

“The world is my homeland”: exile and migration, from Ibn Hamdîs to Dante

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When ‘Abd al-Jabbar ibn Hamdîs left Sicily as a young man in 1078, one wonders if he knew that he would never return. Indeed, Sicily figures in his poetry for the rest of his days as a homeland, a paradise taken from him by Norman infidels. His travel across the Mediterranean world, from his native Noto in southeastern Sicily to al-Mahdiyya in present-day Tunisia to Seville and back to North Africa again, trace a telling pattern of interconnectedness, as well as the difficulties of making one’s way through the regional political turmoil of the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

It is by no means difficult to forge a connection across linguistic, cultural, and religious boundaries between Ibn Hamdîs and the poet of the *Commedia*. These were individuals forced from their homes who sought recourse in poetry, both as an expression of nostalgia and as a means to express their political vitriol in the hopes of changing their world. And the stakes of making this connection, far from being oriented to the long history of scholarship on Dante and Islam that sought to argue for or against the influence of the Islamic visionary tradition upon the writing of the *Divine Comedy*, instead rest on nuancing our view of the late Middle Ages in Italy in order to privilege the experience of migration and cultural alterity as lying at the heart of vernacular literary production.

The *dīwān* (anthology) of Ibn Hamdîs is vast, amounting to some 370 poetic compositions that range widely in genre. And it has not lacked for critical intervention and commentary, from the nineteenth-century historian Michele Amari, to modern scholars oriented to both its Sicilian character and its context in the wider span of neoclassical Arabic poetry.¹ But there remains work to be done in integrating the poetry of Ibn Hamdîs more fully into the tradition, both scholarly and pedagogical, of medieval Italian culture.

There are *qasidas* (odes) that directly evoke the memory of Sicily, which have become known as the *Siqilliyat*, but they are by no means uniform in their evocation of the land. Sometimes they are in the vein of a lament for the lost homeland, a celebration of its beauty, and the flowering of Arab

culture before the Norman conquest; other times they are a bitter indictment of the Norman conquerors of the land and even of those Muslims who did not leave and perhaps did not resist enough for the poet's liking.

In a tender ode that celebrates the time of youth from the perspective of a more sober old age, the poet regales his audience with descriptions of beautiful young men and women, free-flowing wine, and the sensory delights of spices, jewels, and music. Only in the last lines does he finally reveal that he is not only beyond the halcyon days of youth but that he has been thrust out of his beloved homeland of *Siqiliyya*. "*Dakartu Siqiliyya wa al-ās yahayyaj lil-nafs tadakāraha*" "Sicilia mia. Disperato dolore / si rinova per te nella memoria" ("I remember Sicily, and pain is kindled in my soul at the memory of her") (Corrao, 2002: 161). I am citing the Arabic line alongside an Italian poetic translation and my own, more literal English translation of the Arabic original. I do so in order to adequately represent the multilingual nature of the sort of criticism that I seek to engage in, and hope that such an act might urge us to nuance our historical perspective. In order to emphasize a more recent form of reception, both scholarly and artistic, I am citing from the version of this *qasida* presented in Francesca Maria Corrao's *Poeti arabi di Sicilia*, an anthology that the noted Italian Arabist first assembled in 1987 and published with Mondadori.² Corrao provided a number of well-known Italian poets with her own translations of selected medieval Arabic poetry of Sicily by different poets and asked them to make their own poetic versions of them. The result is an important one, a way of emphasizing the historical presence of a different language and culture and inscribing it into the canon of Italian letters by means of employing well-known contemporary poets and artistic figures. This particular ode, for example, was poetically translated by Toti Scialoja, a poet of some note but a very well-known Roman painter and an established presence at the Academy of Fine Arts. We might thus think of a migration of poetry, inflected by translation yet transforming the notion of Italian identity.

