Dante Alighieri. *Dante's Lyric Poetry. Poems of Youth and of the Vita Nuova (1283–1292)*. Edited with a general introduction and introductory essays by Teodolinda Barolini with new verse translations by Richard Lansing. Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2014. Pp. 335. ISBN: 9781442626195. \$39.95.

On the anniversary of Beatrice's death, his mind absorbed in thoughts of Beatrice, Dante, according to his account in the *Vita Nuova*, was busy drawing an angel on "certain panels" (VN, 34). While we cannot judge whether Dante captured Beatrice's essence in the lineaments of this angel, Teodolinda Barolini's magisterial edition of Dante's youthful poems, the first of a projected two-volume commented edition of Dante's *rime*, has given us a means of judging Dante's remarkable success in drawing a verse portrait of Dante, not as he was, but as he would have us see him. Every movement, as Montaigne observes, reveals us, and it is precisely by identifying and exposing Dante's editorial "movements," his retroactive redrawing of his life's path—sentimental, spiritual, and intellectual—that Barolini reveals the true Dante.

Dante's Lyric Poetry is, consequently, at once the finest of edition of Dante's youthful poetry and his most compelling biography, one, significantly, that not only takes the reader on a tour of the path that Dante ultimately took, but of those that he might have taken. The signposts to these other paths are often as subtle as a pearl on a white forehead. The difference between the two names, Licenza and Lisetta, found in the two redactions of *Per quella via che la Bellezza corre* is not, as might initially appear to be the case, trivial, but essential. "Lisetta," as Barolini shows us, points to the flesh-and-blood particularities of lived experience, "Licenza," to the arid abstractions of allegory. By carefully tracing and documenting these forks in the path of Dante's poetic itinerary, Barolini has prepared a road map for future critics, a bird's eye view of the messier, all-too-human wanderings of a poet who not only conceptualized life's journey as a "nuovo e mai non fatto cammino" ("a new and never before travelled path"), but was himself a pilgrim in the world, seduced by novelty and subject to vacillation, even, as Barolini shows us, about the essential nature of Beatrice's influence: the Beatrice of *Lo doloroso amor* leads Dante to death, the Beatrice of the *Commedia*, to life.

Barolini's edition of the *rime* is not only a brilliant analysis of Dante's lyric and a nuanced portrait of Italy's greatest poet, but it is also, if indirectly, an instructive critique of crypto-philology and a call for transparency. Poets work in the medium of fiction, philologists, in that of fact. Yet, as Barolini shows us time and again, much of the philology surrounding Dante's *rime* is actually nourished less by science than by a "secret hope" (15) generously seasoned by cultural prejudice. Secret hopes, impatient of satisfaction, have a way of manufacturing their own truths, and cultural prejudices have a way of shaping them; the history of the philological reception of Dante's lyrics often tells us as much about the critics' desires as it does about Dante's. Therefore, Barolini is confronted not only with the task of dismantling Dante's portrait of Dante, but the philologists' often no less misleading reconstructions of Dante's poetic itinerary.

For instance, out of a misplaced, if natural, reverence for the organic unities devised by authors, Italian philologists, Barolini observes, have traditionally referred to the poems not embedded in the macrottexts of the *Vita nuova* and *Convivio* as "estravaganti" (wandering outside ones). The result of this philological gerrymandering is to give particular value to the poems in the well-defined "districts" of the macrottexts while devaluing the others. Barolini's editorial decision to liberate these poems from their macrottexts and consider them on their own has the effect of revealing the degree to which their traditional interpretations are shaped by their prose context; if the excluded poems are "wanderers," the included ones are prisoners, rigidly bound by the significance assigned to them by Dante's prose frames.

Where the poems of the *Vita Nuova* are concerned, this decision to liberate the *rime* brings unexpected dividends for, finding it "necessary to acknowledge the effect of the prose before being able to set it aside" (24), Barolini produces what amounts to a full-fledged commentary of the *Vita Nuova* which, though incidental and born of necessity, is superior to other commentaries precisely because it brings to light the sometimes seismic shifts in meaning that result from the transplanting to the *Vita Nuova* of lyrics composed at an earlier date and preserved in a pre-*Vita Nuova* redaction. Similarly, the exclusion of certain pre-*Vita Nuova* poems from the *Vita Nuova* allows us to infer the reason for this exclusion, thereby sharpening our sense of the *Vita Nuova*'s ideological agenda—in much the same way that, according to Augustine, heresies have the value of refining and clarifying orthodoxy.

From the pearly veiling in *Donne ch'avete* to the ghostly pallor of *Color d'amor*, Barolini reads Dante's poetic art with as great a sensitivity to detail as

Morelli ever displayed in the sphere of pictorial art. This keen eye for nuance allows Barolini to identify and excavate a host of social and historical particularities from the idealizations and abstractions of Dante's lyric, weaving them into a social history, a series of vivid tableaux that set the social life of Dante before our eyes: funerals, festivals, sick-bed vigils, hunting parties, boat trips, gendered *brigade* and social gatherings. Considered as a whole, Barolini's introductory essays are not only a thorough education in Dante's youthful lyrics, but a privileged glimpse of the customs and cultural values of fourteenth-century Florence—customs and values with which, as Barolini points out, Dante's own actions and beliefs are often at variance, thus creating a subtle tension within the lyrics and providing a useful reminder that the spirit of heterodoxy did not settle, like a Pentecostal flame, on Dante's brow when he turned his mind to writing the *Commedia*, but was from the very beginning an essential part of his poetic complexion.

Finally, and in some respects most importantly, Barolini's analysis reveals the germ of the *Commedia* in Dante's lyric production. As a result, *Dante's Lyric Poetry* is not only a superlative study of the *rime*, but the best possible introduction to the *Commedia* itself.

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***Interpreting Dante. Essays on the Traditions of Dante Commentary.* Edited by Paola Nasti and Claudia Rossignoli. Notre Dame (Indiana): University of Notre Dame Press, 2013. Pp. 470. ISBN: 9780268036096. \$50.**

Interpreting Dante investigates how different commentators have read the *Divine Comedy* across time, and expands the discussion to the tradition of commentary itself, its development and its role in shaping literary criticism as a genre in its own right.

In chapter 1, Steven Botterill examines the methodological transformations in the production and circulation of the *Comedy* commentaries of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. His taxonomy of commentaries attests to a development across three stages: an early phase of private practice, a second of *lectura dentis* as a public practice, and a third stage of commentaries “conceived for print” (25).