and established scholars alike, not just those engaged in Cavalcantian studies, but in Medieval and Dante studies as well.

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Lloyd H. Howard. *Virgil the Blind Guide. Marking the Way Through the Divine Comedy*. Montreal and Kingston: Queen's University Press, 2010. Pp. xiv, 250. ISBN 978-0-7735-3655-5. n.p.

This exhaustive study of Virgil's authority in the *Commedia* is novel in its approach to a subject that has not previously been treated in a systematic fashion. As the author notes, his approach rejects the typical methodology of "simply noting patterns of repetition in an ad hoc manner" and instead looks for *formulas* of repetition and rhyming words, the examination of which reveals a message far different from their literal meaning. Based on a critical path established by the author in an earlier monograph, *Formulas of Repetition in Dante's Commedia*, Lloyd's fascinating study reveals that the repetition of certain words and rhymes continually leads the reader back to earlier episodes in the *Commedia* that expose Virgil's limitations as a guide and set the scene for his eventual replacement by more enlightened figures such as Beatrice and later the Virgin Mary, Jesus Christ and Bernard of Clairvaux.

The book, however, is not an easy read. This is not to suggest that scholarly works should be simple but rather it is intended to make the reader aware that the meticulous attention Lloyd pays to groupings of words, to their repetition and rhyming formulae, often results in a text that is so peppered with quotations and translations that the flow of the author's arguments is interrupted. Moreover, because of the structure of Howard's study, it is at times somewhat repetitive, bordering on the tedious. None of this, however, detracts from the strength of Howard's findings and, notwithstanding the extremely dense nature of his prose style, the book is definitely worth reading.

Consisting of an introduction, five chapters and a conclusion, the book deals with "markers" or "linguistic signals" that, pointing to a concealed poetic itinerary, allow the clever reader to move back and forth within the *Commedia* and thus comprehend a truth beyond the literal text. In particular, Howard looks at sets of rhymes or repetitions with slight variations that continually remind the reader of Virgil's incompetence at various pivotal points in the *Commedia*. In the first chapter Howard examines Virgil's apparent authority as established in *Inferno* 7 where he tames Plutus, and in *Inferno* 12 where there is a similar encounter with the Minotaur. In both cases, the literal narrative presents Virgil as a competent and worthy guide through the depths of hell, a guide in whom Dante is right to place his trust. But Howard notes that there are clues as early as *Inferno* 12 that Virgil himself may entertain doubts about his own ability to navigate terrain that has been changed considerably since the harrowing of Hell. Indeed, Howard notes, as

the two progress further downward these doubts are somewhat justified and underlined by Dante's linguistic cues, as Virgil finds himself incapable of carrying out his mission. Thus, in Chapter 2, Howard considers a series of rhymes and repetitions that link Virgil's blindness in *Inferno* 8-9, in *Purgatorio* 15-16, and in *Purgatorio* 22-23. In Chapter 3, the author conducts a similarly structured study of Virgil's encounters with heavenly beings in Hell and Purgatory, in particular in *Inferno* 9 (the "messo") and *Purgatorio* 28 (Matelda). Dante's subtext or *intra-text*, if we may call it that, is what Howard suggests rationalizes Virgil's eclipse and the eventual ascent of Mary. The linguistic signposts, Howard argues in Chapter 5, then allow us to actually follow Virgil's descent back to Limbo for he is of no use in the enlightened ambience of the celestial rose.

The conclusion that Virgil is not as able as he might seem is hardly revolutionary. Dante critics and readers have long noted the poet's inability to gain entry to Dis, and his unfamiliarity with Purgatory. What is most helpful about Howard's study is what it reveals about Dante the poet's, as opposed to Dante the pilgrim's, own opinion of his purported hero. That Dante would have taken such care in weaving these rhymes and repetitions into the fabric of his great poem seems at first hard to believe, given the unlikelihood of their being perceived, except by the most attentive reader. Yet, as Howard's study unfolds, it becomes clear that the rhymes and repetitions here examined could not possibly be mere coincidence and must somehow form a coherent program on Dante's part aimed at undermining the pilgrim's pagan guide and substituting the unseen author of the *Commedia* as the greater seer and purveyor of truth. Additionally, Howard's systematic approach makes us wonder how many other characters in the *Commedia* receive the same treatment. Virgil is the focus of this study, but one must now consider who else might be the subject of a subtle, internal poetry discernible only to those who, unlike Dante's "blind guide," are able to see something other than the words on the page.

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Massimo Verdicchio. *The Poetics of Dante's Paradiso*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010. Pp. xi, 177. ISBN 978-1-4426-4119-8 (hardbound). \$ 45.

Though the Introduction to Massimo Verdicchio's new study ends with the modest claim that he hopes to "add one more voice to the centuries-old debate on the *Paradiso*" (5), this "debate" is destined to be the discursive analogue of shadow-boxing as he has already announced that he will not acknowledge the work of critics who "have written something similar but reached different conclusions" (5). Since it is the originality of Verdicchio's perspective that justifies this self-granted exemption from scholarly debate, it is well to briefly summarize the main lines of his argument.

Like a host of critics before him, Verdicchio links the prophesy of the "Veltro"