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ARTICLES

Dante between Furor and Studies / *Dante entre o furor e os estudos*

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ABSTRACT
This article analyzes a polemic of Italian Humanism around Dante Alighieri (1265-1321). In that period, intellectuals such as Cristoforo Landino (1424-1498) and Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) interpreted Dante's writing through the platonic prism of the *Phaedrus*, that is, as someone who was granted the grace to contemplate the divine and the power to describe it. Decades earlier, however, Coluccio Salutati (1331-1406) and Leonardo Bruni (1370-1444) had already attributed to Dante the merit of focusing on formal studies and, with that, being able to develop expressive artifices to his poetry on its own. For the analysis of the different readings, excerpts in which Dante gives evidence of his path and intellectual maturity will be observed, as well as those in which it is possible to observe the poet's role in the dissemination of formal knowledge in line with his ethical values.
KEYWORDS: Dante Alighieri; Humanism; Neoplatonism

RESUMO
Este artigo analisa uma polêmica do Humanismo italiano envolvendo Dante Alighieri (1265-1321). Naquele período, intelectuais como Cristóforo Landino (1424-1498) e Marsílio Ficino (1433-1499) interpretavam a escrita de Dante pelo prisma platônico do Fedro, isto é, como alguém a quem foram concedidos a graça de contemplar o divino e o poder de retratá-lo. Décadas antes, no entanto, Coluccio Salutati (1331-1406) e Leonardo Bruni (1370-1444) já haviam atribuído a Dante o mérito de ter se debruçado sobre os estudos formais e, com isso, ter sido capaz de desenvolver artifícios expressivos à sua poesia por conta própria. Para a análise das diferentes leituras, serão observados trechos em que Dante dá indícios de seu percurso e amadurecimento intelectual, assim como aqueles em que é possível observar a atuação do poeta na difusão do conhecimento formal em consonância com seus valores éticos.
PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Dante Alighieri; Humanismo; Neoplatonismo

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1 Landino *versus* Bruni

In 1481, the humanist philosopher Cristoforo Landino dedicated two chapters of the introduction of his commentary to the *Comedy* to one of the themes that will stir up the intellectual discussions of that historical moment, when Greek thought, and especially Plato, returned with renewed strength to Western Europe.[1] In his *Proem*, Landino observes the "divine furor," a phenomenon that occurs when a poet's mind is kidnapped by the muses to the Empyrean, home of the blessed and of the Christian divinity. During this possession, part of the superior nature was revealed to the poet, that necessary truth to the imaginative force as a model of things to be sung by the poet. Landino, therefore, states that the attempt of those who seek to become a poet without such ecstasy is in vain, because the art of forging the poetic word for the benefit of its true expressive properties was outside human limits, but in the domain of the divine:

> Our mind, therefore, strives to imitate [the image revealed to it]. And such imitation is of two types: there are those who delight in the harmony of the voice with musical instruments, like the frivolous musicians of the common people, and there are those who have a more in-depth judgment, who with measured verses express the intimate senses of their mind; it is only these who, stimulated by the divine spirit, can write profound verses full of doctrine. This is what Plato calls poetry, which delights the ear not only with the softness of the voice, like that common music, but it also expresses high and secret divine senses, and with heavenly ambrosia feeds the mind. This *divine furor*, as we speak about poetic art, is said to come from the Muses (Landino, 1481, c.9v-10r).[2]

[1] In previous centuries, Greek texts were already translated into Latin by prominent figures such as Robert Grosseteste, Willem van Moerbeke, and Leonzio Pilato; but the revival of Greek letters in the West is attributed to the period of Emmanuel Chrysoloras in Florence (1397-1400). The Byzantine had taken part of his library to that city as material for teaching Greek at the University (*Studio*) of Florence, at the invitation of the chancellor and philologist Coluccio Salutati. It will be, more generally, a series of facts that determine the 15th century as an intense period of movement of people, codices, and books that took Greek letters to Europe from a philological perspective, among these: the translation project of Pope Nicholas V, the library project of Cardinal Bessarion, the library of the collector Niccolò Niccoli passed on to the banker and patron Cosimo de' Medici (the Elder), the fall of Constantinople, in addition to the typographic work of Aldo Manuzio. Cf. Speranzi, 2011.

