Faithful Parody: Donald Duck as Dante

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"L'Inferno di Paperino," which was written by Massimo Marconi and Giulio Chierchini, illustrated by the latter, and initially published in a 1987 volume of the Italian serial *Topolino*,[1] is neither the first nor the most literal Disney interpretation of Dante's first cantica. Those honors belong to another graphic novel, "L'Inferno di Topolino," which was written by Guido Martina, illustrated by Angelo Bioletto, and initially published

1 *Topolino* 1654 (Milan: Mondadori [for Disney Enterprises], August 9, 1987). For details on each story, begin from the homepage of The International Network of Disney Universe Comic Knowers and Sources (I.N.D.U.C.K.S.), <http://coa.inducks.org/>, last accessed August 18, 2024. For perhaps the pithiest and certainly the most current history of Disney comics in Italy, and of *Topolino* in particular, see <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Topolino>, last accessed August 18, 2024. For an older but more scholarly discussion of the history of *Topolino*, see Caterina Bosco Tierno, "Translation, Pseudotranslation and Adaptation of Disney Comics in Italian Language and Culture," in *Comics – Übersetzungen und Adaptionen*, ed. Nathalie Mälzer (Berlin: Frank & Timme, 2015), 269-280. For more on the Disney Company's business strategies, particularly with regard to medievalism, begin with *The Disney Middle Ages: A Fairy-Tale and Fantasy Past*, ed. Tison Pugh and Susan Aronstein (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). For more on these issues with regard to Italian medievalism in particular, begin with Matteo Sanfilippo's *Il Medioevo secondo Walt Disney: come l'America ha reinventato l'Età di Mezzo* (Rome: Castelvecchi, 1993), especially the first section's fourth chapter (83-100), "Il Medioevo secondo Walt Disney." For an efficiently brief yet thorough history of *Commedia* comics and their origins prior to 2012, see Achim Hölter and Eva Hölter, "Dante im Comic," in *Comic und Literatur: Konstellationen*, ed. Monika Schmitz-Emans (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2012), 17-49. And for other recent works that at least touch on the *Commedia* in comics and/or comic books, see "Poemi a fumetti. La poesia narrativa da Dante a Tasso nelle trasposizioni fumettistiche," ed. Nicola Catelli and Giovanna Rizzarelli, *Arabeschi* 7 (2016): 158-297, <http://www.arabeschi.it/colletion/poemi-a-fumetti, last accessed August 18, 2024; Antonio Rossini, *Palinsesti danteschi. Riscrivere la "Commedia", da Garibaldi all'era del digitale* (Lanciano: Carabba, 2017); Ursula Winter, "L'inferno up to date. Attualizzazioni dell'*Inferno* di Dante nei fumetti," *Dante e l'Arte* 5 (2018), <https://revistes.uab.cat/dea/article/view/v5-winter/pdf_48>, last accessed August 18, 2024: 61-79; Stefano Lazzarin, "Per un atlante del fumetto dantesco. Sondaggi, analisi, congetture," *Italianistica: Rivista di letteratura italiana* 49 (2020): 59-71; Paolo Rigo, "Pocatesta, molto inchiostro. Per una rassegna della presenza di Dante nei fumetti Disney pubblicati in Italia," *L'illustrazione* 5 (2021): 193-208; and Alessandra Forte, "Il Dante di Guido Martina. L'*Inferno di Topolino* e altre storie disneyane ispirate al poema dantesco," in *"A riveder la china". Dante nei fumetti (e vignette) italiani dal XIX al XXI secolo*, ed. Leonardo Canova, Luca Lombardo, Paolo Rigo (Venice: Edizioni Ca' Foscari – Digital Publishing, 2021), 65-87, <https://en.edizionicafoscari.unive.it/en/edizioni4/libri/987-88-6969-566-7>, last accessed August 18, 2024. For more on Marconi, see Disney Comics Fandom's PaperPedia Wiki entry on him at <https://disney-comics.fandom.com/it/wiki/Massimo_Marconi, which was last accessed August 18, 2024. For more on Chierchini, see the Wikipedia entry for him at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giulio_Chierchini>, which was last accessed July16, 2021. And for discussion of both Marconi and Chierchini, see I.N.D.U.C.K.S. at <http://coa.inducks.org/>, last accessed August 18, 2024. I would like to thank Kevin Harty for initially bringing "L'Inferno di Paperino" to my attention and providing me with a copy of its reprint in *"L'Inferno di Topolino" e altre storie ispirate a Dante Alighieri, Capolavori della Letteratura*, ed. Susanna Carboni (Florence and Milan: Giunti Editore [for Disney Enterprises], 2016), 85-141. As of August 18, 2024, the series could be found in parts at multiple sites on-line and in its entirety as it is being reviewed page-by-page at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EOz12fh536M>.

across six *Topolino* volumes from 1949 to 1950.[2] Yet, despite superficially departing from Dante's narrative even further than does that Mickey Mouse story, "L'Inferno di Paperino" emulates the *Commedia*'s tone and spirit in more profound ways that indicate Chierchini and Marconi thoroughly understood this famously complex and protean source.

Though "L'Inferno di Topolino" and "L'Inferno di Paperino" differ widely in not only the kind and degree of their departures from Dante's text but also, as we shall see, the number of *Commedia* episodes they cover, Martina and Bioletto clearly laid the foundation for Chierchini, Marconi, and other graphic novelists to break with Dante, most overtly by adapting his literary cornerstone to what were then called "comic books."[3] Within no more than a few years of Dante's death in 1321, illuminators began depicting the *Commedia* in a corpus of miniatures that may be the largest for any non-biblical Western text.[4] And over the next six centuries other artists followed with renditions in prints, plays, movies, and many other forms of visual expression.[5] But perhaps not until "L'Inferno di Topolino" was Dante's first cantica presented as a pictorial parody for children.[6] While never completely ignoring the visual cues from

