‘[S]ì che la classe correrà diretta; 
e vero frutto verrà dopo ’l fiore.’

(Par. XXVII, 147-148)

DIANA MODESTO

In the gap left by the untimely death of Tom O’Neill in 2001, it has been a great honour to be invited to write the introduction to this fine and varied collection of papers given at the two Dante Conferences held at Flinders University in Adelaide, South Australia. Tom’s wit and perspicacity are sorely missed and his is a very hard act to follow; as I have neither the benefit of his wide and eclectic reading nor his fine turn of phrase.

The tradition at most, if not all, the Dante conferences in Australia was for Tom to sum up at the final session, and so it was fitting that he wrote the introduction to the volume of essays that marked the end of the series of nine Dante Colloquia held in New South Wales in the eighties and nineties.

Following that series of conferences, it was Diana Glenn and Flavia Coassin who picked up the baton to run the very successful biennial series of Dante Conferences in Adelaide, which now alternate with the Dante and the Middle Ages Conferences held at La Trobe University in Melbourne.

This, the second volume of Dante essays edited by Margaret Baker and Diana Glenn, this time also with Flavia Coassin, presents papers given at the two conferences held in Adelaide in 2002 and 2004.

The collection opens with the paper by Adriana Diomedi ‘La teoria dantesca sui limiti del sapere: genialità e dissidio’ that investigates Dante’s theory of the limits of knowledge in man, and looks at how the arguments set out in Book Three of the Convivio regarding man’s capacity to obtain happiness in this life by means of reason alone seem to be contradicted by what he says in Book Four, which no longer relies on Aristotelian philosophy but reflects the views of St Thomas Aquinas; the philosophy is therefore seen by critics to be mystical.

The argument is developed by tracing the differing views of the great dantisti
Busnelli and Vandelli versus Nardi, who maintains that the difference between Dante and Saint Thomas lies in the fact that Dante does admit the possibility of achieving happiness in this life whereas Aquinas did not. Diomedi finds that it is precisely this point that demonstrates the originality of Dante’s philosophy, which takes from various sources, but is not confined by doctrinal restraints: they often form the basis upon which he builds his own original thought.

She then tackles the much debated question of man's desire for knowledge and the limits imposed by the actual capacity of each individual to receive it. The stumbling block here is seen as the innate desire of everything for perfection that leads to happiness (Conv. III, xv.3-4). It is this that leads Dante to formulate the theory that permits the individual to realise himself within each one’s own limits, but that happiness is not the automatic consequence of natural instinct, but rather is achieved through the perfection of human reason.

The next three papers by Simon West, John Scott and Flavia Coassini deal with three of Dante’s poems, discussed in an order that is remarkably close to the ‘chronological order of recognised auctoritates in the vernacular lyric’ (of Arnaut, Cavalcanti, Dante, Cino and Petrarch), as set out by John Scott in his paper on Cino da Pistoia and Dante Alighieri to which I will return later.

Simon West deals in his paper with the sonnet exchange between Dante and his best friend Guido Cavalcanti. He defines these as a series of rime di corrispondenza rather than the more generally-used term tenzone, rime di corrispondenza being almost always in sonnet form and only between poets. He raises the interesting suggestion that some of Cavalcanti’s sonnets to Dante might indicate certain differences of opinion between the poets and this may explain some of the ambiguous references to Guido in the Divine Comedy.

In particular he discusses Dante’s sonnet Guido, i vorrei che tu e Lapo ed io, which takes the form of a ‘wish poem’ of fanciful escape, and to which Cavalcanti’s later reply S’io fossi quelli che d’amor fu degno is an emphatic denial of the probability or possibility of such a voyage. He Notes how Guido then brings the poem back to the world of war and conflict with his introduction of ‘un prest’arcier’. Conscious of the difficulties of using such texts for determining the nature of the personal relationship between the two poets, particularly when the tenzone is in all probability incomplete, West concludes that it is impossible to decide, despite the idea favoured by some scholars that in the Vita Nuova, and consequently also in the Commedia, Dante is distancing himself from Cavalcanti’s ideas.

