lytical approaches to Dante that are both more subtle than "allegorical" analyses and probably truer to Dante's intention. He stresses the concept of "open meanings" in imagery and also explores medieval poetic ideas in which imagery functions neither to "hide" nor to adorn meaning, but rather to create meaning: "imagery consubstantial with meaning." He outlines his approach in the first chapter and, in succeeding chapters, employs it in an analysis of several moments in the *Commedia* which he considers exemplary of the "medieval Latin imaginative world in which Dante lived": the giants in hell (Chapter 2), the "phantasmagoria" in the earthly paradise (Chapter 3), and the first circle in the solar heaven (Chapter 4). Throughout his "method is to begin from Dante himself, trying to ascertain what imagery he might, historically, have known, and how he has transfixed it" (ix).

In the two Excursus which conclude the volume, Dronke seeks to clarify, with documentation, the controversy surrounding the authorship of the *Epistle* to Can Grande, (concluding that Dante probably did not compose the expository part of the letter) and to set out the medieval Latin tradition of the legend of Nimrod the astronomer.

Brief bibliographical note. Index. Excellent end-notes, into which he unfortunately too often consigns intriguing arguments that should be in the body of the text, e.g. note 8 to Chapter 1, on the prophetic tradition.

FB

Joan M. Ferrante. *The Political Vision of the Divine Comedy*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1984. Pp. ix + 392.

Without reducing the *Comedy* to a political tract, Ferrante reads Dante's poem from a socio-political perspective. Indeed, she suggests that the political attitudes in the poem are consistent with those of the *Monarchy* and the *Convivio*, but in the *Comedy* Dante elected to express his views in verse in order to give them persuasive force and to ensure popular circulation. The first two chapters address problems of city and empire, church and state, respectively. Ferrante reads the *Inferno* (Chapter 3) as a metaphor of a corrupt society, "when all its members act for themselves and against the common good." *Purgatory* (Chapter 4) figures "a society in transition, moving from self-centeredness to concern for and commitment to others, but not yet organized within an effective structure." *Paradiso* (Chapter 5) is the "ideal society in all its essential elements working harmoniously." The concluding chapter explains the problems of exchange and communication, and describes how Dante "accepts commerce as an essential part of life in a complex society, as a basic form of exchange, like language, though vulnerable to the same kinds of control." Ferrante surveys medieval attitudes towards "usurers" of both money and language, both forms of exchange open to willful "corruption" (by counterfeiters and

moneylenders or, by analogy, liars and poets), and she shows how Dante's preoccupation with problems of reference leads him to adopt the kind of neologistic, often self-contradictory poetic language found in *Paradise*, a language designed to transcend "the limitations of material values and goods . . . by giving financial terms a metaphorical meaning, by turning the commercial perspective from profit and loss in money to gains in love and knowledge" (379).

Extensive footnotes. Index.

PR

John Freccero. *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion*. Edited with Introduction by Rachel Jacoff. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard UP, 1986. Pp. xvi + 328.

This volume collects all of Freccero's major essays on the *Divine Comedy* published over a 25 year period (1959–84). The essays, most of which are on the *Inferno* (11 out of 17), are essentially unrevised and are arranged to follow the order of the *Commedia*'s narrative movement rather than their dates of publication. Thus, we move from "The Prologue Scene" (1966) to "The Final Image: *Paradiso* XXXIII, 144" (1964), two early essays characterized by the techniques of traditional historical research and a belief in the "interpretability" of Dante's text. Later essays, starting with "Medusa: The Letter and the Spirit" (1972), are more speculative in nature and regularly call into question the ability of language to represent and to mean. Given the collection's organizing principles, the reader is obliged to shift continually between two radically different critical perspectives.

Clearly, the volume's unity is not to be found in methodological coherence. Rather it resides in Freccero's preoccupation with the notion of "conversion," in his belief that a conversion experience lies at the heart of Dante's poem, and more specifically that Dante's model for his conversion narrative is St. Augustine's *Confessions*. As the editor points out in her introduction, conversion is to be "understood both as religious experience and as poetic structure" (xii). In one of his most recent essays, "The Significance of *Terza Rima*" (1983), Freccero expands the idea of conversion to include the dialectic between thematics and poetics; "thematics (that is, theology) and poetics might conceivably be joined in such a way as to offend neither historical understanding nor contemporary skepticism, for, in both cases, we are discussing a coherence that is primarily linguistic. The traditional problem of poetry and belief would then be shifted onto a philosophical plane. Does the order of language reflect the order of reality or is 'transcendent reality' simply a projection of language? What we had always taken to be a problem of Dante criticism turns out to be the central epistemological problem of all interpretation" (260).