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FROM WRATH TO UTOPIA. G. A. BORGESE'S AMERICAN INTERPRETATION OF DANTE (1931-1952)[1]

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This paper describes the influence exerted by Dante on the Italian antifascist exile Giuseppe Antonio Borgese (1882-1952), who fled from Mussolini's Italy in 1931 to find refuge in the United States. In the 1930s and 1940s, Borgese made relevant contributions to the field of Italian Studies modernizing the American reception of Dante: his original interpretation—a blend of literary criticism and political theory, centered on the concept of «structural beauty»—was destined to generate unexpected outcomes in the post-war era, as the philosophical viewpoints stressed in Dante's *De Monarchia* were to be planted, somehow unexpectedly, in the newborn ideology of world federalism.

Keywords: Dante, Borgese, World Government, Monarchia, Exile, Fascism

1. *Introduction*

In the context of the American reception of Dante, Giuseppe Antonio Borgese offers a peculiar reading which combines literary criticism and political theory. As a scholar, Borgese was deeply influenced by the concept of "structural beauty" emerging from the *Divine Comedy.* As an antifascist exile, he was inspired by «modern trends» discernible in the *De Monarchia.* As a political activist, he focused on Wrath and Utopia bringing Dante, somewhat unexpectedly, into the American political discourse of the 1940s and 1950s.

Even though his legacy appears to be fading in the U.S., it is important to keep in mind that "when Borgese came to Chicago in 1936, he was one of the best-known Italian intellectuals of his age, active in academia and the liberal press, a famous anti-fascist

[1] This paper was presented at the 700th Anniversary Conference *Tra liti sì lontani… Dante and the Americas,* organized by the Dante Society of America and Harvard University (May 5th-7th, 2021). The valuable feedback given by colleagues and experts allowed me to better my work. I am grateful to those who showed interest and participated in the discussion.

militant, and a unique voice in Italian literature."[2] His influential reading challenges the conventional image of Dante as a poet and as a man, making him a well-rounded icon whose influence goes way beyond literature. After a short biographical survey of the life and work of G. A. Borgese, this article will focus on his Dantean interpretation, highlighting its social, literary, and political impact.

2. *G. A. Borgese, an Exile*

At the beginning of the 20th century, the Sicilian literary critic and author Giuseppe Antonio Borgese had been playing a pivotal role in the Italian cultural arena. Emerging from the Florentine *milieu* of militant criticism, he discovered many a writer of great talent, and shaped the perception of early 20th-century Italian poetry coining the label "crepuscolarismo."

At the outbreak of the Great War, Borgese volunteered as an artillery officer and took part in a series of diplomatic missions in France, Switzerland, Albania, and Macedonia. Being the official *liaison* between the Italian government and the Yugoslavian émigrés in Bern, he gained a consistent understanding of the so-called "Questione Adriatica," which was to become a national obsession at the end of the conflict.[3]

At the end of the Great War, the Italian political debate polarized on the issue of territorial compensations, especially along the Eastern border. Nationalist factions of different sizes (including Benito Mussolini's recently formed Fasci di Combattimento) sought to expand Italian influence over Dalmatia, a narrow belt of the east shore of the Adriatic Sea historically dotted with Italian-speaking communities but inhabited by a large majority of non-Italian speakers. Borgese, well-informed about the complicated scenario of the Balkans, strongly opposed the territorial claim, maintaining that an Italian occupation of Dalmatia would generate instability and violence. Through his articles in *Il Corriere della Sera,* Borgese supported Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points as the sole effective measure to contrast the disastrous consequences of nationalist policies. Predictably, his opinion became so unpopular that the editors of the Milanese newspaper had to suspend his political column.[4]

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[2] Or Rosenboim, *The Emergence of Globalism. Visions of World Order in Britain and the United States, 1939-1950* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 173.
[3] Giuseppe A. Borgese, *I Balcani 1917-1919. La missione in Albania e la questione jugoslava con scritti e fotografie inedite*, eds. Riccardo Cepach and Ilaria de Seta (Trieste: Luglio Editore, 2019).
[4] A detailed history of Borgese's collaboration with *Il Corriere della Sera* can be found in Luigi Albertini, *Epistolario 1911-1926* (Milan: Mondadori, 1968).

At the beginning of the 1920s, nationalist press publicly accused pro-Wilson Borgese of being a "rinunciatario," meaning an anti-patriot, despite having served during the war and possessing a prestigious pedigree as an early interventionist. Disgusted by these libels, Borgese decided to withdraw from public life and avoid any further contact with the political debate. In 1921, he successfully started a literary career by writing *Rubè*, a novel that deals with the failures of a middle-class intellectual who is incapable of finding his place in post-war Italy.[5] Through the symbolic death of his protagonist Filippo Rubè, who dies in an armed confrontation between socialists and fascists, Borgese shared his pessimistic views on the destiny of culture in a massified society.

As soon as Mussolini seized power in October 1922, Borgese made sure that his growing disappointment towards the regime was not to be disclosed publicly. For most of the 1920s, he focused on his academic and literary career, teaching German Literature (1917-1926) and Aesthetics (1926-1931) at the University of Milan, and authoring novels, short stories, poems, and dozens of articles.[6] His public silence—that necessarily included a certain extent of compromise—worked well until 1929, when he was ultimately caught in a web of political intrigue and academic grievance.[7] Squads of the Gioventù Universitaria Fascista (GUF), backed by the Milanese section of the National Fascist Party and by Senator Gaudenzio Fantoli, Director of the Politecnico di Milano, began to disturb his classes. After the beating of a couple of his students on May 18th, 1931, Borgese started searching for jobs far away from Milan and possibly outside of the country.[8] Help came, somewhat unexpectedly, from Lauro De Bosis, an Italian antifascist who was able to offer him the position of Chair of Italian Culture at the University of California.[9]

[5] Giuseppe A. Borgese, *Rubè* (Milan: Mondadori, 1921).
[6] The most convincing account of Borgese's life and work has been published online by the "Fondazione G. A. Borgese," based in Polizzi Generosa (Sicily). The document can be downloaded for free at the following link: https://www.fondazioneborgese.it/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/ITA_Biografia2_Borgese-1.pdf
[7] The conflictual relationship between Borgese and the fascist regime has been the focus of numerous essays, the two most relevant still being Fernardo Mezzetti, *Borgese e il fascismo* (Palermo: Sellerio, 1978), and H. Goetz, "Borgese und der Fascismus," *Quellen und Forschungen aus Italienischen Bibliotheken und Archiven* 60 (1980): 523-34.
[8] The frightening months of 1929 and 1930 are well described in Sandro Gerbi, *Tempi di malafede. Una storia italiana tra fascismo e dopoguerra: Guido Piovene ed Eugenio Colorni* (Turin: Einaudi, 1999).
[9] Ilaria de Seta, *American Citizen. Un intellettuale fra le due sponde dell'Oceano* (Rome: Donzelli, 2016), 40-41.

According to various sources, this six-month job at Berkeley was intended as a temporary escape from Italy. Borgese never thought of leaving the country for good: he believed that a short-term absence would have been more than enough to distract fascist authorities in Milan and eventually allow him to return to a quiet academic life.[10] Confident that the crisis would be over soon, he left Italy on June 12th, 1931. While on his way to the West Coast, he was alerted that Mussolini had required all Italian university professors to take the infamous oath of allegiance to the regime.
In a community of approximately 1,200 scholars, only 18 refused to take the oath and Borgese was among them.[11] As one can see from this letter written to Giovanni Papini on October 14th, 1934, the reasons behind his decision were self-explanatory:

> Teoricamente io potrei ugualmente vivere in Italia ritirandomi dall'insegnamento e scrivendo libri in campagna, magari per farli pubblicare dopo morte. Praticamente non posso; perché son povero.
> Quanto alle accoglienze che mi sarebbero fatte in patria, è difficile prevederle. Io ho a lungo combattuto con me stesso. […] A giurare o dire il falso nessuno mi potrebbe costringere.[12]

In the eyes of many thinkers, the oath was a clear sign of the definitive subjugation of culture to the regime and its politics. Frightened by the quick asphyxiation of intellectual freedom, Borgese decided not to go back to Italy, therefore transforming his temporary job abroad into an exile. As soon as his Californian contract expired, he moved to the East Coast, wandering very much like a *clericus vagans* in search of academic and journalistic employment. From 1932 to 1936, thanks to special funds dedicated to displaced European scholars, he taught Italian literature at Smith College (Northampton, Mass.) and lectured at the New School of Social Research in New York.[13] In 1936 he was hired by the University

[10] De Seta, *American Citizen. Un intellettuale fra le due sponde dell'Oceano* (Rome: Donzelli), 2016.
[11] The traditional number is 12, as stated by Giorgio Boatti, *Preferirei di no. Le storie dei 12 professori che si opposero a Mussolini* (Turin: Einaudi, 2001). Nevertheless, in the last few years 6 other scholars have been added to the list, Borgese being one of them.
[12] Giuseppe A. Borgese, *Lettere a Giovanni Papini e Clotilde Marghieri* (Naples: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1988), 146-51. Translation: "Theoretically I could easily live in Italy, provided that I give up teaching and end up in the countryside writing books to be published after my death. Practically, I can't: because I am poor. Also, I do not know what kind of welcome I would be given if I returned to Italy. I have been fighting with myself for a very long time […] Nobody can force me to tell lies or commit perjury."
[13] De Seta, *American Citizen,* 42-48.

of Chicago. His separation from Italy became complete on April 12th, 1938, when he obtained his American citizenship.