Such attention to the multilingual strands of the Italian poetic tradition resonates with Valerio Magrelli's 2015 anthology *Millennium poetry: viaggio sentimentale nella poesia italiana*, in which the scholar and poet gathers the poetry that is most dear to him from across the centuries. After beginning with the anonymous ninth-century composition known as the *Indovinello veronese*, Magrelli inserts this very same poem by Ibn Hamdīs in the Scialoja translation that he borrows from Corrao's anthology. His justification underscores both the poet's liminal status as well as the importance of including him in such an anthology. Magrelli writes, "Ebbene, sia pure nella consapevolezza di compiere un arbitrio, ritengo che la decisione sia giustificata dal fatto che i versi di Ibn Hamdīs, oltre ad essere stati vergati in una parte di ciò che oggi chiamiamo Italia, proprio della sua perdita si parlano" ("And

yet, even with the awareness of making an arbitrary call, I hold that the decision is justified by the fact that the verses of Ibn Hamdīs, beyond having been written in a part of that which we today call Italy, in fact speak of its very loss”) (Magrelli 2015: 22).³ Magrelli makes an important distinction between what was and what is, that which “oggi chiamiamo Italia” was by no means a unified and uniform political entity at the time of this poetic composition. He might overreach in speaking of all of this poet’s verses as having been written *in* the part of present-day Italy that is the island of Sicily – perhaps some were in the poet’s youth, others were certainly written in other places across the Mediterranean – but rightly shifts the focus to the status of Sicily as an island containing many Mediterranean identities that do not all fit so neatly into the narrative of one Italy.

Magrelli is keenly interested in this sort of complicating of national identity, and he makes this clear in the introduction to his anthology. He draws upon the work of the scholar Furio Brugnolo on foreign writers who have written in Italian through the centuries and his own experience as editor of a multilingual series of books, “Scrittori tradotti da scrittori” (“writers translated by writers”), in order to transform the moniker “poeti italiani” into something more capacious and “dare spazio alla poliglossia e al multiculturalismo” (“give space to multilingualism and multiculturalism”) (Magrelli, 2015: 8). This leads him to not only include the ode of Ibn Hamdīs but also to anthologize Poliziano’s Greek verse, Milton writing in Italian, and the like. In an especially significant move, Magrelli chooses to include a passage from Dante’s *Commedia* not in Italian but in Occitan. He draws from the *Purgatorio* 26, where the Occitan poet Arnaut Daniel closes the canto by speaking in his own poetic language and thus continues in Dante’s radical vernacular experiments of combining languages and cultures.

But before moving forward to Dante, I would like to return to Ibn Hamdīs and to the nature of his poetic engagement with the homeland that he left behind. There is perhaps a risk in emphasizing only the softer side of his nostalgia, one that feeds into the romantic and overly abstracted figure of the poet in exile. William Granara has focused attention on the later panegyrics and elegies of the corpus of Ibn Hamdīs in order to consider his “poetics of jihad,” which he reads not as a theologically reductive stance of Islam against the world but rather as a means of motivating his audience to retake his homeland: “Ibn Hamdis’s ‘jihad’ was not universal eternal, absolute or theological; it was a custom-made poetics to fit the particular history and geography of Sicily as extended metaphor for all that was transcendent to Islamic history and Arabic literature” (Granara, 2019: 118). This perspective is a salutary one. It prevents us from falling prey to the enervating charm of poetic nostalgia. Granara (2019: 131) posits that the poet’s move from Seville to Ifriqiya around 1091, which coincided with the

completion of the Norman conquest of Sicily (finally including Noto, his native city) meant that Ibn Hamdīs was in direct proximity with thousands of Muslim Sicilian refugees and thus turned his poetry in a more explicitly political direction.

And yet, we might also think about those that remained in Norman Sicily, indeed even those that were drawn to the court of Roger II. Abu ‘Abdallah Muhammad al-Idrīsī, the cartographer born in Ceuta around 1100, is one such individual. His travels in Spain and North Africa mirror those of Ibn Hamdīs (though his journeys also extend to England, France, and Asia Minor), but far from feeling unwelcome or excluded from Palermo, he accepts the invitation of Roger II around 1138 to come to his court. His crowning achievement, in collaboration with other scholars of the court, was a geographical compendium and world map that came to be known as the *Tabula rogeriana*, or *Book of Roger*. It is marked by an elaborate introduction that lavishes praise on the Norman ruler, going so far as to call him one “who crafts so many positions of power and erects summits of high-mindedness that reach the stars.”⁴ I will return to the issue of title in a moment, but it is worth highlighting the contrast between Ibn Hamdīs and al-Idrīsī: one feels he must leave, never to return, and the other is invited and flourishes; one rails against the occupiers, the other lauds his patron as an exemplary ruler and intellectual.

