It is difficult to imagine a more comprehensive compendium relevant to Dante studies than John A. Scott’s *Understanding Dante*. There are, of course, several other volumes that serve similar purposes, but even amongst the many books that seek to clarify and catalogue the many pronged beast that is Dante’s literary and social project, Scott’s stands out. It is not surprising then that this work has been translated into Italian. Given that Dante’s own signature work, the *Commedia*, was written in the *volgare*, precisely to reach the Italian people as opposed to limiting its readership to the intelligentsia against whom he had railed in the *Convivio*, it is also fitting that Scott’s work should now be available to those for whom the *Commedia*, was originally composed. While it certainly not my intention to spend this review commenting on the accuracy of the translation, it suffices to say that this translation is based on an earlier translation and was overseen by Professor Scott himself. I should note, however, that the title does suggest a subtle shift beyond the original intent of Scott’s English version; a shift that is inevitable whenever one translates and whenever one undertakes a revision of one’s own work several years later. The distinction between the English title *Understanding Dante* and the Italian *Perché Dante* immediately signals perhaps a more philosophical approach to the subject, a more reflective work, asking a question that did not necessarily drive the original. That being said, the translation is superb and the edition is as fresh and relevant as the original.

In his introduction, Scott notes that in 1965, Eugenio Montale defined the *Comedy* as “l’ultimo miracolo della poesia mondiale” and then laments that, of course it is impossible to explain a miracle. Scott, however, does suggest it is possible at least to understand its author and his world. The aim of this enormous undertaking, therefore, is to do just that. In this respect, I would say the author has most definitely succeeded. *Perché Dante* provides a well-structured, logically organized and detailed examination of the major works of Dante. The book is divided into twelve chapters and takes the reader through Dante’s world and writing. The first five chapters are devoted to the *Vita nuova*, *De vulgari eloquentia*, *Le rime*, *Il convivio*, and *Monarchia*, in that order. The remaining chapters introduce the *Commedia* and then proceed to a discussion of the moral ordering of the three realms of Dante’s otherworld, the topography and demographics of same, and of Dante and the Greco-Roman past. The remaining third of the book is devoted to the figure of Dante the poet, *Le epistole*, the *Questio de aqua et terra* and the *Egloghe*, and ends with a chapter on Dante and his times. The end materials are particularly helpful, consisting of a bibliography, a list of on-line Dante sites and a series of indices ranging from an index of names to mythological references. In all, the book is what I imagine Dante hoped his own *Commedia* would be; encyclopedic in its collection of knowledge but also exegetical by virtue of its embedded commentary. Indeed, throughout *Perché Dante*, Scott remains cognizant of the context in which his book will be read, taking into account the breadth of critical heritage that has shaped Dante studies over the last centuries. In this
respect then *Perché Dante* is also a compendium of the most relevant critical texts as well as an analysis of the entirety of Dante’s literary output.

Finally, in contrast to the many commentators who tend to approach the three books of the *Divine Comedy* individually, Scott takes a different approach, examining themes that stretch across the fabric of the great poem, considering holistically those issues that are treated throughout the three canticles, thus encouraging the reader who might have been tempted to stop at the end of *Inferno*, to continue the literary journey. This comprehensive approach is, in my humble opinion precisely the type of approach that Dante himself would have urged.

Accordingly, John A. Scott has given readers a comprehensive perspective that is commensurate with the far reaching scope that Dante himself imagined when he caused his pilgrim to look down from the heights of Paradise to see how far he has come. *Perché Dante?* responds to the very question it asks by pointing out what the pilgrim poet discovered at the pinnacle of *Paradiso*; that in order to know something, even a miracle, one must see it from every angle. If the *Commedia* showed Dante the vast breadth of the cosmos, then *Perché Dante?* shows us the vast breadth of the *Commedia*. As such Scott’s work serves the modern reader as competently as Virgil, Beatrice and Bernard served the poet, and is, therefore, a worthy addition to any Dante collection.

MARY WATT

*University of Florida*


“Non al suo amante più Diana piacque:” with this opening verse of Petrarch’s fifty-second madrigal, Janis Vanacker sets the tone for the often epic scope of her chronological analysis of hunting myths—their interpretations and transformations — in Italian literature from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century. She chooses an appropriate place to start; Petrarch’s madrigal draws a direct relationship between myth and mythographer, mythographer and poetic “I,” poetic “I” and eye of the witness—and reader. Vanacker’s thorough account explores these very issues with philological precision and stunning attention to detail.

Impeccably organized, Vanacker’s book is a perfectly structured artifact that expands organically, each chapter in immediate conversation with the ones before. The goal of her “indagine” is instantly clear: “approfondire la conoscenza della tradizione mitologica nella cultura italiana attraverso lo studio di due miti precisi, quello di Diana e Atteone e quello di Venere e Adone” (9). Of course, her final product is much farther-reaching than advertised: in discussing the significance of these two myths, Vanacker also touches on others, and treats almost equally at length Myrrha and Cinyras’s myth not only as contextual precursor to the story of Venus and Adonis, but also as a strong influence in its own right.

Before presenting the essential features of the mythological hunt in their ori-