[2] In Italian: "Ingegnasi adunque l'animo nostro d'imitare questa; ma tale imitazione è di due spetie. Imperochè altri sono che si dilectano del concento della voce et degli strumenti musici, et questi sono vulgari et leggieri musici; altri e quali sono di più grave giudicio, con misurati versi exprimano gl'intimi sensi della mente loro; et questi sono quegli che concitati da divino spirito possono gravissimi et sententiosissimi versi scrivere. Et questa da Platone è decta poesia, la quale non solamente con la suavità della voce dilecta gl'orecchi, chome quella vulgare musica, ma chome dixi alti et arcani et divini sensi discrive, et di celeste ambrosia pasce la mente. Et questo divino furore, chome trattando dell'arte poetica

Defender of an intimate relationship between poetry and theology as foundations for the civility exalted by Humanism, Landino will play a prominent role in the celebration of Dante's *Comedy* as a symbol, in poetry, of the classical and contemporary values that Lorenzo de' Medici's Florence had already been rediscovering for some generations as a strategy for the cultural affirmation of artistic thought based on the ancient model. As happened in the promotion of arts, used as an instrument of political power since Lorenzo's grandfather – Cosimo the Elder –, the process of elevating the figure of Dante as a civil model occurred in that century since Coluccio Salutati, who, after Boccaccio, acted in defense of Dante's elocution, and after Petrarch, he acted in defense of the *studia humanitatis* for the interpretation of the values of antiquity.[3]

It is possible, however, to see from the quoted excerpt from Landino that the theory brought there was not new. It was presented to him above all through the charm of his contemporary Marsilio Ficino with his reading of the *Phaedrus*, a dialogue in which Plato (245a; 1996, p. 70) details the origins of the human soul[4] and the contact that the poet's mind could reestablish with the world of perfect ideas, of non-place and non-time.[5] Some examples of these poets "abducted" by the Muses would have been Hesiod, Homer and King David, among others. And, as expected, when bringing up this theory in the introduction to the *Comedy*, Landino does not refrain from listing Dante among these.

dicemmo, vogliono che proceda dalle Muse." A synthesis of the same ideas had already appeared in *Prolusione dantesca* (*c.* 1474), Landino's inaugural class on *Comedy* at the Florence *Studio*. Cf. Landino, 2016.

[3] Salutati, in addition to valuing Dante as a source of doctrine on free will (with reference to *Purg*. XVI 70-2), he exalts the poet's eloquence in his *De fato et fortuna* (I 3 e III 11-12; 1985, pp. 17-19 e pp. 185-206) and in an epistle to his disciple Poggio Bracciolini (*Epistolario*, vol. IV, p. 161 *apud* Gilson, 2019, p. 97). Other important figures in the construction of this heroic image of Dante are, still in the first half of the 15th century: Francesco Filelfo, *Studio* teacher and public reader of *Comedy* in the 1430s; Matteo Palmieri, author of a *Vita civile* (Ed. 1982) in the same period; just like Leonardo Bruni.

[4] At that moment, the soul "contemplated in God, as in a mirror, the wisdom, justice, harmony and beauty of the divine nature"; see Landino, 1481, *op. cit*. As Gilson notes (2019, p. 184), the reading of Dante and Virgil associated with Plato has been present since the first commentators on Dante, but Ficino's emphasis is "out of the ordinary."

[5] Landino cites as sources "Pythagoras, Empedocles, Heraclitus and, finally, the divine Plato," the same ones already mentioned by Marsilio Ficino in his letter to Pellegrino Agli (Figline, December 1, 1457; Ficino, 2016, p. 297). In *Prolusione dantesca* (*op. cit.*), the other source mentioned by Landino are the *Tusculanae Disputationes* (I 26, 64; 1996, pp. 64-7) by the "platonic Tulio." But mentions of "divine furor" also appear in other writings by Cicero, such as *Pro Archia* (VIII, 18; 1993, pp. 14-17), *De divinatione* (I 37, 80; 1999, pp. 66-67) and *De oratore* (II 46, 194; 1994, pp. 436-437).

