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Thomas Persico. 'Le parole e la musica. Poesia ed esecuzione dalla Vita nuova alla Divina Commedia.' Rome: Aracne editrice, 2019.

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The final essay by Claire Honess and Matthew Treherne traces the impact of the public outreach element of their AHRC-funded project on Dante and Late-Medieval Florence (Leeds-Warwick, 2011-2017). The project is an example of “how specialist and non-specialist Dante audiences were able to come together in creative ways” (144) through, for example, reflections on the meaning of community within their contemporary city, bringing the landscapes of Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise to life with poetry and art. These two culminating chapters offer stimulating reflections on Dante’s enduring accessibility and how he can still speak to audiences today.

The volume offers new methodological approaches to consider Dante’s depictions and understandings of ethics, politics, and justice, offering fresh readings on both popular and less widely considered passages of Dante’s poetic works.

Elisabeth Trischler, *University of Leeds*

Thomas Persico.

Le parole e la musica. Poesia ed esecuzione dalla Vita nuova alla Divina Commedia.

Rome: Aracne editrice, 2019. 288 pp. €23

Thomas Persico’s monograph is the most recent publication delving into the role of music in Dante’s poetics. This remarkable contribution enters the long-standing heated debate between two groups of scholars: those accepting the theory of an Italian divorce between music and poetry, and those who have called for a reappraisal and reassessment of the relationship between them. Persico’s studies bring order to this intricate conversation and, through rigorous textual and lexical analyses, shed new light on the topic.

The first chapter provides a thorough and lucid account of the scholarly debate around Dante and music. Persico demonstrates deep knowledge of 150 years of studies carried out by Italian and international scholars alike. His concise review is highly informative and well-documented: the impressive footnotes alone will be valuable to anyone researching the same topics. What emerges from this chapter and inspires the following ones is the need for a better appreciation of the role of musical performance in Dante’s poetry. Some of the studies he engages with revolve around the different connotations of Occitan and Italian poets and singers, the *vexata questio* of the Italian divorce between poetry and music, and the interpretations of Casella’s episode in *Purgatorio* 2. The closing paragraphs assess the studies of scholars who combine literary and musicological competences. In the past twenty years, many brilliant contributions, such as those by Maria Sofia Lannutti and Maria Clotilde Camboni for instance, have successfully tried to debunk the notion that music is not essential to late medieval Italian poets. Persico joins forces with them and confirms the fruitfulness of their multidisciplinary approach.

The following chapters explore key issues which have long awaited a systematic study. In Chapter 2, Persico carries out a lexical inquiry on 201 medieval musical treatises with the goal of tracing a semantic shift in the lemma “modulatio” from the earlier to the later Middle Ages. Thus, he can cogently prove how this term, famously found in Augustine’s definition of the *scientia musica*, slowly stops hinting at a scientific component of music and starts indicating the concrete sonorous event instead. After reading this chapter, it becomes evident how Dante’s use of the term in his *De Vulgari Eloquentia* is informed by this intricate, multi-layered system of meanings.

In Chapter 3, Persico turns to the lemmas “oda” and “cantus” and ascertains their genuinely musical meaning. He traces their development in musical treatises and analyzes them in connection with other key concepts, such as “modulatio,” “plausus,” and “sonus.” Chapter 4 builds on the assumption that “lungo il percorso poetico di Dante si manifesta infatti la sostituzione dei vocaboli “dico/parlo” con i lemmi “canto,” “cantare” e derivati” (“in the course of Dante’s poetic path, we can observe the substitution of the terms “dico/parlo” with the lemmas “canto,” “cantare,” and their derivatives,” p. 83). This issue is crucial to Dante studies. The importance of the lemma “cant★” for the *Comedy* is undeniable, considering its division into *cantiche* and *canti*. Nevertheless, Persico only touches on this point at the end of the chapter, focusing instead on Dante’s youth poems, the *Vita Nuova*, and the earlier tradition of Italian poetry. His readers need to wait until the last chapter to learn more about the implications of his lexical investigations on the mentioned lemmas for the *Comedy*.