John Scott’s contribution on Cino da Pistoia and Dante also deals with an exchange of sonnets between the poets as a possible reflection of a change in their relationship, but, as he so aptly remarks at the beginning of his paper, ‘it is not easy for most of us [...] to gauge and understand the importance of the role he [Cino] played in the development of the Italian lyric’. This importance of Cino’s prestige as a love poet is underlined by the fact that in the De vulgari eloquentia
II.ii.8 Dante mentions no other poets except himself and Cino as having shared the concept of the *dolce stil novo* of love and mystical harmony, an importance confirmed some years later by Petrarch's lament on Cino's death in the sonnet *Piangete donne e con voi pianga amore.*

Professor Scott then goes on to review Cino's prolific output of *canzoni,* sonnets and *ballate* and how these fit into Dante's criteria for love poetry. Despite the fact that critics have tended either to exclude or to minimise the possibility that Cino might have influenced Dante, the author then joins the scholars who do consider the possibility of a two-way traffic between the poets and adds Cino's sonnet CLX as a forerunner or parallel to the inspiration Dante claimed for his poetry in *Purgatorio* XXIV, 52-54: "...quando / Amor mi spira, noto, e a quel modo / ch'e' ditta dentro vo significando'.

But it is Cino's absence from the *Commedia* that has puzzled generations of scholars, and Scott agrees with Hollander who attributes this fact to 'Cino's defection from the imperial cause', citing the three sonnets hostile to Dante that have been attributed to Cino, and then tracing Cino's career as a jurist. From an initial position of supporting the authority of the emperor, but equally opposing any interference by civil authorities in spiritual matters, his later work shows him to have made a remarkable volte-face, and he now accepts many of the claims for papal supremacy, supporting the pope's entitlement to wield temporal power and jurisdiction. The paper concludes on the touching note that in all his legal writings Cino abhorred breaking faith, a fitting tribute to the humanity of Dante's erstwhile friend.

Flavia Coassini, writing on the episode of Arnaut Daniel, does not accept at face value Dante's skill in writing in Provençal, and looks behind the apparent *virtuosismo* at the message the poet has put into the mouth of the Provençal poet. She outlines the debate between scholars regarding the actual intention of Dante's apparent repudiation of certain poetic styles in *Purgatorio* XXVI, be they that of Guinizelli or of Arnaut himself, or even, as she cites in the case of Umberto Bosco, the opinion that they have no importance in the critical discourse that has just taken place, being simply removed from it.

Coassini then carefully analyses the actual words of Arnaut, finding in them meanings and allusions, not only to troubadour poetry, but also to *poezia cortese.* She also sets out the different contexts in which Arnaut uses the terms 'cobrir' and 'clus', but notes that, despite the fact that he was one of the major exponents of *trobair clus,* he himself never uses the terms *trobair clus* or *trobair leu* and was the only poet not to engage in poetic debates. What Arnaut represents is just that, the leaving behind of the old debates.

Generally, she sees, it is supposed that the terms 'clus' and 'leu' represent the level of difficulty in understanding the poetry, 'clus' being difficult and 'leu' being easy, but scholars of troubadourial poetry have determined that this simplistic approach is not correct: it is not easy to differentiate the two styles, the same
poets, in fact, would often use both, and at times the 'leu' poetry is even more difficult to interpret. Furthermore, deliberately obscure poetry was considered bad poetry. The question that Coassin asks is why would Arnaut have used obscure language with Dante, even if Guittoni's style is undeniably to be considered too obscure, and she sees that like Arnaut and Cavalcanti, Dante too leaves the schools behind and opts to be, one could say 'parte per se stesso', the 'un' who when love inspires him, utters the words.