Until that moment, mentions of *Comedy* were not usually preceded by the adjective "divine" which soon became enshrined in the title,[6] and not even the figure of the poet was normally seen as prophetic, as the step towards the sacralization of work and author takes place precisely in the Neoplatonic circle of Florence that we observe here. An example of this is what Ficino says, in an appendix to the same introduction by Landino: Dante is, "after two centuries, resurrected and restored to his homeland, already gloriously crowned (...). And he returns truly with a divine appearance."[7] This results in not only the consolidation of the poet as an ideal intellectual due to his aesthetic-artistic qualities, but also because the practical ends of moral philosophy are recognized in him in favor of politics and civility, in which a linguistic ideology in favor of the *Volgare* language once again comes back with force in Medici's Florence.[8]

Due to this cultural impulse at a time of broad support for the arts, the book with Landino's comments will become one of the most famous Italian incunabula of its time and with wide circulation.[9] It is possible to conjecture that the fateful addition of the adjective "divine" to the title *Comedy* was a consequence of Landino's writings, since the first edition of the poem in which it is read in this way was printed a few decades later, in 1555.

At the beginning of that same century, there were already those who knew the Platonic theory about the rage of the muses and were against its attribution to Dante:

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[6] The first mention of a "divine Comedy" is by Giovanni Boccaccio (*Vita di Dante* §185; 2021, p. 82), and the title of the poem will be recorded from the edition by Ludovico Dolce (see Alighieri, 1555). It is worth remembering the common use of the adjective, already applied on other occasions by Boccaccio to the "divine poet Homer" (*Vita di Dante* §96; 2021, p. 57) and to the "divine works of Virgil" (*Vita di Dante* §192; 2021, p. 84); and by Petrarch who, on the other hand, restricts it to Virgil's *Aeneid* (*Seniles* IV v 12; 2019, p. 315).

[7] In Latin: "Florentia iam diu mesta, sed tandem leta, Danthi suo Aligherio post duo ferme secula iam redivivo, et in patriam restituto, ac denique coronato, congratulatur (...) Conversus est tibi mortalis prior ille vultus in immortalem atque divinum." Dante had been exiled from Florence in 1302, a hometown he would never return to. This condemnation derives from his opposition to the policy of the Roman curia, represented there by the Black Guelphs.

[8] *Volgare* would be the "natural" language, as opposed to the "noble and artificial" Latin. The conscious process of elevating an Italian *Volgare* to erudite writing is explained by Dante in *Convivio* and in *De vulgari eloquentia*, but it lost strength in the following generations also due to the little circulation of these treaties. A resumption of this purpose occurred in 1441, with the holding of the *Certame coronario*, a poetry competition in the *Volgare* language created by Leon Battista Alberti and sponsored by Piero de' Medici, father of Lorenzo the Magnificent.

[9] With a wide circulation and with more than 160 copies still remaining today, the work was financed by Bernardo degli Alberti, nephew of Leon Battista Alberti (Tropea, 2021, pp. 142-143).

Leonardo Bruni, responsible for the first translation of the *Phaedrus* into Latin.[10] Having been one of the most prominent students of Coluccio Salutati and the Byzantine Emmanuel Chrysoloras in Florence, Bruni had participated in the vanguard of that revival of Greek letters in Western Europe, reaching the position of chancellor of the Florentine Republic (from 1427 until his death in 1444). As an important intellectual and politician from Arezzo, one way he found to extol the culture of the land that had entrusted him with the main municipal administrative position was to write about the illustrious Florentine. Thus was born the *Life of Dante* (1436), a sophisticated biography used to promote and celebrate the city of Florence, a work in which the poet embodies the figure of an ideal citizen.[11] In this, Dante's writing method is contrasted with that which could be received freely and without his knowledge:

> His chief study was poetry: not dry, poor, or fantastic poetry, but such as is impregnated, enriched and confirmed by true knowledge and many disciplines. (...) One class, then, is formed of those who become poets through an inner abstraction of the soul [like St. Francis, Orpheus, and Hesiod]. The other class create their poetry by means of knowledge and study, by discipline, art, and forethought. Of this second sort was Dante. For it, was by study of philosophy, theology, astrology, arithmetic, and geometry, the reading of history, the meditations on many and various books, and by watching and fatigue in his studies, that he acquired the knowledge which he was to adorn and unfold in his poetry (Bruni, *The Life of Dante*).[12]

Concerned with associating Dante with an ethical and political program of civil proto-humanism, Bruni interprets his writing as the result of an individual effort based on texts that preceded him, that is, as the fruit of a poetic-philosophical work constructed from theoretical authorities, to be highlighted as the work of a wise and literate man and

[10] The partial translation is published in 1424. Bruni (*Ep*. VI 1; 2007, vol. 2 pp. 36-40) also talks about the poetic furor in a letter to Giovanni Marrasio (October 7, 1429).

[11] In a biographical and historiographical reflection in the proem of the work, Bruni says that it is a complementary writing to Boccaccio's biography (see note 6), which, in his opinion, had portrayed the poet's life in the style of his literary compositions, as the *Filocolo*, the *Filostrato* or the *Fiammetta*. In Bruni's text, Dante's biography is followed by that of Petrarch, whose patriotic objective is shown at the end of the same proem: "I believe that the news and fame of these poets greatly affects the glory of our city." Dante, however, had already been valued in several passages of *Florentine history* by Bruni (1424), after a negative look at Dantesque scholasticism in his *Dialogi ad Petrum Paulum Histrum* (1405-1406, Ed. 1994). Chancellor Bruni's role in the unsuccessful attempt to recover Dante's remains is also relevant, when he requests them in an official letter dated February 1, 1430 to the lord of Ravenna., Obizzo da Polenta (Gilson, 2019, pp. 121-161).

[12] BRUNI, Leonardo. *The Life of Dante* (*c*. 1436). Translated by Nicola Bizzi. Prato: Aurora Boreale, 2023.

not of one chosen by the heavens. As can be seen, the chancellor translator knew Platonic theory closely, but understood that a conception attributable to less refined intellects did not fit someone with such a vast culture as Dante.

2 The Discussion in Dante

Does this discussion take place within Dante's work? In an attempt to understand how this is reflected in his writings, let us initially observe some of the first chapters of *Hell*, in which something will be said, and insistently repeated, about his relationship with human minds that preceded him, minds that had composed works that were his direct sources in many cases.

We know that the adventure of the poet-traveler in *Comedy* begins with the protagonist in a complicated situation, in the middle of a "dark jungle" from which he will try to free himself along a path that turns out to be a dead end, with three animals that prevent him from moving forward. When everything seems lost, a shadow appears to him, the soul of the ancient Latin poet Virgil, who presents himself and invites him to discover the world of the dead. In this unexpected encounter, Virgil is the one who Dante openly recognizes as the most influential author in his formation as a poet:

> "And are you then that Virgil, you the fountain
> that freely pours so rich a stream of speech?"
> I answered him with shame upon my brow.
>
> "O light and *honor* of all other poets,
> may my long study and the intense love
> that made me search your volume serve me now."
>
> You are my master and my author, you-
> the only one from whom my writing drew
> the noble style for which I had been *honored*. (Alighieri, *Hell* I 79-87)[13]

The relationship that will be established between the two is quite intimate, like between father and son, or master and student, terms used in the poem to mark this bond

[13] ALIGHIERI, Dante. *The Divine Comedy*. Translated by Allen Mandelbaum. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980-1983.

throughout the journey. However, for what we are observing here, it will be interesting to note that Dante does not exempt himself from giving Virgil credit for the intellectual and creative process that had already established him as a relevant poet in that Florence of the 13th and 14th centuries. Virgil's tragic and illustrious "beautiful style" had taught Dante the ability to express the deepest human realities, which had brought him the honor of distinguishing himself for his intellectual, artistic and moral gifts. Due to the poet's insistence on the concept of honor, let us observe how this term will be repeated in the excerpts emphasized below.