What follows is an interesting methodological digression. In Chapter 5, entitled “Cant★: alcune riflessioni statistico-quantitative,” Persico explains in depth which digital and traditional corpora he interrogated and how. These are the *Corpus TLIO* (*Tesoro della Lingua Italiana delle Origini*) and the *LirIO* (*Corpus della Lirica Italiana delle Origini*), both accessible through the GATTO platform, *Concordanze delle Opere volgari e delle Opere latine di Dante Alighieri* (ed. by Società Dantesca Italiana and Opera del Vocabolario Italiano), and *Dante Search* (edited by Mirko Tavoni and available online). Persico presents detailed tables, data visualization charts, and a thorough discussion of the adopted methodology. A thought-provoking analysis of the data thus collected concludes the chapter and attests to the value of this type of textual and lexical study. Personally, I found Persico’s remarks on Iacopone and the genre of *lauda* particularly interesting (pp. 124–130).

The last two chapters build on the lexical analyses of the previous chapters to advocate for the importance of musical performance in Dante’s poetics. Among other topics, the author, who is also an organist as well as a musicologist and literary scholar, discusses the episode of Casella and the controversial reference to *organi* of *Pur.* 9. Through yet another detailed lexical account of the history of the pair *organum/organi*, he cogently confirms the interpretation of *organi* as referring to musical accompaniment rather than vocal polyphony. In the final chapter, as anticipated, he reflects on the formal division of the *Comedy* in *cantiche* and cantos. Persico takes Antonio da Tempo’s distinction between *cantio extensa* and *cantio brevis* as the point of departure for his general interpretation of the structure of the *Comedy*, which is highly informative and convincing.

This monograph fills a conspicuous gap in the literature on the relationship between Dante and music. It offers comprehensive and original analyses which rely on innovative methods of inquiry and the solid philological competence of their author. Its ambitious scope is to ascertain once and for all the crucial role played by musical performance in Dante's poetics by revealing its traces in the language of both his treatises and poetry. Persico demonstrates that music and musical performance occupy a fundamental place in Dante's poetry. His study is rigorous, well-documented, and highly informative. It is a valuable work, which deserves the same attention and credit from American *dantisti*, as well as from scholars of late medieval poetry and music, as it is receiving in Italy.

Paolo Scartoni, *Rutgers University*

Roberta Morosini.

Il mare salato. Il Mediterraneo di Dante, Petrarca e Boccaccio.

Rome: Viella, 2020. 354 pp. €39.

In *Il mare salato*, Roberta Morosini sets out to use a "Mediterranean philology" to treat the *tre corone* not as documents for a cultural history of the sea, but rather as literary innovators who use the sea as a "structure" in their narrative and poetic works. Dedicated to the late scholar of the Mediterranean, Predrag Matvejević, this study uses the concepts of hybridity, connectivity, and liquidity essential to Mediterranean Studies to explore the Sea's place in the great works of Dante, Boccaccio, and Petrarch, with a section dedicated to each one.

Comparing the title of the book to the table of contents, readers will immediately notice that the sequence of authors differs, with Boccaccio occupying the central chapter in the book. In an author's note and in the introduction, the author reveals that this project, originally focused on Boccaccio and the Mediterranean, expanded to include Dante and Petrarch as well.

In the first chapter, on Dante's use of the sea in the *Commedia*, Morosini identifies Dante's sea as an archive for the human experience across time and space. This chapter is divided into two "itineraries": a "geographic-representative" itinerary that tracks Dante's use of maritime geographies towards the creation of a world, and a "poetic-representational" one that explores Dante's symbolic use of shipwrecks, sirens, and classical figures (e.g. Medusa, Jason, and Hypsipyle) related to the sea. Moving adeptly among the rich commentary tradition, Morosini locates not only moments where the *Commedia* evokes maritime geographies, characters, and symbolism, but also how these were interpreted by the poem's early readers, with special attention given to Boccaccio's commentaries.

The central chapter, which is the longest and best-developed, argues that Boccaccio's modernity can be seen in his use of the sea as a narrative space. In this chapter Morosini makes her central claim: that Boccaccio's Mediterranean transcends Dante's and Petrarch's symbolic use of the sea, serving as a productive