3. *(Re)discovering Dante*

During the first five years of his exile (1931-1936), Borgese experienced the most typical isolation of a European émigré in the United States. Apart from his daughter Nanni, who had settled in New York, he possessed scarce connections with the scattered community of the Italian *fuoriusciti.*[14] Since he had to learn how to make conversation in English—a language he mastered very well, but only on a written and literary level—he initially struggled to access the American cultural *milieu*. Professionally, his works were barely known in the United States and the undisputed prestige he had accumulated in Italy was practically non-existent. Like many other expatriates, Borgese was forced to start anew, changing the very essence of his daily life: for a very long time, literature seemed the only element of continuity in his entire existence.

Unsurprisingly, living a precarious life in a foreign country led him to take interest in the figure of the exiled author—and the Italian tradition provided plenty of examples. Looking for a model to follow, he narrowed down the illustrious spectrum down to a pair of very divergent paths: the one set by Ugo Foscolo, that is to say, a voluntary exile, not necessarily related to a conflict with authority, and the one set by Dante, that is to say, an exile triggered by the political struggle and later transformed into the ultimate source of artistic inspiration. Although Borgese did not aspire to be "an exile, or a martyr, or a hero," he saw in Dante the spiritual model that might help him overcome the dreadful task of living an uprooted life.[15]

By choosing Dante, however, Borgese revealed an embarrassing hindrance. Although being known as one of the most competent literary critics of his generation, he privately confessed that he had not studied Dante with the depth and passion that was—and is—usually expected from an Italian scholar. He simply did not feel the urge of navigating the boundless Dantean universe until he

[14] Given that Borgese did not declare his official antifascism until the summer of 1933, he was at first excluded by social gatherings by the small Italian community of *fuoriusciti*. See Mirko Menna, *Giuseppe Antonio Borgese. Un antifascista in America, attraverso il carteggio inedito on Giorgio La Piana* (Bern: Lang, 2015), 36-37.

[15] The passage can be found in the previously quoted letter to Giovanni Papini (October 14th, 1934). Giuseppe A. Borgese, *Lettere a Giovanni Papini e Clotilde Marghieri* (Naples: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 2002), 146-51.

experienced exile himself. As he wrote in his journal on January 25th, 1933:

> Credo che nessuno scrittore italiano abbia studiato Dante meno di me; ma credo che nessuno lo abbia tanto reincarnato (virtualmente, s'intende – a little of Dante) nelle sue posizioni estetiche, poetiche, politiche, religiose, ricondotte al pensiero moderno.[16]

Now an uprooted himself, Borgese felt the need to understand the life and work of the Italian exiled writer *par excellence*. On a biographical level, he even spotted a few similarities: he too was banished *in absentia* by a government that was allowing his family to live and work in the country; he too had a complicated relationship with his wife; he too had to constantly belittle himself begging for jobs in front of wealthy and powerful magnates. Furthermore, Borgese was convinced that Dante had done his best writing in exile, and he tried to reconsider his hardships as a stimulus to reach higher artistic outcomes.

According to his journal, Borgese commenced a systematic study of Dante in 1933, the year in which he openly declared his antifascism. He did not approach the Florentine poet as a conventional topic within the frame of Italian Studies, but rather as a dynamic model to understand the experience of antifascist emigration—which was becoming frighteningly common in the mid-1930s.

As he jotted down in his journal on October 25th, 1935, Dante was a fellow companion in exile who needed to be understood and avenged:

> Il compito di un uomo oggi sarebbe: vendicare Dante; cioè; essere un Dante risuscitato e vittorioso.[17]

Moving to Chicago in the summer of 1936, Borgese made Dante the focus of his first academic course in the Midwest. On October 15th, 1936, he declared that his purpose in the United States was to recreate, with the necessary adaptations of the mind, Dante's

[16] Giuseppe A. Borgese, *Cinque diari americani (1928-1933)* (Florence: Gonnelli, 2020), 455. Translation: "I believe that no other Italian writer has studied Dante lesser than me; but I also believe that nobody has ever reincarnated him better than me (virtually, I mean: *a little of Dante*) in his aesthetic, poetic, political, and religious viewpoints."

[17] Giuseppe A. Borgese, *Diario VI*, unpublished, Fondo Borgese, Biblioteca Umanistica dell'Università degli studi di Firenze, I/1.6 Cc 1-241. Translation: "The task of a man today should be: to vindicate Dante, as to say to be a reborn and victorious Dante."

experience.[18] At this point, his interest in the life and work of the Florentine poet was ready to overflow the boundaries of literary erudition.

4. *On Dante Criticism (1936)*

Borgese's peculiar approach to Dante left relevant traces in his academic production. In 1936, he put together three years of persistent study in a well-received lecture presented at the Dante Society of America: *On Dante Criticism* was a noteworthy report on the latest Italian contributions to the field, with a convincing commentary upon Gentile, Papini, Barbi, and Croce's most recent essays.[19]

This work must be considered Borgese's first major contribution to Italian Studies in America. The author—a flamboyant critic, gifted with a magnificent style both in Italian and in English—manages to keep a sober tone, even though he sometimes fails to hide his approval of Gentile's and Barbi's interpretations of the *Divine Comedy*. While observing with curiosity the bizarre essay of his old friend Papini, he thoroughly criticizes the analysis of his former mentor Benedetto Croce.[20] In the third chapter of his famous essay *La poesia di Dante* (1921), the Neapolitan philosopher stated that "the representation of the other world" in the *Divine Comedy* "was not the intrinsic subject of his poem, its generative or dominant motive." Investigating Dante's inspiration, Croce argued:

> He was not, properly speaking, composing poetry, since the necessary and creative motive is lacking. […] This work of Dante's might perhaps be correctly called a "theological" or an "ethico-politico-theological"

[18] Giuseppe A. Borgese, *Diario VI*, unpublished, Fondo Borgese, Biblioteca Umanistica dell'Università degli studi di Firenze, I/1.6.

[19] Giuseppe A. Borgese, "On Dante Criticism," *Annual Report of the Dante Society*, no. 52-54 (1936): 19-70. The essays are: 1) Giovanni Gentile, *Frammenti di Estetica e Letteratura* (Lanciano: Carabba, 1920), 205-95; 2) Giovanni Papini, *Dante Vivo*, (Firenze: Libreria Editrice Fiorentina, 1933); 3) Michele Barbi, "I nostri propositi," *Studi Danteschi* 1, (1920): 1-26; 4) Benedetto Croce, *La Poesia di Dante* (Bari: La Critica, 1921).

[20] In the essay *La poesia di Dante* (Bari: La Critica, 1921), 1-3, Croce asks the reader a simple question: "Is there any reason why Dante's poetry should be read and judged differently from other poetry?." He then later answers by stating: "Dante's work, in its admittedly significant philosophic and practical aspects, affords rich material, far richer than the work of most poets, some of whom present almost no material at all for such interpretation. But the difference between him and the others in this respect is always simply one of quantity, and there is nothing 'unique' about him along these lines at all."

