of interpreting the three *fiere* as a parody of the Trinity and concomitantly as representative of heresy. Finally, in the third essay “L’altro stilnovo: ammonizioni e invettive nella *Commedia*” Fasani considers the various forms of admonition and invective found throughout the three canticles and proposes that their use in the *Commedia* offers an alternative to the “Sweet New Style” of Dante’s early literary forays. All three of these essays offer new insights in traditional issues in Dante studies and by themselves would justify the book’s publication. This is not to say that the metrical essays are without value, not at all. Rather, given the clear evidence of Fasani’s unique perspective on the exegetical issues, it seems obvious that had the author completed the thoughts alluded to in the closing paragraphs in those articles, Dante scholarship would have been so much the richer.

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Vettori, Alessandro. *Poets of Divine Love. Franciscan Mystical Poetry of the Thirteenth Century*. Fordham Series in Medieval Studies, 3. New York: Fordham University Press, 2004. Pp. 320. ISBN 0-8232-2325-6. US\$55 (hardcover).

As “two thirteenth-century friars” sharing “Franciscanism, Umbrian origin and language, radicalism in the interpretation of the rule of poverty, and literary inclination,” Vettori states in the Introduction to his well researched and thorough two-part monograph dedicated to the lives and laude of Francis of Assisi and Iacopone da Todi and to the multiple intersections and overlaps between their biographies and poetry, the mystics have much in common, both materially and spiritually, in terms of experience and socio-cultural exposure (xiii). In addition to writing in “the same poetic genre of the lauda” and using “similar thematic and rhetorical structures and images,” the poets “have common spiritual roots,” and “depend on the same biblical sources for inspiration,” specifically the Book of Genesis (xiii). Furthermore, “stand[ing] alone as the only two Franciscan poets in the Italian literary canon,” Vettori aptly notes that Francis of Assisi and Iacopone da Todi share “an awareness of inchoation,” that is, “both are aware of operating at the beginning of the Italian literary tradition” (xiii).

Essentially, however, the poets contrast as much they compare. As Vettori notes, “they diverge in their approach to the material world and in their emphasis on different aspects of the Christian faith;” more notably, Francis’s perspective is “luminous” and “positive,” and his lauda “The Canticle of Brother Sun” has a “peaceful, appeased” melody, while Iacopone’s outlook is “somber, pessimistic,” and many of his laude possess a “fiery, tormented” rhythm, and thus their “poetic productions [...] reflect the two opposite sides of the Franciscan theological spectrum and of Christian theology” (xiii). One might also note, as Vettori did – and it is by no means an insignificant observation – that Francis of Assisi produced one lauda in the vernacular, while Iacopone produced an entire *canzoniere*: in Vettori’s words, “The Canticle of Brother Sun” is “Francis’s only attributable poetic text in the vernacular,” while Iacopone’s laude form a “*corpus poeticus* with an internal

progression and development" (xvi).

Effectively, in this book Vettori compares and contrasts a single lauda with what he asserts (quite plausibly) is a complete and "orchestrated" songbook (xvi), drawing upon biographical information of both mystics, as well as upon knowledge of Francis of Assisi's thought in general, to substantiate his thesis that "nudity, matrimonial union of man and woman, and harmony as music according to a medieval concept constitute the fundamental elements of their poetic work and may be traced in the genetics of their poetic endeavour" (74). While Vettori successfully demonstrates that the topics of nudity, union, and harmony figure largely in the poetry of Iacopone and in the life of Francis of Assisi, whose hagiography includes episodes of pre-conversion public denudation, and whose relationship to Clare is characterized by "love and harmony," with God seeming to be "the real spouse of both protagonists" (all of which Vettori details in his book), the scholar's generalizations about Francis's poetry are less convincing, not for any inaccuracy on Vettori's part, but because they are based on the analysis of one work alone (51).

As regards form and content, the first part of the book is dedicated to "considerations of nudity, connubial consummation, and harmonious balance in the world, as derived from a reading of Francis's and Iacopone's poetic productions in light of Genesis" (xviii). It draws heavily upon the hagiography of the two mystics, and focuses upon the intellectual/cultural history of the concepts to be discussed in analyzing their poetry. The section consists of three chapters: "Theater of Nudity," which examines nudity as a "pivotal concept of Franciscan spirituality at its beginning in the thirteenth" (xviii); "Mysticism of Sexual Union," which explores the marital relationship between man and woman as a reflection of the bond between God and humans; and "Harmony of the Cosmos," which discusses the role of music in the medieval art/concept of *harmonia*.

