book challenges the traditional distinction between Dante the poet and Dante the character by introducing Dante's novelty as "regista [...] della volontà e Giustizia divina" (9). Antonelli develops this distinction—initially proposed by the two great critics Gianfranco Contini and Charles S. Singleton—innovatively. He conceives of Dante as the judge of the world beyond history and politics, a title that has never before been attributed to the medieval author. In this role, Antonelli argues, Dante exercises his power over the greatest poets who are gathered in Limbo and referenced in the fourth canto of *Inferno*. By granting himself the status of a special pilgrim embarking on a personal and spiritual journey, he judges the popes (first, among the others, Boniface VIII) and the Church. Dante's judicial role is also evidenced by his power to alter the punishment that was to be assigned to some souls; this is the case, for example, for Forese Donati, who is given the opportunity to advance quickly through the terraces of Purgatory despite his wrongdoing. Finally, as a result of his meeting with his ancestor Cacciaguida, Dante experiences terrestrial justice as a counterpart to the divine justice that supports him throughout his journey in the afterlife.

Antonelli demonstrates that Dante assumes the task of "cantare il 'vero'" (173) in the *Commedia* to overcome certain poetic conventions of *stil novo*. However, Dante the character presents the subjectivity of judgement that contrasts with the objectivity of divine law. He is a sinner, and for this reason he sins because of pride, anger, fear, and other human emotions while travelling in the underworld. These emotions are displayed when he is confronted with Francesca's punishment (Francesca being a *figura* of Dante as a poet of love) and with

Farinata's pride (Farinata being a *figura* of Dante in the political realm). During these episodes, Dante reveals his human weaknesses—and therefore the character tends to obscure the poet—whereas his two alter egos, Virgil and Beatrice, make him aware of his mistakes and correct him in his intellectual and moral stance. Beatrice becomes the intermediary between Dante and divine justice since she enables the reunification of the character and the poet with the author through an act of purification. In this last stage of the journey, after Saint Peter's consecration in Paradise, the author and the poet merge, and Dante becomes the spokesperson of God's will and truth in the world. In this way, as Antonelli illustrates, he can also proclaim himself “judge” of what happens in the earthly world, and his word assumes the sacrality of prophecy. Dante as prophet maintains an open dialogue and constantly interacts with his readership, particularly in *Paradiso* where readers are called upon to participate in the pilgrim's remembrance and recounting of his extraordinary and ineffable experience.

Dante's acquisition of the prophetic gift does not explain, however, the simultaneous presence of situations and characters that accompany the pilgrim towards the achievement of his final goal. Antonelli claims that the combination of relating an exceptional journey and documenting it for the salvation of humanity finds its actualization in the theatre of the human memory. From the stage of this theatre, Dante observes souls gathered in the various sections of Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise according to their moral states. The advantage of such an overview enables an explanation of how Dante moves among these spaces and how he recalls the signs of divine justice. The poem's structure and its many internal symmetries and allusions as well as its conceptual, linguistic, and rhythmic references help reinforce the memory of the experienced events and incorporate them into a unified vision. This allows for an enrichment of the literal meaning of the text with other (allegorical) meanings. A remarkable example that Antonelli mentions is the dialogue that Dante has with his “miglior amico” Guido Cavalcanti, evoked by circumstances, rhymes, and various other signs throughout the *Commedia*. Cavalcanti is still alive in 1300, the year when Dante begins his journey as well as the year of the Jubilee, which in turn offers the writer the opportunity to project his work within a universal context. Cavalcanti is often an interlocutor in Dante's work as the representative of the “other” poetic choice. According to Antonelli, the dialogue between the two poets emphasizes Dante's project of judging the world and humanity by means of interpreting history through the perspective of divine will.

In response to Antonelli's fluid and persuasive discourse in *Dante poeta-giudice del mondo terreno*, the reader experiences models of interpretation that align with tradition but that are also both fresh and incisive. The most renowned critical studies from the last century find new life in the innovative reformulation that this work offers. It is thus easy to predict that Antonelli's book will undoubtedly be appreciated by many present and future generations of Dante scholars.

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