

# Voices from the New World: Giuliano Dati's *La storia della inventione delle nuove insule di Channaria Indiane*

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## *Abstract:*

The article deals with two poetic translations of the first documents announcing the Discovery of the Americas: Giuliano Dati's *La storia della inventione delle nuove insule di Channaria Indiane* ('The History of the Discovery of the Indian Canary Islands'), which rendered Columbus' letter to the Spanish court, and Matteo Fortini's *Libro dell'Universo* ('Book of the Universe'), which instead translated Amerigo Vespucci's account. It concentrates on Dati's *cantare*, exploring its status as a text destined to be recited and performed, and situates the poem within the author's oeuvre. Closely comparing Dati's stanzas with their main source (the Latin translation by Aliander de Cosco of one of Columbus' letters in Spanish to the Court of Spain), the article demonstrates how Dati dismembered and re-assembled his material in accordance with the improvisational devices of the *cantare*, the poetic genre in which he was working. In so doing, Dati replaces the narrative sequence of Columbus' (and Cosco's) report with his own ordering. He substitutes for the coherence of the original a mode of 'impulsive' communication, a manner of transmission essentially indifferent to narrative flow, and he does so to the point where we can theorize what might be called a 'poetics of confusion', a compositional strategy which is perhaps to be identified with the *cantari* style.

Keywords: *Cantare*, *Columbus/Vespucci*, *Discovery*, *Orality*, *Textual Dismembering*

## 1. *The Discovery in Octaves*

It is well known – it has been, actually, the object of a truly 'oceanic' bibliography – that the first documents announcing the discovery of 'new islands' (Columbus) or a 'new world' (Vespucci) were promptly translated into 'poetry' – that is, if by 'poetry' we mean simple versification. These first documents were transposed into octaves, the metrical form which, from the end of the fifteenth century to the beginning of the sixteenth, was in Italy an ubiquitous instrument 'bon à tout faire', a stanza applicable to the most

diverse subjects, chivalric (obviously), but also hagiographical, historical, and, in a manner of speaking, journalistic. Given the constant use of this verse form, it is not surprising that the Letter of Christopher Columbus to Luis de Santángel (or/and to Raphael Sanchez) was recast by the Florentine Giuliano Dati into a *cantare*, *La storia della inventione delle nuove insule di Channaria Indiane* (1493);<sup>1</sup> or that, a few years later, the Letter of Vespucci to Soderini was reworked into the octaves included by Matteo Fortini in his *Libro dell'Universo* (post 1514; 'Book of the Universe'). And yet, these two literary productions share little besides their metrical structure. Of course, it is true that their authors were both Florentine. Indeed, this fact is a significant testimony to the ties between the Discovery and Florence, ties that involved the city's cultural influence, as well as its prominent network of commercial activities all over Europe, particularly in Spain and Portugal. After all, more than mere chance was at work when the 'New World' received its name from a Florentine representative of the mercantile aristocracy of the city. The poems of Fortini and Dati were part of this Florentine nexus, but nonetheless from a literary, or simply a communicative, point of view their compositions are two very different things. Among other considerations, Matteo Fortini's 'translation' of the Soderini letter is not an autonomous text. Rather, it is part of a voluminous geographic-cosmological treatise. This larger work is an encyclopedic endeavor – entitled not accidentally *Il libro dell'Universo* – and the recent 'American' news was included as an intriguing addition to the general trove of information accumulated by its author. Thus, Fortini's version of the letter constituted an up-to-date expansion of an already copious discourse.<sup>2</sup> It was offered as new knowledge, albeit Fortini composed his stanzas in accordance with the standard format of the *cantari*, so that his opening treatment of the Vespucci material, couched in three successive cantos, sounds old-fashioned, not to say trite, with its stereotypical invocation to God:

<sup>1</sup> *Cantare*: according to the common understanding of Italian scholarship, the term is used, here and in the following pages, to identify a poetic text in octaves, of variable length, loosely dating from the XV and XVIII centuries. Such texts are always in precarious balance between the nature of 'oral' and 'written' texts: see Farenga, who argues in favour of a total destination of Dati's work for print ('The characteristic element in the works of Giuliano Dati is the fact that they were totally conceived to be published in print'; 2011, 30). This argument seems to me too absolute: even though we know that Giuliano Dati was not a *canterino* himself, and that he surely promoted the printed editions of his *cantari*, it is equally obvious that they were made available, through the new technology, for professional performers. In other words, I don't think that the 'oral' system of communication, in such works, was just a literary ruse. For an illuminating case in this sense, see Degl'Innocenti 2008.

<sup>2</sup> *Il libro dell'Universo* is a *codex unicus*, now in the Biblioteca Nazionale of Florence (Magliabechiano VII 172), and was never published in its entirety. Since the author declares he is over seventy years old, it must have been composed after 1514. The octaves which translate the Vespucci letter have been published by Formisano 1986.

O trionfante Iesù benedetto,  
 volgi verso di me gli occhi e la facc[i]a,  
 perdona al servo che si picchia il petto  
 e fatti sempre croce delle bracc[i]a,  
 perché tu gli perdoni ogni difetto  
 e della grazia Tua degno lo facc[i]a,  
 acciò che in questo fine l' m'apparecchi  
 far penitenza de' peccati vecchi ... (VII 1)<sup>3</sup>

Onnipotente, magno, alto e divino,  
 sincera carità, unica e pura,  
 specchio dove uno Iddio si vede trino,  
 che formò e cieli e l'umana natura,  
 tu ha' diritto la str[a]da e 'l cammino  
 pel fine dell'umana creatura:  
 così drizza la mano e lo 'ngegno,  
 tanto ch'i' g[i]lunga al disiato segno ... (VIII 1)<sup>4</sup>

Po' che Tu se' quel ben(e) che tutto vedi,  
 vero Messia, anzi Verbo incarnato,  
 e se' colui che le grazie concedi  
 a chi Te l'ha con fede dimandato,  
 i' che sto genuflesso a' santi piedi  
 come Tuo servo e di Te innamorato,  
 supplico e priego almen(o) ch'i' viva tanto  
 ch'i' conduca alla fin qu[e]sto mie canto. (IX 1)<sup>5</sup>

## 2. *Octaves to be Read, Octaves to be Listened to*

Among the other differences between the translations of Fortini and Dati, the most striking is that, while the octaves of the former's *Libro dell'Universo*

<sup>3</sup> 'O triumphant blessed Jesus, pray turn to me Your eyes and Your face, pardon your penitent chest-beating servant, keep Your arms spread out on the Cross, so that You may absolve him of all his errors, and make him worthy of Your Grace, and I prepare myself, to such an end, in order to atone for my obdurate sins'. Dati's poem was translated by Martin Davies (1991). Here I present my own translation which is more literal. Unless otherwise stated, also translations from other works are mine.

<sup>4</sup> 'O You Omnipotent, great, celestial and divine, You, sincere Charity, unique and pure, You, mirror where One God reflects into Three, You who made the heavens and human beings, You have traced the path and the way which lead humanity to its end: the same way lead my hand and my mind, so that I could reach my desired goal'.

<sup>5</sup> 'Since You are the Good that sees everything, You true Messiah, indeed incarnate Verbum, and you are the One that bestows graces upon those who requested them in good faith, I, who here am kneeling at Your feet, Your servant, Your worshipper, I beseech and pray that at least I may live long enough to finish this song of mine'.

were clearly composed to be read quietly in private, those of the latter's *Storia della inventione delle nuove insule* were intended to be read aloud and listened to. Fortini addresses himself to an audience of readers more than once:

*Lettore*, l' t'ò per insin a qui mostro  
come l'acqua divide l'universo ... (VII 2, 1-2)<sup>6</sup>

Quanto tempo, *lettore*, invan si spese,  
quanto mar si solcò ... (VII 12, 1-2)<sup>7</sup>

Se tu vuo' pur, *lettore*, ch'i' ti raguagli,  
questo paese, chi ben lo procura ... (VII 54, 1-2)<sup>8</sup>

Io ò fatto, *lettore*, questo discorso,  
perché non manchi nulla o 'ndrieto resti ... (VII 82bis, 1-2)<sup>9</sup>

Non più, caro *lettore*(e), ch'i' vo' far festa,  
ch'è 'l sol [n]el fin del suo meridiano ... (VII 108, 1-2)<sup>10</sup>

Però, *lettore*, non ti dar più affanno  
e tien' questo per regola infallante ... (VIII 121, 1-2)<sup>11</sup>

S'i' mi son, *lettore* mio, troppo ito a spasso  
l'ò fatto per chiarirti ... (VIII 124, 1-2)<sup>12</sup>

De' leva, *lettore* mio, un po' l'ingegno,  
e nota di costui la fantasia ... (VIII 138, 1-2)<sup>13</sup>

Tutta la frotta ed io vedem[m]o Iris  
- che vuol dir, *lettore* mio, l'arcobaleno ... (VIII 140, 1-2)<sup>14</sup>

... se non ti par(e), *lettore*(e), questo abbastanza,  
guarda questo disegno. (VIII 143, 6-7)<sup>15</sup>

<sup>6</sup> 'Reader, I have shown to you so far how water parts the universe'. Here and in the following passages quoted, the italics of *lettore* and *lettore* are mine.

<sup>7</sup> 'How much time, *reader*, was spent in vain, how an immense sea was navigated'.

<sup>8</sup> 'If you desire, *reader*, that I inform you about this land, about who takes care of it'.

<sup>9</sup> 'Reader, I made this digression, so that nothing be missed, nothing neglected'.

<sup>10</sup> 'And now enough, dear *reader*, because the sun is at the end of its meridian course'.

<sup>11</sup> 'Therefore, *reader*, worry no more, and keep this as an infallible rule'.

<sup>12</sup> 'If I have been wandering a little too much, my *reader*, I have done so in order to explain better to you'.

<sup>13</sup> 'Well, *reader*, open up your mind a little, and note the fancy of this man'.

<sup>14</sup> 'The whole crew and myself all of us saw Iris - which means, my *reader*, the rainbow'.

<sup>15</sup> 'If this seems not enough to you, *reader*, look at this figure'.