This episode, then, terminates the debate regarding poetry in the vernacular and Dante's own poetry before the writing of the Commedia, and this episode is considered by the writer to represent Dante's own progression to being the 'miglior fabbro del proprio parlar materno'.

A completely different aspect of Dante's poetry is presented by Guy Carney who argues fascinatingly for a source of the Pilgrim's experiences in the Commedia to be recognised in the gladiatorial scene in the Confessio of St Augustine. Although there are no mentions of gladiators or of the arena in the Poem, Carney argues that the implication of the Poet in the scenes he witnesses in the Inferno reflects the spiritual fall of Augustine's companion, Alypius, to the temptation of bloodlust. In Virgil's reproaches to Dante (in Inferno XX, 28-30, among others) for the pity ('passion') that he has for the horrors he confronts, Carney sees a reliance on Augustine for those dramatic and moral aspects.

The mirroring of this episode in the Confessio is then traced in Cantos IX and XXVIII, in particular in the 'sensual fascination' of the Medusa episode in Canto IX where the bloodthirsty passion of the furies echoes Alypius' fixation with the blood of the gladiatorial spectator and the spectator's fixation on bloody displays, the Roman amor mortis. In the encounter with Mohammed, the intoxicated, quasi-erotic desire for horror is seen to result in a 'mirroring' in Dante's wide-eyed amazement of the open, gaping wounds and like the paradox of the gladiator, whose claim to honour is tied to depravity, so Mohammed and the other schisms are seen to remain parodies of redemption in the endless circle of punishment and healing. Bertran de Born is also considered to be a parody of a type of Christian martyr or the cephalophore, who after martyrdom carries his own head around. It is, however, by drawing on the idea of bloodlust and the spectator through reference to the gladiator that Carney sees 'a means through which Dante is able to explore the psychological complexities of fixation and self-loss fitted into a broader analysis of moral violence, of which the spectacle is a visible consequence'.

The following three essays form a natural grouping since they concern three of Dante's female protagonists, Sapia, Pia and Matelda. Diana Glenn looks at the echo of 'the envious eye' between the canto of Pier della Vigna (Inferno XIII) and its corresponding canto in Purgatorio of Sapia on the cornice of the envious. Envy, invidia, the second-deadliest of the seven deadly sins, is found in Biblical passages that have connections with spiritual blindness and darkness and Dante affirms that Hell has its origins in envy; Florence on several occasions.

Glenn traces a number of echoes poised between Pier in Inferno XII and Purgatorio XIII, highlighting how the [..] constitute an intratextual and superstitious effects of envy in human.

The element of blindness by using their faculty of sight is the association of invidia with abuse. shadenfreude, represents the closing misfortune of others. Like the blight of Pier's branches, which fills the. seve eyelids of the envious sight of these blind souls.

Sapia, however, is seen in this envy leading to irresponsibility a far to be found in Pier della Vigna. The court of Frederick II, causing his form as an unnatural thorn in the rose. irony is seen in the selection of the barren plant and Sapia harse. avenghe che Sapia / fossi chiamato, the role envy plays there, so is Sapia that was envious of formidable counter-examples that Glenn finds community values when self-interest.

A different starting point is the account of the vicissitudes of 'la scia' the scant seven lines that delineate the circulation and dissemination in the nineteenth and twentieth century sung popular theatre still performed in the Garfagnana.

Just how seven lines from Dante Maggio performance is a long and, all its twists and turns in a master appendix that cannot be sung interesting tradition to the phenomenon of women to marry out of their perpetual tradition, and
that Hell has its origins in envy, a sin Dante deliberately connects with the city of Florence on several occasions.

Glenn traces a number of echoes and contextual links that provide a counterpoint between Pier in *Inferno* XIII and the portrayal of the once-envious Sapia in *Purgatorio* XIII, highlighting how 'the verbal resonances, allusions and visual cues [...] constitute an intratextual moral paradigm by [...] which Dante traces the pernicious effects of envy in human society'.

