



2021

Reviews Full

Editor Bibliotheca Dantesca

Follow this and additional works at: <https://repository.upenn.edu/bibdant>

 Part of the [Ancient, Medieval, Renaissance and Baroque Art and Architecture Commons](#), [Italian Language and Literature Commons](#), and the [Medieval History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Bibliotheca Dantesca, Editor (2021) "Reviews Full," *Bibliotheca Dantesca: Journal of Dante Studies*: Vol. 4 , Article 23.

Available at: <https://repository.upenn.edu/bibdant/vol4/iss1/23>

This paper is posted at ScholarlyCommons. <https://repository.upenn.edu/bibdant/vol4/iss1/23>
For more information, please contact repository@pobox.upenn.edu.

REVIEWS

Elisa Brillì and Giuliano Milani.
Vite nuove. Biografia e autobiografia di Dante.
Rome: Carocci, 2021. 400 pp. €29.

The literary tradition dedicated to reconstructing Dante's life was initiated by Giovanni Boccaccio in the decades after the poet's death. Following Boccaccio's *Trattatello in laude di Dante* numerous scholars—from the humanist period to the present day—have attempted to reconstruct and interpret events in the divine poet's life. The seventh centenary of Dante's death provided a unique opportunity to further explore biographical obscurities, and many specialists have offered new interpretations of the celebrated poet's life.

Among the many Dante biographies published in Italy, in 2021, the most intriguing and innovative is certainly that of Elisa Brillì and Giuliano Milani. *Vite nuove. Biografia e autobiografia di Dante* (published in France, earlier in the year, under the title *Dante. Des vies nouvelles*). The book, which takes an analytical approach, overturns the classical structures of Dante's biography. By combining their strengths and specialized skills, the authors have created a work that merges historical analysis, philology, and critical interpretation. The collaborative writing and dual analytical perspective allow the biographers to explore the poet's life through an interdisciplinary lens. This collaboration and interdisciplinarity led Brillì and Milani to distinguish documentary evidence from literary sources and thus read them on two parallel levels. Consequently, the biography presents chapters based almost exclusively on documentary sources (introduced by the title *La storia*) whereas others (*Il racconto*) analyze the different narratives of self ("racconti di sé"), elaborated by Dante in his works. This bipartite analysis results in a comparative work in which the perspectives of the two authors offer harmonious interpretative counterpoints.

The book is organized according to the stages of human life, as established in the fourth treatise of the *Convivio* (adolescence, youth, and old age). The biographical section is preceded by a *Prologo* on the origins of Dante's family and concludes with an interpretative *Epilogo*. The book's sophisticated composition, combined with the broad chronological structure, allows the reader to fully understand the value of a biography or, rather, a multifaceted life like Dante's. At an historical level, Milani's analysis of the documentary sources shows Dante in an entirely new light as compared to traditional historiography. Milani presents the poet as a "pure" intellectual who is distinguished from other *literati* of his time because of his nuanced view of the intellectual's social role. Unlike other medieval Tuscan poets, Dante did not have a stable profession: he was not a banker like Dino Frescobaldi, a jurist like Cino da Pistoia, nor a notary like Brunetto Latini. From

the time of his youth, Dante transformed the practice of writing poetry from an ancillary activity into a proper occupation; thus, he became a sort of predecessor to Petrarch and his idea of the “professional scholar.” Despite the lack of a well-defined social status, this new view of intellectual life, Milani tells us, allowed Dante to stand out in the political arena of his time, both in Florence and in the intricate geopolitical map of the early fourteenth-century Italian peninsula. When compared with the rigid ideological figure of a partisan man—fashioned by traditional historiography—Milani’s biographical profile presents a Dante who approaches the civic and political dimension as an intellectual who adapts himself to the fluid political landscape of medieval Italy.

Elisa Brilli’s investigation complements this excellent historical analysis by focusing on the relationship between Dante’s intellectual path and his works. The result of this study is an artistic biography that sheds new light on several aspects of the narrative and promotional strategies deployed by the poet in his works. Specifically, Brilli points out that in the *Vita nova* Dante sketches a self-portrait, as a poet and public figure, by virtue of which he aimed to enter the political and social scene of his city—a sort of “business card” of the nearly thirty-year-old Dante seeking social affirmation in the sophisticated late thirteenth-century Florentine context. It is precisely with the *Vita nova* that Dante introduces the poetics of the “narrative of self,” which is both a pioneering narrative device and a publicity strategy to build a new readership and reach wide-ranging intellectual prestige. In Brilli’s analysis, this new strategy reaches its peak in the *Commedia*. According to the scholar, the “sacred poem” is Dante’s true testament, the text through which the poet wished to convey the meaning of his life and that of human history. Like any medieval Italian who dictates his last will and testament to a notary, Dante employs the *Commedia*—and the perspective of the afterlife—to address his successors and influence his present condition. And, as in the case of any legal will, the poet occasionally changes his mind and redirects his intentions according to the circumstances. The result is a treasure trove of phrases, ideas, values, judgments, images, and knowledge that Dante dispenses to an audience that, for him, represents all of humanity. The writing of his poetic *testamentum* reflects and maximizes the powerful strategy of self-validation developed by the poet through the narrative of self. Indeed, in the poem, Dante presents himself as a character-narrator through narrative shifts inspired by literary models including Boethius, Augustine, and the Bible. Through these multiple interpretative lenses, Dante recounts his afterlife journey using his own biography as a narrative tool. He recounts his story as a converted sinner (Augustine) and unjustly persecuted person (Boethius), who is transformed into an apostle and prophet when, in *Paradiso*, he receives the investiture of “scribe of God.” These different portraits conveyed by the poet in the *Commedia*, Brilli suggests, constitute the literary mark of an extraordinary human and intellectual experience. Dante wisely makes this the central point of his narrative and thus delivers to posterity a unique precedent in Western literary history.

In conclusion, *Vite nuove* is a groundbreaking biography of Dante that differs from those that precede it in method, objectives, and structure. As the authors themselves emphasize, it does not claim to be a definitive biography of the poet. Rather, this excellent work seeks to be the first chapter of a historiographical “restoration” that considers the historical context of Dante’s life and the poet’s

multifaceted human and intellectual journey. A journey in which data and chronological and documentary gaps can be equally valuable clues to fully understand the poet's biographical narrative. For all these reasons, Brill and Milani's book should certainly be considered the major biographical study on Dante of the last few decades, and one of the fundamental points of reference for future works on this endlessly fascinating subject.

Natale Vacalebri, *University of Pennsylvania*

John Took.

Dante.

Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020. 582 pp. \$35

Dante by John Took contributes a thorough biography that both centers Dante's works and the historical context they are embedded in. Took begins his text by reflecting on T.S. Eliot's reading of Dante and the limits and possibilities of interpreting his biography and writing. Took agrees with Eliot and notes that reading Dante's contemporaries' after reading his own work is next reasonable step in interpreting a figure as monumental as Dante but expands Eliot's view by noting that something *must* be said or interpreted, because Dante himself invites the *lettore* to speak on his or her own account (XXI).

