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"

of *Inf.* 1 with that of the “DXV” of *Purg.* 33, and like a more restricted group including Della Torre, Olschki, and Crescimanno (none of whom, however, is mentioned), he sees these two messianic entities as variously embodied by Dante’s poem (more precisely, *Paradiso*), or by Dante himself. Having identified the canticle *Paradiso* as the fulfillment of the Veltro/DXV prophecies, a poetic act of retribution, Verdicchio goes on to describe the mechanics of this retribution: a subtle *contrapasso* analogous in kind, but not in degree, to that found in *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* (3). This *contrapasso* consists in the discovery—facilitated by the “key” of the correlated heavens and *Artes* according to the scheme set out in *Convivio* II, 13—that the blessed souls’ appearance of innocence is a sham (22); their brilliance, the deceptive gilding of a guilty conscience (38); and their eloquence, empty rhetoric (22).

Since, however, Verdicchio’s conjectures concerning the identity of the Veltro and DXV more often take the form of assertion than argument, they do little to resolve the age-old debate. Moreover, his correlation of the heavens with the *Artes*, while suggestive in particular instances, is unconvincing as a general scheme. More deserving of attention, because “più ha di felle,” is Verdicchio’s characterization of the blessed souls as guilt-ridden dissemblers (10; 38; 56 etc.).

Verdicchio seems to have forgotten that since the souls’ ritual bathing in the Lethe and the Eunoè has the effect of expunging their memories of sinful acts and refreshing those of virtuous acts, their reticence concerning past sins is not evidence of a wilful evasion, nor is their inclination to dwell on the beneficial consequences of those same inclinations (erotic, martial etc.) that spurred their sinful activities evidence of deception. This principle of necessary—rather than elective—amnesia is made explicit by Folquet, who observes “Non però qui si pente, ma si ride,/ non de la colpa, ch’a mente non torna,/ ma del valor ch’ordinò e provide” (*Par.* 9, 103-5). Verdicchio dismisses this assertion as Folquet’s “vain attempt to hide his guilt” (56), apparently unaware, or unwilling to accept, that Folquet is not inventing an ad hoc excuse, but invoking a general principle of *Paradiso*. Similarly doubtful arguments allow Verdicchio to conclude that the prominence of words and images related to hiding attests to the blessed souls’ guilty conscience and their desperate bid to conceal their guilt (that this is a function of the individual souls’ varied degrees of participation in the divine vision or of Dante’s sensory limitations is not even considered).

To take Beatrice at her word is, Verdicchio insists, to submit to a siren-like seduction, and to believe the testimony of the blessed is to be duped by their self-absolving dissimulation (48). Far from being a guarantee, Beatrice’s certification of the souls’ truthfulness—for, she tells us, the blessed cannot lie (*Par.* 3, 31-3; 4, 95)—must, according to Verdicchio, itself be doubted (27). In short, the only trustworthy witness to the truth turns out to be Verdicchio himself, whose authority is not, as we have seen, won by scholarly debate, but through the “corto andar” of undermining, or summarily discounting, all other competing claims to authority: no commentaries (with the exception of Sapegno’s and Singleton’s) are consulted (5); other Dante criticism is never explicitly cited after the Introduction and two prologues; and authorities of Dante’s time (G. Villani and others) are not con-

sulted directly, but through the selective filter of intermediate sources (Schevill etc.). Once the dust has settled, Verdicchio is the only one remaining in the lists, sheltered beneath the shield of “ironic” allegory (22) emblazoned with Foquet’s “ironic” smile.

This smile becomes the visual emblem of the irony that presumably underpins the whole of the *Paradiso* (x) and is none other than “Dante’s ironic smile that the reader can capture when he/she is prepared to read the cantica allegorically and ironically” (171). Through this sort of rhetorical strategy, Verdicchio leaves no doubt that it is the readers’ state of preparation that is in question, not his interpretation. Indeed, Verdicchio’s regular deployment of such phrases as “we now know,” (89; 93; 118 etc.) assumes, on the one hand, that his reading is not an interpretation, but a revelation, and, on the other, that his readers are willing to be implicated in this dubious hermeneutics. Since, however, this alleged knowledge is often unsubstantiated, misleading, or incorrect, his habit of casting interpretations as truths is a disservice to any readers who, lacking expertise in the field of Dante studies, have no reason to doubt him. For instance, an unsuspecting student might well be left with the belief that: Justinian’s heresy consisted not in monophytism, but “monotheism” (39); Christ was “reincarnated” (44); “no” actually means “yes” (82); Caesar founded Florence and is therefore Dante’s ancestor (83); Cacciaguida was a pagan miscreant “born” and “baptized” in the pre-Christian Temple of Mars before it became San Giovanni (92); the number of rebel angels created (rather than the seconds elapsed) before Satan’s mutiny “hardly amount to twenty” (157) and so forth.

Even the most naive reader, however, may find it difficult to stomach Verdicchio’s summary removal of a tercet (*Par.* 16, 61-3) to bring Dante’s text into better alignment with his interpretation (98), and will certainly be baffled by Verdicchio’s incoherent translation of this same excised tercet: “this fact is Florentine who changes and trades, who would have lived in Semifonte, where his grandfather went begging” (99). When facts, rather than new-minted Florentines, are thus allowed to change and trade, I guess it’s only fair that exegetic fictions—like Shakespeare’s dog—should also have their day.

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Antonio Rossini. *Il Dante sapienziale. Dionigi e la bellezza di Beatrice.* Quaderni della “Rivista di cultura classica e medioevale” 10. Pisa-Roma: Fabrizio Serra Editore, 2009. Pp. 178. ISBN 978-88-6227-079-3 (paperback). n.p.

Il volume di Antonio Rossini, *Il Dante sapienziale. Dionigi e la bellezza di Beatrice*, propone un’analisi seria, rigorosa e ampiamente documentata sulla presenza e influenza dello Pseudo-Dionigi e del *corpus* sapienziale — in particolare della *Sapienza di Salomone* — nella rappresentazione di Beatrice e dell’amore di Dante per Beatrice alla fine del *Purgatorio* dantesco (*Purg.* 28-33). La tesi centrale di