



From Vernacular Poet to Scholarly Authority: Dante's Reception and Intellectual Canonization in Medieval Learning

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ABSTRACT

The relationship with the learned institutions of his age was complex, combining admiration for intellectual traditions with moments of criticism toward academic culture. This tension is particularly visible in *Paradiso* and raises important questions about how the *Commedia* itself was subsequently received by teachers and scholars. This study investigates the role of *magistri*, university lecturers, and other members of the higher educational world in shaping the poem's academic reception during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. It explores whether Dante's work moved beyond literary circulation to acquire a place within teaching and interpretative practices, especially those connected with *lectio*. Particular attention is given to manuscript evidence in which passages from the *Commedia* appear in glosses and commentaries on established *auctores maiores*. These references served diverse scholarly purposes, including the explanation of difficult vocabulary, the support of interpretative arguments, the provision of illustrative examples, and the transmission of moral or intellectual *sententiae*. The evidence suggests that Dante's poem gradually entered the repertoire of texts recognized as useful and authoritative within learned circles. Its presence in manuscripts produced across different regions further demonstrates the widening acceptance of Dante as an *auctor* whose work could participate in established medieval practices of reading, commentary, and textual interpretation.

KEYWORDS: Dante; Divine Comedy; Medieval Learning; Textual Authority; *Auctoritas*; Manuscript Glosses; Classical Commentary; Medieval Universities; *Lectio*; Academic Reception.

INTRODUCTION

The engagement with the educational and university world—the earthly *scole*—was far from straightforward. His writings reveal both familiarity with learned institutions and a sustained willingness to question their intellectual assumptions. In recent decades, scholarship has shown increasing interest in this dimension of Dante's thought, particularly in relation to his intellectual education and his use of contemporary forms of knowledge. *Paradiso* offers especially important evidence. In the final cantica, Dante addresses the nature and limits of learning with greater intensity and defines his ideal reader more selectively. Only those adequately prepared for demanding intellectual inquiry, those who have devoted themselves, are invited to follow the more difficult course of his poetic argument [1].

For Dante, however, the highest form of doctrine cannot be reduced to an institutional method of teaching. Divine truth ultimately depends upon the Word of God and upon

revelation rather than on any purely human procedure. As Pegoretti observes, its complete understanding cannot be achieved through method alone but requires the Pentecostal gift of the Spirit, which acts as the true guide under Christ, the supreme *magister*, within the inward "classroom" of the human heart. Nevertheless, the language and practices of the *scole* remain deeply embedded in Dante's poetry. He clearly understood the workings of academic culture and repeatedly drew upon its terminology and procedures, even when reshaping them for his own purposes [2].

One frequently discussed example appears in the comparison involving the Here Dante evokes recognizable features of academic examination and ceremony, yet he does not simply reproduce scholastic practice. His treatment of the examination of faith deliberately departs from the argumentative procedures associated. Scholars have therefore interpreted the passage as evidence of both Dante's knowledge of academic customs and his critical reconfiguration of them. His acquaintance with scholastic

techniques, including the *disputatio*, is beyond doubt. He could observe such practices directly and may also have participated in them publicly, as the *Questio de aqua et terra*, reportedly delivered in January 1320 at the church of the canons of Verona Cathedral, suggests, although the authenticity of this work continues to be debated [3].

The intellectual procedures associated with scholastic inquiry thus appear in the *Commedia*, but they are transformed rather than adopted mechanically. Recent studies by Barański and Pegoretti have emphasized the personal character of Dante's appropriation of scientific and dialectical methods. Pegoretti, in particular, identifies in *Paradiso* a form of anti-dispute. Dante redirects the structure of controversy, normally associated with sophistic dialectic, toward a different conception of truth—one secured by revelation and by the poet-pilgrim's privileged experience of direct vision. Academic discourse is therefore not rejected outright; instead, its procedures are subordinated to a higher model of knowledge [4].

Research into Dante's intellectual formation has approached these issues from several directions. Scholars have investigated where and when he acquired his doctrinal learning, drawing on Dante's own statements, early biographical accounts, and the broader cultural environment in which he developed. Considerable attention has also been paid to the materials through which his knowledge may have been formed. These include individual books and complete works, commentaries, *compilationes*, and *florilegia*, together with oral channels of cultural transmission such as public readings and the sermons delivered by preachers [5].

A further perspective can be gained by reversing the question and examining how the teachers and learned institutions of Dante's own world responded to the *Commedia*. This study therefore considers the position of the *magistri* who worked in advanced schools and universities and asks how they employed Dante's poem within established educational practices. The reputation of Dante and his work expanded steadily throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. That development is visible not only in complete manuscripts and major commentaries but also in numerous small-scale traces: isolated quotations, brief textual fragments, and other seemingly minor references to the *Commedia* [6].

Particular importance is attached here to Dantean quotations and glosses incorporated into commentaries on texts used for instruction. Such insertions reveal that the poem had begun to function as a readily available reservoir of remembered knowledge. In this sense, the *Commedia* increasingly acquired the status of a memorable work, securely established in the intellectual memory of readers and commentators and capable of standing beside the writings of the major Latin *auctores* [7].