2 *Topolino* 7-12. For a very brief discussion of this story, see the first few lines in Maximilian Gröne two-paragraph section on "Parodie und Persiflage" in his chapter "Die Jenseitsreise als Medientransfer: Dantes *Divina Commedia* in Comic und Videogame" for *Comics – Übersetzungen und Adaptionen*, 125-140 (126-27). For more on Martina and Bioletto, begin with the Wikipedia entries on them at, respectively, <https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guido_Martina> and <https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Angelo_Bioletto>, both of which were last accessed August 18, 2024, as well as I.N.D.U.C.K.S. at <http://coa.inducks.org/>, last accessed August 18, 2024. For a more in-depth biography of Martina, see Valentina Schioppa, *Guido Martina: Il professore gentiluomo. Biografia del più celebre autore Disney dagli anni '40 agli anni '80* (Tricase: Youcanprint, 2014). And for more on Martina's work during Disney's "golden age," see Alberto Becattini and Alessandro Tesauro, *Guido Martina e l'età d'oro Disney in Italia* (Salerno: Alessandro Tesauro Editore, 2017). For a discussion of the evolution of this series across editions, see Roberta Manetti, "L'evoluzione delle parodie dantesche disneyane e delle riedizioni dell'*Inferno di Topolino*: Uno specchio dei tempi," *Perspectives Médiévales: Revue d'épistémologie des langues et littératures du Moyen Âge* 44 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.4000/peme.50529>, last accessed August 18, 2024. As of August 18, 2024, the series could be found for free in color at "L'Inferno Di TopolinoCANTO I-IX," <Scribd, https://www.scribd.com/document/210349127/L-Inferno-Di-Topolino-CANTO-I-IX>.

3 The distinction between a "comic book" and a "graphic novel" has been much debated and sometimes denied altogether. Among the numerous online discussions of their differences, one of the clearest, most concise, and perhaps most disinterested presentations is at <https://www.wikihow.com/Distinguish-Between-a-Comic-Book-and-a-Graphic-Novel>, last accessed August 18, 2024. Though there, and in many other arguments for a distinction, the number of volumes in which a story appears is considered crucial, I prefer to distinguish by the seriousness of the story's tone and whether it appeared before or after "graphic novel" was first coined by Richard Kyle in a 1964 newsletter from the Comic Amateur Press Alliance.

4 The literature on these miniatures is extensive and growing at a seemingly exponential rate. However, for the most thorough survey of their basic components, see Marcella Roddewig's *Dante Alighieri. "Die göttliche Komödie": Vergleichende Bestandsaufnahme der "Commedia"-Handschriften* (Stuttgart: A. Hiersemann, 1984), and for the largest collection of reproductions, as well as several informative essays by Charles Singleton, Peter Brieger, and Millard Meiss, see their *Illuminated Manuscripts of the "Divine Comedy"* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969).

5 The bibliography for *Commedia* appearances in these and almost any other form of media is vast. As with almost any matter related to Dante, perhaps the best place to start in researching any manifestation of any part of the *Commedia* is the "American Dante Bibliography," which can be reached from the home page of the Dante Society of America at <https://www.dantesociety.org/publications>, last accessed August 18, 2024.

6 For a brief but insightful discussion of this aspect with particular regard to "L'Inferno di Topolino," see Giovanni Picchiura, "Forme della parodia: le molteplici funzioni della similitudine nell'*Inferno di*

that extraordinarily descriptive text,[7] not to mention from such artistic predecessors as Gustave Doré,[8] Martina and Bioletto brighten and streamline Dante's narrative by simplifying its language, cast, and plot, eliminating many of its more nightmarish aspects, and rendering the rest in boldly outlined, richly colored, emphatically two-dimensional scenes that are likely to appeal to young children.[9]

Some simplifications in "L'Inferno di Topolino" are probably just byproducts of updating the *Commedia* for that audience, as when Dante's complex Virgil is replaced by Mickey's best friend Goofy, the very embodiment of a simpleton.[10] But Martina and Bioletto go well beyond such changes as they render Dante's text leaner, more accessible, and presumably more entertaining to beginning or barely literate readers. In addition to substituting established Disney characters for Dante's major figures, they occasionally even create new roles for such cartoon stalwarts as the Three Caballeros, who drop into the twelfth canto just long enough to quarrel with Mickey. Moreover, Martina and Bioletto eliminate many of Dante's secondary figures, particularly among the damned and including such flamboyant sinners as Vanni Fucci in Canto 25, Master Adam in Canto 30, and Bocca degli Abati in Canto 32. In tandem with such omissions, Martina and Bioletto also tend to skip comparatively minor episodes, such as the Pilgrim meeting the usurers in Canto 17, comparatively minor scenes within major episodes, such as the meeting with Ciacco among the gluttons in Canto 6, and (other) long oral exchanges, such as that in Canto 10 between the Pilgrim and Farinata, who is represented in this story by Peg Leg Pete and/or Donald Duck.[11] Moreover, when Martina and Bioletto do verbally articulate the *Commedia*,

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Topolino," in *Culture, livelli di cultura e ambienti nel Medioevo occidentale. Atti del IX Convegno della Società Italiana di Filologia Romanza* (Bologna, October 5-8, 2009), ed. Francesco Benozzo, Giuseppina Brunetti, Patrizia Caraffi, Andrea Fassò, Luciano Formisano, Gabriele Giannini, and Mario Mancini (Roma: Aracne, 2012), 843-60, and Hölter and Hölter, "Dante im Comic," 34-36. For a discussion of parody and one process for installing it throughout Disney adaptations of the *Commedia*, see Giovanni Vito Distefano, "Fenomeni di ibridazione nelle Parodie Disney di argomento dantesco," *Cahiers d'études romanes* 40 (2020), <http://journals.openedition.org/etudesromanes/10582> and last accessed August 18, 2024. And for a discussion of parody throughout this series of Disney adaptations, see Pier Paolo Argiolas, "La parodia Disney, fisionomia di un mondo mitico," in Pier Paolo Argiolas, Andrea Cannas, Giovanni Vito Distefano, Marina Guglielmi, *Le Grandi Parodie Disney, ovvero I Classici fra le nuvole* (Rome: Nicola Pesce Editore, 2013), and, less directly about parody per se, Andrea Cannas, "Un sistema mitico in continua evoluzione: le grandi parodie Disney," *Revista Italiano UERJ* 12 (2021): 44-60.

7 For an introduction to this oft-mentioned aspect of *Inferno*, see John A. Scott, "Topography of the *Comedy*," in his *Understanding Dante* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), 214-225 (esp. 217).

8 Doré's engravings for *Inferno*, which, as we will see below, play at least two significant roles in "L'Inferno di Topolino," were planned as early as 1855 and first published in 1861. His engravings for *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* were published in 1868. For more on them and their influence, begin with Aida Audeh, "Gustave Doré's Illustrations for Dante's *Divine Comedy*: Innovation, Influence, and Reception," in *Studies in Medievalism XVIII: Defining Medievalism(s) II*, ed. Karl Fugelso (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2009), 125-164.

