ANNALI D'ITALIANISTICA

Volume 39, 2021

ITALIAN BOOKSHELF

EDITORS OF ITALIAN BOOKSHELF

700 YEARS OF DANTE AND DANTE STUDIES

REVIEW ARTICLES

DANTE STUDIES

MIDDLE AGES & RENAISSANCE

SEVENTEENTH, EIGHTEENTH, & NINETEENTH CENTURIES

TWENTIETH & TWENTY-FIRST CENTURIES: LITERATURE, THEORY, CULTURE

HISTORICAL, CULTURAL & MISCELLANEOUS STUDIES

JEWISH STUDIES

FILM & MEDIA STUDIES

BRIEF NOTICES

IN MEMORIAM

REVIEW ARTICLES

"Diverse voci fanno dolci note": Dante Between Scholarship and Commemoration

Zygmunt G. Barański. *Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio: Literature, Doctrine, Reality*. Cambridge: Legenda, 2020. Pp. 658.
Alessandro Barbero. *Dante*. Bari-Roma: Laterza, 2020. Pp. 368.
David Bowe. *Poetry in Dialogue in the Duecento and Dante*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020. Pp. 240.
Elisa Brilli, and Giuliano Milani. *Vite nuove: Biografia e autobiografia di Dante*. Roma: Carocci, 2021. Pp. 400.
George Corbett. *Dante's Christian Ethics: Purgatory and its Moral Contexts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. Pp. 238.
Manuele Gragnolati, Elena Lombardi, and Francesca Southerden, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Dante*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021. Pp. 741.
Simone Marchesi, and Roberto Abbiati. *A proposito di Dante: Cento passi nella Commedia con disegni*. Rovereto: Keller editore, 2020. Pp. 224.
Laura Pasquini. *"Pigliare occhi, per aver la mente": Dante, la Commedia e le arti figurative*. Roma: Carocci, 2020. Pp. 284.
Paolo Pellegrini. *Dante Alighieri. Una vita*. Torino: Einaudi, 2021. Pp. 252.
Lino Pertile. *Dante Popolare*. Ravenna: Longo, 2021. Pp. 385.
Guy P. Raffa. *Dante's Bones: How a Poet Invented Italy*. Cambridge Mass.; Belknap Press, 2020. Pp. 370.
Roberto Rea, and Justin Steinberg, eds. *Dante*. Roma: Carocci, 2020. Pp. 412.
John Took. *Dante*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020. Pp. 581.

"Povero Dante," are the words used by Justin Steinberg in relation to the current state of Dante Studies in a recent piece for *L'indice dei libri del mese*.[1] "Povero" here is intended in both its acceptations, in the sense of pity and impoverishment: pity for the way in which the Covid pandemic had forced many commemorative initiatives to be postponed, cancelled or moved online, resulting in a rather soulless septicentennial; impoverishment in the sense that Dante is ill served by the avalanche of current overly-specialised scholarly outputs. Steinberg isolates his critique of the non-flourishing field of Dante studies across four areas of concern: the damaging assumption that Dante is the preserve solely of professional Dantisti, rendering exegesis intellectually sterile; the pernicious belief that Dante is one of us—he is not—and therefore, critics need to look also at what is

[1] Justin Steinberg, "Quattro modi per rovinare Dante e un modo per salvarlo: Non specialistico, attualizzante, cattolico o monumentale cercasi," *L'indice dei libri del mese* (1 February 2021).

unfamiliar and distant in the Florentine poet; the dominant strain in Dante studies is Catholic in focus, especially in North America; and finally, that such is the monumentalising tendency, everyone wants a piece of the "torta Dante". Such criticism overlaps in some cases, and contradicts in others, but essentially the piece is a plea to non-Dantists to intervene in order to tear down the Dante monument and save Dante and, more importantly, save him from Dantisti; it is a plea to comparativists, historians, art historians, philosophers, novelists and other creative practitioners to think and create anew. In a similar vein in 2017, another internationally respected Dantista, Zygmunt G. Barański, warned that contemporary *dantismo* finds itself in some difficulty:

> National and 'campanalistic' prickliness, academic politicking, scholarly formation and lineage, linguistic deficiencies, individual ambition, the reluctance to question the contributions of leading figures, innate conservatism and hence an unwillingness to challenge prevailing attitudes, outside interference, and perhaps most significantly, that overpowering, debilitating accumulation of scholarship that can serve as a brake as we endeavour to move our teaching and our research.[2]

Thus, two senior Dantisti take issue with the current state of affairs from different angles, but both point to a malaise in Dante studies. None of this, it has to be said, bodes well for Dante studies. Now, I cannot comment on whether Steinberg's critique is perhaps provocatively tongue-in-cheek and intended more as an ironic prodding of all too comfortable critical assumptions, or if he genuinely means what he writes. I for one disagree. The Pandemic certainly changed events, but also forced organisers to re-think how they were going to communicate their events globally; in many cases these commemorative events actually reached different and much wider audiences than would not have been the case without lockdown restrictions. *Lecturae*, seminars, conferences, exhibitions, performances, dialogues all embraced the same online ethos with an extraordinary urgency and passion to ensure that the septicentennial was not going to pass with merely a whimper. As restrictions slowly lifted actual face to face encounters began to appear in a new hybrid manner, culminating in the wonderful Alma Dante 'Congresso Dantesco Internazionale' in Ravenna (15-18 September), organised by Prof. Giuseppe Ledda and his colleagues at the University of Bologna.[3] As to the state of scholarship in Dante studies, the brief discussion

---

[2] Zygmunt G. Barański, "On Dante's Trail," *Italian Studies*, 72.1 (2017), 1-15 (p. 2). On this topic, see also Daragh O'Connell and Beatrice Sica, "Literary Cultures in/and Italian Studies," *Italian Studies* (Special Issue: *Key Directions in Italian Studies*), 75.2 (2020), 125-139.

