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Dante's *Inferno* and the teaching of law and digital citizenship in secondary schools

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Abstract:

At the heart of the narrative of Dante's Inferno is a descending hierarchy of categories, referring to human behaviour and attitudes, which is largely an expression of the theological and moral (as well as legal, as far as moral judgements are linked to a legal judgements) thinking of his time.
Starting from the application of this system to the framework of human conduct that takes place in the 'other world' of the web, this essay aims to reflect on the pure narrative power of the inverted climax of Dante's *Inferno*, and above all on its potential applications in the teaching of law and of civic and digital citizenship.

Key words: Dante, didactic of law, digital citizenship, emotions, storytelling

1. Introduction and scope of this essay

More than a few analogies can be found between the 'other world' of the afterlife described by Dante in his *Inferno* (other, compared to that of mortals, both in temporal and spatial terms) and the virtual world of the Web. These are, in fact, two worlds that are both 'other', equally disembodied, dangerous, eternal, and that evoke the same human passions and tendencies.

With this in mind, this essay aims to develop the hypothesis that the possible reconstruction and parallel re-proposal of the two types of "journey", which these analogies allow, lend themselves to being happily exploited in education, particularly in secondary schools, with mutually reinforcing effects both in relation to studying Dante and - above all - as a stimulus for reflection on the topics studied on law and civic education courses.

This essay, therefore, which straddles the didactics of law, the sociology of law, and the law and literature approach, aims to assess the possibility and advantages of taking a new approach to Dante, using his vision and his imaginative storytelling as a basis for

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tackling, with the new generations, some of today's most important legal and social challenges.

2. Relevance of Dante's Divine Comedy to today's world

A re-reading of Dante's relevance in today's world can only begin by recognising precisely something that would seem to get in the way of such an approach: as in the case of every other author, in fact, Dante's work has precise roots, which inevitably stemmed from a specific context. The place which formed Dante socially, politically and culturally is, in fact, mainly his birthplace, Florence, and his historical setting is that of the low Middle Ages in fourteenth-century Italy.

Dante is therefore, needless to say, an author who lived in a specific place in a specific period, and this is evident in the way in which, in his work, he engages with the politics, philosophy, religion and the characters themselves of his city and of his time. This clarification, which could obviously be referred to any author, constitutes the starting point for a type of approach - the contextual approach - that is very important for analysing and understanding the products of our cultural heritage.

However, the universality of poetry (but also of other forms of culture, such as philosophy[1]) lies precisely in its capacity to allow another possible interpretation of its material: one that focuses not on the contextual, but on the universal core of contents that are shown to be capable of attracting us and speaking to us, well beyond their time. It is precisely this ability to appeal to people today as well as those in the past that characterises the work of authors who have risen, like Dante, to the rank of 'classics'.

This universal dimension, which leads the reader to transcend the particular context and emotion that inspired the poem, not only allows for, but encourages us to read it again, in a constant process of re-interpretation that reflects the vitality and strength of poetry itself, even in the firm awareness of its historic roots.

Today, actually, by applying the lesson of Richard Dawkins, we might even be tempted to interpret this vital and self-reproductive capacity according to the 'memetic' theory, which explains how the most fertile cultural contents, following dynamics parallel to those of the propagation of genes (which are also 'units of information' that reproduce over time), are capable of preserving themselves by transcending their times through host passages, adaptations and mutations[2].

On the other hand, if the aim here is to try to demonstrate the universal dimension of the emotions, reflections and the same narrative structure presented by Dante in his *Inferno* in a current context (in spite of its extreme distance from the original one), and hence the topicality of Dante's poetry and its ability to resonate in our present day too on a personal and social level, it is also worth emphasising how, in his work, Dante himself did something similar, as he borrowed extensively from earlier sources, sometimes even very distant in space and time, recontextualizing them, in order to make them relevant to his own time and place.

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[1] Consider, for example, the continuous relevance to the present day of Aristotelian thought, or the periodic re-emergence of Platonic philosophical verticalisations.

