

Ephraim Nissan

Italian Jewish or American Jewish Authors Engaging with Dante: A Bird's Eye View, from the Post-Napoleonic Period to the Present

Abstract: This study is novel in that it brings together an array of scholars, writers, bibliophiles, or visual artists who were Jewish or Jewish-born, and were (or are) concerned with Dante Alighieri, beginning in the Restoration period in Tuscany following the Napoleonic years. Many of these individuals, of course, were Italian. We also consider several Americans, two Britons, a Canadian, and a Russian. These also include individuals who were Italian-born. Israeli scholars or Hebrew (or Yiddish) translators concerned with Dante, as well as the first Hebrew translation of *Inferno* (Trieste, 1869), are the subject of a separate article. It clearly emerges from these life stories that interest in Dante, or even abiding love for Dante, was for Italian Jews a form of engagement with their own Italian identity. Hence also perceptions that Dante was supposedly friendly to the Jewish poet Immanuel Romano. As for American Jewish Dante scholars, they represent a facet of the integration of Jews in North American academia, including in Italian studies.

Key words: Dante Alighieri; Jewishness and modernity; Jewish integration in modern Italy; Jews in Italy during the racial legislation; Jews in American academia; Dante and the Italian national movement.

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1. Introduction

Jewish responses to Dante were as early as his own days. In a separate article (Nissan 2017a), I have discussed Hebrew responses and parallels to Dante's themes or even metrics, from medieval or early modern Italy. Tracing responses to Dante among Italy's Jews in the Middle Ages and in the modern period has already been the subject of Salah (2013). My present study has brought to light further aspects from a different perspective, and also encompasses North American Jews, and (in Nissan 2017b) Israelis. In fact, the list of individuals Salah and I have identified and treated only partly overlaps. Four propositions are confirmed by the material in this article (cf. Nissan 2017a, 2017b): (a) Italian Jews responses to Dante are inextricably in the context of their partaking of Italian culture and their need to negotiate their Italianness;¹ (b) There is a cleavage in the transition to modernity, and I would place it in the mid-18th century,² as it was from the second half of the 18th century that secularisation and the urge to more fully acculturate developed hand in hand, and unless one realises this, one cannot make sense of the cultural values, lifestyle, and life story on the Dante enthusiast Lelio Arbib³ in Restoration Tuscany; as shown in Nissan (2017a) however, there already had been the precedent of the intertextual references to Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio (first detected by Roberto Bonfil) in Leone Ebreo's *Dialoghi d'amore*, in the 16th century; (c) Outside Italy, modern Jews have taken interest in Dante because of his place in world literature, and we are going to come across a British Jewish Pre-Raphaelite painter partaking of the Rossetti's obsession with Dante, a development following in the steps of Britain's Romantics; several 19th-century German Jewish scholars intervened in the debate about the supposed relations between Immanuel Romano and Dante; and in the United States, Jews' integration in local academia has also encompassed local academic Italian studies, which by the way began with Mozart's librettist Lorenzo Da Ponte (converted from Judaism in his early teens) becoming America's first professor of Italian; (d) Complicating factors (as we are going to see in Nissan 2017b) in pre-state Israel up to a flurry of competing Dante translations in early 21st-century Israel include not only (d1) Dante's place in world literature in a young local culture eager to be open to it, but also (d2) Ze'ev Jabotinsky's translations from Dante and Edgar Allan Poe being landmarks in the development of Hebrew modernistic poetry, and (d3) the activities of a few Italian Jews in Israel, such as the Dante scholar Luisa Ferretti Cuomo, who has not only been promoting scholarly rigorous retranslation of the *Divine Comedy* into Hebrew with her own commentary, but the truly extraordinary fact that in the late 2010s, a major scholarly critical edition, in instalments in Italy, of the text of the *Divine Comedy*, led by Paolo Trovato, is to carry Cuomo's full-fledged commentary.

2. Italian Jews' Engagement with Dante in the 19th and 20th Centuries

¹ This is also a point Salah (2013) makes, but I illustrate this differently.

² This, too, is a point shared with Salah (2013), and in my perception in his paper he even pinpoints this at the moment when Moszes Zacuto's *Hell Outspread* (whose *editio princeps* is of 1715) and Jacob Olmo's *Paradise Outspread* (whose *editio princeps* is of 1741), which each taken on its own do not cogently show Dante's influence, were printed together in 1743, "showing that the tendency to reconstruct an oeuvre similar to Dante's *Commedia* was in the mind of later readers rather than a goal of the authors themselves" (Salah 2013, p. 171).

³ Arbib was from Livorno. One comes across the surname *Arbib* among Arabic-speaking Jews, too.

2.1. The 19th century saw a major upsurge in the fortunes of Dante in Western civilisation.⁴ The Romantics extolled Dante (Brand 1986), and in Italy, he featured prominently in the rhetoric of the Italian national movement (Ghidetti 2012) and in Italy's later nationalism (cf. Davis 1965). Dante then became a pillar of the civil religion of recently unified Italy. *Pace* his 18th-century detractors, Dante is a towering author indeed, and one who strikes an important chord of Italian identity. It is during the Napoleonic period, or shortly afterwards, that Italian Jews' interest in Dante came into the open — unsurprisingly, as “the long 19th century” was when they sought emancipation, acculturation, and integration in the Italian national and cultural framework.

2.2. We can see this in four exponents (Isacco Franchetti,⁵ his great-nephew Alessandro Franchetti, the latter's son Augusto Franchetti, and Rodolfo Mondolfi, who was Alessandro's nephew) of Livorno's Franchetti-Mondolfi family,⁶ itself the subject of a book edited by Francesca Cagianelli (2006), based on manuscript memoirs by Rodolfo Mondolfi, occasioned by its centennial, and with texts by Cagianelli herself, Anna Lia Franchetti,⁷ and Dario Matteoni. That book is also

⁴ And beyond: even among Indian intellectuals. See an overview in Singh (1970), Nissan (2017c).

⁵ The Franchetti family of Livorno had traditionally traded with the Muslim coast of the Mediterranean, especially Tunisia. Augusto Franchetti and his brother Federico were still concerned with the shares at the Paris stock exchange of the old Enriques-Franchetti firm, active in Tunisia.

⁶ I was surprised to realise, while researching this section, that I am quite remotely related to the Franchetti family, which has several branches. Moreover, there is a Dante connection, too. The musician Alberto Franchetti, the diplomat Edoardo, and the third-born (1865), Giorgio, whose own name is associated (Augusti 1998) with the restoration of the Ca' d'Oro in Venice — a building that earlier on had belonged to Abramo Errera, the paternal grandfather of the writer Alberto Cantoni, and a collaborator of Daniel Manin, the leader of Venice's 1848 revolution (Ragni 1975) — were born to Baron Raimondo and Luisa Sara Rothschild. Mnəššī Nīsān (a brother of my paternal grandfather and my mother's paternal grandmother) and his wife's fate was tragic: they had one daughter and two sons; there was a blaze while the mother was preparing the daughter for the wedding ceremony; the girl perished in the fire, and the mother was blinded. The bridegroom, in the wedding that therefore did not take place, was a Sassoon. Years later, Mnəššī disappeared near the River Tigris, perhaps drowned while swimming, perhaps attacked on a bridge (as a gang of underemployed Nestorians used to hang around there, and they would e.g. attack Jews near synagogues by hitting them with chains and the like; often individual Jews were known to be Jewish. Note that in folklore, bridges are dangerous, as being liminal places). Quite shortly after Mnəššī's disappearance, the body of an unidentified man was boiled for three days (to obtain the skeleton for teaching purposes) at the courtyard of the Institute of Fine Arts, and my mother was dismayed at the sight and the smell (she was a student at the Institute's Conservatory of Music).

The Sassoons were a Baghdadi family that rose to prominence in India and then England, and that was allied by marriage to the Rothschild family. As the latter were also allied to the Perugia family, this establishes a quite far family relation, heretofore unsuspected, to Alda Crema Perugia (1900–1984), long an unassuming pillar of the education system in the Jewish community of Milan, who in her last year of teaching, in 1971/72, taught my class Dante's *Inferno* in depth at Jewish day school in Milan. (I also owe her my introduction, in late 1974, to the editor of a communal periodical to which I from then contributed papers.) Etchings show the wedding ceremony of Leopold de Rothschild (the third son of Baron Lionel, who died in 1879 and was himself a son of Nathan Mayer Rothschild, a son of Mayer Anselm, who brought about their family's wealth) to Marie Perugia from Trieste, with the *verba solemnia* under the canopy on 19 January 1881 (the Prince of Wales, the future King Edward VII, was present), in the Central Synagogue in Great Portland Street in London. These etchings were published in *The Graphic* of 29 January 1881, and a report appeared in *The Illustrated London News* of 29 January 1881. They were reprinted in Cowen and Cowen (1998, pp. 47–49). Marie Perugia's sister was Mrs. Arthur Sassoon.

⁷ Anna Lia Franchetti is a professor of French literature at the University of Florence; her books have appeared between 1974 and 2009. Alessandro Franchetti was her grandfather's grandfather.

significant for the history of art. Alessandro Franchetti (Livorno, 1809 – Florence, 1874), born to David Franchetti and Rosa Tedeschi, was a man of means,⁸ a patron of the arts (painters of the *macchiaioli* school, but he also collected statues), and a collector of editions of the *Divine Comedy*, assiduous in his lifelong study of Dante. He studied law in Pisa, was an intern, but never practised as a lawyer. In his twenties, he joined Giuseppe Mazzini's⁹ republican underground, but afterwards became a moderate, seeking social amelioration through the promotion of education. He wed in 1839, in Marseille, Celestina Marini, who later in life was a draughtswoman and painter.¹⁰

The two interests of Alessandro Franchetti, art and Dante, were sometimes combined, as he was critically astute in his quite judgemental evaluation of the *Divine Comedy* illustrators.¹¹ He castigated the modern Gustave Doré and the early miniaturists of the *Divine Comedy* (as they drew without having studied Dante's text accurately),¹² and the Renaissance painter and draughtsman Sandro Botticelli, whose drawings (which were turned into etchings for editions of the *Divine Comedy*) were only discovered in the late 19th century: Alessandro Franchetti was of the opinion that even though Botticelli was a great painter (for whom critics, first in England and then in Italy, were even "intoxicated"), as a draughtsman for the *Divine Comedy* he performed poorly, because even though "poor Sandro" tried with much effort to understand the text of Dante, he was not proficient at that, on the evidence of his drawings.¹³ (Already in the Renaissance, Botticelli was taunted with his intellectual limitations when faced with the *Divine Comedy*.) Over twenty years after Alessandro Franchetti's death, the Florence newspaper *La Nazione* of 22 October 1896 published an article by the American art dealer and critic Bernard Berenson about Botticelli's drawings for the *Divine Comedy*, and he, too, castigated their inadequacy.

⁸ The trousseau that Alessandro Franchetti's sister had as a bride was so admired, it was shown at the court of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany in Florence, because the Grand Duchess was curious to see it.

⁹ Mazzini, by the way, was one of several Italians who promoted the fame of Dante in England during the Romantic period. Mazzini signed "Un italiano" (instead of his name) the editor's preface to *La Commedia di Dante Alighieri* [sic], *illustrata da Ugo Foscolo*, published in London by Pietro Rolandi in 1842–1843. Dante as a patriot, Mazzini and Foscolo are the subject of Cottignoli (2012).

¹⁰ Francesco Franchetti (Livorno, 1878 – Roma, 1931) was a Tuscan painter. He belonged to the *macchiaioli* school, and then was for a while a Pre-Raphaelite. He was born into a Jewish family, the son of Federico and Fortunée Coriat. Federico was Alessandro Franchetti's son, and Augusto's brother. See an exhibition book edited by Giovanna and Filippo Bacci di Capaci and Francesca Cagianelli (2007).

¹¹ Anna Lia Franchetti's preface to Cagianelli (2006) briefly refers to this. Alessandro Franchetti's remarks were preserved in Mondolfi's manuscript, reproduced in that book.

¹² Doré was also criticised for illustrating places in Hell or Purgatory using too wide views, as he could not handle these appropriately in drawings without these being merely schematic.

¹³ Mondolfi's manuscript relates Alessandro Franchetti's opinion as follows: "Oltre la poca intelligenza della Commedia nocque al Dorè la pretesa di dare alle sue figure troppo ampi sfondi rappresentanti i luoghi d'inferno e del Purgatorio, i quali, oltre che per la vastità mal si prestano ad essa figurati in disegni, che non sieno puramente schematici, richiedono un accurato studio del testo, che mancò all'artista francese, come agli antichi miniatori dei codici danteschi, ed anche a Sandro Botticelli, notevolissimo pittore, che senza sua colpa ha fatto perder la testa al numero gregge de' nostri artisti e critici, per una di quelle ubriacature, per cui andrà famoso il nostro tempo, ubriacatura già da molti anni venutaci dall'Inghilterra. Ma comunque si voglia giudicar del Botticelli come pittore, non credo che gran valore possa attribuirsi ai suoi numerosi schizzi a penna diretti ad illustrare il gran Poema, sul quale non è a dire che il povero Sandro non affaticasse la mente; ma con quanto profitto giudichi chi sa e può giudicare".

2.3. Rodolfo Mondolfi (Florence,¹⁴ 1842 – Florence, 1925) wrote a shorter biography of his uncle, Alessandro Franchetti, *qua* Dante bibliophile, for *Dantisti e dantofili dei secoli 18. e 19.: contributo alla storia della fortuna di Dante*, edited by Giuseppe Lando Passerini (1901–1904).¹⁵ Mondolfi relates that Alessandro Franchetti was initiated into Dante studies by his great-uncle, Isacco Franchetti, who during the Napoleonic period was deputy mayor (Adjoint du Maire) in Livorno. Mondolfi remarks that Isacco Franchetti being adept at Dante studies was still rather uncommon in the very early 19th century, all the more so outside literati circles. Isacco Franchetti bequeathed his personal library on Dante to Alessandro Franchetti, and this was the core of the latter's important Dante library, augmented after Lelio Arbib's death with the latter's collection of Dante editions. Unlike the two older Franchettis being *dantofili* and, as such, erudite, Lelio Arbib, also Jewish, was a scholar and a Dante scholar proper. Mondolfi relates that in 1848, Alessandro Franchetti ceased his work in banking and moved with his family to Pisa, where he immersed himself in Dante studies, and played host to a circle of literati and Dante scholars. In 1855, Alessandro Franchetti moved back to Florence. In 1865, several of his volumes were lent to the book exhibition for the sixth centennial of Dante's birth. In 1865, a catalogue of his Dante library was published. It comprised 227 Dante editions, and 264 works of secondary literature about Dante.¹⁶

Alessandro Franchetti wrote descriptive bibliographical cards about his volumes, but also critical notes. He fell ill in August 1872, and died shortly after his wife, in February 1874. His library was inherited by his son Augusto.

2.4. Augusto Franchetti (Florence, 1840 – Florence, 1905) was a historian, and translated Aristophanes' comedies into Italian verse. He became president of the Jewish community of Florence in 1871. He also was member of Florence's city council, and taught at the Istituto Cesare Alfieri. He eventually became the first secretary of the Società Dantesca.¹⁷ In 1904, its seat (as well as its library) was moved into a 14th-century palace, the Palagio della Lana, bought for that very purpose by the Florence city council. The new seat was inaugurated in 1905, and Queen Margherita was present. The library of the Società Dantesca in Florence had an original core, being the library (comprising 700 volumes and 400 pamphlets) donated by Giovanni Erolì (1813–1904) of Narni, whereas Augusto Franchetti's library was donated in 1907 by his heirs. It had been enlarged by Augusto, and when donated it comprised 1,847 volumes (including 20 incunabola and 124 *cinquecentine*, 16th-century printed books), as well as 695 pamphlets (Benedetti 2010). By 2012, the Società Dantesca had six collections, as pointed out by Rossano De Laurentiis (2012, p. 449), who also quotes (*ibid.*, fn. 33) praise lavished in 1866 by the poet Giosuè Carducci on

¹⁴ Rodolfo Mondolfi was the son of the banker Lodovico Mondolfi, born in Ancona, where his father Sabato was in charge of local finances during the Napoleonic period. In Florence, though well integrated, in the early 1830s Lodovico was a covert member of Giuseppe Mazzini's republican Giovine Italia. Arrested, Lodovico was exiled, reached Mazzini in London, but later was a moderate.

¹⁵ Giuseppe Lando Passerini (Florence, 1858 – Florence, 1932), a librarian bibliographer, and literary critic, as well as a Dante scholar, was the editor of the *Giornale Dantesco*.

¹⁶ Liana Funaro (2015–2016, p. 187), referring to Florentine Jewish participation to the 1865 Dante celebrations, mentions the role of the Paggi bookshop (the first to publish Pinocchio in book form, and evolved into the Bemporad publishing house, active during the 1921 Dante celebrations).

¹⁷ In Italy, the Società Dantesca was established in 1888. In 1865, a Dante society was founded in Dresden, under the patronage of the King of Saxony. The Oxford Dante Society was born in 1876. The year 1880 saw the birth of the Dante Society of America, headed at first by the poet (and translator of the *Divine Comedy*) Henry Wardsworth Longfellow (1807–1882) (De Laurentiis 2012, p. 444).

Alessandro Franchetti's library, on its catalogue, on his discerning elegance as a collector, and on his erudition and diligence as a bibliographer.

2.5. The scholar Lelio Arbib (1808–1847) — his *ex-libris* label names him as “Lelio Arbib Racah”, his motto being “Sapere aude”, i.e., “Dare to know” — was eulogised in a booklet by Gabriele Pereyra d[e] L[eon] (Pereyra 1847). Arbib was the editor of famous editions of the writings of Jacopo Nardi and Benedetto Varchi, early modern historians of Florence. Arbib also collected Dante editions, at great expense (he also spent much for his education). He died prematurely, but even earlier, financial straits forced him to sell his Dante collection to Alessandro Franchetti, even though he had been born into a wealthy family. A catalogue of Arbib's Dante collection was printed in 1845 by David Passigli in Florence. Pereyra (1847, p. 5) claims that an eccentric British erudite, Arbib's teacher, M. Bilby¹⁸ [but spelled “Billy” on p. 8], bequeathed to his pupil that book he may fancy. A Google search for “Bilby Leghorn OR Livorno” returned this: “Beilby, Bielby or Bilby of Livorno (? George Bielby, surgeon), 112, 114”, as an index entry on p. 264 in Nora Crook and Derek Guiton's book (1986) *Shelley's Venomed Melody*. Moreover, in a biography by James Bieri (2005) of the final years of the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822) after he and Mary Godwin left Lord Byron in Switzerland, his marrying Mary after the suicide of his first wife Harriet in 1816, Mary's completion of *Frankenstein* (1818), Shelley feeling ostracised in England, and his 1818 move to Italy. Bieri (2005, pp. 65, 66) writes that Mary thought Leghorn (Livorno) a “stupid town” and a “noisy mercantile” town; then (Bieri 2005, p. 66, my added brackets):

Eager to leave Leghorn, they decided to spend a month in the mountain spa resort of Bagni di Lucca, sixty miles north, before moving on to Florence. Shelley spent two days finding a house in Bagni di Lucca, whose medicinal baths perhaps were suggested by “the physician” they had met, Mr. Bilby. Shelley described to Peacock the “very fine” scenery of Lucca, “a kind of watering place ... where the most fashionable people resort”. They had stayed in Leghorn a month only because of the “very amiable” accomplished Lady Mrs. [Maria] Gisborne, who is the sole attraction in this most unattractive of cities”.¹⁹

¹⁸ In “M. Bilby”, “M.” may be the initial for “Mister” rather than the initial of the first name. Thus infrequent, the surname *Bilby* does occur among British authors. A book of “scriptural and moral lessons for infants” by T. Bilby and R.B. Ridgway (1831) went through two enlarged editions, in 1832 and in 1834, with a sequel (a hymn book for pupils) in 1832. I reckon the best known author by that surname was Julian William Bilby, the author (1935) of *Nanook of the North ... (The life-story of a typical Eskimo)*, published with 29 photographs, and known in Italian as *Nanuk/Nanook l'eschimese*.

Incidentally, we come across, in Italy, the first name *Nanucki*, of African origin, given to one of his children by the Italian Jewish explorer Raimondo Franchetti (Florence, 1889 – near the Almassa airfield near Cairo, 1935), the son of the composer, Baron Alberto Franchetti, and Margherita Levi, whose father, Arnaldo, built the aqueduct of Reggio Emilia. The four children Raimondo Franchetti had from Countess Bianca Rocca, whom he wed in 1920, were Simba, Lorian, Nanucki and Afdera (Surdich 1998).

¹⁹ Maria Gisborne had known the future Mary Shelley as a baby, whose widowed father unsuccessfully proposed to her (widowed at age 29, in 1799, of the architect Willey Reveley). Maria then married the unsuccessful businessman John Gisborne (who much later sent Mary to her with a letter of introduction). The Gisbornes lived in Rome from 1801, later in Pisa, then settled in Leghorn in 1815. P.B. Shelley was dismissive of Maria's husband, whom he afterwards described (Bieri 2005, pp. 65–66) as “an excessive bore” with “little thin lips receding forehead & a prodigious nose” a nose “quite Slawkenburgenian ... once seen never to be forgotten and which requires the utmost stretch of Christian charity to forgive. I, you know, have a little turn up nose; Hogg has a large hook one but add both them together, square them, cube them, you would have but a faint idea of the nose to which I refer”. Shelley was fascinated with human physiognomy. As for his reference to Christian charity, note

A letter which Pereyra claims to have been authored by “Billy” (*recte*: Bilby), Arbib’s teacher, printed in London in 1830 and signed “By an Ansonian” (or rather “Ausonian”? I have found no place within the current borders of the United Kingdom, named *Anson*. An Ausonian is an Italian, or an inhabitant of Italy: perhaps inclusive of an Englishman in Leghorn? “Ansonian” appears in both Pereyra and the 1830 pamphlet), states: “Lelio Arbib, about twenty-one years of age, also a pupil of mine. He has great national sagacity, and good sense and modesty, and understands Shakspeare [sic] better than any6 person, in Leghorn unless. I may venture to except myself, and, perhaps, Mr. J. G. He studied Shakspeare [sic], with me, two or three hours every day, for twenty months”, as quoted by Pereyra (1847, p. 8) in a footnote citing “A word or Two [sic] to the 228 members ec. ec. / By an Ansonian. London. 1830. pag. 33.”

Pereyra (1846) avoids any mention of Jewish identity, so I found it tantalising to discover, searching the COPAC database of academic libraries of the British Isles,²⁰ that the full title of the pamphlet Pereyra was citing is “A word or two to the 228 members who voted against the second reading of the Jews Relief-Bill, on the 27th May, 1830”.²¹ This was part of the long struggle (which was going to require a quarter of century more) for British Jews to be granted political rights. I did not see the 1830 pamphlet, but I suspect that Pereyra abbreviated its title in line with his avoidance of mentioning Arbib’s Jewishness. The COPAC database attributes the anonymous pamphlet to P. Anichini, but they may be wrong, given Arbib’s relations with Bilby. Apparently the pamphlet was mentioning Lelio Arbib’s good qualities as part of an argument for emancipating the Jews.

In his youth, Pereyra (1847) relates, Lelio Arbib engaged in poetry, and visited Paris (where he met Biagioli) and Britain (Pereyra relates this by admittedly lifting Latin wording from a Dante biographer). Pereyra remarks that Arbib used his long stay in Paris to reflect about poetics and Dante. Arbib considered Dante untranslatable²² (whereas Alessandro Franchetti’s library also comprises translations). From France, Arbib moved to England. He considered Shakespeare second only to Dante, and in London, well versed in English, he conceived of translating his plays into Italian, and worked at this for years after leaving Britain.

that Shelley, educated at Eton, and then at University College, London, was expelled from the latter because of a pamphlet, *The Necessity of Atheism*, he authored, published, and distributed among the students.

²⁰ <http://www.copac.ac.uk>

²¹ Copies of that 1830 pamphlet are held at Cambridge University, at University College, London, and in Scotland at Glasgow University and St Andrews University.

²² So Pereira (1847, p. 7, my trans.): “It was precisely there, in Paris, which with peculiar perseverance he intended to meditate about poetic reason and about Dante who was, in his opinion, its most eloquent expression ever. We gratefully remember his talks about Dante, especially about how some dared translate him into foreign languages, which he considered a futile enterprise, because he believed that Dante is only suited by the majestic form that not by chance, but he had deliberately chosen; and the wisdom of such opinion is evident for anybody who pays attention to Dante’s exceeding intelligence and to the utmost art contrived by Dante in order to conjoin and unify the ideal, substance, and form, [...]” (“Colà in Parigi fù appunto che con perseveranza singolare intese a meditare sulla ragion poetica e su Dante che n’era secondo Lui, la meglio eloquente espressione mandata tra tutte l’età, e con grato animo ricordiamo i discorsi ch’egli ci faceva rispetto Dante, e particolarmente sull’ardir d’alcuni che intesero a tradurlo in lingue straniere, vana impresa questa reputava, perchè [sic! Albeit in Tuscany!] a Dante credeva sol convenirsi la veste maestosa che non a caso ma per istudiato giudizio si predilesse; e la saggezza di una tale opinione ben s’addimostra evidente a chiunque ponga mente all’alto intendimento di Dante, ed all’arte somma da Dante trovata onde congiungere e unificare l’idealità, la sustanza e la forma, [...]”).

