

# *The Year's Work in Medievalism*



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with Laura Harrison

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## **A Mickey Mouse *Inferno*: Medievalist Legacies and the Marketing of the Middle Ages<sup>1</sup>**

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Though others may disagree, many Italians insist that Dante's *Divine Comedy* is the most nationalizing of medieval artifacts. And they may be right. In addition to establishing the dominant dialect for an entire country, to serving as a cornerstone of the Risorgimento, and to still qualifying as a "best seller," the *Commedia* and its author are referenced on countless monuments, stamps, street signs, posters, labels, restaurants, and shops, not to mention tank tops, hoodies, and tights.<sup>2</sup>

It therefore may not be surprising that the Disney Corporation chose *Inferno* for one of the earliest stories in its 1949 relaunch of the Italian comic-book *Topolino*.<sup>3</sup> Disney comics have been published in Italy since the early 1930s, primarily in the first series to be called

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Sara Nadzam for bringing my attention to these adaptations of the *Commedia* and to the possibilities inherent in their publishing record. And I would like to thank my audience at the 2016 ISSM conference in Bamberg, the editors of *The Year's Work in Medievalism*, and its anonymous reviewer for their comments on earlier versions of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> For examples of such clothing, see "William Blake: 'Divine Comedy Illustration,'" *Yizzam*, <https://yizzam.com/products/william-blake-divine-comedy-illustration-1824-mens-sweatshirt?variant=495698608153>, accessed July 5, 2019. For more on the burgeoning, comparatively nascent field of Italian medievalism, begin with Tommaso di Carpegna Falconieri's "Medievalismi: il posto dell'Italia," which is the first chapter after the brief foreword to *Medievalismi italiani (secoli XIX-XXI)*, ed. Tommaso di Carpegna Falconieri and Riccardo Facchini (Rome: Gangemi Editore, 2018). At least to the great degree that the *Commedia* has been seen as a medieval rather than Renaissance or early modern text, it has of course played a large part in that medievalism, as is clear from much of my work and that of many other dantisti and as is perhaps most meticulously and completely chronicled in Michael Caesar's *Dante: The Critical Heritage* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995; orig. 1989).

<sup>3</sup> For an index of stories in Disney comics, as well as where and when they were published, see <http://marcoabar.outducks.org/DisneyIndex/>, accessed July 5, 2019. For details on each story, begin from the homepage of "The International Network of Disney Universe Comic Knowers and Sources (I.N.D.U.C.K.S.)," *I.N.D.U.C.K.S.*, <http://coa.inducks.org/>, accessed July 5, 2019. For more on the history of *Topolino*, see "Topolino," *Wikipedia*, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Topolino>, accessed July 5, 2019. For more on the Disney Company's business strategies, particularly with regard to medievalism, begin with *The Disney Middle Ages: A Fairy-Tale and Fantasy Past*, ed. Tison Pugh and Susan Aronstein (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). For more on Disney medievalism specifically with regard to Italy, begin with Matteo Sanfilippo, *Il Medioevo secondo Walt Disney: Come l'America ha reinventato l'Età di Mezzo* (Rome: Castelveccchi, 1993), particularly the first section's fourth chapter (83-100), "Il Medioevo secondo Walt Disney," which touches on other narratives in the *Topolino* serials as the author drives home the book's overall point that Disney provides a mirror, albeit a superficial, distorted one, through which Italy can reflect upon its past and present. Much has been written on other forms of medievalism for children, but most of it pertains to older children, including Chris Bishop's *Medievalist Comics and the American Century* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2016) and the many other recent studies of graphic-novel medievalism, and/or addresses of much earlier manifestations, such as Karla Knutson's "'Lessons Fairer than Flowers': Mary Eliza Haweis's *Chaucer for Children* and Models of Friendship," in *Studies in Medievalism 20: Defining Neomedievalism(s) II* 20 (2011): 79-97.

