CHAPTER 1

The author in history

> Dante è un produttore di *auctoritates*. Culturalmente egli è un uomo del medio evo per il quale . . . la sentenza, il detto in cui si deposita la sapienza umana, è fonte di conoscenza non meno . . . che il ragionamento e l'esperienza diretta; salvo che, invece di limitarsi a incastonare e glossare detti memorabili . . . egli ne produce dei suoi, e conferisce lo stesso piglio legislativo a tutti i suoi enunciati.
>
> (Contini 1965b: 76–7)

1. WHAT IS AN "*AUCTOR*"?

From the perspective of the first decade of the twenty-first century, more than seven hundred years after the fictive date in which the events recounted in the *Divina Commedia* take place, it seems obvious that no single work and no writer in the Western canon possesses more authority, in a generalized sense of widely-acknowledged cultural prestige and ideological weight, than do Dante Alighieri and the "poema sacro" ("holy poem"; *Par.* 25.1) he began not long after his exile from Florence in 1301 and finished shortly before his death at the age of fifty-six in 1321. No work is more central to the Western canon and the educational and cultural apparatus that still actively propounds it, notwithstanding numerous recent contestations; no author possesses more "cultural capital."[1] From shortly after Dante's death, and perhaps even while he was still alive, the *Commedia* was recognized as a classic, comparable to the great poems of antiquity in a way that no other vernacular work of his era was. The poem appeared in manuscript after manuscript accompanied by a rapidly growing number of learned commentaries in both Italian and Latin: a treatment no vernacular work had received previously in the Western tradition, and which – to my knowledge – no work of any kind, possibly excepting the Gospels, had ever

[1] Bourdieu (e.g., 1994: 4–7 *et passim*); also Guillory 1993.

received within such a short time of its composition. Within fifty years, Dante's admirer and successor in the nascent vernacular tradition, Giovanni Boccaccio, was called to deliver public lectures on the poem in his and Dante's native Florence. An uninterrupted and ever expanding tradition of academic study and commentary has continued over the centuries, most thoroughly demonstrated and embodied by the vast resources of the Dartmouth Dante Project, with its compilation of seventy-three distinct Italian, English, and Latin commentaries to date.[2] Poets throughout Italy and all over Europe – for example, Boccaccio, Chaucer, and Christine de Pizan – were treating Dante as a poetic model, an *auctor* comparable to ancients such as Virgil and Ovid. Moreover, to read the *Commedia* is to know that Dante wished for this to occur and may well have hoped to be accorded authority greater than the pagan *auctores*, comparable, perhaps, to that of the fathers of the Church, or the human authors of the Bible.

Notwithstanding the apparent transparency of the question, looking at Dante's relationship with authority is a little like looking directly at the sun: despite the impression of the intensest illumination, one runs a very high risk of being blinded by what one sees, of losing track of the contingent nature and the complex causes of the object, even as one is confronted most directly by it. In other words, because Dante and the *Commedia* have "always already" possessed authority, for today's postmodern, postmillennial readers as for those who first read the poem, something very important has been lost from view. Specifically, whatever the final results may have been, it was not in any sense a given that Dante could hope to achieve authority in a late medieval culture that defined the term so as to exclude anyone like him *a priori* from laying claim to it, even as it was held up as the highest value to which a person might aspire.

What will concern us here, then, is how to historicize "authority" as a category in the conceptual repertoire of Dante's time and place, and as a word and a governing thought that figures crucially in his own understanding of himself as cultural operator and as poet.[3] To begin with, it is important

[2] To see the complete list, go to http://dartmouth.dante.edu and click on "index." On Trecento and Quattrocento commentaries see, *inter alia*, Barbi 1890; Mazzoni 1951, 1958, 1963, 1976–1978; Dionisotti 1965; Sandkühler 1967; Jenaro-MacLennan 1974; Vallone 1981; Barkan 1986: 163–70; Minnis *et al*. 1988 (chapter 10); Palmieri and Paolazzi 1991; Hollander 1993; Parker 1993, 1997; Barański 2001; S. Gilson 2005. Especially useful is the overview in Botterill 2005. See Baranski's cogent critique of recent scholarly use of these commentaries (2001: chapter 1), as well as Parker's apt assertion that "to read commentary is to move from a consideration of the *Divine Comedy* as a text to its use as a culture-bearing work – that is, as a social act with a variety of ramifications for successive social formations" (1997: 251). See Minnis, 2001: chapter 6, for a broad view of the emergence of vernacular commentary in Europe modeled on the Latin tradition. See also n 48.

