

## Editorial Post Script:

### Farfarello between Horror and Humour, in Dante, Leopardi, and Folklore

**Ephraim Nissan**

London

**Abstract.** In this post script, which follows Roberta Cauchi Santoro's article "‘Ridendo dei nostri mali, trovo qualche conforto’: Giacomo Leopardi's Humour", we further develop a topic she touched upon briefly: Giacomo Leopardi's "Dialogo di Malambruno e di Farfarello" from the *Operette Morali*, a dialogue which treats with outwardly levity the theme of human unhappiness (so central to Leopardi). The demon Farfarello and several fellow demons (some of whom, Leopardi's magician Malambruno invokes) already appear in Dante's *Comedy*, in a horrific context with some humour in it. Farfarello (or Farfareddu, in Sicily) also appears in folktales, such as in aetiological tale about why a rival ecumenical religion was demographically so successful (Farfareddu tries to promote with his colleagues his clever little brother, as a condition for a star performance if entrusted with a major task), as well as a variant, told in a feminine perspective, of the legend of Virgil the magician.

**Keywords:** Farfarello; Giacomo Leopardi; *Operette Morali*; Dante Alighieri; *Divine Comedy*; Malebranche; Sicilian folktales; Giuseppe Pitrè; Humour and horror; Virgil the wizard; Count Rezzonico della Torre's voyage to Sicily; Anti-hagiography; Mi'rāj; Cosmic Cock

1. Introduction: The Starting Point for the Discussion
  2. Giacomo Leopardi
  3. The *Operette Morali*, and the *Canticle of the Wild Cock*
  4. The Dialogue of the Magician Malambruno and the Devil Farfarello
  5. The Malebranche, Including Farfarello, in Dante's *Inferno*
  6. The *farfarelli* in the Memoirs of a Lombard Visitor to Sicily: Count Rezzonico della Torre's Reminiscing about the Sculpted Monsters of the Villa of Palagonia in Bagheria near Palermo
  7. Farfareddu Torturing the Unfaithful Wife of Virgil the Magician
  8. Farfareddu in Another Sicilian Folktale, "Maumettu": A Senior Demon Proposes to Send to Earth his Clever Little Brother and Promote him upon his Return
  9. Envoi
- References

#### 1. Introduction: The Starting Point for the Discussion

Roberta Cauchi Santoro has written, in her article that precedes this post script:

The smokescreen of humour in Leopardi is thus doubly oxymoronic. Linking desire directly to *amor proprio* and the impossible search for happiness implies that to cut through humour and reveal the consuming effects of desire, the human being needs to be distanced from his search for happiness and must readily admit his insignificance in the face of *physis*. This task, as Farfarello tells Malambruno in "Dialogo di Malambruno e di Farfarello", is impossible:

FARFARELLO: Dunque, amandoti necessariamente del maggiore amore che tu sei capace, necessariamente desideri il più che puoi la felicità propria; e non potendo mai di gran lunga essere soddisfatto di questo tuo desiderio, che è sommo, resta che tu non possi fuggire per nessun verso di non essere infelice. (100–101)

Well, then, since of necessity you love yourself with the greatest love of which you are capable, of necessity you desire your happiness as strongly as you can. And since this supreme desire of yours can never be satisfied even in the smallest degree, it follows that in no way can you escape being unhappy.

As we are going to see, in the Italian literary as well as folkloric tradition, the demon Farfarello appears more than once, which in contexts of horror, however mitigated sometimes with some sprinkling of humour. It so happens that in a research project in progress (about anti-hagiographies across cultures) I have been writing extensively about Farfareddu in Sicilian folktales and about other occurrences, in Italian literary fiction as well as in non-fiction, of Farfarello. In this editorial note, I provide an abridged and more focused version.

## 2. Giacomo Leopardi

The Italian poet, philosopher–essayist, author of philosophical literary prose, and erudite Giacomo Leopardi (1798–1837) was an intellectual and person “who did not fit”, in more than one way, from his unpromisingly stifling beginnings as the son of the likewise erudite from the back of beyond, Count Monaldo Leopardi, a reactionary writer and oppressive father, yet an affectionate father upon Giacomo’s demise. Monaldo carved for himself a niche in the history of anti-Jewish attitudes in Italy (see Luzzatto Voghera 1988, pp. 72–74). Note by the way Monaldo fashioned sarcastically the title of a 1832 tract of his against the liberals: *Prediche recitate al popolo liberale da don Muso Duro, curato nel paese della verità e nella contrada della poca pazienza* [Sermons preached to the people of the liberals by Father Harsh Muzzle, parish priest in the town of truth and county of impatience].<sup>1</sup>

Giacomo Taldegardo Francesco di Sales Saverio Pietro Leopardi managed to eke a life outside his native town of Recanati and dreaded family palace. An author who, while a teenager in the mountains of the Papal States, celebrated as liberation the Austrian military intervention against Joachim Murat — the King of Naples who tried to survive on the throne the end of the Napoleonic period and the intended return to Naples of an *ancien régime* royal couple that even some at the Congress of Vienna considered notorious because of the atrocities of their earlier return in 1799 — Giacomo Leopardi (in Florence and in his decline years in Naples of all places) had come to appreciate, with some reservations, the liberal Italian nationalists.

Giacomo Leopardi’s thoroughly pessimistic philosophical reflection had made of him an unbeliever, a materialist, out of his clerical beginnings. His years as a books worm in his father’s large private library had given Giacomo a mind of the 18th century, and in a sense he never really ceased to belong there (even as that century died while he was turning from baby to toddler). As a critic, in 1816–1818 he wrote against Romanticism. And yet, in more than one way he was deeply innovative, such as in his rejection of the rigid rule that forced Italian versification to shun vocabulary not found in the poets of the Trecento (14th century): to say ‘hope’, for Leopardi using the word *speranza* was all right, whereas his predecessors would have to do with *speme*.

Giacomo Leopardi’s worldview centred on human life inescapably being unhappy<sup>2</sup> was very much at home in the Romantic period, even though that he personally was unique in the Italian *belles lettres*, abhorring being a recluse in his native home, yet nowhere really at home while away from home, or even in his body, which in his teenage years developed a badly deformed spine (this is currently understood as having been an effect of Pott disease). This certainly influenced his worldview, as did his difficulty to come to term with the fact that women would not love him back. A guest in his final years of Antonio Ranieri and the latter’s sister, Paolina, in Naples, whose climate Leopardi hoped would be beneficial to his health, he

<sup>1</sup> <https://books.google.it/books?id=UXyQ5KUf8ZMC&printsec=frontcover&hl=it>

<sup>2</sup> Leopardi however developed a theory of pleasure.

died shortly after the cholera epidemic of 1836, apparently of pulmonary edema or emphysema, two weeks short of his 39th birthday.<sup>3</sup>



Giacomo Leopardi on his deathbed, drawn by Tito Angelini.



Giacomo Leopardi as portrayed by means of an early photographic technique in the mid-1830s.

<sup>3</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giacomo\\_Leopardi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giacomo_Leopardi) is reasonably detailed, but as could be expected, the Italian-language version of the Wikipedia page is fuller: [https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giacomo\\_Leopardi](https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giacomo_Leopardi)



Giacomo Leopardi as portrayed by Ferrazzi around 1820.<sup>4</sup>

Francesco De Sanctis (1817–1883), the influential historian of Italian literature, who had taken part in the Neapolitan revolution of 1848 and was in prison in 1850–1853, and then taught in Turin and in Zurich before becoming minister of education in unified Italy, wrote as follow in 1858 (De Sanctis [1952] 1979<sup>4</sup>, Vol. 2, p. 184):

[Leopardi] non crede al progresso, e te lo fa desiderare; non crede alla libertà, e te la fa amare. Chiama illusioni l'amore, la gloria, la virtù, e te ne accende in petto un desiderio inesausto. [...] È scettico e ti fa credente; e mentre non crede possibile un avvenire men triste per la patria comune, ti desta in seno un vivo amore per quella e t'infiama a nobili fatti.

[[Leopardi] does not believe in progress, and yet he makes you long for it; he does not believe in freedom, and yet he makes you love it. He calls but delusions — love, glory, virtue, and yet he light up in your breast an unrequited desire for them. [...] He is a sceptic and yet he makes of you a believer; and whereas he does not believe that not as sad a future for our common fatherland is possible, he awakens inside you a lively love for it and enflames you for noble action.]

<sup>4</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giacomo\\_Leopardi#/media/File:Leopardi,\\_Giacomo\\_\(1798-1837\)\\_-ritr.\\_A\\_Ferrazzi,\\_Recanati,\\_casa\\_Leopardi.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giacomo_Leopardi#/media/File:Leopardi,_Giacomo_(1798-1837)_-ritr._A_Ferrazzi,_Recanati,_casa_Leopardi.jpg)

### 3. The Operette Morali, and the Canticle of the Wild Cock

Giacomo Leopardi authored his *Operette Morali* ("Small Moral Works") between 1823 and 1828, but the chronologically very last part was written in 1832. In its final form, the *Operette Morali* comprise 24 imaginatively set philosophical dialogues or fictional essays. Leopardi defined that work as a "libro di sogni poetici, d'invenzioni e di capricci malinconici" ("a book of poetic dreams, inventions, and melancholy caprices"). Not infrequently, the setting is inspired by Leopardi's erudition, and he sometimes provides an enumeration that is itself somewhat humorous. Such is the case of the sources in Hebrew or Jewish Middle Aramaic corpora or strata, as well as Jewish scholars with a spectrum of expertise, he supposedly consulted while writing a long monologue, a meditation about the cosmos, he places in the mouth of the mythical gigantic Wild Cock, in *Il Cantico del Gallo Silvestre*:

Affermano alcuni maestri e scrittori ebrei, che tra il cielo e la terra, o vogliamo dire mezzo nell'uno e mezzo nella altra, vive un certo gallo salvatico; il quale sta in sulla terra coi piedi, e tocca colla cresta e col becco il cielo. Questo gallo gigante, oltre a varie particolarità che di lui si possono leggere negli autori predetti, ha uso di ragione; o certo, come un pappagallo, è stato ammaestrato, non so da chi, a profferir parole a guisa degli uomini: perocché si è trovato in una cartapeccora antica, scritto in lettera ebraica, e in lingua tra caldea, targumica; rabbinica, cabalistica e talmudica, un canticò intitolato, *Scir detarnegòl bara letzafra*, cioè *Cantico mattutino del gallo silvestre*: il quale, non senza fatica grande, né senza interrogare più d'un rabbino, cabalista, teologo, giuriconsulto e filosofo ebreo, sono venuto a capo d'intendere, e di ridurre in volgare come qui appresso si vede. Non ho potuto per ancora ritrarre se questo Cantico si ripeta dal gallo di tempo in tempo, ovvero tutte le mattine; o fosse cantato una volta sola e chi l'oda cantare, o chi l'abbia udito; e se la detta lingua sia proprio la lingua del gallo, o che il Cantico vi fosse recato da qualche altra. Quanto si è al volgarizzamento infrascritto; per farlo più fedele che si potesse (del che mi sono anche sforzato in ogni altro modo), mi è paruto di usare la prosa piuttosto che il verso, se bene in cosa poetica: Lo stile interrotto, e forse qualche volta gonfio, non mi dovrà essere imputato, essendo conforme a quello del testo originale: il qual testo corrisponde in questa parte all'uso delle lingue, e massime dei poeti, d'oriente.

