

Introduction

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It has always seemed to us that the comics had quite a few and not occasional references to the work of Dante. This issue of the magazine is therefore a space in which to verify how the elements of Dante's imagination – and the structural characteristics of the great Florentine's poetry and thought – may have contributed to the media identity of the comics, in some of their experiences or phases. From the classic episode of *Mickey's Hell* (1949-50), to the special book of the fantastic series of *Dampyr* (2016), for more than half a century now Italian comics have enlivened Dante's legacy and reconstructed it (also transfiguring and re-elaborating it) in the narrative keys and the expressive forms that are typical of it. But also the American, English and Japanese comics, whether in the form of the author's book, the underground comic strip, the graphic novel or the manga, present works that adapt and re-launch, in the written-drawn codes of the sequential frames, the Dantesque universe, with a particular predilection for his Hell.

Our first aim, in editing this issue of *Dante e l'arte* was to reconstruct the direct influences and adaptations in the expressive logics of our medium – logics, sometimes paradoxical and eccentric, like that of parody, in Disney comics or in a work such as the *The Divine Comedy Comic Book* by Marcello Toninelli, that translates the Dantesque imagination mixing it with the forms of modern and contemporary communication. Our second aim, on the other hand, was to point out where the relationship between Dante and the comics was less transparent, more mediated, more linked to long-standing reworkings but at the same time, though not easily perceived, no less interesting and binding. These are the relationships of Dante's work and imagination with comic books, graphic novels or manga which, at first sight, do not seem to be connected with them but which, on the basis of an analysis capable of undertaking non-institutional or non-orthodox paths, reveal themselves profoundly marked by the themes and the philosophical, cultural and poetic options of the *Commedia*.

Both in those comics that obliquely receive Dante's legacy and in those that adapt it in a direct way, one of the common premises of this monographic issue is the archaeological method. Although in some texts a somewhat pioneering effort has been made to draw a map of the relationship between Dante and the comics – providing an essential compass for his understanding – most of the approaches see the *Comedy* as a text not only linked to its era but also modern, contemporary with those comics on which it radiates its figurative power.

The mutability and the endless ability of Dante's work to “dance” with the shapes of the sequential image, with the “ghost images” that emerge between the drawing frames, is the condition under which the texts collected here demonstrate their fruitful approach.

The *Comedy* is both a starting and an arrival point. Thanks to it the comics can aspire to ascend (as the character of Dante himself in his work) through the variegated frieze of those cartoons that, in comic books, graphic novels or Japanese manga, proceed towards that “imagination without images” in which the figurative journey of Dante ends in Paradise.

Whether we have succeeded or not in this certainly not yet complete venture, the answer is entirely in the hands of the readers of this issue. In conclusion, Dantesque imagery is confirmed as a chosen place for the culture and communication of comics, both “classic” and contemporary ones, alive beyond all expectations.