



Dante Alighieri from absence to stony presence: building memories in nineteenth-century Florence

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Dante Alighieri - from Absence to Stony Presence: Building Memories in Nineteenth-Century Florence

*Se mai continga che il poema sacro
al quale ha posto mano e cielo e terra
sì che m'ha fatto per più anni macro,
vinca la crudeltà, che fuor mi serra
del bello ovile, ov'io dormii agnello
nimico a' lupi, che gli danno guerra,
con altra voce omai, con altro vello
ritornerò poeta, ed in sul fonte
del mio battesimo prenderò il cappello.
Par XXV, 1-9*

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History of Remembrance

Despite Dante's desire for a homecoming, as evidenced in the above lines from his *Paradiso*, this ambition was never realized. In fact for centuries the poet's native city Florence showed remarkably little interest in remembering and commemorating its exiled son, and those who sought reminders of Dante in Florentine streets were left disappointed. By the nineteenth century, the rather bizarre Sasso di Dante (a stone near the Cathedral which was reputed to be the place where Dante sat and conversed in the evenings) represented the main Dantean tourist attraction in the city.¹ Apart from this historically dubious and largely tenuous link with the poet, there was no other public space or object dedicated to the poet's memory. This state of affairs changed in 1830 when a monument was finally erected to the poet inside Santa Croce church in Florence.

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¹ See Graham Smith, *The Sasso di Dante* (Firenze: Olschki, 2000).

This article will look at the momentum behind the project to commemorate Dante, the effect of the outsider gaze on remedying the absence of reminders of the poet and the beginnings of the utilization of Dante for political and national purposes that was to mark most Dante commemorations in the nineteenth century. It will address the memorial cult of Dante within a proto-nationalist framework, a cult which was led by Italians, but to which awareness of foreign commentary made an important contribution. The project of raising a monument to Dante in Florence in the pre-unification period provides a case study for the close examination of these entangled concerns.

Much work has been done recently on the use of monuments and public ceremonies in Liberal and post Risorgimento Italy.² These investigations have looked at the relationship between people and space; city and landscape; memories and politics. The discussions in Italy have mirrored wider debates on the ability of monuments to communicate, to embody commemorative conflicts, and to represent important moments in national histories and, in the words of Johnson, the ‘symbolic dimension of public monuments and their connections with social memory and identity politics have become the increased focus of analysis in recent decades’.³ The publication of Pierre Nora’s monumental *Lieux de Mémoire* focused interest across the world on how memories can

² For example, Mario Isnenghi, *I luoghi della memoria: simboli e miti dell’Italia unita* (Bari: Laterza, 1996); Bruno Tobia, *Una patria per gli Italiani* (Bari: Laterza, 1991); Ilaria Porciani, *La festa della nazione* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1997); Erminia Irace, *Itale glorie. La costruzione di un pantheon nazionale* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2003).

³ Nuala Johnson, ‘Mapping monuments: the shaping of public space and cultural identities’ in *Visual Communication*, Vol. 1, 3 (2002), 293-298, p. 294; See also Nuala Johnson, ‘Cast in stone: monuments, geography, and nationalism’ in *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 13, 1 (1995), pp. 51-65.

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be constructed, contained, and contested.⁴ From Halbwachs onwards scholars have looked at the notion of collective memory and how societies relate to their pasts.⁵ In these studies, the social character of memory and the importance of collective and nationalized memory have been brought to the fore. Monuments are seen as particularly important material forms of memory and key embodiments of cultural trends. To quote Johnson again: ‘Rather than treating public monuments as innocent aesthetic embellishments of the public sphere alone, recent scholarship has emphasized the political and cultural meaning attached to them’.⁶

Most discussions in Italy have looked at state-initiated monuments from the time of unification. Studies abound on buildings and memorials such as the Vittorio Emanuele monument in Rome.⁷ Little work, however, has been done on monuments erected *during*

⁴ Pierre Nora, *Les lieux de mémoire* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1984-1992).

⁵ Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory* (New York: Harper, 1980) (original France 1925); John R. Gillis, *Commemorations: the politics of national identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Samuel Raphael, *Theatres of Memory* (London: Verso, 1994).

⁶ Johnson, ‘Mapping monuments’, p. 293. Scholarship on monuments has been inspired by key texts, especially by writers such as Maurice Agulhon, ‘La «Statuomanie» et l’histoire’, in id., *Histoire vagabonde, I. Ethnologie et politique dans la France contemporaine* (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), pp. 137-85; or Reinhart Koselleck, ‘Les monuments aux morts, lieux de fondation de l’identité des survivants’, in id., *L’expérience de l’histoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), pp. 135-60.

⁷ On the Vittorio Emanuele monument in Rome, see for example: David Atkinson and Denis Cosgrove, ‘Urban Rhetoric and Embodied Identities: City, Nation, and Empire at the Vittorio Emanuele II Monument in Rome, 1870-1945’, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 88.1 (1998), 28-49; John Dickie, ‘La Macchina da Scrivere: The Victor Emmanuel Monument in Rome and Italian Nationalism’, *The Italianist*, 14 (????), 61-85; Bruno Tobia, *L’Altare della Patria. L’Italia monarchica, fascista, repubblicana nella storia di un monumento* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1998), and C. Brice, *Il Vittoriano. Monumentalità pubblica e politica a Roma* (Roma: Archivio Guido Izzi, 2005). On other monuments see, for example, Sarah Godfrey,

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rather than after the period of unification. There is a crucial difference between the dynamics of the two, with the latter generally concerned with justifying and solidifying the state while the former were attempts at creating collective memory and representing a common past. The earlier monuments were often created with ideas of change in mind while the post-unification monuments were organs of the new ruling powers and are evidence of official rather than popular memorialization. This article will thus add a fresh perspective and original approach in addressing pre-unification nationalism and monuments. An examination of monuments in the formative stages of the Risorgimento reveals their extreme potency and ability to provide concrete examples of how collective myths and memories are mapped onto a landscape; these are part of the negotiation of identities and are important landmarks in the process of identity formation in this period.

Dante

Not only is it instructive to look at monuments constructed during the early decades of the nineteenth century, but it is also important to look at the representation of Dante in this era. The Dante narrative is one of the key narratives of the nineteenth century in the self-fashioning of Italian patriotism. Dante provided crucial references for the century (for example exile, unity and removal of foreigners) and directly inspired central figures

¹‘The Madre Patria: The Rebirth of Modern Italy in the Patriotic Spaces of Lake Fucino (1876) and the Torre Monumentale Di San Martino Della Battaglia (1893)’, *Italian Studies*, 62.2 (2007), 205-17; Lars Berggren and Lennart Sjöstedt, *L'ombra dei grandi. Monumenti e politica monumentale a Roma (1870-1895)* (Roma: Artemide, 1996); Ilaria Porciani, ‘Stato, statue, simboli: i monumenti nazionali a Garibaldi e a Minghetti del 1895’, *Storia amministrazione costituzione*, 1 (1993), 211-42.

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such as Mazzini as evidenced in his writing on *Dell'Amor Patrio di Dante*.⁸ Dante's civic and political interests as expressed in the *Divina Commedia* suited the needs of the nineteenth century, as Bruno Tobia stated: 'Risorgimento politico italiano e culto di Dante Alighieri si sa, vanno insieme'.⁹ Dante was a flexible point of reference: he could be a Ghibelline figure for Foscolo, Mazzini, Cattaneo, Settembrini, a Guelf figure for Gioberti, Tommaseo, Balbo; he could be a prophet or a symbol.¹⁰ In this period Dante came to have an exemplar status – a figure from the past who would guide for the future and, in understanding this role, it is important to look at the way in which he was represented in his native city.

In his article on Dante and the culture of the Risorgimento, Andrea Ciccarelli concentrates on the intertextual links between Dante and nineteenth-century authors and

⁸ Giuseppe Mazzini, 'Dell'amor patrio di Dante (1826)', *Scritti*, vol. 1 (Imola: Cooperativa tipografico-editrice, 1906). On Dante's importance, for example, for the self-fashioning of the Risorgimento exile, see Maurizio Isabella, 'Exile and Nationalism: The Case of the Risorgimento' *European History Quarterly*, 36.4 (2006), 497-520. On Dante's general significance for patriotism in Italy in this era, see Charles T. Davis, 'Dante and Italian nationalism' in *A Dante Symposium*, ed. by W. De Sua and G. Rizzo (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1965), pp. 199-213; and Stefano Jossa, 'Politics vs. literature. The Myth of Dante and the Italian National identity' in *Dante and the Long Nineteenth Century: Nationality, Identity, and Appropriation*, ed. by Aida Audeh and Havelly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁹ Bruno Tobia, 'La statuaria dantesca nell'Italia liberale: tradizione, identità e culto nazionale', in *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome, Italie et Méditerranée*, T. 109, no. 1, 1997, 75-87, p. 75.

¹⁰ Tobia, 'La statuaria dantesca', p. 75. The terms Guelf and Ghibelline in the nineteenth century came to delineate those who favoured unification which included a role for the papacy, and those whose vision was more secular. There were also of course many hues and varieties in between, with Dante appropriated and used for a variety of (often mutually contradictory) nineteenth-century ends.