The book first delves into the historical context, the political background and struggle between Florentine power blocs, partisanship and alignment, and civic disorder. "Historical Considerations", which covers the periods of 1251-1313, is dedicated to outlining this historical backdrop before explicitly inserting Dante to the events. Took outlines Florentine power struggles through distinctive phases. He begins with Buondelmonte to characterize Florence's political past then details the struggle for power between the Guelphs and Ghibellines, describing the period as one of genuine political creativity. This then leads to his discussion of the subsequent early years of the fourteenth century and the inner struggle among Black and White Guelphs. After the first chapter, Took situates Dante within this larger conflict between factions. Chapter 2, "Biographical Considerations", begins with a biographical constellation of Dante's lineage, starting from Cacciaguida and his mention in *Paradiso*, to Dante's birth in 1265. Along with drawing out Dante's later relationship with Guido Cavalcanti and Brunetto Latini, Took underlines how Dante's turn to philosophy and the philosophical schools in Florence was set in motion by the death of Beatrice in 1290. The "Biographical Considerations" chapter is divided into three phases, "Susceptibility and the Significant Encounter (1265-1293)"; "Care, Conflict and Catastrophe (1293-1302)"; and lastly "Far-Wandering and the Agony of Exile (1302-1321)."

After these introductory chapters, Took analyses Dante's biography through a chronological examination of his literary works and letters. Although each section is ordered in a chronological manner, Took references post-exile works to analyze

Dante's development as political thinker, poet, and philosopher. Through the reading of *Vita Nova*, Dante's notion of love as a principle of disposition, as opposed to acquisition, surfaces within Took's inquiry as he also notes how *Vita Nova* functions as a preliminary essay in the dialectic of hell, purgatory, and paradise "as a matter of self-confrontation, self-reconfiguration and self-transcendence" (77). In a continuation of his detailed exploration of *Vita Nova*, Took divides his third chapter, "Literary Apprenticeship and a Coming of Age" into "Dante Guittoniano" and "Dante Cavalcantiano." He elaborates on Dante's Guittonian phase, which was marked by a heightened sense of moral and salvific substance of love in both his *Rime* and *Vita Nova*. In his "Dante Cavalcantiano" section, Took describes this phase in Dante's biography as a lyric poet as one characterized by "restiveness" in his development of "love-understanding" and "love-expression" while also putting into question Dante's Cavalcantianism, noting that his is "just a pale reflection of the real thing, a living out of the Cavalcantian drama under the aspect less of its substance than of its symptomology" (133). In other words, Took notes that within Dante's Cavalcantian phase, love is never "in and for itself as a principle of undoing on the plane of properly human being—of confusion, consternation and near-impossibility, to be sure, but never, in and for itself and properly understood, of anything other than new life" (133). In the following sections, Took continues to touch on Dante's different influences during his development as a lyric poet in both his subsections "Dante and the *Rose*" and "Dante Guinizzelliano" and concludes with summarizing the affective-philosophical aspect of the *Vita Nova* as well as the principle of "properly human being and becoming", meaning, the finality of one's human presence. Took notes in the final section of Part II that Dante's activity as a lyric poet and as a philosopher of love is expressed through the literary-aesthetic facet of *Vita Nova* which had the same underpinnings as Dante's later *Convivio* and *Divine Comedy*.

Part II of Took's book explores the *Rime*, the *Convivio*, the *De vulgari eloquentia* and the Post-Exilic *Rime*. It is noted that in most of the works detailed in this biography that the discussion of the principle of "being and becoming" is an undercurrent in Dante's writing. One of the most striking moments it is investigated in is within Dante's treatise on language and rhetoric and the "becoming" of the *vulgare illustre* which aligns itself with the concept of self-affirmation and recognition. It is made clear that the *vulgare illustre* is a matter of rejoicing but also a diasporic force which Took characterizes as forlorn even while superimposing the matter of being and becoming on the theme of language. Took notes that Dante's three *canzoni* written early in his exile echo his meditations on exile and grief in the *Divine Comedy*.

In the final section of his book, delineating the *Commedia*, *De Monarchia*, the *Eclogues*, and the *Quaestio de aqua et terra*, Took expands on the theme of the self as meditated on by Dante and the world surrounding the self. In one of his final sections titled "The Dialectics of Being: A Difficult Dimensionality" Took analyzes Dante's sense of temporality in relation to both *Paradiso* and the *Convivio*. He writes that for Dante, time is conceptualized as a before and after especially in the reconstruction of the self, "the intentional reconstruction both of self and of the world beyond self, is always temporally conditioned. It is always a matter of its

successive moments” (389). Time is thus described as a means of self-perspectivization but also as an entity that speaks in the imperative for Dante.

Took’s chapters are brimming with both contextual information and analysis of Dante’s biography and life works; the book provides a full view into the background in which Dante is writing while bringing to light themes of existence, exile, language, temporality, and love through its meticulous selection of sources. It becomes clear through every chapter and analysis that the *lettore* mentioned in the preface, is necessarily part of this biography.

Lourdes Contreras, *University of Pennsylvania*

Paolo Pellegrini.

Dante Alighieri. Una vita.

Turin: Einaudi, 2021. XX + 259 pp. €22.

Among the new generation of Dante biographies, inaugurated by Marco Santagata’s work *Dante. Il romanzo della sua vita* (2012), Paolo Pellegrini’s *Dante Alighieri. Una vita* is undoubtedly one of the most cogent and fascinating. This brand-new study begins with the assumption that Dante’s works, and particularly the *Commedia*, are not “instant books” of the poet’s life. In the last few decades, there has been a tendency among Dante biographers to use verses of the sacred poem to glean information about the author’s life. Pellegrini, referring to the interpretative discretion of Italian scholars of the first half of the twentieth century—and especially Michele Barbi—chose instead to find a balance between documentary analysis and literary interpretation in constructing his biographical profile of the poet.

The book is based on an accurate analysis of the archival documents related to Dante and his historical context (specifically the excellent collection of the new *Codice Diplomatico Dantesco* published by Salerno Editrice), as well as literary sources that Pellegrini considers reliable and worthy of consideration. Specifically, the author considers texts of the exegetical tradition of the *Commedia* (e.g., Jacopo and Pietro Alighieri, Andrea Lancia, the *Ottimo commento*, Boccaccio, Filippo Villani) as well as Boccaccio’s *Trattatello*, Leonardo Bruni’s *Vita di Dante*, and Biondo Flavio’s *Historiarum decades*. The author has analyzed the testimonies collected with a highly philological approach, delivering to both specialist readers and the broader public a balanced and innovative profile of Dante. From a strictly narrative point of view, the biographical portrait Pellegrini provides is a “traditional” account that develops chronologically through a geographic-poetic distribution of the chapters.

The book opens with a short introductory chapter on the historical context of Florence between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries; this is very helpful for understanding the governmental structure of the Tuscan city and the social and political upheavals prior to the poet’s birth. This chapter is followed by one dedicated to the Florentine period of Dante’s life (1265-1302) and a third on the poet’s

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.

Natale Vacalebri, *University of Pennsylvania*

Lino Pertile.

Dante Popolare.

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

The 700th 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*.

Mario Sassi, *University of Pennsylvania*

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.

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 14th) 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

illuminated manuscripts and incunables; Maria Maślanka-Soro (pp. 209–225) and Angelo Eugenio Mecca (pp. 255–269) reflect on the role of illustrations in text interpretation and philological studies; Giancarlo Petrella (pp. 227–253) examines editions of illustrated *Commedia*, starting from the Florentine 1481 edition up to the 1491 Venice one.