> romance, by analogy with "scientific" or "socialistic" romances of recent times.[21]

Basing his reasoning on the premise that Dante's *Comedy* is not entirely a work of art, Croce was bound to affirm that the "structure" of the poem must be considered "of but little importance" in the artistic outcome of the poem:

> A somewhat rhetorical admiration is often bestowed upon the "architecture" of the *Comedy,* its sureness of line, its proportions, its "eurythmia," the mathematical correspondences to be found in the construction of the three kingdoms and in their physical and moral topography. This is a favorite subject for lecturers, who are led to talk ornately of the "aesthetic beauty" of the poem's structure, a sort of beauty additional to the other beauty of "the thing itself," as it is sometimes called.
> […] Thus it seems clear how structural parts of the *Comedy* should be treated and how much attention should be paid to them. They should not be treated as pure poetry, nor rejected as unsuccessful poetry, but rather respected as practical necessities, while we go in search of poetry elsewhere.[22]

In his 1936 report, Borgese turned Croce's point upside-down, foreshadowing the direction of his analysis:

> The structural beauty is the highest value of the Divine Comedy. […] The only distinctive mark of Dante, if any, is the ratio between the power of his genius and the bulkiness of the obstacles which he continually piles against himself, and continually overpowers. […] For the rest, he shares with all the others the destiny of the struggle of beauty, which is never, in human work, the Absolute of the Beautiful.[23]

"Structural beauty," far from being a flaw in the *Divine Comedy*, must be intended as its most valuable trait.

5. *Goliath (1937)*

After having delivered his lecture *On Dante Criticism*, Borgese started working on an ambitious project that was destined to become his most successful American book: the essay *Goliath. The March of Fascism*. Published in 1937, the book articulates a fascinating theory on the intellectual origins of fascism, in which Mussolini's movement is depicted as the modern outcome of long-term

[21] Benedetto Croce, *La poesia di Dante* (Bari: La Critica, 1921), 85.
[22] *Ibid.*, 99-103.
[23] Borgese, "On Dante Criticism," 70.

trends that had been accumulating in the Italian society since the Middle Ages.[24]

In the foreword, Borgese states that the purpose of his work is "to outline the characters of some of the personalities and the course of some of the passions which have carried us where we are," which is on the brink of another world war.[25] He claims that fascism, "the Great Involution," cannot be interpreted "merely as an episode of Italian history," but rather as a long-lasting phenomenon that had indeed originated in a peripheral area of Europe but had rapidly found fertile ground in the entire continent. His main point is that "it is impossible to acquire an understanding of the contemporary world and a clear consciousness of what should be our political and social purposes for the near future without a knowledge of the essence and origin of Fascism in its homeland, Italy."[26]

The first chapter, entitled *Italian Background*, offers a historical portrait of the so-called "spirit of Italy" from its formation in the Middle Ages to the present day. Among the great personas that shaped the cultural physiognomy of the country, the figure of Dante is simply towering, for he appears as none other than the "builder" of the national identity:

> The Italian nation rose, as did all others in Europe, about the close of the Middle Ages; but its birth was different. Italy was not the creation of kings and warriors; she was the creature of a poet, Dante. The foreigners that identify Italy with Dante are essentially right. […] It is hardly an exaggeration to hold that he was to Italy what Moses may have been to Israel.[27]

Among many clever definitions of Dante, this one is particularly intriguing. While describing the "spirit" of Italy, Borgese repeatedly places the Italians in a somewhat "privileged" position, for the people that were able to create Rome (the Universal Empire) and Florence (the Renaissance) must be recognized as the spiritual guide of mankind: this supposed extraordinariness of the Italian people allows Borgese to build a parallel with the "chosen people" of the Old Testament. In this respect, Dante is considered an "Italian Moses" because he was the founder of a new nation in exile—a nation that had to rely on a sacred book, the *Divine Comedy,* for its linguistic and cultural identity.

[24] Borgese, *Goliath. The March of Fascism* (New York: Viking, 1937).
[25] *Ibid.*, 3.
[26] *Ibid.*, 4.
[27] *Ibid.*, 7.

Numerous pages are then dedicated to the life and work of this "Italian Moses." Dante's experience as an exile is presented in a very interesting way:

> In the first years of Dante's exile, there was still some hope of reconquering the mother city, either by the change of fortunes or by force of arms. Later, hope also vanished, and Dante was alone with his work. […] Now that sentimental disaster was matched by political and social disgrace, other personages arose in another field of his imagination, a negative climax. They were the wicked Florentines and the bad popes. He remembered the promise at the close of *The New Life*, and started a larger building, the largest possible: a Paradise for his love, a Hell for his enemies, a Purgatory for himself, from which, after struggle and victory, he was finally to soar. […] So completely, Dante became a hero, and could build a world.[28]

Anyone familiar with Borgese's biography can see that the author is subtly presenting himself as some sort of 20th-century reincarnation of Dante. The bittersweet contemplation of "the first years of exile" is a reference to Borgese himself, who did not lose hope of going back to Italy until at least October 1934, when he destroyed the last bridges he had kept open with the motherland.[29] Likewise, the image of Dante "alone with his work" reminds us of the academically stranded Borgese, when he could not but dive into work to save himself from depression. Even the "sentimental disaster" of Dante's love life echoes Borgese's personal history: in 1937 he was divorcing from his first wife, Maria Freschi, who was unwilling to "share his exile."[30]

All similarities aside, Borgese's description of Dante is no hagiography. He highlights the fallacies of his personality and the incongruences in his ideology, and he does that to portray Dante as a man, and not as the untouchable idol revered by the tradition:

> He misunderstood his times, missed his opportunities, and failed to understand the future. […] His ruin was the result of a temperament in which the emotions and imagination were as high-strung as the organic resistance seemed weak.[31]

Borgese mercilessly criticizes Dante's political career, calling him a "conformist," a "zealot," and "an opponent of any change." He also uncovers his early life failures, his "repressed sexual love," and

[28] *Ibid.*, 10.
[29] See Gandolfo Librizzi, *No, io non giuro. Le lettere di Giuseppe Antonio Borgese a Mussolini* (Palermo: Navarra, 2013).
[30] De Seta, *American Citizen*, 44.
[31] Borgese, *Goliath. The March of Fascism*, 9.

his "frustrated family affections."[32] Only later the author reveals the poet's best quality, recalling in slightly different terms the concept of "structural beauty" he had introduced in his lecture *On Dante Criticism*:

> The greatest asset of his personality lay in his feeling for the absolute proportions of intelligence and beauty, in his love for symmetry and unity; in other words, in his genius as a classic master-builder.[33]

What was originally intended as a brilliant architectural metaphor in defense of the *Divine Comedy* is now enlarged to encompass Dante's entire experience, including hardships, literary works, and cultural legacy. "Structural beauty" recurs as a *leitmotiv* climaxing in the accomplishment of the *Divine Comedy*, a "monument" of "unsurpassable majesty and grandeur."[34] This poem clearly shows that

> symmetry is Dante's inspiration. In the harmony of the parts with absoluteness and eternity of the whole, he finds revenge for the misery and dispersion of his personal life. […] The stability of his castle is adamant.[35]

Borgese affirms that the *Divine Comedy* is a philosophically indestructible fortress in which Dante managed to preserve the Zeitgeist of the late Middle Ages. But the *Divine Comedy* is also an impressive personal reaction to the "anguish" of mediaeval exile, when "expulsion was a curse" far greater than the one experienced by contemporary émigrés.[36] The twofold magnificence of this poetic work made it historically difficult for Italians "to draw a line of demarcation between the aesthetic value […] and its theoretical and practical authority."[37]

Having systematized the Catholic afterlife, Borgese continues, Dante felt the need to replicate the "absolute and ultimate perfection" of the *Divine Comedy* in the "political organization of the world." He believed that a new social order was necessary to fix the international chaos of the late Middle Ages and to grant stability and peace to all mankind. Gradually shifting from literary criticism

[32] *Ibid.*
[33] *Ibid.*
[34] *Ibid.*, 14.
[35] *Ibid.*, 12.
[36] *Ibid.*, 10.
[37] *Ibid.*, 13.

to political theory, Borgese dedicates the rest of this section to the analysis of Dante's pamphlet *De Monarchia*:[38]