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he entitles his article ‘Dante and the Culture of the Risorgimento: Literary, Political or Ideological Icon?’¹¹ –I feel that the use of ‘or’ in this title makes an unnecessary distinction between fields which in the nineteenth century were in fact quite fluid. This article will show how, for the Risorgimento, Dante was a literary, political *and* ideological icon and the creation of the monument to the poet in Santa Croce church graphically illustrates the convergence of these many strands. In fact, the three strands were mutually beneficial: the increased political and ideological interest in Dante led to greater study of the poet’s writings and it is no coincidence that during such the politically charged events of the Risorgimento, many editions of the poet’s work were issued.¹² The engagement of literary figures with Dante, as demonstrated by Ciccarelli, stemmed both from direct literary inspiration and from the increased interest of pre-Risorgimento society in the poet. As we will see, the case of the poet Giacomo Leopardi; is a clear example of this interchange between political and poetical, and it is clear that Dante was a multifaceted source for the Risorgimento discourse. As Alberto Banti has demonstrated, literature could have an important role in the formation of public opinion during the Risorgimento, and Dante was a hugely important inspiration to *both* literary and political figures who were contributing the national discourse.¹³ The contribution of

¹¹ Andrea Ciccarelli, ‘Dante and the Culture of the Risorgimento: Literary, Political or Ideological Icon’, in *Making and Remaking Italy: the cultivation of national identity around the Risorgimento*, ed. by Albert Russell Ascoli and Krystyna Von Henneberg (Oxford: Berg, 2001), pp. 77-102. In this article Ciccarelli confuses the monument inside Santa Croce (1830) with the statue to Dante outside the church (1865).

¹² Giuliano Mambelli, *Gli annali delle edizioni dantesche* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1931).

¹³ Luigi Settembrini said in his memoirs: ‘Di Dante non vi dico nulla: era l’idolo degli studiosi: egli rappresenta la grande idea della nostra nazionalità, egli il pensiero, l’ingegno, la gloria, la

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literature to the political construction of Italian glories has been noted and this article will add to the understanding of where these convergences and contributions existed in the nineteenth century.¹⁴

It is therefore important to note the interest in Dante in this period both in literary and political terms. Dante was certainly a politicized literary figure in this era who was harnessed for an emergent nationalistic culture. But this should not overshadow the genuine popular interest in the poet and his literary work that developed throughout the century. In the pages of the journal the *Antologia*, it is possible to observe for example reviews of the many editions of Dante's work and the increasing numbers of commentaries on the *Divina Commedia*. In 1827, for example, in reviewing Foscolo's commentary on Dante, the author of the article says:¹⁵

Se omai riboccano a sazieta i commentatori d'ogni fatta del nostro maggior poeta, il presente lavoro che noi annunziamo, non sarà già considerato come giunto alla derrata.¹⁵

These sentiments are repeated two years later in the *Rivista Dantesca* of the *Antologia*:

A conforto dei buoni spiriti italiani, a decoro e sostegno della nostra letteratura, vediamo che ogni anno abbiamo occasione di discorrere o di nuovi lavori sul nostro maggior poeta, o di nuove edizioni della divina commedia, o d'altre opere di quell'ingegno.¹⁶

lingua d'Italia'. Quoted in Alberto Banti, *La nazione del Risorgimento* (Torino: Einaudi, 2000), p. 40.

¹⁴ On the contribution of literature to national identity see Amedeo Quondam, *Petrarca, l'italiano dimenticato* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2002), especially pp. 35-82 on Petrarch and Dante.

¹⁵ *Antologia*, (27) agosto, 80, (1827), p.188.

¹⁶ *Antologia*, (33) marzo, 99 (1829), p.1.

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how elites sought to claim continuity with a carefully selected past by constructing new spaces and associations with memory-charged locations. Public sculpture was important in anchoring collective memory and fed into a nostalgic, but strategic, desire for links with the past. When Dante Alighieri enjoyed a great revival in the nineteenth century, he became not just a historical point of reference for Italians, but also a prophet for their future. Whereas in commemorations of the poet in the post-unification phase, he was required to prop up notions of 'italianità', in the earlier stages, he was used as a guide who could shape cultural and political identity. With the upheaval of the Risorgimento, Dante could provide a master narrative for the emerging nation. Gillis has argued that 'we are constantly revising our memories to suit our current identities'¹⁸ and the revisions that were made in the early nineteenth century in Florence to incorporate the figure of Dante in a prominent position on the city's landscape, illustrate the changes occurring to identities in this era. It was an element of recollection at a time of new beginnings for Italy and the choice to include Dante betrays a nostalgic use of the past which can often belie a need to counteract negative feelings towards the present. Knowledge of a carefully selected cultural past was to be enshrined for the future through this monument and, in the figure of Dante, the cultural and political worlds could unite around a stony presence in the heart of the city.

▲ Foreigner gaze

The momentum to redress the absence of commemorations of Dante in Florence thus received a boost from the increased interest in the poet in the nineteenth century and also

▲▲¹⁸ Gillis, *Commemorations*, p. 3.

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from his appropriateness to many of the main figures of the Risorgimento as a unifying and importantly, guiding figure. For Mazzini, Niccolini, Leopardi, Settembrini, and Tommaseo, to name but a few, Dante was promoted as both a literary and political figure whose cause could help that of nineteenth-century Italy. There was, however, another major motivational factor to commemorate Dante, a factor that has not been considered by scholars in the study of Dante commemorations. This added momentum came from the highly critical comments made by foreigners about the state of neglect of the poet in his native city.

Dante enjoyed great international popularity in the nineteenth century and tourists prepared for a visit to Italy by reading the *Divina Commedia*.¹⁹ These tourists associated the poet with the city of Florence and were amazed to find the city bereft of monuments to Dante. This amazement turned into words of chastisement for nineteenth-century Florentines, and, as is the case in much travel literature from this era, foreigners were not slow to castigate the natives and complain about their deficiencies. Probably the most famous lines of rebuke came from the pen of Lord Byron in *Childe Harold* where he chastises Florence for not honouring the bodies of three of Tuscany's most famous sons; Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio:

But where repose the all Etruscan three –
Dante and Petrarch, and, scarce less than they,
The Bard of Prose, creative spirit! He
Of the Hundred Tales of love – where did they lay
Their bones, distinguished from our common clay
In death as life? Are they resolved to dust,
And have their country's marbles nought to say?
Could not her quarries furnish forth one bust?
Did they not to her breast their filial earth intrust?

¹⁹ M.P. Caesar, *Dante: The Critical Heritage*, London: Routledge, 1989, pp. 56-72.

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Ungrateful Florence! Dante sleeps afar,
Like Scipio, buried by the upbraiding shore:
Thy factions, in their worse than civil war,
Proscribed the bard whose name forevermore
Their children's children would in vain adore
With the remorse of ages [...]²⁰

High profile criticism of Florence by authors such as Byron (who was particularly popular in Italy) must have rankled. Criticism of Florence's inaction was also contained in Madame de Staël's *Corinne* and in travel accounts such as that by Joseph Forsyth.²¹

Similar negative commentary of the general state of Italian affairs can be found in most of the large amount of travel writing on Italy in this era published throughout Europe. Italians were berated as betraying their past, being unworthy of their glorious heritage and being poor shadows of their illustrious ancestors.²² The French poet Alphonse de Lamartine published the following lines about Italy in 1825:

Monument écroulé, que l'écho seul habite!
Poussière du passé, qu'un vent stérile agite!
Terre, où les fils n'ont plus le sang de leurs aïeux!
Où, sur un sol vieilli les hommes naissent vieux;
Où le fer avili ne frappe que dans l'ombre;
Où sur les fronts voilés plane un nuage sombre;
Où l'amour n'est qu'un piège, et la pudeur qu'un fard;
Où la ruse a faussé le rayon du regard;

²⁰ Lord Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Canto the Fourth*, LVI-LVII (London: John Murray, 1816).

²¹ Madame De Staël, *Corinne ou L'Italie*, (1807) (Paris: Ledentu, 1819); Joseph Forsyth, *Remarks on antiquities, arts and letters during an excursion in Italy in 1802 and 1803*. 2nd ed. (London: John Murray, 1816), p. 65. The Frenchman, G.G. Ampère observed 'In un primo mio viaggio a Firenze, avevo unito la mia voce al commune lamento che Santa Croce, il panteon del genio e della sventura, non racchiudesse una memoria di Dante': G.G. Ampère, *Viaggio Dantesco* (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1855), p. 35.

²² See as a typical example, Jane Waldie, *Sketches descriptive of Italy in 1816 and 1817* (London: John Murray, 1820), especially p. xix.

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Où les mots éternés ne sont qu'un bruit sonore,
Un nuage éclaté qui retentit encore!
Adieu! Pleure ta chute en vantant tes héros!
Sur des bords où la gloire a ranimé leurs os,
Je vais chercher ailleurs (pardonne, ombre romaine!)
Des hommes, et non pas de la poussière humaine.²³

In a similar vein, Samuel Rogers in his poem *Italy* says: 'O Italy, how beautiful thou art! Yet I could weep – for thou art lying, alas, Low in the dust; and we admire thee now As we admire the beautiful in death.'²⁴ Italians were used to hearing such comments and compositions, and in the *Antologia*, one critic, while commenting on a travel writer, said: 'Egli, contro le solite prevenzioni degli stranieri, trova in noi un popolo nuovo, rivolto seriamente alle cose utili.'²⁵ Silvana Patriarca has noted that 'Italian patriots intensely felt the burden of outsiders' representations and often spoke within parameters that were not of their own making'.²⁶ Generally, in this era, Italians rejected what they deemed to be their misrepresentation by foreigners; on this occasion, however, they appear to have accepted the comments on their neglect of Dante.²⁷ Indeed, the foreign criticism heightened the desire to erect a memorial to Dante and so, when in 1818 moves were made to construct a cenotaph to Dante in Santa Croce, direct reference was made to the critical view of the outsider.

²³ Alphonse de Lamartine, *Le Dernier chant du pèlerinage d'Harold* (1825), avec *Commentaire* (1850). *Oeuvres poétiques complètes* (Paris: Gallimard 1965).

