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Introduction

The Pleasure of Dante's Text/*Il piacere del testo dantesco*

When offered the opportunity to assemble an issue devoted to Dante, neither I nor the editor of the *Romanic Review*, kind and patient Elisabeth Ladenson, had an inkling of what awaited all of us in these months and ultimately, alas, perhaps years of the new Covid-19 virus. The horror of the daily death tolls now has distanced my original thinking and correspondence about the issue as a once—and ever harder to imagine—happier time, not a time of innocence in light of the worldwide resistance to the spread of political repression, but not a time either in which our most noble effort to spare the lives of those who risk their lives to keep hospitals and other essential services in crisis open, staffed, and functioning amounted (and still amounts) to adherence to quarantine orders.

In the midst of all this, when “this” has perhaps never carried so heavy a burden, we remember the seven hundredth anniversary of Dante's death. It is hard, no impossible, not to take stock of the context in which we have prepared for and will most likely observe 2021 as a commemorative year. I speak, of course, of the global pandemic that continues to decimate our planet. I hesitate to note current statistics with the knowledge that such numbers will be painfully surpassed within a matter of days; that months from now when this issue is delivered to subscribers and readers there will be only greater tragedy to report. But never will the current numbers become irrelevant: the lives of over 1,200,000 souls across the globe, by conservative estimates, have been lost to Covid-19.

Of course the project did not begin under such an ominous cloud. The invitation to assemble a commemorative issue for Dante was in

the works. But the chaos sewn by death, lockdowns, closures, too often inadequate federal responses, especially in the United States, and by the reactions of some colleges and universities in the daily assessment of their finances against the mechanics of a safe education has proved a challenge that has doubled, tripled, even quadrupled the work of many, who often bear additional sacrifices. Some of the original contributors to this initiative had to withdraw in the face of constantly and quickly changing demands in work schedules, preparation, and sacrifice. The project I was asked to take on as a guest editor was originally intended to host over half again as many essays. Their unintended “contribution” to the seventh centennial commemoration of Dante’s death, virtually a forced silence, is a tragic but in-kind tribute to a life and art lived in tribulation and adversity in an age when violence, disease, and political strife were amplified and intensified by the cruelty of being driven from one’s home into exile. My only hope is that the invited voices not represented in this volume will find other venues, other initiatives to offer their reflections on Dante’s work in this auspicious year.

The prolonged winter and summer of 2020 in phases of lockdown and amid so much suffering and death seemed the moment to return to Aulus Gellius’s *Noctes Atticae*, more this time perhaps to consider the nature of notebooks themselves, keeping an eye out for how Gellius might have materially kept his notes, recollections, and observations. Those who know the *Noctes* know the strange pleasure of its texts, read not as familiar passages of brilliance but as rediscoveries of cultural *recollectio*. Early on, in book 1, there is an entry on textual and linguistic fidelity that many looking for juicier fare might skip over: a copy of Cicero’s *Against Verres* prepared by Tiro (“libro spectatae fidei, Tironiana cura atque disciplina facta”). At issue is the perceived error (*futurum* for *futuram*) in the phrase “hanc sibi rem praesidio sperant futurum” (*Noctes Atticae* 1:7). Gellius delights for a good number of paragraphs in his friend’s (“amicus noster”) defense of *futurum* as a “vetuste locutum” and in his dismissal of the careless reader who might unwittingly correct Cicero’s invariable and “indeterminate infinitive,” for Gellius’s friend had, through sleepless nights in the study of and extensive readings in ancient literature, become an expert.

As I edited and collected the final essays for this issue of the *Romanic Review*, I recognized in every instance I turned to their texts Gellius’s pleasure in recalling this very episode. It was not just the rediscovery and confirmation of a small textual fact that recalled an ancient grammatical truth, but much more the warmth of a shared space of learning and intellect, a space shared with a dear friend—for me eleven dear friends: Dario Del Puppo, Jelena Todorović, Teodolinda Barolini, Beatrice Arduini, Marcello Ciccutto, Francesco Marco Aresu, Nassime Chida, Isabella Magni, Carlo Meghini, Mirko Tavoni, and Michelangelo Zaccarello.