The value of the *Commedia* as a source of doctrinal material,

learned information, lexical clarification, *exempla*, and *sententiae* for use in interpreting classical authors was previously demonstrated. Building on this foundation, the present analysis extends the inquiry into formal educational settings, with particular attention to the highest stage of grammatical schooling, commonly identified as *de tertio latino*. At this level, students encountered the established canon of the *auctores maiores* through systematic reading and commentary. The curriculum included prose authors such as Sallust and Cicero, together with Juvenal, Lucan, Horace, Ovid, Persius, Statius, Terence, and Virgil; from the fourteenth century onward, Seneca the tragedian also entered this canon [8].

Within this environment, the appearance of Dante in commentaries on Latin classics represented a significant development. The author of the *Commedia* was a *modernus*, and his principal poem was written in the vernacular rather than in Latin. As Alessio notes, this linguistic and cultural position placed Dante outside the traditional Latin framework, representing «an expression of a culture and ideology that was actually considered foreign to the Latin one». For this reason, the use of the *Commedia* in the interpretation of canonical authors is particularly revealing. Its presence is even more significant when such commentaries originated in teaching contexts. Quotations from Dante began to accompany the classical *auctores maiores* at the same time that the poet was gradually entering the range of writers discussed by teachers in advanced schools and within the rhetorical and grammatical instruction of university arts faculties [9].

Against this background, the study traces the gradual emergence of Dante as both *auctor* and *auctoritas* during the century following his death. This was a period of increasingly extensive circulation for the *Commedia*, with particularly strong evidence emerging between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The present investigation concentrates on material produced or used within scholastic and educational circles. Where the surviving evidence allows, each testimony is considered within its geographical setting in order to identify the principal areas - in which the academic reception of the poem appears to have been especially active [10].

The *corpus* examined in this research was assembled primarily from existing scholarship and was supplemented through further investigation of manuscript catalogues. Special attention was paid to catalogues recording fragmentary witnesses of the *Commedia*, which provided important starting points for identifying additional evidence.⁵ These indications were subsequently checked, whenever possible, through direct examination of the manuscripts. By combining published research, catalogue evidence, and autoptic verification, the study seeks to reconstruct more clearly the process through which Dante's vernacular poem entered learned practices of reading, explanation, and commentary

and gradually came to be recognized as a source of academic authority [11].

METHODS AND MATERIALS

Dante Glosses in Commentaries Prepared for School

Medieval *lectio* was fundamentally an interpretative exercise in which the close reading of a text was supported by established authorities. Teachers and commentators drew upon *auctoritates* to clarify obscure expressions, address textual difficulties, explain doctrinal questions, and develop literal or allegorical meanings. Within this framework, the gradual entry of Dante's *Commedia* into educational culture marked an important development. Formal engagement with the poem in higher learning gained particular visibility through the Florentine lectures delivered in October 1373. This was followed by readings at Bologna in 1375, probably outside the official curriculum, and at Ferrara during the winter of 1375–1376. From 1385 onward, public exposition of the poem was also undertaken at the University of Pisa by a teacher of grammar [12].

Attestations in the Tuscan Area

Among the earliest known examples of Dante being used within an advanced educational context are those connected with the Florentine teacher Zono de' Magnali. His academic career moved through several important centres. He was active as a *magister* in Bologna during the 1320s and may have received part of his own education there during the preceding decade. He subsequently worked as *magister scholarum* at Montepulciano and also spent time in the Veneto. A commentary on Virgil's *Aeneid*, completed at Montepulciano in 1336, offers particularly early evidence of the *Commedia* entering the apparatus of scholarly interpretation. While explaining *Aen.* VI, 480, the commentator introduced a tercet from *Inferno* XXXII, 130–32 [8].

The appearance of Dante in manuscript glosses became more evident only some decades later. One significant instance survives in an anonymous commentary on Seneca's tragedies preserved in Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Plut. 37.5. In this case, Dante is treated as an authority on a doctrinal matter rather than merely as a source for literary illustration.² The gloss concerns the chorus in *Oedipus* 980 and its statement about the unavoidable force of destiny: «Fatis agimur, credite fatis». The commentator challenges the pagan understanding of fate by interpreting destiny within a Christian framework as part of providential order. Dante is invoked alongside unspecified «nostri theologi», thereby placing the poet within a broader community of recognized theological authorities [13].

This use of Dante illustrates how vernacular poetry could be employed to support arguments involving theology and philosophy. Another revealing example occurs among

the marginal materials accompanying the text of Seneca's tragedies in Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Plut. 37.1. Produced during the early fifteenth century, probably in Padua, the manuscript was later associated with Antonio di Lupardo da Vecchiano and, by the end of the century, with his son Carlo.¹¹ It contains an extensive series of marginal *postillae* linked to the commentary tradition on the tragedies. Particularly notable is a substantial quotation from *Purgatorio* XVIII, 22–39. In these verses, Virgil presents love as an operation of the soul through an argument organized with considerable conceptual precision and terminology associated with scholastic thought. The doctrinal value attributed to this passage appears to explain its use in interpreting *Octavia* 557–58 [12].

