RECENSIONI

Gorni, Guglielmo. Dante Prima della Commedia. Florence: Cadmo, 2001. 289 Pp. 289.

Baranski, Zygmunt G. "Chiosar con altro testo". Leggere Dante nel Trecento. Florence: Cadmo, 2001. Pp. 181.

It is fitting that Cadmo has chosen these two volumes to introduce its new series, I saggi di "Letteratura italiana antica." Read together, Guglielmo Gorni's and Zygmunt Baranski's works comprise both prologue and epilogue to a comprehensive reading of the *Commedia*. The two volumes are, by their very nature, apt bookends, providing the reader with the context necessary for an effective understanding of the way in which the *Commedia* was intended to be read as well as evidence of the way in which it was indeed read by medieval scholars and commentators. As such these two volumes present not only an entree to Dante but, in many ways also present a general introduction to "letteratura italiana antica." Gorni's book, *Dante prima della Commedia*, the first in the series, is a collection of thirteen philological essays on Dantean texts written before the poet approached the *Commedia*. Although the focus of the book, as the author indicates in the foreword, is philological rather than critical, Gorni's quest to determine issues such as the identity of the first "Guido" in *Purgatory* 11, necessarily requires a foray into the exegetical traditions of the Middle Ages and makes the work invaluable to those seeking a truly authentic reading of Dante's earliest and later projects. The first portion of the book "Di qua dal dolce stile" is devoted to considering Dante's interaction and relationship to the other "stilnovisti". In the first of the essays, "Guittone e Dante," Gorni tackles the question of the identity of the first Guido (*Purg.* 11: 97-99.) Moving skilfully through an examination of the poetics of Guido Guinizelli, Guittone D'Arezzo and Guido Cavalcanti, Gorni meticulously traces the textual cues in Dante's earliest projects in an attempt to come closer to a satisfactory resolution of the issue. His ultimate recognition that the matter cannot be resolved with certainty leads nonetheless to an insightful consideration of the myth of patricide and its role in Dante's literary evolution. The second and third essays consider the stilnovistic exchange of "rime di corrispondenza" and the philological problems they present. In both, Gorni continues his examination of the personal/literary relationship between Dante and his peers. In "Guido, i' vorrei che tu, Manetto ed io" Gorni focuses on the poetics of Guido Cavalcanti and the various poetic exchanges between Cavalcanti and other Tuscan contemporaries ("rime di corrispondenza") in an attempt to determine the dynamic underlying Dante's own contribution to this literary game. In the next essay, "Paralipomeni a Lippo," Gorni shifts his focus to the problematic identity of the "Lippo" or "Lapo" figure in the same series of exchanges. Again, as in the case of the first essay, the philological necessarily gives way, at times, to the critical, especially where Gorni considers the role of parody in the correspondence *ora*.

Here the four essays range from a consideration of gaps in the various manuscripts ("Lacuna e interpolazione") to the division of the work into forty-two chapters ("Paragrafi e titolo della *Vita nuova*"). Notwithstanding the strongly philological approach of this section, Gorni's examination also extends to thematic issues, particularly in the essay *Vita nova*, Libro delle "Amistadi" e della "Prima Etade." Here Gorni considers the true meaning of "new," treating again the question of whether "new life" refers to a life renewed or renovated or whether it simply refers to the youthful character of that stage of life. Gorni tends to the latter interpretation, relying both on the chronological arrangement of the book and hints in the *Convivio* as to Dante's cataloguing process and the correspondence of certain of Dante's works to corresponding stages in his life. The argument is compelling though not exhaustive and indeed, Gorni does not explicitly preclude the possibility of a double connotation, leaving the ultimate disposition of the issue in the hands of the reader. The third portion of the book, "Prima della *Commedia*" deals with more general matters central to an effective reading of those works which precede the *Commedia*. Here Gorni presents six essays. In the first of these, "Dante, Andrea Lancia, L'Ovidio volgare e Pier della Vigna," Gorni considers Dante's own approach to the use of the vernacular. The next two essays "Lisetta" and "Iacopo" respectively, Gorni considers again the philological evidence with respect to these two figures whose identity continues to elude even the most devoted Dante scholars. The final essay "Filologia e nazionalismo. Tre donne e tre dantisti" considers the critical exegetical contributions of Michele Barbi, Umberto Cosmo and Nicola Zingarelli with respect to the enigmatic sonnet, "Tre donne intorno al cor mi son venute." (*Rime* 104) Although the essay approaches the issues primarily in terms of their philological aspects of the issues, the question is, by necessity, tied to the issue of reception, and accordingly, the essay provides a neat closure to what is in essence a treatise on how to read Dante's texts.