A little further on, still in *Hell*, with Dante and Virgil having crossed the Acheron, the reader will discover that there are other poets of great importance in a space very close by, in limbo. In other words, before they come into contact with those condemned who pay for the sins committed in the world of the living, we will know of a special place where ancient unbaptized spirits gather protected by seven walls, within what would later be called "noble castle." Arriving at this place, the traveler-poet notices something different: a light emanating from the midst of darkness, a light coming from "honorable people."

> We still were at a little distance from it,
> but not so far I could not see in part
> that *honorable* men possessed that place (Alighieri, *Hell* IV 70-72).[14]

Just before they actually arrive at this "noble castle," described a few verses later, Dante asks his guide – in a way that is also quite symbolic for what we are observing here – who these souls are that stand out from the others present there due to the characteristic feature of the honor.

> "O you who *honor* art and science both,
> who are these souls whose dignity [*onranza*] has kept
> their way of being, separate from the rest?"
>
> And he to me: "The *honor* of their name,
> which echoes up above within your life,
> gains Heaven's grace, and that advances them."
>
> Meanwhile there was a voice that I could hear:

[14] For reference, see footnote 13.

> "Pay *honor* to the estimable poet;
> his shadow, which had left us, now returns."
>
> After that voice was done, when there was silence,
> I saw four giant shades approaching us;
> in aspect, they were neither sad nor joyous (Alighieri, *Hell* IV 73-84).[15]

Virgil then responds that they are those whose fame still resonates in the world of the living, a fame that derives from the poetic works that survive after their deaths. These spirits achieved a special position in divine justice and, therefore, stood out from the other souls in hell; they are worthy, therefore, of an honor that enchants our world and makes the intellectual memory of the living intervene in divine justice for their benefit down there, in the underground world.

Then, an unknown voice proclaims an order to the other souls present there: "Pay honor to the estimable poet." He is one of Virgílio's "suspension" companions who celebrates the return of the Latin poet with his new duo. Then, four other very serene shadows approach and surround the two newly arrived poets. Virgil introduces them to his disciple Dante:

> "(...)
> That shade is Homer, the consummate poet;
> the other one is Horace, satirist;
> the third is Ovid, and the last is Lucan.
>
> Because each of these spirits shares with me
> the name called out before by the lone voice,
> they welcome me [*fannomi onore*] and, doing that, do well."
>
> And so I saw that splendid school assembled,
> led by the lord of song incomparable,
> who like an eagle soars above the rest.
>
> Soon after they had talked awhile together,
> they turned to me, saluting cordially;
> and having witnessed this, my master smiled;
>
> and even greater *honor* then was mine,
> for they invited me to join their ranks,
> I was the sixth among such intellects (Alighieri, *Hell* IV 88-102).[16]

[15] For reference, see footnote 13.
[16] For reference, see footnote 13.

Everyone recognizes themselves in the name "poet," just as they come to recognize Dante as one of their own and, therefore, cannot fail to honor him reciprocally. Thus, Dante sees them all around his main teacher Virgil, who in his poetic superiority flies over the group of literati like an "eagle." At that moment, after a quick conversation between them, Dante feels honored once again, and in an even more incisive way, he definitively joins the group as "the sixth among such intellects."

The episode full of honors ends with the philosopher Aristotle, a prominent character in Dantesque thought and center of consideration for the other inhabitants of that special place in limbo, giving the episode no less than eight occurrences of the word "honor" (and its derivatives), in addition to the one when Dante and Virgil met:

> When I had raised my eyes a little higher,
> I saw the master of the men who know,
> seated in philosophic family.
>
> There all look up to him, all do him *honor*:
> there I beheld both Socrates and Plato,
> closest to him, in front of all the rest; (Alighieri, *Hell* IV 130-135).[17]

As can be seen from the recurrence of the term and its variants, this deference that Dante pays to spirits who distinguished themselves for their greatness is reflected in the action that they reciprocate, recognizing the Florentine as one of their peers. It is necessary, however, to note that hierarchical superiority appears in at least two moments of the episode, with Virgílio ("who like an eagle soars above the rest") and with Aristotle ("the master of the men who know"), which indicates that the honor that remains is not the same for everyone. Here, then, it would be appropriate to ask those, like Landino, who defended the divinity of Dante's work: If these same poets, who now emanate light in the infernal darkness, were contemplated by the "divine furor," why the distinction between them?