In 1830, Arbib was back in Livorno, but moved to Pisa, the seat of a university. At home, he hosted a circle of learned friends, discussing Dante and other subjects, in literature, science, or art.²³ In 1834, two sisters of Arbib died, then his only remaining sister married and moved to Modena. Urged by his parents, Lelio Arbib moved to Florence. It was there that he edited Nardi and Varchi. With Giuseppe Ajazzi, Arbib also edited Varchi's lessons about Dante in 1841 (Ajazzi and Arbib 1841). In those years, Arbib married and had two children, and engaged in the book trade. He also authored essays and poems about Dante.²⁴ He was afflicted with tuberculosis (of which he was to die), and moved to Pisa for health reasons. Pereyra claims that Arbib quoted Dante even in his last few days.

2.6. Rodolfo Mondolfi, a school headmaster in Livorno²⁵ (and a family friend of the household in which the painter Amedeo Modigliani was raised), was also a literary writer, but he also published about Dante's *Divine Comedy* (Mondolfi 1898, 1904). Mondolfi (1904) was concerned with what place Dante reserved to the Jews in the hereafter. Mondolfi concluded rather optimistically, that Dante would place virtuous Jews in the Limbo, rather close to Hell's entrance, and not yet Hell proper, rather than in some deeper place in Hell, but I suspect that assuming that much was wishful thinking on Mondolfi's part, even though he based his conclusions upon a passage in *Paradiso*, 19.70–111, where Dante proposes a problem of theodicy to the Eagle (a mystical being in whom the souls in the heaven of Jupiter are aggregated),

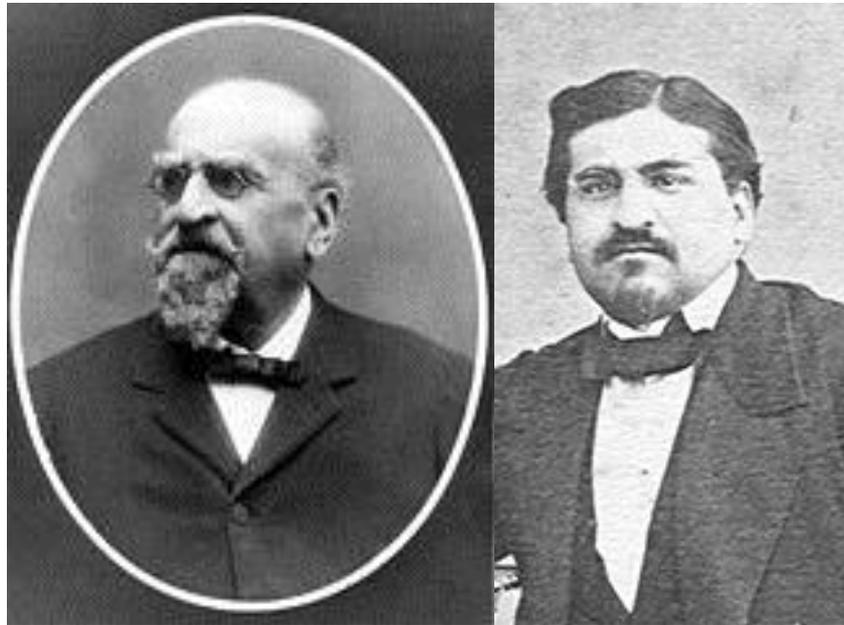
²³ Already a few generations of Italian and other European Jews before the Napoleonic wars had been secularising, their interests and ascription of prestige shifting from Jewish culture to the host culture. The dynamics of secularisation in the 18th century among part European Jews is the subject of Feiner (2010). Bearing that in mind makes it easier to understand Lelio Arbib's cultural values. It must be said however that Pereyra's taboo on mentioning Jewishness or Judaism distorts the picture. An implication of Liana Funaro's (2010–2011 [2012]) examination of the private correspondence of Sabato Morais (1823–1897) — an ordained rabbi who from Livorno moved in 1846 for London as a teacher at a Jewish orphanage (where he knew Giuseppe Mazzini and even, about to leave Europe, gave him his passport to use on the Continent) and then to Philadelphia, as a minister (not formally a rabbi) from 1851 (in 1854, he was permitted by his congregation in Philadelphia to visit Livorno, as his father was ill) — shows that assuming a cleavage between 19th-century rabbinic Livorno and Livornese Jews with an Italian nationalist orientation is just an illusion. Sabato's father, Samuele, was a republican (hence, Mazzini). Sabato was quite devout because his mother, Bona Wolf, was. Morais did refer to (indeed sketched a textual portrait of) Lelio Arbib and his Dante collection (Funaro 2012, p. 291), and Morais did the same for another collector (of manuscripts), Giuseppe (Joseph) Almanzi (1801–1860), and referred to the library of the famous, even legendary rabbi Haim Joseph David Azulay, who was born in Jerusalem in 1724, and died in Livorno in 1806, having settled there (by invitation of a patron) after much travel as a fund raiser for the communities and rabbinic academies of the Land of Israel. Azulay was the early founder of Jewish bibliography, the other, later, founder being Moritz Steinschneider. After Azulay's death, his library was moved to Ancona, as his son was a rabbi there.

Rabbi Sabato Morais was Isaac Leeser's successor at Mikveh Israel, Philadelphia's earliest Jewish congregation, established in 1740. Following Leeser's death, Morais became the leading traditional rabbi in the United States. Morais was the founder in 1886, and the first president, of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York. Isaac Leeser (1806–1868) was not an ordained rabbi; he was the lay officiant at Mikveh Israel synagogue; he also was the editor of *The Occident*, the first successful American Jewish newspaper. Taken together, Leeser and Morais set the tone for the intellectual traits typifying the leadership of the Philadelphia Jewish Community. "The successors to Leeser and Rebecca Gratz [(1781–1869)] in precedent-setting Jewish leadership have been categorized as the 'Philadelphia Group'. Exclusively male and primarily traditional or Orthodox in their religious orientation, they tended to be well educated in Jewish and general areas, and intellectual and scholarly by inclination and accomplishment. In this, they differed from Jewish leaders in New York, who came largely from the ranks of business and the law and possessed great wealth" (Rosenbaum 2008, p. 142).

²⁴ Lelio Arbib's poetic output and Shakespeare translations are presumably lost. He did not seek to publish them, though urged to do so.

²⁵ Mondolfi had been teaching at the Jewish girls' school established by his mother.

concerning the spiritual fate of a virtuous but unbaptised Indian. The reply Dante is given by the Eagle is that nobody who does not believe in Christ has ever gone to Heaven or will ever go there, but on the Day of Judgement (when humankind shall be parted into two “collegi”, one of them to be eternally rich, and the other one a loser), many who proclaim they are Christian will be judged worse than some non-Christians.



Alessandro D'Ancona at different ages.

2.7. One of nine brothers (two of them became senators),²⁶ Alessandro D'Ancona was born in Pisa in 1835, and died in Florence in 1914. He chose a career as a historian of Italian literature upon attending a cycle of lectures on Dante given by Francesco De Sanctis, at a time when, a student in 1855–1859, he was in Turin, also as an intermediary between the Tuscan Liberals and Piedmont's prime minister Cavour (Strappini 1986). Tuscany was united to Piedmont in the spring of 1859. Back in Florence, in 1859–1860 D'Ancona was the first editor of the newly founded newspaper *La Nazione*, which is still extant.

After Italy's unification, his appointment as professor of Italian literature was opposed by some moderate clericals (moderate one, so there was a risk their advice would be heeded; more extreme clericals were boycotting the Italian state). They claimed that as a Jew he could not appreciate Dante's theology, and thus could not properly appreciate Dante (Moretti 1998, Di Giulio 2016).

D'Ancona became an influential²⁷ historian of Italian literature on a par with De Sanctis, and a Dante scholar (who among the other things, made an early contribution

²⁶ “Of the nine D'Ancona brothers, Sansone was a diplomat. He became the general secretary of the Tuscan Finance Ministry, was a member of Parliament from 1860 to 1865 and later a senator. Giacomo was a doctor. Vito a painter, and Cesare a professor of paleontology and botany and an eminent member of the *Accademia dei Georgofili*. Alessandro, the best known of the brothers, was a literary figure, editor of *La Nazione*, senator of the Kingdom, director of a prestigious university, the *Scuola Normale* of Pisa, as well as mayor of that city for two years” (Salvadori 2001, p. 81).

²⁷ D'Ancona's pupils included Giuseppe Mazzatinti, Michele Barbi, Francesco Novati, Pio Rajna, Francesco D'Ovidio, Giovanni Gentile, Abdelkader (or Abd-El-Kader) Salza, and Ezio Levi, who wed

to the debate on eastern sources: D'Ancona 1874, 1889, 1994). He began with a book on Beatrice, in time for the 1865 Dante celebrations. He was university rector and city mayor in Pisa, and donated to the city of Florence what he believed to be Dante's death mask (D'Ancona 1911, but see Altrocchi 1935), which he discussed in his essay "Il ritratto Giottesco e la 'maschera di Dante'" included in D'Ancona (1912); cf. D'Ancona (1901a).

D'Ancona's publications are 1,240. Concerning the *Divine Comedy*, D'Ancona was quite attentive to its literary sources, to its cultural and historical context and antecedents, and to the confluence of medieval Christian motifs into Dante's *Comedy*. He was well equipped to research such motifs: he was a folklorist as well as a literary scholar of the historical school, and, in a monumental work, a major historian of the lower-class Christian origins of the Italian theatre.

2.8. Eugenio [Salomone] Camerini was born in Ancona in 1811, but was mostly active in Milan, where he died in 1875. A literary critic, he also was a journalist for *Il Crepuscolo*, founded by Carlo Tenca in 1850. Camerini directed book series for publishers; the introductory essays he wrote for the volumes in those series are still considered felicitous.

Camerini was a pupil of Puoti, and like Tenca, he was active in bringing Italian national culture up to date (Carducci 1970). "His commentary to the *Divine Comedy* (whose first edition appeared in Milan in 1869) was deservedly well received, and this was not because of his own personal exegetical or philological contributions, which in fact are either missing or marginal, but rather because he gathered there, rather intelligently, the best of the critical tradition about Dante. The interpretation neglected none of the aspects of the poem, and is based upon both old [medieval or early modern] glossators, or modern critics" (Carducci 1970, my trans.). "The first critic to contribute to Dickens's Italian reputation was Eugenio Camerini" (De Stasio 2014, p. 216).²⁸

2.9. Erminia Fuà Fusinato (Leuzzi 2008, Filippini 2014) was born in Rovigo in 1834, the daughter of a Jewish medical doctor (and amateur botanist, which Erminia also became), Marco Fuà, and died in Rome in 1876. She was raised in Padua, and her uncle, Benedetto, educated her in Italian poetry.

In 1852, she met the established poet Arnaldo Fusinato (1817–1888), a widower. He is remembered for two powerful lines in a poem about Venice's surrender to the Austrians in 1848: "Il morbo infuria, il pan ci manca, / sul ponte sventola bandiera bianca!" ("The plague is storming, bread is wanting, on the bridge a white banner is waving").

Arminia and Arnaldo announced they would wed; her family was opposed, because it would require her to convert, and because of his age. In 1856 they wed in Venice, and went to live in Castelfranco Veneto in the house of Countess Teresa Coletti Colonna, the mother of Fusinato's deceased first wife. Presumably this was

D'Ancona's grand-daughter. Like D'Ancona, both Gentile (the fascist philosopher and minister) and Russo (an anti-Fascist) were going to become heads of the Scuola Normale in Pisa.

²⁸ Emilia Errera was a teacher, whose importance in literary studies in Italy is because of her prominence in Italian receptions of Charles Dickens. Her book about "Carlo Dickens" first appeared in 1895, and in 1901 and 1903 with a preface by Angiolo Orvieto, who because of his literary journals was quite well connected with the Italian writers of his times, and who in his poetry wrote also as a Jew. Emilia Errera's sister and sometime collaborator, Rosa Errera, authored *Dante*, published by Bemporad in 1921. The three Errera sisters, all three of them remarkable, are the subject of Norsa (1975).

why Erminia's third child (born in 1863, when Erminia had tuberculosis) was named *Teresita* (she eventually became Tere[sita] Bianco Fusinato).

The Venetia was still in Austrian hands, so in 1864, the couple moved to Florence as Arnaldo was considered subversive. In 1874, they moved to Rome, and with the help of Giovanni Prati, Arnaldo was made director of the office of revision of transcripts at the Senate, while Erminia was made inspector of girls' schools and headmaster of a high school.

In Pomarance in the province of Pisa, in October 1873, writing a preface for the 1874 Florentine edition of a volume of verse by Erminia Fuà Fusinato, M. Tabarrini wrote (p. XIII):

Nel centenario di Dante, mentre in prosa e in rima furono arsi al Divino Poeta incensi d'ogni qualità, molti dei quali sicuramente non esalavano profumo aromatico, la Fusinate cantò di quella povera ed ignorata Gemma Donati, che fu compagna amorosa dell'esule e madre dei suoi figliuoli, appena nominata dai biografi dell'Alighieri. In quel peana trionfale, chi se non una donna avrebbe pensato a Gemma Donati?

[In the centennial of Dante [i.e., of Dante's birth, in 1865: Dante was born in 1265], whereas in both prose and rhyme, frankincense of disparate quality was being burnt in honour of the Divine Poet, and certainly many of these offerings were not giving off aromatic perfume, the Fusinatess [Erminia Fuà Fusinato, by treating her husband's surname as a name for inhabitants] sang about that poor, ignored Gemma Donati [Dante's wife], who was the loving companion of the exile and the mother of his children, and yet is barely mentioned by Alighieri's biographers. In that triumphal celebration, who if not a woman would have thought of Gemma Donati?]



Erminia Fuà Fusinato, detail of
a photograph by Guidi.

Tullo Massarani.

Alberto Cantoni.

2.10. Tullo Massarani (Mantua, 1826 – Milan, 1905), was a writer (a prolific polymath: a poet and translator, as well as an essayist on politics, history, literature, and art), a politician, as well as a painter. He was very affluent. Like Camerini, Massarani wrote for Tenca's periodical *Il Crepuscolo*. Massarani was member of the Camera dei Deputati (House of Representatives) in 1860–1867, in the ranks of the historical Right, before becoming in 1876, a senator (which in his days was always by

royal appointment) — Italy's first Jewish senator. He was independent in his views, and favoured extending the right to vote, extending the access to education, improving child and women's labour conditions, and defending museums and the cultural heritage.

Giuseppe Zanardelli (who before he was Italy's premier in 1901–1903, had been a minister: a jurist, he abolished the death penalty in Italy and introduced a new criminal code) wished Massarani to be minister of education (Balzani 2008), but he was not. Massarani's book on French art resulted in his being awarded France's *Legion d'honneur*. An explicit unbeliever who explicitly would not renege on his Jewish ancestry, but disliked it that Jews would insist on their own cultural traits (his father saw to it that he learned Hebrew but no Jewish orthopraxy; cf. Bertolotti 2015, Cavaglioni 2012–2013 [2014], Funaro 2012), the closest thing one finds to a cult in his output is his Italian patriotism.

It is rather unsurprising than in his poetry, mentions of Dante are part of extolling Italy. In his poetry book *L'Odissea della donna* (*Woman's Odyssey*), his narrative poem "Notti veneziane" ("Venetian Nights") — rather obscure, and that in the last stanza turns out to have been a dream (it is about Italy's national glory) — includes lines such as these: "Te il divino Alighier, me spinse al volo, / Padre de' naviganti, il nostro Polo." ("Thee the divine Alighieri pushed to fly, and me — / The father of navigators, our [Marco] Polo.") Or then: "Il glorioso, in Dante nostro, Ettore, / Pur ci viene Lamagna invida a tôrre?" ("Hector, who in our Dante is glorious, / Nevertheless envious Germany comes to take away from us?") Another poem in *L'Odissea della donna* is "Dove Po irrompe" ("Where the River Po Spurts Forth"). Its first stanza addresses "Father Eridanus" (i.e., the river god of the Po), and mentions the mountain where the Po originates, as well as the city of Ravenna near its delta: "Padre Eridàno, chi dirà l'istoria / Tua da le vette del natio Monviso / A la marina ove trionfa Dante / Sul Re dei Goti," ["O Father Eridanus, who shall relate the history / Thine, from the summits of the Monviso of thy birth, / To the coast where Dante triumphs / Over the King of the Goths,"]. In a footnote, Massarani explains: "Ravenna offre alla meditazione del visitatore il sepolcro di Teodorico e quello di Dante. A voi, savie Lettrici, i confronti." ("Ravenna offers to the visitor's meditation [the sight of] the tomb of Teodoric, and that [actually, the cenotaph] of Dante. I leave to you, wise Ladies, the comparison.") "Morire?..." ("To Die?...") is another poem from *L'Odissea della donna*. It extols those who gave their lives for Italy. There is an explicit reference (moreover, one explained by Massarani in a footnote) to Dante's character of Pier delle Vigne, a politician who had committed suicide, and in Hell inhabits a thorny plum-tree.

Tullo Massarani is the author of an essay about Dante, occasioned by the 1865 sixth centennial of Dante's birth. In the posthumous edition of Massarani's writings, published by Le Monnier, the 1908 volume *Ricordi cittadini e patriottici*, edited by Raffaello Barbiera, includes Massarani's essay for Dante's centennial on pp. 211–222.

2.11. Let us turn to Flora Randegger-Friedenberg. Saul Formiggini of Trieste published there the first Hebrew translation of Dante's *Inferno* in 1869. It is important to point out that there was some contemporary Hebrew writing in Trieste: Aron Luzzatto published in 1857 a Hebrew-Italian dictionary, but the main intellectual involved was Samuel David Luzzatto, Della Torre's colleague at the rabbinic school in Padua. Moreover, there were Jewish contexts in which Dante was mentioned. Marina Arbib (2014) wrote about "Flora Sofia Clementina Friedenberg née Randegger (1824–1910), a Jewish woman from Trieste, [who] was a teacher, pioneer,

and writer. She grew up in the milieu of well-known rabbi and scholar Samuel David Luzzatto (1800–1865).²⁹ This milieu combined deep attachment to Jewish tradition with appreciation of the wider European culture” (*ibid.*, p. 272).

Randegger was twice, in 1856–58 and 1864–66, in Jerusalem, in order to establish a school for Jewish girls there, and published in Trieste in 1869 an Italian diary of her travels (Friedenberg 1869). Arbib points out (*ibid.*, p. 275, citing Randegger-Friedenberg 1864) that “in her translation of the Book of Joshua, Randegger uses a quotation from Dante’s *Inferno* (I, 83–84) as a motto”, about zeal in seeking a book. Dante was referring to Virgil’s *Aeneid*, whereas Randegger was referring to the Hebrew Bible.

After mentioning Saul Formiggini’s translation, Arbib explains: “Dante was [...] the authoritative source that cultured people of those days, including Randegger, referred to in order to be considered culturally up-to-date. It also is important to remember that Dante, celebrated as the greatest Italian poet, played a significant role in the struggle for emancipation among Italian Jews and was also the leading figure among Italian-speaking Jews ruled by the Hapsburg” (Arbib 2014, p. 276).

This was expressed, as both Salah (2013) and Arbib (2014) have pointed out, in seeking Jewish equivalents of Dante (Moses of Rieti, Immanuel Romano: see Nissan (2017a)), and in direct engagement with Dante’s text. “The ideological purpose was to show the closeness of Dante to Judaism and how identifying culturally with Dante, the Jews were participants in the universal spirit and, since they also took part in non-Jewish culture, were worthy of emancipation. In contrast to them, there were Jewish intellectuals, like Rabbi Lelio Della Torre and Rabbi Samuel David Luzzatto, who saw Dante’s vision of the world and theology as opposed to Judaism” (Arbib 2014, p. 277). And yet, Luzzatto participated in the 1865 Dante celebrations with a Hebrew sonnet (published in the *Corriere Israelitico*) in praise of Dante, the greatest poet, even comparable to the prophets of old; that sonnet was translated twice into Italian.

2.12. Alberto Cantoni (Pomponesco near Mantua, 1841 – Mantua, 1904)³⁰ was a writer, often humorous, who was admired by Luigi Pirandello. His father, Israele di Moisè Isepe (i.e., Giuseppe) Cantoni, born in 1805, was a very devout and observant Jew who was a merchant of grain and farm animals and who had become an important landowner, whereas Alberto Cantoni’s mother was Anna Errera, was from Venice. In old age, Alberto Cantoni was a Zionist (Jori 2004). His short story “Israele Italiano”, dated 1 January 1903, relates a dialogue between two young men who are friends. They are a Jew with dark hair and a rather Dantean nose,³¹ and a fair-haired, plump Christian. Their conversation takes place in the Giants’ Hall (Sala dei Giganti) at the Palazzo Te in Mantua. Its subject is the Jewish condition, and the rising tide of anti-Semitism in Europe. In Cantoni’s literary writings, a reference to Dante may be humorous because of the different contexts (“Carolina impietrò di dentro come il conte Ugolino”, i.e., “Carolina turned into stone inside, like Count Ugolino”).

²⁹ As Arbib points out, Samuel David Luzzatto was close to the Randegger family.

³⁰ See e.g. Cavaglion (2013); Ragni (1975); <http://www.classicalitaliani.it/cantoni/>

³¹ In Italian: “the dark-haired one continued, pushing his face against the walls corner as much as his rather Dantesque nose allowed him”, that is to say: “seguitò il bruno spingendo il viso contro lo spigolo dei muri quanto più gli fu consentito dal naso, abbastanza dantesco”. In this instance, Cantoni had conceded as verisimilar the trope of the Jewish nose (on which, see Gilman 1994, 1999). Cantoni partly subverts the trope: the Jewish character’s nose being somewhat like Dante’s at once confirms the trope, but also underscores the character’s Italianness, as Dante is central to Italian literary culture.

In an article about Alberto Cantoni's modernity, Ferdinando Bernini (1937) wrote as follows, referring to Cantoni's short story "Scaricalasino" (Cantoni 1901): "Just as the problem was proposed of narrative art, Cantoni proposes the problem of drama. We may well modernise drama, but in what does such modernity consist? A comedigrapher, who sought refuge at a tavern in Monghidoro, asks that question, questioning in turn several occasional fellow customers, who include three journalists, a surgeon, a councillor at the Prefecture, and a painter, and they each give their respective opinion and relate an episode drawn from their own experience. It basically all turns out to be artistry, by making the comedy pivot around two kinds of persons who would increasingly tend to blend into just one, like in Dante's canto of the snakes" (my trans.). The reference to the "canto of the snakes" is to Canto 24 in Dante's *Inferno*, where thieves are punished. The souls of the thieves run among the snakes, and their hands are bound behind them with snakes. Once a sinner is bitten by a snake, he burns and turns into ashes. Then, from the ashes, the human shape is formed again. Dante sees the body of a sinner blends into the body of a snake that torments him.

In a posthumously published novel, *L'illustrissimo*, which appeared in 1906 with a very important preface by Luigi Pirandello, Alberto Cantoni misquoted Dante, either deliberately or inadvertently. In Canto 26 of *Purgatorio*, Dante had written in lines 67–69: "Non altrimenti stupido si turba / lo montanaro, e rimirando ammuta, / quando rozzo e salvatico s'inurba" ("Not otherwise, in awe, perturbed is / The mountaineer, and while staring he is dumbfounded, / When, unrefined and savage, he comes to town"). It suited Cantoni's given context to misquote Dante here, as he was concerned with peasant women at Milan's Central Rail Station, rather than with mountaineers. Nunziata "avrebbe potuto affacciarsi anche a Londra senza aver nulla che fare 'col villan che *timido* s'innurba' di Dante Alighieri" [sic] ("would have been able to have a glimpse even of London without having anything to do 'with the peasant who, *shy*, comes to town' of Dante Alighieri").

2.13. Flaminio Servi³² (Pitigliano, southern Tuscany, 1841 – Casale Monferrato, 1904) was a rabbi from 1864 — first in Monticelli d'Ongina, a town near Piacenza, later in Piedmontese towns, Mondovì (1867–1872) and next Casale — and the editor of the Jewish periodical *Il Vessillo Israelitico* from 1874 (it ceased publication in 1922), continuing *L'Educatore Israelita* edited by another rabbi, Giuseppe Levi of Vercelli, who died in 1874. Servi authored *Dante e gli ebrei (Dante and the Jews)*, a pamphlet of 23 pages (Servi 1893)³³ in which what can still be appreciated sometimes is his listing parallels between *loci* in the *Divine Comedy*, and *loci* in the Hebrew Bible or in Jewish exegesis, but in which he claimed that Dante and Immanuel Romano were friends (having first met in Rome when Dante was Florence's envoy),³⁴

³² Or, in Hebrew, Efraím ben Shelomó Neḥemiá Servi. <http://www.rabbini.it/flaminio-servi/>

³³ The pamphlet was published as a gift for a wedding in Casale. An earlier, shorter version had appeared, Servi stated, in Rome in "*L'Istruzione* — anno III, num. 10, 11, 12, e IV, num. 4". Servi (1893) began Ch. 1 by remarking that almost thirty years earlier, he had already written about Dante's friendship for Immanuel Romano. That would be around the time of the 1865 Dante celebrations.

