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Federica Coluzzi. 'Dante Beyond Influence. Rethinking Reception in Victorian Literary Culture.' Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021.

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texts and anthologies written in vernaculars other than Italian; yet, Banella clearly defines the scope of the work by focusing on the reception of two of Italian literature's three crowns. The book synthesizes the reception history of both Dante and Petrarch's lyric texts, nuancing the narrative of Petrarch and Petrarchism as the dominant lyric model in Renaissance Italy. The professional and political classes of Venice and the Veneto who anthologized Latin and vernacular texts, interweaving classicizing, humanistic works with the history of Italian vernacular lyric, ensured that Dante's lyric poetry did not disappear in Petrarch's long shadow, but rather remained associated with his fellow exile's lyric output, in what Banella describes as a dialectic relationship. Banella's command of the volume's sizeable corpus of manuscripts and early printed books, which spans 200 years of bookmaking, produces a monograph that crosses the boundaries of conventional periodization, and offers a notable new contribution to the history of the book in Dante Studies.

Katherine Travers, *Durham University*

Federica Coluzzi.

Dante Beyond Influence. Rethinking Reception in Victorian Literary Culture.

Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021. 256 pp. £80.

In the last twenty years, the humanities have witnessed what specialists call “the material turn.” Especially in the field of literary history, the hermeneutic interest of many scholars has shifted from purely speculative solutions to the interpretative analysis of the material traces of the past that have come down to us. In particular, book history is experiencing a renewed golden age. Since the publication of the seminal work of Anthony Grafton and Linda Jardine “‘Studied for Action’: How Gabriel Harvey Read His Livy” (1990), numerous studies have revived a discipline that until a few decades ago was considered minor, underscoring the importance and necessity of the polysemous study of the book as a textual medium and at the same time as a material object. Dante studies are now being enriched by a very important work based precisely on the study of books as indispensable evidence of Dante's reception in the modern age. Indeed, Federica Coluzzi's *Dante Beyond Influence: Rethinking Reception in Victorian Literary Culture* shows how the genesis of Dante studies in Victorian England went through various stages, moving from a *dantofilia* linked to the amateur dimension of reading to a true academic discipline. Coluzzi has analyzed different documentary sources that connect with each other to recreate, as in a mosaic, the true picture of this hermeneutic process that developed from the 1830s, and finally reached its climax in the golden age of Queen Victoria's reign. Through the study of unpublished correspondence of leading figures in English literary culture, notebooks, periodicals, and marginalia in printed books, Coluzzi demonstrates how the Victorian age constitutes the true point of change in the British reception of Dante. In this period, a wide variety of

readers, from academic intellectuals to ordinary people, approached the *Commedia* and even the *Vita nova* critically, resulting in an approach that would completely change Dante's reception in England in the decades to come.

The hermeneutical shift that underlies Coluzzi's research began when English readers abandoned the Romantic approach to Dante's work. Victorian readers developed an interest that went beyond simply reading *Inferno*, the *cantica* that had most influenced and fascinated British readers and writers in the first decades of the nineteenth century. Victorian audiences discovered that the *Commedia* was not only a work of Gothic charm, but contained a semantic polyvalence that reflected the everydayness and existence of the present world. To reconstruct this path toward the universal reading of Dante by Victorian readers, Coluzzi begins by investigating the evolution of reading practices toward the *Commedia* of one particular reader: the four-time British prime minister William E. Gladstone (1809-1898). By analyzing in chronological order the diaries and manuscript entries in Gladstone's volumes, Coluzzi highlights the evolution of this reader's approach to Dante's poem. The first chapter historicizes Gladstone's reading experience, emphasizing how he slowly transformed his approach to Dante. Gladstone's first reading of the *Commedia* lasted for more than two years (1834-35), and was followed by multiple re-readings that also led him to attempt some impromptu translations of Dante's verses. The diary entries and handwritten notes in the volumes of his important Dante collection show how this approach was completely new and different from that of the past generation of intellectuals. By the mid-1850s, Gladstone had reread the poem several times and approached Dante's other works as well so as to cross the barrier of pure amateur reading in favor of a genuinely critical approach to the Florentine poet's oeuvre. Toward the end of his life, Gladstone decided to lavish the results of his long study of Dante in an academic article, which represented the apex of his efforts as a self-made Dante scholar.

The second chapter of the volume focuses on the figure of another Dante reader/user of the Victorian period: the poet and critic Matthew Arnold (1822-1888). Similar to Gladstone, Arnold developed a private Dantism that resulted predominantly in a large body of references within his prose writings. Coluzzi recovers this disjointed and fragmentary body of citations for the first time by meticulously mining Arnold's diaries as well as his prose production, and particularly lectures, essays, and reviews. The result is the first critical study of Dante's influence on one of the leading figures of the Victorian literary arena, who devoted a single essay to the Florentine poet that appeared in the *Fraser's* periodical in 1863, "Dante and Beatrice."