There are signs that Bruni's reading may be closer to how Dante conceived of himself as a student elsewhere in his work; as in *Convivio*, the treatise before the *Comedy* in which philosophical knowledge is presented as a nourishment intended for lay people. Among the autobiographical mentions made by the poet at that time, there is one in which

[17] For reference, see footnote 13.

Dante remembers the vision problem that occurred at the time he wrote one of the songs discussed there (between 1294 and 1298). At that moment, excessive reading had caused something similar to what is now popularly called blurred or tired vision, suggesting that the intellectual path he had followed had been done with the eyes of the body, and not with those of a kidnapped soul:

> This is why many, when they wish to read, hold the writing at a distance from their eyes, so that the image may enter the eye more easily and more sharply; in this way writing is made clearer to their vision. And so a star may likewise seem blurred. I had experience of this in the very year in which this canzone was born, for by greatly straining my vision through *assiduous reading* I weakened my visual spirits so much that the stars seemed to me completely overcast by a kind of white haze (Alighieri, *Convivio* III ix 14-15).[18]

In addition to indicating his exhaustive approach to books, Dante gives us other indications that human reason cannot supplant corporeal matter, as when he deals, still in *Convivio*, with celestial engines and planets concentric with the Earth. At this moment, the poet tells us about the impossibility of empirically demonstrating such a concept because we are separated from the metaphysical plane:

> No one should be surprised if these and other reasons which we might have concerning this matter are not fully demonstrated; but nevertheless we should admire the excellence of these creatures – which transcends the eyes of the human mind, as the Philosopher says in the second book of the *Metaphysics* – and affirm their existence. For *although we cannot perceive them with the senses* (from which our knowledge originates), yet there shines in our intellect some light of their most lively existence insofar as we perceive the above-mentioned reasons and many others – just as one whose eyes are closed may affirm that the air is luminous because some slight radiance or ray of light, such as passes through the pupils of a bat, reaches him. For in just this way the eyes of our intellect are closed, as long as *the soul is bound and imprisoned by the organs of our body* (Alighieri, *Convivio* II iv 16-17).[19]

Although these last two excerpts can be placed chronologically before the journey narrated in the *Comedy*, that is, before Dante's imagined "abduction" of the Empyrean, let us look at a part from *Monarchy*, a book probably contemporary with the last part of

[18] ALIGHIERI, Dante. *Convivio*. Translated by Richard H. Lansing. New York: Garland, 1990.
[19] For reference, see footnote 18. And see Aristotle, *Metaphysics* II 1 (993b 1-11; 2008, p. 705).

the poem,[20] in which the ways in which a man can achieve happiness in this earthly life are explained. When dealing with double human beatitude, the poet states that "happiness in this life, which consists in the exercise *of our own powers*; (...) For we attain the first through the teachings of philosophy, provided that we follow them putting into practice the moral and intellectual virtues" (Alighieri, *Monarchy* III xvi 7-9).[21] Thus, Dante indicates that the scope of our full earthly nature – already presented by him at another time and always following the authority of Aristotle –[22] is possible only through the intellectual practice of theoretical studies. In this sense, understanding the written text should serve as a guide towards the wisdom of ancient philosophers and sacred scriptures with ethical objectives, so that our behavior is constantly reviewed in favor of social harmony, in a reading that Imbach (2003, pp. 151-166) calls political dimension of human intellect in Dante.

