O'Brien, Catherine. "Introduction." : . London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018. 1–12. *Bloomsbury Collections*. Web. 26 Apr. 2023. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781350003309.0005>>.

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Introduction

A statue of a Madonna and Child in a New York kitchen appears in the opening shot of Martin Scorsese's *Who's That Knocking at My Door* (1967–9); and the final image of *Silence* (2016) is of a handmade crucifix glowing in the flames of a crematory fire in seventeenth-century Japan. It is inarguable that there is a Catholic dimension to Scorsese's filmography that can be traced from the Marian icon in his first full-length feature right through to his movie about Jesuit priests that was released around fifty years later. With due respect paid to the scale of the task, the following chapters engage with that particular cinematic trajectory and take seriously the oft-quoted words of the director himself: 'My whole life has been movies and religion. That's it. Nothing else.'

Scorsese was born in 1942, educated by the Sisters of Charity and received his religious instruction before the mood of *aggiornamento* that was heralded by Pope John XXIII's instigation of Vatican II (the Second Vatican Council of 1962–5), which was an effort to modernize the Catholic Church. Indeed, religion(s) played a role in the young boy's life, even down to the fact that his father Charles earned pragmatic money by lighting the stoves for his Jewish neighbours on the Sabbath. Although a cradle Catholic himself, Scorsese does not recall his parents being particularly devout, although he once revealed that 'there were cardinals, way back when' on his mother's side of the family (in Wilson 2011: 91). However, he clarifies that his mother and father 'were working out how one lives a good life on a day-to-day, hour-to-hour basis, with responsibilities, and obligations and decency' (in Martin 2016).

Many critics muse over the detail that Scorsese was an altar boy at St Patrick's Old Cathedral on Mott Street – the first Catholic cathedral for the diocese of New York (and now a basilica) – that was only one block away from his family's home in Little Italy. In those days the Mass was in Latin and the altar server recited the responses. Fr Principe, a diocesan priest whose influence on the young Martin Scorsese is repeatedly acknowledged by the director himself, once explained the overwhelming effect of the dramatic liturgy on his protégé 'in this very large church with this absolutely mind-boggling, beautiful sanctuary,

with these magnificent statues and magnificent organ' (in Wernblad 2011: 18). Scorsese talks about his interest in the drama of Holy Week, which he would eventually strive to capture in *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988); and he has now adapted the novel *Silence* by Shusaku Endo (1923–96), a writer who has been characterized as 'a Holy Saturday author describing the darkness of waiting for Easter light to break into our world' (Fujimura 2016). Before the young Scorsese was 'discharged' from his duties (reportedly because he was late for Mass), he served at a number of funerals, and he evidently gained an early introduction to the rituals of death – a memory that he incorporates into *The Departed* (2006) when the young Colin Sullivan (Conor Donovan) swings the thurible of incense during a Requiem Mass.

Much is also made of Scorsese's one year in the Minor Seminary on 86th Street in the Archdiocese of New York, when he felt that he had the calling to become a Catholic priest, although he obviously found that he did not have a traditional religious vocation – a change of heart (as he readily admits) that was provoked by a growing interest in the female sex. As a result of his low grades, Scorsese was not admitted to Fordham (the Jesuit institution) but found a place to study Liberal Arts at New York University; and, enthused by one of the tutors called Haig Manoogian, he chose to focus on cinema. But filmmaking can be regarded as a vocation as well as an industry, and it is one to which Scorsese has dedicated his life. He famously admitted: 'I guess the passion I had for religion wound up mixed with film, and now, as an artist, in a way, I'm both gangster and priest' (in Kelly 1996: 31) and he has expressed a 'fascination, not necessarily with the Church, but with the teachings and trying to understand what the teachings are about' (in Kakutani 1999: 103).

Scorsese has remarked on his adherence to Catholicism in his younger days: 'Well, I did believe it, every word of it. I wouldn't touch meat on Friday, and I believed I would go to hell if I missed Mass on Sunday' (in Flatley 1999: 5). Discussing his faith during conversations that accompanied the release of *Silence*, he commented: 'I trusted the church, because it made sense, what they preached, what they taught. I understood that there's another way to think, outside the closed, hidden, frightened, tough world I grew up in' (in Elie 2016).