And so, the poet might represent cultures in opposition, and the cartographer might celebrate the multicultural production of knowledge. Ibn Hamdīs longs for the *Siqilliyya* that was, al-Idrīsī praises Roger for the Sicily that is. The “truth” is undoubtedly somewhere in between. For Ibn Hamdīs, those who stayed and did not resist were traitors. But collaboration has its benefits, and might be said to feature more strongly in Roger II’s court than in the subsequent Hohenstaufen rule of Frederick II. Much as we might point out certain multicultural aspects of the Federician court and uphold his epithet “*stupor mundi*” (“wonder of the world”) to a degree, we must also see and acknowledge the expulsion of Muslims from the island of Sicily to the Pugliese town of Lucera from 1224 to 1239.⁵

And perhaps this is the benefit of a map such as that of al-Idrīsī: it takes us out from a focus on prominent individuals with whom it remains possible to make abstract and ambiguous the ideas of exile, migration, and cultural belonging and instead asks us to move our attention outward to a connected world in a form that might be unfamiliar to our eyes. The image of this particular map is the oldest surviving example, from a manuscript housed at the *Bibliothèque nationale de France*, but even this dates to circa 1300. This is a substantial remove from the original composition of the work in 1154. There is reference in the introduction to the work to a map that was inscribed in silver, but it has not survived. The map and the extensive work

from which it springs serve an important role in complicating narratives of the backward nature of medieval cartography.

This map of the world is, to Western eyes, a map turned upside down. South is up, Mediterranean connectivity is privileged, and we must adjust our perspective accordingly. This is not atypical in the Islamic cartographic tradition that informs al-Idrīsī's work, but it nonetheless serves to defamiliarize and recontextualize the shape and orientation of the world. As Ahmad points out, there is evidence that al-Idrīsī uses a combination of Islamic and Western sources in his work, certainly for the various descriptions of the regions that rely on the observations of travelers, but even to the point of using different sets of measures, ones current in Arabic and others in Sicily at the time.⁶ This is a move that might speak to a multiplicity of audiences, a combination of the local and the global. Such cultural fusion abounds in Arab-Norman architecture of the period, from pleasure palaces in Palermo, such as the Zisa, to the Palatine chapel that demonstrates Norman, Byzantine, and Arab influence.

But even from the standpoint of the title, the work of al-Idrīsī stands out with regard to pointing out the difficulty, the violence, the audacity of travel: *Nuzhat al-mushṭāq fi'khtirāq al-afāq*, an entertainment for those who desire to cross the horizon. That word for crossing, *ikhtirāq*, might be rendered more viscerally and violently as a breaking. It is a telling combination of elements: pleasure, desire, and travel as a violent crossing of boundaries. Such an ambiguity resonates with the cross-cultural experience of migration and exile that I'd like to carry over to a reading of Dante.

In reading the trauma and difficulty of exile in Dante's poetry, I am doing the very opposite of something new. This has been a commonplace for centuries and is apparent even in the most superficial reading of the *Commedia*. But therein, perhaps, lies the problem. As Edward Said tellingly observed, "Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience" (Said, 2000: 173). There is a disconnect between the abstract and the experience of trauma, and as much as we might romanticize the poet or writer in exile, we do an injustice to the reality of their suffering. In that well-known essay, "Reflections on Exile," he goes on to ask a pointed question:

Is it not true that the views of exile in literature and, moreover, in religion obscure what is truly horrendous: that exile is irremediably secular and unbearably historical; that it is produced by human beings for other human beings; and that, like death but without death's ultimate mercy, it has torn millions of people from the nourishment of tradition, family, geography? (Said, 2000: 174)

It is certainly no coincidence that the cover of the volume in which this essay was collected, *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*, is adorned with

Domenico Peterlin's 1865 painting, "Dante in Exile," and indeed Dante comes up later in this essay as an emblem of just how unpleasant and vindictive exiles can be ("Who but an exile like Dante, banished from Florence, would use eternity as a place for settling old scores?" (Said 2000: 182)). But Said's observation of the confluence of views on exile in literature and religion is a telling one; in both cases, there is a distancing to either privilege the art that is produced or the afterlife that might be obtained. In this regard, I wonder if it might be preferable to shift to the term migration. What might it mean to term Dante not as a poet in exile but as a migrant poet, or a poet of migration? For that matter, how might our attention to the cross-cultural affinities forged in the *Commedia* with regard to the suffering and value of others, those countless individuals torn "from the nourishment of tradition, family, geography" (Said, 2000: 174), be encouraged by such a shift?

