

## Preface

It is a great honour to have been asked to write a preface for this volume. This wonderful collection brings together an impressive array of contributions, presented to audiences around Australia to mark the 700th anniversary of the death of Dante Alighieri in 2021. As celebrations in Italy and around the world were being prepared to mark the occasion, it seemed only fitting that the Dante Alighieri Society in Canberra, together with other Dante Societies of Australia, organise a national seminar series to reflect the many facets of Dante's presence also in this continent.

This volume brings together those presentations delivered around Australia, and in the case of one presenter, from Italy as well. In the event, almost all presentations were delivered online due to the ongoing effects of the COVID pandemic. One positive corollary from this format was that audiences from around the country, indeed the world, were able to participate in all talks from the series without needing to travel to the home city of the presenter. This also meant that a broader range of presenters and topics was able to be included in the series.

This volume recalls the varied contributions being made by Dante scholars and enthusiasts around the country. It is also an opportunity to recall the long (and long lasting) relationship between Dante and Australia. The collection embodies the strength of interest, fascination, and love of Dante and his works by many also in this hemisphere.

The variety of themes contained in the volume is broad, and reflect the wide interests of the speakers asked to present during the seminar series. Even a cursory glance at

the table of contents evinces the many different ways in which connections to Dante have been felt by authors. In some senses, this variety mirrors the range of subject matter treated by Dante himself. Perhaps we should not be surprised, in fact, that authors come from a wide range of backgrounds: they are members of the Italian community in Australia, professors in universities, poets, educators, and so on. The universality of the Comedy and its capacity to encompass all aspects of human emotion is reflected in the wide-ranging nature of the topics addressed by the chapters presented here. Once again, Dante is able to speak to us and our own experiences from a point that is far way in time and space, even in our condition as so-called “moderns”. It is precisely for this reason that a volume of this nature finds a special place in the contemporary landscape of twenty-first century Australia.

The chapters in the volume can be seen to represent the personal view of each contributor, ranging from their own interpretations of selected passages of the Comedy, but also touching upon questions of methodology and reading. The contributions emphasise the particular ways in which these readers of Dante have been able to select certain *terzine*, themes, topics, connections, or ways of reading that have been most useful for them when approaching the *sommo poeta*. This is striking. It also contrasts with the many other types of series that have been presented in Italy and around the world. In fact, the chapters presented here are even more remarkable for the ways in which they tie particular aspects of Dante to the multifaceted nature of modern Australia, from personal faith, the connection of Dante to older Australians, to such topics as the teaching of Italian.

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This volume can therefore be seen as a unique contribution in the panorama of events marking the anniversary of Dante's death.

For my part, the decision to read aloud lines of Canto I:61-84 of *Inferno* during the introduction to the inaugural lecture of the series was justified, I argued, since this is where Dante meets Virgil for the first time. We were also at the start of a new journey in presenting a national seminar series in Australia. We were doing so accompanied by an Other, in the exact same way Dante had also been. This volume is an outstanding testament not only to the presenters in the series, but it also bears witness to the vitality of Dante Studies around Australia. I recommend a slow, attentive reading of each chapter, in order to gather something of the deep appreciation which each author clearly feels towards their chosen topic.

Eugenio Montale claimed in the 1965 celebrations of the seven-hundredth anniversary of Dante's birth:

*“The Commedia is and will remain the last miracle of world poetry.”*

In the same essay, (*Dante ieri e oggi*) Montale's other famous assertion still rings true:

*“The farther his world recedes from us, the greater is our desire to know him and to make him known.”*

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