*Topolino*, which ran continuously from December 1932 to December 1943 and again from December 1945 to October 1948.<sup>4</sup> But Disney's self-proclaimed Great Parodies, which range from the *Iliad* to *Star Wars*, did not begin until the seventh volume of *Topolino*'s second series, by which time its newspaper format had been replaced by pocket digests.<sup>5</sup> There, the writer Guido Martina and the illustrator Angelo Bioletto constructed the first of six ten- to thirteen-page segments that led audiences through "L'inferno di Topolino" every month from October 1949 to March 1950, a series that, as I hope to show through a survey of where and how often it has been reprinted, perhaps the most telling evidence for its reception, has enjoyed success proportional to the *Inferno*'s historical relevance for the target consumers, as well as to the subtlety and faithfulness with which Dante's narrative has been adapted to those audiences' visual and textual conventions.<sup>6</sup>

After the first canto, whose anomalous nature I discuss below, the narrator-protagonist, Mickey Mouse, relays much of the story via blocks of verse along the edges of the illustrations, which are usually arranged in three rows of two.<sup>7</sup> Though echoing the structure of Dante's stanzas, these verses are far looser, far simpler, and often far sweeter than the original, as is literally true for the gluttons in Canto 6. According to Dante's narrator:

Io sono al terzo cerchio, de la piovra  
eterna, maladetta, fredda e greve;  
regola e qualità mai non l'è nova.

Grandine grossa, acqua tinta e neve  
per l'aere tenebroso si riversa;  
pute la terra che questo riceve.

Cerbera, fiera crudele e diversa,  
con tre gole caninamente latra  
sovra la gente che quivi è sommersa. (*Inf.* 6.7-15)<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See "I.N.D.U.C.K.S.," <http://coa.inducks.org/> and "Topolino," <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Topolino>.

<sup>5</sup> For more on the history of Disney comics in Italy, see "Topolino," <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Topolino>.

<sup>6</sup> For more on Martina and Bioletto, see "Guido Martina," *Wikipedia*, [https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guido\\_Martina](https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guido_Martina), accessed July 5, 2019; "Angelo Bioletto," *Wikipedia*, [https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Angelo\\_Bioletto](https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Angelo_Bioletto), accessed July 5, 2019. Also, see "I.N.D.U.C.K.S.," <http://coa.inducks.org/>, accessed July 5, 2019.

<sup>7</sup> As of July 5, 2019, the first two folios of the series could be found for free in color, "L'Inferno Di Topolino-CANTO I-IX," *Scribd*, <https://www.scribd.com/document/210349127/L-Inferno-Di-Topolino-CANTO-I-IX>, accessed July 5, 2019; the rest could be found there in color for a fee, and the entire series could be found for free at "Topolino," *Topolino*, <http://www.topolino.it/archivio-storie/l-inferno-di-topolino/>, accessed July 5, 2019, though some of the folios are black and white.

<sup>8</sup> All quotations of Dante are from *La Commedia secondo l'antica vulgate*, ed. Giorgio Petrocchi, Società Dantesca Italiana, Edizione Nazionale, 4 vols., 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Florence: Casa editrice Le lettere, [1966-8] 1994).

(I am in the third circle of the eternal, accursed, cold and heavy rain: its measure and its quality are never new; huge hail, foul water, and snow pour down through the murky air; the ground that receives it stinks. Cerberus, monstrous beast and cruel, with three throats barks dog-like over the people who are here submerged.)<sup>9</sup>

But according to Martina's narrator:

Invece siam nel cerchio dei golosi  
Gonfi di creme e di cioccolatini,  
Di torte e d'altri dolci appetitosi.

Dal cielo piovon pizze e salamini,  
E lì vicino scorre un gran torrente  
Di miele e di rosoli sopraffini.

(Instead, we are in the circle of the gluttons  
Bloated with creams and chocolates,  
with cakes and other delicious sweets.