Dati, instead, emphatically and from the start addresses an audience of listeners: ‘S’i’ ti volessi e’ sua tituli dire, / o *auditore*, I’ ti potre’ tediare’ (XIII, 1-2; see here below for other occurrences).<sup>16</sup> Obviously, this does not mean that Giuliano Dati was himself a *canterino*. He was a prelate, and one of some importance in both his native Florence and his adopted Rome.<sup>17</sup> An intimate of several Popes, he was an especially ardent admirer of Alexander VI (a fact that earned him the unsavory title of ‘mitred sycophant’; Harris 1866, 29), a Pope all-too-well-known for his sexual excesses, but who might be better remembered for the important role he played in the early stages of the New World’s Discovery. Not, then, a *canterino* himself, Giuliano Dati was nevertheless a prolific producer of *cantari*, but it should be emphasized that for him the use of that verse form did not mean what it meant for his more literary contemporaries, such as Matteo Maria Boiardo. Dati was a functional versifier, whose lines betray no ambition to ennoble the genre and whose treatment exhibits no intention of transforming the octave into the glorious vehicle for courtly poems that it became in the hands of others. Instead, Dati remained faithful to the popular, even plebeian level of discourse typical of the era’s octave pamphlets, as even the physical nature of his printed works demonstrates. His publications generally consist of no more than four pages, are crudely illustrated, and are often printed on cheap paper. Surviving imprints of his pamphlets are quite scarce, due in part to their humble status: they were bought to be read and discarded. What survives may be described as the relics of an ephemeral market, where such imprints were often purchased in the very *piazza* where their texts were being – or had just been – performed.<sup>18</sup> A devout, conventionally religious figure moving between Florence and Rome in the midst of the fifteenth century’s triumphant Humanism, Dati seems to have been entirely unaffected by the ‘new world’ that was having an explosive impact all around him. Or maybe we should say that he embodied the intellectual compartmentalization in his time, the complex stratification of culture wherein a flux of tenaciously traditional, devotional, even folkloric elements kept flowing under the stupendous achievements of the new classicism:

Indifferent to the Humanism which was triumphing in Literature, Science, Philosophy, deaf to the domineering secular culture, pagan in its substance, classical in its elegance, he is a typical representative of the ‘popular culture’ of his time. This

<sup>16</sup> ‘If I wanted to tell you his titles, *listener*, I would bore you’.

<sup>17</sup> The most complete account of Giuliano Dati’s life and works is found in Curcio and Farenga 1987. Further details in Farenga 2011; very detailed information about Dati’s pious participation in the activity of the Roman Confraternita del Gonfalone in Wisch and Newbiggin 2013.

<sup>18</sup> For a full description of Dati’s *poemetti*, see Dati 1967, 8-10.

culture would keep more or less intact the traditional customs and interests of the Middle Ages and was still impenetrable to the influence of the new doctrines and the peculiar trends of the courts and their intellectuals. (Olschki 1938, 291)

Such critical judgement (which is, after all, a little dated – it was written in 1938) might sound overly harsh. Yet it is difficult not to agree with the same author, when he states that Giuliano Dati ‘was the first to share with the Italian illiterates the details of the great endeavour’ (298), because this is exactly what constitutes the most interesting aspect of Dati’s *cantare*, both in itself and in comparison with Fortini’s octaves. In Dati’s unpretentious verse, the novelty of the newly discovered islands is reported by an unrelentingly old-fashioned sensibility and is couched in an extremely traditional literary format. Nevertheless, unlike the much more ambitious and erudite *Libro dell’Universo* of Matteo Fortini – which was unpublished in its day and remained for a long time unknown – the agile *cantare* of Giuliano Dati enjoyed an immediate success. We can count three editions (that we are aware of) in the year 1493 alone: one in Rome (by E. Silber, on the 15th of June); a second in Florence (by ‘Johannes dictus florentinus’, October 25th); and the third in Florence again (publisher unknown, October 26th). This is the way the news of the New World’s discovery was disseminated throughout Italy: in print, to be sure, but in a manner of print that retained the unmistakable marks of oral transmission. This strongly suggests that the poem was addressed to the same crowds for which Dati had provided, and would continue to provide, stories of Saints, descriptions of places, chronicles of contemporary sensational events. The oral quality of his work has occasioned some rather imaginative responses: ‘Questo e tutti gli altri poemetti che di lui si conoscono deggiono aver deliziato molte volte le pubbliche e le famigliari adunate: e chi sa quante fiata il canterino di piazza li avrà ripetuti con modulate cadenze innanzi all’attenta e rapita moltitudine!’ (Dati 1876, 142).<sup>19</sup> A bit ‘romantic,’ no doubt, but probably not far from the truth. And, in any case, the question remains: how was the new wine poured into the old wineskin? How was such an astonishing piece of news made compatible with so traditional a medium as the *cantare in ottave*?

### 3. *From Latin Prose to Vernacular Verses*

As we know, Dati didn’t translate directly from Christopher Columbus’ letters in Spanish which announced the discovery of the new islands to

<sup>19</sup> ‘This, and all the other brief poems he wrote (at least, those we know of) must have often entertained public and private audiences: and who knows how many times a street *canterino* performed them again and again, in his musical voice, in front of an enthusiastic, fascinated multitude of listeners!’

Ferrando and Isabella and to members of their entourage. The complicated story of Columbus' early accounts – starting with the perhaps legendary *pergamino* (sort of parchment brief) written in the midst of the tempest that caught the explorer on his return trip at a location very near the coast of Spain – has been studiously reconstructed and progressively modified as more and more documents have come to light. This has been done most recently and conclusively by Luciano Formisano.<sup>20</sup> The Spanish version of these documents, however, had no impact on Giuliano Dati. The text that he had before him was the Latin translation of the letters sent by Columbus to Luis de Santángel and Rapheal Sanchez. This was a quite basic, inelegant translation, by Aliander de Cosco, a member of the Roman court. As poor as Cosco's Latin was, it nevertheless marked the precise moment when the Discovery was made public, the announcement of an expanded cosmos, as well as the acquisition by the crown of Spain of an unforeseen, immensely rich and promising new territory. The keen eyes of modern philologists have demonstrated, though, that Giuliano Dati probably made use of other sources. He perhaps used another Latin version – now lost – of Columbus' letters. Maybe he even had available to him some Spanish text, which would not have been impossible to understand for somebody like Dati who, after all, was familiar with a Spanish Pope and his Spanish-speaking court. But regardless of what other versions might have been known to Dati, for our purposes it will be enough to presume that Cosco's letter was the source of Giuliano Dati's *cantare*. Enough, that is, for us to examine the procedures by which a letter sent to be read became a *cantare*, i.e. a small poem intended to be performed and listened to.

#### 4. *The Frame of the Story*

The *Storia della inventione delle nuove insule* consists of 68 octaves, plus an *explicit* in which the origin of the poem is clearly laid out: *Finita la Storia*

<sup>20</sup> Luciano Formisano has published a final account of the question together with the pertinent texts, offered in the most currently reliable critical edition (see Colombo 1992). The book contains the *Lettera a Luis de Santángel e Gabriel Sanchez (Testo Spagnolo and Versione Toscana)*, *De insulis in mari Indico nuper repertis* (Facsimile, critical edition and translation: it is the Latin of Cosco's translation). For Dati's text, Formisano follows, with some further corrections, the edition established by Mario Ruffini (Dati 1967). See De Lollis 'Illustrazione [of the Santángel/Sanchez letter]', in De Lollis 1892, liii-lvi, and Formisano in Colombo 1992, 51. Just one year before, the same texts had been published (and translated into English) in Davies 1991. Davies argued for a more complicated relation between Dati's *cantare* and the Latin translation of Columbus' letter, given 'a number of points independent of the Latin that we have. All this can be resolved if we assume that what Dati saw was a Latin translation of the lost letter attached to the surviving Spanish letter to Santángel' (20).

*della invention delle nuove insule di Cannaria indiane, tracte d'una pistola di Cristofano Colombo e per messer Giuliano Dati tradutta di latino in versi vulgari a laude de la celestial corte e a consolation della Cristiana religion ...*<sup>21</sup> These 68 octaves, however, do not simply correspond to the Latin text. The actual report of the 'invention' is framed by a series of thirteen octaves (at the beginning) plus two octaves (at the end), which establish and confirm the parameters of the genre. The *cantare* duly opens with a characteristic invocation to God, conjured up to assist the *canto* of the poet-performer:

Omnipotente Idio, che 'l tutto regie,  
 donami gratia ch'io possa cantare  
 a laude Tua e di Tuo santa legie  
 cosa che piaccia a chi starà 'scoltare. (I, 1-4)<sup>22</sup>

Then Dati proceeds to contextualize the subject of his report – the 'isole trovate' (I, 8) – by placing it within a larger account of the 'fatti egregi' of the 'antichi regi / e princip 'e signori' (II, 1-2).<sup>23</sup> He mentions, quite randomly, Belùs, Anfitrione, 'de' Lacedemoni el gran Tetrate', Laborès, Oreste, 'il principe Giesippe', Tolomeo, il 'gran Faraon', 'quel fiesolan re Atthalante', and, last but not least, 'Allexandro magnio papa sesto', 'sesto Allexandro papa Borgia Ispano, / giusto nel iudicare e tutto humano' (VI, 2, 7-8).<sup>24</sup> The switch from the fabulous kings and heroes of antiquity to a champion of contemporary politics is indicative not only of the flattering mode of this Vatican 'sycophant' but also of Dati's shrewd oratorical technique. The author introduces the shocking news of his report within the well-known and reassuring framework of references to a traditional repertoire, so that the contemporary is seen as contiguous to the ancient, and the 'isole trovate' are from the very beginning presented as a new chapter of a coherent and connected narration. In this way, the listener is at once stimulated – that is, offered something new –, and reassured – given something in the vein of what he/she was accustomed to hear in the piazza, in the market, in the situations and locations of contemporary everyday life. The pressure of the contemporary becomes more and more apparent in the last octave of Dati's framing device,

<sup>21</sup> 'Here ends the History of the Discovery of the new Indian Canary Islands, drawn from an epistle of Christopher Columbus and translated from Latin into vernacular verses by messer Giuliano Dati, in praise of the celestial Court and for the comfort of the Christian religion'.

<sup>22</sup> 'Omnipotent God, You who all govern, give me grace so that I can sing in Your praise and in praise of Your Holy Gospel something that may please those who listen'.

<sup>23</sup> 'egregious endeavours'; 'ancient kings, princes and Lords'.

<sup>24</sup> 'Belùs. Amphitruo, the great Tetrate of Sparta, Laborès, Oretes, ... prince Joseph, Ptolemy, the great Pharaoh, that famous Atlas from Fiesole, ... Alexander VI Borgia, the Spanish Pope, the fairest judge and champion of humanity'.

where he introduces, by way of a simple possessive, the overarching hero of his account, the king 'Ferrando': 'E chi leggesti po' del suo Ferrando, / christianissimo rege infra 'christiani ...' (VII, 1-2)<sup>25</sup> Here 'suo' refers to Pope Alexander and underscores the shared nationality of the pope and the Spanish king. It makes for an audacious transition, a sudden movement that is typical of the arbitrary, almost Pindaric, style of the *canterino*. The sharp transition does not shy away from a flagrant *anacoluthon* (a characteristic of oral poetry), but the ungrammatical dislocation does serve to push Dati's audience closer to the very subject of the *cantare*:

E chi leggesti po' del suo Ferrando,  
 christianissimo rege infra 'cristiani,  
 che l'Isabella tiene al suo comando,  
 unica sposa sua, che nelle mani  
 tanti reami in dota a lui donando  
 gli à dati, intendi ben, con pensier' sani,  
 ché gli è re della Spagna e di Castella  
 e di Leon, Toledo villa bella. (VII)<sup>26</sup>

Dati's framework of introductory and concluding octaves testifies to the ambiguity of this literary genre, which is balanced – and often oscillates – between its status as oral and written (and printed) text. As we have observed, from the very beginning of Dati's poem the marks of oral transmission are clear. Dati's intention is 'cantare ... cosa che piaccia a chi starà 'scoltare' (I, 2, 4).<sup>27</sup> The addressee of his texts is an 'auditore' ('S'i' ti volessi e' sua tituli dire, / o auditore, i' ti potre' tediare' (XIII, 1-2),<sup>28</sup> to whom these first octaves speak directly with an eloquent 'tu' (you): 'so che inteso l'hai' (III, 4),<sup>29</sup> 'come saprai' (III, 6),<sup>30</sup> 'certo farei la tua mente stupire' (V, 3),<sup>31</sup> 'Or vo' tornare al mio primo trattato / dell'isole trovate, igniote a'tte' (XIV, 1-2),<sup>32</sup> 'come tu

<sup>25</sup> 'And what if somebody read about his Ferrando, the most Christian king among the Christians'.