Dante also functioned as an *auctoritas* in matters relating to history, antiquarian learning, and mythology. Such usage can be found in the commentary on Seneca's tragedies preserved in the Laurentian manuscript Plut. 37.5.¹³ A comparable example is contained in Pistoia, Biblioteca Forteguerriana, A 4, a manuscript transmitting the comedies of Terence. Copied during the opening years of the fifteenth century by the humanist Sozomeno da Pistoia, the manuscript also preserves materials connected with the reading exercises of his teacher, Antonio da San Gimignano, as well as with the Pisan notary and teacher Francesco da Buti [14].

A gloss on the reference to the Athenian Thaïs in *Eunuchus* 391 provides a clear illustration of this practice. The annotation cites *Inferno* XVIII, 133–35, the passage in which Thaïs appears among the flatterers punished in the second *bolgia*. The direction of this reference is particularly noteworthy. Rather than turning from Dante to Terence in order to identify the classical background of the episode, as occurred in some contemporary explanations of the *Commedia*, the gloss proceeds in the opposite direction: Dante's poem is used to illuminate the classical text. This reversal demonstrates that the *Commedia* had become sufficiently authoritative to provide explanatory material for the interpretation of an established Latin author [15,16].

Further evidence comes from school manuscripts containing materials used in the interpretation of Boethius' *De consolazione philosophiae*. In several such witnesses, quotations from Dante appear alongside other authorities employed to explain the Boethian text. A particularly important Tuscan example is Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Plut. 78.20. The manuscript was copied in 1419 by its young owner, Bartolomeo di Pietro Nerucci da San Gimignano, while he was studying at the grammar school of Mattia Lupi da San Gimignano in Pra [17,18,19].

The later career of the manuscript's scribe further demonstrates the close connection between teaching, textual annotation, and Dantean learning. He worked as a notary and *ludimagister* in Colle Val d'Elsa, San Gimignano,

Prato, Volterra, and other centres in Tuscany, and he was also active as a commentator on Dante. His copy of Boethius contains numerous interlinear explanations and marginal annotations. Among these additions, passages from *Purgatorio* XIX, 19–24 and XIX, 7–9 were inserted beside *Consolatio* I, pr. 1, 8–14, where the text refers to the Sirens.¹⁹ A further intervention by another hand placed *Inferno* VII, 91–93 in the margin of folio 14r, alongside the discussion of Fortune in *Consolatio* II, m. 1. [20]

Taken together, these Tuscan witnesses demonstrate that the *Commedia* gradually acquired a practical role within educational and exegetical culture. Its verses could be selected for doctrinal clarification, philosophical explanation, mythological identification, lexical interpretation, and moral instruction. More importantly, their placement within commentaries on established classical texts indicates that Dante's poem was no longer treated solely as a work requiring interpretation. It increasingly became a text capable of interpreting other texts, thereby participating in the same scholarly mechanisms through which medieval schools constructed and transmitted authoritative knowledge [21].

Emilia-Romagna Region

A manuscript closely connected with educational culture is Berkeley, Bancroft Library, f 2 Ms AC 13 c 5. This composite volume was assembled in northern Italy between the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries and was certainly completed before 1420. An unidentified compiler, who also copied most of its contents, brought together texts that reveal a pronounced interest in grammar, rhetoric, and the study of authoritative literature. The selection may therefore reflect a teaching environment or the working collection of someone engaged in instruction. Seneca and Cicero occupy an important place in the manuscript, while a separate section presents *accessus* to classical authors regularly encountered in schools, including Lucan, Ovid, Sallust, Statius, Boethius, and Valerius Maximus. The material on Valerius Maximus includes the prologue to the *Expositiones* prepared during a period of teaching activity at Ferrara between 1385 and 1387 [21–25].

Folios 27v–33v preserve a *Preambulum sive introductio libri Lucani editum per magistrum Petrum de Parma*, an introductory text prepared for the reading of Lucan's *Pharsalia*. Its structure and content show notable parallels with another *accessus* to Lucan produced within the same broader scholarly tradition.²² The text is particularly distinctive for its frequent use of Petrarch, an unusual feature in fourteenth-century commentaries. Dante also appears as a recognized source of authority. In discussing the tribune Curion, the commentary recalls the punishment described in *Inferno* XVIII, 100–2: «Hunc Curionem Dantes ponit in Inferno sine lingua».²³ Elsewhere, the tercet from *Inferno* XXVIII, 97–99 is introduced to reinforce a judgment

attributed to Aristotle, demonstrating that Dante's verses could be used to support philosophical interpretation alongside established ancient authorities [24].

The manuscript also displays a more direct interest in Dante's intellectual identity. On f. 73r appears the celebrated epitaph, Theologus Dantes, nullius dogmatis expers», which presents him simultaneously as theologian, philosopher, and poet. Its inclusion is significant because it condenses into a brief formula the multiple forms of knowledge associated with Dante and helps explain why his writings could circulate beyond strictly literary settings.

The precise locations in which Pietro da Parma taught remain uncertain. Nevertheless, his intellectual connections with the Veneto, and especially with Paduan cultural circles, are suggested by his engagement with Petrarchan materials and by features of the language used in his Dantean citations. Other contents of the Berkeley manuscript point more clearly toward Ferrara. An *accessus* to Statius dated to Ferrara in 1389, together with material related to the commentary tradition on Valerius Maximus, indicates that the compiler had some relationship with Ferrara's scholastic networks. These connections are further illuminated by the career of Federico Spezia, also known as de Peciis, who had studied under Pietro da Parma and came from Ferrara. He later acted as an intermediary in manuscript circulation between major humanist figures and participated in wider Florentine intellectual networks [25].