From the sky rain pizzas and sausages,  
And nearby flows a great river  
of honey and superfine liquor.)<sup>10</sup>

As with the rest of Martina's text, these stanzas are also fewer than in the original text. While Dante devotes an average of 142 lines per canto, Martina averages no more than 36, with a high of 63 for Canto 4 and a low of 18 for Canto 9.<sup>11</sup> And though Bioletto's speech-balloons compensate for some of that lost text, the characters' dialogue is often devoted to simplistic recapitulations of the verses, to comedic asides that leaven the drama and stiffness of the verses, to grounding Dante's high-flying themes by means of the characters' metanarrative identities, and to explaining odd juxtapositions in Martina's Disneyfication of Dante's slog through hell.

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<sup>9</sup> As translated by Charles Singleton in the first volume of the six for his translation of and commentary on the *Divine Comedy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970), 59.

<sup>10</sup> My translation.

<sup>11</sup> Martina and Bioletto label the start of thirteen cantos, but it is not always easy to determine the start of the other cantos or the end of any canto that immediately precedes an unlabeled one. For my part, I am only confident that I can identify Cantos 1-9 and 14-17. All of the rest stop and/or start amid other cantos and/or extra-narrative episodes or are lacking so much of Dante's narrative that it is difficult to know how they correlate to his divisions.

Not that they always succeed. Indeed, perhaps no dialogue could obscure the more bizarre of these disjunctures, including attempts to ease the insertion of Dante's eschatological poem into a comic book. Rather than have a "pien di sonno" ("full of sleep") protagonist suddenly find himself in a "selva oscura" ("dark forest"), Martina has Mickey and Goofy play Dante and Virgil in a stage show of the *Commedia*, fall under a surreptitious spell to make them believe they actually are the two poets, cause confusion when they address Minnie as Beatrice, wander into a library, find a copy of the *Commedia*, fall asleep while looking at it, and, in Mickey's case, get pulled into it by a tree branch.<sup>12</sup> Rather than merely implying the protagonist may be dreaming, Martina explicitly has him do so as he is pulled into a book after being bewitched while performing the book on stage. Through a series of events improbable even for a comic book, the artist polyvalently discourages the reader from believing that Mickey is about to actually trek through an underworld of monsters who torture figures that may closely resemble the reader and his or her loved ones.

This buffer is further compounded by some odd character-substitutions, for though Mickey Everymouse is a natural replacement for Dante's protagonist, silly, stupid Goofy is a strange stand-in for wise, dignified Virgil; sweet, ditsy Pluto is not an appropriate substitute for the vicious demon Plutus in Canto 7 (despite the similarity in their names); and Huey, Dewey, and Louie, who by 1949 had evolved from their bratty beginnings and were rarely portrayed as gluttons, are out of place among those sinners in Canto 6. Yet perhaps most jarring are the insertions of extended episodes from other Disney stories that have only the thinnest relevance to the *Inferno* scenes that flank them and/or that they displace. The sodomites in Canto 14, for instance, are replaced by a parable of repentance that revolves around a school dominated by *Pinocchio* characters, and somewhere around what would be Canto 24 in Dante's text, between what Martina characterizes as charlatans and liars, he inserts a three-page interlude in which the Three Little Pigs blow up the Big Bad Wolf amid a distinctly non-subterranean setting.

Despite the rather graphic violence of that blast, these substitutions are apparently part of a larger effort to accommodate the sensitivities of Martina's anticipated audience, for he often stops well short of the cruelty and misery described by Dante. For example, where the latter fills Canto 12 with tyrants soaking in a river of blood, Martina makes no reference to those sinners or their punishment; where Dante has Count Ugolino gnawing on Archbishop Ruggieri's head in Canto 33, Martina has Ugolino chewing on a soccer ball, as bribing sports officials replaces cannibalism; and though Martina discusses the forest and harpies of Canto 13 at length, he completely omits references to the inhabitants

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<sup>12</sup> The references to Dante being "pien di sonno" and finding himself in a "selva oscura" are from *Inferno* 1.11 and 1.2, respectively.

guilty of perhaps the most difficult sin to explain to children—suicide. Evidently, some subjects were too dangerous even, and perhaps especially, for a highly Catholic country that had just been through the starvation, deprivation, and depredation of World War II.