Contributions on single case studies, particular manuscripts and editions, or very specific themes are even more richly represented. In *Carte ridenti II*: Anna Pegoretti (pp. 47–72) studies what is considered the first topo-chronography of Dante's *Commedia*, *Cammino di Dante*, written by the Florentine notary Piero Bonaccorsi in the 1430s; Joan Molina Figueras (pp. 73–89) and Vincenzo Vitale (pp. 91–118) examine the illuminated manuscript London, British Library, Yates Thompson 36, owned by Alfonso the Magnanimous of Aragon King of Naples and presented here as an example of political representation; Andrea Improta (pp. 133–142) shows the late 14th-century *codex* Cambridge, Cambridge University Library, Gg.3.6, connecting it to Ugolino III Lord of Foligno and Federico Frezzi, author of *Quadriregio*; Gianni Pittiglio (pp. 143–163) analyses the manuscript Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional, 10057 and its illustrations, in order to look for their sources in commentaries, such as the one by Giovanni da Serravalle, and enlightening their anti-Papal critical attitude; Susy Marcon (pp. 165–178) moves the attention to the Istrian environment, studying two illuminated manuscripts of the *Commedia* written by chancellor Pietro Campenni between the late Trecento and the following century; Eva Ponzi (pp. 203–213) underlines the old-fashioned illumination style in the Ott. lat. 2863 of the Vatican Library; Salvatore Sansone (pp. 215–228) studies the representation of the last *Purgatorio* cantos in some manuscripts; Gennaro Ferrante (pp. 229–255) and Ciro Perna (pp. 257–264) talk about the possibilities the *Illuminated Dante Project* (IDP) can provide in manuscript studies, introducing the reader to the field of digital humanities; Anna Perriccioli Saggese (pp. 265–276) focuses on the illustrations contained in the manuscript M.676 of the Morgan Library; even the world of modern book selling and book collecting is represented thanks to Daniele Guernelli's essay (pp. 277–289). In *Carte ridenti III*: Claudia Cieri Via (pp. 15–33) and Giulia Puma (pp. 55–72) study the illuminated Urb. lat. 365, commissioned by Federico da Montefeltro Duke of Urbino in 1474, showing its importance, its complexity and its role as iconographical model; Florence, Landino's commentary and illustrations by Baldini for the 1481 edition of the *Commedia* appear in contributions by Paolo Procaccioli (pp. 73–94) and Marcello Ciccuto (pp. 95–100); Beatrice Arduini (pp. 101–114) introduces the eclectic figure of Antonio Manetti; Luca Marcozzi (pp. 135–159) and Silvia Maddalo (pp. 193–207) study the incunable of Dante's main poem illuminated by Antonio Grifo; Gianni Pittiglio (pp. 161–192) is interested on how *Paradiso* was represented in incunables printed in Venice in 1491.

These dense volumes begin with an introductory premise by the editors and end with a bibliography and rich indexes: names and places, manuscripts and Dante's quotes in vols. II and III; incunables of the *Commedia*, illuminated incunables and other incunables only in vol. III. Since indexes provide a valuable and fundamental help to consultation, the main argument of these books might have been even more fulfilling by adding an index of the illustrations.

Overall, these two volumes give the reader a great and accurate collection of insights on illustration of Dante's verses in the fifteenth century, blending multiple disciplines and connecting manuscripts and printing.

Stefano Cassini, *Catholic University of Milan*

Nuove Prospettive sulla Tradizione della "Commedia." Terza Serie (2020).
Martina Cita, Federico Marchetti, and Paolo Trovato, eds.
Padua: libreriauniversitaria.it edizioni, 2021. 221 pp. €19.90.

As the current issue of *Bibliotheca Dantesca* comes out, the first two volumes (Introduction and *Inferno*) of the new critical edition of Dante's *Comedy*, edited by the so-called *Gruppo di Ferrara*, should already have been or will soon be released. Their publication marks a turning point in the editorial history of the *Comedy*, and in textual philology and criticism in general. Conducted on ca. 630 *loci critici* and more than 580 witnesses, the collation carried out by the *Gruppo di Ferrara*, led by Paolo Trovato, is a truly remarkable endeavor that no Dante scholar nor textual critic will be able to ignore. *Nuove Prospettive* offers us a glimpse into their workshop, shedding light on the problems they faced, as well as on their methodology and some preliminary results.

Nuove Prospettive is the proceeding of an online symposium held in June 2020, in which the *Gruppo di Ferrara* confronted a selected group of Dante scholars and philologists in preparation of the new edition of the *Comedy*. The first part of the volume, "Qualche altra idea su Dante," features seven essays presented by the members of the *Gruppo*. The second part, "Note e commenti," is a collection of objections, observations, and further considerations from the discussants invited to the conference.

The essay by Luisa Ferretti Cuomo, who is in charge of the new edition's commentary, opens the volume. It is a highly enjoyable, insightful, and informative collection of five case studies that show what the lexicological challenges of glossing the *Comedy* are and what tools should be used to reconstruct the history and meaning of problematic terms. In the following essay, Elisabetta Tonello shares some considerations about the contaminations of the manuscripts belonging to the *periferia stemmatica* ("...the witnesses that cannot be linked to neither big nor small families,"¹ p. 23) of the Tuscan-Florentine tradition of the *Comedy*. Tonello provides detailed tables that summarize her findings. She takes into consideration both contaminations of readings, "when the copyist chooses case by case, line by line, from two or more models simultaneously present on their desk," or contamination of exemplars, "when the models alternate regularly" (p. 25). She also identifies and investigates a third kind of contamination, which she terms "hybrid," that is a

¹ All translations are mine.

combination of the other two. Her contribution is of great importance for anyone interested in the slippery topic of contamination.

The following two essays, by Fabio Romanini and Marco Giola, offer some preliminary considerations on the future editions of *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*, respectively. Romanini looks at the 15 *loci critici* from *Purg.* 2 (8 taken from Barbi, 4 from Petrocchi, and 3 selected by the *Gruppo di Ferrara*, p. 39). The *Gruppo* famously identified the codices of the β branch of the stemma, *Florio* (Udine, Università degli Studi di Udine, Bibl. Florio, 001) and *Urbinate* (Vatican City, Bibl. Apost. Vaticana, Urb. Lat. 366), as two of the most authoritative witnesses of the entire tradition and underscored the close affinity between the two. Not surprisingly, then, Romanini concludes that “also in this canto, the agreement between *Florio* and *Urbinate* is extremely high” (p. 45). He also argues that “the families previously identified are solid” and suggests that they also show striking graphic similarities (p. 45). Giola combines a study of the variants, and of Dante’s previous works and sources to offer an interpretation of 5 case studies (6 *loci critici*) from *Par.* 15. His contribution is useful both in terms of methodology and for his multi-layered approach.

Martina Cita and Elena Niccolai’s contributions are specific to *Inferno* and the authors most likely relied on a critical edition which was at an extremely advanced stage. I believe these essays to be the most interesting of the volume. Cita offers a remarkably clear exposition on the *fiorentinismi* of the family β (U and F in the *stemma ferrarese*), the sub-archetype of reference of the edition. Such an assessment is paramount, for U and F are northern witnesses and their degree of “fiorentinness” could hypothetically be evidence of authenticity. Niccolai in turn assesses the “new prosody of *Inferno* according to β .” Her essay offers a detailed account of the prosodic features of *Inferno* based on about 20 cantos of the edition (p. 88). Niccolai compares the prosody of β ’s *Inferno* with that of the Sicilian poets, concluding that they are in conversation (p. 127). She also demonstrates how β allows for the drastic reduction in the number of exceptions to the predominant prosodic practices of the text. That I know of, this is the first critical edition whose results are specifically assessed through the verification of prosody, which attests to the intelligence and rigor of the entire operation.