[3] Others who have examined the categories of *auctor* and *auctoritas, autore* and *autorità*, in the Dantean *oeuvre* are: Mazzoni 1955; Mazzeo 1960; Nardi 1961; Dragonetti 1961b and c; Hollander 1969; Stabile

to acknowledge that medieval Latin *auctoritas* and early Italian *autorità do* overlap in significance with modern understandings of the terms. Authority was and still is a category through which an essential conjunction is posited between individual persons and impersonal sources of power and/or knowledge. To say, as Dante does, and as texts of the Middle Ages so often do, that, in a primary usage, derived from Greek *autentim* or *autentin, authority* is that quality which renders an *author* "worthy of faith and obedience" (*CV* 4.6.5), is to give an individual access to transpersonal and transhistorical "truth" – making his words worthy of *faith* – and to legitimated, and officially delimited, power – making his words worthy of *obedience*. This is not so far from what we think of today as the duly constituted authority of administrative and judicial officials or as the special credibility of certified experts, scientific and otherwise, in various fields of knowledge.

On the other hand, a world of difference separates medieval *auctoritas* from modern *authority*. There are striking differences of degree and emphasis in the way that authority is recognized and exercised: at least in theory, medieval *auctoritas* is far more rigidly hierarchical, far less subject to challenge if not exempt from it, far more liable to be asserted as grounded in an absolute order of Power and Knowledge deriving from the transcendent Deity. There are the evident differences between how the political and epistemological forms of authority are conferred: differences in the norms of political legitimation; differences between medieval science and modern, and so on. There are dramatic differences between the persons who might legitimately be eligible for or lay claim to authority. Moreover, as will appear in Chapter 2, the definition given above is only one of at least three etymologically-grounded meanings attributed to the word, not to speak of its dialectical twins, such as *actor*. Finally, in the medieval period there is a broad spectrum of cultural domains in which *authority* is a fundamental category, ranging from the poetic, through the philosophical and "scientific," to the institutional (especially the Empire and the Church), to the theological, which, in principle, subtends and comprehends all of the others, and mediates the intricate relationships, conceptual and practical, that exist among them. Both the lines that divide these distinct definitions and domains and the relations that connect them are significantly different from those now drawn.

To give one, by no means casual, example, the relationship of literary authorship to the other types of authority was generally conceived of by

1970; Mazzotta 1979; Gellrich 1985; Minnis *et al.* 1988: chapter 10 [written by David Wallace]; Minnis 1990; Stillinger 1992; Picone (e.g., 1993); Barański (e.g., 1996: 9; 1997a; 2005a); Coassin 1996; Botterill 1997; Levers 2002. My own earlier approaches to the question, here significantly revised, are in Ascoli 1989, 1991b, 1993, 1997, 2000a, 2003.

Dante and throughout the Middle Ages in a way quite alien to ours. In modern times, an *author* is a writer of texts in general and a writer of literary works in particular, and, especially in the latter case, is not an authority at all, except in the diffusely cultural-ideological sense specified above. In the Middle Ages an "author" (Latin *auctor* and *autor*; Italian *autore*) was not any old writer of literature, but was instead, and against the modern definition, a person who possessed *auctoritas*, and who might also have produced texts that were known as *auctoritates*. Thus, on the one hand, an *auctor* might not necessarily be primarily a writer at all, and, on the other, there is a restricted field of writers who qualify as *auctores*. More exactly, this dominant concept of authorship was in tension with an emerging, proto-modern usage of the word to refer to "any person who writes a book."[4] The question of how, and when, the medieval *auctor* began to look like the modern author, cogently raised by such very different contemporary scholars as Foucault (1968), Minnis (1984) and Chartier (1992), will turn out to be fundamental for thinking about Dante's concept of authorship.