[2] R. Dawkins (1976) introduced this 'memetic' interpretation of cultural information units in his "*The Selfish Gene*".

This refers not only to his explicit, recurring and overt re-appropriations of Virgil, but also to a plethora of expressions, concepts, images, *topos*, taken from the ancient world, Latin, Greek, Old Testament Hebrew, and most probably even Arabic[3].

And if Dante, who may not have known Greek or Arabic, was able to appropriate elements from cultural worlds far removed from his own, the reason lies, in turn, in this very self-reproductive and self-regenerative potential that allows culture, thanks to its universal 'activating' core, to stimulate ever new reinterpretations and translations, and to attract cross-cultural convergences, sometimes even 'peripheral' ones, through which it can propagate itself, through direct routes, or even by flowing in secondary 'streams' provided by the intermediation of translations and re-appropriations carried out by yet more people[4].

Naturally, the content links, the revitalisations over time and the re-translations on which the *Commedia* itself has fed are not only poetic, iconographic and artistic, but also philosophical and legal. For example, the term *'contrappasso'*, used by Dante to define the principle of retaliatory counter-suffering (Steinberg 2014)(Canto XXVIII of the *Inferno* ends with this neologism), recalls the term *'contrappassum'*, with which the Greek *'to antipeponthos'* was translated in the Latin versions, (Latin was accessible to Dante) of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (in particular, referring to Book V, where Aristotle reflects on justice, in turn recalling the older Pythagorean vision of it, derived from the formula of Judge Rhadamanthus *"Si patiatur quae fecit, vindicta recte fit"*).

However, citations and re-appropriations also emerge if we only consider the *structural scheme of the afterlife itself*, as composed by Dante. The gradual scansion of punishment systems that is featured in the *Divina Commedia*, where levels and vengeful consonances are categorised on the basis of an increasing climax of sinful actions and behaviours, are in fact also found in other earlier or contemporary representations of Hell, Purgatory or Paradise[5].

At a documentary level, one can, for example, cite the description of the infernal punishments and paradisiacal bliss given in the Vision of Alberic of Settefrati, dated around 1100, while slightly later is the Vision of the Irish knight Tnugdalus. Moving on to the next century, the English Vision of Thurkill, dated 1206, and, in the Byzantine world, two widespread texts dated between the 9th and 11th centuries (the Apocalypse of

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[3] In relation to this, see the pioneering work of M. Asìn Palacios (1919). He reconnected Dante's *Commedia* with the Islamic tradition of the *mi'rağ*, the story of Muhammad's ascension to heaven, carried by his mare, narrated in sura XVII (*The Night Journey*) of the *Qur'an*. A narrative tradition then developed on this, which finds its major document in the "*Book of the Ladder*": cf. A. Longoni (2013).

[4] On this matter, I refer to the point made by N. Gennari Periotto at the symposium "*Paolo e Francesca – Inferno Canto V*", Adria, 1 March 2021, available online at: https://youtu.be/lQaejz30QWU.

[5] J. M. Bryant, at https://www.academia.edu/6615641/Dante_and_the_Ordering_of_Hell_A_Sociological_Note_on_Punitive_Imagery_in_the_Christian_Tradition, notes how a similar structuring of the afterlife on the basis of the principle of *contrapasso* is also found in other traditions: from the Narakas in Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism, to the bureaucratic Diyu, or 'earthly prison', of imperial China, to the Zoroastrian 'House of Lies', «This broad consistency across times and cultures is easily accounted for. As imaginary constructs keyed to interests of group discipline and social control, hells would lack purpose or efficacy if the values and normative codes affirmed were not braced by threats of afterlife punishments for non-compliance. From the ancient Egyptian Book of Am-Tuat on through to John Paul II's 1999 modernizing catecheses disowning the fiery furnace and demonic torturers in favor of a reassuringly anodyne determination that Hell is only "a state of definitive self-exclusion from communion with God," hells have always been "ordered," in both the nominal and verbal senses of the word».

the Theotokos and the Apocalypse of Anastasia[6]), share the same characteristics as they propose a structure of the afterlife also subdivided into different retributive sections presented on a progressive basis.