[Some Jewish teachers and writers claim that between heaven and earth, or should we rather say half in the one and half in the other, a wild cock lives. He stands with his feet on the ground, and his comb and beak touch the sky. This gigantic cock, apart from various features concerning him that can be read in the aforementioned authors, possesses reason. Or then, for sure, like a parrot, it was trained, I do not know by whom, to utter words like human beings do. In fact, it was found in an ancient parchment written in the Hebrew script, and in a language combining Chaldaic, Targumic, Rabbinic, Kabbalistic, and Talmudic, a canticle entitled *Scir detarnegòl bara letzafra*, that is to say, *Morning Canticle of the Wild Cock*. That text, which required much effort, and my consulting more than one Jewish rabbi, kabbalist, theologian, jurist, and philosopher, I managed at the long last to understand, and to translate into Italian as follows. I have not been able, as yet, to infer whether this Canticle is repeated by the Cock from time to time, or rather every morning; or then whether it was just sung once, and who hears or heard it sung; or whether than language is actually of the cock himself, or the Canticle was translated into it from another tongue. As for the translation given below, in order to make it as faithful as possible (which I made efforts to do also in any other manner), I deemed it proper to use prose rather than verse, albeit it is poetic matter. The disconnected style, and perhaps sometimes turgid, must not be ascribed to me, because it is in conformity with the original text. In this, that text corresponds to the usage of the languages, and especially the poets, of the East.]

In that case, what Leopardi did consult was an early modern work of lexicography, where he had found mention of *שיר דתרנגול ברא לצפרא* which he transcribed as *Scir detarnegòl bara letzafra* (which by the way, shows that Leopardi pronounced the letter צ *šadei* as [ts], the way Ashkenazic Jews, and now Israelis, do, rather than as [s], as traditional among Italian Jews) and translated this as the Italian title of his own chapter (of 10–16 November 1824).

Leopardi drew his inspiration from his finding *שיר דתרנגול ברא לצפרא* in the *Lexicon Chaldaicum, Talmudicum et Rabbinicum* by Johann Buxtorf the Elder (1564–1629), a Protestant

Westphalian-born professor of Hebrew at Basel for 39 years, and edited by his namesake son. The father saw the publication, in 1607, of *Lexicon Hebraicum et Chaldaicum cum brevi Lexico Rabbinico Philosophico*. I deal elsewhere (Nissan, to appear) with relevant Jewish lore in the background of *Il Cantico del Gallo Silvestre*. Quite possibly, the lexical compound תרנגולא ברך in Aramaic actually denoted the hoopoe, a bird that also in Arab lore is considered to be magic, which was also the case in ancient Egyptian lore.<sup>5</sup> Besides, note that in Greek, too, ἄλεκτρον ἄγριος used to denote the hoopoe. As for Modern Greek, *petinós* denotes the cock, whereas the hoopoe is called *tsalapetinós*, which literally means "cock of the brushwood" (cf. in Turkish, *çalı* = brushwood). As in Leopardi (and his ultimate source) the Wild Cock is associated with dawn, probably background lore intended a gigantic cock (not a hoopoe).

In the *Babylonian Talmud*, tractate *Bava Batra*, 73b — in a digression consisting of tall tales in what is otherwise a legal treatise<sup>6</sup> — one comes across mention of another gigantic bird.<sup>7</sup> It is not the same as the "wild cock" (or then, it is not called the same), and yet, Buxtorf's *Chaldaicum, Talmudicum et Rabbinicum* cites it (the relevant entry is on pp. 1312–1313 in Bernard Fischer's augmented edition of 1875). The *Lexicon* claimed, in Latin, the following (I am replacing the Hebrew script of some Aramaic with a transliteration):

Gallus hic una cum Leviathan cedet justis in prandio inaugurali Messiae, unde in Tg. sec. Esth. 3, 7 legitur: „In die quinto non: propterea quod in eo creati sunt <lwytn wtrngwl br?> Leviathan and gallus sylvestris, quae praeparabuntur synagogae Israel ad prandium magni illius diei, sc. Messiae". Ap. Rab. frequens hujus <trngwl br?> galli sylvestris mentio est. Avis cujusdam maximae, quae pedes in terra, caput inter nubila condit, mentio fit ap. Talm. in Bb. 73 b. (quod in Tg. Psal. 50. male infartum est) sed non vocatur illic gallus sylvestris. <l? yhyb lyh ?l? ltrngwl? br?> non dedit cum nisi gallo sylvestri.

[This cock, together with the Leviathan, succumbs to the righteous ones at the inaugural banquet of the Messiah, hence in the *Second Targum to Esther*,<sup>8</sup> 3, 7, one reads: "Not in the fifth day: because in it, the creation took place of the Leviathan and of the Wild Cock (<lwytn wtrngwl br?>), which are prepared for the great banquet of the Congregation of Israel on that day, i.e., of the Messiah". In rabbinical writings, there is frequent mention of this Wild Cock (<trngwl br?>). Of a huge birds, whose feet stand on the ground [not so: They are claimed to stand in the sea!] and whose head is hidden in the clouds, mention is made in the [Babylonian] Talmud in *Bava Batra* 73b (which is badly inserted in the *Targum to Psalms* 50), but there it is not called a Wild Cock. לא יהיב ליה אלא לתרנגולא ברא <l? yhyb lyh ?l? ltrngwl? br?> [means:] he gave it to none else than the Wild Cock.

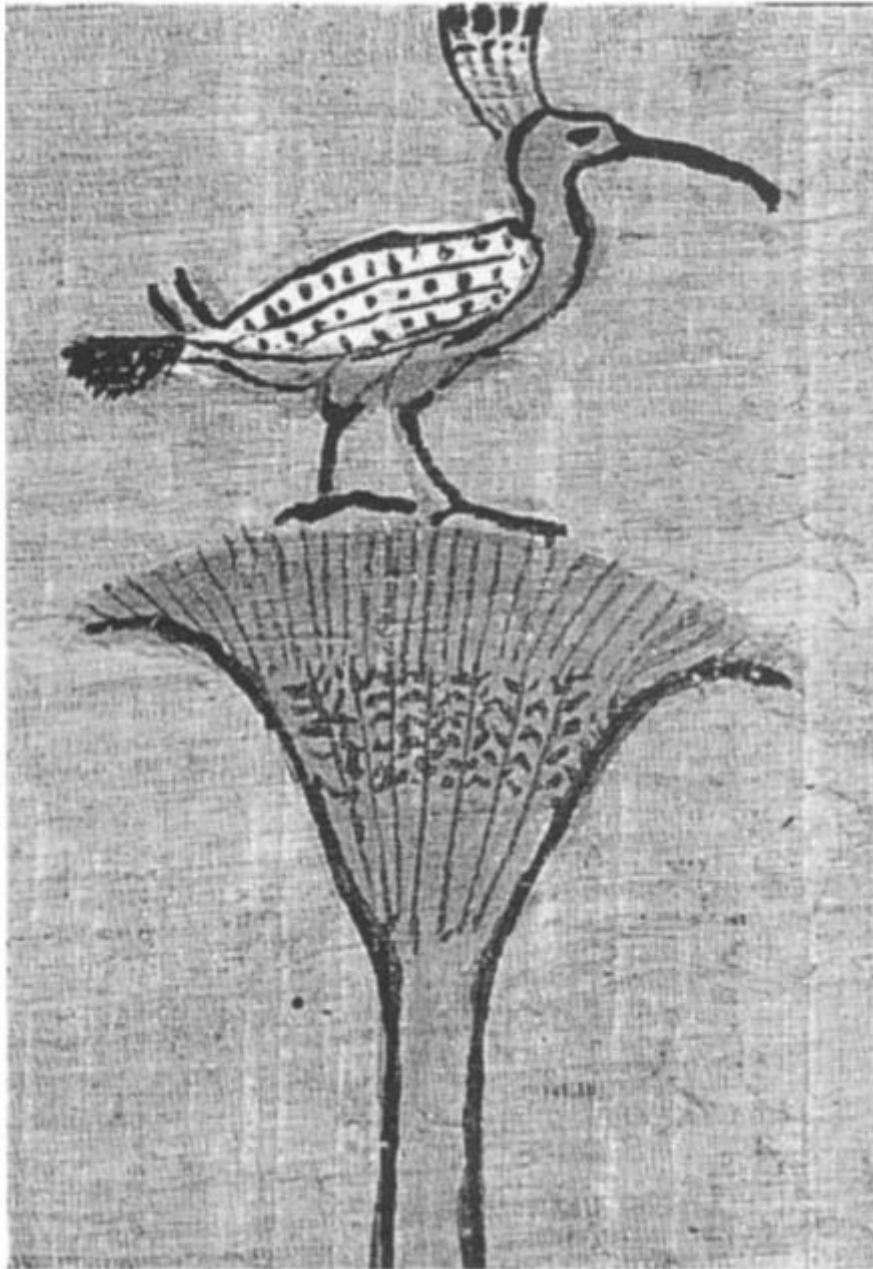
<sup>5</sup> "The Egyptian hoopoe, *Upupa epops*, with its colourful feathering and beautiful head crest, is still common in Egypt. In the Old Kingdom hoopoes were caught to be pets for children. In the papyrus drawing the bird sits atop a stylized papyrus(?) plant and is identified in the accompanying text as 'he whose magic is hidden'. This is an apt description if Nineteenth Dynasty Egypt followed the practice reported from much later times, when parts of the bird's body — the heart, head, and blood — played a role in magic practices (third to eighth century A.D.)" (Arnold 1995, p. 46, last column and Figure 53).

<sup>6</sup> *Bava Batra*, "The Last Gate", which, in the words of Isidore Epstein (1935), "deals with laws concerning the division of property held in partnership; restrictions in respect of private and public property; established rights of ownership; acquisition of property; hereditary succession, and drafting of documents".

<sup>7</sup> "Once we travelled on board a ship and we saw a bird standing up to its ankles in the water while its head reached the sky. We thought the water was not deep and wished to go down to cool ourselves, but a *Bath Kol* {supernatural voice} called out: 'Do not go down here for a carpenter's axe was dropped [into this water] seven years ago and it has not [yet] reached the bottom. And this, not [only] because the water is deep but [also] because it is rapid. R. Ashi said: That [bird] was *Ziz-Sadai* for it is written: *And Ziz-Sadai is with me*' (the translation is from the Soncino English Talmud, Epstein 1935–1948; their brackets, my braces. *Bava Batra* was translated by Maurice Simon and Israel W. Slotki, under Isidore Epstein's editorship).