If the theme for this project, the pleasure of Dante's text, was chosen to afford friends and colleagues the widest breadth in their choice of topic, it soon became evident that their definitions and results became much more meaningful than I had ever imagined possible. Their essays became a place they could turn, and thus we can now turn, for solace and a working contemplation of the pleasure of the text. I know well each of these scholars, and friends, who contributed to the issue. In their essays I see them turning to questions of textuality, of connections, textual recall and echo, and the pragmatics of textual production and the mirror it holds up to different historical periods, places, and values. Each has chosen a topic that, without declaration for the pleasure of the text, makes very clear that very thing, a working out of the kind of nuance and deep textuality that no doubt struck each of us even as young readers of Dante.

The original stirrings of the pleasure and refuge I took in Dante's texts were born in a flurry of difficult years of living abroad, following a curriculum of *corsi singoli* mostly at the old Convento di Santa Maria degli Angeli in piazza Brunelleschi with courses in codicology, *filologia romanza*, *storia linguistica*, and, remarkably, my first official exposure to Dante: *filologia dantesca* and something called a *liberalizzato* (yes, part of the *vecchio ordinamento*) prepared on forty cantos of the *Commedia*. To make matters more interesting, these were the years of the student strikes across Italy and certainly in the Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia in Florence. When classes were canceled my refuge took the shape of the reading room of the Laurentian Library, the manuscript room of the Biblioteca Nazionale, the Biblioteca Riccardiana, occasionally the Marucelliana, and some afternoons the library in the Dantesca in via dell'Arte della Lana, where I first met other refugees who would become lifelong friends. But it was in the Laurenziana where I could spend uninterrupted days with texts, manuscripts to be exact, from the university-made codices—*peciae* for the most part—that were the topic of the late Luciana Mosiici's course to the "bible" of Guittone d'Arezzo's letters, the topic of d'Arco Silvio Avalle's seminar, MS Rediano 9. But it was a strange miscellany only acquired by the Laurenziana in 1958 to which I returned to read Dante's work in a different context, MS Martelli 12. Though I was studying Casini's 1885 edition of the *Vita Nuova*, based on the Vatican Library's Chigiano L.VIII.305, in comparison to Barbi's 1907 critical edition, my introduction to the rigors of scholarly textual editing, whenever I think of the text of the *Vita Nuova*, I visualize the work's copy in the last two fascicles of Martelli 12.

Thus when I read my dear, long-time friend Dario Del Puppo's erudite and thoughtful reflection on the relationship between text and miscellany, I was reminded not just of the ways that we tend to read differently from those who engaged literary texts in the Middle Ages, but especially of the support for

and the role of access to places, especially rare book libraries, that nurtured us both as young philologists. Now access to such cultural exemplars can be found online. And in times of worldwide pandemic, such access seems like a constant gift at our fingertips. But, of course, it is not actually at our fingertips, and the temptation to select those pieces of the miscellany that “serve us” in that moment cannot replicate the act of reading Martelli’s *Vita Nuova* with so many cultural tools bound with it: the treatise on dreams, that on precious gems, and other texts that were planned companions of Dante’s *libello* destined for assembly in the main part of the early fourteenth-century manuscript.