³⁴ Servi (1893, Ch. 8) identified the Daniel guiding Immanuel in the hereafter with Dante, and in a footnote sought evidence in an onomastic custom of Tuscan and Roman Jews in Servi's own days, by which one called *Dan* in Hebrew (like one of Jacob's sons) was called *Dante* in Italian. One may mention in this connection another native of Pitigliano, the rabbi and magazine editor Dante (Dan) Lattes (1876–1965). In onomastics, such pairs of given names which — Justyna Walkowiak writes (2016, p. 84) — "might be called *endoanthroponyms* (personal names which are self-names, i.e. ones reflecting internal identification) vis-à-vis *exoanthroponyms* (personal names given by others, i.e. those

and even that it was Immanuel who suggested to Dante to write the *Divine Comedy*,³⁵ and (in Appendix 1) that when Immanuel refers to a lover whose name is *yymh יימ"ה* (*Gemma*),³⁶ that lover was none else than Dante's own wife!³⁷ Of course, this need not be the case, as *Gemma* was not a peculiar name. It was the conclusion only an enthusiast would reach, and is quite uncharacteristic of a rabbi. It shows how strongly some Italian Jews felt the need to find an authorisation — in Dante, the Italian nation's iconic poet — for friendly co-existence (the new situation they had begun to savour with emancipation and integration). Servi's preface stated: "I letterati giudicheranno del mio lavoruccio che ha, se non altro, il pregio dell'attualità, perchè l'amicizia sincera di un ingegno sovrano come Dante con un ebreo nel medio evo — amicizia su cui non cade più il minimo dubbio — è prova del cuor nobile di lui e della malvagità di quanti odiano o disprezzano gl'israeliti senza una ragione al mondo" ("Men of letters will evaluate this little work of mine that if anything, is of present concern, because the sincere friendship of such a sovereign mind as Dante with a Jew in the Middle Ages — a now quite indoubtable friendship — proves his noble heart, and the wickedness of those who hate or despise the Israelites with no reason at all".) He continued and concluded his preface: "Ma l'Italia fu sempre la terra de' forti propositi e delle magnanime imprese e l'Italia che venera l'Alighieri come il sommo tra i suoi poeti, ha imparato da lui ad ispirarsi ai dettami della fratellanza e dell'amore. E gliene va data somma lode. ¶ Ad ogni modo il nostro studio non tornerà discaro a quanti vogliono l'affetto tra i professanti le varie religioni, nè spiacerà ai cultori delle belle lettere che in ogni accenno al poema dantesco trovan materia

which express external identification), terms that I coined on the basis of the well-established concepts *endonyms* and *exonyms*, of the relatively common analogical pair *endoethnonyms* / *exoethnonyms*, as well as of the practically non-existent *endolinguonyms* / *exolinguonyms* (used, to the best of my knowledge, only by Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson, cf. 1995: 109)".

³⁵ Servi (1893, Ch. 4): "E noi fermamente crediamo che all'Alighieri il concetto di una gita ai regni bui e le fiere che rappresentano popoli e nazioni e cento altre immagini disseminate nella Divina Commedia siano state ispirate, consigliate, diremmo quasi dettate dall'amico suo Immanuel prima nelle intime e fraterne conversazioni, poscia per corrispondenza epistolare" ("And we are quite convinced that to Alighieri, the concept of a tour to the dark kingdoms and the savage beasts that represent peoples and nations, and a hundred other images disseminated in the *Divine Comedy*, were inspired, advised, we would almost say dictated, by his friend Immanuel, at first in intimate and fraternal conversation, and later on by exchanging letters". Servi previously proposed that much, and in 1893 quotes Carlo Del Balzo (1853–1908) in Del Balzo (1889, Vol. 1, pp. 315–316), crediting Servi himself with suggesting that Immanuel gave Dante the idea of the *Divine Comedy* ("Il Servi dà ad Immanuel la gloria di aver suggerito a Dante l'idea della Divina Commedia").

³⁶ Transcribing a voiced palatal sound [ʒ, dʒ] as *yy* or *y* was a practice found among medieval French and Italian Jews (e.g. in Old French transcribed in the Hebrew script within Hebrew text, **יריומא** *yrywm* for *Jérôme*, *r* sounding like Czech *ř*). Immanuel's Hebrew wording is as follows: *Hara'ita 'einei Gemma? Šəson libbi hémma* ("Did you see Gemma eyes? The joy of my heart they are").

³⁷ Servi claimed: "Chi era questa Gemma? Noi propendiamo a credere fosse la moglie stessa di Dante, la quale trascurata dal marito, faceva la galante coll'amico Imanuele che frequentava la sua casa. È una mera supposizione, lo sappiamo, ma nella critica letteraria se non si osa gettare una idea che possa suscitare qualche discussione, non si arriva mai a scoprire la verità. Ne siete convinti? ¶ Questo scrivevamo nel *Vessillo Israelitico*, Anno 1890, pag. 342. ¶ Quella nostra, diremo così ardita induzione, piacque molto ai critici, fra i quali il dottissimo Modona — sotto bibliotecario a Parma — che su Dante e Imanuele ha studiato non poco" ("Who was this Gemma? We are inclined to believe that she was Dante's own wife, who being neglected by her husband, flirted with his friend, Immanuel. It is just a supposition, we know, but in literary criticism if one does not dare to launch an idea that may raise some discussion, one never achieves to uncover the truth. Are you convinced? ¶ We wrote this in the *Vessillo Israelitico*, year 1890, p. 342. ¶ This, let us say, daring inference of ours was much liked by critics, including the very learned [Leonello] Modona [(1841–1902)], assistant librarian in Parma, who has much researched Dante and Immanuel").

gradita di studii severi e di serie riflessioni” (“But Italy always was the land of strong intents and magnanimous enterprises, and Italy, who venerates Alighieri as the topmost of her poets, has learned from him to inspire herself to the dictates of brotherhood and love, thus deserving utmost praise. ¶ At any rate, our present study will not be unwelcome to those who want affection between members of different faiths, nor will it be disliked by those who concern themselves with the *belles lettres* and who in any hint at Dante’s great poem find pleasant matter for rigorous study and serious reflections”).³⁸

3. Italian Jews’ Engagement with Dante in the 20th Century

3.1. Two countervailing trends, the integration of the Jews in Italian society, and their persecution by race legislation and then manhunt during the Holocaust, have shaped responses to Dante on the part of individual Jews in Italy in the 20th century. Of course, also changing attitudes in Italian culture to Dante and his use in national rhetoric were reflected among Jews. Moreover, some Jews who left Italy (because of the racial laws, or later) made contributions to their new country’s culture *vis-à-vis* Dante. Sometimes, individuals’ Jewishness was at play in how they have been relating to Dante, whereas some other times, they have simply been Italian cultural agents who happened to be Jewish. Perhaps no response to Dante’s text was contextually more Jewish than in Annibale Gallico’s Judaeo-Mantuan poems. The subsection devoted to him here is accordingly longer. But so is the one for Guido da Verona: his Jewish ancestry made his travesty all the more unacceptable.

3.2. Rodolfo Mondolfi³⁹ (Florence,⁴⁰ 1842 – Florence, 1925)⁴¹ wrote a shorter biography of his uncle, Alessandro Franchetti, *qua* Dante bibliophile, for *Dantisti e*

³⁸ Servi (1893, Ch. 7) claimed: “C’è in tutta la Divina Commedia — come qualche spirito partigiano potrebbe supporre — una sola frase, una sola parola che suoni disprezzo, odio agli ebrei? No, e no. Dante amava troppo il suo Immanuele per potere — cristiano convinto com’era — sfogare la bile che allora nutrivano le teste piccine — e ce ne son purtroppo anche adesso — contro di essi. Egli non espresse mai un concetto che potesse in qualsivoglia modo ferirne la suscettibilità. Dante — lo si può dire altamente — amava gli ebrei, nè di odiarli aveva ragione alcuna” (“Is there in the entire *Divine Comedy*, as somebody biased may suppose, even just one sentence, one word that would express contempt or hatred for the Jews? Not at all. Dante loved too much his Immanuel for him to be able, a convinced Christian as he was, to pour against them the bile that at that time smallish heads were brewing (there are such also at present, unfortunately). He never expressed a concept that may in any way wound their susceptibility. Dante, we can say so aloud, loved Jews, and had no reason to hate them”. Servi tried to show that some *loci* were not anti-Jewish, or are in the Hebrew Bible. But see Cox (2002), Hede (2008), and Rabbi Lelio Della Torre ([1871] 1908, p. 285). The latter understood Dante’s line “so that the Jew among you may not laugh!” (*Paradiso* 5.81) for what it was: “the line of verse where the Poet, with his usual, admirable concision, concentrates the animadversion and contempt he felt for us, partaking also in this in the prejudices of his time” (my translation from Della Torre).

³⁹ Cf. *Conversando con mio padre* by his daughter, the musicologist Anna Mondolfi Bossarelli (1960).

⁴⁰ As mentioned earlier, Rodolfo Mondolfi was the son of the banker Lodovico Mondolfi, born in Ancona, where his father Sabato was in charge of local finances during the Napoleonic period. In Florence, though well integrated, in the early 1830s Lodovico was a covert member of Giuseppe Mazzini’s republican Giovine Italia. Arrested, Lodovico was exiled, reached Mazzini in London, but later was a moderate.

⁴¹ Rodolfo Mondolfi returned to Florence from Livorno in 1924. His son Uberto (1877–1941), Livorno’s mayor (a socialist and a classicist), was given an ultimatum by one thousand Fascists to leave that city during riots on 22 November 1922, preceded by the murder of two city councillors. Galeazzo Ciano addressed the mayor, Mondolfi, and Modigliani, member of Parliament, warning them that unless they left Livorno by noon, they would be hanged in public. Rodolfo reached in Florence

dantofili dei secoli 18. e 19.: contributo alla storia della fortuna di Dante, edited by Giuseppe Lando Passerini (1901–1904).⁴² Mondolfi also wrote a manuscript relating to the biography of Alessandro Franchetti, and published in book form in Cagianelli (2006). We devote a separate section in this book to Alessandro Franchetti and his son, Augusto. Rodolfo Mondolfi however contributed in his own rights to Dante studies, especially a pamphlet representative to how Italian Jews of his generation felt more comfortable to believe about Dante’s attitude towards Jews.

Rodolfo Mondolfi was a school headmaster in Livorno⁴³ (and a family friend of the household in which the painter Amedeo Modigliani was raised). He also was a literary writer, but he also published about Dante’s *Divine Comedy* (Mondolfi 1898, 1904). Mondolfi (1904) was concerned with what place Dante reserved to the Jews in the hereafter. We have mentioned earlier, but let us repeat this, that Mondolfi concluded rather optimistically, that Dante would place virtuous Jews in the Limbo, rather close to Hell’s entrance, and not yet Hell proper, rather than in some deeper place in Hell, but I suspect that assuming that much was wishful thinking on Mondolfi’s part, even though he based his conclusions upon a passage in *Paradiso*, 19.70–111, where Dante proposes a problem of theodicy to the Eagle (a mystical being in whom the souls in the heaven of Jupiter are aggregated), concerning the spiritual fate of a virtuous but unbaptised Indian. The reply Dante is given by the Eagle is that nobody who does not believe in Christ has ever gone to Heaven or will ever go there, but on the Day of Judgement (when humankind shall be parted into two “collegi”, one of them to be eternally rich, and the other one a loser), many who proclaim they are Christian will be judged worse than some non-Christians.⁴⁴ That understanding was rather wishful thinking; such living American scholars as Jacoff and Feinstein, who are Jewish (as well as a few non-Jewish authors) do recognise the depth of Dante’s prejudices.

3.3. Raffaello Ottolenghi or Raffaele Ottolenghi (Abram Raffaele Ottolenghi, 1860–1917), active in Acqui, Piedmont, published in 1910 the book *Un lontano precursore di Dante (A Remote Precursor of Dante)*, which appeared in Lugano (in Canton Ticino, Switzerland), with the publishing house Coenobium. Ottolenghi indicated in the Hebrew poet Solomon Ibn Gabirol (ca. 1021–1058; see on him Pessin

Uberto, where the latter was teaching Latin and Greek at a friars’ school (the Padri Scolopi’s) before they were forced to dismiss him to avoid reprisals. Before he became mayor, he had taught Italian letters in Livorno. The poet Giovanni Pascoli was his teacher. Even though they had been fellow students, Giovanni Gentile, the minister of education, persecuted Uberto Mondolfi, sacked from state-run schools for “incapacity”.

⁴² Giuseppe Lando Passerini (Florence, 1858 – Florence, 1932), a librarian bibliographer, and literary critic, as well as a Dante scholar, was the editor of the *Giornale Dantesco*.

⁴³ Mondolfi had been teaching at the Jewish girls’ school established by his mother.

⁴⁴ That the very worst, deepest place in Dante’s Hell is the Giudecca, thus sharing the name with the Jewish neighbourhood in medieval Italy’s towns, rather suggests that not only Judas Iscariot, but also the other Jews are that deep in Hell. Dante’s Giudecca at the bottom of Hell is on the face of it so named because Lucifer is chewing the body of Giuda, i.e., Judas Iscariot. And yet, Dante’s choice to name the place *Giudecca* is far from innocent: it arguably implies that in Hell, it is the Jew’s Place, the place of all Jews since the Passion. We cannot know for sure that such was Dante’s intention however, because Dante the narrating character passes through the Giudecca in a hurry, and this because Dante the poet was constrained by the fixed size of a canto: in the last canto of *Inferno*, he had to relate about his passage through the Giudecca, then describing the body of Lucifer, then describing how he and Virgil pass through a tunnel from the centre of the earth to the shore of the island of Purgatory (at the antipodes of Jerusalem); so crammed is the last canto of the *Inferno*, that Dante’s apparently had no room to dwell on encountering the denizens of the Giudecca, but the latter’s very name is quite eloquent. Cf. the article “Judecca, Dante’s Satan, and the Displaced Jew” by Sylvia Tomasch (1998).

2010, Samuelson 2005) a “precursor”: Ottolenghi related the planetary schema of Dante’s *Paradiso* to Ibn Gabirol’s Hebrew poem of praise to God (now read by some during the night of the Day of Atonement), *Keter Malkhut (The Royal Crown)*, a poem of forty stanzas (Lewis 1961). Of its four parts, the third presents Ibn Gabirol’s cosmology. Raffaello Ottolenghi wrote several works about the history of religion, and especially of Christianity, in relation to both Judaism and Hellenism. He also wrote about what he considered Oriental influences in European culture. That he was not always duly cautious can be seen from his book of 1908, *Il cristianesimo è un buddismo rinnovato? (Is Christianity a Renewed Buddhism?)*, and a work of 1910, this one, too, published by Coenobium: *Il dogma cristiano in Eschilo (Christian Dogma in Aeschylus)*. The publishing house in Lugano was the one that published the journal *Coenobium: Rivista Internazionale di Liberi Studi filosofici*, which brought together philosophers and religious thinkers, Modernists on the Catholic side, and Protestants. Ottolenghi was a bold (too bold) author, less than a scholar; and Ottolenghi did possess knowledge of Hebrew that would have become a rarity among Italian Jews in the 20th century (and actually already was in the 19th: in both centuries, it was Jews committed to the Jewish liturgy that did possess knowledge of Hebrew to some degree).

3.4. One of Alessandro D’Ancona’s pupils was Ezio Levi (Mantua, 1884 – Boston, 1941), an Italian and Romance philologist and Hispanist. His Sephardi ancestry was not lost on some Hispanic scholars. Upon wedding in 1916 Alessandro D’Ancona granddaughter, Ezio Levi (who was born into a family whose background was in the Nazione Portoghese of Ferrara’s Jewish community) changed his name into Ezio Levi D’Ancona in 1921 (this follows a pattern of Italian Jewish Levi families of being double-barrelled, i.e., having a second surname which makes the resulting double surname more specific). The racial laws of 1938 lost him his chair at the University of Naples, to the benefit of Salvatore Battaglia. In 1940, Ezio Levi taught at Wellesley College, a liberal arts women’s college in Massachusetts. He soon died of a gastric ulcer, unsurprisingly given his circumstances since 1938. His publications include a book of essays about Dante, *Piccarda e Gentucca: Studi e ricerche dantesche*, published in Bologna in 1921.



Raffaello Ottolenghi.

Rodolfo Mondolfi.

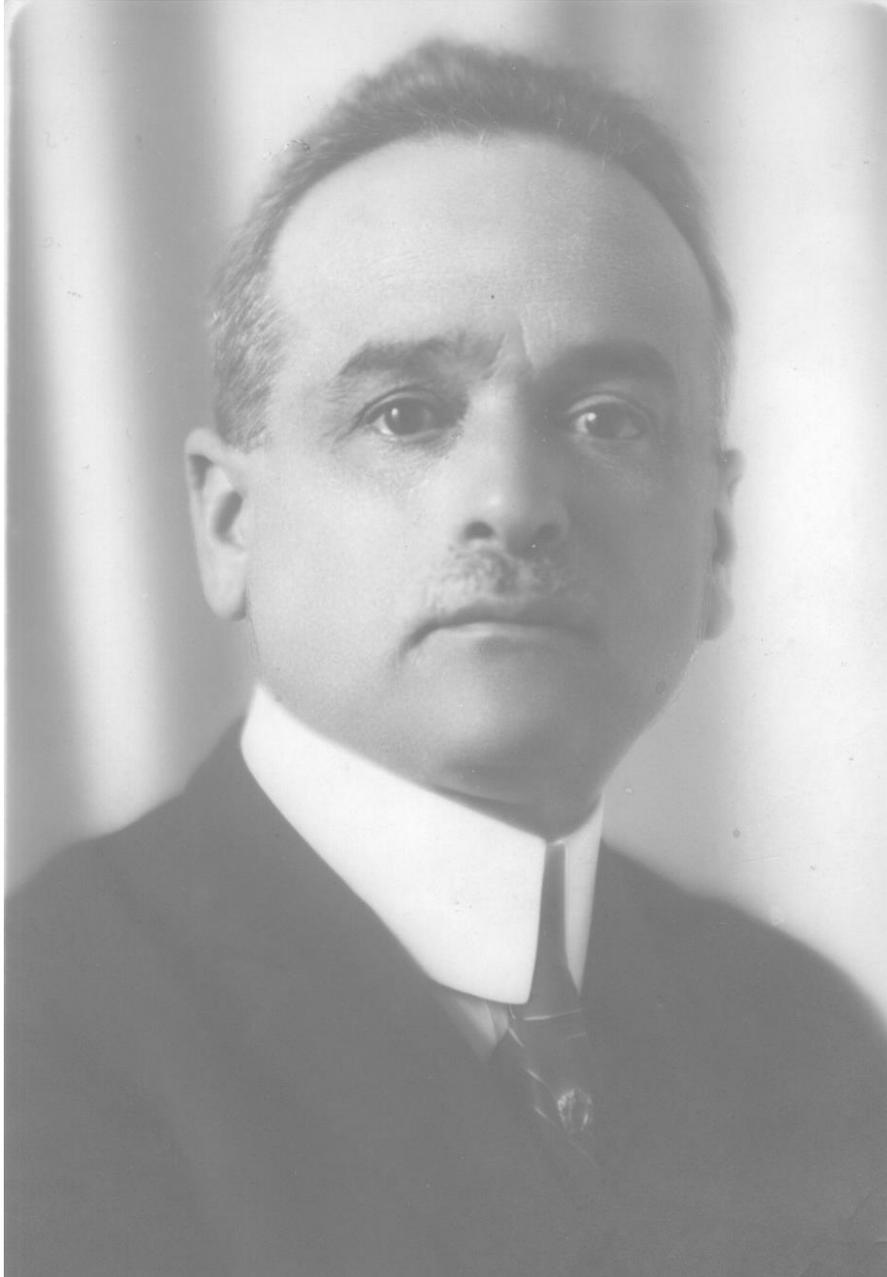
Ezio Levi D’Ancona.

3.5. Annibale Gallico (Mantua, 1876–1936) was a humorous, copious poet in the Judeo-Mantuan dialect. He was a medical doctor (also a circumcisor), as well as a president of the Italian Draughts Federation. His collection of poems *Storie vecie* (“Old Stories”, nearly 6400 lines) on local Jewish themes in a mix of Italian and the Judaeo-Mantuan dialect (which Gallico used to call *ebraico-mantovano*), has now an excellent critical edition by Sara Natale (2014), a bulky volume of 749 pages, where Gallico’s *opus* has been at the long last published in its entirety. In what in Italian is now best described as his *canzoniere giudaico-mantovano*, Gallico reminisces affectionately, often humorously, about the state of affairs in Mantua’s former Ghetto at a time when the Jews were no longer segregated there, but many of them still lived in that neighbourhood, which was poor and notorious, and was eventually demolished. He also handles a multitude of actual people through their nicknames. Gallico was developing throughout his poetry his own literary idiolect, in which he reconstructed Jewish life the way it had been in the Ghetto in recent generations, with both nostalgia and irony. Taken together, Gallico’s poems amount to an epic of the Ghetto of Mantua (Cesare Segre in his preface to Natale 2014, p. 7). Gallico was an educated author, writing poetry in his spare time. As Natale points out in the introduction to her volume, Gallico’s double, inside his poems, is the fictional storyteller Iagnacou Semola⁴⁵ (“Jacob Semolina”); nevertheless (Natale 2014, p. 16), Gallico sometimes directly intervenes to replace Semola.

In her “Introduzione”, Sara Natale claims on p. 28, fn. 23 (my trans.):

[One must bear in mind indeed that Annibale Gallico’s popularistic yet learned poetry does not confine itself, which is instead the case of much popular poetry, to an attempt of mere imitation of high culture, to transfer into simplified formal codes, but is rather articulated in more complex movements of comic reversal. It is not a short distance that separates, for example, the bland dialectal travesty of famous lines of verse by Dante, and the parodistic revisiting of Manzoni’s civil ode, which on the occasion is stuffed with obscene puns and with Hebrew words.]

⁴⁵ *Semola* is stressed on the antepenult (like both *Annibale* and *Gallico*). In the first name *Iagnacou*, consider how the Hebrew letter ‘*ayin*’ (historically, the voiced pharyngeal) is replaced with an approximation of Italian *gn*, i.e., Spanish *ñ*. This corresponds to how that phoneme was pronounced in the liturgical Hebrew of Italian Jews.



Annibale Gallico.⁴⁶

Natale has identified, in her notes, several Dantean *loci* in Gallico's *oeuvre*. I have sifted through her volume to find these intertextual references to Dante. Let a brief exemplification suffice here. On p. 109, one finds Poem 3, entitled "Maciete ebraiche" — i.e., in standard Italian, "Macchiette ebraiche" ("Jewish Sketches") — in which, during the Day of Atonement, the poet sees in the streets of the Ghetto of Mantua a cortege of typical characters. The two final stanzas of that poem are as follows (p. 113, lines 141–148): "E sia gloria a 'sti *gnivrim*, / che ho volù chî ricordar: / fassa Dio che i *kolaim* / non î vaghen a turbar. // Consolemes, o letor, / che el *ckassêr* è in bone man... / con 'ste facie el nostr'onor / durarà lontan lontan!..." ["Glory to these fellow-Jews, / Whom I wanted to remember here: / Let the Lord see to it that no

⁴⁶ The photograph of Annibale Gallico is reproduced courtesy of Sara Natale.

illnesses / Would come and afflict them. // Let it be a consolation for us, o reader, / That the Ghetto is in good hands... / With faces like these, our honour / Shall endure afar, afar!...”].

On p. 116, Natale’s gloss to line 148: states: “*durarà ... lontan*: esplicita ripresa dei celebri versi danteschi: «O anima cortese mantoana, | di cui la fama ancor nel mondo dura, | e durerà quanto ’l mondo lontana» (*If* II 58–60)” [“*shall endure ... afar*: this is an explicit reference to Dante’s famous lines: “O courteous Mantuan soul, / Whose fame still in the world endures, / And shall endure as long as the world is, afar” (*Inferno* 2.58–60)].

Beginning on p. 359, entry 56 is the poem “La Società de la Pedina” (“The Draughts Club”). It is in Italian rather than dialectal. On p. 360, line 57 is “Altro fra i tanti giocator più fini” (“Another among the most refined players”). Then on p. 61, lines 73–80 are as follows: “Sesto ne viene tra cotanto senno / Un tale Cuzzi, un uom senza valore” (“The sixth who comes amid so much wisdom / Is one called Cuzzi,⁴⁷ a worthless man”), an unremarkable yet boastful player who eventually must passively accept his defeat in matches. On p. 362, in Natale’s commentary, there is this gloss to line 57: “57 *altro ... fini*: la locuzione anticipa la scoperta citazione dantesca del v. 73 («Sesto ne viene tra cotanto senno»): «e più d’onore ancora assai mi fenno, | ch’è’ sì mi fecer de la loro schiera, | sì ch’io fui sesto tra cotanto senno» (*If* IV 100–102).” [“*Another among the most refined players*: this expression anticipates the overt quotation from Dante in line 73 (“The sixth who comes amid so much wisdom”), namely, in *Inferno* 4.100–102: “And they honoured me even more, / As they considered me a peer of theris to such an extent, / That I was the sixth one, amid so much wisdom”.]

The context is Dante among the souls of prominent intellectuals in Limbo: Homer, Horace, Ovid, Lucan; counting also Virgil who was introducing them to Dante, Dante is the sixth poet. Dante had a very high opinion of himself. He refuses to partake with the reader of the conversation he had with those luminaries: they had been “parlando cose che ’l tacere è bello, / sì com’era ’l parlar colà dov’era” [“Saying things it is a good thing to keep silent about, / Just as that conversation was a good thing then where it took place”] (*Inferno* 4.104–105).