But even more simply, in the sphere of pictorial art and remaining in Italy, think of the 11th-century wall mosaic of the Last Judgement in the Basilica of Torcello, in Venice, where the damned are placed and punished in relation to the scheme of the seven deadly sins, or the ceiling mosaic of the Baptistery in Florence (certainly well known to Dante), which depicted the Last Judgement and the ordered torments of Hell, or the representation of the Last Judgement painted shortly before the writing of the *Commedia* by his friend Giotto da Bondone, in 1305, in the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua – or again, skipping forward a few years, to the frescoes of the Inferno and the Last Judgement painted in 1336 and 1341 in the Camposanto in Pisa by Buonamico Buffalmacco, a parallel work of the same period.

3. "Stilnovo", empathy and the pedagogical power of narration

What we have just discussed can therefore justify the idea of the *legitimacy* of our attempt to retranslate/ "betray"/contaminate a work that, while certainly 'divine' by definition, should not be considered as intended to have a 'sacred' sterility. To re-interpret Dante, therefore, *is possible*, or at least we may stipulate, for the sake of argument, that it is so.

The next analytical step, at this point, should however consist in understanding why, in order to arrive – this being our aim – at constructing a didactically applicable and effective discourse for legal education – especially online citizenship education –, should it be *opportune and desirable* for us to follow precisely the *narration* of Dante *viator* in the underworld.

Why, in other words, should we think of using Dante's poetic narrative to build parallels, yet to be explored, with the world of the web, instead of simply constructing a handbook on what can be found on the web? Aren't there, in Dante's *Inferno*, elements that are, for our purposes, superabundant and dispensable – first and foremost, poetry – and which we could easily do without if our aim is essentially that of producing an easily usable base for didactic activity, possibly tied, as is now emphasised (quite rightly, especially in this case), to the production of skills and implementable expertise?

Here the discourse falls into the more genuinely didactic-legal side of this essay. As is well-known, leading modern theories on the importance of storytelling (think of Bruner (1990; 2003), in the first place) strongly underlined how the emotional poignancy of poetry and narration constitutes a particularly powerful device for decreeing the success of the transformation of what is learned from a mere received information, to an existentially assimilated competence. But – and that is even more interesting here – even Dante's own poetic manifesto of the "Stilnovo" already entailed these implications – and they were these very implications that led him to the choice, at once methodological and

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[6] Possible biblical sources are the *Book of Daniel* and the *Book of Job*, while the precise idea of an underworld ordered on a retributive basis and with a reasoned *contrapasso* was already to be found in elements of Christian literature such as, for example, the *Apocalypse of Peter*, or the *Vision of Paul* (a stated source when Dante writes («*Io non Enea, io non Paulo sono*» ("I am not Aeneas, I am not Paulo"), *Inferno* II, 32), which describes a journey to the underworld he made under the escort of an angelic guide. Also see E. Gardiner (1989); C. Zaleski (1987); A. Bernstein (1993).

intrinsically content-oriented, of the *poetic-narrative* instrumentarium as the way to deliver his message.

In other words, employing the empathic power of Dante's narration means applying once again the central concept of Dante's stilnovistic poetics, namely, the idea that it is only through empathic feeling that one truly learns. This empathic feeling, in fact – and, therefore, the inwardly elaborated knowledge that follows from it – relies on storytelling in order for it to be evoked. Indeed, storytelling constitutes, par excellence, the instrument that, through the narrative pact that it founds, most allows this feeling to be aroused[7], together with representation (the value of empathic identification, as we know, constitutes one of the basic principles of Aristotle's (2000: 1149b 24-28) theorization on tragedy elaborated in his *Perì poietikes*).