During the Council of Constance, where he was present as a representative of Alfonso of Aragon, Spezia added explanatory glosses to a collection of Cicero's speeches copied at Constance in 1415 «tempore Concilii» and now preserved in Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. Ross. 957. His marginal annotations are especially extensive in connection with the *Catilinariae* and the *Philippicae*. A notable gloss on *Philippics* XI, 24 addresses the contrasting evaluations of Brutus. Cicero's praise of the tyrannicide as «lumen et decus civitatis» is compared with Dante's radically different placement of Brutus at the centre of Hell in *Inferno* XXXIV, 64–66. The commentator explicitly notes the conflict between the two judgments: «Ergo non in centro inferni ponendus, ut eum describit Danthes [27–31].

This reference is especially important because Dante is cited even where his authority is questioned rather than accepted. The *Commedia* had become sufficiently familiar to provide a recognized point of comparison within the interpretation of a classical text. Such a use may reflect the broad interest in Dante during the years surrounding the Council of Constance. At the same time, the readiness to introduce modern writers into classical commentary may also preserve the influence of the educational traditions associated with Pietro da Parma.

Another witness to this practice is found in the commentary on Lucan's *Pharsalia* preserved in Praha, Národní knihovna

Ceske Republiky, VIII. H. 8. The manuscript was copied in 1410 by Giovanni di Pietro di San Lorenzo in Campo, a student from the Marche who was then attending the school of master Valentino da Matelica. The scribe later recorded several details concerning his own life and career. He obtained a degree in civil law from the University of Padua during the late 1420s and subsequently held a series of public offices, including tax judge in Ravenna in 1426, vice-podestà in Forlì in 1437, and a fiscal position in Rimini in 1439 [30].

Relatively little is known about Valentino da Matelica. He may, with due caution, be connected with Valentino di Ciccolino, who served for many years as *magister scholarum* in Rimini and was involved in diplomatic activity during the 1380s. Within the *Pharsalia* commentary, several Dantean passages—*Inferno* XX; *Paradiso* I; *Paradiso* IV; and *Paradiso* VIII—are employed as sources of historical information assumed to be familiar to those following the *lectio*. In some instances, the verses are recalled from memory, with limited concern for exact textual reproduction [31].

The same commentary also preserves an intriguing reference to a commentary on Virgil attributed to Dante and regarded as an authentic work by the teacher. Such an attribution represents an extreme expression of the widespread medieval and early humanist perception of an exceptionally close relationship between Dante and Virgil. The supposed commentary is itself revealing because the phrase «per Ydram ignorantiam» derives from an earlier commentary on the *Aeneid*, composed during the first half of the twelfth century. This exegetical work circulated widely during the later Middle Ages and was subsequently reused without explicit attribution in a major humanist interpretation of the labours of Hercules, where an allegorizer Virgilius is mentioned in connection with the same interpretative tradition [32-35].

Dante's use as an interpretative authority is also visible in manuscripts whose contents are not limited to the standard school canon. An important example is the copy of Justin's *Epitoma historiarum Philippicarum* preserved in Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, D 50 inf. The manuscript was completed in 1447 by the prolific copyist Iacopo da Pergo for Nicolo Martinuzzi of Fano, secretary to Malatesta Novello and an active collector of books. A dense body of annotations surrounding the text is associated with Martinuzzi and demonstrates his broad use of both ancient and more recent sources. Within this network of references, a Dantean passage was employed to clarify a moral and political observation in Justin. The description of envy in *Inferno* XIII, was used in connection with Justin XXXI, which criticizes the conduct of courtiers at the court of King Antiochus in their treatment of Hannibal. The example illustrates once again how the *Commedia* could supply memorable language and

interpretative material for the explanation of historical texts [36].

The evidence from Emilia-Romagna and its connected scholarly networks demonstrates the growing flexibility of Dante's position within learned culture. His verses were not confined to the study of the *Commedia* itself. They could support philosophical arguments, clarify historical events, provide moral examples, supplement classical exegesis, and even serve as a point of disagreement with ancient *auctoritates*. By the early fifteenth century, this repeated presence in manuscripts associated with schools and advanced learning indicates that Dante had entered the active memory of commentators and teachers. The *Commedia* was increasingly treated not only as an object of interpretation but also as a source from which interpretation could be constructed [37-43].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The *Commedia* in Academic Commentaries

The surviving evidence for Dantean glosses in commentaries on classical texts read within university *lecturae* is limited, yet it reveals patterns already familiar from advanced school settings. Dante's verses continued to function as sources of moral instruction, historical explanation, lexical clarification, and comparative interpretation. One important witness is Dresden, Sächsische Landesbibliothek-Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek [44-56], Mscr.Dresd.Dc. Rather than being written beside the relevant passages, twenty tercets from the *Commedia*—including *Inferno* XXVII, *Inferno* XIX, and *Purgatorio* III — were copied together at the end of the manuscript on f. 231r. Their linguistic features display a northern Italian character. Watermark evidence places the production of the codex in Lombardy, probably within the Pavia–Milan–Como area, during the transition from the fourteenth to the fifteenth century [57].