Even more specifically, and as is well known, the dominant medieval idea of the *auctor*, literary and otherwise, is in sharp tension with modern concepts of individual creative personality. If authority was then, as now, a quality mediating between impersonal sources of power/knowledge and historical persons who put them into play, the stress in the earlier period, nonetheless, lay heavily on subordinating the individual to the transhistorical and impersonal, though in somewhat different ways depending upon the domain one wishes to consider. In literature, as in the various branches of philosophy, the fields most obviously relevant to Dante as writer,[5] the

[4] St. Bonaventure's commentary (Bonaventure 1934–64: vol. 1, chapter 12) on Peter Lombard's *Sententia* (*PL*, vol. 192, col. 519–950) distinguishes four ways in which a medieval person might participate in making a book: as *auctor*, *scriptor* (scribe; copyist), *compilator*, and *commentator* (translated in Minnis *et al.* 1988: 229). Bonaventure defines the *auctor* as the one who provides the principal materials from which a book is made. Compare Honorius of Autun's definition in *Expositio in Cantica Canticorum* – "quoque auctor libri, idest compositor" [*PL*, vol. 172, col. 348]). See also Stillinger's useful discussion of the Bonaventurian passage (1992: 1, 37–8); also Minnis 1984: 94–5.

[5] The question of the disciplinary standing of poetry is complex (see, e.g., Antonelli-Bianchini 1983; Minnis *et al.* 1988; Giunta 2002: especially 455–73; Minnis and Johnson eds. 2005), and depends to a significant extent in what context one views it. For Aquinas, writing in the name of theology poetry is "infima inter omnes doctrinas" (*ST* Ia.I., art. 1, q.1). In the school curriculum it was assigned to the first, though crucial, educational step, in the three liberal arts, grammar (Curtius 1948: 42–5 [see Chapter 3 for Dante on "gramatica"]). In the academic prologues (*accessus*) which frequently introduce the authoritative classical poets (see n 48), it is assigned to moral philosophy, aligning it with the epideictic rhetoric of praise and blame, in that it presents examples of morally-charged actions to be imitated or avoided. For the "ethical poetic" see Allen 1982; Minnis 1984: 23–7; Minnis *et al.* 1988; Carruthers 1990; Dagenais 1994; cf. Giunta 2002. The thirteenth and fourteenth centuries spawned a series of treatises on poetry, often drawing heavily on both the rhetorical works of Cicero and Pseudo-Cicero (*Rhetorica ad Herrenium*), as well as the *AP* of Horace (for Dante's debts to the

auctores consisted of a limited number of classical texts that have accrued cultural capital and with it the status of guarantors of truth and models for imitation over the centuries.[6] While authority of this kind was expressed through texts bearing the proper names of time-bound human beings – most notably for Dante, "Virgil" and "Aristotle" – the essential point was that these texts had been proven to have transcended the limitations of the inevitably fallible men who wrote them and to bear truths that exceeded the limitations of historical contingency – being valid in any time and any place. What is more, their validity was closely dependent upon the language in which they were encountered (even if they were originally written in Greek, Hebrew, or Aramaic), namely Latin, a language which is, as Dante himself says in both *Convivio* and *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, a *gramatica*, that is, shaped to resist the individual personalities and historical circumstances of its users.

On the other hand, institutional authority, whether political or ecclesiastical, *was* necessarily available to living persons, although by definition it was not conferred by individual merit or local historical circumstance, but rather transmitted from generation to generation by the transpersonal mechanisms of office and/or genealogy, an idea crystallized in Kantorowicz's formula of "the king's two bodies" (1957). Finally, there is the phenomenon of theological *auctoritas*, which in principle encompasses and determines all other forms of authority. Here, as Minnis reminds us, the paradigmatic case is that of the Bible with its dual authorship – the human "scribes" whose names are associated with individual books of the Testaments – and God, the ultimate *Auctor* not only of the Scriptures, but of its authors, and of the universe itself.[7] From this perspective, then, God is at the origin of

latter, see Chapter 3, n 4; Chapter 4, n 42; Chapter 7, nn 15, 157). These include Matthew of Vendôme, *Ars Versificatoria*; Geoffrey of Vinsauf, *Poetria Nova*; John of Garland, *Parisiana Poetria*, and so on (see Nencioni 1967). During the same period, poetry was increasingly aligned with philosophy more broadly speaking, including metaphysics (Curtius 1948: 203–13; Wetherbee 1972; Greenfield 1981; Minnis *et al.* 1988); as with theology itself (see n 48; Chapter 2, nn 67, 68, 71; Chapter 7, n 134). It was even linked at times to medicine (Olson 1982). Although Dante criticism has focused most of its attention on his alignment of poetry with philosophy (especially *CV*) and/or theology (especially the *DC*, and, if authentic, the *ECG*; see Chapter 7, n 124), in fact, Dante moves strategically among the full range of available discourses concerning poetry in the later Middle Ages (see Mazzotta 1993a: 7–12 *et passim*; also Chapter 2, nn 80, 83).