In other words, this means that developing a new reading of Dante in terms of his relevance for us to today, does not imply betraying his historical position. On the contrary, it actually means reactivating the cardinal concept-of Stilnovist poetics and of the "culture of love[8]" that he himself supported and helped to develop.

In his manifesto for the Dolce Stil Novo (*Purgatorio*, XXIV, 52-54) Dante states: "*I' mi son un che, quando Amor mi spira, noto, e a quel modo ch'e' ditta dentro vo significando*" ("I am one who, when Love inspires me, I notice, and in that manner which it dictates within me I signify"). In other words, Dante maintains that his poetry consists of writing what Love makes him *feel*, exactly in the way that this feeling is 'dictated to him inside'[9]. It is only through the inner and emotional reproduction of feeling, the emotional mirroring 'dictated' by a story or other poetic instigator, therefore, that the gears are set in motion through which the process of profound and transformative understanding is produced.

What is central to a path of true knowledge and understanding, in short, in Dante's project, is the narrative involvement of emotionality: it is in the passage through this 'love', declined in the different nuances revealed to him little by little through the 100 cantos of the *Commedia*, that is the main path that leads to salvation provided through a new knowledge.

The emotional involvement enabled by the narration of the other's stories, passing through the narrative and poetic sharing of the person exposed to them, on the wave of the empathy that resonates from it, constitutes the philosopher's stone that allows the light projected by a full intellectual and emotional understanding to enlighten and transform, in the end, the listener as well.

In the *Commedia*, the entry of souls into Hell is filtered through the figure of Minos, the judge who, beyond the Limbo, determines the punishment deserved by departed sinners by applying evaluations of precise and quantified retributive proportionality, evocative of the sin committed; it is an infernal justice, fierce precisely because it is devoid of pity and redemption, totally turned to the past, and devoid of any transformative

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[7] On the cultural power of storytelling, see Harari (2015).

[8] The centrality of love to the understanding of the *Divina Commedia* is such that the three canticles end precisely with a reference to: "*l'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle*" ("the love that moves the sun and the other stars") (*Paradiso* XXXIII, 145). N. Gennari Periotto (2021) also effectively hints at the importance, in these same verses, of the accumulation of personal pronouns (Io, mi, etc.), as signs themselves of self-identification.

[9] Perhaps it is no coincidence, as N. Gennari Periotto (2021) points out, that the first people Dante speaks to in the *Inferno*, namely Paolo and Francesca, represent precisely the "perversion" of love (il «*nostro mal perverso*») (our "perverse disease"), and that Francesca tells Dante her own story explicitly because of the "pity" (empathy) Dante shows her.

perspective. As Teodolinda Barolini has written, it is a totally inclusive penal system, from which no sin is omitted, and no sinner can escape (Barolini 2000: 87).

Dante *viator*, on the other hand, although confronted with the same task of understanding sin in its various declinations, reinterpreting Aristotelian poetic suggestions in a stilnovistic way, "feels" and participates in the stories of the characters he meets. In order to proceed towards knowledge, Dante must therefore advance through a continuous storytelling, made up of testimonies and stories, capable, through the relatability that these evoke, of passing into his individual history, of leaving their traces on a profound level, and of involving him, setting him on a journey of self-knowledge.

The particular *itinerarium mentis in Deum* constituted by the *Commedia*, in short, emphasises the need, in order to arrive at "*trasumanar*" ('to go beyond the human dimension'), to first pass through the activating power of very human experiences, made up of individual stories, and of tales capable of transmitting to the listener, together with the details of a story, also its emotions.

It is through narrative thinking, in fact, that, by re-examining one's own identity in comparison with the other, one opens up to the potential for a renewal of one's own ideas, interpretations and representations of reality, as well as for a profound understanding of what constitutes the subject of the story[10].

Even today, after all, does not the fascination of so many courtroom dramas lie precisely in the capacity for empathic engagement that is provided by the stories being told? Similarly, in the educational sphere, is not the idea of making law students make a qualitative leap forward in their understanding of their subject by proposing that they deal with specific cases and stories (the celebrated methodology of law clinics[11]) the brainchild of this idea?