Concerning the *Ziz-Saday*, see e.g. Drewer (1981), Nissan (2007–2008 [2011], Sec. 6: "The *ventiones* in a Jewish eschatological version, and a possible Christian parallel").

<sup>8</sup> The *Second Targum to Esther* is not a literal translation into Aramaic of the Book of Esther, but rather an amplified text. See Ego (1996).



A hoopoe, in an ancient Egyptian drawing on papyrus (height: 36 cm), from the 19<sup>th</sup> Dynasty (ca. 1295–1186 B.C.E.). Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

The motif of the Cock in Heaven is also found in Muslim lore, and from there it reached Christendom through the conduit of the *Libro della Scala* (relating Muhammad's ascension and visit to both Heaven and Hell). Both Asín, in his book on Islam's influence on date, and Cerulli, in his edition of the *Libro della Scala*, considered this Muslim lore to have been a source for the singing eagle in Dante's *Paradise*. Theodore Silverstein rejected this, by claiming (1952, pp. 187–188, Silverstein's brackets):

With respect to the eagle, Asín had already insisted on comparing it with the gigantic Cock of Heaven in Muslim legends, and Cerulli cannot quite give this up. While recognizing the prior importance of the traditional figure of the imperial eagle and of such biblical references as those of Ezek. 17:3, Isa. 40:31, and Matt. 24:28, he thinks that 'se la questione concerne la concorrenza di un motivo del Libro della Scala ... con altre fonti, [il Gallo] a mio parere è ammissibile'. And this because, just as the Cock sings, 'Benedictus sis tu, Domine Deus ...', so Dante's eagle becomes

quel segno che di laude  
della divina grazia era contesto ....

Now, aside from the biblical references, the Christian commentators are not unknown to have used the figure of the eagle to symbolize the group of saints and *justi* contemplating God in the heavens — see the *De Beniamine major* of Richard of St. Victor and, once more, Gregory's *Moralia in Job*; and the apocalyptic literature is full of great winged celestial creatures, from the Phoenixes and Chalkydri of Slavonic Enoch to the three stately birds at God's Throne in *Adammán*. These last, and lesser birds also in Brendan as well as elsewhere in the Irish lore, all sing praises to God or note the canonical hours, which is exactly the point also of the *Libro della scala*, where we read:

Et cum ipse cecinerit, confestim omnes galli qui sunt super terram agitant similiter alas suas et cantantes laudant Deum. Et quando gallus angelus ille tacet, omnes tacent. Et cum appropinquat aurora diei, predictus facit illud idem, quod fecerat in medio noctis ... Et cum hoc dixerit, omnes galli dicunt eciam illud idem. Et ita faciunt omnibus horis quibus cantat gallus ille prefatus.

{And as soon as he sings, immediately all cocks that exist on the earth agitate likewise their wings and, by singing, they praise God. And when that angelic cock is silent, they all are silent. And when dawn is nearing, he aforementioned does that same thing, which it did at midnight ... As as he is uttering/saying, all cocks also say that same thing. And they do so at all hours at which that aforementioned cock sings. [E.N.]}

It is not certain, however, that any of this material from the visions is really significant for Dante, and Cerulli's own argument, seeking strength from Ambrose's and Prudentius' praise of the rooster as *presbyter Dei*, proves, if anything, the opposite of what he wishes. For this allegorical magnification of the lowly fowl, a poetic-homiletic convention sufficiently widespread in the Christian Middle Ages to have reached both Dante and his readers would, with its Muslim counterpart, certainly have furnished an effective detail for the *Paradiso*, had the poet been interested in the point which it represents. But this is exactly what Dante has no use for here, since his meaning, like his bird, is quite different: namely, that the winged creature, formed of countless souls, in the sphere of heaven assigned by tradition to the angelic order known as Dominations, is the mark of ruling power which depends on God — a theme St. Bernard had discussed in a book that Dante quotes as one of his sources, the *De consideratione* (v. iv. 10). For this the ancient eagle, transformed, is indeed the fitting symbol. As for the eagle's singing, all heavenly creatures, from Cherubim to the simplest of the righteous, habitually thus voice praise of the Lord in Christian apocalypse; there seems little need to go, for this well-grounded occupation, to God's barnyard presbyter, whether Christian or Muslim.

One comes across the Cosmic Cock in an Islamic tradition about the Mi'rāj (i.e., Muhammad's supernatural voyage to Heaven and Hell), according to a Shi'i text, from which passages were quoted in Italian translation by Angelo Piemontese (1980), and "che si riscontra nel *tafsīr* persiano, sciita, uno dei primi e maggiori, di Abū'l-Futūḥ al-Rāzī (c. 480–525 H./1087–1131)" (*ibid.*, p. 225) ["and which one encounters in the commentary (*tafsīr*) in Persian, a Shi'i one, one of the earliest and longest, by Abū'l-Futūḥ al-Rāzī, who lived *circa* the Hejiral years 480–525, corresponding to 1087–1131 of the Common Era"].

Given below is the Italian passage about the Cosmic Cock (Piemontese 1980, pp. 231–232, his brackets; the closed guillemets » are missing on purpose in this passage):

[4. *Ascensione*. 4.1. *Il cielo inferiore*]

«Gabriele mi prese sull'ala, e di su quella scala mi portò al cielo più basso. Bussò alla porta. – Chi è? – chiesero. – Gabriele, – rispose. – Chi è con te? – Ed egli: – È Muḥammad. – E quelli: – Hanno mandato Muḥammad? – Gabriele: – Sì.

«– Benvenuto a lui! Dio lo vivifichi, e tanto da fratello, tanto da vicario! Ottimo fratello, ottimo vicario, ottimo l'avvento che sta per venire! – Aprirono la porta, e noi entrammo.



[4.2. *Il gallo cosmico*]

«Mentre andavo nel cielo inferiore, vidi un gallo le piume del cui collo erano verdi, e la testa e il corpo bianchi. Non avevo mai visto verde e bianco più belli. Le sue zampe erano sotto la settima terra, la sua testa sotto il Trono. Aveva il collo piegato in due, e due ali che, se le sollevava, giungevano all'oriente e all'occidente. Quando la sera giunge al termine, egli apre le ali, e le sbatte assieme e glorifica Dio dicendo: "Sia lode a Dio, il Signore santissimo" [Cor. LXII 1], il sommo, il gloriosissimo. "Non c'è altro dio che Iddio, il vivente, l'eterno" [Cor. III 1]. Quando i galli della terra odono il suo canto, si mettono tutti a cantare, e lodano Dio e sbattono le ali; quando egli si acquieta, anche i galli terrestri si tacciono; quando, di nuovo, egli si scuote e canta il rosario, anche i galli della terra fanno altrettanto, a sua imitazione e replica. «Dacché lo vidi, desidero rivederlo di nuovo», disse il Profeta.

[[4. *Ascension*. 4.1. *The lower heaven*]

«Gabriel took my on his wing, and on that ladder ghe took me to the lowest heaven. He knocked at the door. "Who is that?" they asked. "It's me, Gabriel", he replied. "Who is it who is with you?" they asked. He replied: "This is Muhammad". They asked: "Was Muhammad envoyed?" Gabriel replied: "Yes indeed".

"He is most welcome! Let God give him life, as a brother and as a deputy! An excellent brother, an excellent deputy, and the forthcoming advent is excellent!" They opened the door, and we went in.

[4.2. *The cosmic cock*]

"While I was going around in the lowest heaven, I saw a cock the feathers of whose neck were green, whereas the head and the body were white. I had never seen green and white more beautiful than those ones. His feet were beneath the seventh earth, his head was under the Throne. His neck was folded in two, and he had two wings that, if raised reached the east and the west. When the evening comes to an end, he unfolds his wings, flaps his wings, and gives praise to God by saying: "Let God be praised, the most holy Lord" [Qur'an 62:1], the most high, the most glorious. "There is no other god than God, the living one, the eternal one" [Qur'an 3:1]. When the cocks on earth hears his song, they begin to sing, and praise God and flap their wing; when he falls silent, also the earthly cocks fall silent; when, again, he moves and sings the rosary prayer, also the earthly cocks do the same, by emulation and repetition. "Since when I saw him, I wish to see him again", the Prophet said.]

#### 4. The Dialogue of the Magician Malambruno and the Devil Farfarello

Let us turn to another chapter of Giacomo Leopardi's *Operette Morali*, namely, to his *Dialogo di Malambruno e di Farfarello*, written in Recanati on 1–3 April 1824. It is a dialogue between a magician, Malambruno, who begins by invoking and adjuring several demons (some of them, belonging to the gang of demons called Malebranche in his *Inferno*), and who longs for happiness, and Farfarello, a demon. In the end, having got Malambruno to admit that not being alive would be better than being alive, Farfarello offers him a service comparable to that now famously offered by the Dignitas clinic in Switzerland.

Given below is Leopardi's Italian text, along with my translation into English.

MALAMBRUNO. Spiriti d'abisso, Farfarello, Ciriatto, Baconero, Astarotte, Alichino, e comunque siete chiamati; io vi scongiuro nel nome di Belzebù, e vi comando per la virtù dell'arte mia, che può sgangherare la luna, e inchiodare il sole a mezzo il cielo: venga uno di voi con libero comando del vostro principe e piena potestà di usare tutte le forze dell'inferno in mio servizio.

[MALAMBRUNO. O spirits of the abyss, Farfarello, Ciriatto, Baconero, Astarotte, Alichino, or whatever is your name; I adjure you in the name of Baalzebub, and order you by the virtue of my magical art, which can wreck the moon, or nail the sun in the middle of the sky: let one of you come here, having been freely ordered to do so by your Prince [the Devil], and the full authority of using all forces of hell in my service.]

FARFARELLO. Eccomi.

MALAMBRUNO. Chi sei?

FARFARELLO. Farfarello, a' tuoi comandi.

MALAMBRUNO. Rechi il mandato di Belzebù?

FARFARELLO. Sì recolo; e posso fare in tuo servizio tutto quello che potrebbe il Re proprio, e più che non potrebbero tutte l'altre creature insieme.

[FARFARELLO. Here I am.

MALAMBRUNO. Who are you?

FARFARELLO. Farfarello, at your service.

MALAMBRUNO. Have you brought the authorisation from Baalzebub?

FARFARELLO. Yes, here it is; and I can perform in your service anything that the King himself could, and which all other creatures together could not perform.]

MALAMBRUNO. Sta bene. Tu m'hai da contentare d'un desiderio.

FARFARELLO. Sarai servito. Che vuoi? nobiltà maggiore di quella degli Atridi?