[3] There are far too many initiatives to mention here but 2021 will also see the culmination of the University of St Andrews' *Lectura dantis andreapolitana* with the reading of

which follows attests to the vibrancy and cogency in the field, and in many cases points to the radical collaborative embrace of Dante. What follows then is necessarily partial, and unfortunately limited to only a selection of volumes written in either English or Italian. The immense scholarship that is being conducted in the Spanish language, in German and in French and in other languages speaks to the wealth rather than paucity of the field.

Interestingly, the above quotation is reprinted in Barański's magisterial *Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio: Literature, Doctrine, Reality* (22). The sub-title is important here, as the three crowns of the Italian tradition are examined under these different lenses. The vast majority of space in the volume is accorded to Dante, and this is fitting given that the book essentially brings together the author's decades-long intellectual engagement with Dante and medieval literature and its contexts. This is a unique contribution to Legenda's Selected Series, and a timely one. Many will be familiar with Barański's work, his distinctive voice and ability to interrogate some of the thorniest issues relating to Dante, medieval poetics and doctrine; but to have this voice sustained in one single volume is to witness a quite remarkable academic career and distinctive engagement with Dante. It would be wrong to single out one particular aspect of this protean study, but the book's introductory chapter—"'A Contrariness in It': Seven 'Fragmented' Reflections" (1-17)—is a particular gem in which the author looks back over his career ("quando l'arte cessa di essere lunga," as Primo Levi, paraphrasing Horace, puts it in *Il sistema periodico*) and charts his personal encounter with, engagement and exegesis of Dante. It is rare to find such a deeply personal and emotionally honest take on Dante, but Barański's autobiographical reflections cohere strangely with his ground-breaking scholarship. His decidedly 'Mancunian' take on the Florentine poet, however, always seeks to foreground a historically nuanced idea of Dante *medievale*, not the idea of the exceptionality of a Dante as a solitary genius. As evidenced throughout this and nineteen other essays, Barański's approach to Dante and other medieval writers is one that seeks to go beyond the debilitating absolutism of philology and seek other necessary avenues of enquiry, in which it becomes imperative for scholars to interrogate the nature of the inter-relationships between authors, texts and the contexts which shaped them, being, however, ever-vigilant of the critical tools we employ. The essays contained within deliver on every count.

One of the most interesting aspects of this anniversary period, is the number of ways in which Dante's biography—despite all the inevitable *lacunae*—has become one of the most hotly contested battlegrounds in terms of approach, critical ideology and stance. Marco Santagata and Giorgio Inglese's recent biographies had already traversed this well-travelled terrain at the beginning of

---

Paradiso XXXII and XXXIII on November 6. This series, the first complete *Lecturae* of the entire *Commedia* in the UK, began back in October 2009.

the anniversary period, with contrasting approaches.[4] Both were responding in a way to Umberto Carpi's two-volume study, *La nobilità di Dante*.[5] The search for the "pantera dantesca," despite the sparsity of documentary evidence, has a long distinguished lineage in the Italian tradition, going back from Petrocchi to Barbi and beyond, but the 2020-2021 period threw new biographies into the mix, backed by powerful publishing houses almost in competition with one another to propose an almost Strega-like prize for best Dante biography in 2021. First came Alessandro Barbero's commercially fortunate *Dante*, which in a couple of months became a bestseller throughout Italy and has since been translated into various languages. In part, this was due to the fact that the author, above and beyond being a respected medieval (military) historian, is also a highly recognisable media personality who effectively communicates quite often complicated historical phenomena in a lucid and engaging manner, in part, because the volume in question, like Santagata's before him, does not display the incumbrance of footnotes or take the reader down vast bibliographical rabbit holes, but rather discreetly packs them into manageable endnotes. Another reason for the resounding success of the volume is the historical narrative proposed by Barbero: building on work he had conducted previously on the battle of Campaldino,[6] his biography opens by pinpointing the young Dante at the battle through a reading of chroniclers and an explanation of the precise meaning of *feditori*. Such an introduction allows Barbero to revisit the question of the social standing of the Alighieri family in the final decade of the thirteenth century, and then read back to its origins. From there Barbero playfully "corrects" many misreadings by professional Dantisti as his engaging prose moves seamlessly through the more problematic years of Dante's exile. Both the specialist and non-specialist will find much to admire in these fluid pages, but Barbero, one feels, takes a little too much pleasure in teaching Dante scholars how to read medieval texts, and this does distract a little from the overall excellence of the study. Paolo Pellegrini's *Dante Alighieri. Una vita* certainly places the accent on the genre of study. In a well-documented introduction, he offers that the impulse to write a new biography of Dante is borne out of both a curiosity and a dissatisfaction with the way recent biographers had approached the topic. He calls instead for a return to the critical lessons of the past, the lessons of what he terms the "nuova filologia". These lessons coupled with the revaluation of documents relating to Dante—he cites the new *Codice Diplomatico Dantesco* (2016) and the new critical editions of older