In 1929, Erich Auerbach came out with his first academic book, *Dante: Poet of the Secular World* (though it was not until 1961 that this book was translated into English). It is a work that sets the stage for his magisterial *Mimesis* and it does so by holding, seemingly against the grain of reading him as a wholly religious poet, that Dante was a great realist author. In summing up the poem, he writes,

Thus in truth the *Comedy* is a picture of earthly life. The human world in all its breadth and depth is gathered into the structure of the hereafter and there it stands: complete, unfalsified, yet encompassed in an eternal order; the confusion of earthly affairs is not concealed or attenuated or immaterialized, but preserved in full evidence and grounded in a plan which embraces it and raises it above all contingency. (Auerbach 2007: 133)

This emphasis on the real, on the stuff of history, means encouraging a reading of the poem that is not limited to theology alone. By that same token, as Auerbach calls Dante poet of the secular world, I would, in turn, call him poet of the decolonized world.

In this, I draw from the approach of Teodolinda Barolini who seeks to detheologize Dante in the interest of reading the poem narratologically. In her groundbreaking study of the poem, *The Undivine Comedy* (1992), Barolini writes, "detheologizing is a way of reading that attempts to break out of the hermeneutic guidelines that Dante has structured into his poem, hermeneutic guidelines that result in theologized readings whose outcome has been overdetermined by the author. Detheologizing, in other words, signifies releasing our reading of the *Commedia* from the author's grip, finding a way out of Dante's hall of mirrors" (Barolini, 1992: 17). In similar fashion, I hold that decolonizing Dante means releasing our reading from the thrall of nationalism that holds the poet of the *Commedia* to be the father of language, culture, and nation. As Saskia Ziolkowski points out

in Chapter 5 (this volume), literature is vitally implicated in Italy's concept of itself, and the dark side of this link is perhaps most clear in the example that she provides of every issue of the Fascist magazine *La difesa della razza* (*The Defense of Race*) having a citation from Dante's *Commedia* on its cover.

Decolonizing Dante means opening our reading of the poem to global and cross-cultural currents. We might consider affinities with world authors, not in the vein of source study but with an expanded approach to the era in which Dante lived. Though a couple of centuries removed, Ibn Hamdīs functions marvelously in this respect. So, too, might the almost contemporary Indian poet Amīr Khusrō, whom I have been reading of late in concert with Dante.⁷ We might interrogate more fully the presence of the medieval Mediterranean in hybrid language, references to trade routes and peoples across the globe, and consider tensions between local rootedness and the cultivation of an unmoored global self throughout Dante's corpus.

Such a global turn is one that Auerbach himself anticipated. In his 1952 essay "Philology and *Weltliteratur*," the German scholar turns to the medieval in his stirring conclusion, which promotes a philology that is not bound by nation alone. He writes, "In any event, our philological home is the earth: it can no longer be the nation" (Auerbach, 1969: 17). He goes on to assert that this is a return "in admittedly altered circumstances, to the knowledge that prenatal medieval culture already possessed: the knowledge that the spirit [Geist] is not national" (Auerbach, 1969: 17). After naming medieval names that would support such separation on ideological grounds such as spiritual poverty and holding the material world to be alien, Auerbach then cites from Hugh of St. Victor's *Didascalion* the compelling lines, "Delicatus ille est adhuc cui patria dulcis est, fortis autem cui omne solum patria est, perfectus vero cui mundus totus exilium est" ("He for whom the homeland is sweet is delicate, he for whom every soil is homeland is stronger, but he for whom the whole world is exile is perfect") (Auerbach, 1969: 17).⁸ Within this spiritual tradition, the ideal of exile and alienation is promoted with the perspective of the transitory nature of earthly things. Auerbach, however, has very different purposes. With the final lines of his essay, he turns this citation instead to the dismantling of wholly nationalist philology in favor of a more global embrace: "Hugo intended these lines for one whose aim is to free himself from a love of the world. But it is a good way also for one who wishes to earn a proper love of the world" (Auerbach, 1969: 17). This move implicates a link between the nationalist and the theological; it also reveals how these impulses might be subverted to more grounded and cosmopolitan purposes.