<sup>26</sup> 'And what if somebody read about his Ferrando, the most Christian king among the Christians, he who commands over his Isabella, his only spouse, who putting in his hands her dowry, gave him possession of so many kingdoms: listen well, with full attention, that he is the king of Spain, Castile, Leon, and Toledo, the beautiful city'.

<sup>27</sup> 'to sing ... something which will be pleasant to its listeners'.

<sup>28</sup> 'If I wanted to tell you his titles, o listener, I would bore you'.

<sup>29</sup> 'I know you heard of it'.

<sup>30</sup> 'as you may know'.

<sup>31</sup> 'I would make you marvel for sure'.

<sup>32</sup> 'Now I want to go back to my original subject of the newly found islands, that you do not know'.

'ntenderai qui ascoltando' (XXIII, 4).<sup>33</sup> Finally, at the end of the *cantare*, a whole crowd of listeners is addressed: 'Magnific' e discreti circhunstanti, / quest'è gran chosa, certo, da pensare...' (LXVII, 1-2).<sup>34</sup> And there is an explicit reference to the poem's orality: the *cantare* is referred to as a text that 'a laude del Signior si canta e dice' (LXVIII 7).<sup>35</sup> At the same time, Dati touches upon his experience as a reader: 'I' ò già *letto* de li antichi regi' (II, 1).<sup>36</sup> He refers to the stories of his ancient kings and heros as 'read stories' ('come se *legie*', III, 4; 'che, se *tu legi*, tu'lle troverai', V, 6).<sup>37</sup> We are confronted here with a circularity which is inherent in the very nature of these literary opuscles. Items intended, as we have mentioned, to be bought and read at the time their texts were performed, they constitute the equivalent of a musical score, printed matter closely connected to a vocal presentation, but destined possibly to survive the performance and be saved as a personal library, no matter how humble such a library might be.

<sup>33</sup> 'as you shall understand, by listening here'.

<sup>34</sup> 'Magnificent and kind people here gathered around me, this is for sure a great thing, worthy of reflection'.

<sup>35</sup> 'it is sung and spoken in praise of the Lord'. Such procedures are common, as is to be expected, in all the other *cantari* by Dati. It is worth quoting the initial octaves of *La gran magnificenza del Prete Janni* (*The great magnificence of Priest Janni*), where the religious invocation (octave I) is combined with an eloquent address to the audience (octave II), which echoes quite precisely the beginning of Boiardo's *Orlando innamorato*: a minimal, but telling evidence of some sort of contamination, within the precinct of the 'poem in octaves' genre, between high and low style: 'O glorioso Omnipotente idio, / che col tuo sangue el peccato pagasti / da noi commesso tanto iniquo & rio, / & con la tua morte ci ricomperasti, / donami gratia dolce signor mio, / ch'io dica in versi una parte, che basti, / d'un de' principi tua infra christiani, / maximo prete soopra gl'indiani. // O venerandi e discrete auditori, / che cose nuove udir vi delectate, / maxime in versi, perché da' doctori / antichamente queste son tractate, / ben che 'n diversi modi gli autori / le loro oppenioni hanno notate, / gli orecchi attenti, & lo ingegno tenete, / & cose magne certo intenderete' (Dati 1876, I-II; 'O glorious God omnipotent, you who atoned our so grave and cruel sin with your own blood, and saved us by your death, bestow upon me, sweet Lord, enough grace so that I be able to say in verse something sufficient about one of your Christian princes, the highest priest among the Indians. O you, esteemed and wise listeners, who take pleasure in hearing new things – especially in verse - because they have been dealt with by the ancient sages, even though the authors have registered their opinions in different ways, keep alert your ears, alert your minds, and for sure you shall listen to great things'.) See *Orlando innamorato*: 'Signori e cavallier che ve adunati / per odir cose dilettose e nove / stati attenti e quieti, ed ascoltati / la bella istoria che 'l mio canto muove; / e vedereti i gesti smisurati, l'altra fatica e le mirabil prove / che fece il franco Orlando per amore / nel tempo del re Carlo imperatore' (Boiardo 1995, I, I, 1-8; 'You who assemble – lords and knights – to hear things new, things of delight, be still, attentive, listen to the rare events that prompt my song; you shall see deeds no man can measure, stupendous feats, amazing labours that bold Orlando wrought for love, when King Charles reigned as emperor').

<sup>36</sup> 'I have *read* about the ancient kings'.

<sup>37</sup> 'which you can find as you can read them'.

In his introductory stanzas, Giuliano Dati has not yet touched upon his Latin source. Nor does he do so for six more octaves. Instead there is a further inner frame of the 'translation' which provides the back-story of the Discovery itself. In these six octaves, the narrator compresses the many incidents leading to Columbus' arrival at the New World. As we know, these incidents were very complex, but they are dealt with here with the simple naïveté of a fairy tale. The hero of the story is a visionary treasure-hunter who proposes to his king a practical bargain in direct, vernacular terms: 'Vo' mettete la roba, io la persona...' (XVI, 1).<sup>38</sup> He supports his proposition by quoting (or misquoting) a proverb from the Gospels ('perché, dice 'l Vangelio in lege nuova, / che chi cerchando va ispeso truova' (XVI, 7-8).<sup>39</sup> The hero's enabler is a king at first a little resistant ('po' che l'ebbe e rre più volte udito ...'; XVII, 1),<sup>40</sup> but soon smiling ('soridendo' XVII, 2) at the prospect of a lot of land ('molta terra', XV, 2) to be added to his possessions. The story proceeds with a predictably adventurous voyage, which elicits a dramatic reference to Ulysses' trip to the edge of the earth as described in Dante's *Comedy*. Columbus, according to Dati, 'navicò più giorni per *perduto*' (XIX, 1),<sup>41</sup> and thus he is analogous to Ulysses who, in the *Inferno*, is interrogated by Virgil about 'dove per lui *perduto* a morir gissi' (*If*XXVI, 84).<sup>42</sup> On the other hand, the high-brow allusion (but one not so unfamiliar, especially for a Florentine), is balanced by the down-to-earth common sense of the narrator, who once again resorts to a proverb: '... chi va in mar non è mai tuto, / ma sempre combattendo in aqua e vento, / perdesi spesso el guadagni' e 'l tributo' (XIX, 3-5).<sup>43</sup>

### 5. *A Change of Voices*

At the end of octave XX, Giuliano Dati finally starts to engage with Cosco's text. But, once again, we are not given a literal 'translation' of Cosco's Latin prose. Here, when he starts establishing a closer relation, Dati lets himself to be trapped, as it were, in a sort of structural incertitude, and this has curious consequences for his narration. After his short account of Columbus' perilous navigation, he plunges into his subject, the amazing Discovery:

<sup>38</sup> 'You contribute the money, I, my person'.

<sup>39</sup> 'Indeed, the new law of the Gospel says that he who seeks, will find'.

<sup>40</sup> 'after the king heard him many times'.

<sup>41</sup> 'navigated many days with no direction'.

<sup>42</sup> In Longfellow's translation: 'Whither, being lost, he went away to die' (Alighieri 1867, I, XXVI, 84). Pio Rajna (1920, 224) pointed to the highly stylized meaning of the word *perduto* in the Arthurian vocabulary, where it designates those knights who 'departed for adventures, entered some forests, never again were heard of, so that people fear, or believe, that they are dead'.

<sup>43</sup> 'those who navigate are never secure, but fighting water and wind incessantly, often they lose their earnings and tribute'.

...

Ma come piaque a Dio, che mai non erra,  
in trentatré giornate pose in terra.

E misse dua de' suoi huomini armati  
a cerchar per le terre ch'àn trovate  
se forse si schoprisin qualche aguati;  
ma caminaron ben per tre giornate  
che non si furon mai 'ndietro voltati,  
e non trovaron mai vill'o brighate. (XIX 7-8, XX 1-6)<sup>44</sup>

It is worth noting here that the 'invention' of the islands is told to us by the voice of the main narrator, Dati himself, or, better, by his *canterino* persona. The information that he finds in his source is seamlessly included in his own narration. This goes on for four more octaves, stanzas filled with what are already crucial observations about the nature of the newly found islands and their inhabitants. Then, all of a sudden, the narrator's voice gives way to the voice of Columbus himself, and the *cantare* will continue from this moment until the very end as an open paraphrase of Christopher's 'pistola magna', the 'great letter' which the great explorer addressed to his king: 'come dirà questa pistola magna, / da Christofano scritta a re di Spagna: // Perch'i' so, Signor mio, che gran piacere / harà la Vostra Magna Signoria, / quando potrà intendere o sapere / de le cose ch'ò prese in mia balia ...' (XXIII, 7-8, XXIV, 1-4).<sup>45</sup> This is vivid, and yet, by going back in the voice of Columbus to the 'invention' of the islands, Dati complicates his narration with some unavoidable repetition. The duration of the journey is reiterated ('dal partir mio a trentatré giornate / molt'isole e gran gente i' ò trovate', XXIV, 7-8)<sup>46</sup> and the anticipation of various characteristics of the Discovery (the nudity of the natives, the motif of the 'fuga al monte', the escape to the hills) creates some confusion in the orderly account of the facts. In other words, Dati doesn't seem to be fully in control of the sudden transition from the voice of the *canterino* to the voice of Columbus. Nor does he appear to be in total control of the shift from a communicative system wherein the addressee was the audience around the performer (treated, as we have seen, with the amicable 'tu') and a new one, where the listener is above all the king (duly addressed

<sup>44</sup> 'But, thanks to God, who never fails, after thirty-three days he went ashore. Then he sent two of his men, armed, to search the land that they had just found, in case there might be some ambush; but they walked for three days without ever looking back, and they did not find either town or tribe.'

<sup>45</sup> 'as this great letter will say, written by Christopher to the king of Spain: since I know, my Lord, that Your Majesty will truly be pleased, when you will realise and be informed of the possessions that have come under my control'.

