George Corbett and Heather Webb, editors. *Vertical Readings in Dante's Comedy: Volume 1*. Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2015. Pp. xiii + 275. ISBN Paperback: 9781783741724; ISBN Hardback: 9781783741731; ISBN Digital (PDF): 9781783741748; ISBN Digital ebook (epub): 9781783741755; ISBN Digital ebook (mobi): 9781783741762. <http://www.openbookpublishers.com/product/367>

The interplay of horizontal and vertical movement is perhaps one of the most intriguing features of the *Comedy's* narrative structure. As the pilgrim progresses along a horizontal plane, i.e. the road of our life, his road is blocked. His journey then takes a distinctively vertical turn as he descends into hell and then ascends through purgatory and heaven. The two trajectories together give shape to the *Comedy* and as Dante's pilgrim traces the shape of a cross, the salvific nature of this intersection is revealed. But the significance of this interplay may also extend beyond explicating the meaning of the pilgrim's journey. Increasingly, scholars have explored the notion that Dante / poet was also constructing a similar *iter* for his readers; urging us to "travel" up and down the cantos as well as across them. As part of this exploration, *Vertical Readings in Dante's Comedy* provides compelling evidence that Dante had such a construction in mind as he designed his poem. Indeed, the entire volume urges the reader to consider the multiplicity of trajectories that the *Commedia* may contain. In the Introduction, Heather Webb and George Corbett observe that the overall structure of the *Comedy* encourages not only horizontal and vertical readings, but also quite possibly, diagonal readings as well as back and forth movement through the text. They note, moreover, that the mere naming of a method of reading raises questions of the self-conscious creation of spatial maps on the part of the reader. Recognition of this self-consciousness marks an interesting possibility, that is, that the reader is an active participant in the creation of the *Comedy*. This potential reading was raised several years ago by Stanley Benfell in *The Biblical Dante* where he argued that for Dante the textual truth of the Bible arose "through the encounter of a reader with the text, that is, a more subjective truth, that need not hinge on what the original author in his or her own historical context may or may not have intended." (8)

The imposition of a vertical reading might be justified in a similar vein. Certainly it would not be inconsistent with a vertical orientation that Dante's own historical context might have provided. Corbett and Webb look to Christopher Kleinhenz's observation that such a structure may have its inspiration in "the pervasive use by medieval artists of vertical parallels between Scriptural (and indeed Classical and mythological) events and personages through different visual media, from mosaics and frescoes to the architecture and sculptures of churches and cathedrals." (282) Specifically, Kleinhenz cites the baptistery of Florence as an example of horizontal and vertical story-bands with which Dante was clearly familiar.

The bigger question, however, is, if in fact Dante did have a plan in mind for the *Comedy* at its inception, whether *Inferno* 1, often considered as a type of prelude canto, should be grouped with *Purgatory* 1 and *Paradiso* 1 or, whether it should be left to stand on its own (thus grouping *Inferno* 2 with *Purgatory* 1 and *Paradiso* 1). The collection assumes the former position, recognizing that the exploratory nature of the exercise is precisely that and may not be conclusive. Nonetheless, the essays themselves should be sufficient to convince the reader of the rightness of this approach.

This wonderful collection of essays has its genesis in a series of public lectures held at Trinity College, Cambridge from 2012–2016. All of the studies will eventually be issued in three volumes but for now we must content ourselves with the first part, which contains an introduction and entries on parallel cantos 1–11.

While all the essays are well-considered and extraordinarily illuminating, the strength of the collection lies in the willingness of the contributing scholars to look for correspondences in the parallel cantos that they might not otherwise have noted. Probably owing to their origins in a lecture series, most of the essays have a conversational tone that engages the reader and invites him or her along on the essayist's journey of discovery. The results are often surprising, a point noted by many of the essayists themselves.

Both Corbett and Webb take on the opening cantos of all three canticles. While Corbett's "Pagan Dawn of a Christian Vision" considers the presence of pagans and classical philosophy, Webb's "Orientation," considers the spatial orientation in the "Ones," as the dual entry exposes from the start, the breadth of study this approach engenders.

Matthew Treherne's examination of the Twos, "Reading Time, Text and the World" examines moments of transition, and explores the interplay between

horizontal reading in which the reader must read the cantos contiguously and the vertical reading, linking them to human time and divine time respectively.

