

Italian youth respond to Dante

Editor Nora Hamerman and correspondent Liliana Gorini report on a Rome conference that transformed the educational landscape.

Amid the typical bustle of the holiday shopping season, an uninformed observer who passed the entrance of the Sala Borromini in the historical center of Rome in early December might have wondered why hundreds of teenagers were spilling into the street from the famous 17th-century auditorium. The onlooker might have guessed that a rock concert or protest rally had taken place—and would have been astonished to learn, during that evening's television newscast, that the occasion was instead a three-day symposium on "Teaching Dante Today," organized by the Accademia Umanistica and co-sponsored by the Italian Ministry of Public Education and Ministry of Culture.

The participation of 1,200 students and hundreds of teachers from 45 high schools and universities in the Rome area at the symposium was an irrefutable vindication of the power of two men's ideas in shaping a movement to reverse the disastrous collapse of education that has afflicted Italy since the Maoist student movement erupted in 1968. One of these men, of course, is Dante Alighieri—Italy's greatest poet, the founder of the Italian language in the 14th century, and one of the towering geniuses of world literature and thought. The second is Lyndon LaRouche, who in 1978 founded the international Academy movement of which the Italian Accademia Umanistica is a part, and whose collaborators on four continents have made Dante a constant companion as they seek to bring back the highest level of culture as a weapon against the return of a Dark Age.

Dante has never entirely disappeared from Italian schools, of course. But as one participant in the Dec. 1-3 symposium observed from the audience, the centuries-old custom of the "Lectura Dantis," group reading and discussion of the full 100 cantos of Dante's masterpiece, the *Divina Commedia* (*Divine Comedy*), now typically attracts those beyond their sixties. Meanwhile, the high schools impart the *Commedia*, as it is properly called, only in limited doses through selections from the cantos believed to be most popular, accompanying these disembodied fragments with pedantic interpretations. The re-

sults of this standard Dante curriculum were aptly summed up in an article dedicated to the symposium in the leading Rome conservative daily, *Il Tempo*: Dante was becoming a "frozen monument . . . a bureaucratic routine destined soon to fade away."

But now there is a Dante renaissance—and not just in Italy—in which Lyndon LaRouche's role has been key. In his writings over the past several years, the American economist and political leader LaRouche has emphasized that Dante's three canticles, the *Inferno*, the *Purgatorio* (*Purgatory*), and the *Paradiso* (*Paradise*), represent the three levels of consciousness attained by a human being as he develops from infantile bestiality (*Inferno*), to the adolescent's struggle to achieve rational Understanding (*Purgatory*), to the adult level of higher Reason (*Paradise*—achieved in our society, LaRouche points out, only too rarely). LaRouche has shown that it is the *process of development* leading the individual, canto by canto, from *Inferno* to *Purgatory*, and then from *Purgatory* to *Paradise*, and, within *Paradise*, to the empyreal realm of pure creative Reason, that is the fundamental law of human morality. This moral law corresponds precisely to the progressive evolution of the physical universe. The greatest scientific discoveries in history have revealed that the physical universe is governed by the same principles that govern the human mind. Therefore, LaRouche has concluded, the *Commedia* is the greatest "physics treatise" ever written.

The LaRouche approach was the subject of the symposium. A Dec. 5 article, titled "Americans Propose Dante," in the daily newspaper *Il Tempo*, described as "disconcerting, but not at all negative" the fact that "three of the speakers were Americans or of U.S. origin, starting with the chairman of the Accademia that organized the meeting, Muriel Mirak. Has the 'Reagan shift' gone so far?" the paper inquired.

"It was due to them [the Americans] that the temperature of the debate was so fervid, with some naïvetés and simplifications: but happy naïvetés and simplifications, if they nourish a solid commitment to relaunching shin-

ing values in a world which has been devastated also by intellectual cynicism.”

Il Tempo summarized the unusual scope of the presentations: “Dante was ‘read’ as a political scientist, a philosopher of science, a source of artistic research, and not only for his time, but also, and above all, for ours, which is in just as extreme a crisis as his and more so. In a bold suggestion, it was even said that the study of Dante’s language facilitates comprehension of the nature of the high energy-dense plasmas observed in nuclear fusion research.”