The element of blindness by which the souls in Purgatory are prevented from using their faculty of sight is in keeping with the traditional etymological association of *invidia* with abuse of vision, and the former Sapia, the epitomy of *shadenfreude*, represents the classical personification of envy smiling at the misfortune of others. Like the blood and words that are produced by the breaking off of Pier's branches, which fills Dante with pity, so the tears that ooze out from the sewn eyelids of the envious in Purgatory, echo the tears Dante sheds at the sight of these blind souls.

Sapia, however, is seen in this paper to be concerned with the social effects of envy leading to irresponsibility at the civic level, demonstrating a candidness not to be found in Pier della Vigna. Pier portrays himself as the victim of envy at the court of Frederick II, causing him to be thrown into prison and blinded, and in his form as an unnatural thornbush Pier is also blind and imprisoned. A further irony is seen in the selection of the names, Pier della Vigna being transformed into a barren plant and Sapia herself making her name into a pun, 'Sapia non fui, avvegna che Sapia / fossi chiamata'. Just as Pier is scathing about the court life and the role envy plays there, so is Sapia about the ambitions of the Sienese Comune that was envious of formidable maritime powers. It is in these parallels and counter-examples that Glenn sees the broader implications of the loss of community values when self-interest is placed before civic responsibility.

A different starting point is taken by Linda Barwick who presents a riveting account of the vicissitudes of 'la Pia' between literary and oral traditions. Based on the scant seven lines that delimit her existence within the *Commedia*, Barwick traces the circulation and dissemination of theatrical works based on the Pia story in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, introducing this reader, at least, for the first time to the most interesting phenomenon of the Tuscan Maggio, a form of sung popular theatre still performed in Western Tuscany today and in particular in the Garfagnana.

Just how seven lines from Dante have managed to expand to fill three hours of Maggio performance is a long and fascinating story, and Barwick does justice to all its twists and turns in a masterly tour de force complete with tables and an appendix that cannot be summarised in just a few paragraphs. Tying this interesting tradition to the phenomenon of *campanilismo*, and to the tendency for women to marry out of their village, she notes that bitter feuds and rivalries perpetuated for generations, and more or less disguised, can find their way onto
the Maggio stage even today, reflecting the local anxieties of women as inherently unstable elements in the patriarchal-place world.

Historical writing about Matilda, Countess of Canossa, widely considered the figure behind Dante's Matelda in the Earthly Paradise, forms the perspective from which Andrea Rizzi approaches the third of this group of Dante's female protagonists. The identification of the Matelda portrayed by Dante centres on the acceptance of this figure as either a symbol or as a historical personage and the acceptance of the latter depends upon the extent to which Dante could have known about the historical character, a matter of continuous debate among Dante scholars and historiographers. Rizzi brings to this debate two fourteenth-century chroniclers, Riccobaldo di Ferrara and Pipino di Bologna, asserting that, despite scholars' claims to the contrary, Dante could well have known more about Matilda di Canossa than Villani, Cino da Pistoia and the early commentators of the Commedia.

Through these two historians, Dante may also have had knowledge of a very detailed narrative on the life of Matilda, the Vita Matildis, completed just after her death in 1115 by Donizo, Abbot of Sant'Apollonio in Canossa. Although the early commentators preferred to consider Riccobaldo the source for Dante's Matelda, later Dante scholars and historians appear to have ignored him as a possible source for available information regarding Matilda, despite the fact that several have acknowledged the influence of his work in other parts of the Commedia. There is also evidence that the second historian named above, Pipino di Bologna, also knew and used Donizo's poem, although the date of its completion, 1314 (or even up to 1322) makes it unlikely that Dante could have known it.