In the last contribution of the first part of the volume, Paolo Trovato shares some reflections on the punctuation of some of the *codices*. Many considerations are fascinating: for instance, the idea that in Triv. (Milano, Bibl. Trivulziana, 1080), the *virgula* might signal words accented on the final syllable and accented monosyllables (p. 133). Nevertheless, what is most striking, especially considering some of the previous essays, are once again the similarities between U and F, which he extends to the archetype β_0 . Trovato points out how the punctuation of U is not “less sophisticated than the autograph section of Petrarch’s *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*,” suggesting that β_0 might transmit traces of Dante’s own punctuation practices (pp. 148 ff.).

The second part of the volume gathers the contributions of some of the discussants: Luciano Formisano, Giovanna Frosini, Laura Facini and Arnaldo Soldani, Rosario Coluccia, Sandro Bertelli, Mirko Tavoni, Tiziano Zanato, and Lorenzo Renzi. Their observations contain, more often than not, some critical

objections. And quite frankly, it would be surprising if an operation such as the one carried out by the *Gruppo di Ferrara* had raised no perplexities: they will, after all, restore a version of the *Comedy* (that is, a text that almost every Italian and many international readers know intimately well) to which our ears are not accustomed. This volume is a must read for anyone planning to evaluate their new *Comedy*. It documents the rigor, spirit of collaboration (among the members of the group as well as with the rest of the community of Dante scholars and philologists), and methodological innovations that made the experience of the *Gruppo di Ferrara* the most interesting philological workshop on the *Comedy* in our time.

Paolo Scartoni, *Rutgers University*

Approaches to Teaching Dante's Divine Comedy, 2nd edition.
Christopher Kleinhenz and Kristina Olson, eds.
New York, NY: Modern Languages Association of America, 2020. 312 pp.
\$65.

The 2020 *Approaches to Teaching Dante's Divine Comedy* edited by Kristina Olson and Christopher Kleinhenz at once complements and expands Carol Shade's 1982 edition, detailing major advancements and transformations in the pedagogical practices of American Dante studies over the last three decades. The excellence of the volume lies in the editors' ability as conductors of a symphonic conversation across teaching practices and educational contexts, research backgrounds and scholarly expertise. While Slade's volume stood granitically centered on a "more traditionally focused Dante pedagogy" (p. xii), Kleinhenz and Olson's collection embraces the ever-shifting horizons of the discipline in both teaching and learning, stirred by "new research in material philology, cultural studies and literary theory" (p. xii), digital humanities and creative writing.

The macro-structure of the volume distinguishes between 'Materials' and 'Approaches'. In the former, the editors' annotated bibliography is a comprehensive, highly practical aid to both first- and old-timer instructors. Among the wealth of editions, translations, critical studies and articles, the "Instructor's Library" records the appearance of new, up-and-coming journals (like our very own *Bibliotheca Dantesca*), "two clusters of essays on teaching Dante" in *Pedagogy* as well as detail the expansion of reception studies and multiplication of digital humanities projects. The 2020-publication date robbed the editors' the chance to include the outburst of works of highly-teachable potential launched for the 2021 Centenary such as Laura Ingallinella's Wiki Education project - developed with her students at Wellesley College and retraces and reinscribes the memory of the women featured in the *Comedy*. Or the online exhibition (<https://www.commediadivinaonlinexhibition.com/>) created by the recently established Centre for Dante Studies in Ireland of 'La Commedia Divina' by Liam

O' Broin (now on display at Dublin Castle): the 100 lithographs are fully searchable and accompanied by original musical compositions.

The editors' introductory essay discusses the results of a survey on the courses delivered across "eighty-five colleges and universities" including "one community college and one high school" and within "a variety of departments: forty-three in languages and literatures; twenty-nine in English and comparative literature; and ten in other humanities-related fields" (p. 34). The data anticipates what the essays variously tackle: that the teaching of the *Comedy* is not a monolithic construct or a one-way road. Rather, it is a layered, protean-like enterprise where, as F. Regina Psaki aptly observes, "certainly the context of the encounter determines the kind of teaching materials we can use, the assignments we can design, and the learning outcomes we can aim for" (p. 80). The essays articulate how the choice of approach, and the selection of cantos are highly dependent on factors such as nature of the courses (term or year-long; general education, Italian-specific, comparatist; credit or non-credit bearing), of the program (general education; Italian majors) and of the teaching institution (secular and Catholic; state, community and college; high-schools and correction facilities). The age, the socio-cultural and even religious background of the students are equally influential for instructors' strategies for making the poem "relevant" to students' cultural formation and personal histories, hence limiting "the potential for [historical, linguistic and cultural] alienation" (Roznak, p. 170). In this regard, the volume effectively demonstrates the evolution of the classroom into a vibrant space of collaboration, exchange and reciprocal growth where new methods, tools, resources and modes of reading the text are discovered, tested and perfected.

These advancements in the teacher-learner relationship are showcased throughout the five subsections of 'Approaches'. In the first, 'Textual traditions, language and Authority', Barolini reflects on Dante's very own "authorial pedagogy" and how his "protocols" put readers "in a continuous cognitive deficit, always challenging them to work for understanding" (p. 39). Reaching beyond the inner textual dimension, Storey's and Magni's material philology argues that by encountering "firsthand and tangibly" (p. 57) manuscripts and early printed editions, their paleographical and book-historical analysis heightens students' appreciation of underlying the architecture of the page, and awareness of "the culture that receives and reproduces the *Comedy*, the patron who requests a copy of the work and the book's production as artifact" (p.52).

Martinez, Filosa, Deen Schildgen, Psaki and Eisner pursue alternative paths into the *Comedy*'s dialogic use of the Bible ("the dimension of Dante's writings hardest to impart to contemporary students", Martinez, p. 62), Of classical and vernacular culture. Filosa shares a set of "class activities as tools" (p. 67) for training students' in "various modes of textual analysis" that unearth Dantean rewritings of Virgil, Ovid, Lucan and Homer. Deen Schildgen expands the discussion to encompass "Greco-Roman legacy", inclusive of "Arabic learning and philosophy" (p. 73). Moving onto vernacular literature, Psaki advocates for student's direct engagement with the very primary "sources that Dante knew and invoked" (p. 80) in both classroom teaching and end-of-year assignments. Parallel readings, she argues, "mobilize[s] students in actively interpreting Beatrice and the pilgrim's love for her through the lenses of both the *Comedy* and its intertexts" (p. 82), courtly love or

romance. Eisner shows the advantages of placing three moments of *Inferno* “at the center of a dialogue with the medieval and modern poetic tradition” embodied by modernist authors like Joyce, T. S. Eliot and Pound. Similarly, Havelly’s comparative assessment of British, American and Swiss courses on Dante’s reception in modern and contemporary literature detail the productiveness of reading (and rewriting) the *Comedy* across national and territorial borders, historical periods and foreign agents of transmission.