MALAMBRUNO. No.

FARFARELLO. Più ricchezze di quelle che si troveranno nella città di Manoa quando sarà scoperta?

MALAMBRUNO. No.

FARFARELLO. Un impero grande come quello che dicono che Carlo quinto si sognasse una notte?

MALAMBRUNO. No.

[MALAMBRUNO. All right. You have to grant me a wish.

FARFARELLO. I will. What do you want? A greater nobility than that of the Atrides [i.e., Agamemnon and Menelaus]?

MALAMBRUNO. No.

FARFARELLO. More riches than those that will be found in the city of Manoa<sup>9</sup> when it will be discovered?

MALAMBRUNO. No.

FARFARELLO. An empire as large as the one they say Charles V dreamt one night?

MALAMBRUNO. No.]

FARFARELLO. Recare alle tue voglie una donna più salvatica di Penelope?

MALAMBRUNO. No. Ti par egli che a cotesto ci bisognasse il diavolo?

FARFARELLO. Onori e buona fortuna così ribaldo come sei?

MALAMBRUNO. Piuttosto mi bisognerebbe il diavolo se volessi il contrario.

[FARFARELLO. Am I to subject to your lust a woman more intractable than Penelope?<sup>10</sup>

MALAMBRUNO. No. Do you think that for that the devil would be required?

FARFARELLO. Honours and good luck in spite of your being a rascal?

MALAMBRUNO. It would rather require the devil, if I were to wish the contrary.]

FARFARELLO. In fine, che mi comandi?

MALAMBRUNO. Fammi felice per un momento di tempo.

FARFARELLO. Non posso.

MALAMBRUNO. Come non puoi?

[FARFARELLO. But then, which order do you give me?

MALAMBRUNO. Make me happy for a moment.

FARFARELLO. I cannot.

MALAMBRUNO. How that, you cannot?]

<sup>9</sup> Here Leopardi inserted a note to explain *Manoa*: "Città favolosa, detta altrimenti *El Dorado*, la quale immaginarono gli Spagnoli, e la credettero essere nell'America meridionale, tra il fiume dell'Orenoco e quel delle Amazzoni" ["A fabled city, otherwise called *El Dorado*, imagined by the Spanish, who believed to be in South America, between the river Orinoco and the Amazon"]. *Manoa* was mentioned by Voltaire in Sections 17 and 18 of *Candide*. The sorcerer Malambruno was mentioned in Cervantes' *Quixote* in relation to a magic horse.

<sup>10</sup> Odysseus' wife, Penelope, rejected the advances of many men.

FARFARELLO. Ti giuro in coscienza che non posso.

MALAMBRUNO. In coscienza di demonio da bene.

FARFARELLO. Sì certo. Fa conto che vi sia de' diavoli da bene come v'è degli uomini.

[FARFARELLO. Honest, I swear to you I cannot.

MALAMBRUNO. Upon the honesty of a proper and decent demon.

FARFARELLO. Yes, of course. Trust that there exist proper and decent demons, just as there are human beings who are that way.]

MALAMBRUNO. Ma tu fa conto che io t'appicco qui per la coda a una di queste travi, se tu non mi ubbidisci subito senza più parole.

FARFARELLO. Tu mi puoi meglio ammazzare, che non io contentarti di quello che tu domandi.

MALAMBRUNO. Dunque ritorna tu col mal anno, e venga Belzebù in persona.

FARFARELLO. Se anco viene Belzebù con tutta la Giudecca e tutte le Bolge, non potrà farti felice né te né altri della tua specie, più che abbia potuto io.

[MALAMBRUNO. But you, expect me to hand you here by your tail to one of these planks, if you don't obey me right away without further arguing.

FARFARELLO. Even if you kill me, I would not be able to fulfil your request.

MALAMBRUNO. If so, the hell with you. Let Baalzebub himself come in person.

FARFARELLO. Even if Baalzebub were to come with the entire Giusecca/Jewry [the lowest compartment in Dante's hell] and all the circles of hell [Dante's Bolge], he could not make you happy, either you or anybody else of your species, any more than I was able.]

MALAMBRUNO. Né anche per un momento solo?

FARFARELLO. Tanto è possibile per un momento, anzi per la metà di un momento, e per la millesima parte; quanto per tutta la vita.

[MALAMBRUNO. Not even for just one moment?

FARFARELLO. It is as possible for a moment, or even for half a moment, or one thousandth of a moment, as it is possible for whole life.]

MALAMBRUNO. Ma non potendo farmi felice in nessuna maniera, ti basta l'animo almeno di liberarmi dall'infelicità?

FARFARELLO. Se tu puoi fare di non amarti supremamente.

MALAMBRUNO. Cotesto lo potrò dopo morto.

FARFARELLO. Ma in vita non lo può nessun animale: perché la vostra natura vi comporterebbe prima qualunque altra cosa, che questa.

MALAMBRUNO. Così è.

[MALAMBRUNO. But if you cannot make me happy in any manner, at least are you strong enough to free me from unhappiness?

FARFARELLO. Only if you are see to it that you would not love yourself to the maximum degree.

MALAMBRUNO. That, I'd only be able to do after I'm dead.

FARFARELLO. But while alive, no animate being can do that: because your nature would rather lead you to anything else, than this one.

MALAMBRUNO. Indeed.]

FARFARELLO. Dunque, amandoti necessariamente del maggiore amore che tu sei capace, necessariamente desideri il più che puoi la felicità propria; e non potendo mai di gran lunga essere soddisfatto di questo tuo desiderio, che è sommo, resta che tu non possi fuggire per nessun verso di non essere infelice.

[FARFARELLO. Then, as out of necessity you love yourself of the greatest love of which you are capable, you necessarily desire as much as you can your own happiness; and as you could never ever, and by far so, have this desire of yours requited, and it is a huge desire, as a consequence there is no way you can escape being unhappy.]

MALAMBRUNO. Né anco nei tempi che io proverò qualche diletto; perchè nessun diletto mi farà né felice né pago.

FARFARELLO. Nessuno veramente.

MALAMBRUNO. E però, non uguagliando il desiderio naturale della felicità che mi sta fisso nell'animo, non sarà vero diletto; e in quel tempo medesimo che esso è per durare, io non lascerò di essere infelice.

[MALAMBRUNO. Not even at such time when I shall experience some pleasure, as no pleasure will ever make me happy or satisfied.

FARFARELLO. None indeed.

MALAMBRUNO. However, as the natural desire for happiness that is fixed in my spirit, would not equal any pleasure, it would not be real pleasure; and at the very time such pleasure would endure, I would still be unhappy.]

FARFARELLO. Non lascerai: perchè negli uomini e negli altri viventi la privazione della felicità, quantunque senza dolore e senza sciagura alcuna, e anche nel tempo di quelli che voi chiamate piaceri, importa infelicità espressa.

MALAMBRUNO. Tanto che dalla nascita insino alla morte, l'infelicità nostra non può cessare per ispazio, non che altro, di un solo istante.

FARFARELLO. Sì: cessa, sempre che dormite senza sognare, o che vi coglie uno sfinimento o altro che v'interrompa l'uso dei sensi.

[FARFARELLO. You would still be unhappy: because in human beings and in other living beings, the deprivation of happiness, albeit with no pain or disaster at all, and even at the very time you experience what you call pleasures, definitely entails unhappiness.

MALAMBRUNO. So much so that from birth to death, our unhappiness cannot cease even in the small space (duration) of an instant.

FARFARELLO. Yes, it does cease, provided you sleep without dreaming, or provided that you are so prostrated, that you lose your senses.]

MALAMBRUNO. Ma non mai però mentre sentiamo la nostra propria vita.

FARFARELLO. Non mai.

MALAMBRUNO. Di modo che, assolutamente parlando, il non vivere è sempre meglio del vivere.

FARFARELLO. Se la privazione dell'infelicità è semplicemente meglio dell'infelicità.

MALAMBRUNO. Dunque?

FARFARELLO. Dunque se ti pare di darmi l'anima prima del tempo, io sono qui pronto per portarmela.

[MALAMBRUNO. But never while we feel our own life.

FARFARELLO. Never indeed.

MALAMBRUNO. So much so that, absolutely, not living is always better than living.

FARFARELLO. If the deprivation of unhappiness is simply better than unhappiness.

MALAMBRUNO. What then?

FARFARELLO. Then, if you are willing to give me your soul before the due time, I am here, ready to take it away.]

It is remarkable how Leopardi is able to develop a philosophical argument in grim matters, while here and there relieving the gravity of what is being said by seasoning it with humour or irony.

## 5. The Malebranche, Including Farfarello, in Dante's *Inferno*

When Leopardi begins the *Dialogo di Marcambruno e Farfarello*, he enumerates names of demons from Italian literature (especially Dante's *Divine Comedy*), but then, which is humorous, he adds "or whatever your name", thus dismantling the assumption (familiar from magic) that knowing a name and uttering it gives the magician power over the referent:

MALAMBRUNO. Spiriti d'abisso, Farfarello, Ciriatto, Baconero, Astarotte, Alichino, e comunque siete chiamati; io vi scongiuro nel nome di Belzebù, e vi comando per la virtù dell'arte mia, che può sgangherare la luna, e inchiodare il sole a mezzo il cielo: venga uno di voi con libero comando del vostro principe e piena potestà di usare tutte le forze dell'inferno in mio servizio.

[MALAMBRUNO. O spirits of the abyss, Farfarello, Ciriatto, Baconero, Astarotte, Alichino, or whatever is your name; I adjure you in the name of Baalzebub, and order you by the virue of my magical art, which can wreck the moon, or nail the sun in the middle of the sky: let one of you come here, having been freely ordered to do so by your Prince [the Devil], and the full authority of using all forces of hell in my service.]

The demons Farfarello, Ciriatto, and Alichino are taken from Cantos 21–23 in Dante's *Inferno*; they escort Virgil and Dante. Baconero appears in the *Malmantile riacquistato* by Lorenzo Lippi. Astarotte is from Luigi Pulci's *Morgante*. The male Astarot is found in the *Chanson de Guillaume* (its name patterned after that of the Phoenician goddess Astarte).

The subnarrative of the Malebolge, the gang of demons in Cantos 21–23 of *Inferno* is lively, here and there with grotesque elements. At one point, a damned soul being tortured escapes provisionally, and two demons end up struggling with each other. As for Dante resorting to the name *Farfarello*, he apparently derived it from medieval lore.

As Dante's *Inferno* became popular also among the lower classes, the appearance of Farfarello there amounts to two things: (1) a demon with a folkish name from medieval lore had entered a literary work of high culture, yet accessible to the masses; (2) the presence of those demonic characters in Dante's *Inferno*, especially as this is in a subnarrative full of action, can be expected to have reinforced the cultural prominence of a demon called *Farfarello*, as well as the pictorial tradition of representing devils, especially groups of them.