²⁴ Samuel Rogers, *Italy* (London: Moxon 1822). See also Joseph Luzzi 'Italy without the Italians: Literary Origins of a Romantic Myth', *MLN*, 117 (2002), 48-83.

²⁵ *Antologia*, vol. 16, 6 aprile (1822).

²⁶ Silvana Patriarca, 'Indolence and Regeneration: Tropes and Tensions of Risorgimento Patriotism', *The American Historical Review*, 110.2 (2005), 380-408, p. 383.

²⁷ For an example of the rejection of an outsider's negative view of Italy, see Anne O'Connor, 'L'Italia la terra dei morti?' in *Italian Culture*, 23 (2005), 31-50.

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In July 1818, a Manifesto, signed by a group of Florentines, including Vittorio Fossombroni, Gino Capponi and G.B. Zannoni was published in Florence and it exhorted Tuscans to erect a monument in honour of Dante.²⁸ The authors called for a general subscription by Tuscans towards the cost of the enterprise and suggested that the monument should be erected in Santa Croce beside other great men of Tuscan history. Although the Manifesto includes the words ‘È presso a compiersi il quinto secolo da che fu Dante [...]’, it is not driven by the approaching centenary of Dante’s death in 1821; in fact centenary celebrations only really became popular later in the century. The desire to commemorate was driven by a different motivation: on the need to honour Dante, the Manifesto says:

La fama che un ingegno straordinario acquista colle sue opere alla patria, vuol essere ricambiata con pubblica ed illustre prova di riconoscenza; e la patria, che paga in tributo dovuto al benemerito cittadino, è giusta insieme ed avveduta perchè fa cosa che propagasi ancora con suo maggior lustro alla più tarda posterità.²⁹

Importantly, given the above comments by Byron and others, the Manifesto also says that five centuries have passed since Dante’s time and that foreigners come to Florence, full of admiration for the poet, in search of a monument in his memory. Their search is fruitless, as no memorial to Dante exists in the city; they are consequently amazed and admonish the city. The critical gaze of the foreigner has obviously had an effect as the next line of the Manifesto says: ‘Si rinnova *adunque* il progetto del monumento all’Alighieri.’ [my italics].

²⁸ Located in Biblioteca Riccardiana, Misc. 470.4, 470.5, T.LXXXII.

²⁹ Part of the Manifesto is transcribed in Melchior Missirini, *Delle memorie di Dante, e del suo mausoleo in Santa Croce*, 3rd edn. (Firenze: Ciardetti, 1832), p. 23.

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Giuseppe Del Rosso, an architect living in Florence, published a response to the Manifesto in October 1818 noting how the idea for a monument was received with enthusiasm in Florence. He said that the honouring of Dante was not a mere end in itself, as such an act would reflect on the city of Florence, and a worthy monument would give the city a means of projecting a positive image of itself to the outside world:

[...]vorrei nello stesso tempo far cosa al di là di ciò che altra nazione moderna avesse fatto per eternare i sommi uomini che le appartengono, e così rendere vie più celebrata la riconoscenza dei Toscani verso sì benemerito concittadino.³⁰

The views of outsiders were also important to Del Rosso, and he recounts the story of two visitors who come to Florence in search of memories of the poet and on finding the Sasso di Dante, one of the visitors kissed it while the other made a sketch of the location. Del Rosso recounts this anecdote to show the effort made by visitors to find in Florence objects relating to Dante. By erecting an appropriate monument, the city would show such visitors the worthiness of Florence.

Nelson Moe has argued that the Grand Tourists' description of Italy determined the ways in which Italians defined themselves in the long nineteenth century, and similar

³⁰ This letter was published as a pamphlet entitled 'Lettera di un artista toscano ad un gentiluomo Patrizio Cortonese' in Anon [Giuseppe del Rosso]: *Idee per un monumento a Dante Alighieri, lettere due, seconda edizione e in appendice l'Edituo della chiesa di Santa Croce in Firenze, opuscolo mai pubblicato. Italia 1819*, p.11. Del Rosso originally published his observations in the *Giornale Arcadico* in June 1819 (pp. 446-54). The republished version includes his original letter, the response to it and an epilogue. The publication is about sixty pages in length, and although no publisher is mentioned, the second edition contains a note which speaks of the intense interest in the topic of the letters and of the urgent need for a second edition.

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ideas have been expressed in Silvana Patriarca and Maura O'Connor.³¹ The monument to Dante in Florence is a concrete example of these interactions and of how the outsiders' gaze had an influence on local perceptions. Abate Renzi of Cortona replied to Del Rosso's published letter and said of the proposed monument:

Abbia dunque l'onore delle invidiate sue ceneri l'illustre Ravenna [...] Abbia Dante, com'ha di fatto, in quella Città magnifico Deposito, che attesti all'Europa il rispetto e l'amore degl'Italiani tutti per sì sublime intelletto: ma abbia la Toscana, e Firenze madre illustre di sì illustre figlio, il vanto di richiamarne la memoria a più alti onori, vale a dire di eseguirne la debita Apoteosi.³²

As Abate Renzi says, honouring Dante's memory would help to dispel the opinion that Florence was ungrateful to her children who did so much to elevate the name of the city. He refers to the 'colpa inespiata di cinque secoli', the time during which Florence had dithered in honouring Dante. After so many failed and abandoned projects, the author feels, like Del Rosso, that there is a duty to commemorate the poet; he says that if Florentines do not create a monument worthy of the great poet:

noi avremo il dispiacere di sentirci rampognare il piccolo animo dagli Italiani e dagli Esteri, cioè di non aver saputo agguagliare l'opera al soggetto, e di esser rimasti addietro ai Ravennati, che pure han fatto di più che erigere a Dante una semplice Urna, inalzandogli e intitolandogli un sacello o edicola sepolcrale.³³

³¹ Nelson Moe, *The View from Vesuvius: Italian Culture and the Southern Question* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Maura O'Connor, *The Romance of Italy and the English Political Imagination* (London: MacMillan, 1998); Silvana Patriarca, *Italian Vices: Nation and Character from the Risorgimento to the Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

³² *Idee per un monumento a Dante Alighieri*, p. 21.

³³ *Idee per un monumento a Dante Alighieri*, p. 23.

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To honour Dante is to save face in Italy and abroad and under the outside gaze, it is hoped that the city will shine. The notion of shame is a strong motivational factor, and another commentator said that:⁶

L'Italia dovrebbe arrossire di non aver dati a lui tutti gli ornamenti che merita, e che hanno ottenuti a Londra ed a Parigi anche altri nostri Classici, non che i loro e gli antichi.³⁴

The *Gazzetta di Firenze* echoed these sentiments, stating that the monument would negate the need for Florentines to reply with embarrassment and sadness to foreigner's enquiries about commemorations to the poet in the city.³⁵ Thus words said in publications could change perceptions, and ideas of shame could lead to action. If Dante was to be used to build a sense of superiority (as exemplified later for example in Vincenzo Gioberti's *Del primato morale e civile degli italiani* (1843)) then this construction would be seriously undermined if contemporaries were viewed to be deficient in their duties to the past. It was difficult in the nineteenth century to reconcile the idea of the greatness of Italians with the lack of ability to commemorate and adequately honour former great heroes. The critical observations from abroad only served to heighten this discrepancy, and to add to the momentum for the desire to properly commemorate Dante.

Leopardi

The movement to commemorate Dante in his native city received its most famous endorsement in the form of Giacomo Leopardi's poem 'Sopra il monumento di Dante che

³⁴ Sig. Bencivenni, 'La Divina Commedia', *Antologia* 1823 (10) giugno, 30, p.111.

³⁵ *Gazzetta di Firenze*, 30 marzo 1830.

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si prepara in Firenze' published in 1819.³⁶ It has been noted that the poem derives from verses already present in the *Argomento di una canzone sullo stato presente dell'Italia*, and many connections have also been made between it and 'All'Italia', the first patriotic canzone of the *Canti*.³⁷ 'Sopra il monumento' was in fact sent together with 'All'Italia' to Bourli  for publication in 1819 and in the *Canti* it is placed after 'All'Italia' as the second poem of the collection, grouped as the 'patriotic poetry'. Many links have been made between these patriotic poems and the tradition of civic poetry in Italy exemplified by writers such as Dante, Petrarch, Tasso, and Alfieri.³⁸ It is often said that Leopardi used the idea of a monument to Dante as a vehicle for the expression of his ideas on Italy.³⁹ In Mario Fubini's commentary on the poem, he says that the monument was only a pretext in order to further elaborate the ideas expressed in 'All'Italia'.⁴⁰ Others have questioned

³⁶ The title was later changed to 'Sopra il monumento di Dante che si preparava in Firenze'.

³⁷ Giacomo Leopardi, *I Canti*, ed. by Luigi Russo (Firenze: Sansoni, 1944).

³⁸ G.A.Cesareo, 'La rappresentazione dell'Italia quale fu rimaneggiata per la sua canzone da Giacomo Leopardi, gi  si ritrovava nell'uso comune della poesia civile de'secoli antecedenti' in 'L'Italia nel canto di Leopardi' in *Nuova Antologia*, vol. 22, 1889, p.455. For links between this poem and Petrarch's 'Italia mia', Alfieri's *Rime*, Foscolo's 'Dei Sepolcri' and other patriotic poetry, see Cristina La Porta 'History and the poetic vocation in 'Sopra un monumento di Dante', in *Rivista di Studi Italiani*, 16. 2 (1998), 359-75.

³⁹ Vittoriano Esposito, 'Rilettura delle canzoni patriottiche' in *Rivista di Studi Italiani*, 16.2 (1998), 234-41.