9 For a demographic discussion of *Topolino*'s consumer base, see Bosco Tierno, "Translation, Pseudotranslation," esp. 270-271.

10 For an overview of Goofy as a Disney character, see the entry for him at "Disney Wiki," <https://disney.fandom.com/wiki/Goofy>, last accessed August 18, 2024.

11 While Donald and Pete match the number of sinners Dante's Pilgrim talks to among the arch-heretics of Canto 10, both of these Disney characters are far more like the combative Farinata degli Uberti than like the anxious Cavalcante de' Cavalcanti, who is the father of Dante's good friend Guido Cavalcante. Thus, it is difficult to be sure whether Pete, Donald, or both are meant to represent Farinata.

they favor summaries and approximations with shorter, less complex phrases, sentences, and passages, as, for example, the declaration by Dante's narrator-protagonist at the beginning of the first canto, "mi ritrovai per una selva oscura" (l. 2: "I found myself in a dark forest"), becomes "In una selva oscura mi trovai"; Charon's admonishment to the doomed in Canto 3, "Non isperate mai veder lo cielo:/ i' vegno per menarvi a l'altra riva/ ne le tenebre etterne, in caldo e 'n gelo" (ll. 85-87: "Don't hope to ever see heaven:/ I come to lead you to the other shore/ into eternal darkness, into fire and into ice") becomes "Le pene dell'Inferno ormai son pronte!" ("The punishments of hell are now ready!"); and a version of the last line over the gate of hell in Canto 3, "LASCIATE OGNI SPERANZA, O VOI CH'ENTRATE," ("ABANDON ANY HOPE, O YOU WHO ENTER") stands in for the entire inscription over the portal in Dante's text:

> PER ME SI VA NE LA CITTÀ DOLENTE,
> PER ME SI VA NE L'ETTERNO DOLORE,
> PER ME SI VA TRA LA PERDUTA GENTE.
>
> GIUSTIZIA MOSSE IL MIO ALTO FATTORE;
> FECEMI LA DIVINA PODESTATE,
> LA SOMMA SAPÏENZA E 'L PRIMO AMORE.
>
> DINANZI A ME NON FUOR COSE CREATE
> SE NON ETTERNE, E IO ETTERNO DURO.
> LASCIATE OGNE SPERANZA, VOI CH'INTRATE.
>
> THROUGH ME YOU ENTER THE SAD CITY,
> THROUGH ME YOU ENTER ENTERNAL GRIEF,
> THROUGH ME YOU ENTER AMONG THE LOST SOULS.
>
> JUSTICE MOVED MY HIGH MAKER;
> THE DIVINE POWER MADE ME,
> THE HIGHEST WISDOM AND THE PRIMAL LOVE.
>
> BEFORE ME NOTHING WAS MADE
> IF NOT ETERNAL, AND I ETERNALLY ENDURE.
> ABANDON ANY HOPE, O YOU WHO ENTER. (ll. 1-9).[12]

In accord with those means of making *Inferno* less forbidding, particularly for the many young children typically attracted to *Topolino* comic books,[13] Martina and Bioletto also render Dante's hell more anodyne. Though they incorporate many

12 For a brief discussion of the ways in which Martina alters Dante's language to a parody for children, see Bosold-DasGupta, "Dante 'travestito'," 52. For a slightly longer discussion of how Martina specifically adapts that language to Disney characters who utter it, see Bosold-DasGupta, "Dante 'travestito'," 52-53. For all quotations from the *Divine Comedy*, see *La Commedia secondo l'antica vulgate*, ed. Giorgio Petrocchi, Società Dantesca Italiana, Edizione Nazionale, 4 vols (1966-68; 2nd ed. Florence: Casa editrice Le lettere, 1994). Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine, and please note that I have retained the use of all capital letters for texts that appear that way in their source.

13 For more on the likely demographics of *Topolino*'s consumer base, see Bosco Tierno, "Translation, Pseudotranslation," esp. 270-271, as mentioned above in note 9.

aspects of his narrative that even (or perhaps especially) older viewers may find disturbing, such as demons whipping the false prophets in Canto 20, and though Martina and Bioletto actually add such gruesome scenes as a sadistic barber shop in Canto 5 and the Big Bad Wolf almost completely flayed by the Three Little Pigs where Canto 24 should be, they omit other *Commedia* episodes and characters that may have been difficult to explain even (or perhaps particularly) to children who had just endured the devastation of Italy during World War II. For example, the tyrants and the river of blood in which they soak in Canto 12 disappear, as do the suicides in the forest of Canto 13, and Count Ugolino gnaws on a soccer ball in Cantos 32–33 rather than Archbishop Ruggieri's head.[14] Moreover, as when, say, replacing most of the sodomites in Cantos 14-15 with a parable of repentance that revolves around a school dominated by *Pinocchio* characters, Martina and Bioletto often redirect Dante's plot towards experiences, values, and concerns typically associated with young children: props as well as settings are rendered in familiar contemporary forms, as when Goofy rides a bicycle into the first canto; lessons are adapted to the more secular, juvenile existence of a mid-twentieth-century Italian child, as when the pagan thinkers in Canto 4 suffer not (just) for their lack of Christian baptism but (also) for writing boring texts that make many students hate school[15]; dialogue is greatly reduced, as in the encounter noted above with Peg Leg Pete in Canto 10; action and expression are privileged, as when Mickey physically brawls with Pete across three frames and almost an entire page; and the growing Western impulse towards self-reflexivity, which was just beginning to filter down to post-war children, is reflected by a self-deprecatory ending in which Dante condemns the Disneyfication of his work by Martina and Bioletto, only grudgingly admits that this distortion might lure young readers into seeking the original version of the *Commedia*, and is given the last word via a patriotic statement of praise for Italy and a call for it to return to its former glory: "'Oh, Santa Italia, nido di dolcezza.../ O patria mia, solleva il capo affranto,/ Sorridi ancora, o bella fra le belle,/ O madre delle madri, asciuga il pianto'" ("Oh, Holy Italy, nest of sweetness…/ Oh my fatherland, lift your shattered head,/ Smile again, o beauty among the beauties,/ O mother of mothers, dry your tears").[16]

What remains after such streamlining and redirection is a framework of *Inferno*'s major sins and punishments bedecked and explained in a pictorial language that is likely to appeal to even the youngest viewers. Though the perspectival depth of the background is sometimes augmented by hatching and gradations in hue, the characters and almost all other elements of each scene are rendered in thick, crisp outlines wrapped around solid blocks of color. Some of these colors are rather subdued as part of the overall palette's tremendous variety, but many are quite bright and some are almost lurid.[17] They help the figures pop out from the darker

14 For more on the ways and possible reasons Martina and Bioletto make *Inferno* more child friendly, see Karl Fugelso, "A Mickey Mouse *Inferno*: Medievalist Legacies and the Marketing of the Middle Ages," *The Year's Work in Medievalism* 33 (2018): 40-48, esp. 41-44.