‘Missionaries of Dante’

Il Tempo also commented that “Rather than Dante experts in the scholarly sense, the participants in the symposium were Dante missionaries, inspired by an enthusiasm and faith in Dante’s current relevance that went far beyond mere æsthetic admiration or erudite interest in the monumental work of a great man.”

The Rome symposium proved that, given a choice, Italian youth do not seek the rock-drug counterculture, and moreover, do not want to be limited to a vocabulary of 500 words plus grunts, despite the contrary message in the major media. The 1,200 students who flocked to the event despite “standing room only” in the two historic halls where it was held, enthusiastically voted by their attendance for the resumption of the study of a cultivated language based on Dante which would be capable of expressing advanced scientific conceptions.

In this effort to create a new kind of “youth movement,” in its essentials very much like the Italian Renaissance which took its impetus from Dante over 500 years ago, LaRouche’s close Italian and American collaborators were joined by leading officials of the Italian government, Vatican officials, representatives of cultural institutions, and educators.

The symposium began with an inaugural session and reception at the Protomoteca hall in the Capitoline Palace, which was the site of the first Roman government, was rebuilt by Michelangelo in the Renaissance, and now is the seat of the City of Rome’s government. It continued at the magnificent meeting room built for the Oratorian order in the 17th century by the architect Borromini, and concluded, after two days of working sessions, with a round-table discussion on how to carry out a new Dantesque curriculum, featuring some of Italy’s most distinguished educators.

Out of this round-table came a commitment, endorsed by the government spokesman Senator Mezzapesa, to pass a new education policy bill in Italy based on the necessity for a renewed classical curriculum. Such a bill is being prepared by the European Labor Party of Italy (POE—Partito Operaio Europeo). Since 1976, the POE has run numerous electoral campaigns committed to a national policy of economic development and cultural renaissance for Italy.

The first annual Dante Symposium in Rome—its organizers have already scheduled a follow-up for December 1982—culminates the opening phase of an intense period of activity spreading knowledge of the great Italian poet by the LaRouche-linked Academy movement. A “Dante Alighieri Society” dedicated to reversing the Dark Age through science has been set up at the University of Monterrey in Mexico. In the United States, the Lafayette Foundation organized two local one-day symposiums during 1981, around the theme “Dante and the Science of Republican Statecraft,” and the bold assertion that Dante must be counted as an American founding father because he established the principles of republican government and the means of educating a republican citizenry in his *Commedia* and other writings. Co-sponsored by such organizations as the New Jersey Alliance of Italian-Americans and the Philadelphia-based American Institute for Italian Culture, the symposia were held in New Jersey in May and Philadelphia in November; they drew a total of over 300 citizens for presentations on the implications of Dante’s work today, and “A Musical Tribute to Dante” linking Renaissance poetry to the musical tradition that also gave the world Beethoven.

‘Don’t let civilization die’

This “Dante movement” is being created in response to an urgent practical necessity. As a television commentator remarked in news coverage of the Rome symposium Dec. 2: “With this initiative, the reading of the Poet is being proposed anew as the first step toward a vigorous upswing of classical studies.

“In the various presentations,” he continued, “the analogies between Dante’s time and ours were stressed again and again. Then, the earth was swept by a devastating plague; today, we are threatened by different and even more serious plagues. As Dante’s work in the 14th century opened the door for the future of creativity, so today’s symposium proposed that the teaching of the Florentine poet can help us find new values.”

Muriel Mirak, chairman of the Accademia Umanistica, led the inaugural session at the Capitoline Palace on Dec. 1. “Civilization, our civilization, is dying,” she began. “If we do not succeed in intervening soon by kindling of the spark of a new renaissance capable of recovering lost sciences, and thus renewing our citizenry morally and intellectually, we shall inexorably follow in the sad footprints of past civilizations which ended in barbarism. If instead we can start the process of regeneration, it will be thanks to the man to whom we dedicate this symposium: Dante Alighieri.”