The manuscript transmits Seneca's tragedies together with the commentary traditionally attributed to the Anonymous to Botticella. It also contains a series of scholarly corrections and interventions made by a particularly careful copyist. The same hand used humanistic minuscule throughout both the literary text and its commentary and copied the Dantean verses in the same learned context. These extracts possess a distinctly gnomic and moralizing function, suggesting that they were selected as memorable statements capable of reinforcing ethical instruction [58-65]. Although no direct evidence identifies the precise institution in which the codex was used, its connection with advanced teaching and the arts faculties of northern Italian universities is plausible. During the period in which the manuscript was produced, Seneca's tragedies formed part of the material employed by masters of rhetoric in these academic environments (Table1) [66].

A more clearly defined scholastic setting is associated with

Table 1: Forms and Functions of the *Commedia* in Medieval Academic Culture.

Academic Context	Type of Evidence	Function of Dante's <i>Commedia</i>	Examples of Use	Intellectual Significance
Advanced grammar schools	Marginal glosses and <i>postillae</i>	Explanation of difficult passages	Historical, lexical, and mythological clarification	Established Dante as a useful supplementary authority
Commentaries on classical authors	Citations inserted into <i>lectio</i>	Interpretation and comparison	Seneca, Virgil, Lucan, Terence, Boethius, and Statius	Integrated vernacular poetry into classical exegetical traditions
University arts faculties	Public readings and academic lectures	Moral and doctrinal instruction	Rhetoric, grammar, and literary interpretation	Expanded Dante's role from poet to academic source
Theological contexts	Quotations and doctrinal glosses	Support for philosophical and theological reflection	Faith, providence, free will, and moral responsibility	Strengthened the perception of Dante as an intellectual authority
Legal and philosophical manuscripts	Marginal annotations	Ethical illustration and conceptual explanation	Magnanimity, virtue, exemplary conduct, and human behaviour	Demonstrated the adaptability of Dantean authority across disciplines
Humanistic and transregional centres	Manuscript collections and anthologies	Cultural transmission and scholarly memory	Italian and northern European manuscript traditions	Contributed to the wider European circulation of the <i>Commedia</i>
<i>Studium Generale</i> and university settings	Formal or semi-formal <i>lecturae</i>	Teaching and textual interpretation	Lectures combining Dante with classical <i>auctores</i>	Marked the institutional recognition of Dante as <i>auctor</i> and <i>auctoritas</i>

the Dominican *Studium* of Santa Caterina in Pisa. Within this environment, an extensive *Lectura Epistolarum Senecae* appears to have developed gradually through a series of lectures delivered and revised between approximately 1374 and 1396. The work brings together an unusually broad range of intellectual resources. Classical, biblical, and patristic authorities are supplemented by medieval lexicographical materials and by references to prominent vernacular and humanist writers. The citations from the *Commedia*, frequently recalled from memory rather than reproduced with strict textual precision, were used to fix significant ideas in the reader's mind. They also contributed historical and mythological information and, in several instances, strengthened explanations of difficult words and expressions [67,68].

Another manuscript that may be associated with a university setting is Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Pal. lat. 1690, containing a complete copy of Statius' *Thebaid* in Gothic *rotunda*. The codex bears a *colophon* on f. 146v written by the same copyist, who repeated the common confusion between the poet Publius Papinius Statius and the Latin rhetorician Lucius Statius Ursulus. Its strong exegetical character is demonstrated by the 187 *comparationes* identified throughout the text. Significantly, the same number is recorded in the *colophon* of another manuscript of the *Thebaid*, Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Plut. 91 inf. 10, copied in 1404 by Giovanni Berto del Friuli while he was studying in Bologna [69].

Among the interlinear and marginal annotations in Pal. lat. 1690, apparently written by a non-Italian, probably German, hand, one gloss directly connects Statius with Dante. *Thebaid* V, refers to Hypsipyle's narration of Troy's destruction, a scene that recalls Aeneas recounting the same catastrophe to Dido in *Aeneid* II. The commentator supplements this passage with *Inferno* V, invoking the famous expression of renewed sorrow associated with the recollection of painful events. The Dantean passage is summarized and deliberately aligned with Virgil's formulation: Sicut Eneidos: Infandum, regina, iubes renovare dolorem. Et elli a me: "non è maggior dolor" etc. Dantes. Here, Dante becomes an intermediary authority capable of clarifying a classical literary motif through a parallel expression of emotional and narrative memory.

Evidence from academic circles beyond Italy demonstrates that the *Commedia* also entered scholarly collections north of the Alps. Manuscript Melk, Benediktinerstift, Cod. 1153 is a composite miscellany with a distinctly humanistic orientation, assembled during the middle decades of the fifteenth century. Containing works in both Latin and German, it originated from the Benedictine Abbey of Melk, an institution closely connected with the University of Vienna. Several texts in the manuscript can be associated with rhetorical and grammatical teaching in the university's faculty of arts, including Pseudo-Ovid's *De vetula* on ff. 89r-132r and Enrico da Settimello's *Elegia* on ff. 133r-148v [70,71].