15 For more on the emphasis Martina and Bioletto place on teachers and schools, see Hölter and Hölter, "Dante im Comic," 35.

16 For brief discussions of the ways in which this self-reflexive sequence functions metanarratively, see Hölter and Hölter, "Dante im Comic," 36, and Bettina Bosold-DasGupta, "Dante 'travestito': Von Edoardo Sanguinetis *Commedia dell'Inferno* zum Comic," in *Dante Alighieri und sein Werk in Literatur, Musik und Kunst bis zur Postmoderne*, ed. Klaus Ley (Tübingen: Francke, 2010), 43-55 (esp. 53).

17 Hölter and Hölter note echoes of Doré's *Commedia* engravings in Bioletto's "Düsternis," 32.

backgrounds and literally, as well as figuratively, foreground the dynamic poses and extreme expressions the characters often strike in response to their circumstances, as when Mickey visibly shakes beneath his crimson robe in Canto 1 (erroneously labeled Canto 2 in the illustration) and raises a lemon-yellow hand against beasts who menace him amid a setting like that from which a branch reaches out in the previous frame and, as discussed below in more detail, pulls him into the first of the four Doré engravings for this canto.

Yet "L'Inferno di Topolino" retains enough echoes of its primary source to leave no doubt about that influence and to serve as a (re-)entry point to the *Commedia*. Though Martina and Bioletto cater to even the youngest members of *Topolino*'s typical late-1940s and early-1950s audiences, this narrative joins the *Inferno* in revolving around a mortal pilgrim traveling in a downward spiral through a dark underworld of broken rocks, turgid rivers, fetid pools, fire, and ice. And like Dante's protagonist, Mickey meets many sinners and their tormentors along the way, some of whom explain the transgressors' reasons for and/or degree of their suffering, and many of whom are described in accompanying stanze of terza rima. Indeed, many of Mickey's encounters with the damned are even labeled according to the corresponding canto in the *Commedia*, though sometimes, as with the first two, incorrectly.[18]

However, even those many parallels in structure and setting may not come as close to Dante's text as do some of the (other) themes and premises in "L'Inferno di Topolino." Like the *Commedia*'s narrator-protagonist, Mickey may be either dreaming his adventures while asleep, or seeing a conscious or semi-conscious vision, or physically visiting the afterworld, or some combination thereof. As suggested by the many different positions that even the earliest commentators have taken on this issue, the claim by Dante's narrator-protagonist that he was "pien di sonno" ("full of sleep") when he found himself in the dark forest with which his narrative begins leaves a great deal of room for interpretation as to precisely how he experienced the events to come.[19] And the same is true for the opening, eleven-frame sequence in which, at the end of playing the Pilgrim and Virgil on stage, Mickey and Goofy are mesmerized by a villain in the audience into believing they actually are those characters, meet confusion from Mickey's girlfriend Minnie about those new-found identities, go to a library to learn more about themselves, and, in front of a massive copy of the *Commedia* that conspicuously features the Doré engraving mentioned above, find themselves growing very tired. As a text box at left in the sequence's penultimate scene explains that "TOPOLINO CEDE AL SONNO, MENTRE PIPPO RESISTE ANCORA UN POCO" ("MICKEY GIVES IN TO SLEEP, WHILE GOOFY STILL RESISTS A LITTLE"), Goofy says, with his eyes closed, "IO MI SENTO MORIRE DAL SONNO...AHHH!" ("I FEEL LIKE I'M DYING FROM SLEEP…AHHH!") and rests his head on a desk, while Mickey says, "E IO...SOGNO DI

18 Martina and Bioletto label the start of thirteen cantos, but, as noted above, they sometimes do so incorrectly, and it is not always easy to determine the start of an unlabeled canto or the end of any labeled canto that immediately precedes an unlabeled one. For my part, I am only confident that I can identify Cantos 1-9 and 14-17. All of the rest stop and/or start amid other cantos and/or extra-narratival episodes or are lacking so much of Dante's narrative that it is difficult to know how they correlate to his divisions.

19 For more on this issue, especially in the context of *Commedia* images, and most particularly in the context of the titular manuscript miniature, see Karl Fugelso, "Illuminating Thresholds: Depicting Dante *pien di sonno* in Musée Condé MS 597," *Word & Image* 29 (2013): 443-455.

MORIRE...OHHHH..." ("AND I…DREAM OF DYING…OHHHH…"). Then, in the next scene, the branch reaches out from the engraving and pulls the now-wide-eyed, gulping Mickey into the image as a text box below him says "E COSÌ, LA MAGIA CONTINUA...MA CHE COSA ACCADRÀ DI TOPOLINO E PIPPO, ORA CHE SONO VERAMENTE NELL'INFERNO? FINIRANNO ARROSTITI O GELATI?..." ("AND SO, THE MAGIC CONTINUES…BUT WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO MICKEY AND GOOFY, NOW THAT THEY ARE TRULY IN HELL? WILL THEY END UP ROASTED OR FROZEN?..."). Is he indeed actually in hell? Is the narrative to come only a figment of his imagination? Like Dante himself, though even more explicitly, Martina and Bioletto leave that decision to the discretion of their audience.[20]

And as is appropriate in the wake of such an ambiguous beginning, indeed as is perhaps part of its purpose in both Dante's text and "L'Inferno di Topolino," the narrative subsequently unfolds as a commentary about not only the underworld but also life on Earth, particularly that of the mid-twentieth century. Terrestrial anachronisms, such as Goofy's bicycle, abound, and many of the sins and punishments have been adapted to foibles that were far more likely to be relevant to an Italian child of the late 1940s and early 1950s than an adult of the early trecento, much less some of the pre-fourteenth-century denizens of Dante's underworld. In addition to condemning Homer and his colleagues not (only) for being pagans but (above all) for boring children, Martina and Bioletto convert the gluttons' foul mud to sweet syrups, as pizza, hot dogs, and other treats, rather than rain, sleet, and hail, fall on them; Dante's political foe in Canto 8, Filippo Argenti, becomes a harsh schoolmaster eager to criticize Mickey and give him bad grades; the trees in Dante's thirteenth canto contain the souls of not suicides but mischievous children who, among other, unnamed transgressions, carved their names in trees and wooden furniture; the false counselors of Cantos 26-27 are no longer purely political figures such as Guido da Montefeltro, but bookies and other racketeers who deliberately give bad advice to the gamblers in their thrall; and they are followed by a succession of similarly adapted groups, such as children who qualify as falsifiers for skipping school by faking illness, and journalists as sowers of discord who lap up earth with their tongues like their research used to dig up dirt on divisive subjects.