Devils as painted by Giotto.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> [https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Diavoli\\_giotto.jpg](https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Diavoli_giotto.jpg)



Detail from the same painting by Giotto.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> [https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Diavoli\\_giotto\\_6.jpg](https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Diavoli_giotto_6.jpg)



Another detail from the same painting by Giotto.

The following are lines 67–139 (i.e., the final part) of Canto 21 of Dante's *Inferno*.<sup>13</sup> Farfarello is mentioned in line 123. I first reproduce Dante's original Old Italian, and then I supply my own translation:

<sup>13</sup> At one point in Canto 21 of *Inferno*, a devil carries a sinner on his shoulders. But in the religious iconography of the good shepherd, a shepherd carries a lamb on his shoulders. The roots of this are in the *Exodus* episode of the burning bush, which in early rabbinic homiletics is contextualised by relating that Moses arrived there while

Con quel furore e con quella tempesta  
Ch'escono i cani a dosso al poverello  
che di subito chiede ove s'arresta,

usciron quei di sotto al ponticello,  
e volser contra lui tutt'i runcigli;  
ma el gridò: «Nessun di voi sia fello!

Innanzi che l'uncin vostro mi pigli,  
traggasi avante l'un di voi che m'oda,  
e poi d'arrunciarmi si consigli».

Tutti gridaron: «Vada Malacoda!»;  
per ch'un si mosse — e li altri stetter fermi —  
e venne a lui dicendo: «Che li approda?».

«Credi tu, Malacoda, qui veder mi  
esser venuto», disse 'l mio maestro,  
«sicuro già da tutti vostri schermi,

sanza voler divino e fato destro?  
Lascian'andar, ché nel cielo è voluto  
ch'i' mostri altrui questo cammin silvestro».

Allor li fu l'orgoglio sì caduto,  
ch'e' si lasciò cascar l'uncino a' piedi,  
e disse a li altri: «Omai non sia feruto».

E 'l duca mio a me: «O tu che siedì  
tra li scheggion del ponte quatto quatto,  
sicuramente omai a me ti riedi».

Per ch'io mi mossi e a lui venni ratto;  
e i diavoli si fecer tutti avanti,  
sì ch'io temetti ch'ei tenesser patto;

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seeking a lamb gone astray; upon finding it, Moses carries it back to the fold on his shoulders, thus proving that he is fit for being a good shepherd also for people. Christian homiletics made much of the trope of the good shepherd (the Pastor Bonus), by applying it to Jesus. In his paper "Iconographic Parody in *Inferno* 21", Christopher Kleinhenz (1982) pointed out that there are several instances of Dante inveighing against people with secular or ecclesiastical power who were being a "bad shepherd". Kleinhenz also pointed out the iconographical tradition of the Pastor Bonus. In light of these two facts, Kleinhenz provided an interpretation of the devil who in Canto 21 of *Inferno*, hauls a sinner on his shoulders, and remarked that this is an antithesis to the gentleness of Jesus carrying the lost sheep back to the fold. Kleinhenz found other details in the context of what is being described by Dante in that infernal area, and interpreted them as anticipating and reinforcing his reading. Moreover, he also pointed out the contrast with Virgil being a "good shepherd" to Dante, the Wayfarer, carrying him at critical points.

However, Ryan (1982) argued that Dante in Canto 21 of *Inferno* was subtly signalling Virgil's shortcomings as guide. Ryan found this especially being the case as Virgil was being over-confident and naive *vis-à-vis* the demons, and as these stand for evil, *vis-à-vis* evil indeed. This was because Virgil was not baptised, so he lacked the knowledge of good and evil he would have had, had he been a Christian. The *American Dante Bibliography* for 1982 (edited by Anthony L. Pellegrini, in the journal *Dante Studies* of the next year) remarked about Ryan (1982) that "[t]he author concludes with a discussion of the special brand of humor the poet objectively incorporates into the canto: essentially the recognition of human dignity and the degradation or absence of it. Virgil in his over-confidence, and by his conduct belies his being drawn into the spirit of the demons' antics thus losing some of his own sensitivity to the dignity of rational nature with the result of his being further diminished in his adequacy as guide. Later, in the *Purgatorio*, it should come with less surprise that after being guided so far by Virgil, the wayfarer is rudely made aware by Beatrice that he has much further to go in his purgation". Cf. Lloyd Howard's (2010) *Virgil the Blind Guide*.



così vid'io già temer li fanti  
ch'uscivan patteggiati di Caprona,  
veggendo sé tra nemici cotanti.

I' m'accostai con tutta la persona  
lungo 'l mio duca, e non torceva li occhi  
da la sembianza lor ch'era non buona.

Ei chinavan li raffi e «Vuo' che 'l tocchi»,  
diceva l'un con l'altro, «in sul groppone?».  
E rispondien: «Sì, fa che gliel'accocchi».

Ma quel demonio che tenea sermone  
col duca mio, si volse tutto presto  
e disse: «Posa, posa, Scarmiglione!».

Poi disse a noi: «Più oltre andar per questo  
iscoglio non si può, però che giace  
tutto spezzato al fondo l'arco sesto.

E se l'andare avante pur vi piace,  
andatevene su per questa grotta;  
presso è un altro scoglio che via face.

Ier, più oltre cinqu'ore che quest'otta,  
mille dugento con sessanta sei  
anni compié che qui la via fu rotta.

Io mando verso là di questi miei  
a riguardar s'alcun se ne sciorina;  
gite con lor, che non saranno rei».

«Tra'ti avante, Alichino, e Calcabrina»,  
cominciò elli a dire, «e tu, Cagnazzo;  
e Barbariccia guidi la decina.

Libicocco vegn'oltre e Draghignazzo,  
Ciriatto sannuto e Graffiacane  
e Farfarello e Rubicante pazzo.

Cercate 'ntorno le boglienti pane;  
costor sian salvi infino a l'altro scheggio  
che tutto intero va sovra le tane».

«Omè, maestro, che è quel ch'i' veggio?»,  
diss'io, «deh, senza scorta andianci soli,  
se tu sa' ir; ch'i' per me non la cheggio.

Se tu se' sì accorto come suoli,  
non vedi tu ch'e' digrignan li denti  
e con le ciglia ne minaccian duoli?».

Ed elli a me: «Non vo' che tu paventi;  
lasciali digrignar pur a lor senno,  
ch'e' fanno ciò per li lessi dolenti».

Per l'argine sinistro volta dienno;  
ma prima avea ciascun la lingua stretta  
coi denti, verso lor duca, per cenno;

ed elli aveva del cul fatto trombetta.

The following is my translation of the foregoing:

With the fury and the storming  
By which dogs come out and attack a poor fellow  
Who is asking as soon as he stops,

Those ones [the devils] came out from under the little bridge,  
And turned against him [Virgil]<sup>14</sup> all the hooks;  
But he shouted: "Let none of you be a rebel!

Before the hook of one of you will take me,  
Let one of you come forth and listen to me,  
And afterwards let him consider whether to hook me".

They all shouted: "Let Malacoda [Badtail] go!"  
Therefore one of them moved — whereas the other ones stood still —  
And came to him [to Virgil], telling him: "What brings you here?"

"Dost thou think, Malacoda, that thou seest me here  
Having come", said my master,  
"Already safe from all your weapons,

Without this being divine will and propitious fate?  
Let us go, because in heaven it is desired  
That I show the other one this savage path".

Then his [Malacoda's] pride was so crestfallen,  
That he let his hook fall down at his feet,  
And he told to other ones: "As it is so, let him not be wounded".

And my guide [Virgil] to me: "O thou who sittest  
Between the crags of the bridge, squatting and quietly cowering,  
In full safety by now thou art able to come back to me".

Therefore I moved and came to him quickly;  
And all the devils came forward,  
So that I was afraid they were in agreement not to keep their word;

Likewise I had seen the infantrymen afraid,  
Who by agreement came out of Caprona [see an explanation below]  
Upon seeing themselves among so many enemies.

I approached with my entire body  
Side by side with my guide [Virgil], and did not avert my eyes  
From how they [the devils] appeared, which was other than good.

They bent down their hooks and "Does thou want me to touch him"  
They were telling each other "on his back?".  
And they replied: "Yes, see to it that thou strike him".

But that demon [Malacoda, Badtail] who was having a conversation  
With my guide [with Virgil], turned all his body immediately

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<sup>14</sup> The ancient Roman poet Virgil or Vergil is Dante's guide throughout Hell and Purgatory. Dante has Virgil reside in Limbo, because even though he was virtuous, he was never baptised (and he was not included in the Harrowing of Hell by Jesus, i.e., the transferral of several inmates of old from Hell to Paradise). Dante's Virgil is the subject of an article by Rachel Jacoff (2002).

And said: "Leave, leave [him alone], Scarmiglione! [Dishevelledchap!]"

Then he told us: "Going beyond along  
This crag is not possible, because it lays  
All broken on the bottom, the curve of the arch.

And if you would nevertheless like to go forward,  
Go up through this cave;  
Nearby there is another crag that serves as a road.

Yesterday, plus more than five hours than the present hour,  
One thousand two hundred sixty six  
Years it was that here the road was broken. [I.e., since the Passion.]

I am sending there some of my personnel  
In order to check whether anybody is getting loose;  
Go with them, as they are not going to misbehave".

"Come forth, Alichino [Bentwings], and Calcabrina [Threadfrost]",  
He began to say, "and thou, Cagnazzo [Evildog];  
And let Barbariccia [Curlybeard] guide all ten.

Libicocco, come further on, and Draghignazzo [Evillittledragon],  
Tusked Ciriatto [Swine] and Graffiacane [Scratchdog]  
And Farfarello and mad Rubicante [Rubicund].

Search ye around the boiling glue;  
Let these be safe until the next crag  
Which in its entirety goes over the burrows".<sup>15</sup>

"Poor me, o master, what is it that I am seeing?",  
said I, "Please, let us go there unescorted, alone,  
If thou knowest how we should go; as for me, I am not asking for it.

If thou art as sagacious as thou usually art,  
Doest thou not see that they are gnashing their teeth,  
And, frowning as they are, they threaten sorrows?"

And he to me: "I do not want thee to be scared;  
Let them gnash as they by their wisdom will,  
Because they are doing that for the boiled ones who are in pain".