The academic character of part of the volume is further confirmed by the *colophon* accompanying Leonardo Bruni's translation of Basil the Great's *Ad adolescentes* on ff. 25r–35r. According to this note, the section was copied in Vienna on 28 July 1460 by Pietro Gotfart de Corona, a Transylvanian *magister artium* who later taught at the University of Vienna and became its rector in 1473. On f. 64v, two Dantean tercets are inserted among references to other classical writers to explain mythological information concerning the rapid death and rebirth of the phoenix, drawing on *Inferno* XXIV, 106–11. The university connection becomes especially clear because an *intimatio* announcing a poetry lecture at the University of Vienna appears immediately after the Dantean verses.

This manuscript predates a later group of codices, mostly from the end of the fifteenth century, that transmit descriptions of the phoenix without an evident association with university instruction. Cod. 1153 is distinctive because it preserves only *Metamorphoses* XV, 391–402 from a larger tradition that elsewhere developed into a compact thematic anthology on the phoenix. That broader manuscript tradition could combine Lactantius' *De ave phoenice*, Claudian's *De phoenice versus*, Pliny's discussion in *Naturalis historia* X, 2, and the relevant Ovidian verses. A complete example is found in Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, Guelf. 6.7 Aug. 2°, f. 377v. [73] Other manuscripts preserve comparable, though not always complete, combinations while consistently retaining the Ovidian section, including Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Lat. 459, f. 103v, [73,74] Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Lat. XII, 232 (=3985), sez. 4, f. 5v, [75] and Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Lat. 3110, f. 199r. [76] An exceptional witness is Rome, Biblioteca Angelica, 603, f. 83r, where

Inferno XXIV, 106–11 appears as an unusual addition to this thematic collection [75–77].

The academic circumstances surrounding another Dantean gloss are more difficult to establish. Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, F 141 sup., was produced in northern France during the first half of the fourteenth century and contains several Aristotelian treatises in Latin translation accompanied by a nearly contemporary commentary. In 1436–1437, the *Ethica* and *Politica* were heavily annotated by Ugolino Pisani while he was studying law at the University of Bologna. The manuscript subsequently circulated in a university environment, possibly at Padua, as suggested by a note of loan or circulation, «conduit», entered on f. IIIr in 1447 [78]. The codex later belonged to Ambrogio Griffi, a Sforza physician and apostolic protonotary who died in 1493 [79].

A particularly revealing marginal note appears on f. 23v beside Aristotle's discussion of magnanimity in *Ethics* IV, 3, 1125a 12–14: «Sed etiam motus gravis, lentus magnanimi videtur esse, et vox gravis, et locutio stabilis». Written in an elegant late fourteenth-century Gothic cursive, the *postilla* explicitly identifies this Aristotelian description as the source of Dante's representation of the «spiriti magni» in Limbo. The paired Latin adjectives *lentus* and *gravis* are translated conceptually into the Italian *tardi* and *gravi*, and the gloss connects the philosophical text directly to *Inferno* IV, 112–14: «Ex hoc loco sumpsit Dans [sic] poeta illud poeticum: "Gente v'erano con ogi tardi e gravi | de grande actorità ne lor sembianti | parlando rato con voce suave. The annotation is particularly important because it reads Dante through Aristotle, treating the *Commedia* as a poetic reworking of philosophical categories [80].

