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REVIEWS

Dante Alighieri.

Purgatorio.

Saverio Bellomo and Stefano Carrai, eds.

Nuova raccolta di classici italiani annotati, 24. Turin: Einaudi, 2019. XLVIII + 601 pp. €60.

There are not many certainties in the history of medieval Italian literature. One of them is that the commentary tradition on Dante's *Commedia* has always constituted one of the most extraordinary and successful strands of European exegetical literature. As it is well known, the first texts aimed at explaining and summarizing what was shortly to become a classic of Western literature were written a few months after the poem's publication. Through his *Divisione* and then with the *Chiose all'Inferno* (1322), Jacopo Alighieri inaugurated one of the richest commentary traditions of European vernacular literature. Over the years, many scholars approached the *Commedia* attempting to grasp its most hidden meanings and provide the ever-growing audience with tools that would facilitate their understanding the "sacred poem." Jacopo della Lana, the *Ottimo*, Pietro Alighieri, Giovanni Boccaccio, Guglielmo Maramauro, Benvenuto da Imola, Filippo Villani, and Cristoforo Landino are just some of the many *litterati* who, between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, focused their energies on studying and explaining Dante's masterpiece, thereby contributing uniquely to its prodigious dissemination.

After a long interlude that began at the end of the Cinquecento, that burdensome legacy was collected by nineteenth-century intellectuals, who rediscovered and promoted the so-called universality of Dante, making him the *sommo poeta* that everyone knows nowadays. Having become a "universal" poem, the *Commedia* was later studied by hundreds of scholars, who analyzed it through the most diverse critical perspectives. Needless to say, the renewed love for Dante's masterpiece resulted in the production of a genuinely exceptional quantity of commentaries that sought to bring both the specialist and general audience closer to the poet's most famous work. In Italy specifically, the twentieth century witnessed the blossoming of an impressive number of—often excellent—exegetical texts on the *Commedia*. From the 1940s, generations of high school and university students, as well as ordinary readers, were able to decipher (and love) Dante's often arduous *terzine* thanks to the work of eminent scholars such as Armando Momigliano, Natalino Sapegno, Umberto Bosco, and Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi.

In terms of Dantean exegesis, recent years have been explicitly characterized by a radical review of the critical edition of the poem's text established in 1965 by Giorgio Petrocchi, and by a renewed interest in the *Commedia*'s ancient commentators, combined with the need to analyze the poem through a critical perspective that refers to its fourteenth-century interpretation. Undoubtedly, one of the world-

leading experts of the *Commedia's* commentary tradition was Saverio Bellomo. After having dedicated years to analyzing and editing the exegetical works of Filippo Villani (1989), Jacopo Alighieri (1990), and Guglielmo Maramauro (1998), Bellomo focused his interests on the evolution of the early Dante criticism, offering the world of Dante Studies fundamental works such as the *Dizionario dei commentatori danteschi* (2004) and the excellent companion *Filologia e critica dantesca* (2007–2012). Because of his extraordinary knowledge of the *Commedia's* medieval exegesis, in 2013 Bellomo decided to publish a commentary on the *Inferno* that would recover and enhance the testimonies of the first scholars who elaborated a radical interpretation of Dante's poem. The commentary had an extraordinary success, both among the academic public and non-specialist readers. His sober and straightforward style and unique ability to handle ancient sources without any displays of arid erudition consecrated Bellomo's *Inferno* as one of the new classics of Dantean exegesis. The volume dedicated to the first *cantica* was the first chapter of a work that was supposed to cover the entire *Commedia*. Sadly, Bellomo passed away in 2018, when he was completing his commentary on the *Purgatorio*. His death has left a vacuum difficult to fill in the Italian academy and the international community of Dante Studies. Nevertheless, thanks to the strong will of some of Bellomo's colleagues and friends, who wanted to ensure his (unfinished) commentary on the second canticle was not wasted, Dante's readers now have the opportunity to see the second chapter of Bellomo's exegetical work.