⁴⁰ Giacomo Leopardi, *Canti*, con introduzione e commento di Mario Fubini (Torino: Loescher, 1971). De Sanctis similarly said: 'Il monumento e Dante non ci entrano se non come via a rappresentare le miserabili condizioni d'Italia.' 'Le prime canzoni di Giacomo Leopardi' in *Opere Complete di Francesco De Sanctis*, vol. X, ed. by N. Cortese (Napoli: Morano, 1933).

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the poet's motivation for writing the poem, while the constructed nature of the writing has also been criticized.⁴¹

What has not been adequately acknowledged, however, is the closeness of Leopardi's arguments to those expressed in the aforementioned Manifesto in favour of the Dante monument, and in subsequent reactions to the movement to honour Dante in Florence. In 'Sopra il monumento', Leopardi shows his affinity with the debates in Florence, and the poem must be seen in the context of the Florentine discussion on Dante in these years. Like others, Leopardi identifies the shameful situation in Florence; Dante's body is buried outside the city, and those who search for a memorial will find that there is no stone to his memory in the city:

Ed, oh vergogna! udia
Che non che il cener freddo e l'ossa nude
Giaccian esuli ancora
Dopo il funereo di sott'altro suolo,
Ma non sorgea dentro a tue mura un sasso,
Firenze, a quello per la cui virtude
Tutto il mondo t'onora. (23-29)

The idea that such an occurrence brings shame is one which is repeated in most of the writing on the subject in this era. The 'vergogna' mentioned by Leopardi underpins a feeling of duty which dictates that the current situation must be rectified. Italians have an obligation to Dante, to the past, and to his memory: 'O Italia, a cor ti stia/ Far ai passati onor' (7-8). As Leopardi says, Dante is the reason for Florence's fame, and the poet is

⁴¹ G. Carducci, 'Le tre canzoni patriottiche di Giacomo Leopardi', *Opere*, edizione nazionale, (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1939) XX, 103-175, p.111; F. Figurelli, 'Le due canzoni patriottiche del Leopardi', *Belfagor*, VII, 1, 1951, 20-39, p.33.

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due a debt of gratitude. Not to have honoured him is a source of humiliation which is emphasized by the fact that the city is under the gaze of the outsider. Leopardi in ‘Sopra il monumento’ repeats the sentiments of shame felt in the face of the foreigner’s gaze:

D’aria e d’ingegno e di parlar diverso
Per lo toscano suol cercando già
L’ospite desioso
Dove giaccia colui che per lo cui verso
Il meonio cantor non è più solo. (18-22)

Leopardi feels that it is imperative that the city pays its debt to the past, and his rallying call is very clear:

Volgiti indietro, e guarda, o patria mia,
Quella schiera infinita d’immortali,
E piangi e di te stessa ti disdegna;
Che senza sdegno omai la doglia è stolta (11-14)

Italy needs to honour the past, to acknowledge its importance, and to place it to the forefront of modern society. To look to the past is to feel shame, but it is also a source of inspiration:

Volgiti e ti vergogna e ti riscuoti,
E ti punga una volta
Pensier degli avi nostri e de’nepoti. (15-17)

The shame and the inspiration provided by the past should be a catalyst for change. The stimulus for action is necessary, and people need to be jolted into rectifying the situation. Glory is due to Dante, and if the future is to be any different to the past age of neglect, inspiration must be drawn from the great ancestors, and the foundations for a new future

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must be constructed. The use of many imperatives (e.g. volgiti, guarda, piangi) by the poet only emphasizes the necessity for action.

Those who do take action, such as the signatories of the Manifesto of 1818, are to be praised and Leopardi affectionately commends their noble enterprise:

Oh voi pietosi, onde s'è tristo e basso
Obbrobrio laverà nostro paese!
Bell'opera hai tolta e di ch'amor ti rende,
Schiera prode e cortese,
Qualunque petto amor d'Italia accende. (30-35)

The similarities between Leopardi and others who wrote on the subject of the Dante commemoration in this era are quite striking. The idea of duty, the debt of recognition to the past, the shame of inaction, the gaze of the foreigner, and the reproachful Dante are all motifs which reoccur throughout the literature on the monument and with such similar sentiments, Leopardi's poem must be firmly situated in this context. It is even possible to speculate that the poet may have been attempting to ingratiate himself with members of Florentine society by echoing the sentiments expressed in the Manifesto and in subsequent publications. 'Sopra il monumento' was certainly very successful: Giordani informed Leopardi that his patriotic poems were spreading like wildfire in Florence and Missirini later noted the hugely positive impact that the poem had on the project.⁴²

Local to national

⁴² Quoted in La Porta, p.359; Melchior Missirini, *Delle memorie di Dante, e del suo mausoleo in Santa Croce*, 3rd edn. (Firenze: Ciardetti, 1832), p. 24.

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If we are to understand Leopardi's poem in a Florentine context, then 'Sopra il monumento' can also help us understand the debate on Dante's memory in a more national context. Accompanied by 'All'Italia', the poem shows us the wider context of patriotic symbols in these years. It shows how the idea of Dante could be significant not just for the Florentine public, but for the wider Italian audience, and how his memory held potency for the people of Italy.

This can be clearly seen in the motifs of Leopardi's poem, but also in his use of traditional imagery to express his disgust at the current state of Italy. The idea of the country depicted as a suffering woman, or an abandoned widow are images which resonate throughout the history of Italian patriotic poetry, inspired no doubt by Dante's own powerful presentation of a suffering female Italy in Purgatorio VI. Leopardi also subscribes to the notion that ruins will inspire the present:

Io mentre viva andrò sclamando intorno,
Volgiti agli avi tuoi, guasto legnaggio;
Mira queste ruine
E le carte e le tele e i marmi e i templi;
Pensa qual terra premi e, se destarti
Non può la luce di cotanti esempli,
Che stai? Levati e parti. (190-196)

Past Italian greatness will inspire future achievement on a national scale, and Leopardi, a non-Tuscan, saw Dante's memory as important for all of Italy. Yet although the monument could be nationalized through words such as those expressed by Leopardi, in fact the monument was deliberately localized by its promoters.

The signatories of the Manifesto went to great lengths to emphasize the Tuscan nature of the venture, and they wanted a monument which would be a testament to

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Tuscan achievement. This did not sit well with everyone, and a pamphlet entitled *L'editio della Chiesa di Santa Croce in Firenze* was published in response to the Manifesto.⁴³ The pamphlet takes the form of a dialogue between a guide in Santa Croce and a visitor to the Church, and the former describes the Manifesto as: ‘uno svegliarino per accumulare la spesa che è necessaria per quest’opera, e col quale s’invitano tutti i Toscani a contribuirvi spontaneamente, escluso chiunque non è Toscano.’⁴⁴

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The visitor objects to the fact that the appeal for funds is addressed to Tuscans only, and describes such actions as: ‘un principio maleinteso d’orgoglio assai dannoso all’esecuzione dell’opera stessa.’ In his opinion, Dante belongs to all of Italy, he is the creator of the Italian language, and the Tuscans are wrong to claim his exclusive heritage. He says that it would be much better to inscribe on the monument that all of Italy contributed towards this tribute to Dante.

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These objections were not successful, and the efforts to commemorate Dante in Florence in the early years of the nineteenth century were exclusively Tuscan ventures. Gillis has noted that ‘Just as memory and identity support one another, they also sustain certain subjective positions, social boundaries, and, of course, power’.⁴⁵ The signatories of the original Manifesto for the monument were all prominent, wealthy Florentine

⁴³ Anon: *Idee per un monumento a Dante Alighieri, lettere due, seconda edizione e in appendice l’editio della chiesa di Santa Croce in Firenze*, opuscolo mai pubblicato, Italia 1819.

⁴⁴ *Idee*, p. 30.

⁴⁵ Gillis, p. 4.

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citizens.⁴⁶ Their view of the past and the relationship of Dante to the present was the one that they wanted to impose, and they would use the monument to communicate this message of a Tuscan, rather than an Italian, poet. Melchior Missirini tells us in his *Delle Memorie di Dante* that the monument was made possible by the generosity of ‘persone tutte toscane o per domicilio, o per nascita, o per origine.’⁴⁷ He then published the names of those who contributed to the monument, and an examination of these names reveals some important facts about the nature of the venture. Firstly, the Grand Duke of Tuscany and the Emperor of Austria are both among the patrons. This tells us that the project was carried out under the auspices of the state, and that it received its official sanction. Indeed the Grand Duke was present at the inauguration in Santa Croce; in 1830, Dante was a symbol of Tuscan greatness, a symbol that could be embraced by the ruling Austrian authorities.⁴⁸ The contributors to the monument numbered more than five hundred and contained many from the upper echelons of Tuscan society. Numerous marchesi, dottori, cavalieri, and avvocati were amongst the donors.

⁴⁶ The signatories were: Consigliere Vittorio Fossombroni, Senatore Tommaso Principe Corsini, Consigliere Giovanni degli Alessandri, Marchese Tommaso Corsi, Presidente Fortunato Ranieri Benvenuti, Marchese Gino Capponi, Cav. Antonio Ramirez da Montalvo, Cav. Gio. Batista Zannoni faciente le funzioni di Segretario, Direttore Cav. Pietro Benvenuti, Sig. Giuseppe Baldi.

⁴⁷ Missirini, *Delle memorie*, p. 3.

⁴⁸ Missirini’s final comments in his book show once again the official recognition gained by the monument amongst the ruling authorities and the dependence of the project on the blessings of the Prince: ‘E soprattutto volgasi la nostra gratitudine all’Ottimo Principe, che con sapiente reggimento, con mansuetudine di eque leggi, con esemplar norma di santi costumi rende beata questa bella, industrie e sagace parte del nostro italiano paese, che degnò aiutare questo progetto, e proteggerlo colla sua real munificenza.’ *Delle memorie*, p. 31.

