

political engagement. The biographical narrative develops through the poet's wanderings during exile and focuses particularly on the years Dante spent in Verona as a guest of the della Scala family.

Pellegrini offers some of the most original hypotheses on the Dante's peregrinations and social and intellectual activity during his exile. The author has recently attributed to Dante's hand a letter previously thought to have been written by Cangrande della Scala to Emperor Henry VII in August 1312. This new information, once corroborated, would confirm the hypothesis that Dante stayed for an extended period of time in Verona before moving to Ravenna and the court of Guido Novello da Polenta. Though other scholars have contested the attribution, Pellegrini is now working on the critical edition of the letter, where he will undoubtedly present new evidence in support of his hypothesis.

The author is also in favor of other attributional theories that are still not entirely resolved and which he uses to shed light on the latter years of Dante's life, for which there is almost no archival documentation. Specifically, Pellegrini considers the Epistle to Cangrande and the *Questio de aqua et terra* to be authentic; this, according to him, would confirm Dante's presence in Verona and involvement in the cultural and courtly milieu of the city. Despite the questions of attribution, the biography provided by Pellegrini is one of the most thorough in recent years. The author analyzes the historical data, with competence and lucidity, and explains and justifies his most controversial hypotheses. This is accomplished with a solid knowledge of medieval literary history and through a meticulous philological analysis of sources.

The other great quality of this biography is that it is beautifully written. With his light and elegant prose, Pellegrini catches the interest of both the specialist and casual reader. To explain some of the most challenging themes in the various chapters, Pellegrini occasionally inserts brief notes on the content and structure of Dante's works. For its rigorous analytical approach, and beautiful writing style, Pellegrini's book can be considered one of the best Dante biographies of the last few decades. And precisely because of this virtuous combination of methodological strength, knowledge of the subject matter, and writing skill, this work deserves to be translated. This would allow readers throughout the world to learn of Dante's biographical and literary journey, in a new fascinating light.

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Lino Pertile.

*Dante Popolare.*

Ravenna: Longo Editore, 2021. 385 pp. €34.

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The 700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Dante's death has been a formidable year to celebrate the cultural magnitude of the Florentine poet and to draw conclusions about global trends of Dante Studies. Lino Pertile's book arrives in this propitious time to

contribute towards an understanding of the great poet that is too often diminished or ignored: the popular Dante. Not that the word *popolare* can be easily defined; what does popular mean? It is important to clarify—and Pertile does so several times throughout the book—as to avoid any doubts, linguistic ambiguities, or anachronisms: Dante’s *popolo* has nothing to do with what we intend as such nowadays. It is not limited and defined by the norms and understanding of contemporary society on themes of education or wealth. It is not a class division—after all, many fourteenth-century aristocrats were unlearned and unable to read—and the approach to literature between a blacksmith and a nobleman was not necessarily too different. The *popolo* we should instead consider has a larger variety of persons, and more importantly, partially changes in Dante’s understanding between the *Convivio* and the *Commedia*. Before we go there, however, Pertile introduces his investigation with a simple and yet powerful question: granted the success of Dante in our world, what is in the *Divine Comedy* that makes it so “universally irresistible” [12]? Aware of the great attention to Dante as the father of Italian language, Pertile’s stated goal is to contribute to moving scholarship towards a new balance between the *Dante colto* and *Dante popolare*, more respectful of the complexity of Dante and his *Commedia*.

In addition to a foreword on the ideas predicating this project, the book is divided into two main sections. The first is an introduction to the problem, showing how some of the more recognized characteristics of Dante’s *Commedia* belong to the world of popular culture, including reports of visions, travels to the Afterlife, as well as hagiographies and sermons. The same can be said about the language of Dante, which is very distant from the refined vernacular of the aristocratic Petrarch and Pietro Bembo. The *plurilinguismo*, celebrated as one of the staples of Dante’s literary wealth, perhaps represented the more open deviation from an aristocratic vernacular, one that will become codified by the *Prose* two centuries later based on a more polished (and less common) language. After the fascinating journey through Dante’s alternate fortunes from the Trecento up to the time of Mussolini and Gramsci, Contini and Pasolini, Lino Pertile spends some time in defining the coordinates of his study, analyzing the method of his work and the challenges, theoretical as well as practical, of such a task. Aware of the vastness of this field, he leaves several suggestions for further study while highlighting those that came before. Particular attention has been given to the scholarship on the relationship between Dante and preaching literature, from which the poet drew ideas and styles. The reason for Dante’s success, says Pertile—especially of the *Infèrno*—is the ability to picture feelings and desires, but also characters and their passions. Not differently from a preacher, Dante aims at moving the readers through this ‘catalog of emotions,’ and he does so in such an intense way that it is still nowadays effective and vibrant. His declared mission—and ironically the one that will fail—is to wear the clothes of the prophet, able to guide his fellow brothers through the perilous waters of sin. He wanted to spark a change in people’s lives; and yet, what remains of him is his greatness as a poet, while some delicate and controversial theological suggestions are quickly tamed by the commentaries.

In the second part of the book, in which Pertile elaborates some of his previous scholarship, we are confronted with practical studies on the popular life in the *Commedia*. Among others, there are studies on the transfiguration of classical

figures from the *Aeneid* to the *Inferno*, the family ties embodied by the absence of Geri del Bello, or the popular story of Buonconte's death. These are all contributions whose role is to demonstrate and to analyze those popular elements and thus stress those aspects that were shared in his society.