4. Sociological analogies between two 'other worlds'

Therefore, an evident advantage in the use of Dante's scheme and his "stories" in making the presentation of the different types of dangers present on the web more interesting and less abstract, would lay on the fact that, in following the proposed analogy, these would not be configured as chapters" but rather as "stations", the various stages of an emotionally involving journey in which the narrative framing, aimed at making the reader/student identify with it, would allow that emotional understanding that constitutes one of the basic principles of Dante's *dolce stilnovo*.

But, in addition to this, the same climax that would be realised in this kind of "Pilgrim's progress" would also lend itself very well to encouraging, in the students, a reflection on the levels of harmfulness and negativity of the behaviours presented, capable, in the final analysis, of developing their critical sense in an applied manner (that of "learning through doing").

At this point, having established that it seems legitimate to consciously recontextualise Dante and that there may even be good reasons for wanting to do so, it is a question of understanding how, and on the basis of which analogical pivots, this new approach can be concretely made.

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[10] On the didactic value of storytelling I would like to refer to A. Verza (2021).

[11] On law clinics see, for example, C. Blengino, A. Gascon-Cuenca (2019). For a more textbook approach see G. Smorto (2020).

In order for Dante's masterpiece to be used in this way, it is first of all necessary to start by highlighting the similarities between Dante's world and the web, so as to make explicit from the outset what the conceptual bridges are that will make it possible for meanings and normative-poetic activators to slide from one context to the other. And this is where the more properly sociological-legal part of this essay can be found.

4.1. Otherness

The first element substantiating the idea of an analogy between the two worlds lies in their common otherness, insofar as they both represent a dimension that is 'other' than the physical one.

Both the 'virtual' cyberworld and Dante's underworld constitute, in fact, an 'other world', even if, admittedly, the analogy is not full and complete: while between the off-line and on-line worlds there is, in fact, a parallelism that allows the user to inhabit both worlds at the same time, as well as to maintain a two-way communication between them, for the no-longer-living who land in Dante's *Inferno*, «*tra la perduta gente*» ('among the lost people'), on the other hand, there is no possibility of return.

Charon's journey is one-way, and those who enter must leave all hope behind them, nor will they have any chance of communicating with the world of the living (and indeed, precisely for this reason, in Dante's journey in the afterlife the opportunity given to find in Dante an exceptional possible bearer of missives to the living people is seized, albeit in torment, by many of the characters encountered).

4.2. Disembodied identities

Secondly, not only are the two worlds equally 'other' compared with the physicality of the world of things living under the sun: they are also both equally disembodied. As much in Dante's underworld as in the cyber world, the things that are moving are images, icons, and shadows.

And this is a second crucial point, given that the absence of the corporeal dimension that prevails in the other world (albeit in the extreme and multiple concrete references that characterises the *Inferno* with respect to the other cantica) also qualifies in an important way the type of interaction that develops online, with all the sociologically important consequences that derive from it (in relation, for example, to the removal of the inhibitory brakes usually aroused offline - again! - by empathy, stimulated by mirror neurons or other mechanisms, that are normally disactivated online).

4.3. "… e *io etterno duro*" ("… and I last forever")

Taking the comparison further, the two worlds are also both eternal: "… *e io etterno duro*". In Dante's underworld, crossing the river Acheronte constitutes an irreversibile fact. As a consequence, the obsession and determination to hold on to the vice the person developed in life is a characteristic on which the identity is compressed into a never-changing present that, always centred on that very vice or error, will last 'forever': Filippo Argenti

will be perpetually consumed with rage, Mirra perpetually deceiving others on account of his lust, Count Ugolino eternally bent over his "*fiero pasto*" ('grim meal').

Similarly, the material that enters the world of the web, i.e., the images and icons in which the people portrayed appear, caught while assuming certain specific characteristics, poses and expressions, will then remain fixed in that same inescapable and permanent form.