However, Scorsese was a young man at a time that the Catholic Church was 'struggling though an agonized period of growth and transition' (Greeley 1967: 295). Vatican II resulted in a number of key constitutional documents (see Tanner 2012) and, for the Catholic in the pew, there were changes to the liturgy that were coming into force at the same time as American society was

experiencing the Sexual Revolution and the war in Vietnam. Although Scorsese stopped being 'a regular churchgoer' in the 1960s, he stated in an interview in 2016 with the Jesuit journal *La Civiltà Cattolica*:

I believe in the tenets of Catholicism. I'm not a doctor of the church. I'm not a theologian who could argue the Trinity. I'm certainly not interested in the politics of the institution. ... But the idea of the Resurrection, the idea of the Incarnation, the powerful message of compassion and love – that's the key. The sacraments, if you are allowed to take them, to experience them, help you stay close to God. (In Spadaro 2016)

In 1966, Scorsese wrote a screenplay called *Jerusalem, Jerusalem!* that begins with a quotation from Robert Bresson's *Diary of a Country Priest* (1951): 'God is not a torturer. ... He only wants us to be merciful with ourselves' and involves a group of eighteen-year-olds, including one called J.R. (Scorsese's alter ego) who appears in *Who's That Knocking at My Door* and then reappears renamed Charlie (both roles played by Harvey Keitel) in *Mean Streets* (1973). The teenagers go on a three-day Catholic retreat (as Scorsese himself did) run by Jesuit priests – thereby introducing a reference to the Society of Jesus, founded by St Ignatius Loyola, in this early artistic effort that will reach its apogee in *Silence*. As Richard McBrien explains, 'The Catholic sacramental vision "sees" God in all things (St. Ignatius Loyola): other people, communities, movements, events, places, objects, the environment, the world at large, the whole cosmos' (1994: 9); and many critics of Scorsese have identified an immanentist and analogical sensibility in his films (see, for example, Blake 2000: 30–1; and Casillo 2006: xii) and the kind of approach that tends 'to emphasize the presence of God in the world' and 'the dangers of a creation in which God is only marginally present' (see Greeley 2000: 5). Indeed, Scorsese once confirmed that his 'films would be inconceivable without the presence of religion' (in Monda 2007: 151).

In *Jerusalem, Jerusalem!* a scene takes place in a Chinese restaurant when a character named Bud cradles a cup of hot tea in his hands and raises it, as the priest would lift up the chalice at the consecration during Mass, and says mockingly, 'Introibo ad altare Dei' (in Kelly 1980: 43) ('I go unto the altar of God'), the Latin words spoken by a priest at the start of the Tridentine Mass. In *Silence*, a Jesuit missionary named Fr Sebastian Rodrigues (Andrew Garfield) utters those very words as he begins to say Mass for the hidden Christians in Tomogi village; and Fr Francisco Garupe (Adam Driver) takes on the role of the altar server, with which Scorsese would once have been familiar, and responds, 'Ad deum qui laetificat iuventum meum' (To God who giveth joy to my youth).

As he wrote his *Jerusalem, Jerusalem!* script, Scorsese presumably did not realize that he would one day make a film about Catholic missionaries that would premiere in Rome at the Palazzo San Carlo to an audience of Jesuits, or that the director himself would be granted a private audience with (the Jesuit) Pope Francis the following day.

A contemporary Dante

While many books on Scorsese take a chronological approach to the films of this celebrated Italian American director, I have chosen a thematic structure that was inspired by a remarkable Italian from a much earlier era: Dante Alighieri. Although Dante (1265–1321) never visited New York for several very obvious reasons, he is honoured by a sculpture erected in 1921 that stands in a small garden across from the Lincoln Center in Manhattan – it is a symbol of the historical links between the United States and Italy, spanning the thousands of miles that were traversed by Scorsese's grandparents as they sailed across the Atlantic to make a new life for themselves. This geographical bond with Italy has been repeatedly recognized by Scorsese, most obviously in the moving documentary that he made about his parents, *Italianamerican* (1974), and in his own tribute to Italian cinema entitled *My Voyage to Italy* (1999). Therefore, it is not surprising that commentators have frequently made allusions to one of Italy's cultural heroes in their analyses of Scorsese's work, with notable intertextual links between Scorsese's films and Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, the poem in 100 *cantos* that charts a pilgrimage through the realms of the Afterlife towards God. First guided by the poet Virgil, the Pilgrim spirals down through the darkness of the nine circles of Hell in *Inferno*; in the morning light he begins to climb the steep Mountain of the Seven Deadly Sins in *Purgatorio*; and he finally encounters heavenly glory in *Paradiso*.