The Threes are treated with Vittorio Montemaggi's extraordinary insight in his essay "The Bliss and Abyss of Freedom: Hope, Personhood and Particularity." Montemaggi's reading emphasizes that the Threes, when taken together reveal that freedom can signify fully only when read within the dynamics of community.

John Marenbon has a difficult task in working with the Fours. Yet out of a threesome of cantos that at first would seem to have little in common, Marenbon's "Virtuous Pagans, Hopeless Desire and Unjust Justice" discerns a common thread. He concludes that the Fours work in concert to reveal Dante's understanding of the will and the separation of two distinct spheres of value, earthly and heavenly values.

The Fives would seem to be an easier task, yet, as Robin Kirkpatrick's "Massacre, *Miserere* and Martyrdom" argues, the popularity of *Inferno* 5 is not overly helpful in determining how it relates to its parallels. Working backwards from *Paradiso*, Kirkpatrick masterfully demonstrates that the Fives are ultimately about embodiment as empowerment. Claire Honess's study "Divided City, Slavish Italy, Universal Empire" follows Kirkpatrick in her departure from a bottom-up reading. Starting with *Purgatorio* Honess takes a circular approach to the Sixes and concludes that the death of Henry VII is the catalyst for Dante's ultimate vision of a heavenly city. Simon Gilson's "The Wheeling Sevens" argues that we should ultimately place any vertical reading within a broader reading that is "fully attentive to textual cues that might send us in multiple directions." (10)

Brenda Den Schildgen's "*Civitas* and Love: Looking Backward from *Paradiso* viii" provides an insightful analysis of the Eights, suggesting that, taken together, the cantos comprise Dante's comparison of selfless love that binds communities with the selfish desire that tears them apart. Zygmunt Barański's contribution "Without any Violence" is typical Baranski. Elegant in its delivery and brilliant in its conclusion, this essay focuses on the theme of violence that stretches across the Nines, and argues that Dante's restraint in depicting violence contrasts with that of his contemporaries and speaks to a certain pacifism on the part of the poet. K. P. Clarke's essay on the Tens "Humility and the (P)arts of Art" discusses verticality in the context of manuscript production. In it Clarke looks at the relationship between *parte*: *parte*: and *arte* which, he argues, demonstrates Dante's movement away from partisan politics to divine art. Finally, Paola Nasti's "The Art of Teaching

and the Nature of Love” considers Dante’s treatment of the relationship between human arts and the Bible across the *Eleven*s.

The results of this exploration have enormous implications for Dante Studies as we move into the new millennium. Although the essays focus on the concordances in each set of parallel cantos, the collection is not a mere *Lectura Dantis* tripled up. Rather, the essays function as a harmonious collective, coalescing into a holistic study that reveals the multidimensional character and shape of the *Comedy*.

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Maria Luisa Ardiszone *Reading as the Angels Read: Speculation and Politics in Dante’s Banquet*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016. Pp. 454. ISBN 9781442637061

Ardizzone’s *Reading as the Angels Read* is the ideal sequel to her previous *Dante: Il paradigma intellettuale* (Florence: Olschki 2011) and, possibly, one the most exhaustive and wide-ranging commentaries ever written on Dante’s *Convivio*. In *Il paradigma intellettuale*, the author had already guided the reader from the *Vita nuova*’s “poems of praise” to the “poetry of philosophy” of the three *canzoni* in the *Convivio*. What in the *Vita nuova* was still “love poetry” (a minor genre in the eyes of philosophers and theologians) is now being theorized as the highest cognitive endeavor and a stairway to the divine.

Reading as the Angels Read projects the conclusions already reached on a larger scale. The book’s motto is a quote from Augustine’s *Confessions* on how angels read: “For they always behold thy face and read therein ... They are always reading, and what they read never passes away.” The reading of angels is *intelligere*; it is an intellectual vision, an active contemplation that puts the eyes of the mind to use. Ardiszone’s thesis is that Dante appropriates the reading of angels and turns it into a cultural-political project. The *Convivio* “testifies to the birth of an intellectual class not tied to the universities” by highlighting “the celestial contemplation of the angel-intelligences and movers of the heavens as the model that unites contemplation and action” (12). *Voi ch’intendendo ‘l terzo ciel movete* offers the