A 'cringeworthy', embarrassing image, posted on the internet, can define and crystallise forever and without redemption the person in that same pose as it appeared at the moment of the shot[16]. And especially if such poses and expressions are of the type that take on negative or sinful contours, the hope that they disappear will be dashed. What goes onto the internet not only remains there, i.e., one cannot be certain it will ever be removed, but it can even begin, as a study of the evolution of memes online shows us, to take on a life of its own. And along its possible continuous evolution and development, unfortunately, the initial 'flawed' element, negative for the person portrayed, is unlikely ever to be deleted.

4.4. Human passions

The two 'other worlds' are indeed dematerialised, but they are also both human, i.e., both peopled (as evident proof of the 'classical' and eternal character of Dante's work) by the same human passions and tendencies.

If in the circles of hell placed under the sign of the "lonza dalla «*gaetta pelle*»" ("fair-skinned lynx") – and therefore of the pull ("*i' fui per ritornar più volte vòlto*") of the irrepressible (and uncontained) passions – we find the inconsistency of limbo, and then we find lust, gluttony, avarice and prodigality, wrath and sloth, and heresy, in the same way we can identify in the circles of the web at least the limbic existence of the *hikikomori*, the lust at zero cost of online pornographic sites, with the resulting potential for addiction, the exhibitionism of food (with the trend, imported from South Korea, of *mukbangs* – true food binges broadcast online), the prodigality of compulsive shopping influenced by manipulative marketing techniques, the negative rage induced by groups created and nurtured online, the sloth provoked by desensitisation due to infodemics and information overload, and conspiracy theories linked to the theme of fake news[12].

If in the circles placed under the sign of the lion and its "*test'alta* e *rabbiosa fame*" ("head held high and rabid hunger"), and thus of violence for the sake of it and prevarication "*sì che l'aere ne tremesse*" ("so that the air trembled with it"), we find violent aggression aimed in different directions (reflexive, transitive, and against God and nature), also on the web we find the figure of the troll and other forms of attack, including group attacks, that can be considered to be in this genre, such as cyberbullying, in its different forms, secondary sexting, or shitstorms.

Finally, if in the bolgias and the last areas placed under the sign of the cold, rapacious and cunning cupidity of the she-wolf, "*di tutte le brame carca ne la sua magrezza*" ("loaded with all lusts in her leanness"), we find the forms of fraud against those who are not to be trusted (among them, seducers, flatterers, hypocrites, thieves, evil advisers, sowers of discord) and the betrayal of those who trust us and put their faith in us, likewise, in the world of the web we can identify various forms of seductive manipulation, from

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[12] On the topic see, for example, W. Quattrociocchi, A. Vicini (2017).

grooming to the processes of ideological conditioning that accompany entry into radicalized communities; we can find identity theft, and even the organized creation and manipulation of political dissent, as well as betrayal (in the form, for example, of the most serious types of cyberbullying[13], or revenge porn (Verza 2020).

4.5. The hypothesis of an order

Dante's *Inferno* is a jumble of expressions of the evil and dangers from which Dante could never, without some guidance sent by divine mercy, have emerged unscathed. Likewise, the issue of protecting students from the dangers that the web, alongside its many wonders, contains, also requires them to be provided with sensible guidance in order to make them fully aware of its dangers. And indeed, in following the path narrated by Dante, one encounters not only a more or less complete galaxy of forms of moral and religious wrongdoing, but a hierarchically *ordered* galaxy, too.

Dante's journey through *Inferno* is proposed as a *gradual* plunging into the universe of evil that corrupts human behavior, in its different shades and aspects (vices when understood in the ontological sense, sins in the religious and moral sense, crimes in the legal sense), and the dangers to self and others that are associated with it. Not only, then, does the *Inferno* provide an overview of the many serious wickednesses that humanity can express, but this repertoire is organized according to a guiding logic of progressively increasing seriousness, which is one that certainly reflects the theological and moral values of Dante himself and his time.