In his biography of Scorsese, Vincent LoBrutto finds inspiration in *The Divine Comedy* for his early chapter headings. Relating events from the director's childhood, LoBrutto describes the 'Paradiso' of an idyllic life in the house in Queens where Scorsese was born, followed by the 'Purgatorio' of illness. In 1950, when the Scorsese family had to move back (for undisclosed reasons) to the Lower East Side, the director witnessed the 'Inferno' conditions in the Bowery – an area that would eventually figure in his film *Gangs of New York* (2002). Scorsese himself describes the change as traumatic: 'Thrown into that

area at that point, having severe asthma, it was a difference of day and night. It was something in my mind that was idyllic: suddenly cast out of Paradise, so to speak, into the diaspora' (in Martin 2016). Commenting on the violence that he saw in the streets as a child, the director explained that 'the worst thing was the thinking, the medieval kind of tribal way of thinking' (Scorsese 2017a) – a way of thinking with which Dante would have been familiar.

In fact, the Dantean allusions have been frequently made by commentators throughout Scorsese's career. In his student film *It's Not Just You, Murray!* (1964), Scorsese's mother Catherine plays her first cinematic maternal role and encourages her onscreen son, the eponymous Murray, to 'Eat first' – a line that 'has heavy antecedents in [La Pia's] note in *The Divine Comedy* [Purg. V] where Dante is told, in effect, to take care of the body' (see Kelly 1980: 72).

The streets of New York in *Taxi Driver* (1976) receive particularly 'hellish' comparisons in the observations of Christopher Deacy (2001: 115), among others. Comparing *Raging Bull* (1980) to *Rocky* (Avildsen 1976) would be like the difference 'between Dante's Inferno and Hollywood heaven,' claimed Andrew Sarris (in Rausch 2010: 82–3); while Roger Ebert described Frank Pierce (Nicolas Cage) 'as a paramedic whose runs through Hell's Kitchen are like a bus route through Dante's Inferno' (2008: 231) in *Bringing Out the Dead* (1999). When *The Wolf of Wall Street* was released in December 2013, several reviewers made explicit reference to Dante's vision of Hell. Indeed, in reflecting on his role as Jordan Belfort, Leonardo DiCaprio described Mark Hanna (Matthew McConaughey) as 'the devil that leads me to Dante's Inferno' (in Dean 2013: 4).

The dialogue of *Cape Fear* (1991) markedly foregrounds the Dantean theme when Max Cady (Robert De Niro) confirms that he has indeed read *Inferno* (a copy of which is visible among the books on the shelf of his prison cell) when he informs Sam Bowden (Nick Nolte): 'I'm Virgil, and I'm guiding you through the gates of Hell.' Serendipitously, for the purposes of my argument, Scorsese himself drew attention to his personal knowledge of *The Divine Comedy* when he commented on his first impressions of Nicholas Pileggi's book *Wiseguy*, which was the source text for *GoodFellas* (1990): 'It seemed that Nick was taking us through the different levels of purgatory and hell in the underworld, like Virgil or like Dante' (in Schickel 2013).

Drawing on this popular analogy, this study expands these brief inferences and envisions Martin Scorsese as a contemporary Dante, with his *oeuvre* offering the dimensions of an onscreen *Divine Comedy*. Scorsese offers visions of (a Living) Hell; (a Daily) Purgatory and a striving for Paradise that contemplates

the Divine, from the perspective that Hell and Heaven 'can be anticipated even now. And this can help us to make sense not only of the existence of hell but also of the compatibility of hell with the infinity of the divine love' (Barron 2011: 256). Scorsese's films present a range of human virtues, understandable foibles and outright wickedness that would enable a twenty-first-century poet to imagine the protagonists' post-mortem positions in colourful terms, as Dante did with the characters in his epic fourteenth-century poem.