Then on pp. 362–363, Natale remarks that considering Gallico’s penchant for inserting intertextual references to Dante, quite possibly Cuzzi’s threat to the other checkers players is evocative not just of Brennus, but also of Charon’s threat to the damned: “Guai a voi, anime prave!” [“Woe to you, depraved souls!”] (*Inferno* 3.84).

3.6. Crescenzo Del Monte, the Judaeo-Roman dialectal poet, also translated into that dialect works by Dante and Boccaccio. Crescenzo Del Monte was born in Rome in 1868, and died in that same city in 1935. He is considered the foremost author in the Judaeo-Roman dialect (*giudaico-romanesco*).⁴⁸ The dominant form of poetry in the Roman (*romanesco*) dialect is the sonnet, and this because of the huge influence of Giuseppe Gioachino Belli (1791–1863) is the author of 2269 sonnets in the Roman dialect (*Sonetti romaneschi*) that were published posthumously (1886–1891). Belli had given instructions for them to be burnt. The title by which he referred to them himself was *Er commedione* (‘The Big Comedy’). They were written especially in

⁴⁷ In her inventory of characters, Natale on p. 530, s.v. “Cuzzi, Anna [in Franchetti]” lists several members of the Cuzzi family.

⁴⁸ In older times, Judaeo-Roman was written in Hebrew characters, but by Del Monte’s time, he was using the usual roman spelling in use for the general Roman dialect.

1830–1838 and 1843–1847. Verse in the Roman dialect has been typically been written in sonnets ever since.

Crescenzo Del Monte, who has been described as the Belli of Jewish Rome, authored sonnets in both Judaeo-Roman and the general Roman (*romanesco comune*) dialects. In Crescenzo Del Monte's own days, another author who wrote sonnets in the Roman dialect was Cesare Pascarella (1858–1940).

Sometimes, Del Monte's poetry gives the impression of having the intent of ethnographic and linguistic documentation. In the introduction to the 1927 edition of his collected sonnets, an introduction he wrote in 1908 as an essay about the Judaeo-Roman dialect, Del Monte stated explicitly his purpose of documenting the dialect spoken by Roman Jews,⁴⁹ as well as the purpose of supplementing Belli's *opus* with a depiction of the Jewish community in Belli's times, when the genuine type of the Roman Jew still (supposedly) existed.⁵⁰ And indeed, Del Monte's social portraiture in scenes encapsulated in his sonnets, he follows Belli's model. But quite revealingly, Del Monte accompanies his poems with a critical apparatus of explanatory notes.

One often comes across irony of endearment in his verse, as well as irony in the characters' dialogue. Del Monte collected in the cluster "I nomi d'aa gente" ("People's Names") sonnets about nicknames, and these often are comic. His setting was either the current generations — the age of emancipation of the Jews of Rome following 1870 — or the difficult past of the Jews in Rome under the temporal rule of the Pope. His poetry was published in two books while he was alive, and another volume of posthumous published poems (*Sonetti Giudaico-Romaneschi, Nuovi Sonetti Giudaico-Romaneschi e Sonetti Giudaico-Romaneschi Postumi*).⁵¹

Del Monte also translated into Judaeo-Roman texts in Old Italian by Dante and Boccaccio, as well as texts from the 16th century. In particular, the volume of the *Sonetti postumi* by Del Monte (1955) comprises Del Monte's Judaeo-Roman translation of Cantos 1 and 33 of Dante's *Inferno*, as well as Del Monte's Judaeo-Roman translation of Cristoforo Castelletti's comedy *Le stravaganze d'amore*. Del Monte also wrote a history of the Jews of Rome from 20 September 1870 (*Storia degli ebrei di Roma dal 1870 ai giorni nostri*), and it appeared as an appendix to Giacomo Blustein's *Storia degli ebrei in Roma* (1921).⁵²

⁴⁹ Debenedetti Stow (1998, p. 33). She remarks (*ibid.*, p. 34) that the documentary intent of social conditions and spoken expression was shared in Italian literature by naturalistic authors such as Giovanni Verga for Sicily and Matilde Serao for Naples, but it must be said that these did not write in the respective dialect. Debenedetti Stow acknowledges (*ibid.*) that in the dialectal literature in late 19th-century Italy, the influence of naturalism was not as strong as the model of Belli's poems from Rome, and Carlo Porta in Milan (who was writing in the Napoleonic period)

⁵⁰ Debenedetti Stow (1998, p. 35). She also points out that in his preface to Del Monte's posthumous sonnets, in 1955, the linguist Benvenuto Terracini referred to Del Monte as an "amabile filologo", a "lovable philologist". In that same preface, Terracini stated that while recreating scenes, Del Monte was treating his dialect, which he knew intimately, as one of the characters, and that his characters are products of the spirit of the vernacular, which is one with Del Monte's poetical language (Debenedetti Stow 1998, p. 36).

⁵¹ See Del Monte (1955, 2007). An anthology of Crescenzo Del Monte's Judaeo-Roman sonnets was edited by Micaela Procaccia (Del Monte 1976). Studies about Del Monte's sonnets include Mazzocchi Alemanni (1993) and Debenedetti Stow (1998), in which she considered Del Monte's theatricality, the types he constructed, and his modalities of reconstruction of custom. Her approach in that paper is admittedly folkloric, more than linguistic as in other papers of hers on Judaeo-Roman.

⁵² https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crescenzo_Del_Monte



The Judaeo-Roman poet Crescenzo Dal Monte.⁵³

3.7. The political economist Gino Arias was born into a Jewish family in Florence in 1879, went on to become the main theorist of Fascist corporatism, converted to Catholicism in 1932, and, hit by the racial laws of 1938, emigrated to Argentina and died there in 1940. As a young scholar, Gino Arias was a historian of jurisprudence. Arias published an article (Arias 1901a) about juridical institutions in the *Divine Comedy*, and next a book (Arias 1901b) on that same subject, in which the article was incorporated as a section. In his intellectual biography of Arias, Omar Ottonelli remarks (2012, pp. 52–53, my trans.) that in his treatise about Dante “contains a patient and detailed collection of traces, often tenuous, concerning the juridical customs of the Italian Middle Ages, as can be inferred by reading the *Divine Comedy* (sometimes supplemented with references to other writings by Dante). What emerges is an accurate landscape of medieval Tuscan juridical system: from substantial law and criminal procedure, to the organisation of the judiciary, from civil law to economic institutions, from commercial law to the political constitution and social classes. By reconstructing Dante’s evaluation of the individual institutions, as often expressed through the voices of the *dramatis personae* of the three canticles, Arias shapes the image of Dante as having basically been a conservative, ‘contemptuous of the commercial spirit of his times and of those [...] healthy ideas, which the new

⁵³ https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Crescenzo_Del_Monte.JPG#/media/File:Crescenzo_Del_Monte.JPG

bourgeois element had introduced into the life of the Communes' p. 49). It is, then, a Dante still deeply affectionate for that institutional framework of scholastic inspiration that at the time was declining [...]. The gradual emergence of a middle class is, for Dante, both the evidence for and the cause of a society irreparably blinded by profit, for which sake people appear to him to be willing to betray the noblest and most traditional principles. [...] Arias offers the portrait of a society undergoing deep transformation; a transformation that was not painless, because just as it was being encouraged by the rise of new institutions, it was being obstructed by the difficult decline, or then by the perpetuation, of older institutions. For example, whereas the work of merchants, interested in the virtuous and pacific collaboration between Communes, was a threat for the institution of revenge (often blessed by God, the wise architect of retribution by *contrappasso*), nevertheless the custom of reprisals kept renewing itself. These reprisals made the inhabitants of a Commune liable for the fault of a fellow citizen of theirs. One can smell those reprisals in Dante's invectives against various cities".





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di Omar Ottonelli

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3.8. Salomone Morpurgo, was born in Trieste in 1860, and died in Florence in 1942. In 1895 wed a daughter of Augusto Franchetti (whose own fame is also associated with Dante). He was a co-founder in 1882 of the *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*, and in 1884 of the *Rivista critica della letteratura italiana*. From 1905 he was (during 18 years) director of the National Library in Florence. In 1923 he resigned, in relation to his opposition to Fascism. He then lived isolated and embittered, but in the 1920s was still able to complete a major writing project.⁵⁴

One of the subjects about which Salomone Morpurgo published was Dante. Morpurgo was a member of the Società Dantesca, and of several other associations. Morpurgo published *Dante Alighieri e le nuove rime di Giovanni Quirini* (Florence: Tip. di Salvatore Landi, 1894), occasioned by the wedding of Enrico Coen Cagli and Emma Bidoli (also for his own wedding, a book had appeared in 1895), and *Dante e*

⁵⁴ See https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salomone_Morpurgo and for more details, the entry by Silva Bon (2012) in the *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*. Also see two papers by Amedeo Benedetti (2011, 2013).

la Venezia Giulia (Milan: s.n., 1921), occasioned by the sixth centennial of Dante's death, and inspired by Salomone Morpurgo's Triestine background.

This in turn reminds that in 1865, a literary work celebrating Dante and his supposed relation to Trieste and the area appeared, by a Jewish author; for the sixth centennial of Dante's birth, a pamphlet in octavo, of just six pages, comprising twelve Italian poems (in all capitals), "del dott. S. Formiggini", was published in Trieste: *Dodici epigrafi poetiche a centone dantesco del dott. S. Formiggini pel secentesimo anniversario natalizio di Dante Alighieri che Tergeste anch'essa festeggia nel maggio dell'anno MDCCCLXV*. The author was the physician, Shaul Formiggini (Saul Menahem Formiggini), born in 1807, and who died in 1873. His Hebrew translation of *Inferno* was published in 1869 in Trieste, by the insurance firm Lloyd Austriaco (now Lloyd Adriatico).

Among the other things, Salomone Morpurgo wrote also about Italy's versions of the Wandering Jew (*L'ebreo errante in Italia*, Florence: Alla libreria Dante [Prato: Tip. Contrucci e C.], 1891; reprinted, Sala Bolognese: A. Forni, 1983).

3.9. Let us turn to Emilio Sereni. Ideologists propound an ideology are not likely to indulge in humour at its expenses. Dante had been incorporated in Italy's national and nationalist rhetoric to an extent that produced some weariness. Entertaining themselves at the expenses of Dante (or for that matter, Alessandro Manzoni), in a recreational context, was agreeable for Italians in the 20th century. All the more so, some who were adept at ideologies (such as socialism or communism) were having little patience with at least some of the sacred cows of the nationalist facet of the well-thinking bourgeoisie. There is another side to this matter, for some of 20th-century Italian Jews. For example, for such Jews who were weary of the older generations' insistence on trying to prove their Italian nationalist zeal, and who may even have dabbled with Zionism, or at any rate were placing new value on their particularism as Italian Jews. Asher Salah (2013, p. 195) supplies the following anecdote:

With the rise of Zionism, the question of Dante and Judaism is overshadowed by more urgent debates among Jewish youth in Italy. No Italian would ever dare to belittle Dante's stature, but he becomes for many Jews struggling to find their place in the new ideological configuration of the aftermath of World War I somehow a cumbersome heritage. In her historical novel *Il gioco dei regni*, Clara Sereni [(1993, p. 139): see on her e.g. Properzi Nelsen (2002)] quotes a 1921 discourse held by her father Mimmo (Vittorio [recte: Emilio!] Sereni, future leader in the Italian Communist Party) in front of his family where he mockingly refers to Dante as a "minor" writer of the 13th century who wrote "a passable adventure's roman entitled *Divina Commedia*". In this parody, Dante is nothing more than an object of erudition, however venerable, and an avatar of bourgeois culture, which Vittorio Sereni, as a Communist, and his brother Enzo, as a Zionist, are trying to detach themselves from.



Emilio Sereni.

Emilio Sereni was a Communist politician (visible in the party from the 1940s, but still active until the 1970s), and was for a while a government minister in Italy, but also was a scholar. In the 1930s, Emilio Sereni survived a trial in the Soviet Union, for having been citing Lenin but not Stalin; he afterwards saw to it that he would be above any suspicion as for his ideological loyalty. Entirely toeing the Soviet line, Emilio Sereni's proclamations in 1967 were considered treasonous by many of Italy's Jews, still reeling from Israel's surviving utmost danger; and he apparently was privately subject to self-pity afterwards over this.

Enzo Sereni is considerably better known to Italian Jews, and all the more so for Israelis: one of the founders of a kibbutz, he volunteered for being parachuted behind Nazi German lines, but was captured almost immediately, and died at an extermination camp.



Emilio Sereni.

Clara Sereni.

Enzo Sereni.



An Israeli postage stamp commemorating Enzo Sereni.

3.10. Guido da Verona, Guido Verona by his real name, was born into a Jewish family in 1881 in Saliceto Panaro (in the province of Modena), and died in Milan in April 1939. He was a prolific, witty, titillating, sometimes bestselling novelist, and a dandy, in the manner of Gabriele D’Annunzio. His first novel, of 1911, became popular. His novels were archetypes of Italy’s subsequent feuilletons and erotic literature. In the 1920s, he was the Italian writer with the greatest commercial success. The journalist and critic Adriano Tilgher defined him as the “D’Annunzio delle dattilografie e delle manicure” (the “typists’ and manicures’ D’Annunzio”).

In 1925, Guido da Verona was among the signatories of the manifesto of Fascist intellectuals. Later on, in 1930, Guido da Verona published a parody, indeed a travesty, of Alessandro Manzoni’s novel *I Promessi Sposi* (*The Betrothed*), the centrepiece of the canon of Italian novels. It is unsurprising that the Fascist regime realised that a satirist on the loose could be dangerous, all the more so as he had mentioned the regime, and depicted members of the clergy as being utterly corrupt, and as on top of that he was Jewish by birth if not by lifestyle or as a claimed identity. That Guido da Verona would mock both Alessandro Manzoni — and Dante — as the third decade of the 20th century was at its end was problematic, in that in mocking Manzoni and the clergy he was being at odds with Fascism’s policy in the immediate aftermath of the signing of the Concordat with the Vatican. In mocking Dante, Guido da Verona was being cavalier with a major reverential figure of Italian nationalism. Guido da Verona was doing so independently of his ancestral Judaism, from which he would have thought he had been weaned as early as in his childhood, and that he was happy to forget — it was the powers that be that reminded him, with the Racial Laws.

Guido da Verona’s parody *I Promessi Sposi* is in a comically inconsistent modern setting, and as often in Italy in ribald references to her, it besmirches Manzoni’s virtuous protagonist Lucia Mondella. (This somewhat resembles how Henry Fielding, using the pseudonym *Conny Keyber*, published the novel *Shamela*, in full *An Apology for the Life of Mrs. Shamela Andrews*, as a parody of the virtuous Pamela, the

eponymous character of Samuel Richardson novel of 1741, *Pamela*. And indeed, Fielding's novel was subtitled "In which, the many notorious Falshoods [sic] and Misrepresentations of a Book called Pamela," and so forth.)⁵⁵

In the italicised introduction to his parody of *I Promessi Sposi*, Guido da Verona postures as though he has a conversation with an elderly count, indeed one so elderly that he is dead — Count Alessandro Manzoni *redivivus* — whom he addresses as "Maestro" or "Count Maestro". And who in turn addresses him as "*signor calunniatore delle sartine d'Italia*" ("Mr. Libeller of Italy's seamstresses"), presumably because of Guido da Verona's lewd best-selling novels. In the introduction, Guido da Verona even relates an autobiographical anecdote about having been served supper by the very domestic servant, Vismara, who when much younger had worked (and presumably served supper) in Manzoni's house. Immediately before that anecdote, Guido da Verona relates in the introduction that he approached Manzoni lying in his bier, and had him smell flowers of his mortuary crown, then announced to him that he intends to tinker with Manzoni's masterpiece, and expected him to spring on his feet in indignation. Manzoni's instead did not respond as expected, but remained lying in his bier, before sitting up. Guido da Verona asks Manzoni for his opinion about his project (of parody), but Manzoni does not come to the point right away, and rather begins by claiming to have read his interlocutor's novels, and give some faint praise, before stopping short of voicing criticism, as "poor son", he is already hearing criticism from others, and stating that he, Manzoni, too, would probably write that way, had he been born one century after he did. Only, he would probably not indulge that much in topics in which Guido da Verona does indulge. Guido da Verona's criticism of the commercial press and promotion or discouraging of literary authors follows. "*Le ditte rispettabili, che non hanno mai frodata la propria clientela, son diffamate dai giornali e boicottate nelle librerie, in favore dei parti estratti col fòrcipe dal ventre di certi lumaconi, che, a sentirli quando sputan sentenze, si direbber tanti dantealighieri*" ("Respectable firms, which never defrauded their clients, are defamed by the newspapers and boycotted by the booksellers, in favour of what is given birth by caesarean section by some slugs, who when you listen to them when they make proclamations, would all appear to be that many Dante Alighieris. The booksellers' crisis is this.")

Then there was this statement the regime did not forgive him: "When they no longer know what to do, in the middle of such a fine mess, they approach the Government, as though Mussolini could, among his other miracles, compel the Italian people to buy the books of those publishers who say they are Fascist, or that they had even been militiamen in the Fascist Escadrons, indeed ones who reached the Capitol

⁵⁵ The fictional character of Don Abbondio, the priest who, in 1628, was threatened by armed men in the service of Don Rodrigo into not celebrating the wedding of the peasants Renzo Tramaglino and Lucia Mondella, in Guido da Verona's parody tries to besmirch Lucia with Renzo, in order to dissuade him from wedding her: he tells Renzo that Lucia was seen with suspicious persons, and that she "avrebbe fatto pubblica professione d'idee comuniste..." ("allegedly stated in public her allegiance to Communist ideas..."). Once Renzo tells Lucia, already ready for the wedding, that they cannot be married, Guido da Verona states she is unfazed: "Vuol dire che sarà per un'altra volta" ("It will be for some other time"). Renzo is nonplussed, and tells her that he went into expenses, and bought for her a very costly trousseau at Rinascente (Milan's upmarket department store in the cathedral square). Some lines further down, we are told that apart from Don Abbondio and his servant, only a stuffed rooster and a portrait of Pope Borgia clipped from the *Illustrazione Italiana* were present. Anachronism is one of Guido da Verona's comic devices in his parody of Manzoni. Elsewhere, Don Abbondio is reading Pitigrilli's outré novel *Mammiferi di lusso* (*Luxury Mammals*), just before Renzo reappears, holding a knife between his teeth, in order to threaten him unless he undoes his defamation of Lucia. Renzo is aware that Don Abbondio was threatened and bribed by Don Rodrigo's cook and chauffeur.

while riding the famous car of Negri, during the March on Rome. This, Count-Maestro, is what the booksellers' crisis is about".

Another example of Dantean reference is found when Renzo is lost in the countryside, and there is a reference to Dante, that subverts the invective preceding his curse for Pisa (because of what they did to Count Ugolino), into a curse for the eastern Lombardy city of Bergamo. "He found it somewhat repulsive to utter that word, 'Bergamo', as though it had in it something suspicious, some effrontery, something with goitre, reproachable, obscene, owing to his being reminded that already in his times, Dante had found it suitable to give everybody a warning with his famous invective 'Ah Bergamo, a reproach of the peoples / Of the comely country where sì for 'yes' is uttered...".

The next paragraph mentions a character, the medieval politician Pier delle Vigne, encountered by Dante in Hell among the suicides, turned into a thorny plum tree. Renzo supposedly thinks of him, but also of Countess Maffei (he had fled Milan, in Guido da Verona's parody, dressed with her garments: he is cross-dressing, in that episode): "And while so immersed in his thoughts, he was thinking of the big riots that were made in Milan for a particle of straw, and of the legs of Countess Maffei, and of Pier delle Vigne, and of Castruccio Castracani, and of other illustrious characters whose shadows alternated accompanying him in that despairing walking of his, it happened upon to pass that he encountered a saintly clergyman, who was certainly the parish priest of one of the hamlets whose trembling lights were beginning to become visible far away in the darkness. The good young man approached him [literally: accosted him], confident in those clerical garments". The priest is startled at hearing a man's voice, but is reassured on seeing his interlocutor was in female dress (because women are not as physically powerful as a man? Or because not unaccustomed to transvestites?). Asked for the way to Bergamo, he responds by declaiming distorted lines from Arnaldo Fusinato's famous patriotic song about Venice's surrendering to the Austrians after the revolution of 1848, and referring to a bridge. The parody, recontextualising that verse within Renzo's goal of crossing into Venetian territory, explains that the bridge must have been either the one of Cassano, or the one in Canonica d'Adda, enabling to cross the river Adda from the Duchy of Milan into... "l'Impero di Bergamo" ("the Bergamo Empire", instead of "the Republic of Venice").

Notwithstanding his distance from Judaism, there is a trace of Jewishness in the writings of Guido da Verona. This was when he wrote: "Dal mio cuore si alzava il sogno esule della mia gente" ["From my heart, the exiled dream of my people rose"]. Interestingly, the writer Orio Ribelli (a *boulevardier* writer and humorist inspired by Pitigrilli, Dekobra, and Guido da Verona) used that quotation from Guido da Verona as an epigraph at the beginning of the conclusions chapter (Ch. 34, p. 211) of an instant book about Israel's unexpected and quick victory in the 1967 war.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Orio Ribelli was a friend of the much older Pitigrilli, probably because of the penchant of both of them for risqué narratives tinged with humour. Pitigrilli congratulated Ribelli for his instant book, and this was mentioned in the book flap. This is interesting, because the half-Jewish, baptised Pitigrilli was in total disgrace, having been revealed as the Fascist regime's spy who had brought about the arrest in Turin and subsequent prison of numerous anti-Fascists (several of them Jewish). After World War II, Pitigrilli reinvented himself as a born again Catholic. During the war, in Lugano, the bishop (to whom Pitigrilli had turned in order to be converted) asked the prominent politician Alcide De Gasperi to evaluate the candidate's moral and spiritual suitability, and De Gasperi delegated this to his then aide, Giulio Andreotti. Surprising, given Andreotti's late-career fame for deviousness.



Guido da Verona.



Dino Provenzal.

3.II. Dino Provenzal (Livorno, 1877 – Voghera, 1972) was an educator (first a teacher, then a headmaster in secondary education), author of popularisation books or books for teachers, and a Jewish-born Catholic. A letter of 9 October 1938 from the “Battlefront of the River Ebro” to Dino Provenzal by the diplomat (and master parodist) Paolo Vita-Finzi (Turin, 1899 – Chianciano Terme, 1986), apologised to Provenzal because he had not managed, given the circumstances, to publish the review of Provenzal’s “Most beautiful commentary to Dante”.

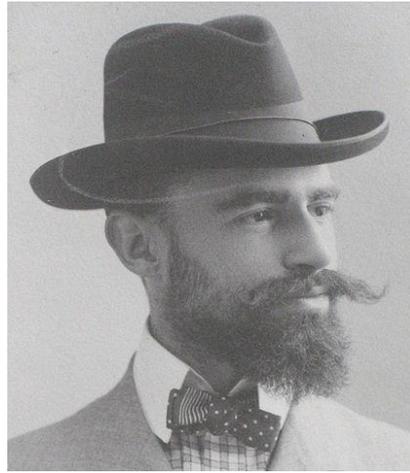
The following month, Vita-Finzi sent Provenzal a letter about the early effects of the Racial Laws, and their (and Eugenio Treves’s)⁵⁷ emotional response of discomfort (Scrollini n.d.). Vita-Finzi expressed his hope that some Catholic educational institution would employ Provenzal.

Having remarked about his witty spirit of observation, and his being a versatile writer who published profusely in newspapers and periodicals, the *Enciclopedia Dantesca* has this to say about Dino Provenzal, in an entry by Enzo Esposito (1970, my trans.): “From his teaching experience, Provenzal derived books whose intent was to make Dante accessible to everybody. The following deserve mention: a dictionary of the proper names in Dante’s *Divine Comedy* and Petrarch’s *Canzoniere* (Livorno, 1912); *Il Dante dei piccoli [Dante for Children]* (Florence, 1922); and finally his commentary to the *Divine Comedy* (Milan, 1938), a commentary intended for the schools, elegant and linear, but without any remarkable novelty”.

⁵⁷ Eugenio Treves (Milan, 1888 – Vercelli, 1970) was a writer and educator, anthologist, translator, reworker of classics into juvenile literature, and erudite. His name as collaborator was omitted from the 1939 original edition of Fernando Palazzi’s *Novissimo dizionario della lingua italiana*, because the racial laws dictated so.



Laura Orvieto.



Angiolo Orvieto.