There can be no doubt about this when we accept the content of the poet's epistle to his benefactor in exile, Cangrande della Scala, in which the *Paradise* is offered to him under the following words: "The branch of philosophy to which the work is subject, in the whole as in the part, is that of morals or *ethics*; inasmuch as the whole as well as the part was conceived, not for *speculation*, but with a *practical* object" (Alighieri, *Epistola* XIII 40; 2016, pp. 370-371).[23]

In the aforementioned excerpt from *Monarchy*, eternal beatitude (granted as a grace to the elect) is contrasted with another completely rational and independent beatitude, for which only human will is sufficient. And as already noted here and elsewhere,[24] Dante's commitment to spreading knowledge in the Florentine language that he intended *illustre* is intimately connected to a practical purpose, in order to guide readers of that "natural" language in a new and elegant form of written communication to be accessible also to those who had no access to philosophical texts in Latin. To do so, a potential reader would need to choose to read.

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[20] Due to the close relationship between parts of the *Monarchy* (I xii 6) and the *Paradise* (V 19 ss.), the dating of that work is still debated (Chiesa; Tabarroni. *Introduzione*, in Alighieri, 2013, pp. lx-lxiii).
[21] ALIGHIERI, Dante. *Monarchy*. Translated by Prue Shaw. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
[22] "As the Philosopher says at the beginning of the First Philosophy, all men by nature desire to know" (Alighieri, *Convivio* I i 1; 1990).
[23] ALIGHIERI, Dante. *The Letters of Dante*. Vol. 1. Translated by Paget Toynbee. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966.
[24] See Alighieri, 2019, *Introdução*.

Conclusion

Looking more broadly at the contrast between the two positions indicated at the beginning of this article (Landino versus Bruni), it would even be possible to say that the modalities of poetic composition based on the effortful achievement of reading by a student or free concession were not necessarily opposites for Landino in his introduction to *Comedy*. The "divine furor," for him, would grant the author the ability to express, embellished by verse, all the disciplines developed by humanity over the millennia. Would this, then, be a contradiction in Landino? Because, without the sciences of man, how could we express something that could be understandable to man? The task, in this sense, would fall not only to poets, but to philosophers.

Not surprisingly, as we saw, we find poets mentioned alongside philosophers in the Inferno episodes. In this excerpt, as in the *Phaedrus* taken up by Landino and Ficino, the figure of the poet blessed with wisdom becomes confused with that of the philosopher, the only ones capable of contemplating the naked Truth on which Wisdom rests.[25]

In an intellectual search to account for this overlapping of meanings, the etymology of the terms "poet" and "poetry" was at the center of a long debate that, at least since Petrarch and Boccaccio,[26] recovered the Greek notion of poets as the first theologians, capable of producing knowledge from the contact of their minds with higher planes. Marsilio Ficino (2016, p. 298) in direct mention of the *Phaedrus*, states that "only

[25] This is the allegory illustrated in Luca Giordano's fresco in Palazzo Medici-Riccardi, current reading room of the Biblioteca Riccardiana, in Florence. In the painting, a young man contemplates Wisdom supported by the clouds of Truth. However, such contemplation does not take place directly, but rather through a mirror held by the Study (or Prudence) and only for the student in whom the ropes of ignorance are already untied. Theology extends its hand and Philosophy grants a wing to this young man, while another wing is brought from above by a boy. Next to, two other boys distill herbs and flowers so that the mind, harvesting the essence of creation, understands the invisible. Below, in the midst of an arid landscape that refers to the difficulty of the path that leads to knowledge, there is an allusive verse by Petrarch: *Move our intellect from earth to heaven* ("Levan di terra a ciel nostro intelletto;" *Canzoniere*, 10). Cf. Giordano, 1685.

[26] From Greek *poiētḗs* (forming power), derived from the verb *poiéō* (I make, I produce); see Petrarca, *Fam.* X, 4 (2016, pp. 289-291) and Boccaccio, *Vita di Dante* §128-155 (2021, pp. 65-73). Like Bruni, Petrarch had also reported in a letter to Boccaccio a certain admiration for Dante, that at the time of his political exile he had left everything aside to dedicate himself solely to his studies, "desirous only of glory." This admiration, however, would not reach the point of recognizing the Florentine poet as a peer of ancient philosophers or poets, mainly because Dante had stood out only in that "inferior" subject that was poetry in the *Volgare* language, to which Petrarch would have dedicated himself in a secondary way and only in his youth; see Petrarca, *Fam.* XXI, 15 (2009, pp. 3069-3087).