Moreover, like the *Commedia*, "L'Inferno di Topolino" is not an unbiased account of either the terrestrial or subterrestrial world. Indeed, in accord with the redirection of Dante's literary classic towards a more juvenile audience, this graphic novel is perhaps even more didactic, or at least more overtly so, than his famously admonitory text.[21] Sprinkled among the many punishments tailored to the particular sins of the guilty are such moments as the Blue Fairy declaring in Canto 13 above the shambles of a schoolhouse made from the children turned into trees, "Da questo luogo vi farò fuggire,/ A patto che giuriate a capo chino/ D'essere buoni e studiosi in avvenire!" ("From this place I will let you all flee,/ Provided that you swear with bowed head/ to be good and studious in the future"), just before she turns to Mickey's harasser, Donald, and says, "E tu,.../ Ti salverai soltanto a condizione/ Di non far più

20 For a brief but interesting discussion of the metanarrative implications in this episode, see Bettina Bosold-DasGupta, "Dante 'travestito'," 51-52.

21 For a concise and easily accessible introduction to these matters, see Teodolinda Barolini, "*Inferno* 1: Myth Meets History, Isaiah Meets Aristotle," *Commento Baroliniano*, Digital Dante (New York: Columbia University Libraries, 2018), <https://digitaldante.columbia.edu/dante/divine-comedy/inferno/inferno-1/>, last accessed August 18, 2024.

dispetti a Topolino!" ("And you,…/ You will be saved only on condition/ that you no longer disrespect Mickey!"), and such as one of Mickey's former, unnamed teachers standing in for the sodomite Brunetto Latini on the fiery fields of Canto 15, pointing to a sign that states "CHI SI FERMA È PERDUTO MILLE ANNI OGNI MINUTO" ("WHOEVER STOPS HAS LOST A THOUSAND YEARS EVERY MINUTE"), and saying "VEDI? IO INCITAVO GLI ALTRI A FAR BENE, MA PERSONALMENTE MI COMPORTAVO MALE: COSÌ ORA LE FIAMME MI INCITANO A CORRERE!" ("YOU SEE? I MADE THE OTHERS DO GOOD, BUT PERSONALLY I COMPORTED MYSELF BADLY; SO NOW THE FLAMES FORCE ME TO RUN!").

And, perhaps not surprisingly, the moral and ethical dimensions of this didacticism join those of the *Commedia* in springing from fundamentally Christian, particularly Catholic, beliefs and values, beginning with the adoption of Dante's *contrapasso* penal system.[22] In having punishments tailored in kind and degree to the crimes for which they are instituted, Martina and Bioletto would seem to depart from Christ's emphasis on compassion and forgiveness, specifically his call to "turn the other cheek" rather than demand "an eye for an eye."[23] But as reflected in Dante's inscription over the gate of hell, particularly the line "GIUSTIZIA MOSSE IL MIO ALTO FATTORE," proportional punishment delivered in the spirit of fairness, rather than out of revenge, had come to be accepted by the early-fourteenth-century Church as a form of compassion in and of itself, as offering a consistency on which mortals could count and to which they could adjust their terrestrial behavior.[24] And, though departing from the Church's and Dante's frequent treatment of damnation to hell as irrevocable,[25] Martina and Bioletto underscore that motive by repeatedly allowing for the possibility of redemption even there, as when the Blue Fairy offers the children in Canto 13 a way out of their predicament. Indeed, the compassionate dimension of that offer is highlighted by the fact that she introduces the latter, and herself, by shouting "NON FATE MALE AI BAMBINI" ("DON'T HURT THE CHILDREN") at the demons gathering the demolished wood to remake the children as trees and thereby restart their suffering. As on the many occasions when Dante stresses that the blessed and the damned are receiving their just deserts in accord with divine wisdom and compassion,[26] Martina and Bioletto constantly reinforce that one's earthly behavior has consequences in the afterlife.

Nor are the parallels between the *Commedia* and "L'Inferno di Topolino" confined to such general themes and premises, for Martina and Bioletto often invoke the

22 For a concise and accessible introduction to the definition of "contrapasso" and the ways in which Dante applies it in the *Commedia*, see Scott, "The 'law' of *contrapasso* in hell and purgatory," in chapter 7, "Dante's Other World: Moral Order," of *Understanding Dante*, 198-201. For fuller yet no-less-accessible introductions to Dante's theology as a whole, see the rest of that chapter, and Christopher Ryan, "The Theology of Dante," in *The Cambridge Companion to Dante*, ed. Rachel Jacoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 136-152.

23 *Matthew* 5:38-40.

24 For more on this, see Ryan, "The Theology of Dante," and, in the same collection, Peter S. Hawkins, "Dante and the Bible," 120-135.

25 See Jeffrey T. Schnapp's discussion of this infernal characteristic relative to the mobility allowed by Dante's (and the Church's) concept of Purgatory, in "Introduction to *Purgatorio*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Dante*, 192-207 (esp. 195).