> The ultimate axioms upon which his system of *Monarchy* reposed are valid, even to the modern mind, as most of the corollaries that he pretended to deduce from them are crudely wrong. There is nothing to object to in Dante's first principle: namely, that human civilization has a unitary goal, and that such goal is the perfectibility of the human mind, in knowledge as well as in action. The second axiom is also easily acceptable: that, to strive towards that unitary goal, universal peace is required, and that universal peace is impossible without a unitary political organization of mankind. […] There is definitely a modern trend in Dante when he assumes that the political and social organization must be self-sufficient.[39]

Far from considering *De Monarchia* an outdated attempt, Borgese believes that Dante is displaying a "definitely modern trend" when he argues that the two primary goals of mankind should be "the perfectibility of the human mind" and "universal peace." However, the means Dante indicates to reach those goals are inadequate, as he looked for political solutions in a mythological past rather than in a Utopian future. By fetishizing a Universal Roman Empire that never actually existed, he produced a somehow reversed Utopia:

> Dante […] started more thoroughly and conscientiously than the Emperor Charlemagne to rebuild the Roman Empire. It was a shadow of the past and a mirage of the North. […] At the time of Dante the medieval Roman Empire was already a lamentable ruin, upon whose rotting framework the new, spontaneous breeds of life, national states and communes, wildly grew. Dante did not mind. The mirage of the North was the most tangible of realities to him. The past was the future.[40]

The schizophrenic pendulum of Dante's political theory—swinging from his universalistic desire to the harshness of medieval Realpolitik—was destined to have devastating consequences for the history of Italy: the country could not develop as a proper nation-state, adjusting itself as a "compromise between infinite and the

[38] It is hard to determine Borgese's philological approach to this pamphlet. Considering the frequency of his Latin readings, it is believable that he studied the text in its original version. We must also take into consideration the fact that an Italian translation might not have been easily accessible in the U.S. In any case, whenever he needs to quote from an English version, Borgese utilizes Aurelia Henry's 1904 translation (Cambridge: Houghton, Mifflin & Co.).
[39] Borgese, *Goliath. The March of Fascism*, 17-18.
[40] *Ibid.*, 14.

city, between eternity and daily news."[41] An inferiority complex sprung from the idolized myth of Rome, becoming the distinctive mark of Italian history. Its ultimate perversion, according to Borgese, had assumed the name of fascism.[42] Throughout the essay, Italy is portrayed in generally negative terms: it is a "phantom," an abortive and short-lived country incapable of pairing its aesthetic accomplishments with acceptable political development.[43] Borgese's dissatisfaction was fueled by recent events, in particular the outbreak of the Ethiopian War and the inefficient reaction of the League of Nations.

A complex and peculiar essay, *Goliath* can be placed somewhere between the historical dissertation and the political tract, with surprising excursuses in the genres of memoir, biography, and even fictional novel. It has the merit of introducing to the American reader—in many cases for the first time—some of the most significant personalities of Italian history, such as Dante, Cola di Rienzo, Machiavelli, Garibaldi, De Sanctis, and Crispi. Four hundred pages are then dedicated to the life and work of Benito Mussolini, who is introduced as the protagonist of an ironic *Bildungsroman* that offers a fresh, propaganda-free, image of Il Duce.

In the *Epilogue*, Borgese puts aside the objectivity of his analysis and tries to forecast the destiny of Europe. His considerations are dark and sinister:

> Should Fascism win a world war, then the blackness of the coming age would make the so-called Dark Ages of the past seem as bright as sunshine. […] No interest has been saved, no feeling has been spared by Fascism, and all fine things of earth and sky have been defiled.[44]

But surprisingly, the book ends on an optimistic tone:

[41] *Ibid.*, 19.
[42] Borgese's unorthodox link between Dante a fascist ideology was heavily criticized in 1946, when the first translations of *Goliath* appeared in Italy. He defended his position in Giuseppe A. Borgese, *Golia. La marcia del fascismo*, trans. Doletta O. Caprin (Milan: Mondadori, 1946), 1-17: "Dante, quello delle prime pagine del libro, non è il Dante di molti lettori – né dell'autore, oggi. […] Ma riman vero che nella genesi e nello sviluppo del nazional-fascismo Dante, inteso più o meno a modo loro, fu stimolo potente a quelli che delirarono di un nuovo Impero Romano, sacro o no. […] Oggi, cadute quelle chimere e in un orrore di cui nessuna epoca ebbe presentimento, riemerge in pieno la validità della concezione fondamentale di Dante: la società universale, ordinata in una legge comune di giustizia e libertà verso la perfettibilità intellettuale e pratica di tutto il genere umano."
[43] Borgese, *Goliath. The March of Fascism*, 22.
[44] *Ibid.*, 467.

> Dawn, however, will rise, in days or generations. […] A new earth and society is rising in the will and imagination of man. This society will fuse all the older religions in a common belief enlightened by the freedom of philosophy and science. […] Of all fading fatherlands one Brotherland will be made, for men to fight united, according to Leopardi's testamentary hymn, their common enemies, untamed Nature and Death.
> This is Utopia. But what is man's earth if not the place predesigned for Utopia?[45]

This heartening reference to Utopia, as we will see, was not just an effortless cliché. Supposing that another world war would break out anyway, Borgese had already started to imagine a post-war society, hopefully without fascism, based on the democratic premises of equity and freedom.

Goliath was Borgese's first wide-ranging publication in the United States. He believed that his essay was powerful enough to influence American public opinion, at that time firmly isolationist and still sympathetic to Mussolini's fascism. Of course, a dense work on the «spirit of Italy» was not even remotely adequate to modify the course of the American political debate. Demanding too high results from his work, Borgese found himself disappointed with the outcome of *Goliath*.

6. *The Time of Wrath (1938-1945)*

Less than a year after *Goliath*'s publication, Borgese's political resentment converged in a new lecture entitled *The Wrath of Dante.* Delivered in front of the Medieval Academy of America, it was a dignified speech on the importance of anger in Dante's poetry. Questioning the peculiarities of *Inferno* VII, Borgese supports the thesis of a significant temporal discontinuity between the first seven cantos of the *Divine Comedy* and the rest of the poem.[46]
Even though the topic appears to be extremely specialized, Borgese manages to expand it beyond the rigid boundaries of philology. Recalibrating the Argenti episode in the frame of Dante's biography, he argues that

> It is certain that between the seventh and the eighth canto there is a gap, a stylistic and moral interval, which postulates a decisive crisis of the personality with, most probably, an adequate interruption in time. It is quite possible that the first seven cantos were composed of inspirations, plans, or even sketches and drafts reaching as far back as Dante's Florentine period. […] It might seem plausible to place them sometime

[45] *Ibid.*, 468.
[46] Giuseppe A. Borgese, "The Wrath of Dante," *Speculum* 13, (1938): 183-93.

> during the early stage of Henry VII's expedition, when collaboration with the papacy and a happy political outcome still appeared conceivable.[47]

Always interested in the personality of the Florentine poet, Borgese then adds that

> In no other artist, before or after Dante, did the release of anger play such a part as in him, and his passion appears to be a decisive component in the structure of his originality.[48]

Even though this passage gives the impression of a marginal statement, it represents a crucial discovery. Borgese is realizing that a philosophically justified "release of anger" was the most powerful weapon at the disposal of the antifascist émigré. Shortly after having delivered his speech, Borgese reflected on "the problem of Dante's anger" in his diaries, and tackled the issue by rereading both *Monarchia* and *Convivio.*[49]

The epiphany came when the drums of war were echoing all over Europe. Elegant essays such as *Goliath* were simply not good enough to help democracy survive. It was necessary to re-enter the political arena and fight fascism by any means. It was the time of Wrath.

7. *Dante and the War*

Disgusted by the accomplishments of the German *Blitzkrieg*, Borgese understood that he and his fellow antifascist émigrés needed to be heard by broader audiences than the ones provided by universities and liberal magazines. At the end of 1939, he founded the Committee on Europe, a think-tank composed of Italian *fuoriusciti*, German exiles, and a large majority of American liberal conservatives,[50] whose purpose was to condense the surviving spiritual energies of Europe and place them at the service of the Roosevelt Administration.[51]

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[47] *Ibid.*, 189.
[48] *Ibid.*, 190.
[49] On December 5th, 1937, while working on the "Dante Paper," Borgese was reading *Monarchia* I, IV, 2 (in Latin) and *Convivio,* IV, IV, 2 [Borgese, *Diario VI*].
[50] The complete list of authors: Herbert Agar, Frank Aydelotte, Borgese, Hermann Broch, Brooks Van Wyck, Ada L. Comstock, William Y. Elliott, Dorothy Canfield Fisher, Christian Gauss, Oscar Jàszi, Alvin Johnson, Hans Kohn, Thomas Mann, Lewis Mumford, William A. Neilson, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Gaetano Salvemini.
[51] See Ester Saletta, *The City of Man. L'utopia democratica di Hermann Broch e il contributo politico-ideologico di Giuseppe Antonio Borgese e Gaetano Salvemini* (Rome: Aracne, 2016).