In the third chapter, Coluzzi brings the experience of female readers/scholars of Dante in the Victorian period into the spotlight. This pivotal portion of the volume is first and foremost credited with reviving and giving proper space to the many women writers who contributed to Dante's nineteenth-century fortunes in the English-speaking world. Scholars and literary women including Claudia Hamilton Ramsay, Caroline Potter, Margareth Oliphant, Arabella Shore, and Mary MacGregor made Dante comprehensible to a wide readership, from the demanding scholars of the urban middle class to younger readers taking their first steps in elementary education. Coluzzi points out the actual lack of recognition of this multitude of female authors and the need to remedy this serious gap, due mainly to the

marginalization that patriarchal culture perpetrated against these protagonists of Dante studies. For this reason, she focuses in these pages on two neglected but very important scholars, the sisters Christina and Maria Francesca Rossetti. Theirs is, as Coluzzi points out, “a paradigmatic example of a female interpretive readership developed under and in reaction to patriarchal influence” (p. 99). Maria Francesca was perhaps the most talented intellectual in the Rossetti family, and her book *Shadow of Dante* is an extraordinary testimony of her approach to the poet’s work and, at the same time, of her ability to popularize Dante with the Victorian-era British public. This veritable bestseller of nineteenth-century Dante publishing, which had thirteen editions between Britain and the United States, testifies to how Victorian women writers were not merely textual mediators of Dante’s work but, on the contrary, refined interpreters of the poet’s texts. Maria Francesca’s importance as a scholar and as a *Dantista* was never recognized within the canon of Dante studies. The only figure who acknowledged her greatness was her sister Christina, who became her literary executor after her death in 1876. Reading the accounts of Christina’s correspondence with her siblings and other intellectuals of her time, one understands how she genuinely regarded her sister’s book as a fundamental work for approaching and understanding the essence of Dante’s oeuvre. And Maria Francesca’s positive influence led Christina to want to increase more and more her knowledge of Dante, which culminated in the publication of essays that raised her critical profile and scholarly authority in the world of pioneering British Dante studies.

Chapter 4 focuses on a practice that was widely in use in fifteenth-century Europe but of which there were no reports for the English-speaking world: the use of Dante in religious preaching and its popularization among less educated audiences. The exemplary case Coluzzi presents is that of Unitarian minister and educator Philip Wicksteed (1844-1927). Beginning with his *Six sermons* on Dante given in London in 1878, Wicksteed initiated an ambitious yet very realistic project: to bring Dante (as well as other authors) to lower-class audiences through a system of lectures, specialized courses, and low-cost publications. Coluzzi highlights how Wicksteed’s case is genuinely a forerunner of what she calls “commercial *dantismo*,” embodied in this case in the publication of all of Dante’s works in the popular Temple Classics book series (1906).

The fifth and final chapter is, in Coluzzi’s words, “the chronological and conceptual culmination” of her research (p. 12). In this final portion of the work, the author chooses to analyze the history of the establishment of the first British Dante Societies, for she considers the emergence of these institutions as the highest point in the evolution of Victorian *dantismo*. While strongly connected with the local dimension of the geographical area in which they arose, these Societies conveyed the development of British Dante studies in the second half of the nineteenth century. As Coluzzi points out, the Dante Societies in Oxford, London, and Manchester all functioned as catalysts for a new discipline, promoting exchanges among scholars, collaborating with parallel societies in other countries, and thus giving rise to a scholarly agenda that would bring about macroscopic changes in the reception and promotion of Dante’s work. Through intense intellectual and cooperative activities, the British Dante Societies completely changed the connotations of Dante

studies, elevating them to the status of a true specialized discipline, carried out no longer by amateurs but by proper academics.

Ultimately, *Dante Beyond Influence* is a seminal book for studies of the modern reception of Dante, standing out in the great landscape of the centennial publications for methodological accuracy, breadth of interest, and narrative and structural coherence. In other words, it is a genuinely indispensable book that cannot be missed in the library of Dante scholars and literary reception specialists.

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George Corbett.

Dante's Christian Ethics. Purgatory and its moral contexts.

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. X + 233 pp. \$99.99.

In this book, George Corbett presents Dante's *Commedia* as a work of ethics. In writing the poem, as the author states at the outset, "Dante's primary aim was neither to produce an innovative depiction of the three realms of the Christian afterlife nor to write a poetic masterpiece for Christendom to rival the epics of Classical antiquity". Rather, he goes on, "Dante's imaginative vision and poetic genius served more important ethical and, I would argue, political goals: to transform people's moral lives and to reform the institutions that governed them" (p. 2). The notion that the *Commedia* is to be viewed as a moral work was stated very clearly also in the *Epistle to Cangrande*, where the work is described as dealing with the "morale negotium sive ethica". Even if the letter was not actually written by Dante, as some scholars claim, it is still noteworthy that an early interpreter of the *Commedia* thought it natural to classify the poem in this way, as Corbett rightly points out. The ethical nature of the *Commedia* is clear from the poem's narrative too, for Dante the character is commanded by Beatrice to write "in pro del mondo che mal vive" (*Purg.* XXXII, 103), meaning for the benefit of those living badly, who will find in the *Commedia* a path to moral education and self improvement. If we avoid the poem's ethical content, Corbett argues, "we potentially jeopardize not only the poem's status as a work of ethics and its function (to lead humankind to salvation) but even its genre as a 'Comedy'" (p. 2). In fact, if the poem is called a comedy it is also because the narrative trajectory Dante the character undergoes in his journey (from Hell up to Paradise) is intended to reflect the moral trajectory Dante the poet wants his readers to follow, that is from evil to good – as also pointed out in the *Epistle to Cangrande*.

The book is divided into three main parts. In Part I, comprising two chapters, Corbett's overarching goal is to present the *Commedia* as an ethical and political manifesto. In Chapter 1, he shows that Dante relies on different ethical criteria in each of the three regions of the afterlife. For Hell, he adopts a philosophical (that is, mainly Aristotelian) taxonomy of good and evil. In Purgatory, he incorporates a more pastorally-oriented kind of ethics, for he structures the seven terraces of