It does not surprise that these studies focus on the first two *cantiche*: with the *Paradiso*, the popular voice disappears and leaves the room to the university: it is time for teaching, for giving answers and solutions, and the single stories are at this point rare and vague. Yet, being an intentional movement, it does not exclude anybody from being part of it, it is still very inclusive despite its announced new high profile. This is ever more evident if compared, and this is a good part of Pertile's argument, with the proudly aristocratic *Convivio*, a text that—although also written in vernacular—is still very keen in having an audience of a certain kind. The progress from the *Convivio* to the *Commedia*, Pertile argues, is a change of perspective. Sure, in both cases Dante is using the vernacular language, the Florentine that he deemed not worthy of being the language of poetry, and yet between the attitude of the two works there could not be more difference. So aristocratic the first, so 'popular' the second. This is of great importance: the passage from the two texts represents a shift in Dante's mission, from the philosopher to the poet-prophet, and therefore to modes and attitudes of a preacher. This change of point of view reflects its essence in the language, and here Pertile aptly dedicates a good amount of space to the Dantean vernacular. Differently from what he had defined in the *De vulgari eloquentia*, the language he uses for his *Commedia* is the Florentine vernacular of the turn of the fourteenth century, crystallized from the time before his exile. It is a language that can be understood by many, apt to his mission and, one can infer, to his pleasure: after all, Dante will demonstrate in his *Eclogues* his ability with Latin.

Mindful of the risks entailed into 'lowering' the horizon of Dante, especially concurrently with the 2021 celebrations and the subsequent sprouts of rhetoric, what Pertile writes is a hymn of love to the poet, not a rebuke of his geniality. Following in the steps of those who do not want to limit Dante to the embrace of the academic world, the author guides the reader in a journey through Dante as a crossroad of popular culture and personal interpretations, a mediator between high and low culture. The prominence of the poet goes beyond his formidable knowledge and memory ability but draws from the world of visions, sermons, *exempla*, folkloristic traditions, all together in his legendary path.

This year of celebration seemed to lack this popular aspect, and Pertile's book came to the rescue, bringing into the field the side of Dante that makes him still rich more than seven hundred years later. It is not intended as a book that could encompass the whole subject, but rather as a reminder that the field of Dante Studies still has a lot to be explored. The *Commedia* that still inspires singers, actors, graphic designers, videogames, and movies; the text that draws hundreds of people in the square of a city to listen to a public reading, and which is performed in Ravenna with the whole city: *that* Dante cannot be limited to academic discussions or aristocratic (or even nationalistic) senses of belonging. *Dante Popolare* is thus a great starting point that guides the reader with an informed and decidedly un-pedantic style—which would ironically invalidate the whole purpose of it. It is an open book,

an invitation to add new chapters, and a different stance on the uniqueness of Dante's *Commedia*.

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*Dante visualizzato. Carte ridenti II: XV secolo. Prima parte.*

Marcello Ciccuto and Leyla M.G. Livraghi, eds.

Florence: Franco Cesati, 2019. 407 pp. €50.

*Dante visualizzato. Carte ridenti III: XV secolo. Seconda parte.*

Rosend Arqués Corominas and Sabrina Ferrara, eds.

Florence: Franco Cesati, 2019. 310 pp. €50.

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Dante's *Commedia* is surely one of the most fascinating and evocative poems which naturally attracted the interests of readers, book owners and publishers for the manifold applications its verses experienced, and still experience, in the field of illustrations. Thus, the importance of the book series *Dante visualizzato* is to collect studies, insights and accurate contributions about the role and the forms illustrations played in the transmission of Dante's work.

In particular, volumes *Carte ridenti II* and *III* collect the proceedings of two international conferences: the first, held in Florence on April 18–20, 2016, was focused on the first half of the fifteenth century (without however neglecting the late 14<sup>th</sup>) and *Commedia* manuscript production; the second, held in Tours and Paris between May 31 and June 3, 2017, moved to the second half of the fifteenth century, consequently considering both manuscripts and printed books. The main feature of both volumes is their multidisciplinary approach, involving codicology, history of art, literature, digital humanities etc.: even though many contributions deal with different case studies or areas, the reader will perceive an atmosphere of continuous dialogue, a *fil rouge* which goes beyond the common subject.

So, that said, contributions on wider subjects are numerous and rich. In *Carte ridenti II*: Marisa Boschi Rotiroti and Francesca Pasut (pp. 11–33) analyze manuscripts of Dante's *Commedia* produced in Florence between the second half of the fourteenth and the first half of the fifteenth century; Chiara Ponchia (pp. 35–46) focuses on iconographical strategies and representations in *Commedia* manuscript transmission, examining also two examples (Firenze, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, B.R. 39 and Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, It. 78); Paolo Procaccioli (pp. 119–132) investigates the still obscure topic of the *lecturae Dantis* in the first part of the fifteenth century, in order to find a link with contemporary illustration trends; Marco Cursi and Luisa Miglio (pp. 179–201) present their research on *Commedia* manuscripts in mercantesca script, focusing on the first half of the fifteenth century (not a particularly rich period for this kind of production) and analyzing some interesting cases. In *Carte ridenti III*: Gennaro Ferrante (pp. 35–53) shows the influence iconography of Dante's *Commedia* exerted on illustrators of Vergil's *Aeneid*; Matthew Collins (pp. 115–133) investigates genealogic relationships between