The Committee on Europe met several times in New York and Atlantic City. In October 1940, it published a pamphlet entitled *The City of Man. A Declaration on World Democracy.*[52] Comparing its vision to St. Augustine's *City of God*, the group pleaded in favor of American military intervention:

> There is no compromise or truce in the totalitarian mind, and as it takes two to be at war it takes two to be at peace. Whether and when we may be called to actual battle may still lie hidden in the alternatives of the impending future. But our major choice is no longer ours. War, declared or undeclared, actual or virtual, has chosen us.[53]

Despite being presented as a political manifesto, *The City of Man* breathes messianism and is rich in religious rhetoric.[54] Fascism—and especially its latest manifestation, war—is depicted as an evil presence that threatens the goodwill of mankind. Nazism is a "religion of darkness" that seems to control the "frustrated masses" via the spell of Satanic fanatism; the subjugation of Europe is referred to as "expiation by tyranny."[55] The Committee also stated that "in an era of Apocalypse" it was necessary to call for a new "Millennium"[56]—the Millennium being of course a renewed idea of democracy enlightened by the spirit of American humanitarianism:

> Universal and total democracy is the principle of liberty and life which the dignity of man opposes the principles of slavery and spiritual death represented by totalitarian autocracy. No other system can be proposed for the dignity of man since democracy alone combines the fundamental characteristics of law, equality, and justice.
> […]
> We can have no freedom or safety from ourselves unless we are ready to reclaim the world from Fascism, to win the world for a new order—unless we endow democracy with a fighting spirit, and meanwhile hold the fort until the day comes when Goliath meets his David.[57]

It is difficult to believe that a reference to the biblical story of David and Goliath is a sheer coincidence. This obsessive recurrence of an ideological Manicheism that opposes the goodness of democracy (David) to the wickedness of totalitarianism (Goliath) is a valid

[52] Herbert Agar et al., *The City of Man. A Declaration on World Democracy* (New York: Viking, 1941).
[53] *Ibid.*, 14.
[54] See the splendid review of the Committee on Europe's activities and influence made by Adi Gordon and Udi Greenberg, "*The City of Man.* European émigrés, and the Genesis of Postwar Conservative Thought," *Religions* 3, (2012): 681-98.
[55] Agar et al., *The City of Man*, 15-16.
[56] *Ibid.*, 20-21.
[57] *Ibid.*, 61.

point in favor of what scholars have already argued, namely that the manifesto was drafted almost entirely by Borgese, and that he was exploiting the collective authority of the Committee to revive and spread the political theory he had expressed in *Goliath.*[58] Also, it seems likely that Borgese considered the Committee a symbolic David and the *City of Man* a sling that could smash fascism—or at least initiate its ideological collapse.

Philologically, many tenets are bridging *Goliath* and *The City of Man*. The most important one is the Dantean concept of "structural beauty," somehow camouflaged but still clearly recognizable as the Utopian destination of mankind. The following excerpt from the manifesto looks as if it had been extrapolated from *Goliath*:

> First of all, we reaffirm that the meaning and the goal of human life, individual and collective, are progress and growth in intellect and action and that peace, universal peace, is the prerequisite of progress and growth.[59]

The ideological aims of the Committee on Europe recall the «modern trend» that Borgese singled out in Dante's political theory. This overlap allows us to believe that *The City of Man*, rather than being a "New Testament of Americanism," should be considered an updated version of Dante's *Monarchia*. Even the towering figure of President Roosevelt—the ideal addressee of the plea, and at the same time last man standing in the trench of democracy—has striking resemblances to Dante's Emperor Henry VII.

The Committee on Europe pursued its political agenda until the summer of 1941, but its outcome remained substantially inconclusive.[60] On a personal level, Borgese's study of Dante climaxed on February 20th, 1943, when he registered in his journal that he had carefully reread the entirety of his *opera omnia.*[61] Of course, the winter of 1943 represented also a turning point in World War II, as the Allies invaded Sicily, the Axis was defeated in Russia, and the outcome of the European war became foreseeable. Borgese intensified his activism, writing numerous pamphlets and articles on the imminence of fascism's defeat and the need for a new democratic order.

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[58] Saletta, *The City of Man*.
[59] Agar et al., *The City of Man*, 20.
[60] Gordon and Greenberg, "*The City of Man*," 681-98.
[61] Giuseppe A. Borgese, *Diary VII*, unpublished, Fondo Borgese, Biblioteca Umanistica dell'Università degli studi di Firenze, I/1.8 Cc. 1-182.

Fighting the ideology of totalitarianism, Borgese had looked at *Dante furens* as a model of stubbornness, hope, and activism. However, in the spring of 1945, the time of Wrath was coming to an end: post-war Europe was physically and spiritually in ruins, and Borgese—together with many other émigrés—felt responsible for the destiny of the place he had left a long time ago. In the short term, he believed that the most immediate priority was to prevent the outbreak of another war since the Soviet Union and the United States were already drifting apart. In the long term, he thought that in the long run, it would have been necessary to create a new society built on the premises of democratic representation. For these reasons, he dismissed the model of the «infernal» Dante and shifted towards the «symmetric genius» of the political thinker, the great architect of State and Language.
It was the time of Utopia.

8. *The Time of Utopia (1946-1952)*

Borgese was appalled to discover that the Manhattan Project which brought destruction over Hiroshima and Nagasaki was being developed in the same city, Chicago, where he was teaching Dante and preaching for a new and peaceful world order. This painful paradox convinced him to take an official stand against nuclear weapons and to work in favor of a new political system to prevent the self-extermination of humanity.

In the fall of 1945, three University of Chicago professors—Richard McKeon, Chancellor Robert M. Hutchins, and Borgese himself—came up with the idea of founding a new committee to examine the best political outcome for the post-war era. As the number of participants settled around fifteen, the group renamed itself Committee to Frame a World Constitution and declared world federalism its main purpose.[62] From November 1945 to July 1947, the Committee held 13 meetings and produced 145 documents totaling over 4,500 pages: this enormous amount of work prepared the ground for the realization of the *Preliminary Draft of a World Constitution*, a pseudo-legal document to be submitted to the United Nations as a concrete step towards a federal world republic.

[62] A letter by Giuseppe A. Borgese to Chancellor Robert M. Hutchins (November 30th, 1945) confirms that the three had been having conversations about a "Committee" or "Institute," necessarily linked to the University of Chicago, to deal with the problem of "World Government" (Robert Hutchins Papers, Box 306, Folder 3, University of Chicago Library).

As the Chicago group officially declared on September 17, 1947,

> [Our] ambition or hope was and is to do [our] part in taking down to earth or, so to speak, spelling out, the general movement for World Government that has been growing, not always in definite shapes, during these years. The problems of the World Government are hard and intricate. The Committee felt that these problems can be best clarified in a constitutional design, intended as a concrete picture to show what a Federal Republic of the World, under certain conceivable circumstances, *might* look like. Thus visualized in an exact frame of government and law, the Republic of the World does not look so absurd—"utopian" is the word—as defeatism maintains. […] To create those circumstances is beyond the power of any individual or group, and this Committee is not a guild of miracle makers.[63]

In the summer of 1947, a tentative version of the *Preliminary Draft* was circulated among a small group of "experts and leaders" to obtain technical improvements. Around the same time (July 1947), the Committee expanded its range of action by inaugurating the monthly magazine *Common Cause*, whose goal was to spread the ideology of world government in post-war United States and Europe.[64] As Silvia Bertolotti claimed, *Common Cause* was the most influential periodical in the world federalist movement, with a readership of 2,000 subscribers in the U.S. and hundreds more all over the world—not only in Europe, but also in China, India, South America, the Soviet Union, and Japan.[65] The monthly welcomed contributions from famous writers such as Thomas Mann, André Gide, Jacques Maritain, Albert Camus, and Ignazio Silone, and comments by renowned world federalists, such as Altiero Spinelli, Piero Calamandrei, Lewis Mumford, and Albert Einstein.