[4] Marco Santagata. *Dante. Il romanzo della sua vita*. Milano: Mondadori, 2012; Giorgio Inglese, *Vita di Dante. Una biografia possibile*. Roma: Carocci, 2015. Inglese's differs greatly from Santagata's and proposes a closer examination of the textual sources and the older commentary tradition in its rereading of Dante's texts.

[5] Umberto Carpi. *La nobilità di Dante*. Firenze: Polistampa, 2004.

[6] Alessandro Barbero. *1289. La battaglia di Campaldino*. Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2013.

Dante biographies[7]—are indispensable for a new biography, which in this case accords a great deal of importance to Verona and the exiled Dante's relationship with the city. The biography argues, to name but a few of the major points, that Dante's contacts with the Scaligeri are more frequent than had previously been assumed; his second period in Verona, on the basis of his reading of Leonardo Bruni, is dated from late 1304 to the Summer of 1306; it is in Verona that Dante will write the first three books of the *Convivio* and also the *De vulgari eloquentia*; that Dante is present in Forlì in the Summer of 1310 before meeting Emperor Henry VII, thus according importance to Biondo Flavio's citing a letter in Dante's hand in his possession; and also the hypothesis, for which the author assumes full responsibility (xix), that Dante is the true author of the letter by Cangrande della Scala to Henry VII (which would also lend credence to Dante's return to Verona in 1312). Pellegrini's biography is meticulously researched and clearly written, where one may argue for or against some of the arguments put forward, all can agree with its importance in the new canon of Dante biographies.

However, perhaps the most intriguing of the new biographies to emerge is one that speaks to that new radical collaborative approach to Dante studies I mentioned above. Written *a quattro mani*, first in French, is Elisa Brilli and Giuliano Milani's excellent *Vite nuove. Biografia e autobiografia di Dante*. The excellence here is both in the structure and content of the biography. It dispenses with the traditional philological approach of previous attempts, which the authors aptly define as an approach that is "filologico-combinatorio" (13), and instead separates the different sources in order to read each one in its own context and rightful place. Therefore, on the one hand, documents and other medieval sources are read separate from, on the other, Dante's works, in which he provides a series of narratives of self in constant change. These parallel lines can and are interlaced, and are put in dialogue with one another, the resultant work is then comparative and no longer combinatory. Utilising Dante's division of human life (*Convivio*, IV, xxiv) they structure their study into four ages (the "etade che puote giovare" is divided into two and the "senio" is cast off completely) preceded by a prologue and concluded with an epilogue. The volume is enriched by the specialities of its two authors. It does not pretend to fill important gaps in the poet's life, but what it does offer is what they call a "restauro problematico" that reads these lacunae in the same way as other textual and contextual elements. For its methodological verve alone, Brilli and Milani's study deserves to be considered the standout biography of recent times. A work like this can only happen when true

[7] The *Codice Diplomatico Dantesco*, edited by Teresa De Robertis, Giuliano Milani, Laura Regnicoli and Stefano Zamponi, is the second part of the *Opere di dubbia attribuzione e altri documenti danteschi*, vol. 7. Roma: Salerno, 2016; the *Le vite di Dante dal XIV and XVI secolo. Iconografia dantesca*, edited by Monica Berté, Maurizio Fiorilla, Sonia Chiodo, and Isabella Valente, is the third part of volume 7. Roma: Salerno, 2017; both form part of the monumental *Nuova edizione commentata delle opere di Dante*, or *NECOD*.

collaboration is embraced, and different specialisms enter into genuine dialogue with one another.

Though much more than a biography, John Took's monumental study *Dante* does reflect in no small detail on the vagaries of Dante's life, and how these are interwoven in the composition of his works. Took's study, at nearly six-hundred pages in length, is divided into four (historical-biographical) parts. The first section, "Preliminary Considerations," details the historical contexts impacting on Florence up to the point of the descent into Italy and demise of Henry VII (1313), before tightening the focus to examine Dante's life. The second section—"The Early Years: From Dante da Maiano to the *Vita nova*"—covers a remarkable range of topics in and around the burgeoning vernacular lyric; a wonderful discussion of Love and its myriad of significances, Dante's apprenticeship following the influence of Guittone, Cavalcanti, Guinizelli, and issues surrounding Dante's supposed authorship of the *Fiore* and the *Detto d'amore*, before moving on to a rich and penetrating discussion of the *Vita nova*. Part three—"The Middle Years" covers Dante's *Rime*, *Convivio* (a particularly rich discussion, 235-286), and the *De vulgari eloquentia*. The final section has as its focus the *Commedia* (what the author calls an essay on significant journeying), the Political Letters, the *Monarchia*, the *Questio de situ aque et terre*, the Letter to Cangrande della Scala and the *Eclogues*. Such a brief synopsis does not even begin to cover the wealth of detail and nuanced articulation in this volume. The staggering erudition displayed here is testament to an academic career deeply engaged with Dante through his works and through his times. As Took sees it, Dante's project is "an invitation to the feast and, with it, to talk it all over with one another; for rather like those coming down from Jerusalem to Emmaus in the evening hour, we too have witnessed a strange and a marvellous thing, talking it all over one with another serving merely to confirm its continuing presence to us as a means of significant self-interpretation" (xxiii).