Mirak reminded the 700 participants at the first presentation that very advanced civilizations such as Atlantis and the Etruscans had disappeared from the face of the earth.



Standing: Marco Fanini of the POE; at right, Professors Tarugi and Mirak.

She spoke of how the degeneracy of language, the spread of irrationalism, and the formation of drug-based cults are danger signals. "How can we stop this degenerative spiral in time?" she queried. "A sentimental return to classical culture, by which I mean pathetically paying tribute to museum exhibits, will not be sufficient.

"A simple revival of past educational models and institutions would also not be enough. What is necessary is a complete regeneration of thought. We must move methodologically through the steps that brought into being the Renaissance, to reestablish the language which will give life to a new art, a new poetry, and the advancement of science."

Showing how deeply Dante was a "politician" rather than an ivory-tower intellectual, Mirak scored modern politicians as comparative pygmies: Because of them the political life of the nation is sliding toward barbarism, just as in the 1300s when Dante wrote his *Commedia* to "radically transform man" as—she noted—the avid Dante reader Pope Paul VI had termed it.

The inaugural session concluded by noting those who had sent greetings, including Italian President Sandro Pertini, Prime Minister Giovanni Spadolini, the Italian Ministries of Public Education and Culture, and Helga Zepp-LaRouche, chairman of the European Labor Party of West Germany.

Bring Dante's language to life

When the proceedings reconvened Dec. 2 at the Sala Borromini, there was a continuous influx of whole

classes of students from Rome and nearby cities. Hundreds were forced to stand due to what the press termed the "totally insufficient space" allotted by the city government. Prof. Giovannangiola Secchi Tarugi, who heads an Academy of Renaissance Studies named for the Florentine 15th-century poet and Dante commentator Angelo Poliziano, discussed "The New Humanism of Dante in the Development of European Civilization."

She was followed by Leonardo Servadio, the secretary of the Accademia Umanistica, on "The *De Monarchia* of Dante and the Concept of the Republican State." Servadio stressed that academic treatises on *De Monarchia*, Dante's essay on statecraft, bypass the issue. Dante does not write as a passive witness to events around him; he writes to change the world. *De Monarchia* is a document, Servadio asserted, to teach political character to statesmen and the population at large.

Servadio explained that Dante starts with the principles that must rule society, and then elaborates what is responsible for the degradation of society, putting the dominant economic policy at the top—the strangling of productive activity through the rule of usury. The oligarchical forces known to Dante operated through the notorious Donation of Constantine, a fraudulent document purporting to bestow temporal authority on the Church; today's oligarchical elite operates from such institutional bases as the International Monetary Fund and World Bank.

The concept of Dante as statesman was re-emphasized in the text of the presentation sent by Prof. Alberto Chiari, one of Italy's foremost Dante interpreters, who was unable to attend. Chiari's address on "Dante for Ugo Foscolo" spoke of Dante's influence in the 19th-century poet-patriot Foscolo, whom one might compare to his contemporary, America's Edgar Allan Poe. Chiari showed the coherence between the expressive capability of the Italian language per se, and concurrent political-diplomatic activity in the service of the nation.

"In Defense of the Italian Language" headlined the afternoon panel which demonstrated—in accord with Foscolo—how the Italian language created by Dante was most fit to express what Shelley called "profound and impassioned conceptions concerning man and nature." Webster Tarpley, formerly a commentator on political economy for the Accademia Umanistica on the Rome TV channel Teleradiosole, and European coordinator of Lyndon LaRouche's National Democratic Policy Committee, took up the subject of reforming the language from its degenerated current usage, linked, he pointed out, "to the political and social crisis surrounding us."

"In the United States, for example, there is no politician who is not deeply illiterate. Take the case of Secretary of State Haig, whose ignorance of the most elementary rules of the English language make him a

national scandal. General Haig often speaks about 'cautious cautiousness,' and of 'strategic strategy.'