the philosopher's mind has [the] wings" to be carried to heights, beyond the body.[27] In this dialogue, Plato seems to affirm that man's logos is not capable of saying everything, and that philosophy would be fed by a projection beyond rational discourse. Thus, the figures of the philosopher and the poet no longer appear so dissociated or distant, but, on the contrary, they tend to come closer together until they coincide,[28] without that crucial opposition that we will see in the critique of mimesis in the *Republic* (595a ss.; 2017, p. 449 ss.).[29]

More pragmatic, Bruni (2022, p. 304) had also expressed himself about the origin of the word "poet" in his *Life of Dante*: "it is a Greek word, meaning 'maker'; (...) These men who made the words were poets, that is makers, of these works which we others read."[30] And, as can be seen from some passages in his theoretical and poetic work, Dante does not exempt himself from the intellectual commitment to the construction of theoretical thought that will be strongly reflected in the poem of the *Comedy*. Perhaps this is why his figure has inestimable value for 15th century Florence, where a "true lover of wisdom – a true humanist – will be the one who can unite, without confusion and with a 'wonderful bond', *res* and *nomina*, in order to show the inseparability between language and reality" (Ebgi, 2016, p. 147).[31] Even so, human rationality in its full exercise could not be seen as "divine" by some of those who most worshiped the poet in that period, such as Landino and Ficino.

Privileging the ethical principles that should guide linguistic expression, Dante is emphatic when he conceives his work as support for those who seek to educate themselves and improve the collective experience in this physical world. This is what we

[27] See Plato, *Phaedrus* 249c (1996, p. 81).

[28] Trabattoni (Plato, 1996, p. 70, note 45) pays attention to the fact that the idea of poetry as divine inspiration, very present in ancient Greek thought, appears in several works of Plato's youth (*Apology of Socrates*, *Ion*, *Menon*). In those, however, the identity of poetry and divine inspiration serves to separate poetry – a happy but uncontrollable attitude – from reason (*logos*), which is responsible for determining the principles of moral life.

[29] As Ferrari points out (2022, p. 130), the exclusion of Homer, Hesiod and the tragedians from the city under construction cannot entail (...) the suppression of all forms of poetry. Plato is deeply aware of the extraordinary attraction that poetry exercises, of its fascination and of the capacity that it has to engage the souls of its recipients.

[30] For reference, see footnote 12.

[31] In Italian: "Vero amante della sapienza – vero umanista – sarà dunque chi riesce a legare senza confusione, e in 'meraviglioso nesso,' res e nomina, al fine di mostrare l'inseparabilità di linguaggio e realtà."

also read in the episode of *Purgatory* in which Beatriz reveals to him the reason for her presence in the afterlife,

> (...) and thus, *to profit that world* which
> lives badly, watch the chariot steadfastly
> and, when you have returned beyond, *transcribe* (Alighieri, *Purgatory* XXXII 103-105).[32]

information that will be reiterated twice in *Paradise*: in the words of his ancestor Cacciaguida,

> Nevertheless, all falsehood set aside,
> *let all that you have seen be manifest*,
> and let them scratch wherever it may itch (Alighieri, *Paradise* XVII 127-129).[33]

and those of Saint Peter,

> and you, my son, who through your mortal weight
> will yet return below, *speak plainly there*,
> and *do not hide that which I do not hide*. (Alighieri, *Paradise* XXVII 64-66).[34]

And even though the entire poem of the *Comedy* merges into the allegory of the beatific revelation, upon which the "vision" as a poetic genre is built, the "abduction" of the muses takes form at the beginning of the poem with the body of a man who accepts an invitation and walks on his own legs to leave the "dark jungle" towards knowledge of the world. Nevertheless, to do so, this same man – as a historical character who builds himself as a literary character in his own work – first needed to have passed through the world of knowledge.

[32] For reference, see footnote 13.
[33] For reference, see footnote 13.
[34] For reference, see footnote 13.

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