At the other end of the career spectrum comes the work of younger academics and innovative approaches to Dante's oeuvre—a case in point in David Bowe's *Poetry in Dialogue in the Duecento and Dante*. The book argues for the fundamental role of dialogue—here articulated in medieval and modern (Bakhtin) conceptualisations—both between and within texts of the vernacular thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. Particular attention is paid to the lyric tradition of Guittone D'Arezzo, Guido Cavalcanti and Guido Guinizelli before moving on to a deeper investigation of Dante's dialogic practices. Bowe's innovative study contests previously held critical assumptions and posits the notion that early vernacular lyrics are essentially open to dialogue, as are those which endeavour to exert control over lyric discourse. One of the salient features of the work is that it reads Dante's immediate forebears first, and deals with their poetry before addressing the *Commedia*, and thus, Giuttone D'Arezzo (whom Dante rejects) is given ample space. Having considered Dante in dialogue with his predecessors in

chapter four, the final chapter interrogates the poet's ability to perform a teleological, unitary and converted subjectivity in the *Commedia*. Bowe writes that such a reading aims to open the way for the "resiliently disruptive textuality of past works to sound alongside the self-consciously authorial voice of the poet of the *Commedia* (17).

Dantean afterlives have also been another significant feature of the period, and nowhere is this more forcefully true than in Guy P. Raffa's wonderfully researched volume on the fate of Dante's tomb, and the cultural accretion which ensued, in *Dante's Bones. How a Poet Invented Italy*. Raffa's text weaves its way through historical time, pinpointing exact moments when the poet's legacy and remains became hotly contested sites. This posthumous Dante, though known to many in fragmentary detail, is woven here into a fascinating narrative of translation (literal), cultural appropriation, and myth making. Dante becomes a humanist ideal, a nineteenth-century prophet, and hence father for Italy, and abstraction to which all political persuasions have sought to harness themselves. The actual travails of Dante's remains also make for fascinating reading. The tomb, as it stands today, and as it has stood for centuries, is a site of pilgrimage to which many have and continue to project their versions of the poet, unjustly exiled from Florence, now physically and symbolically of Ravenna. Raffa's study offers a broad sweep of historical time, but one which unpicks the complexities of Dante's afterlife and enduring metamorphoses.

Mention should also be given here to Laura Pasquini's *"Pigliare occhi, per aver la mente". Dante, la Commedia e le arti figurative*. This study builds on Pasquini's already impressive *Iconografie dantesche*.[8] This handsomely produced volume, Carocci is the editor, is filled with wonderful colour reproductions of the art it speaks of, and thus image and text are in constant dialogue. The title, taken from *Paradiso*, XXVII, 92, perfectly coheres with the aims of its author who sets herself the following questions: What are the images that Dante himself saw? Which of these gave him cause to reflect? And what role, if any, did they have in the construction of the *Commedia*? Though impossible to answer with any certainty, Pasquini guides the reader through Florence, Rome, Padua, Ravenna and Venice and structures her study in a threefold manner: "Patire l'inferno", "Sentire il purgatorio" and "Figurare il paradiso". The richness of figurative detail and scholarly engagement is truly impressive. For example, her discussion of *Purgatorio* X, Dante's "visibile parlare", with the *Deus artifex*, goes beyond the ekphrastic to Dante's understanding of pictorial and architectural technical language—"mensola", for example—and all discussion is always accompanied by concrete examples (the Cloister of Santo Stefano in Bologna or the Telamon on Verona cathedral). Pasquini's discussion of the stars in particular is detailed and rich and linked dramatically and convincingly to the unique mosaics of

[8] Laura Pasquini. *Iconografie dantesche. Dalla luce del mosaico all'immagine profetica*. Ravenna: Longo, 2018.

Ravenna (for instance the Galla Placidia Mausoleum [5th century] and the Archbishop's Palace [6th century]). Alongside this rich pictorial detail, Pasquini always provides its textual equivalent. A particular feature are the figurative examples given to enhance the belief of Dante's brief sojourn in Rome, the year of the Jubilee in 1300. (We are never far from Dante's biography!) The volume is an excellent demonstration of true interdisciplinarity at work in the service of scholarship. Carocci too, as editors, need to be commended for producing such a visually rich volume at a relatively low cost.