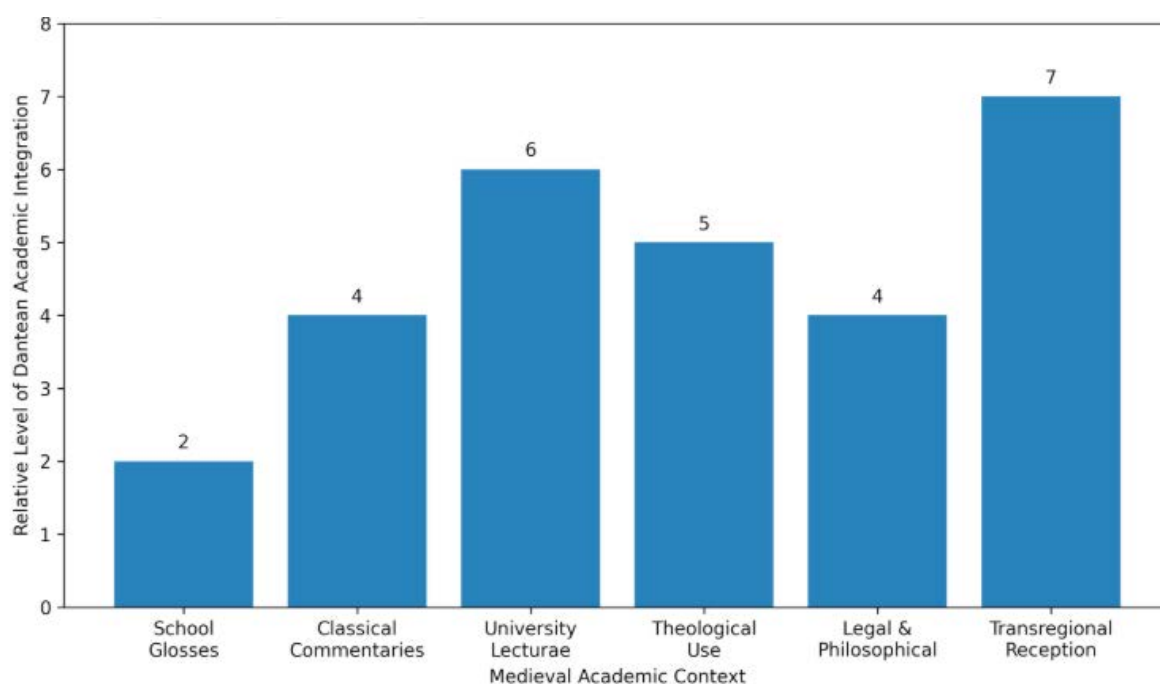


Figure 1: Progressive Integration of Dante's *Commedia* into Medieval Academic Culture.

Dante's presence can also be traced in a manuscript devoted primarily to legal learning. Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. lat. 1391, a parchment codex probably produced in fourteenth-century Bologna, transmits the *Glossa ordinaria in Decretales* and the *Apparatus in Novellas Innocentii IV* [81]. On f. IIIr, a quotation from Virgil's *Aeneid* II—describing Hector's sorrowful appearance in a dream—is accompanied by a later addition of *Purgatorio* I: «Vidi presso di me un veglio solo, | degno di tanta. The relationship between the two passages rests on their presentation of exemplary figures appearing in visionary circumstances: Hector in Virgil and Cato in Dante. The juxtaposition demonstrates how Dante could be inserted even into legal manuscripts as a literary authority capable of extending a classical comparison.

A final example comes from theological scholarship. Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. lat. 782 is a thirteenth-century miscellany containing a substantial collection of theological materials. Its contents reflect the exegetical activity of the early Franciscan school of Paris and include several *quaestiones*, among them the important and debated *De doctrina theologiae*, together with *collationes* on Scripture and commentaries on Peter Lombard's *Sentences*. At the end of the manuscript's *tabula*, a fifteenth-century hand added quotations from Augustine's *De Trinitate* III, 4, 9 to the upper part of f. IIv. A second hand subsequently copied one of the final tercets of the *Commedia*—«e perché el tempo passa che m'asonna | qui faren puncto come bon sartore | che com'egli a del panno fa la gonna» (*Par.* XXXII, 139–41)—alongside verses 148–50 from the *Triumphus Pudicitie*. The three excerpts do not appear to form a unified thematic sequence. Nevertheless, the presence of Dante and another modern poet within a manuscript otherwise dominated by theological writings remains significant (Figure 1) [81–84].

Taken together, these academic and quasi-academic witnesses reveal the broadening scholarly role of the *Commedia*. Dante's verses circulated through commentaries on tragedy, philosophy, rhetoric, history, mythology, law, and theology. They could provide moral maxims, illuminate classical passages, reinforce lexical interpretations, explain mythological material, or establish parallels between ancient and modern texts. In several cases, Dante was not simply an author being explained; his poem had become an intellectual resource through which other authoritative works could themselves be interpreted. This development illustrates the gradual consolidation of the *Commedia* as an *auctoritas* within the diverse textual practices of late medieval and early humanist academic culture [85].

Notes on the Reception of the *Commedia* in the *Studium Generale* of Pavia

The evidence examined so far suggests that many of the principal schools and universities in which Dante's verses

circulated as glosses were concentrated in northeastern Italy. Against this broader pattern, the early academic reception of the *Commedia* at the University of Pavia appears comparatively restrained. Founded in 1361 through an imperial diploma issued by Charles IV of Luxembourg, the *Studium Generale* did not initially display the same intensity of engagement with Dante that can be observed in some other Italian centres [86–89].

One of the earliest indications of Dante's presence as an *auctoritas* appears in a rhetorical introduction to Lucan, the *Principium Lucani*, associated with the teaching of Giovanni Travesio and preserved in Strasbourg, Bibliothèque Nationale et Universitaire, MS 23. The manuscript had been copied by 1443 by Giacomo Mori, a canon and chronicler from Piacenza who maintained connections with influential Visconti court circles and with humanists active in Milan and Pavia during the 1430s. Mori himself had studied in the local Faculty of Arts and Medicine and had also attended rhetoric lessons for a short period [83].

Lucan's *Pharsalia*, a work firmly established within school curricula from the twelfth century onward, developed a particularly close association with the *Commedia*. One reason may lie in the historical orientation shared by the two poems. Unlike epics centred primarily on remote origins or foundational events, both works show a strong engagement with politically significant events closer to their own cultural and historical horizons [84]. Dante's extensive familiarity with Lucan is also evident from numerous passages in the *Commedia* in which characters, episodes, and formulations from the *Pharsalia* are recalled, adapted, or translated into a new poetic setting [85].

In November 1373, Travesio opened his rhetoric teaching «in generali Studio Papiensi» through a commentary on Lucan's poem. The beginning of this *expositio* demonstrates how Dante could already be incorporated into an academic introduction to a classical author. The opening tercet of *Paradiso* I, 1–3 was invoked in defining the nature and operation of divine power:[86] The introductory passage also called upon the assistance of the Muses through the verses of *Inferno* II, 7–9, adapting Dantean poetry to a traditional rhetorical and pedagogical convention [87].