As Stefano Magni maintained, *Common Cause* mirrors with accuracy the evolution of the world government movement from its hopeful post-war premises to the failures of 1951-1952.[66] As a welcoming arena for debate, the monthly contributed to the formation of a clearer ideology for world federalism, and at the same time helped the Chicago Committee to gain a leading position

[63] Robert M. Hutchins et al., "Preliminary Draft of a World Constitution," *Common Cause* 1, no. 9 (March 1948): 325-27.
[64] Giuseppe A. Borgese stated the mission of the magazine in his first editorial, "One World and Seven Problems," *Common Cause* 1, no.1 (July 1947): 3-6.
[65] Silvia Bortolotti, *La rosa dell'esilio. Giuseppe Antonio Borgese dal mito europeo all'utopia americana (1931-1959)* (Trento: Fondazione Museo Storico del Trentino, 2013), 250.
[66] Stefano Magni, *G. A. Borgese. Dal nazionalismo al federalismo* (Pasian di Prato: Campanotto, 2021).

among the numerous organizations that were being founded around the globe.

In the wide range of authors upon which the Committee based its ideological premises, Dante represented one of the fundamental pillars. Even though his old-fashioned dream of a World Empire was no longer viable, the Utopian example he set in *De Monarchia* was believed to be a quintessential anticipation of the contemporary world federalist movement. The first mention of Dante in *Common Cause* appeared as early as the second issue of August 1947, where he is identified as a "precursor" of World Government.[67] In the fourth issue of the first year, one finds another quote from *De Monarchia*, paired with a consideration by lawyer Charles H. McIlwain: both excerpts are used in favor of a world constitution.[68] In the ninth issue, another quote from Dante's *De Monarchia* appears in a group of ten aphorisms—a rather eclectic ensemble, that goes from the Act of the Apostles to Simon Bolívar—generally referring to Utopia.[69] In the tenth, eleventh and twelfth issues, Borgese renewed his interest in Dante in a three-part article, in which he considered again his *Monarchia* a preliminary stage of the contemporary attempts to frame a world constitution.[70]

In the spring of 1948—three years after the foundation of the Committee and almost one year after the publication of the first issue of *Common Cause*—the group announced the definitive version of the *Preliminary Draft of a World Constitution*. Over the course of thirty-six months, a surprisingly high number of writers, jurists, economists, statesmen, and political thinkers had been involved or consulted in various degrees to improve a document that could demonstrate the feasibility of world government.[71]

The book is quite interesting in many respects. Dante's influence goes literally from cover to cover, as the first page is devoted to a picture of the Committee's office in Chicago captioned with a quote from *Purgatorio* XVI ("…Of the True City at least the Tower"), and the third to last page, entitled *Concordances*, welcomes another excerpt from *De Monarchia*:

[67] *Common Cause* 1, no. 2 (August 1947): 71.
[68] *Common Cause* 1, no. 4 (October 1947): 150.
[69] "From the Parliament of Man," *Common Cause* 1, no. 9 (March 1948): 323.
[70] Giuseppe A. Borgese, "Considerations on Germany," *Common Cause* 1, no. 10, (April 1948): 374-82; Borgese, "Foundations of the World Republic. A Commentary on the Preliminary Draft I-II," *Common Cause* 1, no. 11-12 (May-June 1948): 411-21; 450-61.
[71] Hutchins et al., "Preliminary Draft," 321-46.

> O race of men, in what storms and losses, in what shipwrecks must thou needs be tossed, so long as, a beast of many heads, thou strivest after different things, and hearest not what sounds to thee through the trumpet of the Holy Spirit. "Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity."[72]

The *Preliminary Draft* is composed of three distinct parts. It begins with a *Foreword* (written by Borgese and Robert Redfield) affirming that the Constitution must be intended as a "proposal to history,"

> In the sense that it designs a tentative pattern of social and political behavior along whose lines the society of man if it chooses to survive and grow, can be expected to meet conditions favorable to survival and growth.[73]

The second section is a poetic *Preamble*, in which the charismatic and assertive style of Borgese becomes recognizable:

> The people of the earth having agreed
> that the advancement of man
> in spiritual excellence and physical welfare
> is the common goal of mankind;
> that universal peace is the prerequisite
> for the pursuit of that goal;
> that justice in turn is the prerequisite of peace,
> and peace and justice stand or fall together;
> that iniquity and war inseparably spring
> from the competitive anarchy of the national states;
> that therefore the age of nations must end,
> and the era of humanity begin;
>
> the governments of the nations have decided
> to order their separate sovereignties
> in one government of justice,
> to which they surrender their arms;
> and to establish, as they do establish,
> this Constitution
> as the covenant and fundamental law
> of the Federal Republic of the World.[74]

A mixture of poetic and political Utopia, this *Preamble* sums up the Committee's idea of a supranational federal republic whose

[72] Dante, *Monarchia*, Book I, Chapter XVI.
[73] Hutchins et al., "Preliminary Draft," 327.
[74] *Ibid.*, 329.

highest purpose coincides once again with the one Dante demanded of his Universal Empire.

The third part consists of the Constitution itself and reaches a remarkable level of complexity in juridical and political terms. Nevertheless, even in this "scientific" section the presence of Dante remains relevant: for instance, the figure of the President of the World Republic appears to be modeled partly on Roosevelt's Long Administration and partly on Dante's Universal Emperor.

The official publication of the *Preliminary Draft of a World Constitution* in March 1948 raised an intense debate inside and outside the world federalism movement. *Common Cause* published both positive and negative reviews, allocating a fair number of pages to the ones in disagreement. From this point on, his articles and commentaries became more cautious, for the *pars construens* needed to be refined and improved through criticism. This is probably why Dante appears to be cited less frequently: one must wait until the third issue of the second year (October 1948) to read again his name in a threefold article by Borgese. Commenting on the first reactions to the *Preliminary Draft*, the Sicilian reaffirms the link between Dante's and the Committee's ideology, as they both believed that universal peace was of the utmost importance:

> A rigorous demonstration of the supremacy of peace was provided by Dante—himself a fighter, body, and soul—in the opening pages of the One World book he inappropriately called *Monarchy*.

The Committee shared not only Dante's short-term objective but the long-term one as well:

> The goal of civilization as a whole, [Dante] states, Chapter III, is the realizing of all the potentialities of the human mind; and this demands the harmonious development and cooperation—the federal union, we would translate—of the several members of the universal body politic. […] Evidently, the writers of our Preamble [to the *Preliminary Draft of a World Constitution*] had the Dantean passage in mind.[75]

Of course, Borgese adds, the Committee must always keep Dante's example in mind, acknowledging his failures and modernizing his Utopian élan to make it feasible for the contemporary world:

> For all the reverence due to the most representative architect of the Middle Ages, for all our indebtedness to his structure, the foundations of our World Republic cannot coincide stone for stone with those of

[75] Giuseppe A. Borgese, "Foundations of the World Republic. A Commentary to the Preliminary Draft III," *Common Cause* 2, no. 3 (October 1948): 92.

> Dante's world government. […] Our city of man has much in it that is unfinished and unfinishable. Its faith rests on—and rises to action from—the anticipation of largely unpredicted stages of evolutions none of which is final. Its symbolism cannot possibly culminate in anything as absolute as that other city's tower, or gothic pinnacle.[76]

This passage is philologically illuminating, for it helps to connect *Goliath* (Dante as an "architect") with *The City of Man* (directly mentioned) and the Committee to Frame a World Constitution. Plus, it demonstrates that Borgese's group, far from pretending to design a constitutional monolith, intended to outline a flexible document that may enlighten the path toward a world government.