Undoubtedly, one of the most original contributions to Dante publications this year, and one in keeping with the visual richness of Dante illustrations, has been Simone Marchesi and Roberto Abbiati's visually dramatic and conceptually nuanced *A proposito di Dante: Cento passi nella Commedia con disegni*. This collaborative volume brings together a Dantista with an illustrator; both retrace the journey of the *viator* and break down each canto to its single poetic-conceptual unit, the terzina. Each responds with either text or image to these chosen tercets, chosen, it has to be said, with surprising variety—they are more often than not textual moments which would not necessarily be said to stand for the whole, nor is this their intended function—both authors agreed together on which one to respond to. Moreover, this is not an illustrated compendium of diverse Dante snippets, but rather a quite beautiful work of visual and textual dialogue, in which Dante's poetry elicits ethical responses. The key to the work is provided in the preface in which Marchesi reproduces a series of email exchanges between himself and his former Professor and Dantista Robert Hollander. Marchesi informs him of his intention to publish a volume which combines terzina with a note and an image for each individual canto. Hollander's reply is less than enthusiastic, and he states that he never really liked illustrations for the reason that they are aesthetically insufficient, and especially with regard to Dante who has no such need. Marchesi's response then provides the key to the work and it is worth quoting here: "La poesia di Dante è costruita per creare delle immagini mentali (e con che Potenza lo fa!), mentre tutte le illustrazioni tradiscono questo mandato, sosituendosi ai lettori. È per questo che Abbiati e io stiamo cercando di esprimere graficamente non tanto quello che la poesia di Dante dice, ma quello che fa." Thus, the book situates the reading subject before the text in an ethical way; Abbiati's drawings in many respects stage the readers' engagement with the poem. What is Dante doing? There are surprises at every turn of the book, and though it is not strictly addressed to an academic audience and rather to new readers of the *Commedia*, that is not to say that it does not communicate effectively on many unexpected levels. The structure and remit of the volume throw ever new modes of reading Dante's poem. Take for example *Purgatorio* III, and the selection of Manfred's words as its terzina: "Or le bagna la pioggia e move il vento/ di fuor dal regno, quasi lungo 'l Verde, / dov' e' le trasmutò a lume spento" (130-132). Marchesi's commentary note not only recounts the

exhumation of Manfred's corpse and removal from the city's limits by the Bishop of Cosenza, but philologically invokes the Palinarus of the *Aeneid*: "Nunc me fluctus habet versantque"—he who succeeds in swimming to the coast only to find himself confronted and killed on the shoreline by men who throw his corpse back into the sea. Such is the pulse of Dante's text and its analepsis to Virgil, that it proleptically invites another, more shameful death—not the violent ones of Manfred or Palinarus, but the indifference to misery and suffering which renders us all the Bishop of Cosenza. And it is here, as in other places in this unique book, that Abbiati's sometimes whimsical, humorous drawings give way to outrage and despair. The image which accompanies this canto is a reproduction of the image of the Syrian three-year-old child, Alan Kurdi, whose corpse washed up on the shores of a Greek beach in 2015. Abbiati places the image at the bottom right of the page, surrounded by the blank void of the page screaming out for justice.

Ethics, though in a more traditionally academic context, are at the heart of George Corbett's excellent *Dante's Christian Ethics: Purgatory and Its Moral Contexts*. Building on previous studies of the ethical dimension in Dante,[9] Corbett's study moves its investigation on from Aquinas and the Classical sources to interrogate the influence of broader Christian contexts of Dante's ethical vision. One of the stated aims of the work is to offer a significant contribution to three of the wider currents in recent Dante scholarship, that is: the reappraisal of Dante's theology, a renewed investigation of his *forma mentis* and a re-examination of the *Commedia*'s narrative structure. Corbett's study delivers on all three counts. Divided into three parts—Dante's ethical and political manifesto; the reframing of Dante's ethics; penance and Dante's purgatory—the volume sets out the complex moral ordering of the afterlife before treating a dualistic political argument which is shown to underpin many of the classical pagans and contemporary popes we find there. The object of focus becomes more clearly the second of Dante's realms of the afterlife in chapters three and four of the middle section and demonstrates how his Purgatory represents the process of Christian penance, satisfaction and purification and how Dante's approach to Christian ethics should be read as distinct from Aquinas's moral theology. In the final section of the study, Corbett devotes particular space to three of the seven capital vices: Pride, Sloth and Avarice. Indeed, this final section over three chapters draws significantly on Peraldus's *De vitiis et virtutibus* and treats it as a gloss for the Christian ethics of Dante's Purgatory. Corbett's discussion of these three is particularly fascinating and extends on recent scholarship in the area.[10] Chapter 5

[9] Marc Cogan. *The Design in the Wax: The Structure of the 'Divine Comedy' and Its Meaning.* Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999; Patrick Boyde. *Human Vice and Human Worth in Dante's 'Comedy'*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

[10] See *Dante and the Seven Deadly Sins*, edited by John C. Barnes and Daragh O'Connell. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2017.