Gary Cestaro’s path-breaking ‘Teaching Dante LGBTQ’ leads the second section on ‘Society and Ethics’. The essay “historicizes the notion of gender identity” and demonstrates how a vertical reading of the *Comedy* “reflects notions of same-sex desire that both reinforce and undermine the gender binary”, that are “both gender separatist and gender transitive” (p. 107). Olson outlines three critical reading modes for mediating polemic attitudes and political divide caused by Dante’s problematic construction of women and female gender: treating the women of the *Comedy* as historical characters; reading the moments of misogynist rhetoric as inherent to a historiographical mode; and unpacking language as a gendered construction. Drell’s history courses offer another example of an interdisciplinary teaching context where the contrastive study of Dante’s “historical memory” and “historical records” can train students’ “evaluation of sources, disentangling and reconciling conflicting contemporary accounts, historical understanding” (p. 120). Dameron and Contino detail their experiences of teaching the theology of the poem, tackling its “complex religious and moral themes” (p. 29) and medieval church history: elements to which students’ from Catholic Colleges are more familiar and inclined to grasp and appreciate. Roush and Hawkins tackle students’ engagement with Dantean ethics. The first stimulates self-reflection through exercises of proactive, “contemporary and personal” reimagining of “aspects of Comedy” (p. 138) via visual, aural and creative or journalistic writing. For the other, ethical awareness derives from the “transhistorical connection to the vicissitudes of Dante’s life and Dante-pilgrim”, asking oneself “what would it be like to be exiled or made a refugee as millions of people in Africa and the Middle East currently are?” and “who would they even be once all the familiar guarantors of identity were taken away?” (p. 150).

Within the discourse on ‘The Reception of the Comedy’, Aideh centers on the application of the art historical method and the compare-contrast approach to medieval and modern visualization of the *Comedy*, giving precise instructions on the selection of the artefacts and their analysis. More creatively, Webb devises “a new way to look” rooted in a multi-directional reading of the poem, moving between parts “in the most fruitful ways, opening up new hermeneutical possibilities” (p. 166). Defying the apparent structural fixity of the poem, students “seek out connections” and “pick out strands of signification” across the canticles (p. 169). Roznack’s counteraction to students’ lack of “investment in premodern text they feel removed from the contemporary moment” (p. 170) is by exploring how “Dante’s work becomes newly interesting and relevant” (p. 171) when read in light of Naylor’s *Linden Hills*, a contemporary African American which reshapes Dante’s Hell through direct appropriation and rewriting. Ciabattoni delineates Dante’s reception history in modern music while also discussing how internal references to sacred, liturgical and secular music reveal “the *Commedia* as the product of this

dynamic medieval interdisciplinary culture” (p. 183). Coggeshall discusses charting Dante’s presence in contemporary and popular media, detailing lessons and activities employed to let students become “savvy cultural consumers” and critical awareness of “how a single text can invite multiple interpretations” (p. 186). Finally, Essary describes the advantages of combining traditional textual approaches with an immersive gaming experience. Venturing through the digital narrative constructed by the “Dante’s Inferno” PS3 videogame, students reflect on the architectural and imaginative reading of the poem carried out by game-designers, while also with the text at a multimedial-level as well as “using accuracies and inaccuracies as valuable” evidence of (mis-)reading (p. 196).

Directly engaged with ‘Instructional contexts and pedagogical strategies’, in the final section of the volume Sowell evaluates the vast array of English translations and their different usability within varying teaching contexts and levels. Hagedorn promotes a particular type of close-reading exercises within general literature courses, where students unpack the stylistic features of Dantes “damned rhetoric” by reading it “in conjunction” with classical hypotexts, gaining awareness of “the innovations of his autobiographical and spiritual queste” and surprising redeployment of “figures of the epic tradition” (p. 211). Marchesi exemplifies situational teaching, documenting the array of strategies deployed to facilitate the engagement of first-year students in the reading of the *Comedy* through the “interplay between course-long assignments and in-class exercises” (p. 216). These stimulate textual memory, the ability to formulate critical questions and a certain “responsibility” (p. 215) for knowledge produced through research. Applauso argues creative writing empowers “students to put theory into practice”, using their “original content” – in that case, a moral system of Inferno ‘of their own making – to grasp “theoretical concepts in connection to literature and poetry” (p. 224). At a more specialized and technologically advanced level, Haynes’ scaffolding approach resorted to blog-posting as a research tool that would stimulate classroom discussion and collaborative learning through classroom discussion on hermeneutic issues of their choosing. Whereas Chiodo’s “tagging exercise” exploited the “tag” function of a Wordpress blog to display the advantages of digital humanities tools in the classroom (p. 259). Returning to analogical methods, Gorman focused on the challenges of teaching “Dante in a lower-level course to build skills in textual analysis” (p. 239) among non-traditional students: an approach shared by Levenstein teaching the *Commedia* at a selective, secular independent school in New York City. The volume closes with Herzman’s experience of teaching Dante within state correctional facilities, contexts where students have no prior literary knowledge but are able to establish a direct, intimate connection between the characters of the *Inferno* and their own life. He also details the struggle with reconciling “trusting” Dante as “a truth teller and an authority” (p. 253). An issue that builds on the practical difficulty of “bringing the writing skills to the level” of their affective, verbal “interpretation”; nevertheless, the receptiveness of the students demonstrates that “Dante is for everyone” (p. 255).

Overall, the volume has the rare power of infusing new life into teaching practices, inviting instructors to question and innovate their modes of reading, analyzing, and discussing the *Commedia* within diverse classroom environments. The edition is an outstanding contribution that goes beyond acknowledging how the

field has evolved over the past thirty years, to actively promote and produce that change by engendering a space of multidisciplinary exchange and collaboration.

Federica Coluzzi, *University College Cork*

Katelynn Robinson.

The Sense of Smell in the Middle Ages: A Source of Certainty.

London–New York: Routledge, 2020. X + 228 pp. \$165 (pb. \$51).

Katelynn Robinson's book provides the first scholarly investigation into the theories of smell elaborated by Latin medieval scholars, from roughly 1100 until 1400 CE. The book also discusses actual applications of these theories in the medical and religious practices of the time. Robinson's study is motivated by an ambition to fill a twofold lacuna in current scholarship. On the one hand, by focusing especially on the late centuries of the Middle Ages, it aims to complement scholarship on the earlier phases of European history, which already boasts a number of well-researched studies. On the other hand, by providing an exploration of medieval olfactory theories, Robinson has the merit of focusing on topics neglected by scholars, who have traditionally been more interested in studying the cultural practices related to smells than in unpacking the complex theoretical views supporting them. These theories, which are discussed at length in the works of leading medieval schoolmen such as Albert the Great, William of St.-Thierry, Vincent of Beauvais, and Bartholomew the Englishman (to mention only a few), are the result of a long and often-tortuous process of *translatio* from the Greek world into the Latin one through the mediation of Arabic thinkers. Robinson reconstructs the main trajectories of this journey by relying on the Latin translations of Greek (Aristotle, Galen) and Arabic scholars (Avicenna, Haly Abbas) produced during the Middle Ages. In addition to this, Robinson shows how Latin medieval views of olfaction were far from being simply the object of mere intellectual speculations, for they served in fact as theoretical foundation to two crucial spheres of medieval life: medicine and religious practice.