[6] On medieval notions of *auctor* and *auctoritas*, see Chenu 1927, 1950: especially 128–38; Hunt 1948; Quain 1945; Curtius 1948: especially 48–54, 57–61; Mazzeo 1960: 157–8; Stabile 1970; Minnis 1984 (especially 1–2, 10–12, 94–103, 156–8); Marenbon 1987: 9–10, 30–3, *et passim*; Minnis *et al.* 1988; Brownlee and Stephens 1989a; Stillinger 1992; Minnis and Johnson 2005.

[7] For the relation of human *auctores* to divine *Auctor*, the precedence of the latter over the former, see Augustine, *Conf.* 12.14–32, especially 18, 24–5, 30; Aquinas *ST* I[a], 1, 8 (cf. I[a], 1, 10, resp.). See Chenu 1950: 128, 138; Smalley 1952: 300; Minnis 1984: 36–9, 72–112, Minnis *et al.* 1988: 66–9, 75, 97, 197–200, 205, 241–2, *et passim*. See also n 52. For the topos of God as Author of both the Bible and Creation, see Chapter 2, n 87.

all human authority, whether over truth or over power, and the ultimate guarantor that it transcends the frailty of individual human beings and the contingencies of historical existence.[8]

What does this general scheme have to do with Dante Alighieri, late medieval poet, amateur philosopher, and sometime political activist, first of Florence, then from it? In the first instance, it reflects, though by no means completely or exactly, his own explicitly articulated views on what an *auctor* is and what *auctoritas* might consist of. In the entirety of Dante's canonical *oeuvre*, the Latin and Italian words for *author* and *authority* and their derivatives appear one hundred seventeen times – five more if the etymons *autentin* and *avieo* are included; one more if the *Epistle to Cangrande* is recognized as Dantean. When he uses these terms it is almost always to indicate one of the following fundamental cultural domains, in this order of frequency: (1) supreme institutional authorities, above all the temporal authority of the Emperor and the spiritual authority of the Pope; (2) canonical classical writers, especially philosophers and poets, especially *the* Philosopher, Aristotle, and Virgil; (3) poetic authorship taken in isolation; (4) God as supreme Author and Authority, and, in subordinate relationship thereto, the authority of the Bible and the Church fathers.[9] What this rough lexical scheme suggests is, first, that Dante valued *authority* as a quality with foundational applicability to the areas of experience that counted most in his culture and to him in particular, and that he returned to it at crucial moments over the course of his later career, especially in the major treatises. Second, it shows that his overt understanding of *auctoritas* was closely aligned with a typical medieval emphasis on its hierarchical and absolute nature: grounded in antiquity, legitimated institutional office, and/or

[8] Stillinger 1992: 20, 26–32, 74–6, *et passim*, maps the structures of textual authority onto the totalizing and hierarchical neo-platonic cosmos, the "great chain of being," as elaborated from the writings of St. Augustine and Dionysius the Areopagite and culminating in the ordered layout of the *sacra pagina* in Peter Lombard's commentary on the Psalms. While this is undoubtedly the primary conceptual framework for interpreting both textual and social orders in the Middle Ages, and while there is no doubt of its relevance to Dante (see, for example, Mazzeo 1960; Durling and Martinez 1990; cf. Schnapp 1991–92), it is not by itself sufficient to account for the complex discourse of medieval *auctoritas* in its various headings and subheadings or to explain the socio-historic forces guiding the articulation of that discourse in and around the times and places of Dante's writing. Stillinger recognizes resistances to the hierarchical-cosmological model authority both in Peter Lombard's book and in Dante's *VN* (especially 94–107).