<sup>46</sup> 'thirty three days from my departure I have found many islands and many people'.

with the respectful ‘voi’). The result is a structurally odd passage; but it might be interesting to observe that something similar happens in the octaves of Matteo Fortini. Fortini, too, at a certain point decides to give up his voice and let his hero Amerigo speak for himself in continuing the narration. Actually, during Fortini’s much longer and complex account, this sort of narrative transition happens more than once and without any warning. The narrative continually switches back and forth between the voice of Matteo (the voice that says ‘io’ and is tasked with paraphrasing Amerigo’s prose in verse) and the voice of Amerigo himself, who speaks instead in the first-person plural (‘noi’ – that is, ‘me and my crew’). The great majority of the time, Fortini adopts this second solution, with the result that his versification exhibits an almost obsessive use of the simple-past tense (*cercammo, trovammo, lasciammo* ...), a verb tense very useful to the author in providing ready-made, easy rhymes.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>47</sup> ‘To the point that in the octaves of ser Matteo the actor-author of the “four days” can identify with his interpreter or spokesperson from the XVI century; as demonstrated by the blurred distinction between the text which is narrated and the text which is narrating, between Vespucci as the addressing agent and an addressee who does not recoil, after all, from declaring his name’ (Formisano 1986, 335). This structural oscillation between different narrative voices is not, indeed, the only similarity between the works of Dati and Fortini. It seems that the mere use of the octave induces in such works similar communicative devices: namely, a metanarrative attitude which in the *cantari* becomes a systematic simulation of orality. In other genres, it reveals the very action of ‘writing’, if not performing, the text. This is what happens, quite interestingly, at the end of Fortini’s Canto VII, where he takes his leave from his ‘lettore’ in terms very similar to the typical ‘farewell’ of the *canterini* to their audiences: ‘Non più, caro lettor(e), ch’i’ vo’ far festa, / chè ’l sol [n]el fin del suo meridiano, / dove fa fin el cerchio della sesta / e passa co’ suo’ crin(i) nell’oceano. / I’ vo a mostrare un paese che resta / discosto, lungo, salvatico e strano: / però mi vo’ posare in su le piume, / finché torni domane a farci lume. // O signor mio, s’io dovessi morire, / questo decimo canto che tu vedi / intendo e vo’ lo per tuo amor finire; / perché questo né altro non mi chiedi; / a te lo reco, signore, e vo’ tel dire, / mentre che in ozio in camera ti siedì, / perché la voglia el desiderio muove / a voler sempre udir le cose nuove’ (VII, 108-109). ‘Enough, dear reader, I want to be done, since the sun is at the end of its meridian voyage, where the circle of the sixth hour comes to an end, and the sun dips its locks in the Ocean. I am about to illustrate a land that is far away, very large, wild and strange; that is why I want to get some rest on my bed, until the sun comes back tomorrow to illuminate us. O my Lord, even if I had to die, I intend and want to finish for your love this tenth canto which is under your eyes – since this, and nothing else, you ask from me. I am bringing it to you, my lord, and I want to recite it to you, while you are enjoying some leisure in your bedroom, because your craving always moves your desire towards listening to ever new things’. It should be noted how, in the last verses of octave CIX, the written texts, intended for a ‘lettore’, become a text that the writer plans to ‘dire’, that is, to read aloud, to his ‘signore’, to his lord, in the peaceful setting of the latter’s ‘camera’, or private room. Thus, the final expression – ‘udir le cose nuove’ (‘hearing new things’) – fully mimics the ‘oral’ language of the true *canterini*.

## 6. *Dati versus Cosco: a comparison*

This initial structural oddity is not the only peculiar way Giuliano Dati deals with his source. If we follow the development of the Latin source letter, and divide it into narrative segments, or, let's say, thematic cells, and if we then compare the result with the corresponding sequence of the *cantare*, we see that the two do not mirror each other very closely. The fact is, Giuliano Dati has totally dismembered and re-assembled the material of Cosco's original Latin. Mario Ruffini has already noted Dati's textual surgery, but for concision's sake, or as he puts it, 'per non tediare soverchiamente il lettore' ('not to bore too much his readers'), he decided to limit his demonstration to just a few examples (see Ruffini, in Dati 1967, 24). A complete, more analytical comparison, seems both feasible and intriguing, and I have undertaken it here. By sequencing the Latin prose and juxtaposing it with the corresponding lines of verse, we can obtain the following combined data (the numbers and titles of the individual segments, or 'cells', are mine):

### i. *The conquest*

Quoniam suscepte provintie rem perfectam me consecutum fuisse gratum tibi fore scio, has constitui exarare. (146)<sup>48</sup>

#### XXIV

Perch'ì so, Signor mio, che gran piacere  
 harà la Vostra Magna Signoria,  
 quando potrà intendere o sapere  
 de le cose ch'ò prese in mia balìa,  
 per virtù del Signore e Suo potere  
 e simil de la madre Sua Maria:  
 dal partir mio a trentatré giornate  
 molt'isole e gran gente i'ò trovate.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>48</sup> 'Since I know for sure that it will please you that I have fully perfected the conquest of the new territory, I decided to narrate in detail the whole thing'. All the quotations from the Latin letter of Aliander Cosco follow the text of the Formisano edition (Colombo 1992, 146-162).

<sup>49</sup> 'Since I know, my Lord, that Your Majesty will be pleased, when you will realise and are informed of the possessions that have come under my control, thank to God and His might – and His Mother Mary – thirty-three days after my departure I found many islands and a great number of people'.

ii. *Official possession of the territory*

Ubi plurimas insulas innumeris habitatas hominibus repperi, quarum omnium pro felicissimo rege nostro preconio celebrato et vexillis estensis, contradicente nemine, possessionem accepi. (146)<sup>50</sup>

## XXIII

E Christofano e gli altri dismantati,  
armati tutti, el paese cercando,  
insule molte e huomin' à trovati  
come tu 'ntenderai qui ascoltando,  
e gli stendardi de're à rizati,  
e a ciascuna il suo nome mutando,  
come dirà questa pistola magna,  
da Christofano scritta a're di Spagna.<sup>51</sup>

iii. *Renaming the islands*

Primeque earum Divi Salvatoris nomen imposui, cuius fretus auxilio tam ad hanc, quam ad ceteras alias pervenimus: eam vero Indi / 'Guanahanyn' vocant. Aliarum etiam unamquamque novo nomine noncupavi: quippe aliam 'insulam Sancte Marie Conceptionis', aliam 'Fernandinam', aliam 'Hysabellam', aliam 'Iohanam', et sic de reliquis appellari iussi. (146)<sup>52</sup>

## XXV

L'isola prima ch'io trovai, Signore,  
i' l'ò per nome facta nominare  
*Insula Magnia di San Salvatore;*  
e la seconda poi feci chiamare  
*Conceptio Marie,* a Suo honore;  
dipoi la terza feci battezzare  
per Vostra Signoria ch'è tanto ornata:  
*Insola Ferrandina* è nominata.

<sup>50</sup> 'Where I found many islands inhabited by innumerable people, of which all I took possession in the name of our most blessed king, after a public reading of the act, with our flags unfolded, and nobody making any resistance'.

<sup>51</sup> 'And Christopher and the others, once disembarked, all armed, searching the new land, discovered many islands and many people, as you will know if you keep listening: they raised the royal flag, and proceeded in changing the name to each one of those islands, as this great letter will tell you, written by Christopher to the king of Spain'.

<sup>52</sup> 'and I called the first one with the name of our Saviour, thanks to whose aid we reached this island, as well as the others; the Indians call it 'Guanahanyn'. I also gave a new name to each one also of the other islands: indeed one 'Island of the Conception of Saint Mary', another 'Fernandina', another one 'Isabella', another 'Johanna', and similarly I had re-named all the others'.

## XXVI

E la quart' *Isabella* fo chiamare  
 per la Regina ch'è tanto onorata;  
 e alla quinta il nome volsi dare  
 che l'isola *Giovanna* sia chiamata;  
 e la sesta d'un nome volsi ornare  
 che congruo mi parse a quella fiata,  
 che *La Spagnuola* quella si chiamassi,  
 perché mi par che chosì meritassi.<sup>53</sup>

iv. *The escaping natives*

Nulla tamen videns oppida municipiave in maritimis sita confinibus, preter aliquos vicos et predia rustica, cum quorum incolis loqui nequibam (quare simul ac nos videbant, surripiebant fugam), progrediebar ultra, existimans aliquam me urbem villasve inventurum. (148)<sup>54</sup>

## XXII, 5-8

... e, come vidon questi, <al> le diserte  
 forte fuggiendo ciascun si nasconde;  
 e questi dua indrieto si tornavano  
 e a Christofano 'l facto racontavano.<sup>55</sup>

v. *Two searchers on the ground*

Unde duos homines ex nostris in terram misi qui investigarent essetne rex in ea provincia urbesve alicue. Hii per / tres dies ambularunt inveneruntque innumeros populos et habitati<i>ones, parvas tamen et absque ullo regimine; quapropter redierunt. (148)<sup>56</sup>

<sup>53</sup> 'The first island that I found, my Lord, I had it named *Insula magna di San Salvatore*; the second one I had renamed *Conceptio Mariae*, in honour of the Virgin Mary; the third one I had baptized for Your Majesty of such great nobility: now its name is *Insola Ferrandina*. The fourth one I named *Isabella*, for the so highly honoured queen; as for the fifth, I desired that it be called *Giovanna* island; the sixth one I wanted to grace with a name that I thought was fit, and I wanted her to be named *La Spagnuola*, since it seemed to me that she deserved that name'.

<sup>54</sup> 'Since I could not see any town or municipality on the coasts, except for some villages and rustic dwellings – and I could not talk with their inhabitants, because as soon as they saw us, they would flee, I stated to go ahead in the land, thinking that I would find some town or village'.

<sup>55</sup> '... as soon as they saw them, everybody ran away into the wild to hide; these two went back and told the story to Christopher'.

<sup>56</sup> 'Therefore I sent two of our men ashore, who would investigate if there was a ruler in that land, or some towns. These men walked for three days and found innumerable people and dwellings, but small and with no ruler; consequently they came back'.

XX

E misse dua de' suoi huomini armati  
 a cerchar per le terre ch'àn trovate  
 se forse si schoprisin qualche aguati;  
 ma caminaron ben per tre giornate  
 che non si furon mai 'ndrieto voltati,  
 e non trovaron mai vill'o brighate;  
 sì che si maraviglia chi chamina  
 e più chi è restato alla marina.<sup>57</sup>

vi. *The Giovanna island*

... que dicta Iohana et alie ibidem insule quam fertilissime existunt. Hec multis atque tutissimis et latis, nec aliis quos unquam viderim comparandis, portibus est circumdata, multi maximi et salubres hanc interfluunt fluvii; multi quoque et eminentissimi in ea sunt montes. (148)<sup>58</sup>

XXIX, 1-2, 7-8

E questa e tutte l'altre è molto forte,  
 ma questa sopra l'altre par fortissima;<sup>59</sup>

...

E' dotata di frutte molte e varie,  
 e liti, e porti, e chose necessarie,

XXX, 1-2

e molti fiumi, e massime montagne,  
 che son d'alteza molto ismisurate ...<sup>60</sup>

<sup>57</sup> 'He sent two of his men, armed, to search the land that they had discovered, in order to investigate if there were ambushes; but they walked for three days without ever looking back, and they never found any towns or people; therefore these explorers were very surprised, and even more those who had remained on the shore'.

