
Perhaps more than any other aspect of Dante's *Commedia*, the issue of money may very well be the most relevant to modern readers. Certainly the medieval view of the state of souls in the afterlife and the moral judgments that Dante makes with respect to human appetites are of interest to scholars, but in many respects Dante's views on human sexuality, his perception of the cosmos, and his steadfast belief in the Christian monopoly on salvation might seem, if not politically incorrect, then certainly somewhat antiquated to the academy of the twenty-first century. Yet the question of money, or more specifically the question of poverty versus wealth, one that played a substantial role in the socio-politics of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, begs as much consideration today as it did when Dante wandered throughout northern Italy, exiled and often wondering where his next meal would come from. Scholars of liberation theology, the Bolshevik revolution and "Reaganomics" can attest to the extent to which the question of whether it is nobler to be poor than to be rich has shaped not only the socio-economic landscape of the modern world but also the extent to which the question remains unresolved.

It is for this reason that Nick Havely's examination of the issue in the context of the *Commedia* is not only timely but also timeless. Indeed, this thorough and satisfying study of the question provides readers with both an indispensable primer
on the politics and culture of poverty in the late Middle Ages and an essential tool for understanding the degree to which the conflict between the Franciscans and the papacy is but a larger expression of the personal struggle of any man who finds himself in economic hardship. As Havely makes clear, Dante himself, knowing full well how salty is the taste of another man’s bread and how hard is the way up another man’s steps, struggled with the conflict between his early poetic formation in which poverty was seen as a *disgrazia* to be avoided at all costs and the attractiveness of a Franciscan tradition that imbued economic lack with a nobility unattainable through material acquisition. For Dante, the Franciscan approach was ultimately more consistent with the spiritual direction in which the narrative of the *Commedia* leads his pilgrim. But the Franciscan tradition, suggests Havely, also provided Dante with a poetic or literary resolution, pointing to the body of Franciscan literature that informs the *Commedia* as well as the *Commedia’s* use of the *volgare*. Havely’s argument is compelling and well supported by his meticulous study of poverty and shame in medieval Tuscan poetry and its influence on Dante’s early writing. The book’s first chapter, “From Shame to Honour: Tuscan and Franciscan Poverty,” examines the great variety of attitudes towards poverty that existed in medieval society. Noting that a number of contradictory attitudes often existed even within one writer’s corpus of work, Havely points out that Dante’s own literary output was no exception, as variety and complexity continue to be evident even in Dante’s mature discourse of poverty. Havely does, however, detect a gradual evolution in Dante’s writing in which the *ideal* of poverty is distinguishable from the actual hardship and degradation it often brings.

The book also recognizes that the debate on poverty, particularly in the Franciscan context is hardly severable from the issue of papal authority. In its insistence on a return to the values of the early apostles, Franciscan poverty implicitly sought to unseat papal authority that had become corrupt and no longer worthy of obedience. Accordingly, the Franciscan challenge, based in the poverty debate, provided a legitimate paradigm for passive resistance. As the book considers the role of Franciscan ideals and expression as manifested throughout the *Commedia*, it becomes abundantly clear that Dante girds himself in Franciscan humility as a means of continuing the fight against papal simony, avarice and graft.

But Havely is careful not to suggest that Dante is presenting himself as a Franciscan. Rather, he sees Dante’s use of the Franciscan tradition of poverty as a paradigm through which his own status as a “lowly wandering mendicant” (*Conv. I.3.4 and Par. 6.135 and 141*) might be validated, through which, as Havely puts it, the “Dante persona as poet and prophet” is authorized. It is a subtle distinction, but one that Havely deftly makes and elegantly expresses. In this respect Havely’s book shows a clear understanding of and, more importantly, presents a cogent explanation for Dante’s pseudo-autobiographical project, one in which the poet seeks not so much to paint himself as another Paul, another Aeneas or another Francis, so much as to use those models to explicate precisely who he is. In Havely’s words, “Dante’s own authorization of poverty will thus enable him … to express hope of reward from a work which has made him ‘per moli anni macro’, ‘over long years lean’.”

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Similarly Havely is not overzealous in identifying Franciscan elements in every line of the *Commedia*. recognizing that the Franciscan debate on poverty is by no means the only important factor in the construction of Dante’s literary persona. He does, however, present a convincing argument in favor of its pervasive influence throughout the work. To this end, Havely has been painstaking in his efforts to locate the most Franciscan aspects of all three canticles of the *Commedia*, focusing on avarice and authority in the *Inferno*, poverty of the spirit in the *Purgatorio* and on poverty and authority in the *Paradiso*. Throughout the book as well Havely emphasizes that the debate on poverty was not simply one that pitted Franciscans against the papacy, especially given the existence of periodic papal support for the movement, but rather as one that ultimately also pitted the Spirituals against the Conventuals, confirming the difficulty of resolving the issue, but also accounting for the apparently contradictory views on poverty in Dante’s own writing even as late as the *Paradiso*. It is this absence of a pat solution that gives the debate its continuing relevance, while it is Nick Havely’s meticulous research (the appendices, notes and bibliography are particularly useful) and marvelous writing style that mark him as the consummate scholar and that make this book essential reading not only for Dante scholars but also for scholars of medieval religion, politics, and culture.

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*Dante Metamorphoses: Episodes in a Literary Afterlife* is a collection of nine essays on Dante derived from a series of lectures given between 1993 and 2001. Eric Haywood suggests that an alternative title could be “Dante: Five Centuries of Abuse.” The essays document how Dante’s works, primarily the *Comedy*, were “appropriated throughout the ages and across Europe by a variety of authors for a variety of reasons and to various effects”; they demonstrate how globalization, at least in the cultural sphere, is an older phenomenon than we perhaps realize (5). This globalization is twofold: written by residents of, or continental scholars working in, the British Isles, the essays deal with Dante’s appropriation, reception, and “abuse” in Western Europe. All are interesting, well focused, and lead to the conclusion that Dante may be considered “abused” only if widespread adaptation and analysis of his great poem is somehow denigrating not laudatory. The *Comedy* is discussed in terms of translations, source material for other works, literary influence, and politics.

The first essay, Nicholas Round’s “Lovers in Hell: *Inferno* V and Íñigo López de Mendoza” should be read in conjunction with the last, Deirdre O’Grady’s “Francesca da Rimini from Romanticism to Decadence.” Both relate to *Inferno* V and the misreading of literature which informs a large part of Francesca and