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).

Extensive notes in early essays. Index of cantos and verses. General index.

PR

Jesse M. Gellrich. *The Idea of the Book in the Middle Ages: Language Theory, Mythology, and Fiction*. Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1985. Pp. 292.

Gellrich defines the medieval "idea of the book" as a "particular form" of the "larger, mythologizing phenomenon of Western tradition" (20). Mythology, in this context, signifies "a specific structure of thought" which informs the encyclopedic and totalizing organization of cultural form. From Saussure, Lévi-Strauss and Foucault comes the seminal concept of the Text fulfilling "certain expectations that mythology supplied in archaic cultures" (18). In Chapter 2, the author examines medieval efforts to contain sacred meaning in structured space (or its mimesis): in architecture, visual art, cartography, and the schematic structure of Scholastic thought and music. In Chapter 3, he chronicles, from Augustine to Aquinas, the ongoing effort to protect signification from indeterminacy, to mythologize the signs of writing and speaking.

In Chapter 1, since "discussions about writing in the middle ages may very well turn out to confront modern deconstruction with its own history" (31), Gellrich places in juxtaposition Derrida's distinction between "writing" (*écriture*) and the conception of the Book as a "natural totality," and Augustine's "distinction between writing and the celestial Book" (which leads to the medieval fascination with "the presence of one in the other," 35). In his chapters on Dante (4) and Chaucer (5-7), the author undertakes what he describes as "a new look at the place of fiction within the encompassing Text of medieval cultural forms" (23). Dante's innovation (which is modest in relation to Chaucer's emphatic "play" with the indeterminacy of the text) consists of his use in the *Commedia* of language as *interpretative* of spiritual experience rather than as *imitative* of the Book of creation or the Book of culture. Gellrich concludes that "the allegories of reading in Dante and Chaucer open the way for rereading" (247).

Extensive bibliography. Index. Nine full-page, black and white illustrations.

CLM

Luciana Giovanetti. *Dante in America: Bibliografia 1965-1980*. Ravenna: Longo, 1987. Pp. 197.

Giovanetti's bibliography of Dante studies in America for the period 1965-1980 bears witness to the varied and widespread interest Dante continues