The book is composed of three parts, each one consisting of two chapters. Part 1, entitled "The anatomy and physiology of olfaction", discusses the development of medieval olfactory theory from its Greco-Arabic background. Robinson shows that the "mainstream" theory of olfaction that Latin medieval thinkers elaborate starting from the twelfth century was the result of a long-standing quarrel that originated in the Greek world and was later taken over by prominent Arabic philosophers and physicians. Aristotle was allegedly the first to express the difficulty of defining smell in rigorously philosophical terms. Its objects, odors, are very difficult to describe, as opposed to, for instance, colors and sounds. The very names we use for odors, he continues, are derived from the sense of taste – we say that something smells sweet because we know that it tastes sweet, but we do not have a proper vocabulary for odors. Because of its relation to taste, smell occupies a middle

position in Aristotle's system of the senses: it leans towards the lower ones (taste and touch), since these involve physical contact; yet, smell does not exactly involve contact, in this being more similar to the higher senses (sight and hearing). Another major issue was the question of whether odors are material or immaterial (or, as Scholastic thinkers would put it, whether their *esse* is transmitted *materialiter* or *intentionaliter* through the medium); and, in close connection to this, whether the sensory organ of smell should be located in the nose or, as Galen would claim in open contrast with Aristotle, in the brain. Robinson does a good job of unpacking the main phases of this debate, and in showing what each thinker's position was. She also argues that a crucial role in the story was played by Avicenna, who basically combines the two accounts provided by Aristotle and Galen respectively, and builds a more "conciliatory" theory that would eventually become mainstream in the medieval West thanks to the Latin translations of his works (first and foremost, of his *Qānūn fī ṭ-ṭibb*, known to Latin readers as *Canon medicinae*). In the Western fringes of the Islamic empire, however, a fierce advocate of Aristotle, the Muslim thinker Averroes, questioned Avicenna's account of smell and tries to rehabilitate Aristotle's genuine theory instead. The second chapter traces how some prominent Latin medieval thinkers handled the theories they found in their Greek and Arabic predecessors in order to build what Robinson calls "the medieval standard account of olfaction" (p. 4).

Part 2 of the book is devoted to the first of the two applications of medieval olfactory theory discussed by Robinson, namely medical practice. Chapter 3 provides a survey of the main Greek and Arabic treatises of medicine, along with a number of Scholastic texts devoted to medical theory and surgery such as Bartholomew the Englishman's *De proprietatibus rerum*, the *Trotula* (an anonymous collection of texts on the treatment of women's illnesses), the *Prose Salernitan Questions*, and Guy de Chauliac's surgical manual. In medieval medical practice, odors were not only essential in diagnosis, since bad or unnatural odor always signifies corruption and decay, whereas a good or natural odor its opposite, but they also played a crucial role both in the treatment and in the judging of medicines. The importance of smell in medical practice was so central that this sense was considered the second most reliable of the five, right after taste, showing that its placement in the hierarchy strictly depended on the activity to which it was connected. This is clear, for instance, from the *Summa de saporibus et odoribus*, an anonymous twelfth-century text from the Salernitan school of medicine that overturned the traditional Aristotelian hierarchy of the senses by placing taste and smell at the very top, since these are the only two senses in which some of the matter of the object perceived actually reaches the sensory organ (p. 77). In chapter 4, Robinson presents a concrete case in which medieval olfactory theory reached popular audience: through urban regulations regarding cleanliness and public health that followed the 1348 pestilence in Europe.

Part 3 of the book discusses the role of olfaction in the religious life and devotional practices of medieval Europe. Since Christianity had already developed a "theology of olfaction" well before the arrival of Greek and Arabic texts into medieval Europe, Robinson is able to outline the contours of a genuinely Christian set of olfactory theories independent from the legacy of Greco-Arabic culture.

Chapter 5 deals with the theology of odor and the spiritual nose up to 1200, while chapter 6 explains how these theological concepts penetrated into popular culture.

Robinson's book is an original and well-researched contribution to our knowledge of the theories, debates, and applications of smell in the European Middle Ages. By combining diachronic and synchronic analysis, Robinson is able to account for the historical development of this topic through time as well as to delve deep into major texts and problems revolving around the issue of smell in the medieval period. The book also does a good service to scholars, providing a reliable and well-documented account of the theory of olfaction that was standard in the Latin Middle Ages, while showing at the same time how complex and pervasive this topic was. Through the six chapters of her book, Robinson takes advantage of the instruments provided by both intellectual and cultural history, showing that the argument she puts forth is one that eschews such compartmental delimitations.

Tommaso De Robertis, *University of Pennsylvania*

Marco Santagata.

Boccaccio indiscreto. Il mito di Fiammetta.

Bologna: Il Mulino, 2019. 199 pp. €13.99.

Marco Santagata's (28 April 1947 - 9 November 2020) *Boccaccio indiscreto. Il mito di Fiammetta* can be considered a biography of Giovanni Boccaccio's early life. But this reading is only partially correct. As the title itself discloses, in addition to the biographical reconstructions (chapters 1-3), Santagata has a more precise goal in mind. He tries to answer one of the still unresolved aporias within Boccaccio's biography, namely his sudden relocation from the Kingdom of Naples to Florence in 1340 (chapters 4-7). Santagata links this absence to Fiammetta's history, noting that it emerges in different times and places with a span of silence in between, and argues that this character and the way she is portrayed may have been one of the reasons why Boccaccio was forced to leave.

The book starts *in medias res*, without a preface or an introduction, and focuses on Boccaccio's first years within the Florentine school and his move to Naples, where he discovers his natural inclination to poetry (1. *Apprendista mercante*). In the Angevin Reign, the author makes his debuts in the literary scene with his first work, the *Caccia di Diana*, which is analysed for its contents and peculiar sources and framed by its cultural context and its audience (2. *Il debutto letterario*). In Naples, Boccaccio attends university, studying canon law, while simultaneously becoming part of the court (3. *Lo studente di diritto*). Santagata proceeds by investigating the myth of Fiammetta, a fictional character who probably represents a natural daughter of King Roberto of Anjou (4. *L'apparizione di Fiammetta*). In Boccaccio's *Filocolo*, considered by Santagata written after his *Caccia*, this myth is still *in nuce*; nonetheless, it demonstrates some of the autobiographical references and historical elements recurrent also among the author's other works. Excepted

from this are the *Teseida* and the *Filostrato*, both written after the author's encounter with Dante and Petrarch's literary production, where Fiammetta is no longer on the scene (5. *Il silenzio su Fiammetta*). After writing these works, Boccaccio is forced to leave Naples and return to Florence (6. *Via da Napoli*). Even though Santagata acknowledges the role of Boccaccio's father in this decision, he suggests another possible reason; he argues that the departure from Naples could have been caused by the court's negative reactions to the publication of the *Filocolo* because of the rumours raised by the allusions to a natural daughter of the king and her relation to Boccaccio himself. When in Florence, Boccaccio's portrayal of Fiammetta changes (7. *Il mito di Fiammetta*): in his *Comedia delle nife fiorentine*, the *Amorosa visione*, the *Elegia di Madonna Fiammetta*, and the *Ninfale Fiesolano*, Fiammetta is now the *senhal* for Maria d'Aquino, King Roberto is no longer mentioned, and the relationship between this girl and the author, who is mentioned through his different alter egos, is depicted in a very different way. Santagata's argument is sometime too speculative; occasionally, hypothetical premises are treated as evidence. Still, his argument offers another possible interpretation of Boccaccio's sudden relocation to Florence.

Santagata's argumentation is not strictly historical; from the very first pages, it bends to a more fictionalized narrative, placing this book at an intersection between the author's academic background and his career as a writer. Many of the historical frameworks outlined here are enriched by contributions obtained through the tools of psychoanalytic criticism: «dalla vita e dalla psicologia profonda dell'autore affiorano stimoli, suggestioni, nuclei tematici, complessi psichici, ossessioni ricorrenti, che, attraverso molteplici varchi, ne impregnano l'immaginario e si depositano sulla pagina scritta» ("from the author's life and from his deep psychology we can derive stimuli, suggestions, thematic nuclei, psychic complexes, recurring obsessions, which, through multiple passages, imbue the imagination and settle on the written page", p. 170). Santagata's style gives a narrative and pleasant tone to the entire book, filling the gaps in the surviving documentation with plausible descriptions and reconstructions. These documents themselves are thoroughly analysed as well, as part of the sources on which Santagata's speculations rely. In addition, Boccaccio's texts are often quoted directly, allowing the reader to engage with primary evidence. To support his propositions, Santagata also uses recent scholarship, mostly Italian, which is presented in the footnotes placed at the end of every chapter and listed in entirety in the final bibliography, together with an index of names and places.