From Gorni's book, the reader moves easily to Baranski's offering "*Chiosar con altro testo. Leggere Dante nel Trecento*," a series of essays on how some of the earliest readers of the *Commedia* reacted to it. Much like Gorni's text, Baranski's provides the scholar with a treatise on how to read, or rather how one may read Dante's great poem. As Baranski examines the treatment extended to the *Commedia* by some of the greatest thinkers of the Middle Ages, he also offers an explication of the mechanics of fourteenth century reception. Starting with an overview of medieval exegesis, the author makes it very clear that, notwithstanding the novelty of an erudite *opus* being offered in the vernacular, the earliest commentaries on the *Commedia* were nonetheless coloured by a pre-existing exegetical tradition which in turn has its roots in classical hermeneutics. Accordingly, suggests Baranski, the modern reader can only grasp a full understanding of the early commentaries if one has a strong grasp of the "tradizione dei *commentaria* medievali." The first chapter "L'esegesi medievale della *Commedia* e il problema delle fonti," examines the way in which Dante commentaries have traditionally been approached and outlines recent trends in dealing with them. Baranski moves quickly beyond the introductory and offers concrete examples of how the medieval *chiosatore* might have adapted the traditions of *accessus* and *commentum* to

Dante's work and especially to its most non-canonical aspects. In the section entitled "Glossar un canto "pericoloso": Inferno 11," Baranski examines how commentators from Boccaccio to Guglielmo Maramauro have approached problematic passages such as Virgil's explanation of the manner in which the sections of hell are determined and subdivided. From this very thorough overview of the issues at hand, Baranski confronts head on one of the more problematic areas of Dante study, the letter to Cangrande della Scala. What is perhaps, initially at least, the most interesting thing about this chapter, "Comedia: Dante, l'epistola a Cangrande e la commedia medievale," is the fact that Baranski has included the letter at all. Given that the critics are still undecided as to whether or not the letter was even written by Dante, Baranski's implicit characterization of the letter as commentary, to a certain extent, renders the debate as to its authorship moot. As he states in the introductory section of the chapter, "La decisione di prendere in esame il carattere dell'Epistola come *commentarium* deriva non soltanto dal fatto che non molto è stato detto finora in proposito, ma anche dall'impressione che quella della critica letteraria medievale sia attualmente la principale area di ricerca che consente di progredire nell'analisi dell'Epistola a Cangrande" (45). While Baranski cannot, however, resist entering the arena, concluding "Opporsi all'origine dantesca dell'Epistola significa, a mio parere, rendere al poeta un modesto servizio" (76), his approach is considerably more useful than the seemingly endless and seemingly unresolvable debate as to who wrote what is in essence a gloss on one of the most emblematic episodes of the *Commedia*. In the same chapter Baranski examines another issue related to the question of Dante's autoexegetical project as he looks at what Dante himself has to say about comedy in general and in particular what he has to say about it in the *Commedia* itself. The following chapters are less problematic as Baranski considers early Dante commentaries whose authorship is not generally subject to debate. In chapter 3, "Benvenuto da Imola e la tradizione dantesca della Comedia" Baranski's examination considers how Dante's choice of title, *Comedia* affected the way in which Benvenuto da Imola approached his gloss. The problem for Benvenuto was essentially one of genre; or definition. As Baranski points out, Benvenuto himself grappled with the definition of comedy, recognizing that the characterization of the work would by necessity dictate the way in which it should be glossed. The next chapter "Boccaccio, Benvenuto e il sogno della madre di Dante incinta" continues Baranski's study of Benvenuto's commentary, but situates it within the context of the emerging field of "studi danteschi" in the "Trecento". Specifically, Baranski considers the opposing interpretations of the prophetic dream mentioned in both Benvenuto's and Boccaccio's commentaries. Baranski's examination of the issue extends beyond mere comparative analysis and considers the debate against the larger setting of *fortuna*, in recognition of the role such commentaries and debates would have in shaping later studies and interpretations. Chapter 5, "Li infrascripti libri: Guglielmo Maramauro, l'*auctoritas* e la 'lettura' di Dante nel Trecento," considers Maramauro's late fourteenth century study of the *Commedia*. Maramauro's gloss, "Expositione sopra l'Inferno" di Dante" bears witness to the rapidly spreading fame of Dante and the growing fascination with his *Commedia* in the