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Although Mazzini presents Dante's patriotic love for his native city of Florence as a national emblem for all Italians, and even though Leopardi saw the monument as a powerful piece of cultural memory for all of Italy, Tuscans were not inclined to share their heritage in these early decades of the century as is evidenced in the inscription that they placed on the monument in 1830 which read:

Danti Aligherio
Tusci
Honorarium Tumulum
A Maioribus ter frustra decretum
anno MDCCCXXIX
Feliciter excitarunt

Interestingly the inscription, written by G.B. Zannoni is in Latin, and not in the national language, for which Dante would become the icon.

Any emerging national unit has to face difficulties with reconciling the national with the local and the monumentalizing of Dante shows these differences in graphic form. In 1865 on the sixth centenary of Dante's birth, a second Dante monument was erected in Florence to the poet, this time outside the Church of Santa Croce. The context for the erection of this monument was however very different, and at this stage Dante represented the Italian nation and a point around which anti-Austrian sentiment could rally: he was a symbol of unity, independence and achievement. The statue was a focal point of nationalist enthusiasm, and Dante became synonymous with Italian regeneration and an encouragement to remove the lingering burden of the foreign oppressor. Whereas in the 1820s and 1830s, Dante's memory was one of past glory and Tuscan achievement, forty years later Dante was symbolic of broader concepts. On the occasion of the

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unveiling of the new statue in 1865, the following inscription was placed at the entrance to Piazza Santa Croce, the centre point of the Festival:

Onorate l'altissimo Poeta
L'omaggio che rendete a lui
Vendica l'oblio di sei secoli
E attesta al mondo
Che siete nazione ⁴⁹

The inscription on the statue reads simply 'A Dante Alighieri L'Italia'. As the century progressed, Dante's role changed: Dante the Poet, Dante the Cultural Icon also became Dante the Nationalist. His expanded function was reflected in greater memorialization and, by the end of the century, monuments to the poet had been erected across the country from Trento to Naples, and from Florence to Verona. Bruno Tobia has commented that:

È un Dante definitivamente proiettato dalla dimensione locale a quella della nazionale, e, con essa, dalla tradizione alla storia. Ciò significa che gelosie e particolarismi localistici, niente affatto scomparsi, giocano un ruolo capovolto: sono quasi una riprova della ormai avvenuta affermazione di un culto dantesco come sinonimo di culto patriottico, sinonimo non di una volontà esclusivistica d'appartenenza ma ostentazione di primogenitura patriottica, per cui nessuna città, se solo può accampare un pretesto minimamente plausibile, rinuncia a partecipare ai fasti nazionali attraverso la mediazione degli omaggi all'Alighieri'. ⁵⁰

As well as articulating national sentiments in the nineteenth century, monuments to Dante in this era reflected regional peculiarities: commemorations to Dante in Austrian occupied territories for example in the 1860s and 1870s were underpinned by irredentist

⁴⁹ *Guida ufficiale per le feste del centenario di Dante Alighieri nei giorni 14, 15, 16 maggio 1865 in Firenze* (Firenze, Cellini 1865).

⁵⁰ Tobia, 'La statuaria dantesca', p. 77.

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sentiments, for example Verona (1865) and Trento (1896).⁵¹ The monument to Dante in Naples (inaugurated 17 July 1871) struggled to communicate the national message so much so that when it was inaugurated, it lacked an inscription. The inscription ‘All’Unità d’Italia raffigurata in Dante Alighieri’ was only added on 24 May 1931. The monument to Dante in Florence in 1830 represented the early struggle between local pride and national ambitions in the formative stages of the Risorgimento; a struggle from which the poet would eventually emerge as an undisputed national icon.

The monument

The cultural momentum for the monument, the fundraising, and the heightened importance of Dante were eventually translated into concrete form with the inauguration of the monument to Dante in Santa Croce on 24 March 24, 1830. The monument was the work of the sculptor Stefano Ricci, and a celebratory event was organized in the church on the day of the unveiling of the monument. A special collection of poetry, *Versi per l’erezione del monumento alla memoria di Dante Alighieri nella chiesa di S.Croce di Firenze* was published on the occasion, and some of these compositions tell us of prevailing attitudes towards the poet and the monument in this era.⁵² In ‘Sopra il

⁵¹ The monument in Verona had the inscription ‘A Dante Alighieri – Lo primo suo rifugio e primo ostello – Nelle feste e nei voti concorde – Ogni terra italiana’. For more on these monuments see Luisa Elisa Vichi Callegari, ‘Documenti per la storia del monumento nazionale a Dante’ in *Studi Danteschi*, 46 (1969), 273-88.

⁵² *Versi per l’erezione del monumento alla memoria di Dante Alighieri nella chiesa di S.Croce di Firenze* (Firenze: Tipografia all’insegna di Dante, 1830). The collection (which is 20 pages long) was probably assembled by (‘L’avvocato’) Francesco Lamporecchi and includes work by various authors, not all of whom are identified.

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Monumento a Dante', Leopardi had demonstrated the close relationship between poetry and the stone monument: a monument would be meaningless were it not for the significance conferred on it by words, and the associations created by poetry transform marble into pieces of cultural memory.⁵³ Thus the poetry published at the time of the erection of the monument can reveal the interplay of words and stone, of memory and community and one composition captures many of the prevailing sentiments: in an ode to Dante in the volume, one author (A.G.V.) writes:

Non più quel rozzo sasso
Ove al canto divin del trino regno
Principio diè così sublime ingegno
Sol fermerà degli stranieri il passo;

Ma là nel Tempio augusto
Andranno ad ammirar l'alto lavoro
Dell'Artefice illustre, ed il decoro
Rivendicato del tempo vetusto.

Direm con fronte lieta,
Accennando quel santo simulacro,
All'Immortalità devoto e sacro:
'Onorate l'altissimo Poeta.'⁵⁴

⁵³ La Porta says that, 'Leopardi sets the stage for his own pre-eminent role as a depicor of Italy's past greatness. While the sculptor will provide the plastic image of Dante, Leopardi's tool of representation is language' (p. 368).

⁵⁴ A.G.V. 'A Dante Alighieri Ode' *Versi per l'erezione del monumento alla memoria di Dante Alighieri nella chiesa di S.Croce di Firenze* (Firenze: Tip all'insegna di Dante, 1830), p. 15.

Unfortunately, I have been unable to identify the full name of the above author. These collections of poetry in honour of Dante were not necessarily by established literary figures but were rather testament to an increase in feeling towards the poet in the general community. Another poem in the collection, for example, is written by Cammillo Pucci – 'alunno in pittura'. By the time of the 1865 celebrations, poetic production by the ordinary populace in memory of Dante had swelled to extraordinary portions, see for example the compositions in Carlo Del Balzo's fifteen volume collection of poetry entitled, *Le poesie di mille autori intorno a Dante Alighieri* (Roma: Tipografi del Senato, 1889-1906). See also the analysis of the unsolicited poetry sent to the organisers of

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The author of the above composition shows the importance of the monument for the city's pride, how it will supplant the inadequate 'Sasso', and how the visitor can now find a monument worthy of the poet. In a sonnet by Francesco Lamporecchi, the author praises the sculptor Stefano Ricci for the monument:

Ricci, dell'Arte tua gloria primiera
Tre sculti marmi in colossal figura
(Illustre segno di pietà sincera)
Sorgono alfin tra le sacrate mura.⁵⁵

Interestingly, the author says that a statue has *finally* been placed within Florence's walls. Raising a monument to the poet in the city had taken over five hundred years, and twelve years had passed since the publication of the Manifesto. In his ode to Dante, A.G.V. feels that there has been an offence to Dante's name, and that the monument will atone for this centuries old affront.⁵⁶ This author also speaks of the mocking tones of those visitors who came to the city in search of an urn to the poet:

Da lungi a noi verranno
Con riso insultator figlio di sdegno
Dicendo: ov'è l'urna di quei che degno
'Padre, e Maestro è di color che sanno?'⁵⁷

the 1865 celebrations in Mahnaz Yousefzadeh, *City and Nation in the Italian Unification: The National Festivals of Dante Alighieri* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

⁵⁵ *Versi*, p. 3.

⁵⁶ È giunto il dì che i voti
Dei toschi Genii avuto han compimento
E l'oltraggio un eterno monumento
Riparerà dei secoli remoti. *Versi*, p. 15.

⁵⁷ *Versi*, p. 16.

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Florence will no longer have to be content with the Sasso di Dante but can instead admire the work of an esteemed artist in the solemn surroundings of Santa Croce.

The monument itself consists of three figures: Dante, Italy, and Poetry [see image]. On the left of the monument is the proud form of Italy who lifts her hand towards the poet.

The outside audience is again important, and Melchior Missirini says that the statue of Italy ‘con giusta alterezza addita *allo straniero* il fondatore dell’umanità Europea.’⁵⁸ [my italics]. In harmony with much monumental sculpture in these years, the depiction of allegorical bodies tends to favour the strong male and the sorrowful female arrangement.

Here in the Dante monument, the poet is muscular and imposing at the top of the monument, while further down, the figure of poetry lies prostrate and tearful over the (empty) tomb. The figure of Italy is also a woman, but she stands tall and purposeful in her demeanor. The statue representing poetry is said to be gripped with grief for the loss of such a poet (or perhaps, as some suggested, disgusted at the current state of Italian poetry).⁵⁹

The choice of the figure of a female Italy for the monument is striking both in terms of the commanding, energetic nature of the figure, but also because this statue was originally imagined as a female representation of Tuscany, not Italy.⁶⁰ The original

⁵⁸ Missirini, *Vita di Dante*, p. 213.

