

The ICI Berlin celebrates the publication of *The Oxford Handbook of Dante*, edited by Manuele Gragnolati, Elena Lombardi, and Francesca Southerden (2021) with a series of lectures that suggest ways of reading Dante's Comedy from a less central position and with a broader, more critical perspective. How can discussions of race in the Middle Ages and the attentiveness to indigenous forms of knowledge preservation help literary scholars to rethink their understanding of 'canonicity' and the 'canonical'? On what basis can canonical authors such as Dante, Chaucer, and Christine de Pizan continue to be read today? In what sense and at what cost can Dante inspire other poets? What does he mean, more specifically, to a woman writer and artist in Jamaica? What changes when Dante's Virgil is read not only as part of the Christian reception of classical authors in the Middle Ages, but also in dialogue with the practices of ancient pedagogy? Does the queer desire informing the Aeneid also flow through Dante's poem?

A lecture series on the occasion of the publication of *The Oxford Handbook of Dante* ed. by Manuele Gragnolati, Elena Lombardi, and Francesca Southerden (2021) in cooperation with Équipe littérature et culture italiennes (Sorbonne Université) and Bard College Berlin for the Lorna Goodison lecture

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Online Lecture Series

De centring

In English

Monday

10 May 2021

Suzanne Conklin Akbari

Wednesday

12 May 2021

Lorna Goodison

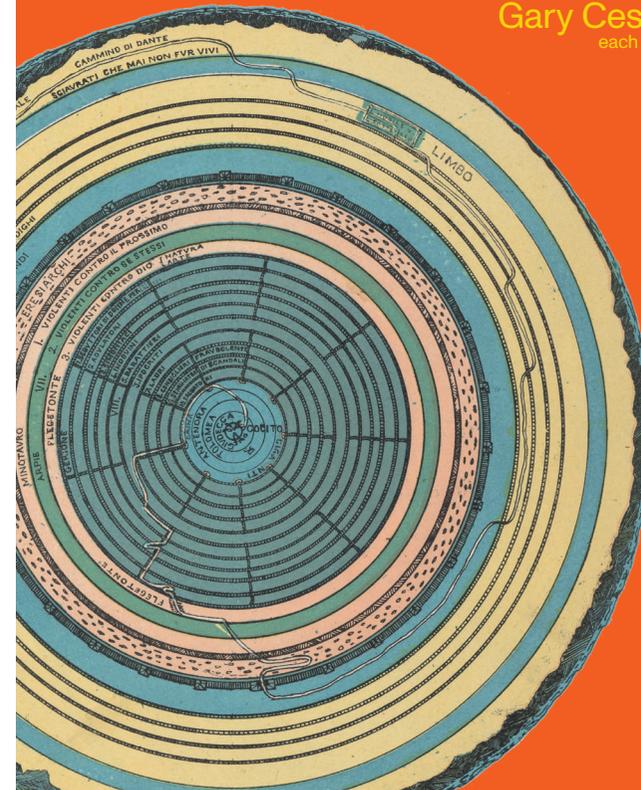
Monday

7 June 2021

Gary Cestaro

each at 19:00

Organized by
Manuele Gragnolati



Dante

Monday, 10 May 2021

Moderated by Elena Lombardi and Francesca Southerden • 19:00

Suzanne Conklin Akbari: What Ground Do We Read On?

The field of Medieval Studies has undergone a period of reckoning, including a greater awareness of histories of race and racialization, an increasingly fraught relationship of religious and racial identities, and the effects of the 'global turn', which has met with varying degrees of success. Beyond these challenges, attentiveness to Indigenous writers, artists, and knowledge-keepers requires those of us in literary studies to look critically at our disciplinary structures and foundational methods, and invites us to consider what we might mean by 'canonicity' and the 'canonical'. If we do continue to read canonical writers – such as Dante, Chaucer, and Christine de Pizan – on what ground will we read them? This talk explores the process of writing a 'Handbook', drawing on the experience of co-editing the *Oxford Handbook of Chaucer* and commenting on the new *Oxford Handbook of Dante*, and sketches out what future approaches to these writers – and their canonical status – might entail.

→ Suzanne Conklin Akbari is professor of medieval studies at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey. Her books are on optics and allegory (*Seeing Through the Veil*) and European views of Islam and the Orient (*Idols in the East*), and she's also edited volumes on travel literature, Mediterranean Studies, and somatic histories, plus the Open Access collections *How We Write* and *How We Read*. Her most recent book is *The Oxford Handbook of Chaucer* (2020), co-edited with James Simpson. Akbari is involved with two global medieval studies projects, the 'Practices of Commentary' and 'The Book and the Silk Roads', with which she is co-Principal Investigator. A co-editor of the *Norton Anthology of World Literature*, Akbari co-hosts a literature podcast called The Spouter-Inn.