<sup>58</sup> 'The above-mentioned Iohana and the other islands around are extremely fertile. She is surrounded by many harbours, ample and very secure, not to be compared to any that I ever saw; she is crossed by very large rivers of the purest water; also there are in this island very high mountains'.

<sup>59</sup> Cosco's original text in reference to these islands reads *fertilissime*, according to the Spanish sources. We follow here the text established by Formisano, who keeps the misreading of Dati ('fortissima', 'very strong', instead of 'fertilissima', 'very fertile') while alerting the reader to it.

<sup>60</sup> 'This one, and all the others, are very strong, but this is the strongest over all; ... She is rich in many and various types of fruit, and beaches, and harbours, and necessary provisions ... and many rivers, and especially huge mountains, which are of immeasurable height'.

vii. *Marvellous trees*

Omnes he insule sunt pulcerrime et variis distincte figuris, pervie et maxima arborum varietate sidera lambentium plene, quas nunquam foliis privari credo, quippe vidi eas ita virentes atque decoras, ceu mense maio in Hispania solent esse; quarum alie florentes, alie fructuose, alie in alio statu, secundum uniuscuiusque qualitatem, vigebant. (150)<sup>61</sup>

## XXXII

Alberi ci è d'una ragion fioriti,  
del mese di novembre che no' siàno,  
come 'n Ispagna e ne' suo' degni liti  
li alberi sono el magio, e 'l monte e 'lpiano;  
sì che no' altri stian tutti stupiti  
per l'abondantia che trovata habiàno.  
Sonci li alberi verdi e le lor foglie  
ch'i' credo che non perdan mai le spoglie.<sup>62</sup>

viii. *Marvellous palm trees*

Sunt preterea in dicta insula / Iohana septem vel octo palmarum genera que proceritate et pulchritudine, quemadmodum cetera omnes arbores, herbe fructusque, nostras facile exuperant. Sunt et mirabiles pinus, agri et prata vastissima, varie aves, varia mella variaque metalla, ferro excepto. (150)<sup>63</sup>

## XXXI

Sonci di sette o ver d'otto ragioni  
di palme, che mi fan maravigliare;  
e se, alzando gli occhi, cura poni,  
pini vi son che l'aria par tohare;  
passere, lusignioli e altri doni  
che non si potre' mai tutto narrare;

<sup>61</sup> 'All these islands are beautiful and variously shaped, easy to access and full of great, diverse trees, which seem to touch the sky; I think that they never shed their foliage, since I saw them green and full, as in the month of May in Spain; and they were vigorous, some in bloom, some bearing fruits, some at another stage of development, each according to their nature'.

<sup>62</sup> 'There are trees in bloom – in the current month of November – like the trees are in Spain and in its decorous regions during the month of May, on the mountains and plains; so that all of us are stupefied because of the abundance that we found here. The trees and their foliage are so green, that I think that they never shed their foliage'.

<sup>63</sup> 'Furthermore there are on the above mentioned island Iohana seven or eight types of palm trees, which, because of their height and beauty – like all the other trees, herbs and fruits – easily surpass ours. There are also marvellous pine trees, vast fields and grass, various birds, various types of honey and metals, except iron'.

della bambagia un pondo ci è infinito  
e d'altre cose assai ci è 'n questo lito.<sup>64</sup>

ix. *The Spagnuola island*

In ea autem quam 'Hispanam' supra diximus nuncupari, maximi sunt montes ac pulcri, vasta rura, nemora, campi feracissimi, seri pascique et condendis edificiis aptissimi. Portuum in hac insula commoditas et prestantia, fluminum copia salubritate admixta hominum, que, nisi qui viderit, credulitatem superat. Huius arbores, pascua et fructus multum ab illis Iohane differunt. Haec pretera Hispana diverso aromatis genere, auro metallisque abundat. (150)<sup>65</sup>

XXXIV

Simil, Signore, i' vi vogli' avisare  
Che 'n quest'isola ci è molta pianura,  
dove 'difizi molti si puon fare,  
e chastelle, ciptà chon magne mura,  
ché non bisogna poi di dubitare,  
né d'aver, chi ci sta, nulla paura;  
molte terre ci son da seminare  
e da pascere le bestie e nutrichare.

XXXV, 1-6

O' po' trovati certi fumaticelli  
che tutti menan oro, e non già poco,  
e molti porti grandi e da far belli,  
ché abbondanza ci è d'acqu'è di loco;  
l'erbe e'lle selve fatte cho' penelli  
non son sì belle; ...<sup>66</sup>

<sup>64</sup> 'There are seven or eight types of palm-trees – a thing that makes me marvel – in addition, if you look up and consider, [you'll see that] there are pine trees so tall that they seem to touch the clouds; there are sparrows, nightingales, and other graceful things that it is impossible to mention; there is an infinite quantity of cotton, and there is abundance of many other things in this land'.

<sup>65</sup> 'In the island that we mentioned above named 'Hispana', there are very high, beautiful mountains, vast farmlands, forests, very fertile fields, totally apt to be sown, put to pasture, and built on. The facility and beauty of harbors on this island, the abundance of rivers together with healthy population is such that it is unbelievable, if one does not see it. The trees, pastures and fruits of this island are very different from those of Iohana island. This one, Hispana, furthermore, is abundant with different types of spices, gold and metals'.

<sup>66</sup> 'The same way, my Lord, I want to advise you that on this island there is abundance of plain territory, where many buildings could be built, castles, cities with high walls, so that the inhabitants could not doubt of any fear; there are many fields to sow, and to graze for the animals. Furthermore I found certain streams of water that run gold, and not in a small quantity, and many harbours, big and easy to make even more beautiful, since there is abundance of water and space; herbs and woods painted with the best brushes are not as charming'.

x. *Naked natives*

Cuius quidem et omnium aliarum, quas ego vidi et quarum cognitionem habeo, incole utriusque sexus nudi semper incedunt, quemadmodum eduntur in lucem, preter aliquas feminas que folio frondeve aliqua aut bombicino velo pudenda operiunt, quod ipse sibi ad id negotii parant. (150)<sup>67</sup>

XXI, 6-8

dove trovoron poi molta brigata  
senza panni vestire, o arme, o scudi,  
ma tutti e' membri loro erano nudi,

XXII, 1-4

salvo ch'alchuna donna, che coperte  
tiene le parte genitale immonde  
con bambagia tesuta, e dipo' certe  
l'àven coperte con diverse fronde.<sup>68</sup>

xi. *No arms, but sharpened canes*

Carent hi omnes, ut supra dixi, quocunque genere ferri, carent et armis, utpote sibi ignotis, nec ad ea sunt apti, non propter corporis deformitatem, cum sint bene formati, sed quia sunt timidi ac pleni formidine. Gestant tamen pro armis arundines sole perustas, in quarum radicibus hastile quoddam ligneum siccum et in mucronem attenuatum figunt, neque his audent augite uti. (150)<sup>69</sup>

XXXV, 7-8

... gli uomini sono afabile formati,  
timidi sempre e al fugir parati.

...

XXXVII, 1-3

Portano alchun' certe chann'apuntate

<sup>67</sup> 'The inhabitants of this island, and of all the others, that I saw and of which I have some knowledge, go around always naked, men and women, the same way they were at birth; except for some women, who cover their pudenda with some leaves or branches or some cotton wool, that they provide themselves for this purpose'.

<sup>68</sup> 'where they met then many people who had no clothes, or arms, or shields, but their bodies were naked, except some women who keep covered their shameful genitalia with some cotton wool – and certain others covered them with different types of vegetable'.

<sup>69</sup> 'They lack, as I said before, any type of iron; they lack also weapons, since they do not know them, and they are not used to them: not because they are deformed in their bodies – actually, they are well built – but because they are shy and full of fear. However, they carry in lieu of weapons some burned canes, where they insert, in the root, some sort of dry wood, sharpened as a point, in the fashion of a spear: but they do not dare to use these, either'.

sotto le braccia, come noi le spade,  
archi con frecce di channe tagliate.<sup>70</sup>

xii. *The unequal trade*

Ceterum, ubi se cernunt tutos, omni metu repulso, sunt admodum simplices ac bone fidei et in omnibus que habent liberalissimi: roganti quod possidet inficiatur nemo, quin ipsi nos ad id poscendum invitant. Maximum erga omnes amorem pre se ferunt: dant queque magna pro parvis, minima licet re nihilove contenti; ego attamen prohibui ne tam minima et nullius precii hisce darentur, ut sunt lancis, parapsidum vitrique fragmenta, item clavi, lingule, quanquam, si hoc poterant adipisci, videbatur eis pulcerrima mundi possidere iocalia. (152)<sup>71</sup>

XLIII

Signior mio dolce, la piacevolezza  
di questa gente non potre' narrare;  
per una stringa, che poco si preza,  
volson tant'oro a un de' nostri dare  
ch'è tre ducati e mezo: o che richeza  
are' potuto in queste parti fare!  
Ma io ho comandato alla mia gente  
che ciascun doni e non pigli niente.

XLIV

Per far lor grata Vostra Signoria  
di molta roba i'ò fatto donare,  
di quella di mia gente e della mia,  
come scodelle e piatti da mangiare,  
e vetri e panni ch'era in mia balia,  
senza riserva alchuna per me' fare;  
perch'io gli ò cognosciuti tanti grati,  
io gli ò come fedeli e buon' tractati.

...

<sup>70</sup> 'Men are pleasantly built, always shy and fast at running away ... Some of them carry under their arms certain sharpened canes, as we carry our swords, bows and arrows made of cut canes'.

<sup>71</sup> 'On the other hand, as soon as they feel secure, all fear abandoned, they are very simple people, true, and extremely generous with everything they possess: nobody reacts badly if somebody requests his possession, on the contrary, they are the ones who invite us to ask. They love all the other people before themselves: they offer great things in exchange for small ones, content with the slightest thing, or even nothing. Anyway I prohibited that they be given minimal things and of no value, like dishes, fragments of plates or glass, nails, spoons – even though, if they could obtain such objects, it seemed to them that they possessed the most marvellous trinkets in the world'.

## XLVI

Volsan anchor per una botte trista  
 e per un pezo d'archo che non vale,  
 tre oncie d'oro darmi e simul mista  
 tanta bambagia ch'è mezo quintale;  
 ma po' ch'i' ebbi questa cosa vista  
 parsemi di pigliar niente, male,  
 et ho commesso a ciasch<h>edun de' mia  
 che di pigliar niente ardito sia.<sup>72</sup>

xiii. *No idolatry; Columbus and his crew adored like deities*

Nullam hii norunt ydolatriam, immo firmissime credunt omnem vim, omnem  
 potentiam, omnia denique bona esse in celo meque inde cum his navibus et nautis  
 descendisse, atque hoc animo ubi<que> fui susceptus, postquam metum repulerant.  
 (152)<sup>73</sup>

## XXXVI, 7-8

e' credan che no' siàn di cielo in terra  
 mandati per camparli d'ogni guerra.

...