In those early years, especially in Avalle’s courses, it was clear that the difficulty of getting closer to textual truths was in part due to what was an oversimplified statistical truth of neo-Lachmannian method, in the after-the-fact form of Paul Maas’s *Textkritik* (1927), a codification of principles selectively drawn from Lachmann’s and others’ working hypotheses about what A. C. Clark had already called the “descent of manuscripts” (1918). In his *Principi di critica testuale*, his early work on Peire Vidal, and in his classes, Avalle focused hard on the value of the individual witness while, for traditions such as the *Commedia*, he pointed out the effects of the *textus receptus* as a stalwart foe even of Michele Barbi’s reasoned methodological results in the 1921 National Edition of the *Opere di Dante* (Avalle 30). Thus my friend and collaborator in things Petrarchan Isabella Magni’s renewed call for attention to the individual witness of Dante’s *Commedia*, in this case Beinecke Library MS 428, traces an intellectual and cultural inheritance linked not to the New Philologists of brief *Speculum* fame, but to Lachmann’s own reverence for the materiality of the individual manuscript and to the complex history production and transmission. (Yes, there are the foundations of a material philologist in Lachmann’s 1850 study and edition of Lucretius.) Magni’s clear-eyed insistence on the small but critical details of a written artifact to define its reading bolsters what can only be called a summons to the fundamental *fenomenologia della copia*, a phrase particularly precious to Avalle.

Out of the cultural tussles that have surrounded the *Commedia* for some time, an even more dangerous terrain as we have neared the seventh centennial of Dante’s death and one I have sworn to avoid, the question of the role and history of the making of editions, especially of the *Vita Nuova*, garners new and insightful attention in my friend Jelena Todorović’s perspicacious essay on the very notion of textual authority at work in nineteenth-century editions and editorial trends. A leading voice among material philologists and textualists, Todorović examines the origins of the latest *editio princeps* of Dante’s works, Sermartelli’s 1576 expurgated Florentine edition, and traces pivotal questions of the text

back to one of its earliest copyists, Giovanni Boccaccio, a figure who, from Petrarco to our own day, still looms large in the editorial history of Dante's texts.

My long-time collaborator and dear sister-in-arms, Teodolinda Barolini, has for all the years I have known her pursued an impassioned and erudite inquiry into the linkage between poetry and philosophy in Dante's culture and verse and prose. Her insightful command not just of Dante's works but also of the poetic, historical, political, and philosophical debates of Dante's day is brought to bear on the polemics of Cecco d'Ascoli against Dante's poetics and curiously eclectic thinking about compulsion and determinism in love. In an essay that guides us analytically through the dizzying development of Cecco's critique and the culmination of Dante's expression in the third heaven of his *Paradiso*, a long road from his letter to Cino da Pistoia (though in truth, as she notes, even earlier in his *Voi che 'ntendendo il terzo ciel movete*), Barolini masterfully traces Dante's alternating points of view from the moralistic to the "scientific" to conclude that "Dante's thinking on love and compulsion is part of a vast system, related to the theology of free will that sustains the *Commedia* and the extended investigation into the existence of absolute will that runs through *Paradiso* 4 and 5." Pressed at a difficult time to finish her essay, Teo would have been forgiven for a shorter, less engaging essay. Instead I could only marvel over the intricacy, breadth, and accessibility of her contribution to this issue and, as always, to Dante scholarship.

Directly in keeping with Gellius's "volumina commentariorum," Beatrice Arduini turns to Dante's own deep-dive *zibaldone* of sorts, the unfinished and textually problematic *Convivio*, to consider in fact Dante's elaboration and assembly of his "litterarum penus" (literary storehouse [*Noctes*, "Praefatio," 2]), from which he would later draw, and which sometimes he would contradict, in his *Commedia*. Long an expert in the early textual tradition and Ficinian "remake" of the *Convivio*, not to mention its problematic editorial history, Arduini underscores the textual truths of the work (and document, the earliest from 1361) and its difficult relationship with the *Commedia*. As the expression reminds us, "God is in the detail" (the original form later supplanted by the "devil," who ended up in the detail), and Arduini supplies us with an expert overview and clear-eyed examples, including Dante's shifting take on Guido da Montefeltro, of the distances, historic, material, and literary, of the *Convivio* from the *Commedia*.

