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**AVARICE IS THE MOST DANGEROUS SIN:
“LA MALADETTA LUPA” IN DANTE’S *COMMEDIA*¹**

Abstract: This essay examines the ubiquity of the sin of avarice and its progeny in the *Divina Commedia* arguing that avarice, more than any other sin, not only affects the sinner individually but extends its nefarious effects centrifugally into the sinner’s family and community, causing destruction at the collective level. Dante paints the picture of the corrosive nature of avarice from the opening canto of the *Inferno* to *Paradiso* 30, showing how, because of the multitudes affected by avarice and the wide array of sinful and criminal acts it generates, she and her daughters eventually destroy the world at large. Thus, this essay argues that, although Dante does not consider avarice to be the deadliest sin (this qualification is reserved for the sin of pride), he sees it as the most dangerous sin pervading every facet of the society and leading to more serious sins and crimes, which medieval moral and theological thinkers defined as avarice’s progeny.

Keywords: avarice, greed, cupidity, filargyria, usury, seven deadly sins, Dante, *Commedia*, Thomas Aquinas, Cassian.

The Theological Context

Teodolinda Barolini points out that Dante’s comparison of lover and miser in the canzone “Doglia mi reca” “lays the foundation for the moral edifice of the *Commedia*, which is based on the idea that everything we do can be analyzed back to its root in desire” (67). In this essay I will trace the centrifugal power of avarice as the most widespread and, hence, the most dangerous form of *cupiditas*—detrimental in all its effects to the wellbeing of the sinner overcome by avarice and, more importantly, to the wellbeing of society as a whole in that avarice preys upon its members.² Avarice, for its perpetrator, is certainly not the deadliest sin *stricto sensu*; Thomas Aquinas qualified it as the most dangerous, if not

¹ This is a companion piece to my article “Verso un’utopia senza avarizia e senza usura,” forthcoming in *Theory and Criticism of Literature and Arts*, edited by Raffaele Pinto and Carla Rossi. London: RECEPTIO, 2021.

² The bibliography on greed is copious, but the following titles offer a useful background. Richard Newhauser documents and discusses in detail the early history of avarice in his seminal study *The Early History of Greed*. Carla Casagrande and Silvana Vecchio survey avarice in the Middle Ages in their book *I sette vizi capitali*. Stefano Zamagni, in *Avarizia*, examines how avarice transitioned from sin (in the early Christian and medieval periods) to virtue (in modern society). On avarice in Dante’s time, see also Scott. Donatella Stocchi-Perucchio examined the role of money in Dante’s moral and political thought in “Il maladetto fiore.”