The volume Einaudi released in 2019 is edited by Stefano Carrai, a colleague and fraternal friend of the author, who brilliantly completed Bellomo's work, which lacked only the commentary on cantos 29, 32, and 33. Following the model already established in the *Inferno*, this edition of the *Purgatorio* is characterized by specific elements that make the reading of the text fluent and extremely easy: a short but very accurate commentary on the verses; a long and detailed introduction to each *canto* containing all the information about the narrative structure and the characters of each episode; and finally a closing note in which Bellomo analyzes the style of the *canto* and explores the exegetical issues through a direct dialogue with the works of the ancient and modern commentators. In my opinion, the essays that close each *canto* constitute the commentary's most fascinating element. In these brief yet refined pages, Bellomo combines an admirable stylistic elegance with a solid analytical ability, reinforced by a knowledge of Dantean exegesis that few scholars in the world could boast. For example, let us take canto 14, traditionally recognized as one of the most heterogeneous of the entire *Commedia*, in which Dante describes the frame of the envious, of which the poet already speaks in the previous *canto*. The *nota conclusiva* opens by proposing to the reader a division of the *canto* into four parts to help the audience to better orient themselves in the complicated episode narrated by Dante. The first element that the commentator highlights is the leitmotif of the proper name that links the first three sections of the *canto*. Bellomo especially emphasizes the practice of censoring proper names, a rhetorical procedure of which Pietro Alighieri, in his *Commentarium super Dantis Commedia* (1342), highlighted the classical ancestry. The refined stylistic analysis then continues to show the continuity elements with the previous *canto*. After this, the commentator dwells on the character of Guido del Duca, using the explanation of the *Ottimo* about the expiation of his punishment to prove this character's

position within the frame of the envious, a point sometimes questioned by some modern scholars. Next, Bellomo focuses on Guido's political speech, highlighting its multiple rhetorical modules, and continues by analyzing the sin of envy and its corruptive influence on society through Cassell's Augustinian interpretation. The reader is left amazed at such a great capacity for synthesis combined with the incredibly detailed knowledge of Dantean centuries-old exegesis, as well as Bellomo's powerful interpretative skills.

After closing the soft pages of this beautiful edition of the *Purgatorio* and reflecting on such a work's greatness, one cannot help but feel deeply saddened, thinking that Dante's readers will never be able to read Bellomo's commentary on the *Paradiso*. After this initial heartbreaking thought, however, one can't help but smile for the great fortune they have had to read one of the most extraordinary Dante commentaries of the last century—a work that will surely make generations and generations of new lucky readers fall in love with the *Commedia* and its author.

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Elena Lombardi.

Imagining the woman reader in the age of Dante.

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. 304 pp. \$80.

In the Palazzo Comunale of San Gimignano, there is a fresco depicting a man and a woman reading a large volume; the man is holding the text, while the woman is right behind him, clenching his shoulder from her posterior position. The fresco is unfortunately damaged and therefore it is not possible to identify the two individuals, nor do we fully understand the relationship between them. It is from this fresco and the spatial relationship of the figures that Elena Lombardi departs on her ambitious project of depicting women engaged with reading. Her intention and the limits of such research are expressed from the very beginning: the author is *imagining* what a female reader might look like, and what her approach to literature would be, with a focus on lyric poetry. The scholar aims not at identifying precise names or identities, but rather at describing how these readers were imagined by poets of the Italian tradition, such as Dante, Boccaccio, and Cavalcanti. The vernacular production of these artists is justified in many instances—it suffices to think of the *Decameron*—as the will of the artists in pleasing their female readers. Therefore, what starts to appear more regularly are women as addressees; it is with this intentional yet imaginary audience that the male writers interact.

It is along these lines that Lombardi structures her book, devoting the first chapter, a thorough introduction, to describe the main features of female literacy in the Late Middle Ages, starting with the issue of numbers: were women trained in writing and reading, and in what proportion? The historian Giovanni Villani, for instance, to show the power of Florence, speaks of at least ten thousand boys and girls learning how to read; these numbers immediately appear to be extremely