Thematic and stylistic limitations also affect Gianni Alfani's ballad *Donne, La donna mia ha d'un disdegno* (third chapter). Bertelli, in fact, points out that this ballad overly depends on a passive imitation of Cavalcanti's lyric *corpus*. At the same time, however, Bertelli suggests that the ballad's conventional images (i.e., Love's bow; the woman's disdain, etc.) have unconventional characteristics.

Although relatively brief, the analysis of Verzellino's poetic exchange with the Tuscan poet Dino Frescobaldi is particularly engaging (fourth chapter). According to Bertelli's close reading, Verzellino's sonnet helps the reader understand the psychological interests characterizing Florence's social community in the late-tirtheenth century. In addition, on the other hand, the sonnet sheds some lights on the intense network of intellectual relations between the vernacular poets.

By observing Chiaro Davanzati's lyric production, the fifth chapter of Bertelli's study investigates the cultural, intellectual, and literary relationship between Guido Guinizzelli and Chiaro himself. Additionally, Bertelli suggests that the influence of the Occitan and Sicilian poetry was everything but irrelevant on Chiaro's rhymes.

What was quite stimulating were the pages dedicated to Iacopone's religious poetry. Divided into four sections, the chapter dwells on the style, content, and literary sources of the laud *Donna de Paradiso*. After having acutely analyzed the most relevant images of Iacopone's poem – i.e., Christ's manifestation; Mary's lamentations, the invocation to Jesus, etc. – Bertelli concludes by affirming that Medieval popular spirituality played a pivotal role in shaping the verses of *Donna de Paradiso*.

Finally, the last chapter of the book is – as already mentioned – focused on Dante. In particular, it scrutinizes the well-known sonnet *Tutti li miei penser parlan d'amore* (*VN* 13) and underlines the relevance of this sonnet for the narrative development of Dante's *Vita Nova*.

In other words, Bertelli's book is a useful guide through the main issues concerning the early origin of Italian vernacular literature. In fact, even though the relatively limited length of this present study does not really allow the reader to become engaged completely with the complexity of the whole picture, *Studi sul Due e Trecento* may function as an introductory approach to some of the most interesting, fascinating, and stimulating questions debated by the literary critics in the last few years.

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Vittorio Montemaggi.
Reading Dante's Commedia as Theology. Divinity Realized in Human Encounter. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. 307 pp. $87.

Vittorio Montemaggi is both a theologian and an Italianist within the interdisciplinary field of religion and literature. He began his career nearly two decades ago in the U.K. (Cambridge and Leicester), before moving to the U.S. (Notre Dame), and then returning to the U.K., where he is lecturer in Religion and the Arts at King's College London. His earlier volume co-edited with Matthew Treherne is a clear result of his interdisciplinary approach: *Dante's Commedia: Theology as Poetry* (2010). He has also published several methodological articles on the ways in which literature coveys religious messages and vice versa, and on the status of Dante's *Comedy* as a text at once literary and theological. Thus, one might say that his more recent *Reading Dante's Commedia as Theology: Divinity Realized in Human Encounter* represents the result of a more than a decade of reflection on the extent to which Dante's *Comedy* is a true work of theology. These biographical data are necessary to understand not only the author's methodological approach but also the deeper aims of his volume.

The essence of *Reading Dante's Commedia as Theology* is communicated in its subtitle: "Divinity realized in human encounter." Indeed, according to Montemaggi, reading the *Commedia* as theology "is an activity that can help us realize divinity in human encounter – with Dante, with each other, with our own self" (30). Montemaggi, thus, concretizes the importance of these human encounters by inserting several autobiographical references which testify to how all these encounters profoundly contributed to his writing of the book and to his formation as a scholar, and more generally, as a human being. These insertions (which may surprise the typical reader of a scholarly work) constitute a precise methodological choice on the part of the author; they call the reader to find the "divine" in his or her own encounters with the other and to see how the *Comedy*, throughout its one hundred cantos, is in fact a theological and literary work on "encounter". Such a focus on encounter represents the "particularity" – rather than the "originality" – of Montemaggi's volume, and the particular hermeneutic of encounter reads the *Comedy* as "a form of human encounter with its author" (27) and with our neighbor in any context, including (and perhaps foremost) the academic world.

The first chapter *Reading the 'Commedia' as Theology* is a concrete manifestation of the value of such encounters and is the most autobiographical of the volume. This chapter is, however, fundamental for establishing Montemaggi's essentially theological interpretation of the *Comedy*. What is "theology" exactly? Unlike (or in addition to) the meaning of "theology" or "theologian" in the late Middle Ages, the scholar chooses a contemporary approach towards the *Commedia*'s "theology", describing it as "discourse and inquiry about God wishing to aid us in our comprehension of our relationship with, and in our journeying into, the divine" (63). Thus, the *Commedia* can be read as a guided journey towards the realization that every encounter with the other is an encounter with God—the divine reveals itself in the network of relationships between man and man, in the unrepeatable singularity of those relationship, and in the everyday moments of life.