3.12. This subsection is about a couple, Angiolo and Laura Orvieto, he a poet and literary magazine owner; she, an appreciated and translated author of juvenile literature, as well as (Orvieto 2001) a memoirist. Her 1911 book *Storia delle storie del mondo* is still reprinted. Alberto Cantoni's nephews, Angiolo Orvieto (Florence, 1869–1967) and his younger brother, Adolfo, founded the literary magazine *Il Marzocco* in Florence.⁵⁸ A man of means, Angiolo could afford to fully devote himself to the *belles lettres*.⁵⁹ Laura Orvieto, *née* Cantoni (1876–1953), was born and raised in Milan; she moved to Florence upon her wedding, in 1899. Her father, Achille, was Alberto Cantoni's cousin. In part of their literary output, Angiolo and Laura did not touch upon their Jewishness, but Laura was a Zionist (and wrote about this in her memoirs), and Angiolo gave full expression to his Jewish identity⁶⁰ and longings, especially in his poetry book *Il vento di Sion. Canzoniere d'un ebreo fiorentino del Cinquecento* (*The Wind of Zion: The Collected Poems of a Florentine Jew of the Sixteenth Century*), published in Florence in 1928, and in which he imagined himself in the shoes of a fictional Jew in Florence during the Renaissance, Dattilo. One senses there the influence of lessons he attended during the 1920s, and given by Umberto Cassuto, about the Jews of Florence during the Renaissance. When the then young poet Eugenio Montale reviewed *Il vento di Sion*, he did so favourably, considered it Orvieto's best book, and remarked about his tension between the palm (as a Jew) and the olive tree (of his native Tuscany). This arguably is a parallel to the two trees in Heine's poem *There stands a lonely pine-tree*, with a pine-tree longing for a date palm in the East.⁶¹ This wasn't Angiolo Orvieto's first "Jewish" work; for example, he had written sonnets entitled *Il Semita* (1895) and *Il rovetto* (*The Burning*

⁵⁸ The literary magazine *Il Marzocco*, so named after Florence's emblem, published works by Pirandello, Pascoli, D'Annunzio, Ojetti, Neera, Aleramo, Cardarelli, Capuana, Cecchi, to name a few, but also papers on Jewish themes (e.g. on Talmudic concepts and on the Kabbalah, the latter being a topic pursued also by David Castelli, a professor of Hebrew in Florence), and reviews of Zionist books.

⁵⁹ Angiolo Orvieto founded or co-founded and funded literary journals: the short-lived *Vita Nuova* (1889–1891), which published Giovanni Pascoli's early verse, and then the quite influential weekly *Il Marzocco* (1896–1932), whose editor from 1899 was Adolfo Orvieto, Angiolo's brother. In fact, Angiolo Orvieto was assiduous in his cultural initiatives. His public service was the reason for the gap of 1912–1928 in his literary production.

⁶⁰ Jewish identity in Angiolo (or Angiolo and Laura) Orvieto's work was discussed by Del Vivo (2012), Cerasi (2013), Di Porto (1995), Sciloni (1993).

⁶¹ Imperial Roman coins of the "Judaea capta" type, celebrating the Flavian dynasty's defeat of the Jews, features a standing armed man, a sitting woman (a personification of Judaea), and a date palm.

Bush) in 1907. Salah (2013, p. 195) quoted in the original Italian a passage from Angiolo Orvieto's *Il vento di Sion* (1928, p. 8) that I give hereby in my own translation:

It was only natural that he [Dattilo da Montolmo] would seek any argument suitable for better make brethren, in his spirit, Jewishness and Florentineness, which he so intensely felt, and that he would even wish to persuade himself that even Dante Alighieri, precisely because perhaps of Etruscan, and therefore probably Oriental, origin, found himself *vis-à-vis* Florence in a situation similar to Dattilo's Florentine and Jewish just as Dante had been both Etruscan and Florentine.

Of course, that was rather specious, as Orvieto could as well consider all native Florentines to have been of at least partly Etruscan origin. And yet, this theme of cultural and perhaps biological hybridity is one that has been rather prominent in our own days, in literary criticism in Western countries in the late 20th century (in parlance associated with Homi Bhabha: see Bhabha 1991, rev. 2004). Ruth Natterman (2015) relates:

Angiolo continued at Laura's own wish her education⁶² in private, introducing her to philosophy, reading and discussing with her Italian as well as foreign literature. In October 1899, shortly after Laura had married Angiolo, the educationalist Lina Schwarz (1876–1947) a dear friend of Laura's, inquired eagerly: "When you are writing to me again, you will tell me many things about you two. Have you already begun studying together? What are you reading?" And Laura replied immediately: "We have read three *canti* by Dante the other evening ... and yesterday a thought by Amiel."

In note 45, Natterman further writes: "Also Amelia Rosselli wrote often about her readings to Laura, among others Dante, Tolstoi, and Colette; see especially her letters on May 22, 1905; July 18 (s. d., 1905?)" Amelia Rosselli Pincherle — Natterman claims (2015) — "one of Orvieto's dearest friends, amused herself a few years later about the fact that her vivacious friend Laura had never gone to a ball". "Readings represented an important theme in Laura's correspondence with her friends. Especially in the exchange with Amelia Rosselli and Lina Schwarz one can find frequent allusions to Italian, English, German and French writers and poets from various epochs" (*ibid.*). Amelia Pincherle Rosselli (Venice, 1870 – Florence, 1954), a playwright and political activist (and the grandmother of the poet Amelia Rosselli), achieved fame in her own right, but she is especially remembered as the bereaved mother of the politicians Carlo and Nello Rosselli, murdered in 1937 in Bagnoles-de-l'Orne.⁶³

Angiolo and Laura Orvieto were hidden in a convent in the Mugello, the Florentine countryside, from the autumn of 1943 to the summer of 1944, during the Nazi German occupation of Tuscany. They were already old. Even while in hiding, both of them engaged in literary writing. Angiolo wrote a collection of poems, the

⁶² Natterman remarks that "an important mentor of Laura's was the Italian-Jewish educationalist Rosa Errera (1864–1946), one of Angiolo Orvieto's Venetian cousins who lived in Milan. She taught the young woman Italian literature and supported at the same time her impulse for social commitment. Rosa as well as her sisters Emilia and Anna, all writers, shared a strong interest in pedagogics". We have already noted that Rosa Errera authored the book *Dante*, published by Bemporad in 1921; and that the three Errera sisters are the subject of Norsa (1975).

⁶³ After the murder, Amelia Pincherle Rosselli reached her daughters-in-law in Paris, and with these and her seven grandchildren, they next fled in 1940 the Nazi occupation of France, first to Switzerland, then to England, and then again to the United States. In 1946, she returned to Italy, and resumed there her political activity. During her American exile, she was active among Italian anti-Fascists.

Sonetti della vita (Sonnets of Life), in which he described dozens persons he had encountered in his life, as well as places and situations. Del Vivo remarks that it is sort of a book of poems about time past, in which self-irony and paradox would, but never fully could escape the daily oppression, the anxiety of hiding and danger: “Una sorta di canzoniere di un tempo ormai concluso, in cui autoironia e paradosso vorrebbero — ma non riescono mai completamente — sfuggire all’oppressione quotidiana, all’ansia del nascondiglio e del pericolo” (Del Vivo 2014, p. 72).

Laura Orvieto, during that same period in hiding, emulated the medieval Tuscan narrators, and wrote a series of *novelette*, short stories, in which she described daily life at the convent during that predicament. Based on Laura Orvieto’s autobiography, a scholarly paper by Caterina Del Vivo (2014, p. 72) singles out a passage about books which the persons hosted at the convent had brought there. Del Vivo remarks that this is an expression of indebtedness to Dante’s model. In fact, the *Divine Comedy* features prominently among the books, along with the Bible and a collection of old poetry and prose. Laura Orvieto, in the given passage, expresses the lifelong role model of Dante, “the Exile of Florence” (just as the Orvietos were Florentine), for both Laura and Angiolo Orvieto. Laura Orvieto wrote (quoted in Del Vivo 2014, p. 72):

Poiché fin dalla prima giovinezza al poeta e alla sua donna, che non anche si erano incontrati mai né visti, l’Esiliato di Firenze era stato amico grande, e senza conoscersi, insieme e lontani, essi giovani ambedue se da viltà o allettamenti di facili piaceri colti fossero, animosamente si dicevano e ripetevano: bada a te, che seggendo in piuma, in fama non si vien né sotto coltre, e se alcuna volta lassi e pigri si sentivano per aspro impedimento che davanti a loro sorgesse, con l’amico grande dicevano e si ripetevano: leva su, vinci l’ambascia con l’animo che vince ogni battaglia, se col suo grave corpo non s’accascia.

[Because from their childhood, for the poet [Angiolo] and his wife [Laura], before they had ever met or seen each other, the Exile of Florence [Dante] had been a great friend. And without knowing each other, together as though even though far from each other, both youths — if tempted by cowardice of easy pleasures — used to tell themselves excitedly, and to repeat it to themselves: ‘Be careful! As by sitting on feathers or under a bed cover, one does not arise to fame’. And if sometimes they felt weary and sleazy when faced with a major obstacle, they used to tell themselves repeatedly, just as that big friend [Dante] did: “Stand up! Overcome the difficulty with the sprit that wins every battle, provided that the heavy body does not fall”.]



Laura Orvieto when young.



Laura Orvieto. The image faces an issue preface introducing an article-cum-obituary (Perugia 1953).



Attilio Momigliano.⁶⁴

3.13. Attilio Momigliano (born in 1883 in Ceva in the province of Cuneo in Piedmont, he was to die in Florence in 1952), a prominent scholar of Italian literature. Just like with Angiolo and Laura Orvieto, we encounter Dante in the context of living in hiding also in Attilio Momigliano's biography. With his wife, Haydée Sacerdoti who was in poor health, during the Nazi occupation he went into hiding in Bologna, then in Città di Castello, and then again during eight months at a clinic in Borgo San Sepolcro. During that time, Attilio Momigliano was preparing his commentary to Torquato Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata*; it was eventually published in Florence in 1945, and then as a textbook in 1948. In his preface, he was to state (Momigliano 1948, p. VII ff., quoted in Ghidetti 2011, my trans.): "I owe Tasso and Dante the two or three hours of absence that fate allowed me almost every day. In the afternoon, while my wife was falling asleep after the constant terrors of the day and of the night, I would forget that at any moment, a sudden kick may open wide my door. I would be little by little submerged in the far away world of poetry. I must say that, if for the latter I have always lived, it was only for it that I survived".

Attilio Momigliano was also a Dante scholar. He published a commentary to the *Divine Comedy* (Momigliano 1951, incorporated with other commentaries in Mazzoni 1972), as well as essays on Dante, and in his latter days he planned a book about Dante he never completed. In 1944, in Messina, Sicily (an area of Italy already under Allied control), the D'Anna publishing house published Attilio Momigliano's book *Dante, Manzoni, Verga*. Vittore Branca wrote (1970, my trans.) that "in his wide-ranging and diversified activity as a literary critic he very soon directed his attention to Dante. Even during the last few months of his life, with in his background the experience of having written a commentary to the *Divine Comedy*, he was thinking about writing a compendary study of Dante's poetry. The latter really lived in him "not in the manner of memorisation, but in his very bone marrow". That way, his

⁶⁴ The photograph of Attilio Momigliano comes from an old newspaper clip, whose scan was kindly supplied to me by the literary scholar and historian Alberto Cavaglion in Turin and Cuneo, Piedmont.

career as a critic was punctuated by penetrating readings both of Dante Alighieri's masterpiece, and of his other works". Cf. Petrocchi (1983).

Branca (1970) remarked that as early as 1908, Attilio Momigliano had approached one of the most difficult texts by Dante, namely, the first one of the *canzoni pietrose* ("stony songs/canzoni", or "canzoni for Madonna Pietra": it is a pun), namely, "Così nel mio parlar voglio esser aspro" ["So in my speech I want to be harsh"].

Momigliano underscored the psychological and lexical forcefulness of that poem, and was innovative in how he analysed its metre. Branca pointed out that as early as that first publication about Dante, Attilio Momigliano "gave added worth to his quite felicitous intuition, through uniquely novel and precise verifications" ["avvalora il suo felicissimo intuito con verifiche singolarmente nuove e precise"].

Branca quoted a statement of Momigliano's conviction that Dante's poetry is "so entrenched in the powerfulness of its harmony and its gravitas, that it is difficult to penetrate it for good, and it is impossible to exhaust it" ["così asserragliata nella sua potente e severa armonia che è difficile penetrarla davvero e impossibile esaurirla"].

It took Momigliano two decades to overcome Benedetto Croce's influential ideas and reservations about the *Divine Comedy*. (Croce's influence could really overwhelm literary studies in Italy, well beyond the mid-century.) With "his thoughtful sensitivity to poetry listened to, almost religiously, as a supreme human message" ["sua assorta sensibilità alla poesia ascoltata, quasi religiosamente, come supremo messaggio umano"], Momigliano's efforts on behalf of Dante peaked, Branca avers, in his commentary to the *Divine Comedy*, which achieved what two decades earlier, a scholar with a quite different temperament, Michele Barbi, had indicated as a *desideratum*. Momigliano underscored the unity of the construction of the *Divine Comedy*, with the harmonious connection of one canto to the canto that follows it, between episode and episode, and between narrative contexts, and with the powerful fantasy (and its linguistic expression), which Momigliano put in evidence, and the expressive power of some characters being identified, Branca states, "being identified in their consciousness of being damned, and in the sense of hieratic horror" ["identificata nella coscienza della dannazione e nel senso di ieratico orrore"].

Momigliano's attention to the unity of the *Divine Comedy*, according to Branca, is the main merit of his commentary, even as it was somewhat lacking in attention to the historical-cultural tradition and moral-religious conscience of Dante. *Purgatory*, Branca notes, was Momigliano's preferred canticle of the three of the *Commedia*, whereas *Paradiso* was the least congenial to Momigliano. The *Divine Comedy* stood out, according to Momigliano, by departing from the tradition of reliance on literary models: what Dante describes, Momigliano stated, "is nourished much more of life than of literature".

3.14. Let us turn to the memoirs of two Holocaust survivors, Primo Levi and Bruno Piazza. An American scholar, Risa Sodi, published a book (1990) of 112 pages, entitled *A Dante of Our Time: Primo Levi and Auschwitz*. She states that Primo Levi's "conversations were littered with quotations from the *Commedia*; in an interview with me, Levi used Conte Ugolino to help prove his point about the memory of offense and Fra Alberigo illustrated his comments on the Nazis' view of the Jews" (*ibid.*, pp. 1–2). Alberto Cavaglion (2016 [2017]) detects the occurrence of sacred parody in Primo Levi's *oeuvre*, and relates this to the occurrence in Dante's *Inferno* of travesty from the liturgy. Primo Levi's draws upon Dante, not in order to ridicule, but, Cavaglion remarks, by contrasting high and low levels as typical in parody.



Primo Levi.

Sander Gilman (1989) had discussed on pp. 140–141 the 11th chapter, “Il canto di Ulisse”, in Primo Levi’s *Se questo è un uomo*, referring to pagination as in the first edition of its English translation (Levi 1961). Cf. Gunzberg (1986). Gilman wrote:

Italian signifies for him the apotropaic role of “pure” culture. For Levi, at least in his first book, this language is to be found in Dante. He attempts to teach the canto of Ulysses from *The Divine Comedy* to Jean, the “Pikolo”, an Alsatian student who “knew French and German fluently” (99). It is the tale of Ulysses’s journey, and it becomes a tale of the journey through the camps, the wished for, hoped for, successful journey, the journey that was, to quote the final phrase from Dante, successful “as pleased Another”. This phrase is juxtaposed with the cry “Kraut und Rüben, Choux et navets, Kaposzia és répak”, for Levi and the “Pikolo” were standing in line for the daily soup and what echoes in their ears to replace the hopeful poetry of Dante is “the official announcement that the soup of today is of cabbages and turnips” (105).

“Italian” represents the language of the Jews prior to the Holocaust, but even more importantly, it represents the intact identity of the narrator in an intact world. [...]

In the chapter “Il canto di Ulisse” of *Se questo è un uomo*, Ulysses is relevant because of the feature which Dante emphasises in him, namely, his pursuit of knowledge, and because of the end he meets, when he drowns in the Ocean. After the announcement of the daily soup, Primo Levi inserts Dante’s line about that shipwreck: “Infin che ’l mar fu sovra noi rinchiuso” [“In the end, as the sea closed up above us”]. Intertextual references to Dante are not confined to the chapter “Il canto di Ulisse”, and some of them are even enumerated on the Italian-language Wikipedia page⁶⁵ of *Se questo è un uomo*.

⁶⁵ https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Se_questo_è_un_uomo



Primo Levi.



Bruno Piazza.

3.15. The Triestine Bruno Piazza (1889–1946) had been a successful lawyer and a journalist prior to the 1938 Racial Laws. Arrested on 13 July 1944, he was miscategorised as a political detainee rather than a Jewish detainee. Had he arrived to Auschwitz (where his younger brother, Alceo, perished) as a Jew, he would have been killed right away, because he was aged over fifty. Bruno Piazza’s memoirs of his deportation and survival were written by him in three weeks, in June and July 1945. These memoirs were rejected by various publishers, and eventually published, in 1956, by Feltrinelli, as no. 216 in its *Universale Economica* series (the fifth edition appeared in 1995, and comprises a postface by Sergio Franco). Its title is *Perché gli altri dimenticano* (*Why the Others Forget*). On the day before Piazza and other inmates were taken from the Coroneo prison to the train, they were kept in a special cell. “It was 30 July 1944. On the wall of the cell, we read an inscription: ‘Abandon all hope, ye who enter!’⁶⁶ But somebody had scratched away the word ‘abandon’ (*lasciate*) from Dante’s line, and replaced it with ‘entertain’ (*abbiate*)” (my trans.) In the introduction to his book, Bruno Piazza wrote:

Anch’io fui trascinato in questo campo ed esito ora a vergare queste righe, memore del precetto dantesco:

Sempre a quel ver che ha faccia di menzogna
de’ l’uom chiuder le labbra quant’ei puote,
però che senza colpa fa vergogna.

[I, too, was taken to that camp. And am now hesitating before penning these lines, as I remember Dante’s precept:

Always to that truth that has the face of a lie,
Of man closing the lips as far as he can,
Though faultless, the cause if shame.]

That *terzina* is placed at lines 124–126, towards the end, of Canto 16 in Dante’s *Inferno*, that the poet prepares the reader for the appearance of the monster Gerione (Geryon, a symbol of fraud) at the beginning of Canto 17. Piazza was apparently quoting from memory, and his recollection of that *terzina* is almost entirely accurate.

⁶⁶ This is the inscription Dante reads above the gate of Hell.

3.16. Santorre Debenedetti (Acqui, 1878 – Giaveno, 1948) was a prominent Italianist (a few other important Italianists had been his pupils). After being a lecturer in Strasbourg, was a professor at the universities of Pavia, and then Turin. He researched the syntax of Dante Alighieri, Giovanni Boccaccio, and Niccolò Machiavelli, the language of Ariosto, the poetry of Dante da Maiano, as well as researching 14th-century short stories (which is something also his likewise famous grand-nephew, Cesare Segre, did), and the history of Provençal studies in Italy in the 16th to 18th centuries. Both Debenedetti and Segre researched Ariosto, and an edition of the *Orlando Furioso* carries both their names. Dante da Maiano, a poet of the 13th century, did not join the Dolce Stil Novo, and rather remained faithful to the manner of the Sicilian school of Italian poetry, and to the manner of Guittone. One link between the two Dantes is Dante da Maiano tenson (*tenzone*) with Dante Alighieri and other poets.



Benvenuto Terracini.

Santorre Debenedetti.⁶⁷

Cesare Segre.

As a youngster in 1897, Santorre Debenedetti wrote a short poem about his Jewish identity. It was entitled “La mia razza” (“My Race”), and intended as a contribution to the anthology *Canti semiti* (*Semitic Songs*), in honour of the lawyer Artom of Asti, another Piedmontese town. In that poem, Debenedetti wrote about the fate of the Hebrews or Jews, and a reviewer claimed that the poem displayed the powerful breath of the prophets Ezekiel and Nahum, as well as the serene sweetness of Petrarch in his *Triumphs* (“la dolcezza serena che molceva il canto del divino Petrarca nei sui Trionfi”).⁶⁸

The philologist, semiologist, and literary critic Cesare Segre (1928–2014) was a pupil of both Santorre Debenedetti and Benvenuto Terracini. One of his latest publications was his preface for Sara Natale’s edition of Annibale Gallico’s poems we have already considered. Several entries in Segre’s extensive publication list are about Dante Alighieri.

⁶⁷ The photograph of Santorre Debenedetti is reproduced courtesy of Maria Luisa Meneghetti, Cesare Segre’s widow. A Romanist, she joint editor of scholarly journals, including the *Rivista di Studi Danteschi*.

⁶⁸ http://www.lancora.com/monografie/giornalismo_acquese/penne_acquesi_5.html

3.17. Benvenuto Aronne Terracini, an important dialectologist and, more generally, Romanist, was born in Turin in 1886, and died there in 1968. On 29 settembre 1917, during the days of Italy's rout at Caporetto (now in Slovenia), he was wounded severely, and was paralysed for a while. He was widowed in 1923. On 14 December 1938, he was dismissed from the University of Milan because of the racial laws. In 1940, he applied for a post at the University of Tucumán in Argentina, where his brother Alessandro was teaching mathematics from 1939. Benvenuto Terracini was hired, and having moved there with his mother and his daughter, from 1941 he held there the chair of "lingüística románica y general", which he held until 1947. He returned to Turin, and retired from academic teaching in 1958–59. In subsequent years, he alternated stays in Italy and in Argentina, for family reasons (Nencioni 1969). A bequest of his in Turin established the Archive of the Jewish Traditions and Customs bearing his and his brother's names.

In literary studies, in 1951 Benvenuto Terracini published a book about the style and language of Dante's *Vita Nuova*. Terracini (1964) discussed the language of Canto 27 of the *Divine Comedy*. In fact, Terracini was quite respectful of the individual human who produces language and while doing so, is a cultural protagonist. It was, in a sense, a holistic approach that would not disregard any part of the continuum between language and culture.

3.18. Mario Fubini (Turin, 1900 – Turin, 1977) was a literary critic. In 1938, he had to leave a university chair in Palermo, for racial reasons. After the war, he held university posts in Turin, Milan, then Pisa. He was the editor of a prestigious journal, the *Giornale Storico della Letteratura Italiana*. Bonora 1985 discusses that role of Fubini. Cf. Marti (1977), Stella (1993). As a critic, Fubini was formed in the school of Benedetto Croce. His own approach was historicist. He also used methods from stylistics, alongside philological methods. Fubini also was a Dante scholar. His essays about Dante were collected in two books: *Il peccato di Ulisse e altri scritti danteschi* (Fubini 1951), and *Due studi danteschi* (Fubini 1966). Ettore Bonora and Mario Fubini jointly edited (1966) an anthology of Dante criticism *Antologia della critica dantesca*. One of Fubini's best known essays about Dante is "Il peccato di Ulisse" (Fubini 1947, repr. 1966).

3.19. Giorgio Siebzeher-Vivanti (1895–1952), a businessman, is remembered as a Dante populariser. Dante's "study provided him with consolation during the years of the racial persecutions" (Messina 1970, my trans.). The lexicon he wrote was completed and edited by Michele Messina Siebzeher-Vivanti 1952, 2nd edition 1965, with reprints). It is not intended to be a scholarly work, but it is a useful reference work of popularisation, "aiming at providing as much knowledge of the language, history, philosophy, and so forth, as necessary for anybody to understand by himself the voice of the poem" (Messina 1970, my trans.).

3.20. One of the scholars who contributed to the debate about Dante being supposedly influenced by eastern sources was the Orientalist Giorgio Levi Della Vida (Venice, 1886 – Rome, 1967). As a teenager, it was while living in Genoa that he decided to become an orientalist. A religious crisis saw him reading Renan, learning Hebrew on his own in order to read the Hebrew Bible in the original, and taking interest in Modernism,⁶⁹ and yet he chose to remain a secular Jew, and reflected

⁶⁹ Levi Della Vida's contacts with Modernism were through Ernesto Buonaiuti and Giovanni Semeria.

throughout his life about Judaism as a moral religion (Soravia 2005). His university studies were in Rome, supervised by Ignazio Guidi (whom he succeeded in his chair in 1920), and his first university post, following a trip in 1909, was in Cairo. In 1911 he wed the daughter of a marquess. From 1913, he taught Arabic in Naples. Also a journalist, shortly after the March on Rome he was attacked and forced to drink castor-oil. Notwithstanding his difficult relations with Giovanni Gentile, he was made to author entries in Semitic studies for the *Enciclopedia Italiana*. In 1931, he was one of the 12 university professors who refused to pledge the oath of loyalty to Fascism and the Duce, and therefore lost in 1932 his chair⁷⁰ (but it was not until 1937 that Gentile terminated Levi Della Vida's collaboration with the *Enciclopedia Italiana*). In 1932–1939, he was curator of the Islamic Arabic manuscripts at the Vatican Library.



Giorgio Levi Della Vida.

In 1938, Levi Della Vida taught a course at the Collège de France. The racial laws prompted him to leave Italy; he moved to the United States alone (his wife and children were considered Aryan, and remained in Italy). He taught at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, and was influential in U.S. Oriental studies. In 1945 he returned to Italy, but in 1946–1948 he was in the U.S. with his wife. He then taught Islamic studies in Rome until 1956. Apart from his own research, he was a frequent reviewer, and his contribution to the Dante debate was in a review article (Levi Della Vida 1949).

Cantarino remarked (2015, p. 40): “Beyond the assertion that Dante did not copy directly from the Muslim legend as found in the *Liber scale Machometi*, Cerulli’s

⁷⁰ At Berkeley, under McCarthyism, Leonardo Olschki (whose contribution to the debate on Dante’s eastern sources is weightier than Levi Della Torre’s) refused to take an oath of allegiance in 1950 and lost his job as an Orientalist. He refused, as it reminded him of the oath policy of Fascism.

study resulted in very little agreement among scholars. Levi della Vida, for example, says ‘the *Book of the Ladder* ... has furnished some important elements to the *Divine Comedy*, whether in the general design or in particular details’. Manfredi Porena, on the other hand, says, ‘as for the relationship between the *Book of the Ladder* and the *Divine Comedy*, the only thing that seems nearly certain to me, is that in Dante there are no imitations, nor even any certain echoes or reminiscences of the Muslim book’. The diametrical opposition expressed in these two comments is characteristic of the divergence of opinion among commentators after the publication of the *Liber scale Machometi*”.