They turned towards the left-hand side embankment;  
But before they did, they did each their tongue squeeze

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<sup>15</sup> Michael Palma (2003, p. 235), who rendered the name *Farfarello* with *Littlehoof*, has translated as follows: "Once I had seen a line of troops parade / out of Caprona amid their enemies. / Despite the pledge of truce, they looked afraid. // I stood beside my leader and tried to squeeze / against him, keeping the fiends under close watch, / for their looks were far from putting me at ease. // They aimed their hooks, and one said: 'Should I scratch / his butt for him?' and another one replied: / 'Sure, why not stick it to him in the notch?' // But the demon speaking with my leader cried / aloud as he turned around to face them: 'No! / At ease here, tangletop, put your hook aside'. // Then he said to us: 'It's impossible to go / along this crag, for the sixth arch is long gone. / It's lying in pieces in the pit below. // But if it is still your pleasure to go on, / I know another way that you can take. / Nearby is a spur that you can cross upon. // About five hours from now, it's going to make / twelve hundred and sixty-six years and one day / since the road was broken by a mighty quake. // I was about to send a squad that way / to see if anyone's drying out in the air. / You'll be safe with them'. And then he turned to say: // 'Step forward, Tramplefrost, and Droopwing there. / And Baddog, I want you to join the hunt. / Let Spikebeard lead the ten. And let that pair // Lusthoney and Dragonsnout step to the front, / and Pigface with the tusks, and Scratchbith too, / and Littlehoof and crazy Rubicant. / Search round the edges of the boiling glue, / get these two safely to the next precipice / that bridges all the ditches and runs clear through".

With their teeth, towards their commander, by way of beckoning;

And he of his backside made a trumpet.

Concerning Caprona, a gloss by Jacopo Alighieri, Dante's third-born son who wrote a commentary to *Inferno*, explains this as follows (the text is given according to the Piccini edition of 1915):

Alcuna tenuta del contado di Pisa, nominata Caprona, per alcun tempo per Fiorentini a patti si prese, securando le persone de' fanti che tenuta l'aveano, della quale, fidati, partendosi, e veggendosi tra tanti nimici, ciascuno ne' sembianti temenza mostrava, la quale per assempro della presente qui figurativamente si piglia, veggendo gli atti e la moltitudine di figurati presenti demoni.

[An estate of Pisa's countryside, called Caprona, for was time was taken by agreement by the Florentines, giving assurance of personal safety to the infantrymen who had held it. These relied on this, and left, but upon seeing themselves among so many enemies, they each displayed fear in how they looked. By way of example, this is taken as a similitude of the present situation, at the sight of the actions and multitude of demons who are present and are being described.]

## 6. The *farfarelli* in the Memoirs of a Lombard Visitor to Sicily: Count Rezzonico della Torre's Reminiscing about the Sculpted Monsters of the Villa of Palagonia in Bagheria near Palermo

A form of the name *Farfarello* appears in a book by Giuseppe Pitrè, in the last few pages of Vol. 1 of his *La vita in Palermo cento e più anni fa*, within his *opera omnia* (Pitrè 1944 [1904]). The passage where that form of *Farfarello* appears is inside a quotation from memoirs in Italian, and the word is in the plural, *farfarelli*, with a lower-case initial because it is used as a common name. The sense is apparently 'spiteful elves'. This is in relation to a visit that Carlo Gastone, Count Rezzonico della Torre, an erudite whose background was in Lombardy (he was born in Como in 1742, but was raised in Parma)<sup>16</sup> and who was visiting Sicily, made on 19 August 1793 to the town of Bagheria in the company of the Praetor of Palermo (the Duke of Cannizzaro), of the Prince of Grammonte (a brother-in-law of Cannizzaro), and of the Duke Calvello. Rezzonico died in Naples in 1796. In the 17th and 18th centuries, Bagheria had become a suburb for the aristocracy of Palermo, who had there villas sometimes more impressive than the palaces they had in Palermo.

Rezzonico contrasted the Atticism of the much praised villa of Valguarnera, to the bizarre, maligned, (materially rather than spiritually) haunted villa of Palagonia. Pitrè remarked that Rezzonico must have been aware of the negative, sometimes horrified response to the villa of Palagonia (and to its sculpted monsters) by several visitors. One of these was Wolfgang Goethe, who visited it in 1787, and of whose visit Cannizzaro but apparently not Rezzonico was aware. Cannizzaro remembered he had been heard more than once from the Vice-Roy of Sicily, Caramanico, concerning the German poet and naturalist (unnamed, but this was Goethe) who was Caramanico's guest for lunch at the villa of Palagonia, and how that guest had uttered an indignant and horrified appreciation of that villa. In a footnote, Pitrè remarks that Goethe wrote down his impressions in his *Italianische Reise* in the letter of 9 April 1787, but that this work had not been published earlier than 1816–1817.

Pitrè (in the last few pages of Vol. 1 of his *La vita in Palermo cento e più anni fa*) quoted Rezzonico as having written in his *Viaggio della Sicilia e di Malta*, Vol. 1, p. 45:

<sup>16</sup> Rezzonico was exiled from Parma in 1790 because of charges made against him in Rome by Cagliostro, as though Rezzonico was an acolyte of Cagliostro Masonic Egyptian rite. Pope Pius VI tried to protect Rezzonico.

Sembravami il castello di Circe o di qualche fata, che di lemuri, di larve, di farfarelli popolando loggie e tetti ed archi e viali godesse atterrire, deludere, affascinare i pellegrini con istrani ludibrij infernali, ed apparenze grottesche di uomini, di animali e di mostri insieme accoppiati e misti. Qui vedi sopra un sol corpo annestate più teste umane e ferine, ciclopi non solo triocoli ma sestocoli, orecchie d'asino, di capra, di cinghiale e tempie d'uomini affisse, demoni che abbracciano streghe o suonano violoni, e vanno imbaccuccate di larghe parrucche e di folte ricciaje anuti, cercopitechi, policefali, gerioni e pagodi indiani

It seemed to me the castle of Circe or of some fairy, who by means of lemurs, larvae, and farfarelli peopling loggias, and roofs, and arches, and tree-lines alleys, enjoyed terrifying, delude, fascinate visitors with strange infernal pranks, and grotesque appearances of humans beings, of animals and of monsters, both coupled and mixed. Here you see, on the very same body, grafted several human and beastly heads, Cyclopes both three-eyed and six-eyed, and attached the ears a donkey, of a goat, of a boar, and the temples of a human head, demons who embrace witches or play the violone, and one finds, sporting wide wigs and dense curly heads of hair, anuti, cercipithecii, polycephalous beings, geryons,<sup>17</sup> and Indian pagodas.

After that quotation, Pitrè added:

E se hai forza di resistere, vedi un uomo che cammina su due teste e sopra un piede, con occhi sul collo; e una testa collocata a mezzo lo stomaco, e una testa di toro sul corpo di un uomo appoggiantesi sulla coda d'un pesce.

And if you have the strength to stand it, you see a man who walks on two heads with one foot above, and with eyes on the neck; and a head positioned in the middle of the belly, and the head of a bull on the body of a man who leans on the tail of a fish.

Farfarello appears as a little devil in Trilussa's poem "Ninna nanna della guerra" ("War Lullaby"), of 1914.

## 7. Farfareddu Torturing the Unfaithful Wife of Virgil the Magician

Giuseppe Pitrè was born on 21 December 1841 in Palermo, and died there on 1 April 1916. He was a medical doctor, and became famous as a man of letters. As a philologist, he concerned himself with variation among Sicilian dialects. He also was concerned with folkloric texts, and is indeed known as Sicily's greatest folklorist ever. He also authored short stories and fables. He is also credited with providing inspiration to two well-known authors of fiction, Luigi Capuana and Giovanni Verga (Italy's greatest writer in the school of Verismo, i.e., naturalism). Giuseppe Pitrè's collection of Sicilian folktales *Fiabe novelle e racconti popolari siciliani* comprises four volumes (1870–1913).

In just a few of those Sicilian folktales, one comes across the character of the demon Farfareddu. One of those folktales is *Lu Magu Virgillu*, a version of the medieval and Renaissance legend which made of the Poet Virgil a powerful wizard (probably because his *Aeneid* includes a visit of Aeneas to the netherworld).<sup>18</sup> In Vol. 2 of Giuseppe Pitrè's *Fiabe novelle e racconti popolari siciliani*, Tale 53 is *Lu Magu Virgillu* (Virgil the Wizard).

<sup>17</sup> In Dante's *Inferno*, the mythological Geryon, *Gerione*, is a snake-bodied, scorpion-tailed, human-headed monster with two hairy forelegs (or rather arms), a stinking monster being the allegory of fraud (*Inferno* 17.1–17), and riding on whose back Dante and Virgil descend into the Malebolge, where the souls of the fraudulent are tormented. See in the Appendix below.

<sup>18</sup> There are a number of reasons Virgil came to be considered, in Christian times, to have been a pagan prophet relevant to the first Advent (as he was believed to have announced it), but quite possibly, around Naples Virgil, who is reputed to have been buried there, was probably already considered a kind of prophet, a person with access to the divine realm, because of what he related in the *Aeneid* about the underworld, which the protagonist,

That Sicilian tale (as told in Borgetto by Ninfa Lobaido to Salomone-Marino) begins by relating that Virgil had a beautiful yet terrible wife. Their relations change once he becomes a wizard (on a whim, he even makes her mate with Farfareddu: see the added underlining):

Accussì Virgillu addivintau magu di li cchiù putirusi, e cu tri circuli e 'na chiamata, li diavulu curriànu scantatizzi 'mpressu d'iddu, e li custringia di notti e di jornu, ed ora cci facia fari 'na cosa, ora 'n'atra, ca travagghiavanu comu tanti cani. Ma la cchiù forti fatia cci la dava cu sò mughieri, ca prima avia fattu dispirari ad iddu, e quasi ca cci niscianu li sènzii, e ora iddu facia firriari a idda a lu tornu. Ora cci dava pri maritu a Farfareddu, ca la sgranfugnava, cci jittava 'na favàra di sùrfaru e focu e la lassava menza arrustuta a lu lettu; ora cci dava a lu Capu Cifaru, ca a forza di cudati e scurnuna la facia tutta pirtusa e pustemi; ora la juncia cu Carnazza, ca la mantaciava e la facia unciari comu un utru, e poi *tiritimpiti e tiritampiti!* 'nsumma a dd'affritta mughieri nun cci fici vidiri cchiù un'ummira di beni. Ma, signuri, idda si miritava chissu ed àutru; e tuttu chiddu chi cci fici sò maritu nun si pò diri nè spijari, ca macari a li stissi diavuli cci paria piatusa; ma avianu a siquìri li cumanni di lu magu Virgillu, ca cu la sò virga putenti li custringia; e cu' havi virga 'n manu si jetta allura a l'abuso di putiri.