[9] See also Stabile 1970; Ascoli 2000a. Of the one hundred twenty-three references mentioned, sixty-six are in *MN*; thirty-five in *CV*; nine in the *Eps.*, eight in *DVE*; five in the *DC*; none in other works. Of these, sixty-seven refer to institutional authorities with governing powers; thirty-seven refer to intellectual authority (primarily of classical authors); ten exclusively to poetic authorship; four to God as divine Author; two to Biblical authors; and three references are pre-definitional. (N.B., additional distinctions can and perhaps should be made; in some cases one reference indicates more than one type of authority, e.g., imperial and philosophical.)

extra-historical (i.e., divine) sponsorship. Indeed, as regards government he is one of the leading late medieval theorists of the absolute, hierarchical authority of the Emperor (see Chapter 5).

This survey shows immediately why Dante might find it difficult to attribute the role of *auctor* and the quality of *auctoritas* to himself and his works, despite his evident valorization of, and desire for, them. In his whole *oeuvre* he uses words for "authority" or "author" in relation to himself alone in only two isolated cases (*CV* 1.4.13; *Ep*. 3.2–3 [to Cino da Pistoia]), and there is only a small cluster of references in Book 2 of *De Vulgari Eloquentia* where he uses them in reference to modern poets, such as himself, as a class. Each of these exceptional cases will be discussed in due course. However, even this cursory description of what constituted *auctoritas* in the Middle Ages reveals that Dante and his works, especially the vernacular works, had limited or no access to the title and the quality he and his culture valued so highly. To the extent that a modern person *might* claim the prestigious title of *auctor*, Dante was poorly situated; he possessed none of the attributes that could help transform his own ambitions and visions into *auctoritas*: as a lay figure in a culture still dominated by clerics, a scion of a family on the fringes of the aristocracy, without the standing conferred by public office,[10] he had no claim whatsoever to institutionally derived authority.

As to literary authorship, the question is even clearer. By composing his major poetic works in the vernacular, he denied himself the intrinsic *auctoritas* of high Latin culture. More fundamentally, a modern, living individual with a distinctive personality like Dante's could not hope to claim that depersonalized *auctoritas* which belongs to the Biblical and classical *auctores*, all long dead, all part of an irretrievably distant past. Like all moderns, Dante was constitutively relegated to the role of belated *lector* of or *commentator* upon the true authors (see, e.g., Quain 1945: 225).

How, then, is one to square these two things? On the one hand are the historical circumstances, reflected throughout Dante's mature writings, which dictate that he had little or no claim to authority as it was understood in his culture. On the other is a tradition of reception that confers authority virtually without reserve, notably the vast array of commentaries that appeared almost immediately after the *Commedia* began to circulate, calling Dante an *autore* without hesitation and treating his work to much the same respectful glossing as had in the past been reserved for the Bible and the classical *auctores*. One must begin with the knowledge that, however

[10] Not forgetting his unfortunate two-month stint as Prior in 1301, I refer to the period of exile thereafter. For cogent reviews of Dante's involvement in Florentine politics, see Petrocchi 1983: chapters 7–9; Najemy 1993; Peters 1995; Scott 1996: 3–20, 2004: 309–36.

rigidly, ideally absolute, however much aimed at establishing a transhistorical, suprahistorical basis for knowledge and power, the phenomenon of *auctoritas* was a complex one in the later Middle Ages, and, in particular, was under transformative pressure from a series of intertwined histories, all of which in some way militated for a redefinition and reallocation of the quality so as to allow for the inclusion of new and different *auctores*, even moderns.

Most prominent among the historical trends in play,[11] as is well known, was the dramatic shift from a feudal culture based on hierarchy and inherited nobility to a commercial and monetary economy, most powerfully embodied by Dante's native Florence.[12] Along with this came the gradual opening of possibilities for lay, and even non-aristocratic, participation in a literate culture previously dominated by clergy, a trend favored not only by economic developments, but also by popularizing religious movements, especially Franciscanism in its more radical expressions. The same period saw the emergence in Italy and elsewhere of new forms of statehood and political participation: in Italy, the communes and *signorie*; in Europe more generally, the prototypes of the modern European nation-state (especially France under Philip the Fair).