Obviously, with the exception of Lazarus in *The Last Temptation of Christ*, and Rose (and her ghostly companions) in *Bringing Out the Dead*, Scorsese's focus is on his characters' mortal existence. However, earthly actions have consequences whether or not one believes in life after death. David Sterritt considers *Shutter Island* (2010) to be 'an inspired instance of cinema *hauntology*' which 'displaces its near-homonym *ontology* (i.e. that which is grounded presence and being) with the figure of the ghost as an incomprehensible intruder on our world' (2015: 106). When the inhabitants of Dante's Hell recount their own tales, 'the sins they describe reveal that life on Earth is just as horrific as the experience of Hell – that the world, like the *Inferno*, is full of damned and tormented souls' (Parker and Parker 2013). The screenwriter and director Paul Schrader, whose Calvinist upbringing has served as a dynamic counterpoint to Scorsese's Catholicism during their collaborations, has pointed out: 'We are both quite moral, we believe decisions have consequences. There is right, there is wrong, and in the end, there is a price to pay' (in Wernblad 2011: 21).

While Dante was known for the *dolce stil novo* – the sweet new style that indicated 'a unique poetic voice' (Shaw 2014) – Scorsese brought a fresh dynamism to New Hollywood as one of the Movie Brats, alongside Francis Ford Coppola and Brian De Palma in the 1970s. It was the poet Boccaccio who added the adjective 'divine' to the title of Dante's poem (Reynolds 2006: 116), but one of the reasons that this epic medieval work is called a 'Comedy' is that it is written in Italian (rather than Latin), using the language of everyday life, including vulgar vocabulary. One of the infernal demons, Barbariccia, 'sounds the advance, not with a bugle but a fart' (Reynolds 2006: 178); and while Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (whose version is used throughout this book) translates a line in Canto XXVIII of *Inferno* as 'His heart was visible, and the dismal sack / That maketh excrement of what is eaten' (Dante Alighieri 1867), other translators are not afraid to use the word 'shit'.

Scorsese's films have been criticized for the recurrent deployment of expletives, most obviously in the depictions of the gangster community and the stockbrokers of Wall Street. Indeed, at the opening night of *Mean Streets* (1973),

Mrs Scorsese was keen to talk to members of the audience and say, 'I just want you to know, we never used that word in the house' (in Schickel 2013). It is a stance that she reprises in *Casino* (1995) in her role as a gangster's mother, when she reprimands her son Piscano for his repeated use of bad language. As a result, Scorsese's 'family film' *Hugo* (2011) was something of a surprise to many viewers (see, for example, Keyser 1992: 159).

One of the Pilgrim's most joyful meetings in *The Divine Comedy* is with Beatrice – a character who is reportedly based on Beatrice Portinari, a young woman who captivated Dante's heart when he was aged nine. He was about eighteen when he next saw her, but she 'then later still cut him dead, to his great sorrow' (Shaw 2014). Dante wrote:

Whenever and wherever she appeared, in the hope of receiving her miraculous salutation I felt I had not an enemy in the world. Indeed, I glowed with a flame of charity which moved me to forgive all who had ever injured me; and if at that moment someone had asked me a question, about anything, my only reply would have been: 'Love,' with a countenance clothed with humility. (In Royal 1999: 19–20)

As a result, Beatrice left the poet sorrowful when she married another man and died at the age of twenty-four in 1290. In capturing Beatrice in verse, Dante transformed his lost love into a representation of 'ideal virtue, incomparable beauty, a paradisiacal being' and, therefore, 'a new form of allegory: it is not personification or symbolism, but the realisation that actual persons can be images of qualities beyond themselves, ... leading to the creation of the convincing, unforgettable characters who people the *Commedia*, and at the same time represent sins or virtues' (Reynolds 2006: 24).