The subsequent mention of Dante can be found in the tenth issue of the second year (May 1949), as a closure to two addresses by Robert M. Hutchins.[77] The last significant mention appears on the third issue of the third year (October 1949), in which Dante is extensively referred to in the *Report on the Goethe Bicentennial Convocation in Aspen, Colorado*, where Borgese and other members of the Committee delivered political speeches in what was technically a festival of literature and music.[78] In his *Message of Goethe*—opening lecture of the event—Borgese hazarded a parallelism between Goethe and Dante as One-Worlders:

> [Goethe] whose keywords *Weltliteratur, Weltbund, Weltfrömmigkeit*, World Literature, World League, World Piety, are inscribed on the halls of his educational castles, should be with those among us who are One-Worlders. No matter how much of his distaste for nationalism was derived from a diehard loyalty to the European unities of medieval and humanistic tradition, a vanishing past, how much of it was inspired by a sense of the future, he could not but be interested in our planning for a World Republic to take the place of the Dantean universal monarchy which perished, if it ever had lived.[79]

The speech aligns with Borgese's efforts to create a "One World Pantheon" demonstrating the "natural" inclination of mankind towards a unified society under a unified government.

Both the Committee to Frame a World Constitution and its monthly *Common Cause* ceased to exist in July 1951. Many events led to the end of the enterprise: first and foremost, the resignation

[76] *Ibid.*, 94.
[77] Robert M. Hutchins, "I. On Five Delusions II. On Catholicism and the World State," *Common Cause* 2, no. 10 (May 1949): 396.
[78] "Goethe and the Unity of Mankind," *Common Cause* 3, no. 3 (October 1949): 113-32.
[79] Giuseppe A. Borgese, "The Message of Goethe," *Common Cause* 3, no. 3 (October 1949): 117.

of Robert Hutchins as Chancellor of the University of Chicago, which exposed the group to financial uncertainties; second, the explosion of the Soviet atomic bomb, which demolished the hopes of world federalists all over the world;[80] third, the outbreak of the Korean War, that unequivocally split the international community into two non-communicant hemispheres.

Looking panoramically at the forty-eight issues of *Common Cause*, one notices that, apart from five quotes coming from five different writers, every other reference to Dante is encapsulated in Borgese's articles. Without any doubt, the element that fascinated him the most was Dante's proximity to Utopia: the simple fact that he had engineered a new political system that stood practically no chance of becoming alive was more than enough to fuel Borgese's passion for "structural beauty." Furthermore, in the remarkable gathering of "precursors" of One World, Dante required special attention, for his exile bore numerous similarities to the uprootedness of many contemporary antifascists—or at least to the one of Borgese himself. At the beginning of the 14th century, the Florentine poet stared at the hopeless landscape of Northern Italy with the same despair as the émigrés who observed the collapse of Europe in 1939. Likewise, Dante dreamed of a perfect political Utopia for the redemption of Christianity with the same enthusiasm as the antifascists who, six centuries later, were looking for a new political organization for Europe and the rest of the world.

9. *Foundations of the World Republic (1951-1953)*

Even after the collapse of the world federalist movement, Borgese kept working on his idea of a metaphysical architecture for mankind. His last and most ambitious work, entitled *Syntax*, planned to encompass the complexity of the human spirit in a trilogy dealing with politics, poetry, and religion.[81] However, the author's sudden death on December 4th, 1952, interrupted the work at his first book, entitled *Foundations of the World Republic*.[82]

[80] A letter that Elisabeth Mann Borgese, wife and collaborator of Giuseppe A. Borgese, wrote to Robert Hutchins on January 30th, 1950, reads as follows: "It is quite possible that the Hydrogen bomb means for the world government movement as invigorating a shock as did the Hiroshima bomb." This demonstrates that hopes were still high despite the worsening international relations (Robert Hutchins Papers, Box 109, Folder 8).

[81] Bortolotti, *La rosa dell'esilio*, 250.

[82] Giuseppe A. Borgese, *Foundations of the World Republic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953).

It is genuinely challenging to describe this essay.[83] Its three sections deal respectively with the concepts of *Peace and War*, *Justice*, and *Power*. As Stefano Magni pointed out, the first half of the book had already appeared in various issues of *Common Cause,*[84] thus implying that Borgese was systematizing his editorials in a unitary frame, as he used to do with his articles on literary criticism. The second half of the essay seems quite original and generally less related to world events. Placed somewhere between a late theorization of the world federalist movement and a grandiose attempt to create a new political Utopia, *Foundations of the World Republic* presents itself as an out-of-date essay, where the distinction between literature and political theory is often unclear.

The first arrangement between Borgese and the University of Chicago Press for the publication of this essay is dated June 1950—a time in which it was not yet unreasonable to believe in world government as a valid alternative to the Cold War. As the author pointed out in a letter to Rollin D. Hemens, Director of the Publishing House, *Foundations of the World Republic* was originally conceived "as a systematic commentary on the Chicago Preliminary Draft," later enriched with philosophical and political considerations on a much broader scale.[85]

Several delays forced the publication to be postponed to the spring of 1952—a time in which most of the prominent supporters of world federalism, including Borgese himself, had abandoned their political activism. Concerned by the long wait, Hayden Carruth, Associate Editor of the University of Chicago Press, wrote to Borgese that even if the publishing house was still backing the contract,

> The developing crisis in world affairs, will I am afraid, kill a good deal of the interest in your work, unless the next two years take a much more encouraging turn that seems likely now.[86]

At this point, a less authoritative writer would have probably seen his contract terminated, but Borgese had a prominent position at the University of Chicago and a significant influence on the cultural life of the city. In another letter to Rollin D. Hemens, the Sicilian defended the value of his work:

[83] Bortolotti, *La rosa dell'esilio*, 278-79.
[84] Magni, *G. A. Borgese dal nazionalismo al federalismo*.
[85] Letter by Giuseppe A. Borgese to Rollin D. Hemens, January 9th, 1951 (University of Chicago Press Records, Box 63, Folder 5).
[86] Letter by Hayden Carruth to Giuseppe A. Borgese, January 5th, 1951 (University of Chicago Press Records, Box 63, Folder 5).

> It is my feeling at this moment that the events are too fluid not to affect the frame and context of the book. *Foundations of the World Republic* could either be a treatment of forthcoming possibilities in the direction of world government or the attempt at establishing a pattern that may be valid both as a summary of the past and as a suggestion to a future generation. The model for a book intended to act on the present or predictably near future is provided, say, in the *Federalist*. A model for a more detached and ideological book is provided, at the highest level, in Dante's *Monarchia*.[87]

Once again, Dante pops up as a model of "the highest level" in Borgese's political theory.

In the tortuous editing of *Foundations of the World Republic*, the manuscript was heavily criticized by an anonymous peer reviewer who suggested cutting more than two hundred and sixty pages to transform it into a much clearer "political tract."[88] After having received the reviewer's report, Borgese furiously protested with the publisher, arguing that

> I did not plan or write a "political tract." My book is, within the limits of my power, a *Tractatus Theologicus-Politicus* or, within the limits of my power, a *Republica Universalis* as a counterpart to Dante's world *Monarchia*. To obliterate from my book the theological-evolutionary "discursions" would be tantamount to what would be the obliteration of the Biblical or of the Roman-Christian discursions from Spinoza.[89]

Almost fifteen years after his first original interpretation of *De Monarchia*, Borgese ultimately proposes a "counterpart" to the Dantean essay, adding that in a unified perception of the world the distinctions among politics, literature, religion, and science were insignificant.

Even though Borgese promised to deliver the manuscript before June 30th, 1952, the work was far from being finished when the author passed away on December 4th, 1952. To celebrate his legacy, Robert Redfield, together with Borgese's wife Elisabeth Mann, concluded the editing and honored the contract with the University of Chicago Press. *Foundations of the World Republic*

[87] Letter by Borgese to Hemens.
[88] The peer reviewer was Bert Hoselitz. In a letter to Morton Grodzins, he claimed that the author of *Foundations*, "for someone who is so much interested in peace, seems often needlessly belligerent" (University of Chicago Press Records, Box 63, Folder 5).
[89] Letter by Giuseppe A. Borgese to Morton Grodzins, general manager of the University of Chicago Press, June 14th, 1952 (University of Chicago Press Records, Box 63, Folder 5).

was published in the first months of 1953: in the foreword, Redfield defines it as "a strange and wonderful book," in which "problems of political action are expressed and resolved in metaphysical speculation, and both are lifted on wings of poetry."[90]
Despite Redfield's passionate introduction, Borgese's latest work had little to no circulation.[91] According to a letter written by Elisabeth Mann Borgese in 1954, the book had sold only 243 copies in a year—a merciless mirror of the outdated ideas it expressed.[92]