⁵⁹ Missirini, *Vita di Dante*, p. 213.

⁶⁰ See Rajna, ‘I centenarii danteschi passati e il centenario presente’, pp. 8-9, where he quotes from contemporary letters on the depiction of ‘Toscana’ rather than ‘Italia’ in the monument.

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designs and plans, drafted in 1818-1819 imagine a figure representing Tuscany, but by 1830, she had changed into a representation of Italy. The intervention of the outsider gaze and non-Tuscan figures such as Leopardi must have influenced this metamorphosis, as did the growing nationalist sentiment throughout the country. The Tuscan element lingered, however, as the aforementioned inscription with the words 'Tusci' below the statue shows. The monument thus became a hybrid, vaunting both local and national glory, and as such, represented an important step in the journey towards a national appropriation of Dante for the needs of the entire country, and not just Tuscany.

Obviously, most of the attention on the monument focused on the statue representing Dante. The second sonnet of the collection, signed G.G.U. says of the statue:

Si questi è Dante: ecco quel genio altero,
Che tanta fama accrebbe al patrio suolo,
Quando in carte descrisse il rio sentiero,
Che al Regno guida dell'eterno duolo.⁶¹

Dante is seated in an authoritative pose, and is depicted gazing in an intense manner. The images selected to represent the poet present a picture of power and thought. The meditative figure was a common theme in Romantic sculpture, and was a very different Dante to the angry figure who was placed outside the Church thirty-five years later. According to Missirini, in order to depict the greatness of a man whose did not just write, but painted, who did not just speak, but sang, it was decided that the figure of the poet should be depicted with his right elbow on a book andwith his hand under his chin, thereby conveying a sense of intense meditation. Missirini also tells us that the head is

⁶¹▲▲ *Versi*, p. 4

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designed to have a severe character, which impresses on viewers a feeling of awe and sublimity. In his ode, A.G.V. describes the poet as follows:

Siede sull'urna il Vate
Sugli omeri ricurvo e grave e mesto,
In cui del tempo, e del destin funesto
Chiaro è l'oltraggio di sue genti 'ngrate.⁶²

In Leopardi's poem, the attitude of Dante had not been one of a loving predecessor. Instead, as happens in many of the writings relating to the poet, he is presented in an attitude of disdain. Similarly, in the statue, it is a stern figure who is presented to the people: Dante's outbursts against the perceived wrongs in his society were still very alive in the minds of those writing in the nineteenth century and so, when commemorated, he is not presented as a benevolent figure. Rather, he is seen as a person railing against his contemporary circumstances, speaking out about the state of his society, and urging change within that same society. A national rhetoric often needs a sense of outrage and injustice to stir a people into action and the frowning, solemn Dante certainly filled this role.

Empty monument

Despite the celebratory attitudes, a major issue plagued the monument, namely its emptiness. Byron had said in *Childe Harold* that Santa Croce lacks the great writer's 'mighty dust' and this issue was of course not resolved with the erection of the monument. The lack of the human remains still rankled even after the erection of the

⁶²▲▲ *Versi*, p. 17.

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monument and despite numerous attempts to regain the bones, Ravenna held tenaciously to her Dantean booty. In the collection of poetry *Versi*, all of Sonnet Six is dedicated to a request for the return of Dante's remains from Ravenna.⁶³ Del Rosso, who had objected to the overly Tuscan nature of the project in the early years, also objected in 1818 to the idea of an empty monument. He wrote that to erect a funerary monument to Dante in Santa Croce would be a mistake:

Noi non possediamo le ceneri, e per conseguenza un monumento funereo rappresenterebbe un'idea falsa, e per quanto magnifico si facesse, si rischierebbe di fare sempre cosa da meno dei Ravennati, e di altro genere disconverrebbe, nè sarebbe ammissibile in un Tempio Cristiano, laddove ogni altra memoria esistente è del genere mortuario.⁶⁴

Del Rosso therefore believed that Tuscans should attempt a different memorial to the poet, one which would express, what he terms, *L'Apoteosi di Dante*, and which would be a celebratory rather than a funerary monument.

Ravenna's action in venerating the bones of Dante had put pressure on Florence not just to emulate her neighbour but also to surpass the work of the Ravennese.⁶⁵ The failure of Florence to commemorate in any fashion its most famous son weighed heavily on certain Dante enthusiasts, even more so given the contrast with Ravenna. Having described Ravenna's memorials to the poet, Del Rosso asks rhetorically: 'Dante divinizzato attenderà di meno dai suoi concittadini?' For Del Rosso, Ravenna could only

⁶³ *Versi*, p. 11.

⁶⁴ *Idee per un monumento*, p. 10.

⁶⁵ 'I Toscani sono in dovere di fare molto di più di ciò che è stato fatto a Ravenna, dove in venerazione dell'Altissimo Poeta, gli si è dedicata una edicola in luogo d'un Sepolcro alla comune maniera; col qual mezzo sembra che siasi voluto fare allusione alla sua divinizzazione.' *Idee per un monumento*, p.16.

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be surpassed if Florence moved away from the idea of a funerary monument and concentrated instead on what he terms the more elevated and noble aim of an honorary and festive monument.⁶⁶ In his opinion Florence should focus on the memory of the poet rather than the mortal remains of the man.

Del Rosso's ideas were refuted in the pamphlet *L'edituo* where the fictional guide in Santa Croce says:

[...]l'esperienza mi dice che non è necessario che il cadavere sia nel luogo ove venga inalzato il deposito, e qui nella nostra Chiesa ve ne mostrerò una dozzina che non sappiamo ove sieno stati tumulati, o almeno della maggior parte.⁶⁷

He mentions that Roman tombs often did not possess the body of the person in question. The visitor who is talking to the guide appears however to have different opinions on the matter. He says that in the absence of the body of the poet, the principal object of the sepulchre, the whole effect would be one of emptiness:

Per un Monumento di altro genere bisognerebbe per necessità accostarsi a qualche idea profana, la quale oltrechè non sarebbe ammissibile in un tempio sacro farebbe un disgustoso contrasto con tutti gli altri che qui esistano, che sono tutti del genere mortuario, atti a richiamare la nostra meditazione sopra le preziose ceneri che essi racchiudono.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ 'Lungi dunque da noi, cui è negato il possedere le ceneri del sempre vivo Cantore, ogni vano onore di Tomba, ogni segnale di querimonia e di nenia, e si elevi il nostro pensiero a più nobile scopo, vale a dire ad un monumento onorario e festivo soltanto.' *Idee per un monumento*, pp. 16-17.

⁶⁷ *Idee per un monumento*, p. 33.

⁶⁸ *Idee per un monumento*, p. 49.

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These discussions and disagreements over the possibility of having a tomb without earthly remains are worthy of comment as they show us the significance of the physical links with the past in this era. From Foscolo's 'Dei Sepolcri' onwards, the importance of adequately honouring the dead and surrounding them with loving memory became a central cultural trope in Italy. From funerary monuments to related commemorative practices, the dead were honoured and given a place of prominence in the city and on the cultural landscape.⁶⁹ Throughout the nineteenth century, there were prizes and competitions for designs of tombs and cemeteries, and the death mask and deathbed portrait became popular artistic endeavours. Journals carried discussions on the suitability of various forms of burial and burial sites, and there were wide-ranging debates on issues of mortality, disposal of corpses, appropriate ceremony, and dignified commemoration. Inscriptions, eulogies, and monuments were just three elements of this much wider encounter with death and with the rising importance of the remembrance of the past.

The lack of Dante's body in the monument was thus an awkward and irretractable issue; it took from the potency and impact of the venture and undermined its emotional connection with the people. In order to compensate for this matter, the organizers felt it necessary to make the ceremony for the unveiling of the monument as funereal as possible. The *Gazzetta di Firenze* commenting on the ceremony said that 'Per cura dei sigg. Operai, il suddetto Tempio era stato adorno con funereo e modesto

⁶⁹ Carlo Sisi, 'Il cimitero romantico di Santa Croce', in *Santa Croce nell'Ottocento* (Firenze: Alinari, 1986); Anne O'Connor, *Florence: City and Memory in the Nineteenth Century* (Florence: Città di Vita, 2008); Sandra Beresford, *Italian Memorial Sculpture 1820-1940* (London: Frances Lincoln, 2004).

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apparato, quale all'inaugurazione d'un Cenotafio si conveniva'.⁷⁰ The Archbishop sang a specially commissioned *Requiem* during the mass. A visiting tourist said that the monument was opened for public inspection with the solemnity of a grand funeral mass and that the candles, drapings and ceremonies made it seem as if the great poet had only recently died.⁷¹ In adopting this approach, the organizers were aiming to tap into the emotional potency of the dead, and to solidify the links with the past.

The opening ceremony in itself was not just a celebration of the monument and an attempt to make up for the lack of Dante's corpse; it was also a significant event for the city and the monument was unveiled with much pomp and ritual. The service started at 10 am on 24th March 1830 and access to the Church was advertised *for* 'per la nobilità ed altre persone distinte sì nazionali che estere'.⁷² The invited presence of foreigners at the ceremony is significant as it reflects one of the motivating reasons for erecting the monument in the first place; as the *Gazzetta di Firenze* observed on the day of the unveiling:

Ormai al peregrino che cerchi un monumento del Divino Poeta nella Terra sua natale, non dovremo più risponder colla dolente istoria delle vicende per cui mancava. [...] alle domande dello straniero risponderemo pronti additando il Cenotafio dell'Alighieri in Santa Croce.⁷³

Apart from the aforementioned mass, poetic compositions in honour of the poet were also distributed, and from the morning on, the church witnessed a continuous stream of people visiting the church that day. A visiting Englishman, Charles Greville who was at the

⁷⁰ *Gazzetta di Firenze*, 30 marzo 1830.