Throughout Scorsese's feature films there are a number of beautiful women (usually in the form of illusive blondes) who entrance the male protagonists as well as leading them to despair. Although Scorsese's celluloid heroines do not share the exceptional sanctity of Dante's Beatrice, they manifest a magnetism that generates male heartache when they leave the scene, including the Girl (*Who's That Knocking at My Door*); Betsy (*Taxi Driver*); Vickie (*Raging Bull*); Paulette (*New York Stories: Life Lessons*); Countess Ellen (*The Age of Innocence*); Ginger (*Casino*) and Naomi (*The Wolf of Wall Street*). Explaining that he understood the tone of *The Age of Innocence* (1993), Scorsese mentioned 'the spirit of the exquisite romantic pain. The idea that the mere touching of a woman's hand would suffice. The idea that seeing her across the room would keep him alive for another year. That's something I guess that is part of me' (in Ebert 2008: 117).

In *Casino*, Ginger (Sharon Stone) is first spotted on a TV security monitor and Sam Rothstein (Robert De Niro) is shown 'falling so instantly in love that the image becomes a freeze-frame' (Ebert 2008: 144). However, as Barbara Reynolds points out, 'For all his idealization of women in his love poems, there was an element in Dante of what is now called chauvinism' (2006: 336). Some feminist critics of Scorsese would have no difficulty in applying such an appellation to the director.

While Dante engaged with the society around him in his magnificent poem, he was also concerned 'with the state of his own psyche' (Turner 1993: 133) and offers a confessional approach to which Scorsese could relate. Discussing the 'religious stuff' in his first films, Scorsese admitted that he found it embarrassing to watch because 'it's just so personal'; but he clarified that he would continue in this vein because 'it's got to be done, and you just have to be honest with yourself' (in Kelly 1980: 19–20). He once stated that he 'became a director in order to express my whole self, and also my relationship with religion, which is crucial' (in Monda 2007: 155). Having revealed that he had not been to the Catholic sacrament of Reconciliation since 1965, he added: 'I've been confessing most of the time on film since then, so it doesn't matter. My own friends who are priests, they look at my films and they know' (in Rensin 2006: 354).

It has frequently been reported that Fr Principe, who encouraged Scorsese's love of motion pictures, once remarked on the director's first productions: 'I've always told you, "Too much Good Friday, not enough Easter Sunday."' As Dante's Pilgrim enters Hell on the evening of Good Friday, such a viewpoint would suggest that Dante's *Inferno* (rather than his *Paradiso*) would be the chief reference point for a Scorsese audience. However, in 2012 Scorsese himself contacted the Jesuit publication *America* (which had incorrectly attributed the 'Good Friday' comment to his university teacher Haig Manoogian) to identify the precise source of the citation and to add a further clarification:

This remark has often been repeated, but seeing it once again in print in *America*, I remembered Father Principe's exact words to me, and I would like to take this opportunity to correct the record. It was after a small screening of my movie *Taxi Driver* in 1976. My then publicist had invited a small group of friends to the Plaza Hotel afterward, including Father Principe. His response to the movie after the screening was, 'I'm glad you ended it on Easter Sunday and not on Good Friday.' This was a personal remark to me, as he knew me well. But over the years it has often been quoted in a shorter version, which has quite a different meaning. (In Reidy 2012)

Indeed, the revised quotation does markedly change the perspective. In the first season of *The Sopranos*, there is a humorous scene in the episode entitled '46 Long,' in which 'Martin Scorsese' (played by Anthony Caso) arrives at a nightclub and hears Christopher Moltisanti (Michael Imperioli) shout out, 'Marty! *Kundun*, I liked it!' Although Scorsese has indicated that members of the Mafia have spoken positively about *Mean Streets*, it is less certain whether his 1997 film about the Dalai Lama is a firm favourite within the criminal fraternity, but the joke in *The Sopranos* serves as a playful reminder that Scorsese has not only set his sights on gangsters. The bloodletting and profane language, for which the director is particularly well known, are only part of the story.