And this hierarchical order, which is the last constituent element of *Inferno*, beyond its structural function, has value in itself also as a proper content.

The assumptions typical of Dante's Middle Ages and of Dante himself, in fact, are in many ways questionable today, or at least they cannot fail to be a stimulus for reflection, and this very fact makes them a powerful spur for a critical and comparative analysis of the negative behaviours classified therein, potentially capable of deeply engaging students, on an educational basis.

And with that, among other things, we return to precisely that very "embedded," contextualised dimension from which we had started – that is, to the fact that the *Commedia* is firmly rooted in the value systems of the Florentine Lower Middle Ages –, but with a new perspective: at this point, in fact, what might have seemed to us, prima facie, to be a possible stumbling block for a new interpretation of Dante, actually turns out on the contrary – once we relate it to the present day –, to be an additional value factor, insofar as it serves as a significant contrasting device on the basis of which differences, changes, and personal ethical and argumentative positions can be measured.

5. Conclusions

To compare, therefore, the context of Dante's *Inferno*, and its narrative, with a path that leads through the dangers that (amidst the many undeniable opportunities offered) lurk in the world of the web, enables us to invoke the empathising mechanism of storytelling,

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[13] See, among many contributions on the topic, A. L. Pennetta (2019).

to give perspective depth to the discourse (the synergistic and original intersection of perspectives provided by the juxtaposition of Dante and the web, precisely because it is unusual and unexpected, can stimulate our curiosity and encourage lateral thinking), and to propose an analysis of the moral and legal structure of the *Inferno*, and the relative hierarchical relationship between vices/sins/crimes, using Dante's low-medieval assumptions as a springboard for critical reflection of the present day.

This, in turn, not only lends itself to the development of ethical and social reflection (which is stimulating insofar as Dante's creation enables a confusing and dangerous universe to be arranged according to an intelligible "order"), but also lends itself to the launching of a critical discussion that is potentially fruitful for students because it is exciting, and capable of engaging them emotionally. In other words, this juxtaposition allows for the integration of *emotional* stimuli (think of the *Inferno*'s colourful figures and punishments, and what they lead to) with *rational* stimuli (with respect to the plausibility of Dante's moral order: the condemnations of the gluttonous, or the slothful, or that of Paolo and Francesca, for example, are not so obvious) to a *practical* education that encourages students to be careful in their use of the internet.

Moreover, such a juxtaposition also provides valuable literary pretexts that are appropriately "external" and indirect, allowing even issues such as bullying - often very delicate and "sensitive," especially for secondary school students - to be addressed by placing them within an academic and "distant" context. This is a context that offers the opportunity to discuss these themes with a helpful degree of detachment, avoiding embarrassment (on the part of those who are perhaps experiencing those situations), and thus lowering the emotional/defensive filter that would prevent them from discussing these issues openly.

The applicative juxtaposition of the two worlds, then, has a lot of potential: that of achieving at the same time an educational objective, in relation to the risks of new digital technologies; a didactic objective, allowing one to "get to grips with" Dante; and finally, a critical objective, provided by its potential to stimulate thoughtful debate in the classroom on issues of ethics and justice.

Moreover, references to the punishments that punctuate Dante's infernal scheme of justice could help possible and future victims to rely on the prospect of psychological self-absolution (thus avoiding secondary victimization) as well as justice, and to know what safeguards (unfortunately, students are often unaware of these) exist for victims of internet abuse. Not to mention that, of course, de-compartmentalizing and making the three levels and functions interact with each other would produce a further and considerable enhancement of each of them.

In conclusion, therefore, this essay, motivated by the search for arguments in favour of the legitimacy, appropriateness and conceptual and practical possibility of transferring Dante's other world into our development of courses of digital citizenship, civic education, and law, must inevitably end with a positive conclusion, and with a strong invitation not to miss the opportunity to seize, in our educational courses, the "poetic" insight that a timeless classic work of poetry can still offer to those who, today, need guidance to help them navigate the hidden "dark woods" of the modern world.

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