Rizzi concludes his paper with an acknowledgement that, in view of the missing part of Riccobaldo's work, it is probably impossible to establish with any certainty the extent of the information Dante might have received regarding Matilda, but it does reveal what was known about Matilda di Canossa in Dante's time and helps cast light on what was commonly available in Dante's cultural environment, both directly and indirectly.

Dugald McLellan's paper is on an early fourteenth-century illustrated manuscript of the Commedia and its commentary by Jacopo della Lana. The two parts of this manuscript are currently split between two libraries, the Inferno and Purgatorio being in the Riccardiana in Florence and the Paradiso in the Braccesco in Milan. McLellan looks at the historiated capitals of the Inferno, which have been attributed to the Bolognese school of the mid-fourteenth century.

In this paper, we are given a fascinating glimpse into the world of illuminators and their patrons, as well as into the book trade in Bologna. Although the identification of the person who commissioned the manuscript must perforce remain elusive, the addition of the Commentary in Italian suggests a specialised reader or owner, perhaps a powerful figure in the Bolognese society of the day.

McLellan attributes the fact that the Commedia was analysed only fairly recently in the programme. However, he looks into the identificato that give the whole book a capital at the beginning of each section classifiable into discrete groups that seem to bear no direct relationship to a productive interaction between the Church Fathers, he traces who investigates how Dante's own in this tradition. Starting with the lives of the Church Fathers, he traces do actually see God's face. Ferzoco's This, Ferzoco claims, is the very Trinity as similar and equal, which is the Christ. While not being able to have read Pietro's autobiography, he concludes his paper with the point that marks the culmination of Dante's work: he glories in the beginning.

Adriana Diomedi's second contribution, a paper on the presumption that persisted among Dante scholars of the fourteenth century that St Thomas Aquinas was the source of Dante's philosophic thought, is part of a paper on the Commedia's wide ecclesiastical influence. Her paper is concerned with traces of the problem from the early manuscripts had raised the question that De Siger of Brabant and the conclusion that his thought was Thomistic. She shows that Dante was neither a Thomist nor could any particular school of philosophy be Dante criticism in the twentieth century, of the medieval thirteenth and fourteenth and rhetorical influences of his
McLellan attributes the fact that the illustrated capitals have been systematically analysed only fairly recently to the fact that they do not fit a conventional programme. However, he looks at the imagery to discover if in fact threads can be identified that give the whole some coherence. The coupling of the historiated capital at the beginning of each canto with its commentary is shown to be classifiable into discrete groupings, and McLellan concludes that, although some seem to bear no direct relationship to the cantos themselves, they may have set up a productive interaction between the reader and the text.

Medieval visions of God are the subject of the paper offered by George Ferzoco who investigates how Dante's own vision at the end of Paradiso XXXIII is part of this tradition. Starting with the descriptions in the Scriptures and the discussions of the Church Fathers, he traces the debate regarding whether the saints in heaven do actually see God's face. Ferzoco finds that although Dante's writings on beatific vision were never cited in this debate they were clearly related to it, and he draws attention to the writings and images of Hildegarde of Bingen as being among the works that shaped Dante's spiritual outlook.

Having drawn attention to Hildegarde's image of the Trinity as a pillar where the three persons unite to sustain all creation, he turns to other hagiographical writings of the period, among which those of Pietro del Morrone (better known to all Dante's readers as Celestine V) present a contemporary image of the Trinity in which, as in Dante's image, the three persons of the Trinity appear the same. This, Ferzoco claims, is the earliest appearance in visionary literature of the Trinity as similar and equal, with a special distinction of a human appearance for Christ. While not being able at this point to establish whether or not Dante would have read Pietro's autobiography in which this description appears, the author concludes his paper with the plea that further scholarship consider the moment that marks the culmination of Dante's journey with the same attention that it devotes to its beginning.

