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Nicolò Crisafi. 'Dante's Masterplot and Alternative Narratives in the "Commedia.'" Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022.

Alejandro Cuadrado
Columbia University, a.cuadrado@columbia.edu

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examination of the events, texts and people involved can illuminate all their features. This allows the reader to ask certain questions, some of which could be developed in future studies and research. These are questions which historians and archivists have partly answered, but which I feel have not been asked sufficiently in the fields of the history and philology of Italian literature. These include: did these notaries entertain relationships with other chanceries of Italy that were particularly active in the cultural field? And if so, in what terms? Is the situation of the Bolognese archives unique in the Italian landscape of the time? As they traveled, did notaries disseminate and/or acquire texts in other chanceries as well? Is the strong ideological component that moved the writing of the *Serventese* and the other texts analyzed by Antonelli also discernible in other centers of Italy at the time, one above all, the Florence of Leonardo Bruni (fifteen years older than Pietro Ramponi)? Would it be possible to produce an overview of the type of texts produced within Italian chanceries? What was the relationship between the official classes and the universities between the 14th and 15th centuries? And above all: what do adventitious texts such as the traces tell us about the channels through which the laity were able to acquire a literary culture (first and foremost Dante, but also Cavalcanti, Lapo Gianni, Dino Compagni, to limit ourselves to Florence)? These and other questions are further proof of the great potential of an archival investigation applied to the texts of Italian literature, of which Antonelli's volume is certainly a remarkable example.

Lorenzo Dell'Oso, *University of Göttingen*

Niccolò Crisafi.

Dante's Masterplot and Alternative Narratives in the Commedia.

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022. 208 pp. \$80.

Studies of Dante and his *Commedia* often embrace and take on the teleological ordering and structures of the poem and the poet's life, whereby what comes later is given precedence over what came before. In *Dante's Masterplot and Alternative Narratives in the 'Commedia'* Nicolò Crisafi presents an anti-teleological manifesto that urges readers to read beyond, and against, the teleology of Dante's poem. The result is an exploration of alternative narrative structures that demonstrate the poet's narrative pluralism.

The title of Crisafi's book maps out the monograph's argumentative structure. In an introduction titled "Dante's Masterplot" the author presents his *pars destruens*, identifying the characteristics of the Dantean masterplot and the limitations of accepting it as our hermeneutic guide to the text. Here Crisafi shows how his reading emerges from other studies of Dante and narrative, especially Teodolinda Barolini's *The Undivine Comedy: Detheologizing Dante* (Princeton 1992), and Albert Russell Ascoli's *Dante and the Making of a Modern Author* (Cambridge 2008). Through an analysis of scholarly 'keywords' and a deft use of narrative

theories, Crisafi identifies how most critical readings of the *Commedia* are guided by the teleology of Dante's masterplot, that is, the mechanism by which *before and after* and *old and new* become an arbiter of *bad and good*. Crisafi argues that the masterplot's "hegemonic appetite for conclusive and cannibalizing interpretations" (p. 41) has overshadowed Dante's narrative pluralism, and that a corrective could be found in an exploration of the poem's alternative narratives. The *pars construens* of Crisafi's book then takes place over the course of three body chapters, each of which explores one alternative narrative structure in Dante's *Commedia*.

The first chapter ("Paradox in the Poem") analyzes how Dante's poem uses contradiction as a narrative model that deviates from the teleological masterplot. Unlike the masterplot, which "can count on the inherent temporality of the text in order to charge it with value" (p. 82), contradiction demands that the reader get involved in its creation of meaning beyond the text. Crisafi begins with Barolini's study on temporality (Chapter 8 of *The Undivine Comedy*) and charts a course through the Scholastics and the mystics. He then analyzes paradox at both the local verbal level (through the figure of speech of oxymoron) and the "long-range" narrative paradoxes of the poem. Crisafi offers a convincing model for how Dante's use of paradoxical plot, antanacsis, and ineffability all contribute to this alternative narrative structure.

Crisafi's second chapter on "Alternative Endings and Parallel Lives" offers a reading of conditional statements as a opportunities for non-teleological narrative. By exploring "souls' fantasies, regrets, and wishes that their life had been different" (p. 89), conditional statements open a narrative space that sits outside the masterplot—the example from the text that Crisafi uses to great effect is that of Carlo Martello in *Paradiso* 8. This section in particular will be useful to scholars thinking about Dante's use of language and possibility. This chapter also reaches outside of Dante's time to use Gerald Prince's concept of the "disnarrated" and read the *Commedia* and the *Convivio* alongside Robert Frost and T.S. Eliot's poetry. Crisafi's knowledge of narrative theory in relation to the novel is here applied to the *Commedia*. A section on parallel lives reads Guido da Montefeltro and his son Buonconte, alongside other pairs that demonstrate the possibilities of alternative storylines. The last section of this chapter introduces the concept of secrecy, which is interesting but perhaps could have used more elaboration.

"The Future In/Out of the *Commedia*" is Crisafi's final chapter and considers the possibility of a future beyond the "endpoint" from which Dante the poet is purportedly writing retrospectively. Here Crisafi analyzes the future as a narrative space that subverts teleology by reading the proems of the three canticles in relation to one another and considering the use of the future tense as a Dantean deviation from the epic. He also introduces the precarity of unfinished writing in Dante's *oeuvre* and how this vulnerability challenges the image of an author who is fully in control.

On the last page of the epilogue, Crisafi writes, "It would be this work's proudest accomplishment if, alongside the established notions of Dante's *plurilingualism* and *pluristylism*, an appreciation of Dante's *narrative pluralism* could come to play a key role in contemporary and future readings of his *Commedia*." (172). In my estimation, Crisafi's text will succeed in this respect. While this monograph will by no means extirpate the use of Dante's masterplot as a guiding device for

many scholars of the poem, Crisafi has offered those scholars of Dante interested in his narrative technique a vocabulary for and examples of the poet's narrative pluralism.

Crisafi's writing is clear throughout his book, and his command over difficult concepts is evident. While some readers may balk at his frequent comparison to non-medieval (primarily Francophone and Anglophone) works of philosophy and literature, I found these moments delightful (in particular the citations from Ben Lerner's 2014 novel *10:04*). In terms of errors or oversights, I found only one: on page 117, Crisafi cites "Maria Grazia Riccobono" instead of "Maria Gabriella Riccobono" as the author of *Dante Poeta-Profeta, Pellegrino, Autore* (Aracne, 2012).

As one of the more insightful works on Dante's narrative technique since Barolini's *The Undivine Comedy* thirty years ago, Crisafi's *Dante's Masterplot and Alternative Narratives in the 'Commedia'* will be essential for scholars working on the poet's narrative modes, and useful to anyone interested in reading against the poem's teleology.

Alejandro Cuadrado, *Columbia University*