26 For multiple entry points to this issue, see Scott, "Dante's Other World: Moral Order"; Ryan, "The Theology of Dante"; Hawkins, "Dante and the Bible"; Schnapp, "Introduction to *Purgatorio*"; John Freccero, "Introduction to *Inferno*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Dante*, 172-191; and Rachel Jacoff, "'Shadowy Prefaces': An Introduction to *Paradiso*," in that same volume, 208-225.

sequence and details of Dante's episodes. The gluttons Mickey encounters may be immersed in sweet syrups rather than fetid mud, but those sinners still appear with Cerberus, after the barber shop that Martina and Bioletto substitute for the lustful in Dante's Canto 5, and just before the avaricious and prodigal, who, in accord with the *Commedia*, are explicitly labeled as appearing in Canto 7. Filippo Argenti may be replaced by a highly critical schoolmaster, but that substitute and the rest of the wrathful still appear in the Styx two cantos later, as denoted by a label to that effect in an adjacent text box. The flatterers of Canto 18 may be conflated with the quarrelsome barrators of Cantos 21-23, but that would appear to be only because Martina and Bioletto omitted sins that were much more difficult to explain, as in the case of the simonists from Canto 19, the diviners and magicians from Canto 20, and the hypocrites and thieves from Cantos 23-26. And the flatterers and barrators still appear just before the bookies and other false counselors in Cantos 26-27, are immersed in liquids (albeit hot cocoa, rather than excrement for the flatterers and boiling pitch for the barrators), and, in the role of Dante's wily lawyer from Navarro, Brer Rabbit nearly pulls Mickey into the chocolate and does pull in Brer Bear. Despite deleting many of Dante's scenes, at least somewhat altering all others in a declared effort to make them more child-friendly,[27] and even adding such episodes as the Three Little Pigs flaying the Big Bad Wolf, Martina and Bioletto adhere closely enough to the *Commedia*'s plot, premises, and themes that, even without the title and explanation on the first two pages, their primary source of inspiration could hardly be overlooked.

Chierchini and Marconi, on the other hand, are much coyer about referencing Dante's text, especially at the beginning of their narrative and in its initial publication. While their source is quite clear from the title of their story's repackaging in the 2016 compilation *"L'Inferno di Topolino" e altre storie ispirate a Dante Alighieri*,[28] and while the mere mention of an inferno in the title of their tale may invite audiences to suspect a link to the most ubiquitous of all Italian poems, the connection is far from explicit in that tale's title or for quite a while within the narrative itself. While the very first frame of "L'Inferno di Topolino" features Mickey dressed as Dante beneath the title of the novel and next to a paragraph that explains he is playing that part in a theatrical version of "UNA...DIVINA COMMEDIA," the first scene of "L'Inferno di Paperino" features Donald dressed as himself below the novel's title and recoiling from a demon who is seated on a rock at right, while a text box just beneath the flames at left declares, "La storia che stiamo per presentare è diversa dalle solite! Tra l'altro, essa comincia come molte altre terminano..." ("The story that we are about to present is different from the usual! Among other things, it starts as many others end…"). In fact, this narrative's first concrete connection to Dante's text does not come until 15 pages after the opening scene, when Donald discovers that his nephews Huey, Dewey, and Louie have packed a copy of the *Commedia* among his supplies for a solo canoe trip down the Colorado River. After 81 frames of Donald fleeing his uncle, slipping on a banana peel amid trash-covered streets, finding his car buried under more trash, receiving tickets from a police officer for improperly removing that trash, suffering from a bureaucratic maze while trying to pay those

27 As when their self-reflexive ending for the narrative has Mickey point out to Dante how much children appreciate the ways in which Bioletto's and Martina's departures from *Inferno* make it more accessible and engaging.

28 For this citation, see note 1, above.

tickets, getting caught in a traffic jam on the way home, choking on the fumes from a forest fire when he finally escapes the city, being blasted by a neighbor's new stereo upon arriving at his house, collapsing in bed with "FORTE DEPRESSIONE PSICOMOTORIA, CON ASTENIA GENERALE" ("STRONG PSYCHOMOTOR DEPRESSION, WITH GENERAL ASTHENIA"), and embarking on the canoe trip as an escape from those pressures, he reads Dante's first line, declares it "SIMPATICO" ("AGREEABLE"), claims "LA POESIA RILASSA MOLTO PIÙ DELLA PROSA" ("POETRY RELAXES MUCH MORE THAN PROSE"), and, with a gentle snore, unambiguously falls into a dream that covers only Dante's first eight cantos and does it much more loosely than "L'Inferno di Topolino."

Indeed, even Chierchini's and Marconi's formatting is less faithful and extensive in its references to the *Commedia* than that of Martina and Bioletto. Unlike "L'Inferno di Topolino," "L'Inferno di Paperino" does not include text boxes that label the relevant cantos, correctly or otherwise. Indeed, Chierchini and Marconi never explicitly refer to such divisions. And, while "L'Inferno di Paperino" does have passages in terza rima, they are far fewer than those in "L'Inferno di Topolino" and are reserved solely for third-person descriptive summaries of the plot, rather than following Martina's (and Dante's) lead by having verses with the protagonist's first-person perspectives (or those of his guide, Gyro Gearloose, who, as Archimedes, substitutes for Virgil) on what he is thinking, feeling, and experiencing. Moreover, Chierchini and Marconi stop Donald's underworld journey at the Styx, rather than join Martina and Bioletto in touching on moments throughout Dante's first cantica.

Immediately after ending Donald's subterrestrial trip there, Chierchini and Marconi propel Donald back to the canoe in which he began his journey and, as, with eyes closed, he struggles against a web of fishing lines that he initially perceives as tentacles from the depths of Styx, reinforce the premise that he dreamed his adventures while asleep. Yet this departure from the ambiguity regarding how the Pilgrim and Mickey experience their underworld sojourn does not keep Chierchini and Marconi from commenting on the terrestrial world of Donald or, implicitly, that of their contemporaneous audience. Indeed, even (or perhaps particularly) after their extensive opening sequence solely in Donald's terrestrial world, "L'Inferno di Paperino" is much more explicitly about life on Earth than is "L'Inferno di Topolino" or perhaps even the *Commedia*. Almost all of the sins described by Chierchini and Marconi revolve around exclusively contemporary circumstances and behaviors, particularly those Donald encountered in the story before he fell asleep. While "L'Inferno di Topolino" features a few thoroughly post-medieval and even post-Renaissance sins, such as the journalists sowing discord by digging up gratuitous dirt on their subjects, and while some of the sins covered by Chierchini and Marconi had pre-modern manifestations, such as the gluttons and misers punished just before Donald comes to the Styx in Canto 8, most of hell in "L'Inferno di Paperino" features such transgressions as littering, fetishizing cars, running stop signs, terrorizing pedestrians, and being addicted to radio and television. Moreover, the punishments for these sins are often also explicitly contemporary, as when: the litterers are pummeled with washing machines and other modern garbage in their whirlwind; the car lovers and speeders must carry their vehicles on their backs for all eternity; and drivers who terrorized pedestrians are themselves chased by cars.