⁷¹ Rembrandt Peale, *Notes on Italy* (Philadelphia: Carey and Lea, 183), p. 242.

⁷² *Gazzetta di Firenze*, 23 marzo 1830.

⁷³ *Gazzetta di Firenze*, 30 marzo 1830.

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opening found the church ‘very crowded and the music indifferent’⁷⁴ It is significant that church had mass in honour of monument’s inauguration – in 1865 when the relationship between church and nationalism much more fractured, the event was held outside the church in the square, with only limited religious involvement. Also significant was the presence of the Grand Duke of Tuscany at the inauguration in Santa Croce; thus illustrating, as previously mentioned, the lack of friction between the erection of the Dante monument in 1830 and ruling Austrian authorities; the situation thirty-five years later was much altered.⁷⁵

Location in Santa Croce – Pantheon

The decision to locate the monument within the church of Santa Croce deserves particular attention as this was an ideologically-charged space within the city. Santa Croce, which holds the remains of Galileo, Machiavelli, Michelangelo, and many other illustrious Tuscans was considered the symbolic heart of Florentine greatness, the ceremonial centre of remembrance.⁷⁶ It provided visual cues about heritage, civic achievement, and the power of memory. Johnson reminds us that ‘sites are not merely the

⁷⁴ Quoted in Aubrey S. Garlington, *Society, culture and opera in Florence, 1814-1830* (Aldershot: Ashgate 2005), p. 92.

⁷⁵ Missirini’s final comments in his book show once again the official recognition gained by the monument amongst the ruling authorities and the dependence of the project on the blessings of the Prince: ‘E soprattutto volgasi la nostra gratitudine all’Ottimo Principe, che con sapiente reggimento, con mansuetudine di eque leggi, con esemplar norma di santi costumi rende beata questa bella, industrie e sagace parte del nostro italiano paese, che degnò aiutare questo progetto, e proteggerlo colla sua real munificenza.’ *Delle Memorie di Dante*, p. 31.

⁷⁶ Massimiliano Rosito (ed.) *Santa Croce nel solco della storia* (Firenze: Città di Vita, 1996).

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material backdrop from which a story is told, but the spaces themselves constitute the meaning by becoming both a physical location and a sight-line of interpretation'.⁷⁷ The emotional and ideological messages emanating from this particular space made the choice of Santa Croce as the location for the monument an obvious one for the promoters of the project. Missirini called Santa Croce, 'questo augusto luogo omai consacrato pel santuario del patrio genio ed ingegno'.⁷⁸ In this setting, Dante could be venerated and a saint-like adulation of the poet encouraged. Gillis has noted that 'In the course of the nineteenth century nations came to worship themselves through their pasts, ritualizing and commemorating to the point that their sacred sites and times became the secular equivalent of shrines and holy days'.⁷⁹ In Santa Croce, the secular and the spiritual sat side by side and it is understandable why the supporters of the monument chose to locate the monument here rather than in other locations in Florence as had been suggested in earlier stages of the project.

Santa Maria del Fiore had been suggested in the early years of the century as a possible location for a Dante monument in the city.⁸⁰ A sketch survives of a proposal by Luigi Adamolli for a monument to Dante in a city square, this monument was imagined on a massive scale, six times the height of a human.⁸¹ Giuseppe Del Rosso put forward

⁷⁷ Johnson, 'Mapping monuments', p. 293.

⁷⁸ Melchior Missirini, *Delle memorie di Dante, e del suo mausoleo in Santa Croce*, 3rd edn. (Firenze Ciardetti, 1832), p. 30.

⁷⁹ Gillis, p. 19. Mona Ozouf in her seminal, *La fête révolutionnaire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976) has spoken of a 'transfer of sacrality' between the commemorative and the spiritual.

⁸⁰ See Rajna, p. 3, and Missirini, *Delle memorie di Dante*, p. 22.

⁸¹ This proposal was published in Florence and has a possible date of 1810. A copy is preserved in the British Library under the title: *Idea d'un monumento per Dante Alighieri* [An engraving] Luigi Admolli (Florence? 1810?). Shelfmark: General Reference Collection Tab.1237.a.(2.).

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two proposals for commemorating Dante in the city: he firstly suggested a *Portico a Dante* which would incorporate many images of the poet and would provide a point of focus for visitors.⁸² His alternative suggestion was the conversion of the Loggia dell'Orcagna into a *Tribuna a Dante*. This enterprise would consist of a colossal statue of *l'Apoteosi di Dante*, surrounded by other statues representing Theology, Poetry, Philosophy, and Eloquence.

In rejecting these alternatives and in ultimately deciding on Santa Croce as the location for Dante's monument, the organizers were complementing Foscolo's vision of the church as expressed in his *Dei Sepolcri* where he had said of Florence and Santa Croce:

Ma più beata ché in un tempio accolte
Serbi l'Itale glorie, uniche forse
Da che le malvietate Alpi e l'alterna
Onnipotenza delle umane sorti
Armi e sostanze t'invadeano ed are
E patria, e, tranne la memoria, tutto.⁸³

With these words, Foscolo created the powerful imagery which was to become widely connected with the church and subsequently, Santa Croce came to assume a symbolic position, one that would transform the building from a local site of worship to a secular

⁸² Del Rosso, *Idee per un monumento*, p.13.

⁸³ Ugo Foscolo, 'Dei Sepolcri' (1807), (180-185) in *Edizione Nazionale delle Opere di Ugo Foscolo*, vol. 1 (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1985). This association was underpinned by the reaction of the protagonist of *Le Ultime Lettere di Jacopo Ortis* to the church: 'Dianzi io adorava le sepolture di Galileo, del Machiavelli e di Michelangelo; e nell'appressarmivi io tremava preso da brivido. [...] Presso a que' marmi mi pareva di rivivere in quegli anni miei fervidi, quand'io vegliando su gli scritti de' grandi mortali mi gittava con la immaginazione fra i plausi delle generazioni future.' Ugo Foscolo, *Ultime lettere di Jacopo Ortis* (1802) (Milano: Rizzoli, 1982), p. 131.

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symbol of greatness. Gone were the days of discreet memorials and pavement tombs; by the nineteenth century the memory of the dead in Santa Croce was celebrated with large, visible monuments. Santa Croce, a Franciscan church, thus became the house of the distinguished and the magnificent. It provided many examples of achievement, and it was also a place where greatness would be rewarded. Burial in the church in the nineteenth century was seen as an acknowledgement of effort, virtue, and achievement. As Francesco Domenico Guerrazzi said: ‘Allora la nostra vita mortale sarà conclusa quando ci saremo meritati un sepolcro in Santa Croce’.⁸⁴

The focus on greatness in Santa Croce is encapsulated in the idea that the church was a pantheon. This concept, first mooted in the early years of the nineteenth century, was quickly accepted. Other countries such as France and Germany had been seen to develop their own pantheons, and Italy did not want to be left lagging behind.⁸⁵ The idea of an Italian pantheon gained particular currency in the early decades of the nineteenth century, and was fuelled by the many eulogies, monuments, and publications which fostered the idea of honouring the illustrious. Eventually, the word pantheon became synonymous with Santa Croce and almost all native and foreign accounts used this description for the church. As it became an accepted title, the association of the church

⁸⁴ F.D. Guerrazzi, ‘Orazione in morte di Francesco Sabatelli’, (1829) in *Orazioni funebri d’ illustri Italiani*, 3rd edn. (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1848), p. 15.

⁸⁵ Guerrazzi discusses these European traditions and says, ‘La Francia ebbe il Panteon pei suoi Grandi passati; oggi la Baviera dedica un tempio a Odino. [...] Noi, Italiani, abbiamo Santa Croce’ in ‘Del modo di onorare gli illustri defunti’ in *Scritti* (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1847), pp. 171-190 (p. 178). See also *Il Pantheon di Santa Croce a Firenze*, ed. by Luciano Berti (Firenze: Cassa di Risparmio, 1993).

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with glory and greatness became more commonplace. The function of the building as a pantheon was intended for both a local and national audience as Filippo Moisé said:

Qui verrebbe l'Italiano a specchiarsi, ad ispirarsi, ad esaltarsi, ad imparare; qui trarrebbe il padre la prole affinché dei belli esempi facesse documento alla vita futura, affinché ne usasse a decoro ed a pro della patria; *qui lo straniero deporrebbe la superba baldanza, e riverente confesserebbe che l'Italia, l'antica maestra di civiltà alle moderne nazioni, non s'è lasciata strappar di mano lo scettro [...]*⁸⁶ [my italics]

Over this period, Santa Croce became a national shrine to Italian greatness.⁸⁷ The erection of Canova's monument to Alfieri in 1810 and the redesign of the Church whereby the main aisle was reserved for the illustrious heroes and the *Chiostro* was used for the commemoration of other citizens marked important steps in the conversion of the Church into a national monument. This division created two types of reaction in the church: those visiting the *Chiostro* spoke of the sentimental power evoked by the memory of so many loved people. On the other hand, the more public, central section of the church was deemed to provide exemplary inspiration. The division within Santa Croce resulted partly from the marked rise in requests for burial in the church in the early nineteenth century, and indeed, demand was so great that in 1817 the Operai della

⁸⁶ Filippo Moisé, *Santa Croce di Firenze* (Firenze: 1845), pp. 195-96. Similarly, Giuseppe Borghi said in 1832: 'Puoi tu con animo freddo visitar quell'Urne potenti, che là nel Tempio della Toscana Rinomanza fan cadere senz'onta l'orgoglio dello straniero?' Quoted in Luigi Foscolo Benedetto, *Uomini e Tempi* (Milano: Riccardi, 1953), p. 285.

