Amilcare A. Iannucci, ed. *Dante e la "bella scola" della poesia: Autorità e sfida poetica*. Ravenna: Longo, 1993. Pp. 358.

This collection of essays deals with Dante's relation to the five poets who form Limbo's "bella scola" and to the two, Statius and Terence, who might have been expected to be there. The first essay (by Amilcare A. Iannucci, also the editor of the volume) analyzes the scene in Limbo in which Dante becomes "sesto tra cotanto senno." The second (co-authored by Gian Carlo Alessio-Claudia Villa) attempts to determine and describe more exactly the medieval reader's, and therefore Dante's, knowledge of Virgil. The next four articles examine questions about the remaining members of the "bella scola," Homer (Giorgio Brugnoli), Horace (Claudia Villa), Ovid (Michelangelo Picone), and Lucan (Violetta de Angelis). These are followed by a survey of the present state of studies on Dante and Statius (Luca Carlo Rossi) and an essay on Dante's relation to classical comedy and in particular to Terence (Zigmunt G. Barański). Finally, Robert Hollander presents a list of almost 400 echoes and possible echoes of Virgil in the *Divine Comedy*, as the first stage of a more definitive re-evaluation of Virgil's influence on the poem, to be produced with the help of the *Dante Dartmouth Project*.

While the essays, written by scholars from several different countries, vary in interests and character, there are some recurrent themes that give the collection a real unity: the place of classical comedy, and in particular of Terence, in Dante's background and the meaning of comedy in his poetics; the format in which Dante read the classics and the information and tradition contained in the various forms of medieval commentary that accompanied, or in some cases might have substituted, Dante's reading of the classics; Dante's emulation of his authors as a challenge to their authority and as the means of proving his own superiority. All of these ultimately involve questions related to Dante's knowledge of the classical authors and genres and their role in his poetics and, despite the diversity of the book's contributions, it stays on this twofold topic, offering a wealth of valuable philological information and reopening a discussion of our interpretation of Dante's relation to and judgment of his poetic sources.

Iannucci, Picone, and Barański deal with the issue of the changes and the intentional distortions to which Dante subjects his authors in his echoes of them. Their discussions turn around Dante's creation of a resolved version of the poetry of the classics which not only asserts the validity of Christianity in relation to the pagan world but, somehow, the superiority and novelty of the medieval poet over his classical "rivals." A variation of this theme is to be found in Brugnoli's contention that, not only is Homer's text unknown to Dante, but Dante's Homer may be intentionally deformed even in relation to what Dante knew. The Homeric allusions help to suggest Virgil's triumph over Homer, based on the Christian values of humility and providence reflected in the *Aeneid*.

Alessio, Villa, de Angelis, Rossi and Hollander deal primarily, although not exclusively, with facts rather than interpretation. Their contributions are aimed mostly at improving our knowledge of what Dante was familiar with and of how, as a medieval reader, he might have understood the texts in question. These authors are all cautious philologists who do not claim to change our opinion greatly, but rather to advance our

knowledge reliably. Among their works, Violetta de Angelis' essay on Lucan should be singled out both as an example of outstanding scholarship and as the one among them that is able to make some conclusive points and get very close to important breakthroughs, particularly concerning Cato and his placement in Purgatory. Hollander's catalogue — which, although considered preliminary by the author, already represents a greatly improved tool for Dante scholars — should also be distinguished from the other works just mentioned, in that it deals with internal facts of the text rather than with its historical context.

While the papers fall generally into two categories, the interpretive and the philological, the most recurrent theme in the first group, that Dante's echoes of his sources contain a built-in commentary, can, as Iannucci points out, be linked directly to the premise of the other papers, that the medieval reader would not be accustomed to reading the classical poets in isolation from various forms of commentary. All of the articles contained in this collection are valid contributions to the study of Dante and the classical tradition and the volume itself is all the more welcome for having presented them together as, among other things, a convincing illustration of their relevance to each other despite the variety of their authors' scholarly origins.

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Deborah Parker. *Commentary and Ideology: Dante in the Renaissance*. Durham, N.C.: Duke UP, 1993. Pp. 248.

"This book is an attempt to reclaim an interpretive legacy" (159). The legacy to which Deborah Parker refers in this summary statement of intent is the "extrinsic" approach, the historicist rather than the hermeneutic mode of interpretation. The author is urging the righting of what she sees as a present imbalance in critical studies, by refocusing on the legacy of Dante commentary: on ideological and social issues, and on literary reception and material production. To continue reading the *Comedy* "in the relative isolation of most current editions, thereby shearing it from its successive interpretations and reinterpretations," Parker warns, "is to read in practical ignorance" (158). This book is at once both an appeal for a reorientation of critical methodology — one which may require that we "read more, work collaboratively, publish less, and offer more tenuous conclusions" (160) — and a demonstration of the value of this mode of interpretation.

To demonstrate that the recognition of ideological and political concerns rests at the center of an understanding of the reception of Dante's poem, Chapters 3, 4, and 5 focus on commentary as a form of mediation between the *Comedy* and particular social agendas. This mediation is shaped by the role of institutions (Chapters 3 and 4) and by particular conceptions of imitation and authorship (Chapter 5). Chapter 6 demonstrates how an examination of the material production of the *Comedy* in the Renaissance can be applied to the resolving of current problems of Dante scholarship.

The critical debate which developed in the Renaissance over the dramatization of Brutus and Cassius in *Inferno* 34.61-67 forms the nucleus of a demonstration in Chapter 3 of how the *Comedy* both defined and was in turn redefined by culture, as commentary became a political tool for the legitimization of power groups. Parker perceives such an