Dante. A Critical Reappraisal. Ed. Unn Falkeid. Oslo: Oslo Academic Press Unipub, 2008. Pp. 255. ISBN 978-82-7477-347-9. n.p.

Culled from the proceedings of the Third Conference of the Nordic Dante Network, the fourteen essays (eleven in English and three in Danish) in this anthology do indeed represent a critical reappraisal of a number of existing issues in Dante studies. As such the volume is appropriately titled. It does not take the reader long, however, to consider whether the volume might have been better named "New Perspectives on Dante" or "New Critical Approaches to Dante," for it soon becomes obvious that this collection does in fact look at Dante in brand new ways. Although the authors of the essays in this collection have a firm grasp and deep comprehension of the great corpus of Dante criticism, they appear only to have been guided, and not bound, by the giants of the past as they offer the reader novel ways of thinking about long-standing issues in Dante studies.

The first essay, Giuseppe Mazzotta's "Dante's poetics of births and foundations" reflects this direction. Professor Mazzotta was the keynote speaker at the above noted conference and as such his offering logically sets the tone for the rest of the essays, becoming itself the very foundation or starting point from which the other essays may depart. In his assertion that Dante's treatment of foundations and genesis motifs "calls on us to think anew and differently," (26) Professor Mazzotta, himself a giant in Dante criticism, urges the Nordic scholars to take the past and give to it *una vita nuova*.

And they do. The next essay "Dante and King David" offers novel insights into the parallels between the Old Testament poet / king and Dante the poet / protagonist. In proposing David as a figure integral to the creation of Dante's poetic persona, Trond Berg Eriksen suggests a much more tenable solution to the meaning of the episode of Purgatorio 37 (when Dante is crowned and mitred) than has previously been offered. As poet, king and priest, David provides an apt model for this moment in which Dante also emerges as a fusion of all three roles.

Similarly refreshing are the arguments put forward by Espen Grønlie in "The domestication of vernacular poetry. Measuring authority in *De vulgari eloquentia*." Grønlie considers the work done by Erich Auerbach, A.J. Minnis and Albert Ascoli and, drawing on his own research, formulates a cohesive theory of Dante's political and poetic projects. Grønlie sees *De vulgari eloquentia* as Dante's attempt to legitimize vernacular poetry as part of a larger attempt to "solve the political problems of Italy by placing enormous weight on the exemplary judgement of the poets." (169) As such Grønlie's article dovetails nicely with Ericksen's assertion that Dante's absorption of David as a poetic model reflects the Florentine poet's belief that when "the pope or the king fails, the poet is the best counsellor of mankind." (34) Grønlie concludes that by "domesticating" the vernacular, by giving it linguistic authority and thus moving it away from chaos and towards order, Dante endows the vernacular with sufficient authority to take on moral and political subject matter. Uniting Italians in language, Grønlie suggests, is the first step towards political unification.

Most of the essays in the volume similarly take a second look at what might

seem well trodden ground, yet still manage to bring new insights and offer novel solutions. Of particular note is Leonardo Cecchini's "Galeotto fu il libro e chi lo scrisse. Some remarks about intertextuality in *Inferno* V," P.M. Mehtonen's "Dante's avant-gardism reinvented. Past and present vernaculars in the 1920's," and Asbjørn Bjørnes's "Dante and the Bible. A reading of central passages in the *Vita Nuova* and the *Commedia*."

The last English language essay in the collection, Unn Falkeid's "Petrarch in the footsteps of Dante" takes its cue from Mazzotta's overture in presenting Dante himself as a foundation for further poetic exploration. Falkeid, a post doctoral fellow at the University of Oslo and editor of the volume, considers the oft-noted resemblances between Petrarch's Ascent on Mount Ventoux and Dante's own purgatorial journey but offers a somewhat different conclusion from that ordinarily reached by Dantisti. By following in Dante's footsteps, even if unwittingly as he claims, Petrarch has the opportunity to reassess or reappraise, as it were, the poetic model offered by Dante. Petrarch's rereading or reappraisal of the *Commedia*, Falkeid suggests, is in fact what leads to a detheologizing of the great poem and opens the door to a new poetic construction. Just as Petrarch was led by Dante, so then are Falkeid's scholars led by those who trod before. It is fitting, therefore, that Mazzotta's essay on Dante and foundations should ultimately lead the reader to Falkeid's study of Petrarch and the birth of a new humanism. The order of the essays in the book thus demonstrates Dr. Falkeid's clear understanding of the road that human thought follows, as each essay easily gives way to the next. It is with a sense of disappointment then that this reader reached the last three essays, those written in Danish. Some obvious cognates made their titles comprehensible but my inability to read Danish meant that their contents remained a mystery to me. Their inclusion should not, however, be seen as a negative, but rather as an invitation to learn more, another language perhaps, to think anew and to understand Dante in yet another way.

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Olivia Holmes. *Dante's Two Beloveds. Ethics and Erotics in the "Divine Comedy"*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008. Pp 272. ISBN 9780300125429, £35.00.

Il giudizio di Simone Marchesi su questo innovativo saggio di Olivia Holmes, riportato sul dorso di copertina del libro, può ottimamente servire a introdurre questa nostra breve recensione, la cui acribia sarà forse in parte viziata da un'entusiastica adesione alla metodologia e ai risultati dell'intensa e documentata ricerca dell'autrice (già peraltro distintasi nel mondo degli studi medievali nordamericani col suo volume *Assembling the Lyric Self. Authorship from Troubadour Song to Italian Poetry Book* pubblicato nel 2000 e vincitore del premio AAIS di quell'anno): "*Dante's Two Beloveds* maintains a rare balance between the philological and semio-