Stefano Levi Della Torre.

3.21. Stefano Levi Della Torre, a painter, as well as a professor of art teaching architecture students at the Technical University of Milan, and a frequent voice on the public arena in Italy, has published his drawings of episodes from the *Divine Comedy* in a book (2014) which discusses it on a canto by canto basis (with some cantos skipped). The *terzina* quoted by Bruno Piazza appears when Dante is about to relate the appearance of Gerione (Geryon), the beast that makes the entire world stink: Gerione swims in the air up from the ravine, and with his hairy arms clasps its edge, his face that of an honest man. But his body is that of a snake, and the tip of his tail is poisonous. Dante and Virgil mount Gerione, who takes them down to the Malebolge, where the souls of fraudulent sinners are punished. Levi Della Torre discusses that passage beautifully. He does not refer to Bruno Piazza and the latter’s quoting relevant lines of verse⁷¹ while remarking about how difficult to believe the reports of

⁷¹ “Sempre a quel ver che ha faccia di menzogna / de’ l’uom chiuder le labbra quant’ei puote, / però che senza colpa fa vergogna” [“Always to that truth that has the face of a lie, / Of man closing the lips as far as he can, / Though faultless, the cause if shame”].

survivors like him were,⁷² but Levi Della Torre begins his book by relating that his own father re-read the *Divine Comedy* in an edition without footnotes, while in prison for anti-Fascism. He had been arrested with others (including his brother, the painter Carlo Levi) rounded up in Turin in 1934, during a police raid against the Giustizia e Libertà underground opposition group, apparently because of the notorious informer, the writer Pitigrilli. Levi Della Torre (2014, p. 11) explains that Gerione is, in a sense, the opposite of the *Divine Comedy*.⁷³ For Dante, the *Divine Comedy* is telling the truth though with the face of a lie, whereas Gerione, as being an allegory of fraud, has the face which Dante describes as that of an honest man: Gerione is a lie with the face of truth. Of the *terzina* at lines 124–126 (the one Piazza quotes) of Canto 16, Levi Della Torre states (2014, p. 11, my trans.): “That is to say, if one wants to avoid the shame of being taken for one who is telling an untruth whereas he is saying the truth, one ought to keep his mouth closed, rather than relate such an inverisimilar truth that it would appear to be a lie. But the poet immediately announces that he cannot stick to this maxim.” (and so forth).

3.22. This subsection is about Valentina Sereni, who lives and works in Rome, is an architect who as such is especially active in building recovery or transformation. She is an activist on human rights and animal rights. She is president of the organisation Gherush92 (Hebrew for “expulsion [of 14]92 [of the Jews from Spain, Sicily, and Sardinia]”), a non-governmental organisation for human rights⁷⁴ that has offered consultancy to the United Nations. In March 2012, she opened a controversy, by claiming that the *Divine Comedy* is not something that pupils should be made to read without warning them about the anti-Jewish or Islamophobic or homophobic ideas contained in some passages. Responses were usually derisive or at any rate dismissive, probably because of an ambiguity in the proposal, wavering between a request to censor, and a request to only teach problematic passages if accompanied by adequate explanations. The headline in the *Corriere della Sera* of 12 March 2012 was “Dante antisemita e islamofobo. La Divina Commedia va tolta dai programmi scolastici” [“Dante, an antisemite and Islamophobe. Remove the Divine Comedy from the curriculum”].⁷⁵ On that very day, the *Corriere della Sera* published a comment piece by Di Stefano, headlined “Sciocco censurare il razzista Dante” [“It’s foolish to censor that racist, Dante”].⁷⁶ The *Daily Telegraph* in London, on 13 March 2017, ran a headline, “Dante’s Divine Comedy ‘offensive and should be banned’”. That report from Rome was by Nick Squires; among the other things, it stated:

“We do not advocate censorship or the burning of books, but we would like it acknowledged, clearly and unambiguously, that in the Divine Comedy there is racist, Islamophobic and anti-Semitic content. Art cannot be above criticism”, Miss Sereni said.

⁷² After stating “I, too, was taken to that camp”, Piazza wrote: “And am now hesitating before penning these lines, as I remember Dante’s precept”.

⁷³ This insight is so central to Stefano Levi Della Torre’s understanding of the *Divine Comedy*, that he pointed it out in our very first email communication. He discusses the episode of the appearance of Gerione in the introduction of his book (which he kindly sent me), as well as in his treatment of Canto 17 (pp. 73–78).

⁷⁴ <https://en-gb.facebook.com/Gherush92/> Also see: <http://www.gruppomistosenato.it/sito/accademia-di-belle-arti-di-brera-gherush92-committee-for-human-rights/>

⁷⁵ http://www.corriere.it/cultura/12_marzo_12/divina-commedia-eliminare-gherush92_674465d8-6c4e-11e1-bd93-2c78bee53b56.shtml

⁷⁶ http://www.corriere.it/cultura/12_marzo_13/distefano-dante-razzista_9b13460c-6cdc-11e1-b7b3-688dd29f4946.shtml?fr=correlati

Schoolchildren and university students who studied the work lacked “the filters” to appreciate its historical context and were being fed a poisonous diet of anti-Semitism and racism, the group said.

It called for the Divine Comedy to be removed from schools and universities or at least have its more offensive sections fully explained.

The remarks prompted Italian cultural associations, actors who have performed the epic and even gay groups to rush to the defence of the poet.

It was wrong to judge Dante by the standards of today, said Giorgio Rembado, the president of an Italian head teachers' association.

“Works of literature need to be placed in the historical context”, he said.

Banning the Divine Comedy would be “senseless”.

Franco Grillini, the head of Gaynet, a gay rights' organisation, said the suggestion that Dante's writings should be prohibited marked “an excess of political correctness”.



Lorenzo da Ponte.

4. Jews (Other Than Italians in Italy or Israelis) Engaging with Dante

4.1. Italian expatriates contributed to “growing appreciation of Dante” (Friederich 1949, p. 52). In the United States of America, Italian studies, and Dante, were first promoted by Lorenzo Da Ponte, Mozart's librettist, in his later career as an academic, importer of Italian books, and cultural entrepreneur in New York. Da Ponte taught Italian in New York at the precursor of Columbia University. It was he “who gave America its first glimpse of the greatness of Italian literature, and particularly of Dante” (Friederich 1949, p. 52).⁷⁷ Da Ponte does not appear to have retained any

Also see <http://www.gruppomistosenato.it/sito/accademia-di-belle-arte-di-brera-gherush92-committee-for-human-rights/>

⁷⁷ Emilio Goggio pointed out (1924, pp. 275–276) that “in his Autobiography [Lorenzo da Ponte] affirms that between the year 1807, which marks his arrival in America, and 1833, he alone instructed more than two thousand persons in the Italian language and literature, and, by means of public lectures, by his writings, and by importing into the United States from all parts of Europe over twenty-four thousand volumes in Italian, he succeeded in creating a genuine and sympathetic appreciation for Italian letters among element of this nation”. Cf. Anthony Holden's (2006) biography of Da Ponte.

Jewish basic learning, or any ancestral identity, from his Jewish childhood in Ceneda, now Vittorio Veneto (perhaps he got none; when a bishop converted the Jewish child Emanuele Conegliano, he gave him his own surname, as well as access to high culture).⁷⁸ He became a priest in 1773. And yet, he was a libertine, scandalously womanising in Venice, as he averred in his memoirs, which he eventually wrote in New York. Because of his lifestyle in that pre-Viennese period of his life, Lorenzo Da Ponte had to move from city to city. In 1779, he was tried for seducing a woman. On that year and the next, he was in Dresden and Gorizia. In that area, comprising also Trieste, and culturally mixed (Italian, German, and Slovenian), already under Austrian rule (which was later to be the case of the Republic of Venice as well), he came to know a family of converts from Judaism (their culture was German), and he wed the daughter. Henceforth, he apparently was a family man. Lorenzo Da Ponte lived in Vienna in 1781–1791, where he worked as a librettist for the imperial theatres. His best librettos stand out for the musicality of their verse, verse that does not slow down. Characters are shaped as a function of the scenic actions required of them, but they are developed in psychological depth. After his Viennese period, Lorenzo Da Ponte and his family lived in London, where he had to lend an associate, an impresario, money, and found himself in difficulty. From 1819, Da Ponte and his family lived in New York or the surroundings. See Sgroi (2007), Holden (2006).



Detail of Simeon Solomon's *Dante's First Meeting with Beatrice*⁷⁹ (ink, watercolour and gouache on paper, from the period 1859–1863).⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Being a convert from Judaism (which was not by his own choice, but because his father, a tanner, remarried, wedding a young Catholic) does not appear to have mattered to Lorenzo Da Ponte, but why then did he marry only when accepted into a family of converts from Judaism?

⁷⁹ Now at the Tate. Image released under Creative Commons CC-BY-NC-ND (3.0 Unported).

⁸⁰ <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/solomon-dantes-first-meeting-with-beatrice-n03409>



Another detail from the same artwork by Simeon Solomon.

Paget Toynbee however, in his 1919 monograph “Dante in English Art: A Chronological Record of Representations by English Artists” (where works by Simeon Solomon are listed on pp. 86 and 89), on p. 86 dated this work as “c. 1893”, on this evidence: “Exhibited at Dante Loan Collection at University Hall, London, in 1893”. The dates Toynbee gave for Solomon’s artwork with a Dante theme span 1892–1893, 1895–1896.



Yet another detail from the same artwork by Simeon Solomon.

4.2. The English painter Simeon Solomon (1840–1905) partook of the Pre-Raphaelite fascination with Dante. A Pre-Raphaelite early on, he later turned to classicism and Aestheticism, and to the fantasy of Symbolist imagery. He was especially influenced, early on, by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, whom he met in 1858 or shortly afterwards. 1858 is also the year he first exhibited work he did while at the Royal Academy. These were three items, one of them entitled “Isaac Offered”. He is noted for his depictions of Jewish life (he was born into a Jewish family), or of scenes from the Hebrew Bible, or of homoerotic paintings such as Sappho kissing Erinna, in the 1864 watercolour *Sappho and Erinna in a Garden at Mytilene*, apparently resulting from the influence on Simeon Solomon of the poet and critic Algernon Charles Swinburne, who loved both classicism and erotica. Swinburne seems to have caused Simeon Solomon’s classicist turn, as well as his becoming an Aesthete, embracing the idea of “art for art’s sake”. Apart from Swinburne, other Aesthetes included John Abbott Mcneil Whistler and Walter Pater. Solomon Simeon travelled to Italy three times, the first in 1866–1867, and produced some of his best art while there.



Simeon Solomon photographed in 1886.



Simeon Solomon wearing a turban and an oriental costume. Photograph by David Wilkie Wynfield.

In 1873, Simeon Solomon’s career was cut short when he was fined, and in 1874 went to prison, for his sexual orientation. “After his prosecutions he no longer exhibited, but achieved a degree of celebrity amongst those who shared his sensibilities: Oscar Wilde, John Addington Symonds, Count Eric Stenbock, and Walter Pater all collected his works”.⁸¹ Languorous or effete youths often appearing in his art are what distinguishes Simeon Solomon from other Aesthetes. In his later life, he was an influence on the Rhymers’ group of poets, especially Lionel Johnson, but also William Butler Yeats. From 1884, Simeon Solomon was in and out of a

⁸¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Simeon_Solomon A more detailed biography, indeed a scholarly one, can be found at <http://www.simeonsolomon.com/simeon-solomon-biography.html> within the Simeon Solomon Research Archive of Carolyn Conroy and Roberto C. Ferrari.

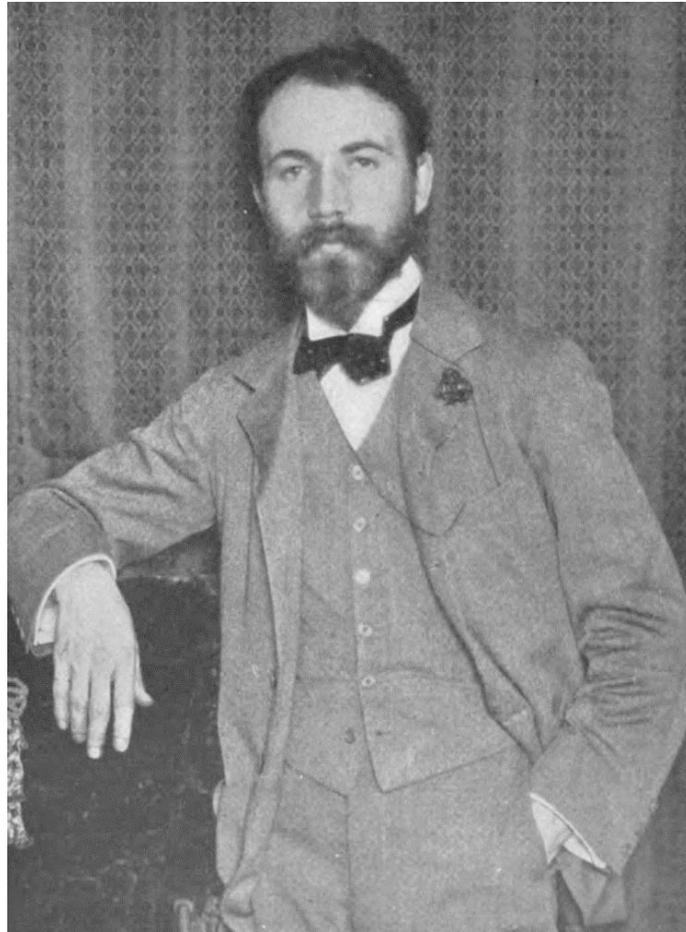
workhouse for the poor, where he died of the effects of alcoholism. The son of Meyer Solomon, a merchant, he was the youngest of eight siblings. His mother, Kate Levy Solomon, was an amateur artist of miniatures, and his brother Abraham (1823–1862) and his sister Rebecca (1832–1886) were also painters. Simeon Solomon’s works of art whose theme is Dante or from Dante, enumerated by Paget Toynbee (1919, pp. 86, 89–90), include Paolo and Francesca (crayon); a watercolour in which Beatrice is portrayed by Giotto for Dante; “Nessun maggior dolore” from *Inferno* 5.121 (crayon); the first meeting of Dante and Beatrice in their childhood; a watercolour showing Dante in exile in Verona being fingered by women as the man who has been in Hell (“Ecco! è l’uomo che viene dall’Inferno”); and a drawing (crayon) in which the exiled Dante is dreaming: Toynbee stated that “Dante is represented lying on his back, with a tablet at his side inscribed with the titles of his works (misspelt)”.



Simeon Solomon, *Queen Esther Hearing the News of the Intended Massacre of the Jews* (1860).

4.3. While discussing Alessandro Franchetti (1809–1874), we noted that he criticised Botticelli’s drawings for the *Divine Comedy*. His point was that Botticelli had tried hard to understand Dante’s text, but was not proficient at it, and this was reflected in his drawings. Two decades later, the American, Italian-based art historian and critic Bernard Berenson (1865–1959), a specialist of the Renaissance, born into a Jewish family but who converted, devoted an article (published in the Florence newspaper *La Nazione* of 22 October 1896) to Botticelli’s illustrations to the *Divine Comedy*, and found them to be delicate and ineffectual, actually undermining with

their beauty the content of *Inferno*. In 1896, a book of facsimiles, *Drawings by Sandro Botticelli for Dante's Divina Commedia*, based on originals from the Royal Museum, Berlin, and in the Vatican Library, was published in London. It included an introduction and commentary by F. Lippmann (1896). Bernard Berenson lived much of his life in Settignano, just outside Florence, and died there. A specialist in the Renaissance art, he was a collector, but had started as an art broker.⁸²



Bernard Berenson when young.

⁸² He was born in the Lithuanian village of Butry-Mantsy, the son of a “lumber merchant who had been suspiciously burnt out of home and business”, Ralph Melnick relates (2008, p. 527). The father went to America in 1874, and after he had saved enough money as a peddler, he had his wife and five children reach him in Boston’s impoverished North End. Bernard, the eldest child, “began to make his fortune as an art dealer to the wealthy” (*ibid.*), and this provided relief for his siblings. For example, he introduced his sister Senda (1868–1954) to Boston’s intellectual / bohemian circles. Senda Berenson became an athletic director at Smith College, where she introduced women’s basketball, for which she is remembered (Melnick 2008). She was the first Jewish faculty member hired at that college, and it only happened because she was initially intended to just be a temporary replacement for the ailing titular athletic director. It may be that it was the contrast between such difficult beginnings with poverty and social acceptance *qua* Jews, and his experience of glamorous circles for whom he had been buying works of art, that brought about Bernard Berenson’s not only relinquishing Jewish identity, but his perceived antipathy for other Jews. He had experienced antisemitism himself, in the United States. Citing Jeffrey Meyers’ biography (1999) of Ernest Hemingway, Robert Michael remarks (2008, p. 173) that “Hemingway’s attitude toward Bernard Berenson changed, but then, Berenson had converted to Christianity. Whereas in 1928 Hemingway had called Berenson ‘an empty asshole and kike patron of the arts’, by 1949 he regarded Berenson as ‘one of the living people I respect most’”.

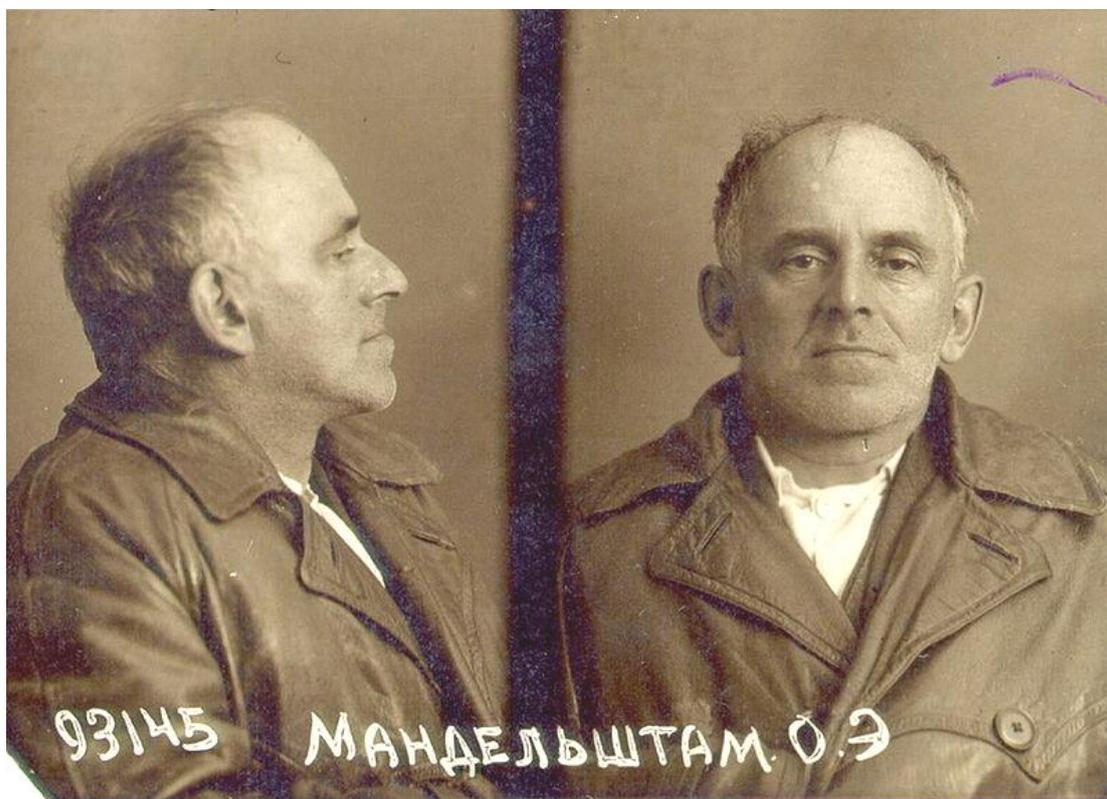


Bernard Berenson.

4.4. The Russian poet and essayist Osip Emilevich Mandelstam [or Mandel'shtam] (1891–1938) in 1933, Osip Mandelstam wrote the important essay *Razgovor o Dante* (*Conversation about Dante*), which was published in 1967. Marina Glazova (1984) discussed the *Divine Comedy* in his poetry of the 1930s. He and Anna Akhmatova, like him an Acmeist poet, were Dante's devotees. He kept with him a Dante edition throughout his eventually lethal ordeal in the Soviet Gulag. In 1911 he had himself baptised (but as a Methodist, not a Russian Orthodox) in order to be admitted to the University of St. Petersburg as a student, even though he had already studied in Paris and Heidelberg. Nevertheless, he did not complete a formal degree. In 1922 wed another Nadezhda Yakovlevna Khazina (born Jewish, but converted with her parents). The title of her memoirs *Hope Against Hope* (1976) contain a pun on the literal sense of her first name. Osip Mandelstam eventually embraced his Jewish ancestral identity (with no relation to religion). He also saw a Jewish connection of Armenia, and authored a complex work in prose, published in 1933, *Puteshestvie v Armeniiu* (*Journey to Armenia*): the latter, as Nancy Pollack has shown (1987), has a Dantean structure and intended meaning,⁸³ one combined with commitment to the 18th- and 19th-century natural scientists, thus resulting in a highly unusual yet intellectually rather sound (or should I rather say, coherent) use of Dante. Cf. a discussion of Mandelstam's *Journey to Armenia* by Jane Gary Harris (1986). Clare Cavanagh entitled an article (1991) "The Poetics of Jewishness: Mandel'shtam, Dante and the

⁸³ "Puteshestvie v Armeniiu, which can be read as a Dantean canticle, traces a journey into that ideal time. In the linear order, Mandel'shtam's travel journal follows the *Purgatorio* in particular, as the record of a journey from an island (Sevan, in the first chapter) up a mountain (Alagez, in the last); Mandel'shtam's mountain, moreover, resembles Dante's: Apparently inaccessible from the base, it reveals itself to be progressively easier with the ascent (2: 173; cf. *Purgatorio* 4: 88–90). The pilgrim ascending the Armenian mountain enters a purgatorial temporality: Training his eye in Armenia, he envisions a new dimension. [...] The implications of the situation are worked out over the course of *Puteshestvie v Armeniiu*. In its aspect as a Dantean canticle, the journey reveals a geodal structure. Motival correspondences link the first chapter with the eighth and last, the second with the seventh, the third with the sixth, the fourth with the fifth, making the text a literal realization of the concentric construction characteristic of Dante's three realm" (Pollack 1987, pp. 458–459). Cf. Harris (1986).

‘Honorable Calling of Jew’”. I have discussed Mandelstam in relation to Dante and Armenia elsewhere (Nissan 2017d).⁸⁴



Osip Mandelstam while in detention, after his arrest in 1938, in a mugshot of the NKVD (the Soviet secret police).

4.5. Two prominent Romanists, Leo Spitzer (Vienna, 1887 – Forte dei Marmi, 1960) and Erich Auerbach (Berlin, 1892 – Wallingford, Connecticut, 1957), were Jewish and left Nazi Germany for Istanbul in 1933 and 1936 respectively. In Auerbach’s case, in 1929, once his habilitation thesis, *Dante: A Poet of the Profane World*, was published, he was appointed a professor at the University of Marburg. Because of the Nazi anti-Jewish legislation, his position was rescinded in 1935. Spitzer received his doctorate in 1910 (his supervisor was Wilhelm Meyer-Lübke). He became a professor at the University of Marburg in 1925, and at the University of Cologne in 1936. In Istanbul, Spitzer headed a large university program of modern languages. “Unlike Auerbach, who had also come to Istanbul but stayed there throughout the war, Spitzer was able to join the Johns Hopkins faculty in 1936, where he remained for the rest of his life” (Welleck 1960, p. 310). Auerbach took over from Spitzer his position in Istanbul, where he wrote his famous book *Mimesis*, which is in part about Dante. Spitzer learned Turkish, and had a lasting impact on the development of Romance studies in Turkey. Auerbach’s mood was more somber. On meeting Harry Levin in America for the first time, Auerbach discredited the scholarship of his Turkish colleagues, pointing to the case of a Turkish translator of

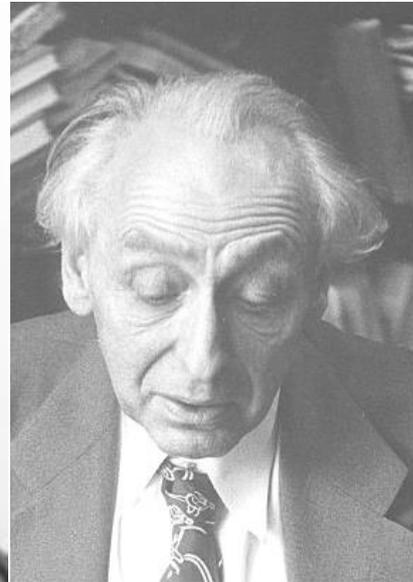
⁸⁴ Cf. Dimock (2001), Ronen (1968), Kahn (1994), Coetzee (1991), Terras (1969), Vaingurt (2014), Spektor (2014), Freidin (1982, 1987). Freidin (1982) discussed a poem which like many others by Mandelstam, “is constructed around an allusion to Dante” (*ibid.*, p. 407).