A further stage in the institutional history of Dante's academic reception occurred during the temporary relocation of the Pavia *Studium Generale* to Piacenza between 1399 and 1402. During this period, teaching continued to be shaped by rhetorical and grammatical forms of commentary, although the direct reading of classical authors was acquiring greater prominence within the curriculum.[88] Alongside the established *lecturae*, a reading of Seneca was assigned to Giovanni della Mirandola, while a separate *lectura Dantis et auctorum* was entrusted to the *magister* Filippo da Reggio.

The precise character and institutional stability of this *lectura Dantis* cannot, however, be reconstructed with certainty. The surviving evidence for the final years of the fourteenth century is incomplete, and no comprehensive lists of teachers and professors from the University of Pavia are available for this period. Consequently, it is impossible to determine whether some of the teaching positions recorded at Piacenza had existed before the transfer or whether they were later incorporated into the university's regular organization after its return. The document traditionally treated as a list of lecturers for the year 1399 may also cover a wider period. Recorded in the *Annales Placentini*, it identifies lecturers active at the *Studium Generale* and records the salaries provided by the host community. The unusually broad range of subjects and teachers listed suggests that the record may encompass the entire period during which the university functioned in Piacenza rather than a single academic year [89].

The financial position of the *lectura Dantis et auctorum* is itself revealing. Its salary amounted to less than one quarter of the remuneration assigned to the principal reading of the classical authors. Such a disparity suggests that, during this early phase, the institutional teaching of Dante occupied a relatively modest position within the Lombard *Studium*. The available evidence therefore points to a cautious rather than enthusiastic initial academic reception of the *Commedia*.

The identity of Filippo da Reggio, the otherwise little-known *magister* associated with the Dantean *lectura*, remains uncertain, although a possible identification can be considered cautiously.[89] A commentary attributed to a professor of rhetoric bearing the same name survives on Book IV of the pseudo-Ciceronian *Rhetorica ad Herennium* in Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, MS 3206. The manuscript was completed on 23 June 1458 by the Veronese student Giuliano de Peregrinis de Sancto Zillio and subsequently entered the library of the Faculty of Arts at the University of Vienna [90].

This professor may possibly be connected with the teacher of the same name who worked in public educational institutions in the Veneto. In 1449, the municipality of Treviso appointed a «famosus et eximius gramatice professor» named Filippo da Reggio to teach grammar to children and adolescents and to offer instruction in poetry and rhetoric to all interested listeners for a five-year period. Documentary evidence also records his involvement in presenting a prospective notary for the *tabellionatus* examination in Treviso in 1454 [91].

Between 1456 and 1458, a teacher of the same name was employed in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Ferrara, where he received a salary situated in the middle range of the faculty's pay structure.[92] It is therefore possible that the lectures on Book IV of the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, preserved through the notes copied by Giuliano de Peregrinis in June 1458, were delivered during this period of activity at

Ferrara [92,93].

If future evidence confirms that this professor was identical with the Filippo da Reggio recorded as reader of Dante in the *Studium Generale* at Piacenza, the implications for the earliest institutional teaching of the *Commedia* at Pavia would be significant. The first documented academic reader of Dante would then appear to have been a comparatively young scholar at an early stage of his professional career. Such a profile would differ considerably from the more established intellectual figures associated with Dantean teaching in the universities and advanced schools of Padua and the Tuscan-Emilian regions [94].

The available evidence also supports the possibility that Dante's poem occupied a less prominent position within the scholarly institutions of the Visconti dominion than in the cultural circles connected with the Milanese court. The early Pavia evidence thus presents a picture of gradual and limited institutional acceptance rather than immediate academic centrality. Dante was known and could be cited as an *auctoritas*, particularly in rhetorical and exegetical contexts, yet the formal establishment of a *lectura Dantis* appears to have developed cautiously and with comparatively modest institutional investment. Taken together, these features suggest that the transformation of the *Commedia* into a recognized academic text did not occur uniformly across Italy but depended significantly on local scholarly networks, teaching traditions, and patterns of cultural patronage.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

CONCLUSION

This study has traced the gradual transformation of the *Commedia* from a major vernacular poem into a recognized source of scholarly authority within late medieval educational culture. The manuscript evidence shows that Dante's verses were increasingly employed in school and university settings to clarify difficult passages, support moral arguments, explain historical and mythological material, and reinforce philosophical or theological interpretations. Their presence in glosses and commentaries on classical, legal, and theological texts demonstrates that the poem entered established practices of *lectio* and textual exegesis. Although this process was neither uniform nor equally developed across all academic centres, the evidence from Tuscany, Emilia-Romagna, northern Italy, Pavia, and regions beyond the Alps confirms a broad expansion of Dante's intellectual authority. The *Commedia* thus moved beyond its status as a vernacular literary work and became part of the wider repertoire of texts consulted by teachers, students, and commentators. Dante's reception as both *auctor* and *auctoritas* reflects the continuing integration of vernacular knowledge into the learned culture of late medieval Europe.

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