After having established the centrality of "encounter" in the architecture of the poem, the second chapter *Truth and Theological Virtue* deals more closely with Dante's text and Dante's understanding of truth. As the scholar explains, Dante's theological ideas concerning "truth" are of a threefold and intertwined nature: the ultimate truth, Dante's conception of the possibility of that truth, and Dante's understanding of the truthfulness of the poem. According to this rubric, Montemaggi analyzes *Par.* 25-26, the cantos of the Heaven of the Fixed Stars in which Dante is interrogated by Saints Peter, James, and John on the three theological virtues of faith, hope, and love. These cantos represent the only time Dante explicitly presents himself as doing something akin to academic theology. For instance, from Aquinas' answer in *Par.* 11, we can infer that Dante considers theology to be "intellectual seeking" that transcend earthly divisions and aims toward "unity-in-diversity" (92-97). Ultimately, the result of Montemaggi's analysis is that Dante's belief that truth "is to be identified with love and that […] theology can […] be conceived as an act of praise" (90). Taken together with Dante's lines "Se mai continga che 'l poema sacro / al ha posto mano e cielo e terra" (*Par.* 25.1-2), Montemaggi highlights the profound interconnection between Heaven and Earth, humanity and divinity: an interconnectedness that nourishes (and is nourished) by hope. Thus, this connection is a specific feature of the ethical dimension of Dante's theology; in other words, according to Dante, to practice theology – i.e. to say something about God – coincides with the humble and daily exercise of the virtues of faith, hope, and love that make man worthy of Heaven. (Montemaggi returns to the role of the *Commedia* in cultivating the virtues and the active exercise of virtues in the third chapter, especially on pages 232-233). In the last section of the chapter (2.12. "Reading Dante in Community"), Montemaggi underlines the poetic form of Dante's theology and reminds the reader how Aquinas considered poetry to be "infima inter omnes doctrinae", a point generally accepted by scholars. By quoting the theologian Denis Turner – who argued against this view by showing how the conception of human embodiedness would be consistent with a "poetic view of language as the inextricable union of body and thought" – Montemaggi observes how poetic language as human embodiment configured as love, can "reveal the peace that transcends and communally unifies all human wisdom" (154). Along these same lines, my own dissertation research has revealed that while he was writing the *Vita nova*, Dante experienced similar adversity to poetry by theologians from the time of his intellectual formation Florence in the 1290s at the "schools for the religious" ('scuole de li religiosi') and at the "disputations of the philosophers" ('disputazioni de li filosofanti'). In fact, in his *quaestiones quodlibetales* held in Santa Croce in 1295, the Franciscan Peter of Trabibus argued against the poets many times: from their speculative inability to speak about the truths of faith to their practical incapacity to understand the miraculous eclipse that occurred on the occasion of Christ's death.

As the title states, the third chapter *Pride and Prayer* focuses on pride, the Dantean sin *par excellence*. Here, Montemaggi argues that both pride and humility in the *Commedia* (precisely *Purg.* 10-12) are expressed within Dante's references to his own proud nature. Also, he argues that this duality is charged with theological meaning. Through a close reading of the famous lines of *Purg.* 11.94-99 ("Credette Cimabue ne la pittura" ecc.), the scholar observes that the use of "forse" in line 98 ("[…] e *forse* è nato / che l'uno e l'altro caccerà dal nido") and the fact the Dante is not named might indicate "more than empty gestures toward humility" (181). The same can be said for the *Padre nostro* at the beginning of the canto, which may be both "an instance of extreme pride and of radical humility" (186). This leads to another key point of the chapter. If Dante in *Purg.* 13 confesses his pride and his future redemption in the first terrace of the Purgatory, this statement should be considered an invitation for us readers to pray for him "in the same way that he invites us to pray for the penitent themselves" (191). In other words, one can read the episode of the Terrace of Pride, in part, as "Dante's call for our prayers for his forgiveness" (224). Thus, here is emphasized the second element of the chapter's title: the value of "prayer". Dante emphasizes, as Montemaggi argues, this value on multiple occasions within the poem, one of which is the case of the Roman Emperor Trajan who was saved by the prayers of Pope Gregory the Great. By showing how the "realization of divinity is possible through Gregory's prayers" for Trajan (200), Montemaggi legitimately (and provocatively) wonders if the same may be applied to Virgil: whether, in other words, the journey is potentially transformative for Virgil, too, and whether Dante, upon Virgilio's departure, might be asking to us readers to pray for the Latin poet to save him. Montemaggi, however, only argues that Virgil "might be" saved (208). Among the many hints at Virgil's possible salvation, the scholars notes Virgil's "sorriso" (along with that of Statius, who is saved) at the end of *Purg.* 28 as a clue that Virgil "mov[es] in harmony with Dante and with the love which moves the sun and the other stars" (215). Even if it recalls the experience of the beheaded Orpheus, the scholar argues that the comparison between the Pilgrim and the legendary Greek poet is meant to evoke presence and life rather than loss and death; it is also meant to recall the first martyr of Florence, St. Minias, instead of Bertran de Born.

Therefore, Montemaggi's study highlights the idea that Dante "invites us [readers] to see that recognition of the truthfulness of the *Commedia* coincides with the realization in the human encounter of our inherent divinity" (239). To drive home his concept of encounter, the *Epilogue* summarizes the arguments of the book and celebrates particular encounters with colleagues, students, and friends that have shaped his own work. He focuses on the value of prayer, on Dante's ability to "nourish and enrich our own ability to pray" (243), and on the value of joy (both in reading and in scholarship) and desire. He then reaffirms the truthfulness of Dante's text and the value of justice by analyzing the episode of Geryon (251-253) and his "faccia [...] d'uom giusto" (*Inf.* 17.10). Like Geryon, the *Comedy* is a truthful fiction, and "it is in *our* lives that any truthfulness the *Commedia* might have will primarily be found" (253). In other words, according to Montemaggi, we readers of the *Comedy* are invited to choose the same path of purification and self-recognition in God that Dante himself undertook: the reader is indeed the actual protagonist of the Poet's "poema sacro / al quale ha posto mano e cielo e terra" (*Par.* 25.1-2).

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Luca Carlo Rossi.
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This book by Luca Carlo Rossi is part of SISMEL's series "Traditio et renovatio," whose goal is the conservation and circulation of studies on medieval subjects, while