It is no coincidence that Said would use the very same lines from Hugh of St. Victor in his essay on exile some decades later. In fact, I cite from

Edward and Maire Said's translation of the Auerbach essay that was published in a 1969 issue of the journal *The Centennial Review*. Said acknowledges Auerbach as his source of this citation, and writes:

Erich Auerbach, the great twentieth-century literary scholar who spent the war years as an exile in Turkey, has cited this passage as a model for anyone wishing to transcend national or provincial limits. Only by embracing this attitude can a historian begin to grasp human experience and its written records in their diversity and particularity; otherwise he or she will remain committed more to the exclusions and reactions of prejudice than to the freedom that accompanies knowledge. (Said, 2000: 184)⁹

Said elaborates on what Auerbach alluded to: that adopting this globally nuanced perspective is vital for us as scholars to be able to truly and freely read that which we study.

And with that I would like to turn to such a globally oriented reading of Dante as poet of migration. It was quite telling to me that Theresa May in an October 2016 speech at the height of Brexit debates proclaimed, "But if you believe you are a citizen of the world, you are a citizen of nowhere. You don't understand what citizenship means." May seemed to be calling out the "elite," but her remarks of course implicate the thrall of nationalism. Such a stance flies in the face of Dante's expanded notion of citizenship, one that holds it up as a virtue but shifts the paradigm of *civitas* to encompass a more diversified composition. In his treatise on vernacular eloquence, *De vulgari eloquentia* (1.6.3), Dante notably writes, "Nos autem, cui mundus est patria velut piscibus equor" ("To me, however, the whole world is homeland, as the ocean is to fish") (Alighieri, 1996: 13). Dante makes clear that he holds the world to be his homeland, even though he loves his native city of Florence so much that he suffers unjust exile for it. In making this move within the grounded context of his thoughts on language, he opposes his worldly conception and emphasis on reason to the provincial belief of those who reside in the village of Pietramala who think so much of their own language that they believe it to be the universal mother tongue that Adam himself spoke.

The philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah, in response to May, writes, "Real cosmopolitanism is not a privilege; it is an obligation. It does not belong to the rarefied circles of some frequent flyer upper class. It belongs to anyone who cares about global justice, about the environment, about the alleviation of strife and carnage beyond our immediate national borders" (Appiah, 2016).¹⁰ In this regard, when Dante sees home as Morocco at the end of *Purgatorio* 4, when Beatrice tells him that he will be "cive / di quella Roma onde Cristo è romano" ("citizen of that Rome where Christ is a Roman") in *Purgatorio* 32.101–2, when he speaks to Charles Martel

about global citizenship in *Paradiso* 8, he is embodying Appiah's sense of cosmopolitanism.¹¹

In closing, I'd like to turn to a reading of Morocco across *Inferno* 26, which recounts the last voyage of Ulysses, and *Purgatorio* 4, a canto of difficult climbing, a playful yet bittersweet reunion with an old friend, and astronomical reckoning. These two moments of the poem are the only times that the word "Morocco" comes up. Both of these canti also celebrate and temper desire as a quintessential Dantean theme. From Ulysses' "folle volo" ("mad flight," *Inferno* 26.125) across the sea, to Dante-character's arduous flight up the mountain of Purgatory ("ma qui convien che l'om voli" ("here, a man must fly") *Purgatorio* 4.27), there is a Mediterranean bond that stretches across cultures and centuries to link these journeys that endeavor to go beyond prescribed limits.

From the very first moment of Ulysses' recounting of his final voyage, one that goes beyond the limits of the epic tradition before Dante, we have a sense of Mediterranean history pulsing in the names and places evoked. The voice that comes forth from the flame lays out the voyage home that will not last, saying, "Quando / mi diparti' da Circe che sottrasse / me più d'un anno là presso a Gaeta / prima che s' Enëa la nomasse" ("When / I sailed away from Circe, who'd beguiled me / to stay more than a year there, near Gaeta – / before Aeneas gave that place its name") (*Inferno* 26.90–3). In the intersecting epic voyages of Ulysses and Aeneas, we see an awareness of names and the cultural weight they carry. That place where Ulysses was kept existed before Aeneas named it after his nursemaid, as told by Virgil's *Aeneid*. And so, indeed, we have an awareness of the cultural mixing poetically narrated by these epics, as Greek gives way to Trojan and then Roman.

