

CASA DI DANTE LECTURES SERIES

SPRING 2014

The first series of “Dante Lectures” provided by the Casa di Dante in Roma took place in the Palazzetto degli Anguillara from March to April 2014. For the first time since its foundation, in 1914, the Board of the Casa di Dante offered to the students of the Californian University and the Richmond University in Rome a short series of lectures in English as a general introduction to Dante, his works and his world: a new achievement of the Casa di Dante’s mission to propagate the knowledge of the Florentine poet.



On Tuesday the 18th of March, Professor Massimiliano Malavasi described the fundamental events of Dante’s life explaining some passages of his works which cast light on late medieval Italy history and literature. Malavasi read Cacciaguida’s speech on the virtues of the ancient, small, pacific and sober Florence of Dantes ancestors (*Paradise*, xv). Then he focused on the civil wars between the Guelphs and the Ghibellins reading the dialogue between Dante and Farinata degli Uberti (*Hell*, x), the most eminent Guibelline leader of the 13th century. Finally Malavasi analysed the beginning of the *Vita nuova*, one of the *canzoni* composed for the *Donna Petra* (*S’io avessi le belle trecce prese*), and the return of Beatrice in *Purgatory*, xxx; by these

means, Malavasi illustrated the cultural and psychological basis of the sublimation which permits Dante to transform a personal biographical experience – i. e. the love for a florentine girl doomed to die very young – in a spiritual and cultural experience – i. e. the meeting with the token by which God saved him.



On Tuesday the 8th of April, Professor Maurizio Campanelli provided a wide description of Rome in the age of Dante, starting from the passage of *Hell*, XVIII in which the poet refers to the thronging of pilgrims walking on the bridge in front of Castel Sant'Angelo during the Jubilee of 1300. Then, Campanelli commented the famous similitude of *Hell*, XXXI between the head of the giant Anteaus and the huge bronze pinecone which is now in the courtyard of the Vatican Museum, but in Dante's time had been turned into a fountain in the atrium of old St Peter's. Finally, Campanelli provided a new interpretation of the passage on to the astonishment of the barbarians in front of the Lateran in *Paradise*, XXXI, using information from the medieval descriptions of Rome, the genre of the *Mirabilia Urbis* (12th-13th centuries).



On Tuesday the 15th of April Professor Luca Marcozzi enlightened the premises and the possible sources of the main features of Dante's description of the Otherworld, in particular of the Hell, drawing relevant parallels between Dante's visions and a series of 14th century frescoes found in famous Italian churches of Italy (especially the mosaic representing the hell in the Baptistery of St John in Florence). Marcozzi put Dante's work in the context of the medieval texts relating journeys to the otherworld, which are generally inspired by the descent of Aeneas to Hades in Vergil's *Aeneid* VI, and by St Paul's *Epistles* (*Corinthians*, XII 2-4). As Marcozzi explained, St Paul's text was the basis of the so called *Visio Pauli*, a Greek work translated into Latin in 500 ca, which Dante was very likely to know, since it was widely read, transcribed and reworked during late the Middle.