## XLVII

Non è fra loro alchuna briga o setta,  
 ma, pacifici, tutti insieme stanno;  
 di parole o di facti mai s'aspecta  
 di far vendecta alcuna, ingiuria o danno:  
 beato è quel che servir si dilecta!  
 Acompagnati a braccio sempre vanno;  
 i' gli ò visti sì buoni e recti e grati  
 che a buon fine Idio gli arà chiamati.

<sup>72</sup> 'My sweet Lord, I could not express how pleasant these people are; for one piece of lace, of such small value, they wanted to give to one of ours so much gold, that it would be paid three ducats and a half: oh how much wealth I could have accumulated in these lands! But I ordered my people to give away everything for nothing. In order to ingratiate them in the name of Your Majesty, I commanded to give them a fair amount of stuff, belonging to my people and to me personally: dishes, plates, glass, cloths which were in my possession, without any hesitation, everything well-meant; since I found them so grateful, I treated them as faithful and good people. ... Moreover, they insisted on giving me – for a cheap barrel and for a piece of bow of no value – three ounces of gold, plus so much cotton that it may be half a quintal; but after seeing this business, [where] I thought it would be bad not to take anything, I ordered each one of my crew not to dare to take anything anymore'.

<sup>73</sup> 'These people know no idolatry, indeed they firmly believe that any force, any power, finally, all good is in heaven, and believe that I descended from on high with my ships and my crew; in this persuasion I was welcomed everywhere, once they were free of fear'.

## XLVIII

Non è fra loro idolatria nisuna,  
tutti le mani al ciel tengono alzate,  
non adoran pianeti, o sole, o luna,  
ma, le lor menti al ciel tut<t>e levate,  
dichon la gloria in ciel esser sol una;  
da la qual patria credon che mandate  
le nostre barche siano, e noi in terra  
a far pace col ciel d'ogni lor guerra.<sup>74</sup>

*xiv. Indians kidnapped and domesticated; natives' adoration of Columbus and his crew; the canoes; no difference of language, looks, habits among the inhabitants of the islands*

Ego statim atque ad mare illud perveni, e prima insula quosdam Indos violenter arripui, qui ediscerent a nobis et nos periter docerent ea quorum ipsi in hisce partibus cognitionem habebant; et ex voto successit: nam brevi nos ipsos, et hii nos, tum gestu ac signis, tum verbis intellexerunt, magnoque nobis fuere emolumento. Veniunt modo mecum tamen, qui semper putant me desiluisse e cello, quamvis diu nobiscum versati fuerint, hodieque ver / sentur; et hi erant primi, qui id, quocunque appellebamus, nunciabant, alii deinceps aliis elata voce dicentes: 'Venite, venite, et videbitis gentes eterea'; quamobrem tam femine quam viri, tam impuberes quam adulti, tam juvenes quam senes, deposita formidine paulo ante concepta, nos certatim visebant, magna iter stipante caterva, aliis cibum, aliis potum afferenti bus maximo cum amore ac benevolentia incredibili. Habet unaquaeque insula multas scaphas solidi ligni, etsi angustas, longitudine tamen ac forma nostris biremibus similes, cursu autem velociore: reguntur remis tantum modo. Harum quedam sunt magne, quedam parve, quedam in medio consistent, plures tamen biremi, que remiget duodeviginti transtris maiores, cum quibus in omnes illas insulas, quae innumere sunt, traicitur, cumque his suam mercaturam exercent et inter eos comertia fiunt. Aliquas ego harum biremium seu scapharum vidi quae vehebant septuaginta et octuaginta remiges.

...

In omnibus his insulis nulla est diversitas inter gentis effigies, nulla in moribus atque loquela, quin omnes se intelligunt adinvicem; que res perutilis est ad id quod serenissimum regem nostrum exoptare precipue reor, scilicet eorum ad sanctam Christi fidem conversionem, cui quidem, quantum intelligere potui, facillimi sunt et proni. Dixi quem / admodum sum progressus antea insulam Iohanam per rectum tramitem

<sup>74</sup> 'Among them there is no quarrel, no party, but they all live together in peace; nobody is supposed to seek revenge, or respond with offence or any damage for words or actions: happy are those who take pleasure in their service! They go around all the time arm in arm; I saw them so good, honest, grateful, that God surely might have prepared some good for them. Among them there is no idolatry, all of them keep their hands raised up to heaven; they do not worship any planet, or Sun, or Moon, but – always with their minds turned to heaven – they maintain that there is just one and only glory, in heaven; they believe that our ships have been sent from there above, and that we have been sent on earth to make peace with heaven and finish any war'.

occasus in orientem miliaria CCCXXII, secundum quam viam et intervallum itineris possum dicere hanc Iohanam esse maiorem Anglia et Scotia simul: nanque ultra dicta CCCXXII passuum milia, in ea parte que ad occidentem prospectat, due, quas non petii, supersunt provincie, quarum alteram Indi 'Anan' vocant, cuius accolae caudati nascuntur. (154-156)<sup>75</sup>

#### XLIX

Io n'ò con meco sempre alcun menato,  
li quali i' feci per forza pigliare,  
quand'al principio in terra fui smontato,  
non potend'io in altra forma fare:  
pel veloce fugir mai ascholtato  
non era le mie voci o 'l mio parlare;  
e questi, che per forza allor pigliai,  
son per amor venuti sempremai.

#### L

Sempr'a mangiare, a bere e a dormire  
acanto a me i' gli ò sì ben tractati  
che gli aferman per certo e usan dire  
che dal regno del ciel no' siam mandati;  
vannoci inanzi gridando: 'Venire

<sup>75</sup> 'As soon as I arrived at that sea, I abducted a few Indians, so that they could teach us, and the same way we could teach them, what they knew about these territories – which happened as we desired, because very soon they started to understand us, as well as we started to understand them, sometimes with gestures and signs, sometimes with words; and so they turned out to be extremely helpful. They accompany me all the time, still believing that I descended from heaven, even though by now they have been with us for quite a time, and still are; these were the first ones to loudly enunciate whatever we named, while others would proclaim: 'Come, come, and you shall see folks from heaven!'; so that all the people, women and men, children and adults, young and old, not fearful anymore, would mingle with us; the crowds would block our path, while some of them offered food, some drinks, with incredible love and affection. All these islands have boats made of solid wood: they are narrow though, similar in length and shape to our two-oared boats, but speedier; and they are driven just by oars. Some of them are big, some are small, some are of medium size, most of them with two oars, that navigate – the biggest ones – with eighteen benches of oarsmen. With such boats they go from one island to another – they are innumerable –, and carry on their trade, and sustain commerce among them. I saw some of those boats which could transport seventy and also eighty oarsmen'.

...

'In all these islands there is no difference in the features of the people, nor in their costumes or language, so that all of them can understand each other; which is extremely useful to what I believe is the greatest desire of our most blessed king, that is, the conversion of these populations to the holy faith of Christ: and as far as I could understand, they are totally open and ready for it'. 'I said how I went beyond the above mentioned Iohana island, straight towards East from West, for three hundred and twenty-two miles; calculating that route and the way in between I can say that this Iohana is larger than England and Scotland put together: in fact, beside that distance of three hundred and twenty-two miles, along the side exposed to the West, two more regions extend – which I did not visit – of which one is called 'Anan', where the inhabitants are born with a tail'.

debba ciaschuno a vedere e' beati!;  
 Si ch'al presente ogniun corr'a vedere,  
 e portan tutti da mangiare e bere.

LI

Dall'un'isola a l'altra questi vanno  
 con certe barche che in quest'isol'è,  
 le qual' d'un legnio solo fatte stanno,  
 e son chiamate queste chanoè;  
 son lunghe e strette, e par quasi volanno  
 andare a chiunche messo drento ci è,  
 ben che sian grossamente lavorate  
 (con sassi e legni e ossi son cavate).

LII

E òne vista alchuna tanto grande  
 che ottanta persone ci sta drento,  
 e ciaschun à 'l suo remo e le vivande;  
 navichan questi e con buon sentimento  
 la roba l'uno a l'altro li si spande  
 (quel ch'i' vi scrivo, Signior, nulla mento);  
 e vanno baratando tutti quanti  
 come se fussin quasi mercatanti.

LIII

In quest'isole tutte nominate  
 non ho veduta nulla differenza  
 d'incharnati, di visi, o di brigate;  
 ma tutti quasi son d'una presenza  
 e d'un costume tutte costumate;  
 homini e donne son pien' di clemenza;  
 tut'anno una loquela e un parlare,  
 che vi farien, Signor, maravigliare.

LIV

Che par che util cosa questa sia  
 a convertigli a nostra santa fede;  
 ché, come scrivo a Vostra Signoria,  
 ciaschun disposto ci è, e già la crede,  
 di que' chàn vista la presentia mia.  
 Non gli ò tutti veduti, ma si vede  
 che gli è maior Giovanna, senza sotia,  
 che non è l'Inghilterra con la Scotia.

LV, 1-6

Son due provincie ch'i' non ho cerchate,  
 secondo che quest'altri detto m'anno:

una ce n'è, la qual queste brigate  
 dichan che quelle gente che vi stanno  
 son con le chode tutte quante nate,  
 et Anahan el nome posto l'anno.<sup>76</sup>

xv. *Building a fortress*

... ibique arcem quandam erigere extemplo iussi, que modo iam debet esse peracta; in qua homines qui necessarii sunt visi, cum omni armorum genere, et ultra annum victu opportuno reliqui ... (156)<sup>77</sup>

XL, 7-8

e di legniamè una bastia fo fare  
 e'lla giente vi metto per ghuardare.

XLI, 1-2

E forniti gli lasso per un anno  
 d'arme, di victoaglia ...<sup>78</sup>

<sup>76</sup> 'I have been bringing with me all the time some of them, whom I had taken by force, when I first disembarked, since I could not do otherwise: my voice or my talk was never listened to, because they would always flee from me; and now those, whom I took by force, have been accompanying me for love. I have treated them so well – always eating, drinking, sleeping with me – that they state and say that we are sent from above; they precede us yelling: 'Come, everybody must come to see the blessed ones!' So that now all people hurry to see, and everybody offer food and drink. These people go from one island to the other with some local boats, made in one whole piece of wood, and they are called canoes; they are long and narrow, and their passengers feel as though they are flying when they are transported by them – even though they are roughly made (they are hollowed out with stones, pieces of wood and bones). And I saw some of them so big that they could carry eighty people, and each one has his oar and his provisions; so they navigate and exchange goods in good faith (what I'm writing about, my Lord, is the truth); and everybody goes around trading merchandise, as if they were regular merchants. In all the islands I mentioned I saw no difference in skin color, features, communal behavior; everybody seem the same, and follows the same norms; men and women are very compassionate; all of them share the same language, the same tongue, so that you would marvel at that, Sir. This circumstance seems useful in order to convert them to our holy faith; because, as I am writing to Your Majesty, everybody is well inclined, everybody already is a believer, of those who have been in my presence. I did not see all of them, but it is evident that the Giovanna island, alone, is bigger than England and Scotland put together. There are two regions that I have not visited, according to what I have been told: there is one, of which these folks living with me say that its inhabitants are born with a tail, all of them; they call it Anahan'.