Santagata's psychological approach, chosen narrative style, and use of Boccaccio's quotations coalesce in a text intended for non-expert audience. When considered in the context of Marco Santagata's latest book on Boccaccio's whole life (*Boccaccio. Fragilità di un genio*, Collezione Le Scie, Milano, Mondadori, 2019), this text is unlikely to be used by scholars and university students as a biography *per se*. However, it is perfectly helpful to anyone who wants to approach Boccaccio for the first time, would like a narrative introduction to his early career as a writer and catch a glimpse of his humanity, or wishes to be guided into a possible and plausible profile of one of the Italian Three Crowns.

Valentina Rovere, *University of Helsinki*

Chaucer and Italian Culture.

Helen Fulton, ed.

New Century Chaucer. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2021. XLVIII + 288 pp. £70.

Chaucer and Italian Culture sets itself the task to prove “those who think there cannot be anything new to say about Chaucer and the Italian tradition” wrong (1), and the eight essays contained in this volume do so by drawing on the resources of textual criticism, history, cultural theory, and art history. They demonstrate that a transnational approach to Chaucer allows to challenge prevalent narratives about historical periodisation, diplomatic relations in the fourteenth century, and the influence of classical literary genres on medieval English literature.

The Introduction provides an overview of previous works on Chaucer’s Italian contexts by Piero Boitani, David Wallace, Warren Ginsberg, and K. P. Clarke (1-4). It also summarises Chaucer’s historical connections with Italy, such as his Italian missions of 1372/3 and 1378 as an esquire in the King’s household and possible interactions with Italian bankers when working as a controller of customs in London.

Having provided this summary, however, the book suggests that we should take a wider view of these relatively limited and sparsely documented interactions with Italian texts and persons to truly understand Chaucer’s European identity. As the editor Helen Fulton explains in her Introduction (1-16), the volume makes a deliberate choice to move beyond the traditional “sources and analogues” approach to Chaucer’s Italian contexts, given that the relationship between a Chaucerian motif and its “origin” in some other text (or, more likely, multiple texts) is at times not at all clear. In fact, Fulton suggests, Chaucer “distributes the borrowed material throughout his work, smelting it, combining it with other elements,” and frequently refashioning its genre and tone, as when he turns a Latin *exemplum* into a source of both comedy and tragedy in the *Monk’s Tale*. To account for this unorthodox approach, *Chaucer and Italian Culture* proposes, likely Chaucerian borrowings should be considered in the context of pan-European politics, literary genres, and theories of perception.

The geographical space of Italy, both real and imagined, and its influence on Chaucer’s life and works are considered in the first three chapters of the book. Chapter 1, “Chaucerian Diplomacy,” by William T. Rossiter (17-44), investigates both standard and non-standard diplomatic roles that Chaucer takes on during his missions to Italy. Rossiter proposes that Chaucer built on his Italian experiences, as well as on Petrarch and Boccaccio, in representing ambassadorial figures in the *Clerk’s Tale* and book IV of *Troilus and Criseyde*. Intellectual and cultural exchanges depicted in Chaucer’s works and surviving historical documents challenge the narrative of modern diplomacy emerging in the fifteenth century, as well as the traditional binary between “medieval” and “Renaissance” political practices. In

Chapter 2 (“The Haunting of Geoffrey Chaucer: Dante, Boccaccio, and the Ghostly Poetics of the Trecento,” 45-90), James Robinson considers how the poetics of “present absence” and “textual haunting” (50) can account for the kind of intertextuality that links Chaucer with Dante and Boccaccio. Taking Dante’s *Inferno* 10 as a case study, Robinson analyses how the episode is evoked in *Decameron* 6.9, thanks to its focus on Guido Cavalcanti, a “great non-presence” in Dante’s canto (Teodolinda Barolini, *Dante’s Poets: Textuality and Truth in the Comedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 126). Finally, Helen Fulton’s “Chorography and Topography: Italian Models and Chaucerian Strategies” (Chapter 3, 91-120) demonstrates that Chaucer’s preface to the *Clerk’s Tale*, indebted to the classical genre of chorography, or regional description, draws attention to international and economic contexts that lie behind the marriage of Walter and Griselda. Fulton argues that Chaucer’s choice to use the opening present in Petrarch’s version of the Griselda story, but not in Boccaccio, is unconventional and innovative, since in English literature, chorography is rarely found outside the historiographical tradition before the early modern period.

The central chapters of the book focus on the representation of perception and multisensory engagement in Chaucer and his Italian near-contemporaries. Chapter 4, “Vision and Touch in Dante and Chaucer,” by Robert S. Sturges (121-44), examines the depiction of vision and touch in Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde* and Dante’s *Convivio* and *Vita nova*. While I was not convinced that Chaucer’s merging of Platonic and Aristotelian theories of vision is necessarily attributable to the influence of Dante, there are clear affinities in the representation of the sensory aspects of love in the two authors. Sturges’s idea that Chaucer’s knowledge of the *Convivio* might extend beyond Book IV also deserves further examination. In Chapter 5, “The Aesthetics of ‘Wawes Grene’: Planets, Painting and Politics in Chaucer’s *Knight’s Tale*” (145-68), Andrew James Johnston proposes that Chaucer’s depiction of the paintings in Theseus’ Theatre in the *Knight’s Tale* could have been influenced not only by Boccaccio’s *Teseida*, but also by astrological wall paintings in Italian urban spaces. While Chaucer clearly understood the effectiveness of appropriating public-facing visual art for political purposes, in the *Knight’s Tale*, the ekphrastic description presents his readers with a critical rather than a celebratory portrayal of power.

The volume closes with an analysis of pan-European circulation of genres and motifs. Chapter 6, “The Prophetic Eagle in Italy, England and Wales: Dante, Chaucer and Insular Political Prophecy” (169-92), by Victoria Flood, considers the surprising absence of political prophecy in Chaucer’s work, given its popularity elsewhere in Europe, including in Dante’s works. Flood’s work on the parodic interpretation of Dante’s Eagle in Chaucer’s *House of Fame* resonates well with Teresa A. Kennedy’s argument (Chapter 8, “From Imitation to Invention: Chaucer’s Journey from *The House of Fame* to the *Nun’s Priest’s Tale*,” 217-40), which similarly suggests that Chaucer demystifies the Eagle to emphasise the unreliability of language as a conduit to absolute truths. Leah Schwebel instead focuses on “trophee,” a textual crux in Chaucer’s writing (Chapter 7, “‘Trophee’ and Triumph in the *Monk’s Tale*,” 193-216), proposing that it should be understood in the context of the genre of poetic triumph, used by Ovid and Virgil and revived during the *trecento*. By appropriating this Latin and Italian form of expression in the

Monk's Tale, Chaucer highlights the crucial role of the poet in memorialising famous people and events.