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This monograph is divided into three main spheres; but while key films and characters may predominate under a particular heading, there are certainly overlaps and intersections in relation to the analysis. Dante's Pilgrim noted that members of one family might end up in different realms of the Afterlife, and the same holds true for various aspects of the movies that make up Scorsese's earthly *Divine Comedy* as the protagonists struggle with issues of morality and faith. Scorsese himself chooses not to distinguish between his works of fiction and documentaries: 'You can't say one is better than the other. It's apples and oranges, I guess. But in a sense, in the documentaries, there is more of a truth that you get at. Something happens that you can't really do in dramatic films' (in Kelly 1980: 31). However, this study focuses on his feature films (with some tangential references to religious themes in his documentaries) out of a (no doubt wise) sense of reluctance towards allocating real human beings to places within a Heaven and Hell structure. Many of Scorsese's characters in feature films are based on recognizable people, but they are roles created for the screen. As Scorsese explained when discussing *GoodFellas*, he is creating the story of 'Henry Hill' as opposed to the real Henry Hill – on film it is 'purely an imaginative version of this guy' (Smith 1999a: 149). Dante himself had no qualms about putting living people into hot places, even leaving a couple of popes in his *Inferno*. I am not so bold.

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Part One: Inferno: Visions of Hell presents the infernal environments in Scorsese's filmography via the 'Hell on earth' approach recognizable in his mise en scène and the murderers and/or double-crossers who play a significant role in this landscape. Here are Scorsese's most ruthless protagonists who commit

violence and fraud (often with a sideline in avarice, lust and gluttony); and the overshadowing theme of treachery, which can be identified in films that range from Scorsese's student production *It's Not Just You, Murray!* to *Silence*. Dante places murderers, fraudsters and traitors in the lowest reaches of his Hell – the most famous region described in his poem. For some viewers, it is the villains in Scorsese's films who also endure in the memory, such as Travis Bickle in *Taxi Driver* and Max Cady in *Cape Fear* (two memorable personalities interpreted by Robert De Niro); Tommy DeVito in *GoodFellas* and Nicky Santoro in *Casino* (both played by Joe Pesci); Frank Costello (Jack Nicholson) in *The Departed*; and Andrew Laeddis in *Shutter Island* and Jordan Belfort in *The Wolf of Wall Street* (with Leonardo DiCaprio taking on two roles that cause suffering by death and deception, respectively).

Part Two: Purgatory: The Three Story Mountain reflects on the Deadly Sins; and on the protagonists whose everyday struggle to find happiness might be reflected in the lyrics of the song 'You Can't Always Get What You Want' by The Rolling Stones – a group of musicians who have also been the topic of a Scorsese documentary, *Shine a Light* (2008), and whose music often enhances his soundtracks.

Part Three: Paradise (Lost or Found?) contemplates Scorsese's direct cinematic engagement with organized religion (notably Christianity and Buddhism) and the nature of the Divine. In the words of Thomas Aquinas: 'Of a pair of opposites, one is understood by means of the other, as darkness is understood in terms of light; so we come to understand what evil is by considering good' (in McCabe 2010: 53).

The Episcopal bishop of New York, Paul Moore, gave Scorsese a copy of *Silence* after a screening of *The Last Temptation of Christ*, and he eventually read it while travelling in Japan, where he had gone to act in a Kurosawa film about Vincent van Gogh: '*Last Temptation* was where I was at that time in my own search, and that left off on one track, and this took up another track. This went deeper' (in Martin 2016). Discussing *The Last Temptation of Christ*, Scorsese admitted: 'I've always taken that Word – the idea of love – very seriously. It may not be a stylish thing these days to say you're a believer, especially to say it so often in the papers, as I've been saying it. But I really think Jesus had the right idea' (in Corliss 1999: 117).

In taking the particular journey of writing this book I am indebted to many of the leading film scholars and the experts on Dante (such as Lansing 2000) who have paved the way, especially as a study of the biography of Dante offers an opportunity to draw some interesting parallels between the medieval Italian poet and the Italian American film director: 'The enduring image of love that Dante uses is that of light' (Casey 2009: 282); and cinema is a way of painting with light.