deals specifically with pride, and the study interprets the three groups together (three examples of humility [X]; three prideful souls [XI]; twelve examples of Pride [XII]) as a triptych—Dante's puzzling choice of exempla only becomes understandable when they are read in their relational function in terms of the moral purpose of the terrace. The penultimate chapter reappraises the importance of sloth, and again here Peraldus is an essential influence for Dante. The vice then is articulated in terms of it being the vice of scholars and poets (Virgil's doctrinal lectures on love, free will and moral responsibility are not parenthetical to terrace's moral aims). Corbett here argues successfully that Virgil's doctrine is represented symbolically by the dream of the Siren. The final vice is treated in the concluding chapter. Corbett examines avarice again through the lens of Peraldus, and also argues that Dante viewed avarice (in its opposing vice, prodigality) as his own. Moreover, the volume uncovers Dante's implicit confession of both sloth and prodigality through Statius, his moral cypher. One might argue that Corbett's failure to deal with the other capital vices in the same systematic manner as these three might be a flaw of the study, however, even here Corbett is very much aware of these lacunae and indeed provides the reader with judicious reasons for their lack of treatment, among which is the notion that pride (with envy) is a vice of the intellect, sloth (with wrath) is a vice of irascible appetite, and avarice (with gluttony and lust) is a vice of concupiscible appetite. Sloth may very well be the besetting vice of scholars, but on the evidence of this rigorous and genuinely innovative study, Corbett is anything but.

One of the most important volumes to appear this year was Lino Pertile's much-anticipated *Dante Popolare*. The premise to the volume starts from the simple, yet dangerously complex question, why is Dante so read, performed, imitated and translated? In short, what makes him so universally irresistible? Pertile's study shifts the focus of study onto cultural forms and the collective phenomena of the wider public of Dante's time, onto the experience of the everyday, onto Dante's encounter with the everyday and with the assimilation of his contemporary popular culture. Pertile does not ignore high culture but does privilege the lower forms and argue that Dante treated them with the same seriousness as those higher cultural forms. Indeed, Pertile reminds his readers of earlier prevailing attitudes to Dante and his cultural contexts. Take for example the following mid-twentieth century quotation from Curtius in relation to much of the popular vision literature which circulated in the various vernaculars of the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries:

> The smallest contribution—if indeed there was any at all—come from the legendary otherworld—visions of popular religious stamp which circulated so widely in Latin and in the vernaculars of the Middle Ages. Dante stands with the learned tradition of the Middle Ages, and at the beginning of the *Paradiso* (II, 1-6) he advises the ignorant to cease reading.

He shares in the contempt for the laity which is to be found everywhere in medieval Latin literature.[11]

Pertile rightly takes such elitist assumptions to task and writes that Curtius's words barely disguise his cultural snobbery, almost as if he believed that Dante wrote the *Commedia* in Latin, or as if he had only written the *Convivio* and the *Paradiso*. What about the Dante of the *Inferno* and the *Purgatorio*: "Dante li scrive con in mente la cultura e la sensibilità di quei 'profani incolti', quegli *ydiotae* che, secondo Curtius, disprezzerebbe" (23). For Pertile, Dante's decision to write the *Inferno*—after the experience of the doctrine of *Convivio*, albeit in the vernacular—signals a moment of radical change for the direction of Dante's literary production, and also his profile as a poet. Indeed, Pertile calls it a "conversione" in the sense that it was a choice that went against the prevailing norms, a provocative choice whose significance is religious, political and ethical. It was, ultimately, a popular choice. It demands a wider public, in which both popular and high culture come together. Pertile's study itself is a work of ethical criticism, and does not shy away from awkward areas, indeed, the first section of the study examines the history and problems of a popular Dante through the prism of his legacy: Giovanni del Virgilio, Petrarch and Bembo, Contini, and most intriguingly, Fascist Dante, in which Dante's legacy is put in the service of 1938s racial laws, and is quoted quite deliberately on the covers of the infamous magazine *La difesa della razza*: "Sempre la confusion delle persone / principio fu del mal della cittade" (*Par*., XVI, 67-68). The remainder of the volume digs deep into the wider questions of popular culture—vernacular Florentine and plurilingualism, popular traditions, religion, society and culture—and interrogates the *Commedia* through its own popular themes and episodes. It is a timely and important study, by one of the foremost voices in Dante studies, and it is written with cogency, deep erudition and informed by an ethical spirit.

I mentioned above the notion of a new radical collaborative approach to Dante studies more generally, and this is markedly true of the final two volumes considered here. The first volume is *Dante* co-edited by Roberto Rea and Justin Steinberg, and those names reflect the aim of the volume, that of gathering together some of the most important voices on Dante's work, and questions related to him, from both the Italian and North American traditions. Thus, we get a plurality of critical voices. The first section of the book relates directly to the individual works: Marco Grimaldi, *Rime*; Donato Pirovano, *Vita nuova*; Andrea Mazzucchi, *Convivio*; Mirko Tavoni, *De vulgari eloquentia*; Giorgio Inglese, *Commedia*; Diego Quaglioni, *Monarchia*; Antonio Montefusco, *Epistole*; Marco Petoletti, *Egloge*; Theodore J. Cachey Jr., *Questio de acqua et terra*; Paolo Canettieri, *Il Fiore* (and the *Detto d'Amore*). The remainder of the volume is

[11] Ernst Robert Curtius. *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*. 1948. Translated by Willard R. Trask. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1953, 362.

dedicated to a series of questions. The themes of Florence and exile are tackled by Elisa Brilli, whereas Enrico Fenzi examines Dante's politics. Giovanna Frosini looks at Dante's use of the vernacular and Paola Nasti writes on the scriptural tradition which precedes him. Ronald L. Martinez examines the liturgical tradition, whereas Pasquale Porro deals with the philosophical tradition. The final two chapters deal respectively with Dante and the classical tradition (Stefano Carrai) and Dante and the lyric tradition (Lino Lionardi). The eighteen chapters which go to make up the volume are written in a manner which is both accessible and rigorous. Each chapter provides the reader with excellent further readings on the related topic. Once again, the Carocci publishing house has shown itself to be at the forefront of exciting and new Dante publications in Italy. Such multi-authored volumes can suffer from the plurality on show, but this volume reads more like an authoritative celebration of Dante with contributions from scholars at the forefront of their fields.