But, while these and all of the other punishments in "L'Inferno di Paperino" still adhere to the *contrapasso* approach of fitting their crime in kind and degree, and

though this story does not completely escape (other) Christian roots, for it, too, builds on the "Golden Rule" of treating others as one would want to be treated and it, too, is rooted in Catholic notions of guilt and redemption,[29] Chierchini and Marconi are less explicit than Martina and Bioletto in refracting their narrative through Christian belief. While "L'Inferno di Paperino" features multiple references to "Belzebù" ("Beelzebub"), including an apparent substitute by that figure for Dante's Minos in Canto 5, Chierchini and Marconi do not use the more loaded term "Satan," apart from echoing the first line of Dante's Canto 7, "'*Pape Satán, pape Satán aleppe!*'" ("'*Pape Satán, pape Satán aleppe!*'"), by having a demon say to Donald at the outset of his underground adventure, "'PAPE SATAN! PAPE SATAN, PAPERINO!'" ("'PAPE SATAN! PAPE SATAN, DONALD DUCK!'"). And rather than join Martina and Bioletto in referring to Count Ugolino from Cantos 32-33 and to some of the other doomed as "peccator[i]" ("sinners") and his and his colleagues' transgressions as "peccate" ("sins"), Chierchini and Marconi refer to them as the "dannati" ("damned"), the "condannati" ("condemned"), "anime perse" ("lost souls"), "perdute gente" ("lost people"), or by their particular transgressions, as with the "taccagni" ("stingy").

Chierchini and Marconi also depart from Martina and Bioletto in having many sins and punishments oriented to a greater degree around such adult transgressions as ignoring stop signs, but that difference may not be as noticeable, much less extreme, as some of the other ways in which "L'Inferno di Paperino" departs from Dante's plot, even apart from ending Donald's underworld journey at the Styx and introducing that trip with a long preface about his life on earth. Though Chierchini and Marconi neither rearrange nor omit as many sins as do Martina and Bioletto, much less insert such long and incongruous episodes as the flaying of the Big Bad Wolf, "L'Inferno di Paperino" does tend to devote far less text and far fewer scenes, frames, and pages to each episode. In "L'Inferno di Topolino," for example, the gluttons and their tormentors are the main subjects of 21 stanze of terza rima, 34 spoken passages, and 15 scenes spread across four pages, whereas these underworld denizens are portrayed only once by Chierchini and textually singled out by him and Marconi only in an accompanying text box that states "Alla gola concesser gran finezze./ abbuffando se' stessi oltre misura:/ adesso mangian solo le schifezze!" ("To their gluttony they would bestow great delicacies./ stuffing themselves beyond measure:/ now they eat only garbage!"); Donald's declaration amid that scene, "PUNIZIONE APPROPRIATISSIMA, PER QUESTI GOLOSONI!" ("PUNISHMENT MOST APPROPRIATE, FOR THESE GLUTTONS!"); and Gyro's note one frame earlier that "NELLO PROSSIMO GIRONE VEDRAI PUNITI LI AMANTI DELL'IMBANDITA TAVOLA!" ("IN THE NEXT GROUP YOU WILL SEE PUNISHED THE LOVERS OF THE FULL TABLE!").

Moreover, though as with the seven scenes and many words devoted to the glutton's demonic cook, Martina and Bioletto sometimes depart from the core as well as detail of the sins Dante covers (never mind those he does not), they do not do so nearly as often or to nearly as great a degree as do Chierchini and Marconi. Especially when updating the *Commedia* and/or rendering it friendlier to children, "L'Inferno di Paperino" often strays far from not only the particular circumstances of Dante's sinners but also the kind of transgressions and sometimes even of the

29 For widely accessible introductions to these issues in the context of the *Commedia*, see Scott, "Dante's Other World: Moral Order"; Ryan, "The Theology of Dante"; and Hawkins, "Dante and the Bible."

impulse(s) to which he ascribes their behavior. While loving one's car or television too much are, in their preoccupation with earthly things, not in the spirit of much Christian doctrine and belief, and while driving one's car recklessly, playing one's media device too loudly, or carelessly disposing of one's garbage are not very considerate, they are comparatively minor peccadilloes relative to those in the *Commedia* and even to most of those in "L'Inferno di Topolino," and they are far less difficult to explain to young children and/or likely to horrify them than, say, carnal lust or suicide.

These departures in content are often accompanied by a faster narrative pace than that of the *Commedia* or even "L'Inferno di Topolino," and not just because Chierchini and Marconi have far less text and almost always devote fewer illustrations to each comparable (and many a non-comparable) sin than do Martina and Bioletto. Episodes with fewer frames in "L'Inferno di Paperino" not surprisingly tend to have at least one more and sometimes many more scenes per frame than does "L'Inferno di Topolino," which often leads to a busier appearance within each image, but it is the figures' compositions, poses, gestures, and facial expressions that may be most responsible for the greater dynamism of Chierchini's scenes. The litterers seemingly cartwheel through the air as they are pummeled with trash; the drivers who terrorized pedestrians race headlong with mouths wide open and arms outstretched until they themselves are hit and go flying; the sinners addicted to media devices grimace, clutch their ears, and tumble backwards as they are bombarded with sound and by the devices themselves; the gluttons squint and grimace as they are forced to swallow putrid concoctions; and the miserly cry copious tears as they are forced to take sacks of money from a bank and dump them in a volcano. Even Donald and Gyro strike highly expressive poses on the few occasions when they are not shown walking between those even more dynamic scenes of the doomed.

As part of that increased energy and pace, Donald and Gyro do not stop to talk to many of the damned, and, indeed, few of those lost souls are singled out in the same way as in "L'Inferno di Topolino," much less the *Commedia*. In tandem with the comparatively large overall reduction of text in this illustration cycle, the transgressors are confined to short, rather generic comments that match their own anonymity and depart sharply from the one, major shift in particular characters from that of "L'Inferno di Topolino" and of the *Commedia*: the substitution of Archimedes for Virgil. No reason is given within "L'Inferno di Paperino" for that change, but, if the overall reduction in singular characters among the doomed was not enough to signal the liberties Chierchini and Marconi felt free to take with Dante's narrative, this substitution certainly does.