During Dante's lifetime Florence was 'a vibrant and prosperous city, an international mercantile and banking centre' with a 'flourishing textile trade' (Shaw 2014) – a description that would fit Scorsese's home town of New York where his parents, who were the children of immigrants, worked in the garment industry. Dante is believed to have been about five feet five inches in height and 'may have indulged in herbal stimulants which induced a heightened state of consciousness' (Reynolds 2006: xiii); and Scorsese – not a tall man himself as he underlines by calling himself 'Shorty' in his cameo role in *Mean Streets* – was reportedly not a stranger to narcotics (see Ebert 2008: 61). Dante's famous line: 'All hope abandon, ye who enter in!' might be contrasted with the memorable quotations from Scorsese's films: 'Are you talkin' to me?' or 'Funny how?' in *Taxi Driver* and *GoodFellas*, respectively.

While Scorsese considered joining the priesthood, Dante is reported to have become a novice of the Franciscan Order for a short period when he was young (Reynolds 2006: 93). While families were open to religious vocations in the Old Country during medieval times, there was less enthusiasm among Italian American Catholics in the twentieth century for the priesthood, with the realization that 'children could better serve the family and themselves by building economic and political roles in the secular world, the primary site of power in American society' (Gambino 2011: 231). However, the loss to the religious life is compensated by the artistic legacy that both poet and director have provided. As Andrew Greeley argues, it is 'unlikely, although not absolutely impossible, that a person who is not Catholic could be responsible for such monumental exercises of Catholic sensibility' as *The Divine Comedy* and *Mean Streets* (2000: 18).

In *The Divine Comedy* the Pilgrim finds himself lost in a dark wood in the year 1300 (when the poem is set) in the middle of his life – which would be around the age of thirty-five, given the biblical lifespan of seventy years (as revealed in Ps. 90.10). Robert Royal points out: 'It is precisely at the height of his human life that he finds himself deeply lost. In the modern world, successful people often feel a hollowness at midlife about the achievements and possessions supposed to make us happy' (1999: 37). As Dante scholar Prue Shaw (2014) indicates, the

poet's words speak to anyone who is 'facing the future with confusion, anxiety, despair. Anyone (in modern terms) who has sought counselling, seen a therapist, had a breakdown.' Scorsese was thirty-five in November 1977. He had enjoyed success with *Taxi Driver* but was soon to enter a troubled period, with the poor critical reception of *New York, New York* (1977), relationship troubles and an addiction to drugs that led to hospitalization, and his own dark days.

Dante loved music and there is evidence that 'his poems were set to music, one at least by his friend Casella, who was a singer as well as a composer' (Reynolds 2006: 8) – and no one could ignore the importance of music in Scorsese's films (with his friend Robbie Robertson sometimes working on the soundtrack), as well as the documentaries that deal specifically with musicians such as *The Last Waltz* (1978) and *George Harrison: Living in the Material World* (2011). In particular, there is a good deal of music in Dante's *Purgatorio*, with reports of memorable celestial melodies.

Dante also drew pictures – in *La Vita Nuova* 'he speaks of himself drawing figures of angels on wooden boards' before he would create angels in his poetry in words (Reynolds 2006: 8) – a detail that might evoke Scorsese's own use of storyboards before transferring his ideas to the screen. In *La Vita Nuova* Dante accompanies his poems with 'a commentary in prose' (Reynolds 2006: 18) that records his feelings when he wrote the work and his own analysis of its content – a forerunner of the director's commentaries that are now available on many DVDs.

Of course, one of the obvious dangers with this Dante/Scorsese analogy is to rejoice in glib parallels and to do injustice to the intricacies of Dante's poem or to the richness of Scorsese's filmography. When one reads that Dante 'was trained in horsemanship for battle and in the use of the lance, the sword and the mace' or that he enjoyed hunting with hounds and hawks and regretted 'spending too much time in such masculine pursuits, to the neglect of the company of women' (Reynolds 2006: 9), any analogy with the famously asthmatic, five-times married New Yorker admittedly breaks down. (Although the director's admirers certainly rejoice that the young Scorsese learnt his craft by passing more time in the cinema than on the sports field.) In embracing this structure, my intention (and it is too much of a cliché to mention which road is paved with the good ones) is to underscore the ongoing influence of the Italian poet, while demonstrating a fresh way of exploring the complexities of the Italian American director's films.