Perhaps the greatest contribution of this volume is that it convincingly shows the value of reading Chaucer in the context of European-wide circulation of people and ideas. By reading and repurposing Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio critically and selectively, Chaucer was able to capture phenomena as central to medieval scholarship as prophetic writing or political uses of public art on the cusp of change. Implicitly, this volume issues an important correction to the prevailing narrative about Chaucer's inability to imitate the Italian poets structurally: perhaps Chaucer has been able to absorb his Italian influences so successfully not despite the fact that his Dante is a "Dante of fragments" (Warren Ginsberg, *Chaucer's Italian Tradition* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), p. 30), but because of it.

Aistė Kiltinavičiūtė, *University of Cambridge*

Building the Canon Through the Classics: Imitation and Variation in Renaissance Italy (1350-1580).

Eloisa Morra, ed.

Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2019. XII + 225 pp. \$143.

It is no longer possible to talk of the "translation" of classical literature in Renaissance Italy without acknowledging the diverse and complex processes the term encapsulates. The essays of this volume explore the various ways that the classics were imitated, adapted, domesticated and revived by authors who were, at the same time, working to build and position themselves within a canon of their own. This dynamic between old and new, authority and personal authorial identity involved an evolution – traced by the chronologically-ordered essays – in attitudes towards the traditional humanist view of *imitatio* and a shift in status of the *auctoritates* from timeless authorities to historical sources. In the process, the Italian humanists succeeded in developing a classical literary canon that spread throughout Europe, and in carving out space for their own literary creations within it.

A key contention of the volume is that, throughout the long-fifteenth century (1350-1580), the earlier humanistic model of close study, imitation and memorization of the classics gave way to a more creative mode of readership in which the inner mechanisms of the classics were still adopted, but did not supplant the individual style and authorial identity of the modern Renaissance writer. Recently, scholars studying the vernacular tradition in particular have theorized a broad definition for "translation" with regard to the reception of classical works in this period; in his *Vernacular Aristotle*, for example, Eugenio Refini defines translation as "forms of adaptation, abridgment and rewriting" (3) in which the translator interprets and revivifies the original for the contemporary audience. This volume takes this broad definition of translation and offers a series of vignettes that masterfully

depict the growing confidence and conviction of Renaissance authors in “translating” classical sources for their own ends.

Jaspreet Boparai’s essay marks the midpoint of the volume and its subject, Politian, is positioned as an exemplary moment in the broader shift it narrates, so it is prudent to begin our discussion here. Politian’s status as a key figure in the particular historical narrative the volume seeks to relate is actually made most apparent in Eloisa Morra’s introduction than in the essay itself. Here, Morra usefully describes how Politian sharply criticized the traditional humanist view of imitation and the lack of originality of Ciceronian imitators, arguing strongly for the value of his own personal authorial voice: “non enim sum Cicero; me tamen, ut opinor, exprimo.”

Politian’s extensive oeuvre of poetic and prose works in Latin and the vernacular reveals a complicated network of relationships with ancient and early modern texts. Boparai approaches this subject through a study of the contents of his library, and analysis of his reading practices there. Along with Maddalena Signorini’s piece, this chapter’s attention to the material aspects of the formation of the literary canon is a particular strength of this volume. Boparai’s study shows that in the Medici library Politian had access to scientific works by Hellenistic and imperial-era scholars, antique and Byzantine commentaries, scholia and anthologies, along with grammatical texts. The manuscripts she examines reveal that Politian put great time and effort into copying out extracts from Greek texts and commentaries, and show that his knowledge of Greek verse was based largely on scholia and late antique commentaries, rather than the texts themselves. The evidence of his library suggests a lack of interest in Greek tragedy, which has consequences for our interpretation of his play *Orfeo*, written in the vernacular in 1480. Examining the play alongside the materials from his library, Boparai finds that Politian does not make any particularly obscure or learned references to Greek or Latin literature in his play and shows that, despite some apparently covert references to Euripides, it should not be identified as a “Greek tragedy in Italian” as previous scholars have claimed.

Morra states in the introduction to the volume that the essays are organized around this piece: those in the first part of the volume, preceding the Politian episode, are therefore concerned with the processes of selection and imitation by which Renaissance intellectuals decided the fate of classical authors. The second part of the volume, by contrast, looks at those authors who, following Politian, approached the classics with less reverence and more creativity than their predecessors. In fact, all of the essays portray Renaissance authors engaging with the classics on their own terms. Valentina Proserpi’s chapter on the misfortune of Homer’s poetry in Renaissance literary canon shows the complex, deeply subjective role played by translation in the formation of *auctoritates*. When Homer was finally translated at the bequest of Petrarch in 1358–9 – after a long absence in the West – Italian humanists could not accept that the translation of the so-called father of poetry could be accurate: how could Homer be so archaic? How could his account of the Trojan war in the *Iliad* contradict so heavily those accounts they already knew and trusted? In his long-absence, it seems, Virgil had taken his place as the favored “father of poetry.” In the anxious search for better Latin translations of Homer that followed, it became clear that “better” meant “more like Virgil.” As humanists generally showed little will or patience with the Greek language, Homer could only be accepted into the canon-building process if he could be made to conform, in language and form, to

Virgil. From a historical perspective too, the discovery of Homer's stylistic weakness reinforced the long-standing censure of the *Iliad* as a falsification of historical truth regarding the Trojan War. As such, Prosperi tells us, a dissatisfaction and lack of confidence in Homer resulted in a lack of translation and circulation of his works in Italy in a self-perpetuating cycle.

Indeed, a key concern of many of the studies in this volume is to show how humanist interactions with classical texts involved this negotiation between what the texts were, and what the Renaissance authors wanted them to be. Giacomo Comiati's study of humanist biographies of Horace, for example, shows how such paratexts they worked to lessen, deny or justify the poet's relationship with Epicurus in order to promote the inclusion of his entire corpus in their canon of classical authors. Comiati skillfully shows how authors and publishers quickly realized the power of format and paratexts to influence the reader's perception of a subject and, by consequence, how it was only through the intervention of original texts – such as Niccolò Perotti's metrical treatise *De metris horatianis*, and the addition of biographies to various editions of Horace's works – that the poet was reframed and appreciated for the Renaissance reader.

Comiati's attention to extra-textual apparatus is indicative of a broader shift in the relationship between authority and originality, towards the new "creative model of readership and authorship" the volume's editor defines. The emphasis shifts from imitation to variation, and the function of the classical work shifts from that of model-to-be-imitated to model-to-be-used creatively. Irene Fantappiè's piece on Pietro Aretino marks the endpoint of this narrative. Aretino's self-fashioning as an *uomo nuovo*, an author of novelty and originality, marks a new moment in which it was no longer necessary to claim the authority of *imitatio*. Despite the, somewhat ironic, fact that his work is mainly derivative from literary and classical sources, he takes an anti-classical and anti-literary posture in order to appeal to a literary market in which novelty was increasingly becoming a valued intellectual and economic factor.

The strengths of this volume are manifold. In a series of lively vignettes, it shows us the variety of strategies, and the strength of agency, with which Renaissance authors engaged with classical authorities. Many essays managed to integrate well-known developments in the production of early modern literary texts – such as Manuzio and Bembo's invention of a notation system in 1496 (Caruso) into the larger story of a shift in relationship and attitude towards the classical authors. The introduction makes claims to the essays' narrative arc that are not so explicitly apparent in the works themselves, and so is essential (and extremely thought-provoking) prior reading. Nevertheless, with attention to the material, visual, philological and paratextual elements of the works studied, the volume is as rich in methodological variety as it is in topical content. The introduction makes claims to the essays' narrative arc that are not so explicitly apparent in the works themselves.

Eleanor Webb, *University of Pennsylvania*