Once we move outright to the *Commedia*, three superb essays allow us to wander in the erudition of three very distinct moments of encounter in *Purgatorio* and *Inferno*. The first is from the current president of the Società Dantesca Italiana and professor of Italian literature at the University of Pisa, Marcello

Ciccuto. But to me Marcello is first and foremost my dear friend, a brother, of more than thirty years. I asked Marcello to write an essay that reflected his notion of the pleasure of Dante's text. The result is a view into the extraordinary learning and ear for Dante's text that marks not just his scholarship but also the intricate joy of his reading of its deep connections. The episode is pivotal, the meeting with Matelda, and his interrogation of the resonances in Ovid and the nuance of textual and visual recall of Christian Eden and the dream "perhaps" of ancient poets, as Dante's Matelda reminds us (*Purgatorio* 28: 139–41), marks the passage of Dante's poetic narrative from "original innocence" to visualized forms of perfection before the poet's own passage through the two rivers.

Between intertextuality and linguistic echo, Francesco Marco Aresu's work in general has relied on a philological care among both Latin and vernacular texts that far outpaces his still young career. His kind of study, here of the possible resonance of Quintus Ennius in the episode of Bertran de Born in *Inferno* 28, requires a learned eye and ear that few possess. A Calabrian poet (b. 239 BC) with a refined knowledge of Oscan, Latin, and Greek who set up shop in Rome, Ennius is still known today as the founder of Latin literature, but few of his works remain, and what remains is mostly fragmentary. Working from what Aresu himself calls "microscopici indizi," he interrogates every aspect of the *terzina* in question, especially its prosodic structures and its resonances, via the motif/figure of tmesis, central to Bertran's "condition," and the brief citation of Ennius in the ancient commentator Sergio. Aresu intuits the strict connection between prosody and semantic/thematic threads in the narrative and demonstrates that through the microscopic we can hear a resonance that Dante himself drew on quite possibly through Virgil, or the Virgilian commentary tradition, if not directly through a tradition now lost to us.

Originally in a much longer and more sweeping form that examined a wide range of historical documentation and its critical treatment, Nassime Chida's study investigates the historical underpinnings of *Inferno* 28, especially in the form of local chronicles that discuss Guido da Montefeltro, such as those of Salimbene da Parma, Fra Elemosina, and the *Serventese* of 1277. Establishing those "categories of influence" most shared with other sources, including some chronicles that we should all know better, Chida devotes an exacting historical method to Dante's reply to Guido da Montefeltro's question, paying special attention to Guido's second retirement into the Franciscan order and Dante's reliance on the historical context of "the political and military coalition known as the *lega romagnola* and its activities in the final years of Guido's life."

In Monselice, at a conference in 2002 on Guido Guinizzelli and pre-Dantean poetic culture, just weeks before *Le Lettere* released Domenico De Robertis's five-tome edition of Dante's *Rime*, the culmination of over fifty years of research

and a much-anticipated event, I met a young scholar by the name of Michelangelo Zaccarello. By 2006 we were collaborating on a special issue of *Dante Studies* (the first ever entirely in Italian), the revised *acta* of a conference Michelangelo had organized to commemorate Dante's sojourn in the Lunigiana in western Tuscany. Years of continued collaboration, friendship, and discussions of textuality have followed, especially through the Society for Textual Scholarship, a fruitful Fulbright in Bloomington, and reciprocal invitations to seminars and conferences, and now laboring together with editor-in-chief Marta Werner on the journal *Textual Cultures*. Now one of the driving voices in Italy on digital editorial issues, especially in the intersection between philology and the digital, Michelangelo Zaccarello, together with Carlo Meghini and Mirko Tavoni—both well-known pioneers in the production of digital resources—leads the discussion toward new avenues for studying and consulting the commentary tradition of Dante's *Commedia*. Their essay both reviews the technical progress of the process in establishing the interface among resources and breaks new ground in establishing the protocols that will be available to users *free of charge*. Each of them brings a rich and varied expertise to the initiative, marshaling as well experts from numerous universities and centers to contribute to the knowledge base. It is an essay and a project that by design looks backward and forward to provide greater access to tools and a tradition that has loomed as an important gateway to more careful and accurate interrogations of Dante's text.