Adriana Diomedi's second contribution deals with the problems raised by the presumption that persisted among critics until the beginning of the twentieth century that St Thomas Aquinas, or Aristotle by way of Aquinas, was the only source of Dante's philosophic thought. She returns to the claim made in her earlier paper of the wide eclecticism of Dante's sources and their multiplicity. Diomedi traces the problem from the earliest neo-thomists to Nardi, who already in 1911 had raised the question of Dante's sources in relation to Mandonnet's work on Siger of Brabant and the conclusion reached in that work that in the main Dante's philosophy was Thomistic. She then refers to the idea promoted by Gilson, that Dante was neither a Thomist nor an Averroist, nor, for that matter, a follower of any particular school of philosophy. As Di Salvo rightly claimed in his review of Dante criticism in the twentieth century, which she cites, Dante was a man of his time, of the medieval thirteenth century, and so subject to all the literary, religious and rhetorical influences of his period.
The final two in this very wide range of papers address the influence Dante has had in more modern times, with Carla Riccardi looking at Dante’s influence on Montale and Tully Barnett going much further afield to address the intertextuality adopted by the Australian author Janette Turner Hospital in her detective stories.

In her paper entitled ‘La tua impronta verrà di giù: Dante in Finisterre dalla Bufera a Gli orecchini’, Carla Riccardi takes D’Annunzio’s dantesque idea of the ‘fossa fuia’ as a starting point to explain certain obscure passages regarding Clizia in Finisterre and Silvae (although the combination of the two words does not appear in Dante). Based on the passage in Inferno XII, 86-90 where Virgil explains to Chiron that Dante is alive and that it is his task to lead him through the ‘valle buia’, but that Dante is not a thief nor he himself an ‘anima fuia’, Riccardi finds three specific points here that are of particular interest in explaining Montale. These are: the descent into the ‘valle buia’ where the tyrants in particular are punished, the presence of the Minotaur and the descent of Christ into Hell to save the Jewish patriarchs. She connects these events with the situation in Europe under the Nazi occupation and, in particular, with the extermination and persecution of the Jews.

She sees in Clizia’s voyage into darkness at the end of Orecchini the beginning of the journey of transformation that will conclude in Iride. The occurrence of ‘fuia’ here in Inferno XII has echoes in Purgatorio XXXIII, 43-44 where the Psalm intoned by Beatrice, ‘Deus venerunt gentes’, reflects the despair of the Jews after the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem by the Babylonians. Riccardi finds the context of these passages in the Poem perfectly applicable to the situation in Europe in 1940 under the Nazis and to Montale’s personal relationship with Irma Brandeis.

The last paper, ‘The Many Modern Circles of Hell’ by Tully Barnett, looks at the deliberate intertextual references to Dante in the detective stories of the Australian author Janette Turner Hospital, and at the way she uses the writings of Dante, not only to pay homage to his greatness but to give shadow and meaning to her own work. The role that Dante and in particular the Inferno play in modern culture has been seen by Judith Schulevitz, writing in the New York Times Review on the influence of Dante on two modern American thrillers, to be so ubiquitous that we no longer recognise his influence.

Barnett looks closely at The Last Magician, a novel published by Turner Hospital in 1992, the first part of which is even called ‘Charlie’s Inferno’ and is set in the underworld of Sydney, represented by a quarry that consists of an excavated pit and a number of subterranean tunnels. The story is told through the eyes of Lucia, a schoolgirl who is drawn into this dark and disturbing subterranean environment. Barnett identifies a Dante figure in Charlie and the Divine Comedy’s Saint Lucia in the schoolgirl, and just as Dante used the Inferno to criticise contemporary politics, so Turner Hospital critiques contemporary political and social events in Sydney by broadening the metaphor of the quarry as Hell.

Note
The present selection of papers from these two Dante Conferences in Adelaide demonstrates the wide range of interest that the Poet continues to instil in his readers. Ranging from Thomistic philosophy to modern thrillers, these offerings can be seen as the 'vero frutto' of a continued interest in Dante in Australia, as far away from Italy as one can be, here 'a l'altro polo'.

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Note