With regard to those subjects, as with many others, Bioletto follows Martina's lead in Disneyfying Dante's narrative, in rendering it more innocuous and more cheerful. Especially for a narrative that unfolds underground, the palette is often quite bright, as in the backdrops of cerulean blue, lemon yellow, and tangerine orange. The demons often act a bit silly, as in the culinary pretensions of the beast who attempts to cook Goofy and Donald's nephews in Canto 6. The other denizens often smile and joke, as do the Three Caballeros in Canto 12. And slapstick abounds, as in pretty much all of those images.

But Bioletto also joins Martina in retaining far more of the *Commedia's* drama, suffering, and menace than one might otherwise expect from a comic book populated by talking animals. At least in terms of composition, many of these characteristics are refracted through earlier *Commedia* illustrations, particularly Gustave Doré's famous engravings from the 1860s.<sup>13</sup> That Bioletto, and perhaps Martina, were looking at Doré's work is obvious from the fact that a close copy of Doré's illustration for *Inferno* 1 contains the tree that grabs Mickey in Bioletto's illustrations of that canto.<sup>14</sup> But Doré's influence is also obvious in many of Bioletto's backgrounds, particularly such rocky ones as that behind the arch-heretics of Canto 10, and in many of his figural arrangements, such as that of those same sinners. And even when Bioletto does not appear to pull directly from Doré, he can tend towards horror, darkness, and other Romantic traits. His forest at the beginning of Canto 13 comprises huge, black trees set opposite a mossy, black outcropping and outlined against a sky that shades towards blood red. His nearly full-page spread at the beginning of Canto 15 shows fire falling on a long caravan heading into a vast black distance across a burning desert. And his tale of the Three Little Pigs and the Big Bad Wolf ends with the latter reduced to little more than a clothed skeleton.

Particularly in juxtaposition with the many ways in which Martina and Bioletto Disneyfy Dante's narrative, these Romantic touches help make this comic book highly heterogeneous and often quite strange. Yet it has been highly successful in Italy, as indicated by the fact that Disney reprinted it as a single comic-book on August 7<sup>th</sup>, 1955, just a little over four years after the first printing, and has subsequently reprinted it in Italy

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<sup>13</sup> Doré's engravings for *Inferno* were planned as early as 1855 and first published in 1861. His engravings for *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* were published in 1868. For more on them and their influence, begin with Aida Audeh, "Gustave Doré's Illustrations for Dante's *Divine Comedy*: Innovation, Influence, and Reception," in *Studies in Medievalism 18: Defining Medievalism(s)* 18 (2009): 125-64.

<sup>14</sup> For one of many internet copies of Doré's first of five engravings for *Inferno* I, see "Canto 1, Inferno by Dante Alighieri," *Florence Inferno*, <https://www.florenceinferno.com/canto-1-dante-alighieri/>, accessed July 5, 2019.

no fewer than twenty-one times.<sup>15</sup> In contrast, Martina and Bioletto's "Topolino e i grilli atomici" ("Mickey Mouse and the Atomic Crickets"), which appears as thirteen- and fourteen-page installments in the next four volumes of *Topolino*, has been reprinted in Italy only nine times,<sup>16</sup> and "Paperino in villeggiatura" (known in English as "Taming the Rapids")—which appears in volume seven of *Topolino* immediately after the first installment of "L'inferno," was written and illustrated by the famous and highly esteemed Carl Barks for the July 1945 issue of *Walt Disney Comics and Stories*, and, at eight pages, is easy to slip into multiple formats—has been reprinted in Italy only fifteen times.<sup>17</sup> Of course, "Topolino e i grilli atomici" differs from "L'inferno" in length, minor characters, number of installments, and the relevance of its subject to the historical moment at which it appeared. And the Barks story differs from "L'inferno" in those regards as well as in its creator, primary character, original language, and myriad other, more minor ways. But no two examples are exact matches, and a survey of the twelve other multi-episode Mickey Mouse stories that are securely ascribed to Martina and appeared in *Topolino* during the 1950s confirms that none of them were reprinted in Italy even half as often as "L'inferno," eleven were not reprinted even a third as often, and nine not even a quarter.<sup>18</sup>