The last essay can be explained easily enough as the collision between my very early work in the 1980s on instructions to medieval illuminators in Old Occitan and early Italian manuscripts and my later service on the editorial board of *Dante Studies*. A 1999 version titled "Over Dante's Dead Body" and presented at a conference in New York contained a small kernel of the far less strident study in the pages of this issue.

I reserve this antepenult paragraph to thank Elisabeth Ladenson for her kind invitation, her extraordinary patience and generous guidance, her confidence in me and in my process for bringing this issue to press, and for her good works on behalf of the issue. She has been a good ally in making the issue a reality.

Under the final rubric of "housekeeping" I would note that making the editorial styles of two linguistic traditions as uniform as possible was in no small part a function of my years of work on *Textual Cultures*, the journal of the Society for Textual Studies, and *Medioevo letterario d'Italia*, journals necessarily edited in two different styles but with the common goal of treating philological and textual discourse with the greatest respect. Beyond the issue of where the journal's punctuation ultimately falls, the bailiwick of others in English, some might find initially jarring the use of the term *carta/charta* (in English, yes—a neologism) to describe the front and back (recto and verso) of a manuscript "page"

for philologists, but for many American journals “page.” For those flummoxed by this distinction, we should recall that the author’s original punctuation, or lack thereof, should be contained inside the quotation marks that set off the quoted speech/text; editorial punctuation should, philologically speaking, remain outside, thank you very much. I will forever be amazed that the country, my own, that gave birth—for example—to Emily Dickinson for the most part repunctuates her verses inside her “quoted space” without regard to the complexities of her punctuation. Nonetheless I have tried to adhere to this anti-philological, quotational-punctuational style except where absolutely necessary. Working backward, the notion of “pagination” gives a new number to the front and back of each printed page; “chartulation” assigns a number to the recto of a manuscript charta, the verso is unnumbered. Reasoning in a more forward way, a “folio” is a sheet of parchment or paper that was usually then folded to make a bifolium. The codicological illogic of calling both a full sheet a “folio” and the two resulting half-sheets now half the size “folios” as well can be resolved by resorting to calling half of the folded folio a charta or carta (c./cc.), as I have insisted in numerous publications including and especially those in English, with its recto and verso. This primary unit of bookmaking, the bifolium, was then gathered together with other bifolia to make: a binion (the old “duerno”), or a fascicle of four chartae = eight modern pages if numbered front and back; a trinion (the old “ternion”), or a fascicle of six chartae = twelve modern pages if numbered front and back; a quaternion, or a fascicle of eight chartae = sixteen modern pages if numbered front and back); a quinion (the old “quinternion”), or a fascicle of ten chartae = twenty modern pages if numbered front and back), and so on.

Throughout all the essays, lyric poems are by design expressed in italics rather than double quotation marks. In each essay their lyric genre is identified as “sonnet,” “ballata,” “canzone,” and so on, but the stand-alone nature of lyric poems in the medieval tradition, their first verse being their “title,” and their status as individual units of poetic expression require that they be treated as a “work,” with italics.

In closing, I have to cite one more source that inspired the theme of this collection of essays, an unusual source in a sense: the undergraduate—he knows who he is—from one of my courses many years ago who unfailingly writes to me every year after he has reread the *Comedy*—all the while learning a little Italian along the way—to tell me what he has learned from it this time and new passages he enjoys. One year he wrote to say he had only made it through *Purgatory* due to the demands of his child’s health problems. I invariably reply to share with him a couple of passages I have “rediscovered.” He always expresses his gratitude for that course and the *Comedy*, but I know perfectly well that even

my best days in the classroom could not begin to compare with the delight he found in the canto or two he had read for the class and would come to reread every year of his life.

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