"The humorous aspects are evident," Tarpley continued; "but when one hears General Haig speaking, one also hears the language of the releases issued during the Vietnam War—the language used by those who created, carried forward and justified that war to effect massive population reduction. There exists, in other words, a very direct link between a competent use of language, intelligence, and morality; and a decay in language involves directly a decay in intelligence and morality."

Tarpley, assisted by Fiorella Operto, chairman of the POE, then detailed the project formulated by LaRouche to bring back a cultivated language. Giving examples from Dante's Italian, Schiller and Goethe's German, Rabelais's French, Shakespeare and Milton's English, and Pushkin's Russian, Tarpley demonstrated how in any cultivated language the cornerstone of formulating hypotheses is the use of the conditional-subjunctive (hypothetical phrase). The vanishing of the subjunctive mood from today's language, he noted, reduces the capacity not only for expression, but for thought itself.

The general thesis was demonstrated with great effectiveness for the case of Italian by Operto. This December, the POE brought out a pamphlet titled *Toward a Dantesque grammar of real Italian—A Preliminary Study*, with a preface by LaRouche. She gave examples from contemporary Italian from modern novels, the language of the press, and politicians including Socialist leader Bettino Craxi. She showed that even the best known authors and journalists write entire pages without ever using the subjunctive, or make themselves incomprehensible by borrowing from already degenerated English.

The scientific Renaissance

The last day of the symposium opened with three presentations on "Renaissance Art and Natural Science in the Tradition of Dante." U.S. art historian Dr. D. Stephen Pepper spoke on "Dante, Raphael, and the Basis of the Italian Renaissance," and demonstrated that the painter Raphael's application of the principles of Dante's three levels of consciousness to pictorial representation completely exposed the pornographic fraudulence of such forerunners of modernism as Caravaggio, a much-admired Roman artist of the 17th century.

Alessandro Parronchi, the well-known Professor of Art History at the University of Florence who has written on Dante's contribution to the science of perspective, then presented his exciting thesis on "The Botticelli Drawings." The famous illustrations of the *Commedia* by the late 15th-century Florentine Neopla-

tonic artist, Parronchi showed, are not preparations for a book, as widely believed, but designs for frescos for the interior of the famous Brunelleschi dome of Florence Cathedral, which from the beginning of its construction has been associated with Dante's work. The dome, begun in 1418, is considered the greatest single scientific and engineering feat of the Florentine Renaissance.

Muriel Mirak, author of "How Dante Used Poetry to Start the Scientific Renaissance," next stirred up an intense debate with her presentation on "The Significance of Paradise for Geometry—from Pacioli to Bruno." Dr. Mirak's article elaborating the LaRouchian approach to the *Commedia* came out in English in *The Campaigner*, April 1980, and appeared in the inaugural edition of *Il Machiavellico*, a new periodical released at the Rome symposium.

Mirak easily destroyed the myth that the third canticle of the *Commedia*, *Paradise*, is the least interesting and most "abstract," by demonstrating how Dante anticipated by centuries the Keplerian theories of planetary motion. She emphasized that through the Platonic dialogue between Dante and Beatrice, *Paradise* instructs the reader on how to give up the Aristotelian, empiricist sense-certainty method in favor of the rigorous scientific method of elaborating hypotheses on the nature of the physical universe and its laws. Today, Mirak stated, reading Dante's *Paradise* is more useful for scientists than reading Newton!

How to teach the classics

The highlight of the conference for many was the round-table discussion where Academy leaders grappled alongside leading figures in the government and Church educational programs with the question of how Dante can be made the basis for a revival of Italian education. Although Dante's 700th birthday was celebrated nationally and internationally in 1965, a 16-year-old youth in Italy today, born in that year, is likely to have little interest in and less knowledge about Dante, for that was also the year when the nihilist "student movement" was launched, creating today's terrorist gangs and destroying the remnants of classical curriculum.

Panel participants included Monsignor Giovanni Fallani, Vice President of the Casa di Dante and President of the Vatican Commission of Sacred Art; Italo Borzi, the General Director of the Information, Literary, Artistic, and Scientific Service to the Italian Prime Ministry; Senator Pietro Mezzapesa, Undersecretary to the Ministry of Culture; Maria Luisa Bonelli of the National Teachers' Association; Muriel Mirak; and Fiorella Operto.