That is to say:

This way, Virgil became a wizard among the most powerful, and by his making three circles and calling out, the devils would come running, fearfully, to him, and he compelled them by night and by daytime, and now he would have them do one thing, now another thing, so they worked as though they were as many dogs. But the hardest toil, he assigned it involving his wife, who earlier on used to make him despair, and would almost make him go crazy, whereas now her husband was troubling her as though she was a horse that runs round the riding-ground. Now he would make Farfareddu into her husband, and Farfareddu would scratch her horribly, pour on her sulphur and fire, and leave her half roasted in bed. Now he [Virgil] would give her to Capu Cifaru [Lucifer the Boss], who would strike her with his tail and gore her with his horns,<sup>19</sup> and would leave her full of holes and wounds. Now he would join her to (i.e., made her mate with) Carnazza [another devil], who would blow into her and inflate her like a wineskin, and then would strike her with blows as though she was a drum. Summing it up, this afflicted wife, he [Virgil] would have experience any good at all any more. But, Sirs, she deserved this and more; and everything that her husband did to her can be neither related nor explained, because it may be that the devils themselves found her pitiable; but they had to obey the orders of Virgil the wizard, who with his powerful magic wand was compelling them; and having a magic wand in one's hand is conducive to abusing one's power.

Importantly, the storyteller focused on the terrible fate of a wife who had violated social norms. The Virgil legend is complex, and yet, the lady who related the tale in Sicilian was almost entirely interested in the fate of Virgil's wife. There is no humour in that version; it is just horrific.

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the Trojan fugitive Aeneas, supposedly visited by entering it from a point in the region of Naples. A legend of Virgil the Wizard developed.

<sup>19</sup> There is probably neither a phylogenetic relation nor a typologically kinship of the idea to the following, but nevertheless consider an ancient aetiology given by Ovid for a rite at the Roman festival of the Lupercalia, carried out by the naked male officiants (the Luperci, or wolf-men) in February, which used to be the last month of the Roman calendar. Robert Schilling explains (2005, p. 5531, his brackets, my braces): "When the Luperci ran around the Palatine in the midst of a crowd of people, the act had a purifying purpose that Varro (*De lingua Latina* 6.34) sums up thus: '[in February] the people are purified [*februatur*], insofar as the old fortress on the Palatine was circled by nude Luperci for purposes of lustration [*lustratur*]'. This ceremony began with a sacrifice in the grotto of Lupercal, located at the southwest corner of the Palatine (Plutarch, *Romulus* 21.5); the offering was a she-goat (Ovid, *Fasti* 2.361; see also Plutarch, *Romulus* 21.6) or a he-goat (Servius, *Ad Aeneidem* 8.343). During their run, they would carry lashes, called *februa*, made from hides of she-goats or of he-goats (Paulus-Festus, op. cit. {i.e., ed. Lindsay, 1913}, p. 76 L.). With these lashes they would strike the spectators, especially women, 'in order to ensure their fertility' (Servius, *Ad Aeneidem* 8.343). Ovid (*Fasti* 2.441) proposes a strange etiology for this rite: it would be the application (discovered by an 'Etruscan augur') of an order from Juno, 'Let a sacred he-goat . . . penetrate Italian mothers' ('*Italidas matres . . . sacer hircusi-nito*')."

One chilling aspect of the Sicilian tale of Virgil the Wizard as published by Pitrè is that the storyteller was a woman in Borgetto, and that she went the extra mile not only describing how Virgil mistreated his wife, but also in trying to justify this, by claiming that Virgil's wife "deserved this and more" (presumably, for being an adulteress). Then however the storyteller conceded that it was an abuse of power on Virgil's part, and that the devils themselves may have been pitied his wife, even though they carried out his orders. The thing is, the entire career of Virgil according to the version published by Pitrè is about Virgil abusing his wife horrifically. That is the middle part of the Sicilian folktale of Virgil the Wizard. The first part is about his beginnings as a long-suffering, cuckolded husband and about his training, whereas the final part is about Virgil dying a natural death, then his soul being unable to continue exercising power over the devils, because death deprived him of his magic wand.

The European legend of Virgil the Wizard made much instead of his travels and adventures. See for example Maslen (2011). Let us consider here just how Maslen (2011, pp. 39–40) summarises the last chapter of *Virgilius* (the brackets are Maslen's own, but the ellipsis at the end is mine):

In the last chapter of the book *Virgilius* attempts to rejuvenate himself, using the method by which Medea promised to rejuvenate King Pelias. He tells his servant to chop him to bits and stow them away in a barrel, then carefully tend a lamp hanging over the barrel for nine full days, after which the mage will be reborn as a beardless youth. Unfortunately, the Roman Emperor suspects the servant of having murdered his master and executes him before the nine days are over:

Than sawe the Emperoure and all his folke a naked chylde .iii. tymes rennyge a boute the barell saynge the wordes. Cursed be the tyme that ye cam ever here | and with those wordes vanysshed the chylde a waye and was never sene a geyne and thus abyd Virgilius in the barell deed [i.e. dead]. (sig. F3<sup>r</sup>)

Ironically, given his status as the Emperor's surveillance expert, *Virgilius* dies as a result of the Emperor's eagerness to keep him under surveillance, which leads the dictator to break into his castle and stab his research assistant. *Virgilius* the spy is killed by an aggressive act of espionage; and his lifelong struggle to get the better of the supreme imperial authority — which began with a campaign to get back his father's lands in Rome, and later saw *Virgilius* challenge the Emperor's supremacy by setting up a rival metropolis — ends with power being restored to the Emperor once again, albeit with the minor compensation that the latter never gets hold of the magician's fabulous wealth, which remains secreted in an undiscovered cellar.

This scholar's fantasy ends, then, by reinstating the political status quo, thus setting a precedent for the ultimate submission of magicians to their political masters, and the eventual entrapment of itinerant sorcerers, which is a regular feature of magical jest-books from the *Faustbuch* to *Fortunatus*. The return of the status quo is reinforced by the effacement of the wonders created with the help of the black arts. A traveller-magician builds many monuments but leaves few behind. The palace *Virgilius* built for the Emperor exists no longer. Neither do the surveillance statues he set up on the Capitol, or the lighting system he devised for Rome, or the airy bridge with which he abducted the soldan's daughter, or his lie-detecting serpent. At each stage of the narrative the reader is invited to gawp like a tourist at *Virgilius*'s achievements in Rome and Naples; but should we wish to retrace his footsteps like a secular pilgrim, we shall be disappointed. All that remains of the magic that founded Naples is an egg suspended in a steeple, and the myth that the city will fall if the egg should break.

In fact, Naples' most impressive and oldest castle (a fortress), Castel dell'Ovo, (literally, "Egg Castle") owes that legend its name (which in its Latin form, is *castrum Ovi*). An Italian version of the legend of Virgil the Wizard calls that castle "Castel marino" ("quell'ovo pendevano tutti li facti e la fortuna del Castel Marino"), as Castel dell'Ovo is on the seashore, actually on an islet now joined to the mainland. It already was a Norman-held fortress, and became a fortified castle under the Angevin dynasty of the Kingdom of Naples. The detail concerning the egg in Virgil's legend as current in Naples has it that either the egg was placed inside an iron cage that Virgil had immured in a secret niche in the foundations of the castle,

or the egg was placed in a carafe of costly crystal, and the carafe was sealed and hidden in the walls of the castle. In any case, Virgil is claimed to have prophesied that upon the egg being broken, the entire city of Naples would crumble. The castle itself partly crumbled during the reign of Queen Joan I, because an arch underlying it had crumbled; she calmed the popular panic by claiming on oath that she had replaced Virgil's egg.



Virgil's supposed tomb in Posillipo. Leopardi underwent reburial in the same park in Naples.



**8. Farfareddu in Another Sicilian Folktale, "Maumettu":  
A Senior Demon Proposes to Send to Earth his Clever  
Little Brother and Promote him upon his Return**

The demon Farfareddu is also a character in a Sicilian folktale that tries to explain why Islam was able to spread quickly and maintain itself, demographically, as a rival of Christianity in that they both are world religions. Rather than focus on Muhammad during his lifespan in the earthly life, the Sicilian folktale we consider in this section is mainly about Muhammad before and after that parenthesis. The bulk of the narrative is a conversation among devils in Hell, concerned with how to remedy to the reduced intake of damned souls since Jesus' appearance and success in attracting believers. The devil *Farfareddu* (*Farfareddu* is a Sicilian form of Italian *Farfarello*) tells the other devils that, should Lucifer agree, they should recruit his brother, Maumettu, send him to earth as a human, who is really clever, and afterwards, when he is back, reward him with promotion to their own status as tormentors of souls in Hell. That is to say, the success of the rival religion is explained out as though it came about by magical means: supernatural means, but instead of positive ones, quite negative ones. There is some humour, in that Farfareddu is cast into the situation of a man who tries to obtain social promotion for his younger brother; presumably the audience would have found that social situation familiar.

This folktale appears as Tale 206 in Vol. 4 of Giuseppe Pitrè's four-volume collection *Fiabe novelle e racconti popolari siciliani*, first published in 1870–1913.



Giuseppe Pitrè.



Salvatore Salomone-Marino.

This tale is different from more familiar anti-hagiographic claims in pre-modern European lore about Muhammad. The prominent Italianist and folklorist Alessandro D'Ancona authored *La leggenda di Maometto in Occidente* (1889); a current edition exists, edited by Andrea Borruso (D'Ancona 1994). The Sicilian text, along with Pitrè's notes, is reproduced below, and followed with my English translation.

**CCVI.  
Maumettu.**

'Nca si cunta e si ricunta a lor signuri ca un tempu li diavuli ficiru cuncùmiu a lu 'nfern<sup>46</sup> e dicianu: — «Ora viditi! cu sta vinuta di la Misá tutti cùrrinu pri iddu, e a nui nni vennu a mancarì l'armi.<sup>47</sup> Chi si fa?» — «Nenti, dici Farfareddu (unu di li diavuli), lassàti fari a mia (dici), ca lu rimèddiu cc'è.» — «E comu?» — «'Nca aviti a sapiri ca haju un frati ca si chiama Maumettu, ca stà 'nta lu munnu suttanu, ca è veru abilitusu,<sup>48</sup> ed è 'na pena ca nun l'avemu ccà cu nui, cà nni darìa veru ajutu. Eu (dici), si tantu Lucifaru voli, lu vaju a chiamu, e lu mannamu a lu munnu, e po' penza iddu a tutti cosi, ca l'armu cci abbasta: ma cu pattu ca sùbbitu chi torna l'avemu a situari ccà cu nui, cu aviri tutta la putenza chi avemu nui.» — «Bona, bona! (dicinu li diavuli), nni piaci. Cci sia cuncessu, avillu puru cu nui.»

Accussì ficiru. Maumettu vinni a stu munnu e a forza di magariá e arti arbòlica<sup>49</sup> nun vi pozzu diri lu chiddu chi fici e chi uprau. Basta, pr'abbriviari lu cuntù, si misi tuttu contra la liggi di Diu e fici 'na liggi a parti, ca è la liggi chi si chiama di Maumettu, e misi a cògghiri armiceddi<sup>50</sup> pri lu sò 'nfern<sup>u</sup>. Quannu cci parsi a iddu ca la ricòta era bona,<sup>51</sup> chi fa? lassa a li so' 'nfami ministri a fari l'opira sua, sempri cu 'ngannu e arti arbòlica, e iddu si nn'ha jutu cu sò frati Farfareddu e cu Lucifaru a marturiari l'armi addannati.