It is barely possible to do just to the final volume considered here, both for its size and the vastness of its critical sweep. If Rea and Steinberg's *Dante* employed a plurality of voices, Gragnolati, Lombardi and Southerden's monumental *The Oxford Handbook of Dante* is a very different beast, both in its conceptual framework and for the sheer variety of voice and treatment. Handbook is something of a misnomer here, in that the volume runs to well over seven hundred pages, though this should not deter the reader in anyway, as the volume is designed to be sampled at different angles, non-sequentially, and at different times. For length, one needs to read wealth, in that there is some much to encounter and enjoy critically in its many pages. The *Handbook* opens with a quite wonderful introductory essay from its three editors—"Dante Unbound: A Vulnerable Life and the Openness of Interpretation" (xxiii-xxxv)—who begin with Dante's body—his *bios*—and move to the language produced by that embodied self, to cover the span of his life and writings. They inform us that the guiding principle of the volume has been to resist the temptation of celebrating a triumphant, unified and overly coherent Dante, and instead allow for a different Dante to emerge, one who is (made) open to interpretation, "unbound from the shackles of completion and wholeness haunting it" (xxxii), and thus the essays contained within offer a plurality of interpretation. As such, the book is deeply collaborative—in the best sense of that term—decidedly plural and dialogic, encompassing a truly international and, quite significantly, intergenerational group of scholars, whose methodologies and disciplines range from philology, material culture, history, religion, art history, and visual studies. This multidisciplinary work allows for, indeed encourages unexpected encounters, contaminations, interferences, even voids. The *Handbook* is divided into seven sections, or rather seven critical poles around which several strands may collide. These are: "Texts and Textuality," "Dialogues," "Transforming Knowledge,"

"Space(s) and Places," "A Passionate Selfhood," "A Non-Linear Dante," and "*Nachleben*."

The first section examines how much of Dante's writing is occupied with notions of authorship and readership. The essays contained here range from Steinberg's "The Author", through to questions of textual memory (Lina Bolzoni), the act and history of reading (Mary Carruthers), to questions of material culture around textual transmission (Martin Eisner) and the editing and manuscript tradition (Fabio Zanelli). Equally, the commentary tradition, both on Dante and Dante as commentator is accorded space here in Luca Fiorentini's fine essay. The particular richness of this section is further enhanced by the inclusion of Akash Kumar's excellent "Digital Dante" who ends on a note of considering a completely immersive virtual reality *Commedia*. The following two sections are in many ways complementary. The Dialogues the *Handbook* proposes are with the Classics (Barański), the *Roman de la Rose* (Antonio Montefusco), the Troubadours (William Burgwinkle), Early Italian Lyric (Roberto Rea), Comic Culture (Fabian Alfie) and Visual Culture (Gervase Rosser), and in this way the culture of the later Middle Ages in its complexity is given ample space. Equally, the following section, "Transforming Knowledge" extends these encounters to open out onto such areas as Encyclopaedism (Franziska Meier), Medicine (Natascia Tonelli), Visual Theory (Simon Gilson), Law (Diego Quaglione), Politics (Tristan Kay), Philosophy and Theology (Pasquale Porro), Religion (Alessandro Vettori) and Poetry (Elena Lombardi). This section continues and expands the excellent essays of the 2015 on Dante's medieval contexts.[12] The central section of the *Handbook* is given notions of space and place, in which Dante as author is always situated in-between places, and always in motion. The wide-ranging essays contained within both pinpoint and expand the spatial terrain of Dante's situatedness. It begins with Giuliano Milani's take on Florence and Rome and moves on to Elisa Brilli's examination of the city in "*Civitas*/Community." The expanse of the Mediterranean is considered in Karla Mallette's essay, while Brenda Deen Schildgen moves the critical point to the East. Johannes Bartuschat examines Dante's exile and Mapping, Wandering and Travelling are the focus of Theodore J. Cachey Jr's excellent essay. This section is concluded by Peter S. Hawkins's wonderfully nuanced take on other worlds of classical and biblical tradition and medieval vision literature more generally.