When Ulysses lays out the geographical parameters of his final voyage beyond the western limit of the world, we find a way of connecting across multiple shores of the Mediterranean. He recounts, "L'un lito e l'altro vidi infin la Spagna, / fin nel Morrocco, e l'isola d'i Sardi, / e l'altre che quel mare intorno bagna" ("I saw as far as Spain, far as Morocco, / along both shores; I saw Sardinia / and saw the other islands that the sea bathes") (*Inferno* 26.103–5). Ulysses sees one shore and the other, and we find still more specificity in the verses that follow as he recounts that he passed the columns of Hercules and left behind sight of both Seville and Ceuta.

These places named – Spain and Morocco, Seville and Ceuta – of course take us back to the movements of Ibn Hamdīs and al-Idrīsī across their Mediterranean worlds. Within this volume, we have the stunning artistic work *Cornered* by Raquel Salvatella de Prada that represents the status of Ceuta, in particular, as a place marked by the history of migration. The installation poignantly captures the struggles and frustrations of contemporary

migrants, but it also urges us to consider the long history of such acts of crossing over, as we might see evoked in Dante's Ulysses.

The scholar Maria Corti, some decades ago, argued that we might consider this moment of *Inferno* 26 through the perspective of what she termed "interdiscorsività," a way of reading common tropes across a cultural heritage that is not predicated upon the argument that there is a direct source of transmission to be found. This is an important distinction: Corti claims that the shared prohibition of passing beyond the Strait of Gibraltar points to "the striking relationship between the Christian and Arab worlds at the outset" – not that the presence of a statue in Morocco warning travelers to go no further in the work of Arab geographers served as a source for Dante, but rather that attention to this shared cultural interest in defining the limits of the world merits attention and calls out the connective tissue of Islamic, Christian, and Greco-Roman thought (Corti, 2007: 59).¹² Al-Idrīsī's map provides an interesting perspective in this regard: on the western edge, we see some islands that are likely the Canary Islands. Indeed, in the *Nuzhat al-mushtāq*, with that suggestive title implicating the violence of the going beyond the limits that is inherent in the experience of travel, we have a story of travelers going to those islands and making a successful return.

Such an archipelagic focus might also bring us to the work of Édouard Glissant. In the grand anthology of poetry he assembled very close to the end of his life, *La terre, le feu, l'eau, et les vents: une anthologie de la poésie du tout-monde*, Glissant includes part of *Inferno* 26 as somehow important and emblematic of his poetic and philosophical notion of "tout-monde" that urges us to rethink categories of cultural identity.¹³ This act of anthologizing creates what Alexandre Leupin calls a "Glissant canon," and might be considered alongside Valerio Magrelli's act of anthologizing, which includes Ibn Hamdīs as an Italian poet and chooses to emphasize Dante's linguistic experimentalism instead of his Tuscan verse (Leupin, 2021: 131).

I turn now to the second and final mention of "Morrocco" in Dante's *Commedia*. *Purgatorio* 4 is a canto filled to the brim: there is the difficult climb in which we feel the physical presence of the mountain, the erudite conversation on issues of astronomy, time, and celestial positioning, and the playful reunion with an old friend. Though the canto opens with a universalizing simile of human experience wherein great delight or great pain will cause us to neglect all else in our view, it quickly moves to characterize the arduous ascent up a steep mountain path by grounding it in intensely local experience and topography:

Vassi in Sanleo e discendesi in Noli,
montasi su in Bismantova e 'n Cacume

con esso i piè; ma qui convien ch' om voli;
 dico con l'ale snelle e con le piume
 del gran disio, di retro a quel condotto
 che speranza mi dava e faceva lume. (*Purgatorio* 4.25–30)

(San Leo can be climbed, one can descend / from Noli, and ascend Bismantova
 / and Cacume with feet alone, but here / I had to fly: I mean with rapid wings
 / and pinions of immense desire, behind / the guide who gave me hope and
 was my light)

By focusing on the steep paths to get to hill towns such as San Leo near Rimini or Noli (near Savona), Dante seeks to actualize his otherworldly travel experience for a carefully chosen vernacular audience. But even in these two choices, he is ranging geographically in the north from eastern Italy to the northwest of the Riviera. From hill towns he moves to geological features: Bismantova is a rock formation in the Apennines of Reggio Emilia (due west of Bologna) and Cacume represents a move decidedly south to a peak in the province of Lazio (between Rome and Naples). With its clear tie back to Ulysses in the language of flight and longing, those rapid wings and feathers of great desire, the statement by Dante that he must fly up the steep mountain path is given local relevance across the length and breadth of the Italian peninsula.