Vonnu diri ca lu sò corpu è misu 'nta 'na càscia di ferru 'nta 'na Chiesa pagana; e sta càscia di ferru stà 'ntra l'aria, tinuta a forza di calamiti cuncignati di li diavuli, pri nun la tucari nuddu mai.

E cu l'ha dittu e cu' l'ha fattu diri  
Di mala morti nun pozza muriri.

*Borgetto.*<sup>52</sup>

46 Fecero convegno nell'inferno.

47 *Armi*, anime.

48 Che è veramente pieno d'abilità.

49 *Arti arbòlica*, arte diabolica; voci che ricorrono pure nel *Magu Virgillu*, n. LIII di questa raccolta, vol. II, pag. 13, nota 2 [nota 49 nell'edizione elettronica Manuzio].

In detta fiaba è pure un convegno di demonii all'inferno.

50 E mise a raccogliere anime (*armiceddi*, plur. femm., dimin. di *arma*, anima).

51 Quando a lui parve che la raccolta fosse veramente abbondante.

52 Raccontata al Salomone-Marino da Giuseppa Giambrone.

[206. Mahomet

Here it is told and related to you, Sirs, that once upon a time, the devils convened in Hell and said: "Just look! Now that the Messiah has come, everybody runs to him, and we have a dearth of souls. Whar are we to do?" "Nothing", said Farfareddu/Farfarello (one of those devils), "Leave it me", he said, "as there is a remedy". "How that?" "You must know that I have a brother whose name is Maumettu/Muhammad, and who stays in the world beneath, but who is quite clever, and it's a pity that we don't have him here with us, and he would give us real help. I", Farfareddu said, "if Lucifer agrees, would go and call him, then we'd send him into the world, and afterwards he would see to it that everything is done properly, and we'd have enough souls. But on condition that as soon as he comes back, we's have to place him here with us, with all the power that we have". "A good idea", the devils said, "We like it. All right, let us have him here with us".

This is what they did. Maumettu/Muhammad was born into this world, and made such use of magic and diabolic arts, that I cannot tell you what he did or operated. Suffice it, to keep the tale short, that he placed himself entirely against the law of God, and made a separate law, which is the law called of Maumettu, and he began collecting souls for his Hell. When he deemed the collection abundant, what did he? He left it to his infamous ministers to carry out his work, always by deception and diabolic arts. As to himself, he went with his brother Farfareddu and with Lucifer to torment the damned souls.

I also want to say that his body is placed inside an iron bier inside a pagan church; and this iron bier is in mid-air, kept there by means of magnets devised by the devils, so nobody would ever touch it.

Let the one who relates it or had it related  
Never come to a bad death.

From Borgetto [told to Salomone-Marino by  
Giuseppa Giambrone]

In this folktale, Hell sets goals in response to diminished intake of damned souls, and one devil negotiates in particular, Farfareddu, his brother's services and resulting promotion at a devils' meeting. One can see that that in this instance of anti-hagiography, the life of the biographee is disregarded, and replaced with a supposed supernatural prequel, and then a sequel, of the biographee's life on earth. The biographee is not one: he is a non-biographee, in the particular kind of anti-biography represented by the Sicilian folktale we have considered in this section.

## 9. Envoi

In this journal issue, this editorial contribution follows Roberta Cauchi Santoro's article "'Ridendo dei nostri mali, trovo qualche conforto': Giacomo Leopardi's Humour". We have said more about Giacomo Leopardi, and also have further developed a topic Cauchi Santoro touched upon briefly: Giacomo Leopardi's "Dialogo di Malambruno e di Farfarello" from the *Operette Morali*.

After introducing Giacomo Leopardi to such readers who may be unfamiliar with him, we turned to his *Operette Morali* of 1824–1832, and exemplified some features of theirs on *Canticle of the Wild Cock*: Leopardi was somewhat playful and humorous in how he displayed erudition by enumerating concepts that were not necessarily relevant. Leopardi had been inspired by Buxtorf's *Lexicon*. We have considered both Jewish and Islamic lore in the background of the claims about a huge, cosmic cock.

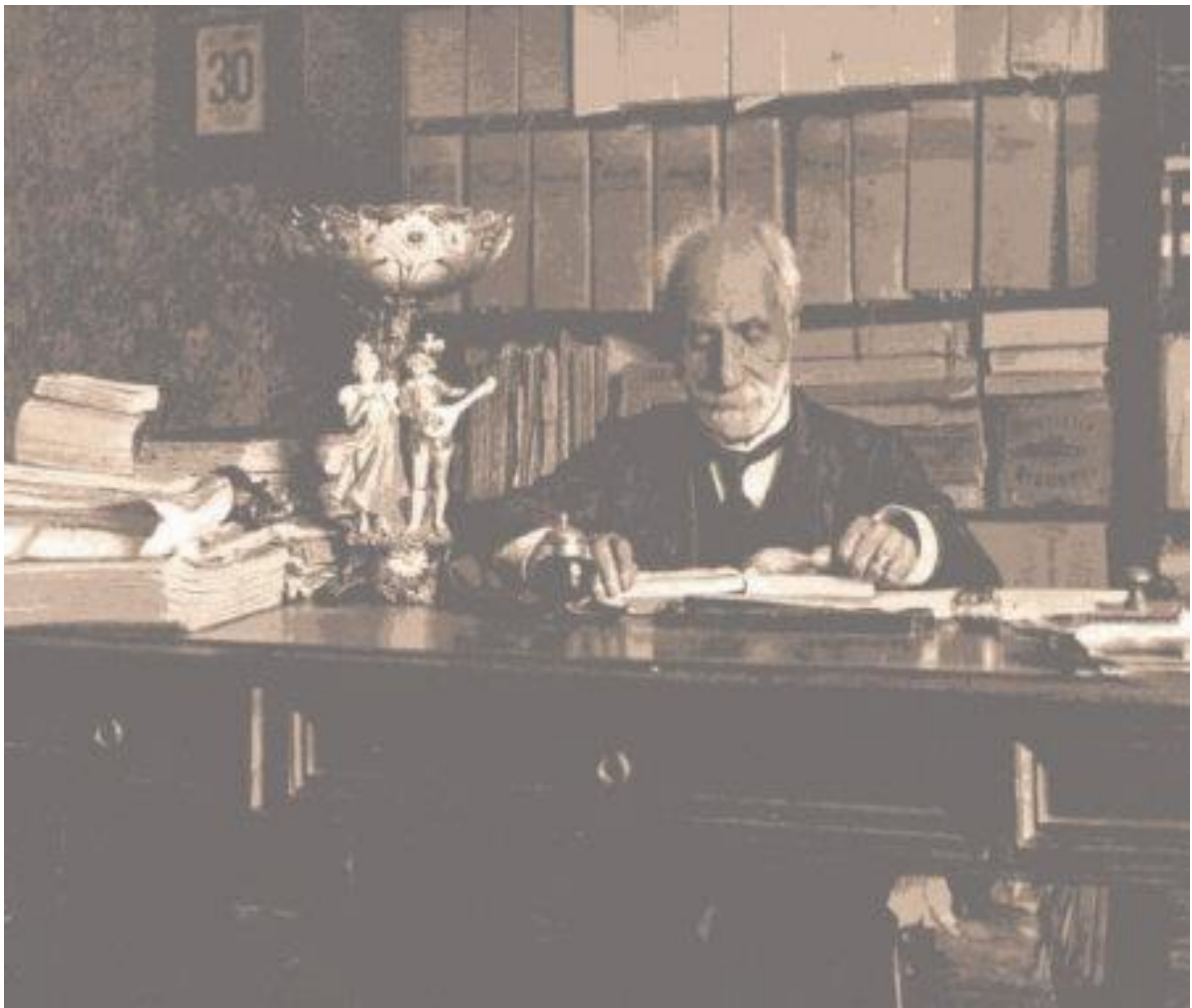
Next, we turned to reproducing in full and translating Leopardi's dialogue of the wizard Malambruno and the devil Farfarello. We saw how Leopardi was able to develop grim philosophical considerations, and yet provide some relief by resorting to a fantasy setting and by sprinkling humour or irony here and there.

We reproduced and translated a long passage from Dante's *Inferno*, concerning Virgil rejecting the threats made against him and Dante, his *protégé*, by a gang of demons, one of these being Farfarello, and other two likewise appearing at the beginning of Leopardi's dialogue of Marcambruno and Farfarello. Leopardi's humour while beginning the dialogue with an invocation of devils enumerated by name, by then refuting the notion that it is essential, for a magician, to utter the name of the recipients of his invocation or adjuration, so that he may exercise power over them. In fact, marcamburuno adds: "or whatever your names".

We turned to other occurrences of *farfarello*, *Farfarello*, and (in Sicilian folktales) *Farfareddu*. We considered a passage from the erudite Count Rezzonico della Torre's memoirs of his voyage to Sicily, at a time when he had been exiled from Parma, and had very few years to live. He resorted to the term *farfarello* while describing the sculpted monsters of the Villa of Palagonia in Bagheria near Palermo.

We completed this survey of occurrences of *farfarello* or *Farfareddu*, by considering two folktales published by Giuseppe Pitrè, namely, a tale about how Virgil the Wizard resorted to devils including *Farfareddu* in order to punish horrifically his unfaithful wife, and an anti-hagiographic tale which tried to explain out the demographic spread of a rival world religion, by replacing the biography of its founder with what supposedly happened before his birth and after his demise.

In that tale, there is a humorous element, in that *Farfareddu* behaves like a man who tries to obtain a promotion for his younger brother, by describing him as being quite clever, offering his services, and making it a condition of such employment that the prospective employee be promoted after the completion of his task. The transposition of such a social situation that could be expected to occur in real life, into a meeting of senior staff in Hell in order to find a remedy for the decrease in intake of damned souls, supposedly makes the aetiological (explanatory) tale more "cogent", but this is also an element of humour, owing to the startling juxtaposition of the netherworld and a pattern of social negotiation familiar from real life.



Two photographs of Giuseppe Pitrè.



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  5. Gladiators as an allegory for Cain and Abel, in early rabbinic problematising of theodicy
  6. The *venationes* in a Jewish eschatological vision, and a possible Christian parallel

7. Matching the eschatological *venationes* to elements in the *Liber spectaculorum*
8. Other early rabbinic references to the arena games
9. Setting the bear upon Joseph: A metaphor from the arena?

10. Envoi

Appendix: A. Augustus' crocodile coins

B. Matches in the arena, vs. matches in myth and allegory: Which animal types?

C. Bird-headed humans in different European contexts

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