Editorial: For Pursuit of Virtue and of Knowledge

The present issue includes the article “Syllabification of the Divine Comedy” by Andrea Asperti and Stefano Dal Bianco. *Divine Comedy* is the masterpiece of Dante Alighieri, the Italian poet who established his native dialect as the standard Italian language in early 14th century. Together with two master writers of the same period, Petrarch and Boccaccio, he shaped the language in such a way that it was eventually adopted in all Italy, prevailing on other local dialects derived from Latin. Present-time Italian is not much different from Dante’s one, and although the *Comedy* was written seven hundred years ago, any modern Italian can still read and understand it. Dante also established the orthographic rules that make written Italian an almost 100% phonetic-consistent representation for pronunciation.

The *Comedy* describes Dante’s imaginary travel through Hell (Inferno), Purgatory, and Paradise. The poem expresses the author’s vision about religious, theological, and philosophical matters, using for the first time a vernacular language instead of Latin, which was the customary literary language in the Middle Ages. Mathematics is addressed as well, as in the following verses¹ (*Paradise*, XXXIII, 133–136):

As the geometrician, who endeavours
To square the circle, and discovers not,
By taking thought, the principle he wants,

where Dante compares the impossibility of “squaring the circle” as the most difficult geometrical problem—actually an insoluble one—to his difficulty in understanding profound theological questions without support.

Readers are probably more fascinated by the vivid portraits of human characters in the *Inferno*, among others Ulysses, who addresses his companions in his last travel with this allocution (*Inferno*, XXVI, 118–120):

Consider ye the seed from which ye sprang;
Ye were not made to live like unto brutes,
But for pursuit of virtue and of knowledge.

I borrowed the title of this editorial from the last verse, as I believe it well summarizes JOCCH’s mission.

Back to the JOCCH article mentioned previously, it seemed a fortunate coincidence that a technological paper concerning Dante and his *Comedy* was submitted and accepted just in time to appear on the present anniversary year. The year 2021 is the 700th anniversary of Dante’s death in 1321, celebrated in Italy with events and public reading of the *Comedy*. They were inaugurated by Roberto Benigni (Academy Award recipient as Best Actor for *Life Is Beautiful*) reciting Dante on March 25 in front of the highest Italian authorities and broadcast on Italian television. Serendipitously, the final decision on the article was taken on the same day, named *Dante Day* and

¹ Although 150 years old, I use here the beautiful translation into English by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, dated 1867, which in my opinion is the one that renders better the meaning, the style, and the rhythm of the poem. Quotes are taken from the Wikisource version, openly available at [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Divine_Comedy_\(Longfellow_1867\)](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Divine_Comedy_(Longfellow_1867)).

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marking the beginning of the celebration year to follow the calendar used at Dante’s time, which started the year on March 25 according to the *ab incarnatione* calendar style.

Too many coincidences to go unnoticed, ideally connecting present-time digital technology as the one presented in the article to one of the “greatest works of all medieval European literature” according to *Encyclopædia Britannica*, on its anniversary year and day: with the hope that like Dante, we all may soon exit the present Hell and come forth to “rebehold the stars” (*Inferno*, XXXIV, 139).

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