In this regard, there is a contrast between this first part of the canto and the great astronomical theme that dominates much of the rest of it, which enforces a planetary perspective in considering the position of the sun and seasons in the southern hemisphere. When Dante, exhausted from such a grueling climb, pauses to look back, he realizes that the sun is not where he expects it to be in the sky. Virgil explains to him that he must think globally, putting Jerusalem at one antipode and the mountain that they are climbing on the other. In the same way that Ulysses' mad flight through the Mediterranean vacillated between one shore and the other ("l'un lito e l'altro" in *Inferno* 26.103), so too does Virgil's explanation rely on a formal equivalency that has the path of the sun pass by Jerusalem on the south and the mountain of Purgatory on the north. As shores relate, so do hemispheres.

We might look at this alternation between intensely local references to Italian geography and the planetary, celestial perspective that emerges in this astronomical consideration through the lens of world literature. Neil Lazarus argues for a "local cosmopolitanism" that sets upon readers the task of situating themselves in context (Lazarus, 2011: 119). Jahan Ramazani asks whether poetry might complicate assumptions about localities, and sets the task of reconfiguring before us: "It may be time to explore such questions from the perspective of a polytemporal, polyspatial poetics and

consider a different way of understanding poetry's relation to place, particularly as the transnational turn in the humanities reconfigures our understanding of how localities are enmeshed within the global" (Ramazani, 2020: 55).

I believe we can read the end of *Purgatorio* 4 in light of this critical perspective, and indeed that it is vital to apply such reading practices beyond the confines of the modern and postcolonial. On the one hand, this canto has the intensely local and personal flair of a reunion with Dante's Florentine friend Belacqua, a maker of musical instruments who is defined by his endearing laziness. On the other hand, at the very end of the canto, is Virgil's reminder that the climb must go on in the form of a time check: it is noon here and night is falling on Morocco.

In the reunion with Belacqua, there is sweetness and playful banter: he calls Dante out for his exhaustion at the climb, Dante calls him out for his laziness. And Belacqua hits the nail on the head in jabbing at Dante's insatiable curiosity to know how things work. Belacqua's was a young death and this reunion, like those with other friends in *Purgatorio* such as Casella in *Purgatorio* 2 and Forese Donati in *Purgatorio* 23, is a way for Dante to go home to the Florence that he has lost through exile. The way that such purgatorial reunions are received and adapted, as Ziolkowski brings to our attention in Paolo di Paolo's story in *Anche Superman era rifugiato*, work to enhance our reading of Dante as migrant and refugee.

But the shift to a planetary perspective at the end of the canto is a telling one. It is a return to the language of Ulysses' travel, our second and final mention of Morocco in the *Commedia*:

E già il poeta innanzi mi saliva,
e dicea: "Vienne omai; vedi ch'è tocco
meridian dal sole e a la riva
cuopre la notte già col piè Morrocco". (*Purgatorio* 4.136–9)

(And now the poet climbed ahead, before me, / and said: "It's time; see the meridian / touched by the sun; elsewhere along the Ocean, / night has now set foot on Morocco.")

Being on the other side of the world has a curious effect. We have to account for jet lag, calculate time relative to our present position and the home that we've left behind. But that home is not named Florence or any of the Italian toponyms that we have encountered earlier in the canto. Instead, it is a place on the other side of the Mediterranean. In the embrace of travel and the necessary breaking of his cultural horizons, perhaps Dante has found a new home in Morocco and the sea that bathes it.

Dante's global perspective that enables him to see Morocco as home connects not just to his expanded planetary awareness in cartographic

terms, but also to his radical stances of sympathy for the cultural other. In *Paradiso* 19, we have three groups named that might be traditionally excluded from a Christian idea of virtue that might merit salvation: Indians, Ethiopians, and Persians. The searing question posed about the justice in condemning a virtuous man born on the banks of the Indus river based solely on his lack of knowledge of Christianity finds a radical response in the statement that an Ethiopian might be saved while the Christians going around saying “Christ, Christ,” might not be (*Paradiso* 19.109–14). We then find a shift to the idea that Persians might put Christian rulers to shame, and a catalog of the misdeeds of European rulers that extends for a full 36 verses (*Paradiso* 19.112–48), forming the acrostic L-U-E (a Latinate word for plague) and so indicting political misrule as a plague upon the people. The end of the canto is thus an important recentering of these issues of cultural difference and merit in a grounded sociopolitical reality.