Borzi very effectively posed how the classics are now being killed in the schools, noting that the *Commedia* is read only in isolated cantos and those are buried in

obscure interpretation.

"I was very glad to hear the second canto of *Paradise*," Borzi remarked, referred to the reading by actor Roberto Bramucci before the round-table, "which is never read in school because it is considered 'inferior.' Let us please not say 'that canto should have been written differently,' let us shut up, because the worst line of Dante is better than anything in contemporary production!" The speaker was warmly applauded.

Senator Mezzapesa, officially representing the Italian government, then posed the question of how Dante must be taught in order not to appear too difficult or outdated.

He blasted some new interpretations and "alternative" ways of teaching Dante as "a conspiracy against Dante," and added that the first enemy of Dante is the intellectual laziness which prevents a student from concentrating on his poem.

Monsignor Fallani, who chaired the round-table, emphasized Dante's importance in the moral formation of young people: "Every young person faces a certain point in his life, what Dante faced when he found himself lost in the forest [at the beginning of the *Inferno*], which means difficulties and obstacles, and intervention is needed at this point to get him out."

To no one's surprise, the corruption of the mass media was hit hard by the speakers. Dr. Mirak posed Dante as a way out: "If one thinks of the joy children feel when resolving conceptual problems, and if one thinks of the fact that life is short and should be used to contribute to the continuous progress of humanity, one will no longer lose time with television and comic books. In this sense the love for science brought about by Dante is morality."

Many members of the audience—particularly teachers and teachers in training—joined the discussion when it was opened to the floor. One student from a teachers' college stressed what the symposium sponsors had also deemed most significant—the number of young people attending. She said she was most struck by the words of Muriel Mirak in her inaugural speech on the death of civilization: "Participating in this symposium has made me realize that I am not adequate to my task of becoming a teacher—in all these years of school, all I saw in Dante's *Commedia* was the beauty of the verse."

"It will not be easy to take this enthusiasm and these intuitions into the schools," commented the daily *Il Tempo* in its article praising the symposium. "Nonetheless, the teachers and students were numerous and interested, ready to participate. From the audience, the [stage and television] director Orazio Costa also took the microphone and announced the news that he is preparing a dramatic reading of the *Commedia*, to be transmitted next year over Italy's national radio channel.

THE VATICAN

John Paul II wars against Malthusians

by Vivian Zoakos, European Editor

In a 175-page "apostolic exhortation" released Dec. 15, Pope John Paul II attacked head-on the neo-Malthusian "population control" forces of the Club of Rome and the Global 2000 "futurology movement."

Although he cited no institutions by name, the Pope's target was perfectly clear when he sharply criticized "the studies of the ecologists and futurologists, which sometimes exaggerate the danger of demographic increase to the quality of life."

Asserting that "the Church stands for life," John Paul said it "condemns as gravely unjust" the neo-Malthusians' policy of making economic aid to nations and individuals conditional on willingness to introduce and accept "programs of contraception, sterilization and procured abortion," to cite the population control policies specifically named by the Pope.

And he declared the Church opposed to all government "population control" policies, saying it "condemns as a grave offense against human dignity" governmental efforts "to attempt to limit in any way the freedom of couples in deciding about children."

Landmark statement

John Paul's statements, in a document intended to provide guidance for the Catholic clergy around the world, mark the first time the Vatican has explicitly identified the ecologist movement and the international futurologists as the purveyors of the genocide policy euphemistically dubbed "population control."

Instead of passively accepting the threats of schism in the Church proliferating from the neo-Malthusian genocidalists inside and outside the Church, the Papacy is finally putting the full weight of its authority behind an active battle to target these forces. The futurists have in the past voiced their insistent fears about the role of the Church in spoiling their well-laid plans—to the point of threatening John Paul with assassination as the only way to silence him.

Reins in Jesuits

The Pope's attack on the neo-Malthusians, the very networks behind the Polish crisis and the ongoing Central American bloodbath, is the latest in a series of