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**George Corbett. 'Dante's Christian Ethics. Purgatory and its moral contexts.' Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020.**

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studies, elevating them to the status of a true specialized discipline, carried out no longer by amateurs but by proper academics.

Ultimately, *Dante Beyond Influence* is a seminal book for studies of the modern reception of Dante, standing out in the great landscape of the centennial publications for methodological accuracy, breadth of interest, and narrative and structural coherence. In other words, it is a genuinely indispensable book that cannot be missed in the library of Dante scholars and literary reception specialists.

Natale Vacalebri, *University of Copenhagen*

George Corbett.

*Dante's Christian Ethics. Purgatory and its moral contexts.*

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. X + 233 pp. \$99.99.

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In this book, George Corbett presents Dante's *Commedia* as a work of ethics. In writing the poem, as the author states at the outset, "Dante's primary aim was neither to produce an innovative depiction of the three realms of the Christian afterlife nor to write a poetic masterpiece for Christendom to rival the epics of Classical antiquity". Rather, he goes on, "Dante's imaginative vision and poetic genius served more important ethical and, I would argue, political goals: to transform people's moral lives and to reform the institutions that governed them" (p. 2). The notion that the *Commedia* is to be viewed as a moral work was stated very clearly also in the *Epistle to Cangrande*, where the work is described as dealing with the "morale negotium sive ethica". Even if the letter was not actually written by Dante, as some scholars claim, it is still noteworthy that an early interpreter of the *Commedia* thought it natural to classify the poem in this way, as Corbett rightly points out. The ethical nature of the *Commedia* is clear from the poem's narrative too, for Dante the character is commanded by Beatrice to write "in pro del mondo che mal vive" (*Purg.* XXXII, 103), meaning for the benefit of those living badly, who will find in the *Commedia* a path to moral education and self improvement. If we avoid the poem's ethical content, Corbett argues, "we potentially jeopardize not only the poem's status as a work of ethics and its function (to lead humankind to salvation) but even its genre as a 'Comedy'" (p. 2). In fact, if the poem is called a comedy it is also because the narrative trajectory Dante the character undergoes in his journey (from Hell up to Paradise) is intended to reflect the moral trajectory Dante the poet wants his readers to follow, that is from evil to good – as also pointed out in the *Epistle to Cangrande*.

The book is divided into three main parts. In Part I, comprising two chapters, Corbett's overarching goal is to present the *Commedia* as an ethical and political manifesto. In Chapter 1, he shows that Dante relies on different ethical criteria in each of the three regions of the afterlife. For Hell, he adopts a philosophical (that is, mainly Aristotelian) taxonomy of good and evil. In Purgatory, he incorporates a more pastorally-oriented kind of ethics, for he structures the seven terraces of

Purgatory according to the scheme of the seven capital vices, a common framework for medieval Christian confession. Finally, the overarching moral theme of Paradise is Christian asceticism, which Dante incorporates in his account of the four cardinal and three theological virtues. In Chapter 2, Corbett moves from ethics to politics, his aim being to demonstrate that there is perfect unity between the ethical-political theories presented in the *Monarchia* on the one hand, and in the *Commedia* on the other. Both works served “as a potent propaganda for the Imperial faction in Italy, and as a controversial manifesto for the radical reform of the Roman Church” (p. 7). The harmony between the two works is now further corroborated by recent philological evidence, according to which the *Monarchia* was composed when most of the *Commedia* was already completed (1317–1318). In view of this, Corbett argues, the notion that the *Monarchia* represents a formative (and later to be abandoned) stage in Dante’s political theology is no longer sustainable. In fact, Dante’s political views remained fundamentally consistent throughout his intellectual arc.

Part II, also comprising two chapters, is entitled “Reframing Dante’s Christian Ethics”. In Chapter 3, Corbett demonstrates that Dante shaped his vision of Purgatory by combining two different areas of Christian theology, that is the new doctrine of Purgatory and the tradition of the seven capital sins. The chapter thus presents a “theological Purgatory”, a realm that “embodies an explicit re-orientation from natural to supernatural ethics, from pagan to Christian *exempla*, and from this world to the heavenly city” (p. 8). In Chapter 4, the author delves deep into Dante’s treatment of the seven capital sins. He makes the convincing point that, although scholars have traditionally associated Dante’s approach to the issue with the account provided by Thomas Aquinas in his *Summae theologiae*, Dante was actually relying on a different source, that is Guglielmo Peraldo’s (1200–1271) *De vitiis et virtutibus*. Not only was this work more influential than Aquinas’ *Summa* in the early fourteenth century, but Corbett’s close textual analysis also shows very clearly that Dante elaborates on Peraldo in both *Purgatory* and *Paradise*, structurally as well as thematically.