Dante who admitted to working from a French translation chosen at random” (Apter 2003, p. 262). Apter’s article is entitled “Global *Translatio*: The ‘Invention’ of Comparative Literature, Istanbul, 1933”.⁸⁵ Auerbach is the focus of Biddick’s (2000) “Coming Out of Exile: Dante on the Orient(alism) Express”. Cf. Damrosch (1995), Shahar (2011), Konuk (2007, 2010), Landauer (1988), Porter (2008), Mufti (1999), Richards (2001), Nissan (2017e).

While in Istanbul, Spitzer concerned himself, among the other things, with Dante’s *Vita Nuova*, in his article “Bemerkungen zu Dantes *Vita Nuova*”, published in the *Travaux du Séminaire de Philologie Romance* (Istanbul), Vol. 1, 162–208 (undated, but from his time in Istanbul). In 1942, while already in the United States, he published “Speech and Language in *Inferno XIII*” (this is the canto of the Violent against Self) in *Italica*, the journal of the North American Italianists. Then, in 1955, he published in *Italica* (the American journal of Italian studies) his paper “The Ideal Typology in Dante’s *De Vulgari Eloquentia*” (Spitzer 1955a). On that same year, he also published the paper “The Addresses to the Reader in the *Commedia*” (Spitzer 1955b).



Erich Auerbach.



Leo Spitzer.

4.6. Both Dante Alighieri and Michelangelo Buonarroti affect *The Second Scroll*, a prominent Canadian (and very Jewish) novel by “A.M. Klein”, i.e., Abraham Moses Klein. He was an English-language writer and poet, as well as journalist and lawyer and Montreal Jewish communal figure. He was born in Ratno in Volhynia, in the Russian Empire (now Ratne, Ukraine), in 1909, moved at age one with his Montreal, the city where he mostly lived, and where he was to die in 1972. His short novel (some call it novella), *The Second Scroll*, first published in 1951 (Klein 1951; cf. Spiro 1984, Hyman 1999), was Klein’s only complete novel, and is considered by some one of the most important novels ever written in Canada, which is also the case of *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, authored by another Jewish writer, Mordecai

⁸⁵ Spitzer and Auerbach working in Istanbul and America (Levin 1968) was quite influential.

Richter. The entry “A.M. Klein” in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* states: “After a visit to Israel he wrote about its creation in *The Second Scroll* (1951), a symbolic novel that carries overtones of the techniques of James Joyce, on whom Klein was an authority”.



The Canadian novelist A.M. Klein.

The novel has been described as an odyssey, both literal and spiritual. This, too, is a link to Joyce. “Klein structured his novel as a series of five chapters, from Genesis to Deuteronomy, each of which corresponds to one of the five books of the Pentateuch. The story’s narrator, an unnamed character based loosely on Klein himself, goes in search of his long-lost uncle, Melech Davidson”, from Ratno, who having survived the Holocaust, “drifts to Rome and then Casablanca before immigrating to Israel. Just as the narrator is about to catch up to his mercurial uncle, Davidson is murdered by a group of Arabs”.⁸⁶ His nephew visits Rome and Casablanca in turn. Linda Rozmovits claims (1991, p. 34): “Moving from the intoxicating fragrance of the city to the putrescence of the ghetto [in Casablanca, the nephew relives his uncle’s disillusioned experience of a Renaissance masterpiece. “Beset... by ... [a] frenzy of hands” at every turn, the second narrator is assaulted not by the sublimity of the Sistine Chapel but by the undisguised anguish of Dante’s *Inferno* (74).⁸⁷ If Melech’s task was the unmasking of a dominant narrative, his nephew’s task is to somehow make his way through the freshly unburied carnage”. She explains: “Like Melech’s passage into the “new world” of the Sistine Chapel along “the long umbilical cord of corridors” (136), the nephew too marks the beginning of his experience with a birth metaphor. But here, in a world entirely stripped of its illusions, even the act of birth is fouled by a sense of corruption”.

4.7. Uberto Limentani, a literary critic, was born in Milan in 1913, and died in 1989 in Castelrotto, while on holiday on the Siusi plateau in the Dolomite

⁸⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A._M._Klein

⁸⁷ The page references are to the 1951 edition of A.M. Klein’s *The Second Scroll*.

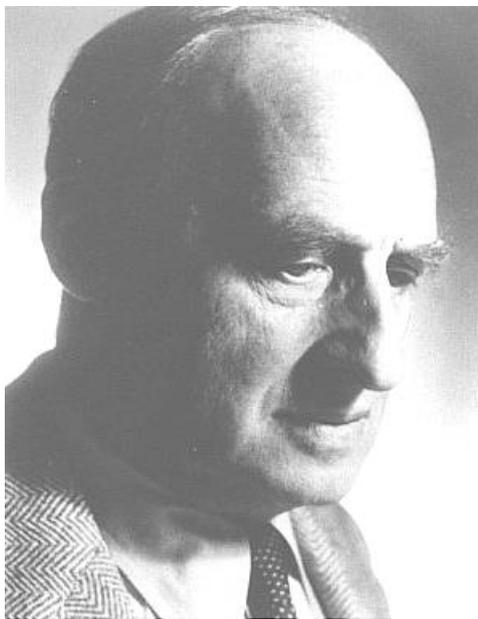
mountains. In the late 1930s, while a law intern, he also graduated in literature. Because of Italy's 1938 racial laws, he moved to Britain. In 1940, having been arrested as an enemy alien on June the 13th, he was interned and then made to board a ship bound for Canada, but on July the 2nd, it was torpedoed by a German U-Boat north of Ireland. Limentani survived the Arandora Star shipwreck, taken to Scotland, and later released, on 31 July 1940.

He worked at the BBC, did translations of anti-Fascist propaganda, and broadcasted in Italian, until September 1945. See the obituary for him by Patrick Boyde (1990), which is followed by another short paper, this one by Massimo Coen (1990), whose subject is Limentani's time at Radio Londra: in November 1939 the BBC Italian unit comprised two Britons, and (mostly Jewish) Italians.

In September 1945, Limentani joined the University of Cambridge as a lecturer. In 1962, he succeeded E.R. Vincent, as the Professor of Italian at Cambridge, and he delivered his professorial inaugural lecture in 1964. It was entitled *The Fortunes of Dante in 17th Century Italy*, and was published under that title by the Cambridge University Press as a booklet of 64 pages. In 1965, a 200-page collection of seven essays edited by him, *The Mind of Dante*, was published in Cambridge. The local university press also published in 1969 his *Dante's 'Comedy': Introductory Readings of Selected Cantos*. It was reprinted in 1985. Limentani's research mostly spanned 17th to early 19th century Italian literature.

4.8. Theodore Silverstein was a scholar of medieval literature (Latin and English), and Dante, too, and his contribution to Dante studies is important because of his expertise in earlier Christian accounts of journeys to the hereafter. In that capacity, Silverstein's opinions about claims of Dante's use of eastern sources is important. There even was a debate in 1949–1951 between Silverstein and Leonardo Olschki as to whether the reference to the Heavenly Rose as a city in an Ethiopic text may be considered an influence of Dante through the presence in Ethiopia of Italians such as the painter Niccolò Brancaleone, who was professionally active in Ethiopia from around 1480, well into the 1520s (Silverstein 1949, Olschki 1951, Nissan 2017f). “As a student of George Kittredge, Silverstein was familiar with that positivistic philology that concerned itself mostly with tracing a work's sources rather than with the organic complexity by which a work transformed its sources; this positivist method Silverstein applied in his first essay (1931) on the figure of ‘Veglio di Creta’ [i.e., the Old Man of Clay] in Dante's *Inferno*” (Cherchi 2004: 422, my brackets). “Dr. Silverstein joined the English department at the University of Chicago as an assistant professor in 1947, and stayed until his retirement in 1973” (Martin 2001). Silverstein's “intellectual work virtually began and ended with editions of the Apocalypse of Paul, an anonymous text written in the third century A.D., or even earlier, which tells of Paul's visits to heaven and hell. It was the subject of Dr. Silverstein's first book in 1935, and in 1997, he and Anthony Hilhorst, a Dutch scholar, cooperated on a version that many scholars consider definitive” (*ibid.*, my added underlining). The vision of the hereafter is the link that led Silverstein to Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Remarkably for a scholar who was personally Jewish, his vantage point when approaching Dante was his expertise in a genre of texts of the early and medieval Church. His scholarship was often playful, and he once made up a verse of Latin poetry to begin an article on his beloved Sir Gawain and signed it Petrus Argenteus, Latin for ‘silver stone’”, his surname (Martin 2001). Theodore Silverstein was born in Liverpool, England, in 1904. His family brought him to Boston in 1910, and his secondary education was at the Boston Latin School, a

reflection of both his talent and of his family's ambition for him: his father was a furniture salesman. Theodore Silverstein died in Chicago in 2001, the University of Chicago having been his final academic affiliation. His earlier affiliations were as a postgraduate student at Harvard (where he also taught) — he was among the last doctoral supervisees of George Lyman Kittredge — and next, the University of Kansas City. A local student was so enthusiastic, that “he enlisted at 37 in the Army Air Forces in 1942, she wrote him every day for three years. They married after the war, after Dr. Silverstein agreed to her one demand: that he drop his first name, Hyman” (Martin 2001). Too Jewish a name? His wartime career remained classified until the late 1980s. At one point, he was among soldiers who took control of the Eiffel Tower. He also accidentally shot his commander in the groin, and yet this boss turned victim would later praise Silverstein as “the finest intelligence officer in the Western Theater” (Schonwald 2001).



Leonardo Olschki.

4.9. Leonardo Olschki (Verona, 1885 – Berkeley, California, 1961), whose father was the publisher Leo Samuele Olschki, was a professor in Heidelberg (1909–1932) and Rome (1932–1938). He was a Romanist — he authored *Dante poeta veltro* (1953)⁸⁸ — but at the University of California at Berkeley his job was as an Orientalist. Olschki published an article (1936) entitled “Dante e l’Oriente”; then “Mohammedan Eschatology and Dante’s Other World” (1951). His opinion about the extent to which Dante was influenced by the East was reductive. Cf. Cantarino (2015, pp. 37–38 and 42). In 1939, Leonardo Olschki left Italy for the United States, where he taught at a few universities in turn, at first at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland, where his rank was merely that of a “lecturer”. In 1940/41, he was substitute teacher of Spanish at Sweet Briar College, Virginia. He also taught provisionally in Cambridge, Massachusetts, at Harvard, but aged 56, he was registered unemployed in that town. In 1943, he taught at the Army language training

⁸⁸ Cf. Della Torre (1901).

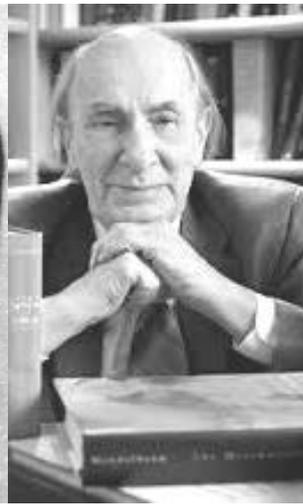
program in Eugene, Oregon. With his wife, Kate Mosse Olschki, he then moved to California, where in 1944, his wife worked at a factory. In 1945, they obtained American citizenship. He was hired by the University of California at Berkeley, at the Department of Oriental Languages, as a research associate, and from 1948 as a lecturer. Olschki, who while in Italy was only able to teach at a university because he presumably complied with the requirement of taking an oath of allegiance to the Fascist regime, refused to take the Loyalty Oath in 1950 (imposed by the university during the United States' Second Red Scare), and protested to his university that now it was happening all over again, this time in America. In McCarthyist America, in 1950, he lost his Berkeley professorship, and this was the last academic real job he held in the United States, even after Senator Joseph McCarthy's grip on people's lives ended in 1953. Having lost his post at Berkeley, Olschki returned to Italy. In 1952, Olschki returned to Berkeley (the town). Eventually, the senior managers at Berkeley (only because so ordered by a court of law after a long trial) backtracked on Olschki's dismissal, so they invited him back, but he gave a despondent reply, and did not rejoin. See Cahill (2011).



Theodore Silverstein.



Irma Brandeis.



Allen Mandelbaum.

4.10. Irma Brandeis (1905–1990) was an American Dante scholar. From 1944 until her semi-retirement in 1979 taught at Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson, New York. Her graduate studies were at Columbia University in New York. She was a pupil of Charles Singleton, whose influence is perceptible in her acclaimed book *The Ladder of Vision* (Brandeis 1960), about the ladder towards God in Dante's *Divine Comedy*. She is also known for her relation in the 1930s with the poet Eugenio Montale (something that got significant coverage in the literary press in the 1980s, especially because she appears to have been the inspiration for the character of Clizia in his poetry). Among the other things, Irma Brandeis defended in *The New York Review* of 14 February 1985 the translation into English of Dante's *Paradiso* by another American Jew, Allen Mandelbaum, from a hostile review by D.S. Carne-Ross that had appeared in the issue of 20 December 1984.

4.11. Allen Mandelbaum (Albany, New York, 1926 – Winston-Salem, North Carolina, 2011) was a professor of Italian literature, and well as a poet and (like Irma

Brandeis) a translator in addition to his scholarly work. In 1973, his translation of Virgil's *Aeneid* received the National Book Award in category translation. He also translated Homer's *Odyssey*, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and selections of the poetic output of the 20th-century poets Salvatore Quasimodo and Giuseppe Ungaretti. From 1966 to 1986, Allen Mandelbaum was affiliated with the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. In 1986, he joined Wake Forest University. Between 1980 and 1984, the University of California Press (and soon afterwards, Bantam in New York) published his translation of the *Divine Comedy*. Afterwards, he was the general editor of a book series about Dante, the *California Lectura Dantis*, in which he published commentaries to *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*. He was the recipient of several awards in Italy.⁸⁹

4.12. Warren Ginsberg, born in 1949, is both Professor of English, and Philip H. Knight Professor of Humanities at the Comparative Literature Program, of the University of Oregon in Eugene.⁹⁰ Within English studies, Warren Ginsberg's specialty is the writings of Geoffrey Chaucer. In Italian studies, he is a Dante scholar. In fact, a paper his academic webpage lists as forthcoming is "Dante and Chaucer", in an edited volume about Chaucer in relation to Italy's Trecento (the 14th century). Cf. his 2002 book *Chaucer's Italian Tradition*, and his paper "From Simile to Prologue: Geography as Link in Dante, Petrarch, Chaucer" (Ginsberg 2009). Ginsberg has also written about Dante in relation to Ovid (Ginsberg 1991, 2010), or in relation to Brunetto Latini, an author who is a character cherished by Dante, yet placed in *Inferno* (Ginsberg 1985). In the same year as his paper "Dante and the Aesthetics of Being" (Ginsberg 2000a), related to his 1999 book *Dante's Aesthetics of Being*, Warren Ginsberg has contributed four entries (2000b, 2000c, 2000d, 2000e) to Richard Lansing's *The Dante Encyclopedia*, and one of those entries is "Eagle",⁹¹ a theme he already addressed in "Dante's Dream of the Eagle and Jacob's Ladder" (Ginsberg 1983a), from a year when he published a paper in Jewish studies (Ginsberg 1983b), on the binding of Isaac in a literary perspective (which by the way, is a theme that Erich Auerbach had dealt with in *Mimesis*). In 2004, Warren Ginsberg gave the Annual Dante Lecture at Yale University. He also co-organised the conference Dante's Traditions in the New Millennium, held at the University of Oregon on 7 February 2009. He is on the advisory board of the journal *Dante Studies*.

4.13. Rachel Jacoff's graduate studies at Cornell University (1955–59) and postgraduate studies at Harvard (1959–64) were in English studies, but in 1970–74 she studied at Yale, and in 1977 she earned there a Ph.D. in Italian studies, with a

⁸⁹ To honour his translation of the *Divine Comedy*, Allen Mandelbaum was awarded the Gold Medal of Honour of the City of Florence, when in 2000 he travelled there for the 735th anniversary of Dante's birth. Why the 735th anniversary should be celebrated calls for comment. At the very opening of the *Divine Comedy*, Dante states that his sinful state at the beginning of his voyage was in the middle of "our" life, that is to say, at the very middle of the canonical human lifespan, which is seventy years (*Psalms xxx*; it also was how long King David lived). Therefore, in his literary fiction, Dante was aged 35 at the beginning of his voyage in the hereafter, which supposedly resulted in his writing the *Divine Comedy* (he tells some of the souls that he will do).

⁹⁰ In 1971, Warren Ginsberg earned a master's degree in English at the State University of New York (SUNY) at Stony Brook; then in 1975 he earned a Ph.D. in medieval studies at Yale University. Before moving to the University of Oregon as a full professor in 2000, he was full professor at SUNY, Stony Brook, from 1993, and associate professor there from 1984. He was previously affiliated with Yale University, in 1975–1982 as assistant professor, and in 1982–1984 as associate professor.

⁹¹ The Eagle features prominently in Dante's *Paradiso*. That canticle is also the subject of "Place and Dialectic in Pearl and Dante's *Paradiso*" (Ginsberg 1989).

thesis on Guido Cavalcanti. From 1978 to 2010, she was employed by Wellesley College (in Wellesley, Massachusetts), in Italian studies or comparative literature. She was director of the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Stanford Dante Institute in 1988, and co-director of the NEH Dante Institute at Dartmouth College in 1986. As an Italianist, in 1974–78 she was affiliated with the University of Virginia.⁹² Rachel Jacoff is the editor of *The Cambridge Companion to Dante*, which appeared in two editions, in 1993 and in 2007. Her many publications from 1980 on are overwhelmingly about Dante (see in the bibliography). They include “Dante and the Jewish Question”, of 2004. Cf. the paper about Dante and Jeremiah (Jacoff 1988a). She is the author of some entries in Richard Lansing’s *The Dante Encyclopedia* (2000, 2nd edn. 2010). She has sometimes published about Dante with Peter Hawkins, including a book. She also authored a book with William Stephany (1989), and edited a book with Jeffrey Schnapp (1991). She has been on the board of *Dante Studies* from 2003 to 2009. Her webpage at Wellesley College, where she is Professor Emerita, states: “Much of my work explores the relation between Dante’s *Commedia* and the texts with which it is in dialogue, especially the Bible, the *Aeneid* and the *Metamorphoses*. I am particularly interested in the *Paradiso*. [...] I taught a Dante course yearly [...]”.⁹³ Among the other things, she has discussed Dante’s intertextual references to Virgil or Ovid (e.g., Jacoff and Schnapp 1991). She has sometimes had to deal with fine points of Christian doctrine.⁹⁴ Some of her Dante scholarship also fits in women’s studies (e.g., Jacoff 1988b). She has also discussed illustrators of the *Divine Comedy*, such as (Jacoff 2003a) the drawings of the British artist John Flaxman (1755–1826); those drawings were etched by Tommaso Piroli, and published in Rome in 1793 in an edition of the *Divine Comedy* (Toynbee 1919, pp. 4, 7). Then in 1807 “was published the first English edition (with quotations from the version of Henry Boyd) of Flaxman’s Compositions from the *Divina Commedia*, originally published in Rome in 1793” (Toynbee 1919, p. 9).

Jacoff, in a guest lecture then published as a booklet (2004), “Dante and the Jewish Question”, she is acutely aware of Dante’s unfriendly attitude to Jews (contrary to what some scholars in the 19th century and even in the 20th, have preferred to believe), and reflects about paradoxes in the relation between the personal identities or beliefs of a few Dante scholars, and the subject of their studies.

⁹² We have come across Harry Levin in connection to Spitzer and Auerbach. In 1961–64, Jacoff was Levin’s assistant in English studies at Harvard University.

⁹³ <http://www.wellesley.edu/italian/faculty/jacoff>

⁹⁴ Such is the case of “Dante and the Legend(s) of St. John” (Jacoff 1999). The *American Dante Bibliography for 1999* described it as follows: “Beginning with the question of why Dante makes a point of insisting on the untruth of the legend that St. John was present in Heaven ‘in the body’, the article explores the development of the legend, the versions of it that Dante might have known, and their varying implications. Special attention is given to the formulations in Albertus Magnus, Thomas Aquinas, and Bonaventure. Like Bonaventure, Dante reserves the privilege of anticipatory resurrection or assumption to the Virgin Mary. St. John’s forceful denial of his bodily assumption in *Paradiso* 25 also calls attention to the paradoxical nature of Dante’s claim in *Paradiso* 30 that he sees all the saints in their bodies, ‘in those aspects they will have at the Last Judgment’, in the Empyrean. None of the blessed other than Christ or Mary is yet reunited with his or her body, and yet they are all visible to the Pilgrim in their bodies. This ‘double truth’ is an example of Dante’s ability to find representational equivalents for the fundamental paradoxes of Christian theology and an instance of the poem’s characteristic ‘slippage’ between the end of time and the interim temporality of its narrative”.

4.14. The English-language American poet, essayist, literary critic, and translator Robert Pinsky was born in 1940 in Long Branch, New Jersey.⁹⁵ He has also authored a play, an opera libretto, and an interactive fiction game. He even guest-starred in an episode of *The Simpsons*, the animated TV sitcom. He teaches in the graduate writing program at Boston University. He previously taught at Wellesley College and at the University of California at Berkeley. A graduate of Rutgers University in 1962, in 1966 he earned a Ph.D. at Stanford University. He is a former saxophonist, and his early poetry was inspired by jazz. Musicality and rhythm are central to his poetry, which is intended to be read aloud. From 1997 to 2000, he served as United States Poet Laureate, and Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress: by the end of 2016, “he is the first and so far only poet to be named to three terms”.⁹⁶ As Poet Laureate, he founded the Favorite Poem Project, of outreach to the broad public. He is poetry editor for *The New Republic*. Pinsky published with Schocken Books, a Judaica publisher, a book of prose, *The Life of David* (2005) about King David; this was the book that launched the publisher’s Jewish Encounters series. On occasion, Pinsky referred there to Dante (see a review by David Wolpe 2005). On 31 December 1994, Pinsky’s translation in verse of Dante’s *Inferno* was released by Farrar, Straus and Giroux, in a bilingual edition,⁹⁷ with illustrations by Michael Mazur and a foreword by John Freccero. Rachel Jacoff reviewed that book. She begun with “With Robert Pinsky’s *Inferno*, the tradition of poets rediscovering Dante has a new and splendid exemplar”, and pointed out that this is a translation that can be read aloud without discomfort,⁹⁸ but after explaining the difficulty of translating in verse Dante’s

⁹⁵ His mother, Sylvia Eisenberg Pinsky, an optician, was a lifelong member of Hadassah, the Jewish women’s organisation. An obituary of hers states: “She could tell jokes well, in English or Yiddish”.

⁹⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Pinsky He kept that post even as Rita Dove, Louise Glück and W.S. Merwin were appointed in 1999. Then Stanley Kunitz was appointed in 2000.

⁹⁷ Larry Kart, reviewing (1995) that book in the *Chicago Tribune*, claimed: “Casting about through the literary past, the sole English-language poet who bears much resemblance to him is the too-little-known Elizabethan master Fulke Greville, whose verse, like Pinsky’s, can be at once urgently plainspoken and remarkably virtuosic, especially in the sphere of rhythm. It’s a paradoxical blend of virtues, arising, I think, because the impulses that drive their work are more public than private. And because they need to speak to, argue with and convince an actual or imagined ‘us’, their verse tends to become elaborate only when what they have to say demands that”. Actually, Kart reviewed Pinsky’s *Inferno* unfavourably, and having compared his translation to the verse translation of the *Divine Comedy* by the British poet C.H. Sisson, concluded: “Robert Pinsky, one feels sure, will write more remarkable verse of his own, while the praise given to his ‘*Inferno*’ will be considered an anomaly in the history of taste. Whatever, don’t deny yourself the experience of C.H. Sisson’s Dante”. The comparison was of lines from the episode of Francesca da Rimini, or, in Kart’s words: “the conclusion of Canto V of the ‘*Inferno*’-the passage in which Francesca of Rimini tells Dante how she and her brother-in-law Paolo were led to commit adultery as they read about Lancelot and Guinevere. (Galeotto, or Galahalt, was Lancelot and Guinevere’s go-between.)” Dante’s “Galeotto il libro e chi lo scrisse” revolves on a double sense (Kart did not clarify this): a *galeotto* is the inmate forced to row on board of a galley. Francesca is referring to one true to his name, a villain of which one feels the urge to say: “Send him rowing!” Pinsky rendered this with: “A / Galeotto, that book! / And so was he who wrote it”, whereas Sisson rendered it in an explanatory way: “The book, the writer played the / part of Galahalt”. Kart criticised a procedure Pinsky opted for: “It may not be clear right away, because of his use of ‘slant rhymes’ (eyes/was/this, book/spoke/slack), but Pinsky has tried to approximate Dante’s self-invented terza rima (the rhyming pattern aba, bcb, cdc, etc.). Now terza rima is not impossible in English, even though Italian is rich in rhymes and English is relatively poor. At least one major poet (Shelley) wrote major poems (‘Mont Blanc’ and ‘Hymn to Intellectual Beauty’) in terza rima-inspired but even more elaborate patterns. But terza rima, for Dante, is a sinuous verbal lope that furthers the flow of his verse, while Pinsky’s approximate terza rima seems to inhibit the flow of his”.