Far less freedom from the *Commedia* is found in many of the settings within "L'Inferno di Paperino," particularly with regard to distant backdrops. Perhaps because of the extraordinary detail in Dante's descriptions of the Pilgrim's surroundings,[30] as well as the long artistic tradition engendered by that comparative minuteness,[31] Chierchini follows his predecessors' lead in often showing the

30 As stated above, in note 7, see Scott, "Topography of the *Comedy*," 214-225 (esp. 217), for more on this matter.

31 The launching of this tradition whose subsequent history has been chronicled in myriad sources on post-medieval and post-miniature images of Dante's text is perhaps best described by Peter Brieger's early but expert and still-relevant remarks on it throughout both "Pictorial Commentaries to the

underworld as spiraling ramps of bare ground flanked by walls of broken rock. But he does not do so as frequently as does Bioletto, particularly when not portraying infernal denizens mentioned in the *Commedia*, and his scenes are usually much lighter than those described by Dante, those illustrated by many of Chierchini's artistic predecessors, including Bioletto, and than is probably appropriate for an underground hell. For example, the corrupt bureaucrats who immediately succeed the litterers are bashed with ink stamps and wrung through printers on a slick, bare, sometimes gridded ground that meets a light blue sky occupied by only these sinners (in the form of official documents); the dangerous drivers are seen on gray or pink pavement beneath an empty purple or gray sky; and the media addicts are bashed in a space that seems to contain nothing other than them, their tormentors, and, in one of their four scenes, Donald.

The anachronisms among these atextual settings are only some of many in "L'Inferno di Paperino," as we have seen, but unlike, say, Goofy's bike, they may at least in part be a mere byproduct of a more simplified approach to art than is found in "L'Inferno di Topolino." Bioletto includes far less detail than do many earlier *Commedia* illustrators, most notably the artist of the engraving that seems to pull Mickey into his journey through the afterlife–Doré.[32] But "l'Inferno di Topolino" has much more detail in many instances, even though its scenes are often much smaller in scale, than "L'Inferno di Paperino"; Chierchini favors large blank fields of consistent color unmodulated by hatching much less gradations of hue, and, when he portrays spatial depth, it is often only via checkering of the ground or a few layers of overlapping scenery, as in Donald's encounter with Beelzebub, for his compositions are dominated by efficiently simple, comparatively thick outlines that quickly and clearly articulate the basic components of each image. While sophisticated viewers, presumably adults in particular, might appreciate the economy, confidence, and even forcefulness embodied by this approach, its emphasis on clear communication of basic concepts in lieu of optical realism and (other) artistic nuances overtly caters to a younger, presumably less sophisticated audience.

This simplification of the art is complemented by the degree to which, even apart from featuring fewer words and favoring action over speaking, Chierchini and Marconi greatly exceed Martina in simplifying Dante's text. Though "L'Inferno di Paperino" features transgressions that are more commonly committed by adults, it does so in language that (otherwise) caters to a younger, less literate reader. Far less knowledge about or interest in history, particularly that before modern times, is assumed, and not only episodes and scenes, but also passages, sentences, and even words tend to be shorter and less complex, as, for examples, the "acqua del color del fiele" ("water the color of gall") of the Styx becomes "acque scure e cupe" ("dark and gloomy waters"), and as Charon's dialogue shrinks from 30 words spread across four speech-bubbles, including one bubble in which he says "UNO ALLA VOLTA! AVANTI C'È POSTO!" ("ONE AT A TIME! THERE'S ROOM AHEAD!"), to just "AVANTI C'È POSTO!" ("THERE'S ROOM AHEAD!").

Commedia" (81-113) and "Analysis of the Illustrations by Canto" (115-208) in *Illuminated Manuscripts of the "Divine Comedy"*.

32 For more on Doré's unprecedented level of detail, and on the technical developments behind it, see Audeh, "Gustave Doré's Illustrations for Dante's *Divine Comedy*."

That and the many other ways in which we have seen "L'Inferno di Paperino" depart from the literary surface of its primary source even more than does "L'Inferno di Topolino" may be owing to the fact that the latter and other early graphic novels opened the door to parody of literary cornerstones via this medium, or because of the broader contemporaneous movement away from reverence for so-called "classics," or because of shifts in readership toward older (and wealthier) audiences for graphic novels,[33] or because of the greater distance in time from the completion of the *Commedia* in the early fourteenth century and from its resurgence as a political symbol in the nineteenth century,[34] or because of some combination thereof. But regardless of the reason(s) for this greater departure, "L'Inferno di Paperino" paradoxically comes closer in doing so to the *Commedia*'s tone and spirit. While Teodolinda Barolini, Kevin Brownlee, and other scholars have recently underscored the many ways that Dante acknowledges, respects, and often builds on his predecessors,[35] the *Commedia* still represents a significant break in some ways from many and sometimes all of those forerunners, particularly in the degree to which Dante renders even the most serious and sacrosanct subjects more accessible. By couching a first-hand account of visiting the afterworld in vernacular terza rima liberally sprinkled with not only earthly events and terrestrial politics but also gossip and even fart jokes, he departs quite radically from the traditional treatment of such subjects in grave, no-nonsense Latin that caters to elite audiences and leaves little room to doubt the significance of its narrative.[36]

Thus, even as "L'Inferno di Paperino" echoes and in many ways surpasses "L'Inferno di Topolino" in departing from the *Commedia*'s most literal levels, Chierchini and Marconi come closer than Martina and Bioletto to the core of Dante's text. While still somewhat invoking the *Commedia*'s format, pacing, arrangement, and content, they challenge the traditional reverence for Dante's text as a whole and thereby emulate the spirit and tone with which Dante himself departed from the literary past. Even as they seem to resist his authority, they paradoxically pay homage to it on another, deeper, much more meaningful level that invites reinterpretation of, and perhaps new appreciation for, many other ostensibly irreverent interpretations of the *Commedia*.

33 For more on the aging of the comic-book buying population in Italy and elsewhere, begin with Heidi MacDonald's condescending but informative article, "Report Says 25% of Comic Readers Are over 65," at *The Beat*, <http://www.comicsbeat.com/report-says-25-of-comics-readers-are-over-65/>, last accessed August 18, 2024.

34 For a concise, accessible, source-based account of these developments as a subtext of the *Commedia*'s reception as a whole over the last seven centuries, see Michael Caesar, *Dante: The Critical Heritage* (New York and London: Routledge, 1989).

35 Teodolinda Barolini, "Dante and the Lyric Past," in *The Cambridge Companion to Dante*, 14-33, and Kevin Brownlee, "Dante and the Classical Poets," in that same collection, 100-119.

36 In at least somewhat resisting this position, Barolini and Brownlee provide an excellent introduction to it and the massive bibliography that at least touches on it.

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