This, I hold, is what Dante asks us to do in mapping the metaphysical and the empirical together, and it is not divorced from the poem’s primary ethical concerns but rather related to what Theodore Cachey calls the “cartographic impulse.”¹⁴ We might see the results of this practice in the 1544 treatise by Pierfrancesco Giambullari, *Del sito, fórma, & misúre*



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits, Arabe 2221

Figure 4.1 al-Idrīsī’s world map, BNF MS Arabe 2221, fol. 3v-4r. Courtesy of gallica.bnf.fr.



Figure 4.2 Pierfrancesco Giambullari's world map with Inferno and Purgatorio. *Del sito, forma, & misüre dello Inferno di Dante* (Florence, 1544). Image courtesy of Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington.

dello Inferno di Dante (*On the site, form and measurements of Dante's Inferno*). On page 18 of this treatise, we find a map of the globe that seeks to superimpose Dante's poetic geography on to the real world so that, in addition to the landmasses, we have a view inside to the pit of hell and we have the mountain of Purgatory rising upward in the southern

hemisphere. While there was much Renaissance interest in mapping and measuring Dante's afterlife, this map is atypical, standing apart from many others that seek to depict the structures themselves without a thought to the globe on which they poetically reside. In the Lilly Library catalog, which is where I had occasion to examine this volume some time ago, there is an annotation that cites collector Henry Harrisse's 1866 *Bibliotheca americana vetustissima*, where he writes that it should be placed among books relating to America because of this map.¹⁵ Indeed, to the left, we find Ethiopia and Terra Incognita, a suggestive grouping that asks us to consider how cultural difference and pushing beyond the limits of the known world are linked in the poem and occasion those moments of radical affinity, global perspective, and cultural syncretism. Giambullari's map, in other words, urges us to see the connected world as Dante did, to consider its limits and embrace its migrations.

Notes

- 1 For an overview of Ibn Hamdīs in modern scholarship, see Granara (2019), especially pp. 99–104. Granara's book is an invaluable and incisive study of Muslim Sicily as seen by poets, chroniclers, jurists, and beyond.
- 2 I am citing, however, from the more recent reissue of this anthology, Corrao (2002: 161). This anthology is notable for its insistence not only on the Italian poetic translations assembled but also for including the original Arabic text on the facing page.
- 3 Translation is mine.
- 4 See Granara (2019: 143–4) for the translation of this portion of the introduction. See also Mallette (2005: 146–8) for another portion of the introduction that focuses attention on the intellectually sound methodology apparently used by Roger to make the work happen. Mallette's work in considering Sicily through its transition from Arab to Norman to Hohenstaufen rule and the multilingual traditions that are manifest remains a valuable antidote to monolingual approaches of reading late medieval Italy.
- 5 On the complexities of this process and the ambivalence of Frederick's relation to Muslims, see Metcalf (2009: 275–94).
- 6 See Ahmad (1992: 160).
- 7 For my work on this subject, see Kumar (2021).
- 8 Auerbach is citing specifically from *Didascalion* 3.20. Translation is mine.
- 9 For more on Auerbach's Turkish period and the writing of *Mimesis*, see Konuk (2010).
- 10 Cosmopolitanism has of course long been on Appiah's mind. See Appiah (2006) and (2019).
- 11 All citations of the Italian text of the *Commedia* follow Petrocchi 1994. English translations are from Allen Mandelbaum's 1982–86 text (New York: Bantam),

available at Digital Dante: <https://digitaldante.columbia.edu/>. Accessed February 16, 2022.

- 12 I cite from the English translation of Corti's essay (Corti, 2007). This particular work on Ulysses and the Pillars of Hercules extends back to her 1993 *Percorsi dell'invenzione*.
- 13 My thanks to Helen Solterer (Duke) for this reference. There is much to be gained in considering Dante through the perspective of Glissant's various formulations of language and world philosophy, from "creolisation" to 'Relation' to 'tout-monde.'
- 14 See Cachey (2010: 325). Cachey makes a key point in emphasizing Dante's own cartographic leanings, as opposed to the position that mapping Dante's afterlife was a later Renaissance interest.
- 15 I am grateful to the Lilly Library (IU Bloomington) for being able to examine this early print book and for their permission to reproduce the image here.

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