The reasons for the Italian popularity of "L'inferno" can only be surmised, as Disney has not released sales records for each printing, much less a demographic breakdown of buyers, and as the online reviews are sparse, often little more than a number, limited to

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<sup>15</sup> For a list of these reprints, "L'Inferno di Topolino," *I.N.D.U.C.K.S.*, <http://coa.inducks.org/story.php?c=I+TL+++7-AP>, accessed July 5, 2019.

<sup>16</sup> For a list of these reprints, "L'Inferno di Topolino," *I.N.D.U.C.K.S.*, <http://coa.inducks.org/story.php?c=I+TL+++13-AP&search=grilli%20atomici>, accessed July 5, 2019.

<sup>17</sup> For a list of these reprints, "L'Inferno di Topolino," *I.N.D.U.C.K.S.*, <http://coa.inducks.org/story.php?c=W+WDC++58-02>, accessed July 5, 2019.

<sup>18</sup> "Topolino nella valle [“terra” in the second and third volumes] dell’incanto” (*Topolino* 44-46) has been published three times in Italy and only once (Turkey) elsewhere. “Topolino e i regali a valanga” (*Topolino* 104-6) has been published twice in Italy and nowhere else. “Topolino e il doppio segreto di Macchia Nera” (*Topolino* 116-19) has been published ten times in Italy and a total of twenty-one times in eleven other countries. “Topolino e il topazio dello zio in ozio” (*Topolino* 121-22) has been published four times in Italy and never outside of it. “Topolino e la doppia vigilia di Natale” (*Topolino* 129-31) has been published five times in Italy and only once (Portugal) outside of it. “Topolino e la grande impresa di ‘Lascia o t’accoppo’” (*Topolino* 140-41) has been published four times in Italy and a total of six times in three other countries. “Topolino e il mistero di Tapioco Sesto” (*Topolino* 142-43) has been published seven times in Italy and a total of eleven times in seven other countries. “Topolino e il tesoro degli Aztechi” (*Topolino* 170-71) has been published seven times in Italy and a total of twelve times in seven other countries. “Topolino e il pupo rapito” (*Topolino* 175-76) has been published four times in Italy and twice (Turkey) outside of it. “Topolino e l’anello di...” (*Topolino* 188-89) has been published four times in Italy and a total of ten times in four other countries. “Topolino e l’imperatore della luce” (*Topolino* 193-94) has been published four times in Italy and a total of nine times in four other countries. “Topolino e il ritorno dell’artiglio” (*Topolino* 212-14) has been published five times in Italy and a total of six times in three other countries. Note that “Topolino e il satellite artificiale” (*Topolino* 41-43), which was reprinted only four times in Italy and never outside of it, may not be by Martina. For more on these statistics and others regarding the publication of stories in *Topolino*, see <http://marcobar.outducks.org/DisneyIndex> and “I.N.D.U.C.K.S.,” <http://coa.inducks.org/>, accessed July 5, 2019.

the last twenty years, and usually untraceable.<sup>19</sup> But it is not hard to imagine that Italian children would have exposure to and concomitant interest in an author whose name and likeness are on countless products and places around them, or that their parents would welcome this interest in such an important cornerstone of their culture.