Wednesday, 12 May 2021

Moderated by Jason Allen-Paisant, Francesco Giusti, and Laura Scuriatti • 19:00

Lorna Goodison: Going Through Hell

Perhaps it was seeing an illustration of Henry Holiday's painting, 'Dante and Beatrice', in a history text book at school in Jamaica that started my fascination with the Divine Comedy; for I remember that I had a premonition that this poet and whatever primal force it was that rendered him so undone by the sight of this woman, was destined to play a part in my life. At the time I was busy burning all my poems because I was terrified of what poetry would demand from me. This poet was demanding that I go with him through hell. I did not want to go. I trained as a painter, but I could not escape Dante. He kept turning up in my art history books. That portrait of him in red, by Giotto, somehow always brings me to tears. I do not know why. I was constantly being reminded of him through artists like his namesake, the Pre-Raphaelite Dante Gabriel Rossetti and by the pure-in-heart William Blake. Dante manifested in the work of every major poet and writer I ever read. I saw how Derek Walcott, Kamau Braithwaite, Seamus Heaney, and Thomas Merton, writers I leaned on for support and nourishment, leaned on him. Then literally midway through the journey of my life, in the midst of a dismantling brought on by hurricanes within and without, I turned to really reading the Divine Comedy. I began to understand why I always had a sure appointment with this poet: uncompromising as an old testament

prophet, stern as a Rastafarian elder, and loving and compassionate as my own and the divine mother. This poet and his monumental work guided me through my own version of Inferno and Purgatorio, and gave me permission to contemplate Paradiso. In 2000, I was invited by the South Bank Center to do a rendering of one of the cantos from the Inferno. I chose canto 15-Brunetto Latini; and in this talk I will speak about the writing of it and of other cantos from the *Divine Comedy* that I have attempted since then, setting them in Jamaica and employing Jamaican vernacular. I will also read some of my own poems that have come under his influence.

→ Lorna Goodison is a major figure in world literature, she was the Poet Laureate of Jamaica (2017–2020), and in 2019 she was awarded the 2019 Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry. Goodison has won many other awards for her work, including the Windham-Campbell Literature Prize for Poetry from Yale University, the Commonwealth Poetry Prize, the Musgrave Gold Medal from Jamaica, the Henry Russel Award and the Shirley Verett award for Exceptional Creative Work from the University of Michigan, and one of Canada's largest literary prizes, the British Columbia National Award for Canadian Non-Fiction for *From Harvey River: A Memoir of My Mother and Her People* (2007).

Monday, 7 June 2021

Moderated by Manuele Gragnolati • 19:00

Gary Cestaro: Dante's Queer Fathers

In 700 years of intense commentary, readers of the *Comedy* – at least professional readers – have almost entirely managed to avoid a crucial inquiry: what did Dante know about classical pederasty? What did he think of it? And most poignantly, did he think about Virgil in this context? After all, we have in the *Comedy* a classic pedagogy narrative. A younger man in desperate need of a guide encounters a much-admired elder, who takes him under his wing for mentoring instruction. That the *magister* in this case happens to be Virgil is no small matter. Virgil had something of a reputation in antiquity as a lover of boys. His enthusiasm for male couples, human and divine, along with fawning admiration for beautiful, often wounded, young men, is apparent to attentive readers of the *Eclogues* and the *Aeneid* – a group that must surely include Dante. Cestaro argues that Dante is not only aware of, but is subtly and strategically engaged with, his admired master's personal proclivities and from the very opening lines of the *Comedy*. The talk may begin with some broad historical and theoretical considerations around intergenerational male-male desire with help from Freud and post-Freudian queer theory and will then focus attention on the remarkable presence of Virgil's warrior-lovers Nisus and Euryalus in *Inferno* 1.

→ Gary Cestaro is Associate Professor in the Department of Modern Languages and the LGBTQ Studies Program at DePaul University in Chicago. He is the author of *Dante and the Grammar of the Nursing Body* (2003) and editor of the collection *Queer Italia: Same-Sex Desire in Italian Literature and Film* (2004). Most recently, he has contributed an essay entitled 'Queering Dante' to the *Oxford Handbook of Dante*. A member of the editorial board for the journal *Dante Studies*, he is currently at work on a book called *Dante's Queer Fathers*.

In English