Part III includes three chapters, which are all strictly dependent upon the argument presented in chapter 4, that is Dante’s reliance on Peraldo’s *De vitiis et virtutibus*. In Chapters 5 through 7, the author shows that Dante drew significantly on Peraldo’s work to inform his conception of Christian ethics in *Purgatory*. He does that by focusing on three different sins, each one corresponding to a terrace in Purgatory: pride, sloth, and avarice. Corbett justifies his choice of focusing on these particular vices by arguing that interpreting Dante’s *Purgatory* through the narrative units of its moral structure presents many hermeneutical advantages: that Dante gives special emphasis to these sins in *Purgatory*; that they are representative of three different kinds of vices as categorized by human psychology (respectively, envy, wrath, lust); that Dante himself sees pride as one of his gravest vices; that Dante associates sloth and avarice with the moral corruption of the Church.

Corbett’s book is a great scholarly contribution. It adds much to our knowledge of the markedly ethical dimension underpinning Dante’s *Commedia*. The book focuses on aspects of Dante’s work that have been traditionally downplayed by the scholarship, if not denied altogether, in part because of the disciplinary boundaries within which scholarship on Dante tends to move – Italian Studies and Comparative Literature in the first place. Thus, as the historical and literary elements

of the *Commedia* have traditionally taken the lion's share, only a handful contributions have been devoted to the investigation of the ethical foundations of Dante's masterpiece. In addition, Corbett shows in a very convincing way the extent of Dante's debt to Guglielmo Peraldo's *De vitiis et virtutibus*, as opposed to Thomas Aquinas's *Summa theologiae*. He thus supports a partial reorientation of the origin of Dante's ethical discourse in the *Commedia*. The book contributes therefore to three main currents in contemporary Dante scholarship: it provides a reappraisal of Dante's theology, it proposes a new assessment of his intellectual sources, and it promotes a new investigation of the narrative structure of the *Commedia*. Written in a very economical and clear style, *Dante's Christian Ethics* provides a truly original and solid study of the ethical bearings of the *Commedia*.

Tommaso De Robertis, *University of Pennsylvania*

*Selve oscure e alberi strani.*

Paolo Grillo, ed.

Rome: Viella libreria editrice, 2022. 260 pp. \$26.

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*Selve oscure e alberi strani*, edited by Paolo Grillo, presents a collection of chapters dedicated to the representation of the dark wood in the thirteenth through fourteenth century. The book revolves around the context in which Dante's Divine Comedy was written and features a variety of perspectives, ranging from ecological, institutional, economic, and archeological readings of the setting and landscape where Dante enters the dark wood in *Inferno* and departs from *Purgatorio* to *Paradiso*.

Grillo begins the edited volume with an introductory chapter that underlines the interdisciplinary nature of the "selva selvaggia" in the Divine Comedy and the importance of the forest setting in Medieval Italian literature overall. The volume is divided into two sections, the first, *Il bosco narratore, il bosco descritto*, begins with Sandra Carapezza's reading of the various forests in the Comedy, outlining the different lexicon associated with the image of the forest, including, *selva*, *bosco*, and *foresta*. Carapezza notes that in contrast to Guido Guinizelli's *Al cor gentil rempaira sempre amore*, Dante's selva is not a place of continual return or a place in which love is binded to the *cuore gentile*; it is instead a place of exile, loss, but eventual elevation. Where the rhymes in the first Dantean Forest allude to darkness (*oscura, dura*) those in Guinizelli's imply a place of color and light (*verdura, natura*). Carapezza notes that the dark wood that begins the Comedy is a "function" rather than a real place, it is a place of departure and arrival towards a new kind of poetry. Carapezza's analysis carries on to the image of the suicide forest in *Inferno* which physically resembles those forests that enclose the area of a *bosco* where boars inhabit. It is, to some extent, the opposite of a domesticated forest, such as the earthly paradise in *Purgatorio*. The *foresta* in the earthly paradise is described as ancient, an antithesis to the suicide forest, domesticated and seemingly maintained, however,