Indeed, many adults may have bought “L’inferno” for themselves. In the last thirty years or so, as indicated by the hyperinflation of comic-book prices, by an influx of far more talented and expensive artists, and by the spread of much more mature themes, some older readers in Italy and elsewhere are gravitating toward “graphic novels,” even those that revolve around talking mice and ducks.<sup>20</sup> Many probably do so out of nostalgia, and others may be pure speculators, but at least some may appreciate the literary and artistic challenges of engaging young minds, particularly when the core of the story is a pre-modern classic. And any guilt they may feel at spending the cost of a meal, albeit a very cheap one, for a type of publication that their grandparents would probably consider trash, would be soothed by the belief that they are studying such tactics while strengthening their own knowledge of a highly respected classic.

Presumably some of these same motives are at play, as it were, in the American market, where the average age of comic-book buyers has also increased in the same period.<sup>21</sup> Yet perhaps because of the far greater visibility, popularity, and importance of the *Commedia* in Italy, the Disney Company may not have expected “L’inferno” to do well in America, for they did not publish it there until the March 2006 issue of *Walt Disney’s Comics and Stories*.<sup>22</sup> Nor did they apparently expect it to do well anywhere else outside of Italy, for they did not publish it until 1982 in Greece, 2001 in Germany, 2008 in Spain, 2010 in Brazil, 2013 in Finland, and 2015 in Portugal, and they have never published it in France, Denmark, Sweden, or any of the many other countries where Disney comics have been popular since well before 1949.<sup>23</sup>

Moreover, they may have been right to hesitate, for, despite the fact that reprinting-cycles are notoriously short for comic books (particularly those that, at least ostensibly, cater to

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<sup>19</sup> I.N.D.U.C.K.S., for example, gives ratings on a scale of ten, based on reviews by its users. As of July 5, 2019, “L’inferno” scored a 7.8 based on 145 ballots, “L’Inferno di Topolino,” *I.N.D.U.C.K.S.*, <https://coa.inducks.org/story.php?c=I+TL++++7-AP&redirected=1>, accessed July 5, 2019.

<sup>20</sup> For more on the aging of the comic-book buying population in Italy and elsewhere, begin with Heidi MacDonald’s condescending but informative article, “Report Says 25% of Comic Readers Are over 65,” *The Beat*, <http://www.comicsbeat.com/report-says-25-of-comics-readers-are-over-65/>, accessed July 5, 2019.

<sup>21</sup> MacDonald, “Report Says 25% of Comic Readers Are over 65.”

<sup>22</sup> *Walt Disney’s Comics and Stories* 666 (March 2006), Gemstone Publishing, under license from Disney Enterprises, Inc.

<sup>23</sup> For these statistics and more data on “L’inferno,” “L’Inferno di Topolino,” *I.N.D.U.C.K.S.*, <https://coa.inducks.org/story.php?c=I+TL++++7-AP&redirected=1>, accessed July 5, 2019.



small children), it has been republished more than once in only one of those seven countries, Greece, and that was for a 1984 serial with a different format and a somewhat different audience than the 1982 edition.<sup>24</sup> In contrast, “Paperino in villeggiatura” has been reprinted a total of sixty times in fifteen countries outside of Italy,<sup>25</sup> seven of Martina’s twelve other 1950s, multi-episode Mickey Mouse stories for *Topolino* have been published more often abroad than inside Italy, six have been published abroad at least one-and-a-half times more often, and three have been published abroad at least twice as often.<sup>26</sup>

In the case of America, the lack of success for “L’inferno” may have something to do with the fact that Disney made few changes to the Italian version, and those alterations rarely, if ever, improve the original. Indeed, many readers might think the changes are for the worse. For example, though Martina’s text was translated into English, it is not a particularly inspired interpretation, as demonstrated by the beginning of the narrator’s overview in Canto 2:

I saw this creepy forest, as I knew it  
From my first canto—I was Dante, right?  
Or was I? Hmm! I still felt like a poet...