<sup>77</sup> 'There I ordered the building of a fortress immediately, which by now must be already standing; where I left the men who seemed necessary, with all sorts of weapons, and food provisions for one year and more'.

<sup>78</sup> 'I order a fortress in wood to be built, and I put in it the people necessary to guard it ... and I leave them well provided for one year with weapons, and food'.

xvi. *Marriage; women's labor; the laws of property*

In omnibus his insulis, ut intellexi, quisque uni tantum coniugi acquiescit, preter principes aut reges, quibus viginti habere licet. Femine magis quam viri laborare videntur; nec bene potui intelligere an habeant bona propria: vidi enim quod unus habebat aliis impartiri, presertim dapes, obsonia et huiusmodi. (158)<sup>79</sup>

LVII

In quest'isole tutti questi stanno  
contenti d'una donna ciascheduno,  
ma questi principali tutti n'anno  
venti, le qual' son date lor per uno;  
e l'uno a l'altro mai torto non fanno,  
ché a ciò fare non ci è pronto nisuno;  
e nelle cose tutte da mangiare  
nulla division ci vegho fare.<sup>80</sup>

xvii. *The Caribs; Mateunin's women; other, hairless, populations*

Itaque monstra aliqua non vidi, neque eorum alicubi habui cognitionem, excepta quadam insula 'Charis' nuncupata, que secunda ex Hispan<i>a in Indiam transfretantibus existit, quam gens quedam, a finitibus habita ferocior, incolit: hi carne humana vescuntur. Habent predicti biremium genera plurima, quibus in omnes indicas insulas traiciunt, depredant surripiuntque quecumque possunt. Nihil ab aliis differunt, nisi quod gerunt more femineo longos crines, utuntur arcubus et spiculis arundineis, fixis, ut diximus, in grossiori parte attenuatis hastilibus, ideoque habentur feroces; qua re ceteri Indi inexhausto metu plectuntur, sed hos ego nihil facio plusquam alios. Hi sunt qui coheunt cum quibusdam feminis, que sole insulam 'Mateunin', primam ex Hispan<i>a in Indiam traicientibus, habitant. He autem feminae nullum sui sexus opus exercent: utuntur enim arcubus et spiculis, sicuti de earum coniugibus dixi, muniunt sese laminis eneis, quarum maxima apud eas copia existit.

...

Aliam mihi insulam affirmant supradicta Hispana majorem: eius incole carent pilis, auroque inter alias potissimum exuberat. Huius insulae et aliarum, quas vidi, homines mecum porto, qui horum que dixi testimonium perhibent. (158-160)<sup>81</sup>

<sup>79</sup> 'On all these islands, as I understood, everybody is content with one partner, except princes or kings, who are allowed to have twenty of them. The women seem to do harder work than men; I have not been able to discover if they own private possessions: indeed, I have seen that what one possesses, is shared with others, especially food, bread and dripping, and such like'.

<sup>80</sup> 'On all these islands all the men are content with one woman each, except that their rulers have twenty, all of them, who are given to them: they never do wrong to each other, since nobody is inclined to do so; and as far as food is concerned, I see that everything is shared, with no distinction'.

<sup>81</sup> 'I did not see any monster, nor had I any knowledge of them anywhere – except a certain island called 'Charis', the second that the passengers from Hispania to India encounter, which is inhabited by a population that its neighbours consider quite ferocious: they feed on human flesh.

## LVIII, 5-8

In queste parti nulla cosa ria  
 si truova di che questi habin paura,  
 salvo che ci è un'isola all'entrare  
 de l'India, per voler qui arrivare,

## LIX

in nella quale sta gente villana;  
 da questi non mi par che siano amati:  
 perché dice che mangian carne umana,  
 però non son da questi qui prezati.  
 Ann'assa' legni questa gente strana  
 da navichare, e hanno già rubati  
 a questi, discorrendo d'ogni banna  
 con archi i'mano e con freze di canna.

## LX

Nonn-è da questi a quelli differentia  
 se non i'ne' capegli che quelli hanno  
 lunghi come le donne, e di presenza  
 son come questi, e fanno molto danno  
 a questi, che son proprio essa clemenza,  
 sì che in gelosia sempre ne stanno;  
 ma ispero ben che Vostra Signoria  
 saprà purghare una tal malatia.

## LXI

Un'isola ci è detta Mattanino,  
 i'nella qual le donne sole stanno,  
 e questo iniquo popul gli è vicino  
 e a usar chon queste spesso vanno;  
 ma questo popul tutto feminino  
 esercitio di donne mai non fanno,  
 ma con gli archi traendo tuttavia,  
 che par per certo una gran fantasia.

This population have various types of boat, by which they travel across all the Indian islands, they pillage and ransack whatever they can. They do not differ from the others, except that they let their hair grow long, like women; they use bows and sharp spikes, inserted, as I have said, in the thickest part of thinned spears, so they are considered ferocious; that is why the rest of the Indians are disturbed by continuous fear of them – but I do not esteem them more than the others. Those are the ones who mate with certain women, who live by themselves the island 'Mateunin', the first one encountered by those who go from Hispania to India. These women do not do anything expected of their sex: they use bows and spikes, like I said of their partners, and provide themselves with leaf blades of bronze, of which there is abundance in their land. They tell me that there is another island even bigger than the above-mentioned Hispana: its inhabitants are hairless, and their land is rich in gold above all others. I am bringing with me men from this island, and from the others that I saw, who can bear witness to what I have said'.

## LXII

E vanno queste ben tutte choperte  
 non già di panni lini o lani o veli,  
 ma d'erbe e giunchi, e queste cose certe  
 son, ché di qua non è lenzuoli o teli;  
 'n un'altr'isola poi le genti oferte,  
 femin'è maschi, naschon senza peli;  
 inanzi voglio confuso esser nel dire  
 ch'i' voglia alchuna cosa preterire.

## LXIII

E dove questi senza peli sono  
 più oro ci è ch'i' abbia anchor trovato;  
 di quel che scrivo o parlando ragiono,  
 Signore, i' ne son ben giustificato:  
 a Vostra Signoria u'magnio dono  
 i' ò per portar mecho preparato;  
 di tutti questi luoghi i' vo' menare  
 gente che possin ciò testificare.<sup>82</sup>

Even a superficial review of the above correlations shows quite clearly that Dati didn't follow the order of the subjects as they appear in his source. Indeed, if we give a number to the passages from Dati's *cantare* in relation to the narrative position of the same material in the corresponding textual portions in Cosco's letter, we obtain the following sequence: 5, 4, 6, 3, 1, 7, 9, 8, 10, 2, 11, 13, 14, 15, 12, 16, 17.<sup>83</sup> We see that only in two instances

<sup>82</sup> 'In these lands nothing nasty can be found that scares these peoples, except that there is one island, the first we encounter on the way to India, in order to arrive here, where a primitive population lives; they do not seem to be much loved by the population around me: they are said to feed on human flesh, that is why they are not so greatly appreciated by these ones. This weird people have many boats to navigate, and they have robbed my people in the past, coming from anywhere with bows and arrows made of canes. There is no difference between the ones and the others besides their hair, that they grow long like women; physically they are the same as these ones, and damage them gravely – and these are goodness itself, so that they live in terror of the others all the time; but I hope that Your Majesty will be able to heal this disease. There is another island called Mattanino, where only women live, and this unjust people, their neighbours, often go there to mate with them; but this population, all made up of women, never do anything feminine, but live always using their bows – a truly peculiar thing. These women go around all covered not with linen or veils, but with grass and reeds, which is sure, because here linen or fabrics do not exist; in another island the population, male and female, is born hairless; I prefer to be confused in my explanation, than leave out something. And where these hairless people live, there is more gold than I have found so far; Sir, I have just reason to say or write what I am saying or writing: I prepared a great gift to be given to Your Majesty: from all these lands I want to bring with me people who can testify to everything I said'.

<sup>83</sup> According to the following equivalence: i = XXIV > 5; ii = XXIII > 4; iii = XXV-XXVI > 6; iv = XXII > 3; v = XX > 1; vi = XXIX-XXX > 7; vii = XXXII > 9; viii = XXXI

(13-15, 16-17) did successive textual fragments in Dati's *cantare* follow the sequencing of the original Latin source. In all the other cases, Dati completely subverted the order of the original. Moreover, within this mode of procedure, he sometimes chose to follow extensive portions of his source quite faithfully, even as he at other times rearranged the given order for no apparent reason. This is evident if we notice how closely he kept the order of the arguments towards the ends of his work, whereas elsewhere he was moved, to give only one example, to invert the order of segments 7-8 (octaves XXXII-XXI), in which he praises the variety, beauty and height of the local palm trees before introducing the general magnificence of the islands' flora. Is there a reason for this kind of practice? Can some sort of poetics, or at least some consistent compositional principle, be detected in such a radical, apparently unjustified manipulation of the pre-text of Dati's *cantare*?

### 7. *Incongruence, Discrepancy, Ambiguity*

Case by case, an explanation for Dati's rearrangements can be posited, but I'm afraid the explanations taken as a whole don't add up to a coherent vision of operational behaviour. The initial liberties can be attributed to the impatience of the *canterino*, who has dragged his audience through nineteen octaves of introduction and now feels an urgent need to grab its attention with some exciting news. That is probably why the explorers of Giuliano Dati jump ashore right away, instead of cautiously exploring the coasts of the newfound 'terra' by ship, as they do in Cosco's text. This is also probably why Dati's text immediately calls up, for his listeners, the image of 'montagnie ... d'altura smisurata', 'molti fiumi', 'molta brighata',<sup>84</sup> and why it concentrates right away on the nudity of the natives (a shocking detail, which was to resonate for a long time in the reports from the New World). Other alterations reveal what seems to have been a rather cursory reading of the original. Dati's anxiety to entertain his audience generated ambiguities that a close reading can easily detect, but that might well go unnoticed by listeners overwhelmed by the many marvels showered upon them in a live performance. This is what happens, for example, in the case of the subsequent descriptions of two islands called Giovanna and Spagnuola. In octave XXVII, Dati specifies the distance between them: 'dalla Giovanna alla Spagnola el mare / cinquantaquattro miglia largo apare' (7-8).<sup>85</sup> Yet, in the following octave, we are told of what

> 8; ix = XXXIV-V > 10; x = XXI-II > 2; xi = XXXV-VII > 11; xii = XLIII-IV, XLVI > 13; xiii = XXXVI, XLVII-III > 14; xiv = XLIX-LV > 15; xv = XL-XLI > 12; xvi = LVII > 16; xvii = LVIII-LXIII > 17.

<sup>84</sup> 'mountains ... of excessive height', 'many rivers', 'a lot of people'.