10. *Dante and His Time (1953)*
As Secretary General of the Committee to Frame a World Constitution and editor of *Common Cause*, Borgese had been absorbed by the world federalist enterprise for more than six years. He engaged in highly theoretical debates, intervened in international conferences, and participated in radio discussions and roundtables. Dante was his most cited author as well as his most influential guide. A conclusive testimony of his importance comes from a posthumous article published in September 1953 with the title *Dante and His Time*.[93] As one reads in the first footnote, this contribution was a condensed version of "a larger and more comprehensive essay on Dante" that would have served as the introduction to a new English translation of the *Divine Comedy*. However, according to the Dante Society of America, such translation—and consequently Borgese's introduction—was never published in the United States.[94]

Dante and His Time describes with accuracy the interpenetration of personal history, world events, and literature that

[90] Borgese, *Foundations of the World Republic*, VII.
[91] Bortolotti, *La rosa dell'esilio*, 279.
[92] In this letter by Elisabeth Mann Borgese to Morton Grodzins, February 20th, 1954, one reads as follows: "Some time ago I received a Report of Sales on *Foundations*, and it results that 243 copies had been sold. I had not expected much of a sale, because it is a difficult book; but it seems a little indeed. And I have not seen any reviews at all. Are there any?" (University of Chicago Press Records, Box 63, Folder 6).
[93] Giuseppe A. Borgese, "Dante and His Time," *Diogenes* 1, no. 4 (September 1953): 1-16.
[94] *Ibid.*, 1. As we read in Anthony Pellegrini, *American Dante Bibliography for 1953*, (https://www.dantesociety.org/american-dante-bibliography-1953), this article is "A general but substantial discussion of the major aspects of Dante's life, thought, and masterpiece in relation to his time. The author notes that this an excerpt of a longer essay to be published in 1954 as an introduction to an edition of the *Divine Comedy* (Henry Regnery Company) and in Italian translation in a volume of essays by Borgese (Mondadori). (There seems to be no record of its appearance in 1954 in either version.)" We must correct the information adding that the "larger and more comprehensive essay" did appear in the Italian translation in Giuseppe A. Borgese, "Introduzione a Dante," in *Da Dante a Thomas Mann* by Borgese, ed. and trans. Giulio Vallese (Milan: Mondadori, 1958), 30-58.

constituted Borgese's original reading. Among many interesting remarks, the author claims that Dante's political thought was a "revolutionary fire" destined to bolster the modern conception of the State. He then states that the most appropriate translation for the Latin title *De Monarchia* would be *World Government,* since Dante's Empire was a constitutional monarchy respectful of smaller sovereignties and separated from the Church. He then concludes his 20-year-long circumnavigation of the Dantean Ocean with his signature architectural metaphor:

> La breve composizione, non maggiore di un opuscolo – sistemata, inutile dirlo, in tre parti o navate – s'innalza audace dalle sue cripte e dai fondamenti di vecchi culti testamentari alle presenti insurrezioni, e al di là di queste si volge alle eterne utopie, con uno slancio stupendo che senza metafora può dirsi gotico.[95]

In the end, Borgese firmly believes that Dante is a never-ending source of inspiration, even when he produces "optical illusions" mistaking the past for the future.[96]

11. *Final Considerations*

Borgese had always been a strong believer in supranational organizations. At the end of the Great War, he was one of the most energetic advocates of Wilson's League of Nations and tried to talk some sense into the nationalistic public opinion of post-war Italy. His encounter with Dante, which matured slowly during his exile, helped him to take a further step in his political theory: instructed by the concept of "structural beauty," he enlarged his Eurocentric vision and engineered—with the help of many others—a constitutional design that showed the actual feasibility of a world government.

It is important to remember that Borgese was not pursuing some sort of delusional dream. At the end of the second World War, many respected scholars and politicians engaged in such theoretical a cause as World Government. In 1946, the activities of the Committee to Frame a World Constitution were carefully

[95] This excerpt comes from the extended Italian version (Giuseppe A. Borgese, "Introduzione a Dante," in *Da Dante a Thomas Mann* by Borgese, ed. and trans. Giulio Vallese [Milan: Mondadori, 1958], 38-40). Translation: "This short composition, something like a booklet—divided, needless to say, in three parts or aisles—rises boldly from his crypts and from the foundations of the old Testament myths to the insurrections of today, and beyond these it turns to eternal Utopias, with a stupendous élan that can be considered gothic."

[96] Giuseppe A. Borgese, "De Republica Universali," in *Da Dante a Thomas Mann* by Borgese, ed. and trans. Giulio Vallese (Milan: Mondadori, 1958), 275.

observed by the U.S. Secretary of State, who asked Borgese to submit all the documents produced by his group.[97] In 1948, the Committee was convocated by the Indian National Assembly to give constitutional advice in terms of world federalism, and around the same time, the independent candidate for the U.S. Presidency Henry A. Wallace agreed to take world federalism on his political platform.[98] In 1951, both Borgese and Hutchins were nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of their efforts as advocates of world harmony.

These outcomes testify that Western public opinion was genuinely interested in figuring out the new leading role of the United States and the possibility of a world federal republic. Hopes were still surprisingly high when the first shot was fired along the 38° Parallel in Korea, but soon after that, the general feeling among the world federalists was one of sadness, distrust, and despair. For more than six years, Borgese and his committee had been offering a valid alternative to the dangerous partition of the Cold War. Inspired by Dante's «structural beauty», they conceived a liberal-conservative political system that brought to new life the «modern trends» expressed in *De Monarchia*.

Borgese and his family moved back to Italy in September 1952, just two months before his sudden death. He was reinstated at the University of Milan and was offered his old job as a columnist at *Il Corriere della Sera*. For the Milanese newspaper, he wrote a fictional interview with himself, looking back at his recent activities in the U.S. His considerations are unmistakably bitter, but hope is still there, as the inevitable byproduct of a long exposition to Utopia:

> Fra il '45 e il '48 esistevano possibilità che il mondo sentisse ragione, traducesse in salvezza la dannazione di Hiroshima. Poi vennero le due date nere: 1949, 23 settembre, esplosione atomica russa; 1950, 25 giugno, fuoco in Corea. Esse prostrano la ragione, ma esaltano il destino. La repubblica federale del mondo, scritta dalla penna, è, se così ti pare, remota; ma il governo unitario del mondo, istituito dalla spada, è prossimo come non fu mai.[99]

[97] Letter by William Benton, Assistant Secretary of State, to Giuseppe A. Borgese, October 24, 1946 (Robert M. Hutchins Papers, Box 306, Folder 3).
[98] See Thomas W. Devine, *Henry Wallace's 1948 Presidential Campaign and the Future of Postwar Liberalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013).
[99] Borgese, "De Republica Universali," 276. Translation: "From 1945 to 1948, there had been concrete chances that the world would listen, translating in salvation the damnation of Hiroshima. Then the two black days came: September 23, 1949, Russian atomic explosion; June 25, 1950, fire in Korea. They prostrate reason, but they exalt destiny. For the federal republic of the world, as written by the pen, is still remote, but the unified government of the world, as forged by the sword, has never

As an Italian scholar, Borgese was never really interested in Medieval literature. Forced into exile, he gradually became a *dantista* and rediscovered the profound message of Dante. He later mixed literary knowledge and political activism, shaping an original response to the fascist threat and later to the early stages of the Cold War. His peculiar interpretation of Dante played a significant role in the ideology of both the Committee on Europe (1939-1941) and the Committee to Frame a World Constitution (1945-1951), while the relatively wide distribution of *Common Cause* helped bring *De Monarchia* in the lively debate of world federalism.

Apart from visible traces in his articles and letters, Borgese's biggest achievements in the field of Dante Studies were of an immaterial kind. He taught the life and work of Florentine poet to hundreds of students across the United States, he modernized the American reception of his *opera omnia*, and he lectured the U.S. on the intellectual origins of fascism. On top of it all, he made sure that the most useful Utopian elements in Dante's political theory could be an asset to the early Cold War American ideology. He believed that "the prophets of Utopia" were necessary to invigorate the progress of mankind, and humbly tried to work as one until the very last day of his life.

been this close." Jokingly, Borgese writes "è, se così ti pare," creating a wordplay on the title of *Così è se vi pare,* Italian drama by Luigi Pirandello (1917). This humorous solution has to be read as an acknowledgement of Pirandello's theatrical characters, that undoubtedly are the source inspiration of this sagacious fictional interview.