But I’m not Italian, am I? And...good night!  
Awful-lookin’ beasts straight at me stared,  
With sounds of doggone awful rage an’ fight!

If I’d been Dante, I’d have been prepared  
For this...but no, I only hoped to hide!  
I remembered I was Mickey...I was scared!

Even apart from ascribing a highly inauthentic courage and preparation to Dante’s narrator-protagonist, even apart from the strings of rhetorical questions, numerous ellipses, liberal use of exclamation points, and letter dropping, there are the poor choice

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<sup>24</sup> “I.N.D.U.C.K.S.,” <https://coa.inducks.org/story.php?c=I+TL++++7-AP&redirected=1>.

<sup>25</sup> Besides Italy, “Paperino in villeggiatura” has been published in Brazil four times, Denmark six times, Finland seven times, France four times, Germany nine times, Greece once, Iceland once, Mexico once, the Netherlands seven times, Portugal once, Russia once, Spain once, Sweden six times, and the United States six times. For details on its title in other languages and publication history in Italy and elsewhere, see <http://coa.inducks.org/story.php?c=W+WDC++58-02>, accessed July 5, 2019.

<sup>26</sup> See note 19, above. The exceptions are “Topolino nella valle [“terra” in the second and third volumes] dell’incanto,” “Topolino e i regali a valanga,” “Topolino e il topazio dello zio in ozio,” “Topolino e la doppia vigilia di Natale,” and “Topolino e il pupo rapito.”

of words, garbled syntax, and clumsy rhythms. Clearly, much of Martina's content and form, not to mention Dante's, has been lost.

This lack of subtlety and faithfulness in translation may in part explain why the comic has yet to be reprinted in the U.S. and most other countries apart from Italy, but the lack of adaptation to American pictorial tastes may also have played a part. Disney toned down the palette from the bright, glossy colors favored in Europe towards the paler, more matte finish that is traditional in American comics, particularly those by Disney and/or featuring talking animals; they compacted every two Italian pages to a single American page by shifting to a four-row format with three panels per row; and they eliminated six panels about a barber shop in which Minos tortures souls with flames, shaving cream, tar, electricity, and a fan. But compared to Mickey Mouse illustrations that originate in America, the palette is still a bit bright, the scenery is more detailed, the poses are more theatrical (even outside the play within the narrative), and, via Doré, the scenes often go beyond the dramatic to the melodramatic, spooky, and even gory, as in Canto 13's forest and Canto 24's partially skeletal Big Bad Wolf.

These differences do not, however, explain why this story is not particularly popular in European countries outside of Italy, for the images were not altered for the Greek, German, Spanish, Brazilian, Finnish, and Portuguese editions. Nor is the clumsiness of the textual translation likely to have substantially impacted sales, for probably few, if any, consumers based their purchase decision on the beauty or faithfulness of that translation. A far more likely explanation is that Americans, particularly children who buy talking-animal comic books, do not have enough investment in the *Commedia* to overcome the strangeness of it being Disneyfied. Unless they have unusually strong ties to Italy, they are not immersed in a language and culture that have closer connections to the *Commedia* than to any other native text—indeed, that may be more indebted to it than any other culture is to any work, outside of core texts for major religions and/or political institutions. Whereas Italians often treat the *Commedia* as a national treasure to be celebrated whenever they need to reinforce their collective identity, Americans rarely encounter it outside of required-reading lists (if then), and even Disney, the most medievalizing of American corporations, a national icon famous for overwhelming other nations with American pop culture (which, ironically, sometimes builds on those nations' middle ages), apparently cannot overcome this lack of cultural continuity.<sup>27</sup> At least in this case, nationalist medievalism and the myths that attend it would seem to be crucial to the subsequent marketing and consumption of the Middle Ages.

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<sup>27</sup> For more on this characterization of Disney, begin with *The Disney Middle Ages and Il Medioevo secondo Walt Disney*.