⁸⁷ For the growth in popularity of Santa Croce see Carlo Sisi, 'Il cimitero romantico di Santa Croce', in *Santa Croce nell'Ottocento* (Firenze: Alinari, 1986), and *Santa Croce nel solco della storia*, ed. by Massimiliano Rosito (Firenze: Città di Vita, 1996). Bruno Tobia says 'Quello di Santa Croce è un mito progressivamente coltivato e di continuo arricchito, versione italiana della "Chiesa della nazione"': Bruno Tobia, 'Una cultura per la nuova Italia' in *Storia d'Italia*, ed. by G.Sabbatucci e V.Vidotto (Bari: Laterza, 1995), p. 510.

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Basilica had to take measures to contain and regulate burials.⁸⁸ The erection of the monument to Dante in the central aisle of the church tapped into these emerging trends which favoured honouring and commemorating the illustrious with prominent monuments in the church.

In 1838, Silvestro Centofanti, Principal of the University of Pisa, and commentator on Dante, published a poem written to celebrate the erection of the monument in Santa Croce.⁸⁹ At the opening of the poem, Centofanti celebrates the Church and its position as a temple of honour:

Ecco il tempio! ove quei, che ad immortale
Opra nel mondo esercitò la vita;
Ha onor di tomba dopo il dì ferale,
E ancor dal marmo alla virtude incita.
Ove in mirabil vista e trionfale
Mostransi all'alma a contemplarli ardita,
Del silenzio fra l'ombre e del mistero,
I secoli dell'italo pensiero. (I, 1-8)

In common with other writers, Centofanti emphasises the position of the Church as a repository for those touched by immortality. Santa Croce now houses Dante's monument which, according to Centofanti, is causing quite a stir:

Ecco il tempio! un susurro, un nuovo intento,
Un popol che si reca in atti vari...
E là tutti rivolti al Monumento,
Da cui l'uom meditando il nume impari.
E tra festoso e funebre un concento
Si avvicenda dagli organi agli altari;
E par di antica voce eco profonda
Che dal seno dei tempi alfin risponda.(III, 1-8)

⁸⁸ See Sisi, 'Il cimitero romantico di Santa Croce', p. 127

⁸⁹ Silvestro Centofanti, *Un preludio al corso di lezioni su Dante Alighieri* (Firenze: coi Tipi della Galileiana, 1838), pp. 3-41.

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The church was a symbolically-laden edifice and the Dante monument contributed to the message of greatness and respect for the past that emanated from the building. Although in the early decades of the century the church was considered to be a Tuscan Pantheon (Alfieri was the most famous non-Tuscan buried there), as the century progressed it gradually became a more national shrine, just as Dante was becoming a more national figure. For example, in the 1830 'Ode a Dante Alighieri', Santa Croce is called the 'Tempio degli etruschi eroi.'⁹⁰ This contrasts with the famous lines of Foscolo in *Dei Sepolcri* where he considers the church to be the home of Italian glory: 'in un tempio accolte/serbi l'itale glorie.' (180-181). Eventually it was Foscolo's vision for the church which won out, and by the time of unification, Santa Croce was a national shrine to Italian greatness. Dante completed this journey with the church which housed his monument and the presence of his memorial in Santa Croce helped in the creation of a 'sanctified' history for an emerging nation.

A tardy, inadequate and empty tomb

Did the tardy tomb in Santa Croce make up for centuries of inglorious neglect?

Florentines from the era argued triumphantly that it did. Subsequent visitors to the monument disagreed deeming the monument to be ill-conceived, empty, and unworthy of the great poet. Thomas Trollope, called it 'terrible' and said that 'the great Florentine has been unfortunate in his marble immortality'; while his mother compared the representation of Dante in the statue to a witch and once again called Florence ungrateful. G.G. Ampère said it was a pity that the execution of the monument had not reached the

⁹⁰ Versi, p. 15.

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lofty heights of the sentiments that inspired it, while A.L. Von Rochau judged it to be 'absurd'. M. Valéry declared that the monument was just a magnificent reminder that Dante is not at all there, and that the tardy tears of Poetry on this urn without bones were ridiculous after five centuries of neglect.⁹¹ Frenchman Paul Lemoyne commented on 'quell'immenso e strano ammasso di marmi', and said that Florentines could not exculpate the guilt of centuries with the simple erection of a monument.⁹² Dante had found revenge for the wrongs inflicted by his native city by giving custody of his remains to another city. Lemoyne exclaims: 'Oh quanto furono tardi i concittadini tuoi a pagare il giusto tributo, che ben si doveva al tuo gran nome!'⁹³ A publication in 1865 summarized the situation:

Un numero di eletti cittadini vergognando che Firenze dovesse pur tuttavia sembrare ingrata non alzando al Divino nemmeno un sasso ad onore, volsero l'animo determinato al generoso proposito. [...] Quest'opera non sodisfece gran fatto alla pubblica aspettativa, mentre parve l'artista aver negletto in quei marmi la intelligente interpretazione, che richiedeva il sublime informativo concetto.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Thomas Trollope, *Impressions of a wanderer in Italy, Switzerland, France and Spain* (London, Henry Colburn, 1850), p. 250; Mrs. Frances Trollope, *A Visit to Italy* (London: Bentley, 1842), p. 106; G.G. Ampère, *Viaggio Dantesco* (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1855), p. 35; A.L. Von Rochau, *Wanderings through the cities of Italy in 1850 and 1851*, trad. by Mrs. Percy Sinnett (London: Bentley, 1853), p.169; M. Valéry, *Florence, Pise, Livorne et leurs environs* (Bruxelles: Société Belge de Librairie, 1842), p. 123.

⁹² 'Credono forse i concittadini tuoi farsi perdonare e la loro ingiustizia a tuo riguardo, ed un oblio più vergognoso per loro che oltraggioso per te, alzando a' tempi nostri un'immensa mole marmorea, e decorandola con la tua imponente effigie?' Paul Lemoyne, *Visita fatta alle tombe degl'illustri Italiani in Santa Croce di Firenze* (Roma: Tipografia delle belle Arti, 1846), p.21.

⁹³ Paul Lemoyne, *Visita fatta alle tombe degl'illustri Italiani in Santa Croce di Firenze*, p.21.

⁹⁴ *Festa di Dante*, No. 56, 21 maggio 1865.

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The negative judgment on the monument would appear to have ultimately gained the upper hand when it was considered necessary in 1865 to erect another monument to the poet outside Santa Croce, barely twenty metres from the 1830 monument. Dante, bereft for many years of a monument in his honour, suddenly had two in close proximity to each other. Eventually the hybrid Tuscan Dante inside the church was supplanted by the Italian Dante outside in the square.

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Conclusion

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In studies of cultural memory, the act of forgetting can often be as important as the act of remembering.⁹⁵ Therefore it is important to ask if the neglect of Dante's memory in Florence was a mere oversight? Or was it that, in previous centuries, Dante was considered merely as a poet (albeit a great one) rather than a charged political icon? Following the flurry of Dante commemorations in the nineteenth century, Dante's role as a public and politicized figure changed. On the anniversary of the poet's birth in 1921, Benedetto Croce, the then Minister for Education, replied to requests for funding for centenary celebrations with the very succinct put-down: 'Fate come me – rileggetevi Dante'.⁹⁶ Dante had retreated to the personal literary sphere from the highly politicized realm of the Risorgimento. The sixth centenary of the poet's death in 1921 was notable for the publication of Michele Barbi's *Le opere di Dante*, and these national editions of the poet's work represented a new philological approach to his writing rather than a historical appropriation and opportunistic moulding of a medieval literary figure.

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⁹⁵ Adrian Forty and Susanne Küchler, *The Art of Forgetting* (Oxford: Berg, 1999).

⁹⁶ Quoted in *Dante minore: letture introduttive*, ed. by M. Rosito (Firenze: Città di Vita, 1965), p. 35.

Although at times in the nineteenth century, it might have seemed as if the political and ideological use of Dante outweighed all other interests, a sustained literary current continued throughout the century. This can be seen in the momentum behind the monument to Dante in Santa Croce where politics, ideology, and literature combined to bring the project to fruition and to celebrate its presence in the city. The literary and political engagement with Dante in Italy in this era is striking and both strands left their legacies for the twentieth century: the former would eventually lead to increased textual attention to Dante, and the latter provided a patriotic education and left prominent monuments in many Italian cities. The function of the foreign gaze in provoking and encouraging this interest in Dante should not be underestimated: as the popularity of Dante spread throughout Europe and further afield, the poet's importance and the need to honour his memory became ever more significant. Even apart from the importance of Dante in the construction of a nineteenth-century notion of 'italianità', the wider context of international criticism and comment provoked a reaction within the domestic community which ultimately played a role in the successful erection of the monument in 1830.

The inauguration of the Santa Croce monument marked an important step in Dante's journey with the emerging Italian nation, but by the end of the century that journey had been completed. The local and national context of the decades following 1815 had made the commemoration of Dante in Florence seem possible and desirable. The fact that the city felt shame and an urgent need to remember the poet was fuelled by feelings of inadequacy, particularly when faced with the critical gaze of the foreigner. This was a time when links with the past were valued as a counterpoint to accusations of

indolence in the present and therefore even at a time of new beginnings, the past was woven into an emerging narrative, and Dante became an important stony presence in that new landscape in Florence.

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