Sections five and six again should be read together in that both participate in articulation of the self and subjectivity; the first is centred on relationality and the contours of the self as they are defined in Dante's oeuvre—Manuele Gragnolati, building on his already substantial work on the body and soul, examines Eschatological Anthropology, Heather Webb considers language (she writes that language is "the mark of our humanity. It constitutes us as relational beings, first

[12] *Dante in Context*, edited by Zygmunt G. Barański and Lino Pertile. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2015.

in an intimately personal relationship with God who breathes our linguistic capacity into being in the womb, and subsequently with others, from our family and our neighbors to those distant individuals who may only be reached by the words of a text designed for longevity and travel" [p. 463]), Bernard McGinn looks at the Mystical, and Cary Howie considers Bodies on Fire. What emerges from these pages is a fundamentally embodied and desiring 'I,' open to encounter. The following section, "A Non-linear Dante" endeavours to connect subjectivity with textuality, such connection in turn reveals tensions within the linearity of Dante's works and thus point in the direction of difference, plurality and sometimes contradiction. Alternative critical paradigms are revisited and recast. The contributors to this section—Nicolò Crisafi, Jennifer Rushworth, Francesca Southerden and Teodolinda Barolini all participate in this recasting, and what emerges from these pages are alternative patterns and movements, including the unfinished, the errant, the recurrent and the trace. This textured subjectivity ultimately questions the linear telos of Dante's works, and makes us think anew through difference.

The final section, *Nachleben*, or afterlives, inspired by Aby Warburg, points to this very notion of 'after', of survival, continuation and transformation. The eight chapters which constitute this section speak to different aspects: Martin McLaughlin takes on the daunting task of Translation, Rossend Arqués Corominas looks at Dante and the Performing Arts, while John David Rhodes examines Dante on Screen. The following chapters brilliantly interrogate their subject areas: Daniela Caselli positions Dante within Modernism, whereas Lino Pertile examines Dante with regard to the Shoah, and Jason Allen-Paisant examines Dante from the perspective of Caribbean literature (Lorna Goodison et al), through the lens of language, power and race. The final two chapters open out Dante to even wider theoretical considerations and interrogate the medieval poet through Queer theory (Gary Cestaro) and Decolonial Feminist theory (Marguerite Waller). Indeed, these final two chapters are wonderfully articulated and situate Dante under new and exciting critical and theoretical paradigms. Waller concludes her essay with these words: "The poem proposes interactive, nonhierarchical, nonexclusionary relation and community, and the interactive, nonhierarchical, nonexclusionary performances of gender and sexuality upon which they depend, as the 'pan de li angeli' ['bread of angels'] (*Par*. II, 11) that nourishes life" (718). This whole final section demonstrates the richness and possibility in current Dante Studies, indeed, this *Handbook* will stand for some time as the reference point in the discipline in a fixed commemorative moment in time, but it does also, it is has to be stated, speak to the futurity of Dante Studies, a futurity in rude health.

We cannot speak of a "Povero Dante," ill-served by scholarship, but rather an enriched Dante—*Dante ricco*—, whose septicentennial celebrations have given rise to some extraordinary scholarship globally, some of which is the

summation of long engagement with the poet, others their first tentative steps into the sea of exegesis, many who have embraced the a radical collaborative, multi- and inter-disciplinary approach to Dante and his works. All of the works touched on in these pages are imbued with a passion for Dante and a shared commitment to collaboration and dialogue. As Dante writes in the *Paradiso*:

> Diverse voci fanno dolci note;
> così diversi scanni in nostra vita
> rendon dolce armonia tra queste rote.
>
> (*Par*. 6.124-26)

Daragh O'Connell, *University College Cork, Ireland*

Roberto Antonelli. *Dante poeta-giudice del mondo terreno*. Roma: Viella, 2021. Pp. 297.
Lino Pertile. *Dante popolare*. Ravenna: Longo, 2021. Pp. 385.

È insolito recensire o, più modestamente, 'segnalare' due libri diversi e di autori diversi, i quali hanno in comune l'attributo di 'veterani' nel campo degli studi danteschi. Non è una qualifica sufficiente per giustificare l'accostamento proposto in queste pagine, per cui bisogna aggiungere che entrambi cercano 'un senso' della *Commedia*, cioè una formula che dica in essenza cos'è quel poema straordinario che ha lettori di ogni ceto e lingua, e che in tempi a noi vicini ha creato una vera industria critica così folta e invadente che in qualche modo ha offuscato 'il senso' dell'opera. Si può dire che entrambi i libri indicati in esponente nascano dal desiderio di liberarla dall'involucro spessissimo creato dalla dantistica degli ultimi decenni, specialmente quella di stampo americano, tanto che si accolgono con gioia le letture senza 'note esegetiche' dei Benigni e dei Sermonti. Ed entrambi i nostri autori fanno questo lavoro di scrostatura ma non cancellando tutto il lavoro pregresso, bensì 'selezionando' ciò che a loro appare ancora fecondo e riproponendolo dopo averlo rielaborato e rifinito lungo le linee emerse dall'uso fattone nel corso del tempo. Il che giustifica ulteriormente la qualifica di 'veterani' usata per questi due autori. Ed è interessante e perfino straordinario che in un momento in cui la dantistica sembra giunta ad un disperante *huis-clos* ritornino motivi e strumenti critici del passato per rienergizzarla. In quest'anno di celebrazioni dantesche si ripetono immancabilmente cose arcinote (e questo perché le celebrazioni sono spesso una compiaciuta e orgogliosa *mise au point* delle acquisizioni critiche fatte da schiere di dantisti), ma il vecchio che i nostri due autori riutilizzano, viene presentato con tanta intelligenza che sorprende gli addetti ai lavori per la freschezza delle proposte che arrivano come folgorazioni a chiarire tutta una serie di ricerche che