⁹⁸ “Pinsky has many virtues as a translator. His ear for tone is much sounder than that of other recent translators, as is his ear for spoken English. His translation rarely produces the discomfort I feel reading aloud in a classroom from Singleton or Mandelbaum. Pinsky’s taut rendering gives it a robust

terza rima, she stated she did not consider Pinsky’s approximation of that metre to be successful.⁹⁹ And yet: “Compression, concision, and clarity are the salient virtues of Pinsky’s translation. The forward moving energy of the narrative derives from that compression as well as from the repeated transgression of the structural role of the three line unit. By working against the *terzina* structure Pinsky gets the poem moving even faster than it does in Italian and gains syntactical freedom for his own idiom” (Jacoff 1995). Jacoff expressed an important misgiving: “As much as I relish the interest in the *Inferno* this translation has generated, I can’t help regretting its reinforcement of the cliché that the *Inferno* is the *Commedia*. Of course no one actually says such a thing, but it is implied in both Pinsky’s own comments and those of the reviewers, who are unanimous in their conviction of the special pertinence of the *Inferno* to our contemporary sensibilities”.

4.15. Michael Mazur (New York, 1935 – Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2009) was an American printmaker, painter, and sculptor. He studied at Amherst College and the Yale School of Art and Architecture.¹⁰⁰ See e.g. Schwartz (2009).¹⁰¹ Concerning Michael Mazur’s illustrations to Robert Pinsky’s dramatic translation of *Inferno*, Liana De Girolami Cheney states (2016, p. 490, fn. 8):

Even today artists such as Michael Mazur are moved by the *poema sacro*. Mazur’s monotypes¹⁰² illustrate Robert Pinsky’s *The Inferno of Dante*. Mazur’s imagery combines his personal interpretation of the *poema sacro* and his visual impressions of Florence. The effects of tenebrism in his monotypes create infernal images fusing the

muscularity. There is neither archaism nor the awkward padding characteristic of many verse translations, which fill out lines for purposes of rhyme” (Jacoff 1995).

⁹⁹ “Because English is a language with greater lexical resources [than Italian] but far less capacity for rhyme, rhyming on the scale demanded by *terza rima* feels more like chiming, and is often obtrusive or comic. For this reason, some translators have modified the verse form (rhyming only the first and third lines of the tercet), or allowed themselves great leeway with inexact rhymes, or rhymed sporadically. Pinsky opts for consonantal or slant rhyme as his basic scaffold to avoid the negative potential of strong rhymes. Has Pinsky created the equivalent of *terza rima*? For long stretches of text it required the greatest effort to sense any rhyme at all. Although very taken with the idea that the effect of slant rhyme in English would approximate that of rhyming vowels in Italian, I found that I couldn’t ‘hear it’ most of the time; for me the slant rhyme couldn’t provide the delight that strong rhymes offer by their mixture of ‘rightness’ and surprise” (Jacoff 1995).

¹⁰⁰ At <http://michaelmazur.net/> Michael Mazur’s biosketch is followed by this citation: “‘They who do not grow, grow smaller.’ – Rabbi Hillel”: a hint at Mazur’s Jewish identity. It is an imprecise quotation. Hillel is so important that it is standard to omit his rabbinic title (we say “Einstein”, not “Prof. Einstein”). “Rabbi Hillel” instead is standard for a minor figure of the late Amoraic period. The Aramaic quotation is “Ngad shma, aved shmeh. Udla mosif, yasef. Udla yalef, qṭala ḥayyav. Ud’ishtammesh betaga, ḥolaf”, i.e. “He whose name/fame spreads afar, his name is lost [leadership is short-lived]. And he who does not add [learning to what he knows], shall lose it [or: shall be taken away from among the living]. And he who does not study deserves to die. And he who uses the crown [of Learning for profane purposes], he passes away [with no part in the afterlife]” (*Avot* 1:13).

¹⁰¹ Schwartz (2009) wrote that Michael Mazur “had his first solo exhibition in 1960, the year after he received his BFA. Working toward his MFA, he became sculptor Naum Gabo’s assistant. In 1961, he started teaching: printmaking, life drawing, and anatomy at Rhode Island School of Design. On a Guggenheim [fellowship], in 1964, he moved to Cambridge [Massachusetts] with his family [...] Shows began to happen. Awards began to accumulate. In 1965, he published his first unqualified masterpiece, a portfolio of 14 lithographs, powerful black and white scenes in a mental hospital called *Images from a Locked Ward*, his first artistic descent into Hell. In 1968, he published his first image based directly on Dante’s *Inferno*, in Boston’s Impressions Workshop fundraising portfolio for the group Artists Against Racism and the War”.

¹⁰² “Mike was giving a talk there about monotypes — the form of printmaking closest to painting (no two are exactly alike), and for which his innovations are famous” (Schwartz 2009).

visual tradition of past Dante’s imagery with his present apperception of visualizing a poem and experiencing Dante’s history. For example, the frontispiece illustrates Canto III with the boat of Charon passing through the bridges of the Arno River. For Canto VIII, Mazur also draws from the topography of Florence, including in mist the tower of Palazzo Vecchio and surrounding it with burning flames, an image inspired by Dante’s Furies at the City of Dis. Mazur’s Cantos IX (Virgil’s description of Hell) and XXXIV (Lucifer or Simia Dei) undoubtedly represent two of the most fearful Dantesque images. Redemption, forgiveness, and hope are indeed abandoned.



Robert Pinsky.

Rachel Jacoff.

Warren Ginsberg.

Michael Mazur.

4.16. The American poet¹⁰³ and publishing executive Daniel Halpern, born in 1945 in Syracuse, New York, founded in 1971 and still heads Ecco Press in Manhattan. He is the president and publisher, but from 1999 that press is an imprint of HarperCollins. Halpern led, *qua* editor and publisher, a peculiar initiative concerning the *Divine Comedy*. Rachel Jacoff kindly explained to me: “You ask about Daniel Halpern. He is a much venerated editor and the founder of the journal [*Antaeus*]. He put together twenty poets who translated the *Inferno*. There was, to my knowledge, no further work on Dante. It was doing a canto for the Halpern volume [(1993)] that gave Pinsky the idea of doing the whole canticle” (email, 20 February 2017). Reviewing Pinsky’s *Inferno*, Jacoff wrote (1995): “A poetic reappropriation of Dante had been the goal of Daniel Halperin’s earlier project of farming out the *Inferno* to twenty different contemporary poets, each of whom was to translate one or two Cantos. It was translating Cantos 20 and 28 for that volume that got Pinsky hooked on the challenge of an English-speaking Dante. In the Introduction to the Halpern book James Merrill wrote of the potential for twenty further translations, but thus far Pinsky’s is the only one”. Rachel Deahl began an article (2011) on Halpern and the 40 years of Ecco Press, by stating:

It was a chance chauffeur job, shuttling a bored author back to his hotel room, that got Dan Halpern into publishing. The author was Paul Bowles, it was the late 1960s, and Halpern agreed to take the writer on the long drive back to Santa Monica when Bowles tired of the party he’d been thrown at Cal State Northridge. The trip led to a conversation about poetry, which Halpern was studying, and a recommendation to travel abroad. It also led to Halpern cementing a friendship with Bowles and becoming a small press publisher. ¶ After a stint in Morocco and the launch of the literary

¹⁰³ <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poets/detail/daniel-halpern> “Both *Tango* [(1987)] and *Something Shining: Poems* [(1999)] were praised for their formal ambition and control, as well as their revelation of the ordinary” (*ibid.*).

magazine *Antaeus*, Halpern got the backing of ketchup heiress Drue Heinz to start a book operation. The name she had in mind for the press, Ecco, he found out years later, was a reference to a beloved little dog she once owned.



The New York publisher, editor, and poet Daniel Halpern.

The Chicago Italianist Wiley Feinstein.

4.17. Wiley Feinstein, born in 1952, is professor of Italian at Loyola University, Chicago (it is a Catholic university). He has been researching 20th-century Italian literature, Italian Jewish studies, and Italian language pedagogy. He has published, for example, the book *Humily's Deceit: Calvino Reading Ariosto Reading Calvino* (Feinstein 1995). Feinstein earned a B.A. in Italian at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, in 1974, then an M.A. in Italian at the University of California at Berkeley in 1977, and finally a Ph.D. in Italian Literature at Berkeley, in 1982. He is on the faculty board of the Jewish Studies Division of the American Association of Italian Studies.

We are interested, here, in Feinstein's rather bleak assessment of the reflection of cultural antisemitism in medieval Italy, in Dante's *oeuvre*. Feinstein discussed this in part of his book (2003) *The Civilization of the Holocaust in Italy: Poets, Artists, Saints, Anti-Semites*. Six prints of that book appeared in 2003. Considering that the book is concerned with Dante and other Italian authors who preceded the Holocaust by several centuries, the book title is therefore teleological: Feinstein tries to identify the local cultural roots of Fascism's first segregationist, and then eliminationist actions in 1938–1945. In that book, Feinstein was responding to the false myth of *Italiani brava gente*, the notion that during the persecutions most Italians had been humane, an evasion from responsibility which, according to Feinstein began when in September 1944 the philosopher Benedetto Croce claimed that most Italians had retained their humanity and protected the Jews. When it comes to Dante, Feinstein was claiming that Primo Levi had contributed to the false myth, through his attachment to Dante, as evident in his best-known book, his memoirs from the concentration camps. Feinstein situates Dante within medieval religious antisemitism, and in her book review, Susan Zuccotti (2006) concedes that point ("There is no question that the prevailing culture in Italian city-states in the Middle Ages and the

Renaissance was Catholic and anti-Semitic”, *ibid.*, p. 234), while disagreeing with Feinstein on other aspects.

As one born three years after Feinstein was (I was born in Tel-Aviv in 1955, and was raised in Milan and lived there in 1965–1983), I would say that the title *The Civilization of the Holocaust in Italy: Poets, Artists, Saints, Anti-Semites* is shaped by teleology in the form it takes in the feeling that history led to the Holocaust. Precisely this is something that has affected me greatly as a child (and of course, it never went away).

Once in Milan, aged nearly 13, I and my class were assigned as a test the task of writing an essay explaining “Which historical character would you like to have been”. I usually excelled at writing essays in the classroom, but was quite evasive on that occasion, and stated I just wanted to be who I am.

The reason, which I did not dare to state to my teacher, an old lady who doted on me, was that to me, all history led to the Holocaust, and that had I lived at any time earlier, I would have unwittingly lived on a trajectory that ultimately ended in the Holocaust, and that the only period in time I would like to have been alive in, is my own generation, born after the Holocaust, and born free because born in the State of Israel. That was totally clear to me, as I sat at my desk at that exam, but it is something I state nothing about, as I was trying to dodge the subject assigned for that composition.

On p. 58 in Feinstein book, one comes across the section title:

DANTE: “AND THE JEWS TOOK GREAT PLEASURE
IN THE DEATH OF GOD”

One of the passages on p. 58 in that section, for example, is the following:

In the work that Dante calls *Comedy* because of its happy ending in the salvation of the poet’s soul, the poet establishes the ideal relation between the individual and cultural collectivity. In so doing he not only excludes Jews from the collectivity — but also calls attention to their particular dangerousness and status as enemies of Christ. Dante has no apparent personal sense of any direct danger that contemporary Jewish thought might pose in an age of confident Christian affirmation. But hatred of the Jews who killed Christ will appear as an inevitable component of the set of emotions that is so central in art, music, and theater in the medieval and Renaissance flowering of culture.

On p. 57, Feinstein writes:

[...] It is clear that Dante’s idea of the “laughing Jew” is conceived in the context of a growing Judaeophobic climate in Europe. As we will see, Dante will weave his anti-Semitic characterization into a very important section of his meditation on the Crucifixion and its religious, historical, and emotional significance.

But to enhance our understanding of Dante’s anti-Semitic meditation on the crucifixion in canto 7 in *Paradise*, let us now turn to a more general consideration of Dante’s text and the way in which it establishes the Italian political community in such a manner as to mark Jews as an eternal enemy of the Italian people.

It must be said that the flagship of Fascist anti-Jewish propaganda *La Difesa della Razza*, made extensive use of extremely negative depictions of Jews in Italian Renaissance art, and connected this to Dante.



The cover of *la Difesa della Razza*, 5(15), of 5 June 1942 (Year 20 of the Fascist Era).

The cover of *la Difesa della Razza*, 5(15), of 5 June 1942 (Year 20 of the Fascist Era) quoted those words by Dante, to the right of the right-hand half of the cover, showing an image captioned (bottom left) “L’ETERNO EBREO” (“The eternal Jew”). The profile of a young man is shown at the bottom. He is claimed to be Jewish, and he is smiling in self-satisfaction, pleased with himself, perhaps in a mix of self-confidence and scorn. His image is the point of arrival of morphing from the edited profile of Judas Iscariot as painted by Giotto that the Cappella degli Scrovegni in Padua. In this image, Judas’ face appears in the same orientation as painted by Giotto,

but Jesus' face is deleted, apparently because it was considered a distraction. The magazine's artist wanted to focus on the profile of both Judas and the supposed modern Jew, who was *shown smiling* to drive in the point that it was incumbent upon Italian society *to stop him smiling*.

4.18. “The 1935 motion picture, *Dante's Inferno* directed by Harry Lachman, written by Philip Klein, and starring Spencer Tracy, is about a fairground attraction based on *Inferno*. The film features a 10-minute fantasy sequence visualizing Dante's *Inferno*”.¹⁰⁴ That film of 88 minutes, released on 31 July 1935, was produced by Sol M. Wurtzel for Fox Film Corporation, and was distributed by 20th Century Fox. “The film remains primarily remembered for a 10-minute depiction of hell realised by director Harry Lachman, himself an established post-impressionist painter. This was Fox Film Corporation's last film when the company merged with Twentieth Century Pictures to form 20th Century Fox”.¹⁰⁵ A plot of the summary of the 1935 film follows:

Jim Carter [played by Spencer Tracy], a former stoker, takes over a fairground show, run by ‘Pop’ McWade, which depicts scenes from Dante's *Inferno*. He marries Pop's niece Betty and they have a son, Alexander. Meanwhile, the show becomes a great success, with Carter making it larger and more lurid. An inspector declares the fair unsafe but Carter bribes him into silence. There is a partial collapse at the fair which injures Pop. Recovering in hospital, he admonishes Carter and we see a lengthy vision of the *Inferno*. Undeterred, Carter establishes a new venture with an unsafe floating casino, only for disaster to strike again at sea.¹⁰⁶

As for the background of the production of that film of 1935:

The film uses a conventional story of greed and dishonesty to project an image of the *Inferno* conjured up in Dante's 14th-century epic poem. Director Lachman had established a substantial reputation as a painter before embarking on a Hollywood career and he summoned his artistic vision to realise Dante's work in cinematographic form, drawing on the engravings of Gustave Doré. The film's reputation pivots on the 10 minute vision of the *Inferno* and reception has been mixed. Leslie Halliwell described it as “one of the most unexpected, imaginative and striking pieces of cinema in Hollywood's history”, while *Variety* held that it was, “a pushover for vigorous exploitation”.

Some hell scene footage was taken from Fox's *Dante's Inferno* (1924) which was originally tinted red. The film featured many naked men and women suffering in hell.

The 1935 film was produced by Fox Film Corporation just before the May 31, 1935 merger that created Twentieth Century-Fox, and so was released as a Twentieth Century-Fox film.

This was Spencer Tracy's last film for Fox before moving to MGM.

¹⁰⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dante_Alighieri_and_the_Divine_Comedy_in_popular_culture

¹⁰⁵ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dante's_Inferno_\(1935_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dante's_Inferno_(1935_film))

¹⁰⁶ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dante's_Inferno_\(1935_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dante's_Inferno_(1935_film))

Films inspired by Dante include:

L'Inferno (1911); see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/L'Inferno_\(1911_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/L'Inferno_(1911_film))

Dante's Inferno (1924); see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dante's_Inferno_\(1924_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dante's_Inferno_(1924_film))

Dante's Inferno (1935), the film we have been describing.

The Dante Quartet (1987); see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Dante_Quartet

A TV Dante (1989); see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_TV_Dante

Dante's Inferno (2007); see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dante's_Inferno_\(2007_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dante's_Inferno_(2007_film))

Dante's Inferno: An Animated Epic (2010), about which see

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dante's_Inferno:_An_Animated_Epic

and *Dante's Inferno Animated* (2010); see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dante's_Inferno_Animated

The film released on 7 September 1924, a silent film of 60 minutes, was released by Fox Film Corporation. It was directed by Henry Otto. The story was written by Cyrus Wood, and the screenplay by Edmund Goulding. The setting of scenes at Dante's Inferno (or rather, in hell, regardless of Dante) was an opportunity for featuring full or almost full nudity.¹⁰⁷ The 1924 film does not appear to have had actors or other professionals with a Jewish family background involved (or am I missing something?). Such family background was instead the case of the author of the screenplay of the 1935 film, and based on his surname, also of the film director, Harry B. Lachman (1886–1975), from Illinois, whose career began with him as a book illustrator; he returned to painting in the 1940s.¹⁰⁸

The screenwriter and actor Philip Klein was born in 1889 in New York City, was active in films from 1926, and died in 1935 in Los Angeles. “He worked on around forty films during his career in both the silent and sound eras. He was the son of the British playwright Charles Klein”.¹⁰⁹ The latter was married from 1888 to Lillian Gottlieb, from whom he had two children.¹¹⁰ So apparently also Philip Klein's mother was Jewish.

Charles Klein (January 7, 1867 – May 7, 1915) was an English-born playwright and actor who emigrated to America in 1883. Among his works was the libretto of John Philip Sousa's operetta, *El Capitan*. Klein's talented siblings included the composer Manuel and the critic Herman Klein. He drowned during the sinking of the RMS *Lusitania*.

Klein was born in London, England to Hermann Klein and his wife Adelaide (née Soman). Apparently, the elder Klein emigrated from Riga, Latvia. Once in Norwich, Hermann became a professor of foreign languages at the King Edward VI Grammar School, and Adelaide taught dance. The younger Klein's five brothers included Max, a violinist; Manuel, a composer; Herman, a music critic and music teacher; Alfred, an actor; and Philip. They had a sister, Adelaide. He was educated at North London College.

Klein moved to New York City in 1883 [...] Klein died during the sinking of the RMS *Lusitania* in 1915, at the age of 48, reportedly entering the Grand Staircase, and shutting the door behind him.¹¹¹

Alfred Klein had a Jewish middle name: “Alfred Asher Klein (May 12, 1861 – February 21, 1904) was an English-born stage actor, singer and comedian who appeared in operettas and musical theatre in America in the late 19th century”.¹¹² As for his brother Herman:

Herman Klein (born Hermann Klein; 23 July 1856 – 10 March 1934) was an English music critic, author and teacher of singing. Klein's famous brothers included Charles and Manuel Klein. His second wife was the writer Kathleen Clarice Louise Cornwell, and one of their children was the writer Denise Robins.

Klein was born in Norwich, Norfolk, East Anglia, England the son of Hermann Klein senior and his wife Adelaide (née Soman). Apparently, the elder Klein emigrated from

¹⁰⁷ Based on see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dante's_Inferno_\(1924_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dante's_Inferno_(1924_film)) — which also states: “The UCLA Film and Television Archive has an incomplete print, three reels out of a total of five reels. A print of the film reportedly also survives at the Museum of Modern Art. Some of the original prints of this film had the scenes in hell tinted in red. [...] For his 1980 sci-fi thriller “*Altered States*” director Ken Russell intercut borrowed footage from this film with his own digital effects to create a hallucination sequence”.

¹⁰⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harry_Lachman

¹⁰⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philip_Klein

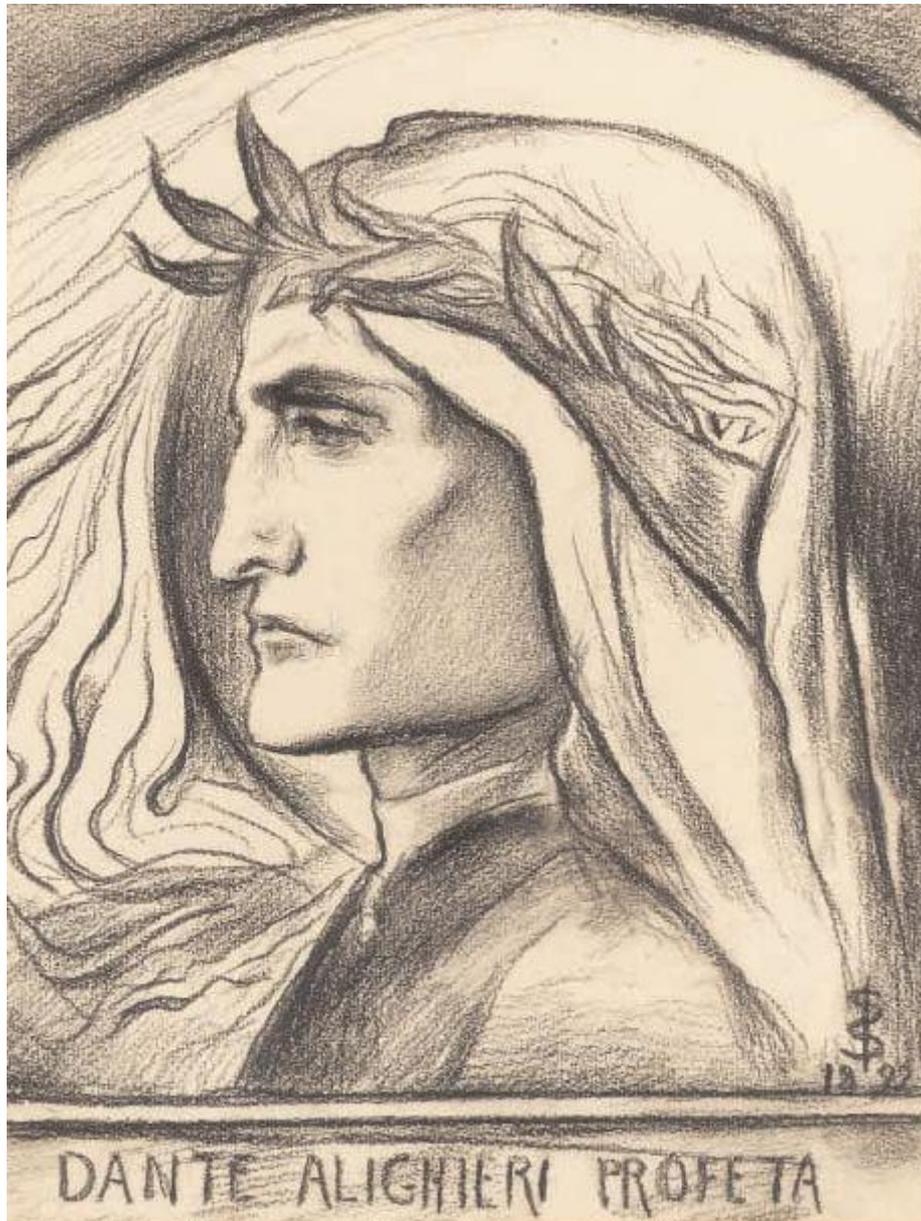
¹¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Klein

¹¹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Klein

¹¹² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alfred_Klein

Riga, Latvia, then part of the Russian Empire, and home to a large community of Baltic German Jews such as the Kleins.

“A petition from the Jews of Norwich, *Norwich Petition For the Removal of the Disabilities of the Jews*, January 24, 1848, includes the signature of a David Soman, boot and shoemaker, who could have been the father of Adelaide”.¹¹³



A portrait of Dante by the British artist Simeon Solomon (1840–1905).

5. Concluding Remarks

This survey could not be exhaustive, but is representative, and as ample as I found it feasible. Several 19th-century Italian Jewish authors not mentioned here wrote about

¹¹³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Klein

Dante on some occasion. Jewish authors have engaged with Dante even in his own days (Immanuel Romano) or in the 15th century (Moses of Rieti). With the publication in one volume (Venice, 1743) of Hebrew poems by early modern authors, Zacuto's *Hell Outspread*, and Olmo's *Heaven Outspread* (not themselves significantly influenced by Dante), one comes across "the tendency to reconstruct an oeuvre similar to Dante's *Commedia* [being] in the mind of later readers rather than a goal of the authors themselves" (Salah 2013, p. 171). Many Italian Jews in the 19th century wrote about Dante, or even were significant contributors as *literati* to the Italian national celebration of Dante, as part of their seeking integration in Italian society. One of the effects of that goal was a tendency to embrace a view by which Dante was friendly to a particular Jew (Immanuel) or more benign towards the Jews than his contemporaries. That view took an extreme form with Flaminio Servi, whereas another rabbi, Lelio Della Torre, could lucidly see that Dante, admirable as he was as a poet, partook of the prejudices of his times. In the 19th century, Simeon Solomon in England drew or painted on Dante themes, because of his early association with the Pre-Raphaelites. Lorenzo Da Ponte, Mozart's librettist, was the United States' earliest professor of Italian, and promoted Dante appreciation there, but he had only been Jewish in his childhood. Jewish engagement with Dante other than in Italy boomed in the 20th century, in part because of Dante interest for world literature, and in part as an aspect of the integration of Jews in American academia. Hebrew translations of an entire canticle of the *Divine Comedy* began to appear in 1869, have sporadically appeared (once in Yiddish, too, shortly before the Holocaust) in the 20th century, and multiplied in Israel in the early 21st. The Jewish case of engagement with Dante has historically been complex and multifaceted. It is an illustration of how engaging with Dante in given ethnic or national context has sometimes taken on forms that are far from obvious.

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