All three chapters are well documented and follow a logical progression. Vettori takes care to situate each topic or concept, be it nudity, mystical union, or harmony, in the historical and cultural context and/or tradition to which it belongs and that is reflected in the poetry of Francis and Iacopone. More specifically, Vettori succinctly presents the tradition of courtly love and its transformations as these pertain to the concept of mystical union, and he takes care to explain the medieval concept of nature as God's second book after the Bible in his discussion of *harmonia* (59), likewise furnishing an introductory discussion of the role of clothing in Genesis.

The second part of the book, which is perhaps the strongest, consists of four chapters, all devoted to precise and impressively comprehensive textual analyses, with chapter four providing a judicious close reading of Francis's "Canticle" and chapters five through seven focusing on an equally well executed close reading of Iacopone's canzoniere. All poems appear in the original Italian as well as in translation, usually by the author, or by Joseph Tusiani, in the case of Francis's "Canticle," which is reproduced in Italian and English in the Appendix. References to secondary sources are presented in end notes, with quotes appearing in their original language, which is often twentieth-century Italian.

While Vettori is thorough and insightful in his analyses and he touches upon

legitimate parallels between what often amounts to the life of one mystic and the poetry of the other, the conclusions he arrives at, or at the very least, the manner in which he presents them, are at times tenuous. In the chapter on nudity, for instance, Vettori states that “the language of Iacopone’s poetry is replete with such opposition of clothes and nakedness and highlights a part of Franciscan spirituality that, although not immediately perceptible in ‘The Canticle of Brother Sun,’ is nevertheless a consistent and considerable trait of Francis’s thought and practice,” thus comparing the poetry of Iacopone, to the life of Francis, whose sole Italian lauda features neither nudity nor clothing, either literally or metaphorically (xviii). Elsewhere, Vettori relates the concept of mystical union, which he perceives in the bond between Clare and Francis, to the latter’s “Canticle of Brother Sun,” by stating that the lauda “cryptically and obscurely conveys the sense of gender union thanks to the designation of masculine and feminine attributes” – an accurate observation, but the only one substantiating his claim that mystical union is a theme of Francis’s poetic production (xix). Finally, the well presented chapter on music and *harmonia* is ultimately linked to the poetry of Francis and Iacopone almost solely on the basis of the litany of the former’s “Canticle” and the “litanic scansion” characterizing many of the latter’s laude (72).

These are minor criticisms, however, and the only ones to be made on this fine piece of scholarship that, were it to have been entitled *Poet of Divine Love. The Franciscan Mystical Poetry of Iacopone da Todi*, might well have escaped any form of criticism at all. Vettori’s observations are astute and he furnishes a wealth of information, including a bibliography rich in secondary sources. His book is an interesting and accessible read, as well as a wonderful addition to the fields of literary criticism and cultural history alike.

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Mita Ferraro, Alessandra. *Matteo Palmieri. Una biografia intellettuale*. Preface by Cesare Vasoli. Genova: Name, 2005. Pp. 552. ISBN: 88-87298-79-3. €34

Contro una convinzione ancora troppo diffusa, l’umanesimo politico del Quattrocento non fu una dottrina utopica, estranea alla realtà, lontana dalle preoccupazioni concrete della politica. Ben al contrario, si trattò di un sistema teorico profondamente legato alle circostanze di un’epoca cruciale nella genesi moderna dello Stato. La parabola di Matteo Palmieri (1406-75), speciale, umanista e uomo di stato, viene a confermare e ribadire questa natura “organica” dell’intellettualità umanistica. Ma se tutto ciò è ormai relativamente scontato, meno facile era provarlo con uno studio esteso, sistematico e solido come quello di Alessandra Mita Ferraro. Il sottotitolo del volume, *una biografia intellettuale*, non dà completamente l’idea dell’ampiezza di questo lavoro, una biografia di stile “classico” impostata su un’attenta successione cronologica e su una vasta ricostruzione contestuale, che sa porre efficacemente in relazione le fonti storiche generali con l’analisi dettagliata delle testimonianze dello stesso Palmieri, in un proficuo andirivieni tra la precisione