<sup>85</sup> 'from the Giovanna Island to the Spagnola island the sea appears to be fifty-four miles wide'.

seems to be Columbus' navigation towards the island of Spagnuola, and we are made to think that the mileage given in the previous distich refers to the dimensions of Spagnuola itself: 'son cinquecensantaquattro miglia / la larghezza che questa isola piglia' (XXVIII, 7-8).<sup>86</sup> In another inconsistency, up to the point when, in the octave XXIX, the extreme fertility of 'questa sopra l'altre isole'<sup>87</sup> is celebrated, the listener has every right to suppose that Dati is talking about the virtues of Spagnuola. However, this turns out to be wrong: a comparison with the Latin source makes it clear that we are dealing instead with the superlative qualities of the Giovanna island: 'que dicta Iohana et alie ibidem insule quam fertilissime existunt. Hec multis ... portibus est circumdata ...' (148).<sup>88</sup> Even more disconcerting, a few octaves later, this remarkable island starts changing its landscape under our very eyes. Besides being provided with 'massime montagne, / che son d'alteza molto ismisurate' (XXX, 1-2), it is now suddenly blessed with vast plains: 'Simil, Signore, i' vi vogli' avisare / che 'n quest'isola ci è molta pianura ...' (XXXIV 1-2).<sup>89</sup> Of course, islands can quite naturally be both flat and mountainous in various parts of their territory; but the reality is that Dati has here begun to describe not the Giovanna island, but, without any warning, the Spagnuola (Compare this to the precision of Cosco's letter: 'In ea autem quam 'Hispanam' supra diximus nuncupari, maximi sunt montes ac pulchri, vasta rura, nemora, campi feracissimi ...' (150).<sup>90</sup> Also, Dati's subsequent observation that it would be easy to build cities and castles and establish a regular agriculture in such a favourable landscape is likewise made with regard to the island of Spagnuola rather than to Giovanna: '... 'n quest'isola ... / ... 'difizi molti si puon fare, / e chastelle, ciptà chon magne mura, / che non bisogna poi di dubitare, / né d'aver, chi ci sta, nulla paura; / molte terre ci son da seminare / e da pascer le bestie e nutrichare' (XXXIV, 2-8).<sup>91</sup>

In conclusion, the dismembering and reassembling of the original text doesn't seem to follow an alternative compositional plan. Instead, the impression one gets is that Giuliano Dati scribbled down the most interesting bits of information he could glean from his source and then assembled them in his *cantare* without any scruples about fidelity to the structural order of

<sup>86</sup> 'this island is five hundred and sixty-four miles wide'.

<sup>87</sup> 'this (island) over all other (islands)'.

<sup>88</sup> 'The above mentioned Iohana and the other islands around are excessively fertile. It is surrounded by many ... harbours'.

<sup>89</sup> 'huge mountains, which are of immeasurable height ... The same way, my Lord, I want to advise you that in this island there is abundance of plain territory'.

<sup>90</sup> 'On the above mentioned 'Hispana' island there are very high beautiful mountains, vast farmlands, forests, very fertile fields'.

<sup>91</sup> 'on this island ... many buildings could be built, castles, cities with high walls, so that the inhabitants should not suffer any fear; there are many fields to sow, and for animals to graze'.

the text he was transforming. The new disorder, shall we say, of the text was apparently of no importance to Giuliano Dati. He knew that what was important was to communicate in the most interesting, vibrant, exciting manner a bundle of information, information that his listeners would have neither the time nor the attention to scrutinize for inconsistencies. Of course, what I am saying should not be misinterpreted as a self-righteous condemnation of Dati's compositional methods, but rather as an attempt to understand how the mind of a popular narrator of the late sixteenth century might have functioned when confronted with what was highly challenging and indeed previously inconceivable information. After all, the author himself, in a sudden access of naïveté and sincerity affirms towards the end of his endeavor: 'inanzi voglio confuso esser nel dire / ch'i' voglia alchuna cosa preterire' (LXII, 7-8).<sup>92</sup> Perhaps we can be so bold as to read these lines as Dati's declaration of poetics. We might call 'confusion' the creative hallmark of the *canterino* style.<sup>93</sup>

#### 8. *The Indian Tryptic*

Finally, the *Storia della inventione delle nuove insule* must also be considered in the context of Giuliano Dati's body of work, within which it constitutes a sort of line of demarcation. Before the *Storia della inventione*, Dati had written hagiographic or devotional *cantari* (*Historia e leggenda di San Biagio* 1492-1493; *Historia di Sancta Maria de Loreto* 1492-1493; *Stazioni e indulgenze di Roma* 1492-1493); after it, he expanded his repertoire to treat of more contemporary subjects (*La Magna Lega* and *Il Diluvio di Roma*, both printed in 1495-1496). He did so, however, without abandoning the religious subject matter of his earlier compositions (*Leggenda di S. Barbara* 1494, *Storia di S. Job profeta*, 1495; a life of Giovanna da Signa, written in 1522, was never published). What is telling, though, is that after the *Storia della inventione delle nuove insule* he wrote, one after the other, two other

<sup>92</sup> 'I'd rather be confused in my words, but without leaving out anything that I have to say'.

<sup>93</sup> Perhaps not only of *this* style. As scholars have noted, Matteo Fortini, too, in his paraphrase of Vespucci's text, doesn't follow the narrative ordering of his source: 'Regarding the literary devices used by the paraphrasing author, they consist first of all of a very shrewd combinatory technique which prefers, instead of following the sequential order of his source, to contaminate the single sequences, alternating unities even very remote from one another in the text (especially if such contamination is prompted by internal links with Vespucci's text) ... The source is treated like a narrative repertoire open for free exploitation, thus creating a true stylistic competition between the texts' (Formisano 1986, 336, 339). The textual procedures of Dati and Fortini are in this sense similar, even though it would be hard to attribute to Giuliano Dati any special 'very shrewd combinatory technique', or any intention of 'stylistic competition'. In Dati's case, the structural 'disorder' of the text seems instead more connected to the improvisation intrinsic to the genre of the *cantari*.

*cantari*, poems dealing with the subject of ‘prete Janni’. This was the fabled monarch of the East Indies, who had already been reassigned in the popular literature to a new throne in Ethiopia, albeit not in the fantasy of Giuliano Dati, who entitled his two new *cantari* *La gran magnificenza del Prete Janni o Primo Cantare dell’India* (1493-1494) and *Secondo Cantare dell’India* (1494-1495).<sup>94</sup> In other words, after having celebrated the discovery of the ‘new’ Indies, Dati was inspired to go back to the lore of the ‘old’ Indies. In so doing, he ended up composing what was almost an Indian tryptic, working his way through the assortment of western marvels revealed by Columbus and on to the fantastic treasures of the East.<sup>95</sup> And, speaking of marvels, Dati has an odd approach to such things. One might expect him to take literary advantage of the highly ‘alien’ traits offered by the New World. Instead, he shares the attitude of Columbus himself who, in his reports, pursued a strategy of reassurance, emphasizing the similarity of the natives to the people of his own world rather than their differences (hence his insistence on their eagerness for the conversion to the ‘true Faith’). Dati takes a similar approach. For example, he reports the existence of humans born with tails with no evident emotion, and he highlights the fact that in the new islands ‘... nulla cosa ria / si truova di che questi habin paura’ (LVIII 5-6).<sup>96</sup> This is an even blander translation than that of his Latin source, which reads: ‘Itaque monstra aliqua non vidi’.<sup>97</sup> Even the omission of a crucial reference to the kingdom of Catai in the Columbus-Cosco report could be considered as part of this strategy of reassurance. Columbus, faithful to his strongest convictions, mentioned his initial impression that the ‘Iohana insula’ might actually be a continent: ‘tamque eam magnam nullo reperto fine inveni, et non insulam sed continentem Chatai provinciam esse crediderim’.<sup>98</sup> Perhaps it is not an accident that Dati omitted this observation from his *cantare*. His

<sup>94</sup> ‘The only feature that demonstrates a relative independence of the author from his sources consists in the fact that he shifts the kingdom of the legendary Priest to India Major, whereas the *Meschino* puts it in Ethiopia’ (Olschki 1938, 300). The *Meschino* is the extremely popular poem *Guerin Meschino* (or *Meschino di Durazzo*), the main source of the ‘Indian’ *cantari* written by Giuliano Dati. The complete title of the first *cantare* reads: ‘La gran Magnificencia de Prete Ianni Signore dellindia / Maggiore & della Ethiopia’; the second one has no title, but the colophon reads: ‘Finito el secondo / cantare dellindia’. They are both in quarto, with no date or place of publication; the proposed dates are conjectural.

<sup>95</sup> As noted by Olschki: ‘Therefore these two “Indian cantari” ... are the most interesting among those composed by Dati: they prove how the old legends grafted upon the reports of the most recent geographical discoveries, integrating them in the imagination of the general public’ (1938, 295).

<sup>96</sup> ‘nothing nasty can be found that scares those people’.

<sup>97</sup> ‘I did not see any monster’.

<sup>98</sup> ‘I found this island so big, with no visible border, that I was prone to believe it was not an island, but a region pertaining to the continent of Chatai’.

islands are new, certainly, but from the title of his *cantare* on through the body of his poem, they are presented as additions to the well-known isles of *Channarie*. That is, they are imagined as the extension of an already assimilated geography and not as a dramatic discovery resulting from what was thought to be the first circumnavigation of the globe.

Yet, even as he seeks to reassure his audience, Dati insists that in the new islands there are rivers flowing with gold: 'l'or e l'argento e 'l metallo ci avanza, / massim'un fiume ch'è per questa via, / che non può questa terra farne senza, / dov'ò trovato con mie fantasia / che di molt'oro è piena quella rena / sì come l'acqua di quel fiume mena' (XXXIII 3-8);<sup>99</sup> 'O' po' trovato certi fiumicelli / che tutti menan oro, e non già poco' (XXXV 1-2).<sup>100</sup> This is an invention which is nowhere to be found in his Latin source. Once again, the textual practice of Dati is inconsistent. On the one hand, his narrative downplays some obvious opportunities for fantastic expatiations; on the other, he resorts to the trite repertoire of the 'mirabilia' tradition. However, this apparent contradiction operates to a single end: the domestication of the marvellous, a normalization of the new. Dati assimilates the newly discovered Indies with the old ones. He includes 'wonders' so familiar to his audience that they surely inspired a sense of continuity and normalcy rather than provoke consternation or unease. In his role as a *canterino* aligned with the expectations of the 'common man,' he understands that his audience is to be amazed, but not beyond certain limits. His common man (or woman) must marvel at the wonders on offer, but he/she must do so without being unduly disturbed by the narrative extravagances he/she is listening to. Which means that, in the end, the traditional format of the *cantare* prevailed over the novelty of the Discovery. Never before had such a potentially troubling piece of news been conveyed in so conventional a manner. In the treatment of Giulano Dati, the shocking is thoroughly domesticated, very often at the expense of accurate translation or faithful reportage. In 1493, the news of a New World was without doubt amazing, but *les mots pour le dire* had not been found yet.

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<sup>99</sup> 'There is great abundance of gold, silver and metals – especially considering a river nearby, essential for the well-being of this land, where I found by myself that its sand is full of gold, down along its flow'.

<sup>100</sup> 'Furthermore I found certain streams of water that run gold, and not in a small quantity'.

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