"Trecento," as Maramauro, a Neapolitan poet and member of a prominent Neapolitan family, joins the growing number of 'dantisti' including Boccaccio and Petrarca with whom Maramauro also had frequent contact. As Baranski notes, Maramauro's commentary considers not only the poetics of the *Commedia* but its theology, providing the basis for one of the most enduring points of Dante's commentary, the interplay between poetry and theology. Finally, Baranski looks at the Petrarchan response in "Le costrizioni di forma: verso una definizione provvisoria dei *Triumphs* di Petrarca." Here Baranski considers the issue of narrative structure, particularly metaliterary structure, in light of the Dantean project. In his examination of the *Trionfi*, Baranski considers the issue of the use of the vernacular, the blending of genres evident therein and the implicit debt owed to Dante's novel approach to genre. The book in its totality is a compelling look at the earliest attempts to determine precisely what Dante was doing. However, Baranski goes beyond a mere examination of how Dante was read to show the implications of these early readings, both in terms of later literary trends and, especially later Dante criticism. With "*Chiosar con altro testo*" he has created a work of enormous importance to the field of Dante studies, but he has also created a perfect complement to Gorni's work, providing the reader with a useful epilogue to the scholar's own reading of Dante's major *opus*.

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Illiano, Antonio. Invito al romanzo d'autrice '800-'900 da Luisa Saredo a Laudomia Bonanni. **Fiesole: Edizioni Cadmo, 2001. Pp. 192.**

This brief *compendium* of reflections on the writings of women authors of the late 19th century and early 20th century expands and complements the well known and much appreciated work done with focus precisely on this field by Lucienne Kroha (*The Woman Writer in Late Nineteenth Century Italy*. New York: Mellen Press, 1992).

Using examples from many of the same writers, Illiano proposes his thesis that in the century between 1850 and 1950, there were three generations of women authors who merit being reconsidered and saved from their seemingly immutable status of "minor writers". To the first generation belong authors such as Luisa Saredo, la Marchesa Colombi (the pseudonym of Maria Antonietta Torria), Emma (Emilia Ferretti Viola) and Neera (*nom de plume* of Anna Zuccari). These were the women who first detailed the social environment in which contemporary women found themselves, whether in the home and marriage, or in a broader social environment, as for example the Marchesa Colombi's *In risaia*. In the second generation we find the names of Grazia Deledda and Matilde Serao, prolific writers faithful to the concept of literature as a profession as well as artistic endeavor. Finally, in the third generation, that which stretches between the two world wars, there is the group of women who introduce new, modern themes, as problematic and uncomfortable as they may be: Amalia Guglielmetti, Lina