In tandem with these economic, social, and political phenomena was the rapid development of the romance vernaculars – especially Occitan, Old French, Italian – into acknowledged languages of culture, capable of sustaining important literary productions. (In *Vita Nova*, chapter 25, Dante dates this from the mid-twelfth century, but in France it goes back further still.) Works in these languages increasingly modeled themselves upon and undertook to mediate high Latin philosophical–rhetorical–literary culture (Imbach 1996), whether through translations (Segre 1963b; Copeland 1991; Cornish 2000a, 2003), like Brunetto Latini's Italian Cicero, or a compendia of learning, like Jean de Meun's continuation of the *Roman de la Rose*,

[11] This digested account of political, economic, and social change draws on Davis 1957, 1984a; Tierney 1964; Waley 1969; Hyde 1973; Martines 1979; Najemy 1982, 1993; G. Holmes 1986; Imbach 1996: chapters 1–4; Durling and Martinez 1996: 3–24; Scott 1996, 2004.

[12] Dante's conflicted attitude toward proto-capitalist Florence, of which he is both product and critic, gives some indication of the dynamic complexities of the situation. On the one hand is his consistent condemnation of "la gente nuova e i subiti guadagni" (*Inf.* 16.73), that is, the new Florentine banking and mercantile class, and, on the other, the obsessive return to problems of monetary value – as in the rough equivalence established between suicide and the wasting of one's property in *Inf.* 13; as in the extension of the deadly sin of avarice to include its opposite, unrestrained generosity (prodigality) in *Inf.* 7 and *Purg.* 21; as in the elaborate metaphorics of coinage deployed throughout the *DC* (on this last, see Shoaf 1983; Ferrante 1984: chapter 6). For readings of the *DC* in terms of the economic world of late thirteenth century Florentine banking and mercantilism to which, for example, Dante's own father may have belonged in the specific capacity of usurer, see Noakes 1990, 2001, 2003; Steinberg 2007.

Latini's *Tesoretto* and *Trésor*, not to mention Dante's *Convivio*, or even the doctrinally sophisticated lyrics of Guinizelli, Cavalcanti, and, again, Dante. These developments in turn coincided with the emergence of new forms of manuscript and book culture, together with novel practices of writing and of reading, which were linked in particular to a growing legal-notarial professionalism and an increasingly literate mercantile class.[13]

Related and important changes were taking place within the domain of High Latin culture. As the work of Giuseppe Billanovich (1961), Roberto Weiss (1969) and, most recently, Ronald Witt (2000) has shown, a classicizing, secularizing humanism was taking root in the Northern Italian *signorie* from the mid-thirteenth century on, through figures such as Lovato Lovati, Albertino Mussato, not to mention Giovanni del Virgilio, with whom Dante would enter into epistolary conversation late in life (see Chapter 5, nn 7, 9; Ascoli 2007). Even in what might seem to be the best fortified bastion of the culture of philosophical and theological *auctoritas*, Scholasticism, a sea-change was under way. Both the institutions and the interpretive practices of clerical-scholastic culture had already undergone significant transformations during the twelfth century,[14] and evolved more rapidly and more radically over the course of the thirteenth. The rise of university education in the verbal arts, philosophy, and above all theology, in Paris, but also, nearer to hand in Bologna, at once reinforced and interrogated the standing of the *auctores*, as will be seen in Chapter 2, section ii.

In other words, against the basically static medieval definitions of authority and authorship, and the many deeply conservative tendencies of that culture, dynamic historical forces were at work that provided a contemporary writer of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, such as Dante, with the impetus and some of the resources to approach those categories creatively and transformatively. With this observation, we arrive at the basic project of this study: an exploration of how a culture in general, in the person of one of its most remarkable members, can engage in a distinctly conservative attempt to maintain and embody fundamental ideological categories, but still end up radically transfiguring those categories

[13] Overviews of the new forms of literary culture are in Antonelli and Bianchini 1983; Huot 1987; Cristaldi 1994: chapter 1 (vis-à-vis *VN*); Usher 1996; Botterill 1996b; Meneghetti 1992, 1997 (especially the remarkable bibliography: 235–66); Giunta 1998, 2002; Minnis and Johnson 2005. See also the classic studies of Auerbach (1941, 1958) and, for the Italian, Contini 1959. On manuscript and book culture, see Petrucci 1979, 1995; Ahern 1982, 1990; Antonelli and Bianchini 1983; Chartier 1992; Storey 1993; Holmes 2000; Steinberg 1999, 2007.

[14] For the importance of Chartrian Platonizing humanism, see Wetherbee 1972. For the twelfth-century Renaissance generally, see Haskins 1955; Benson and Constable 1982.

and that ideology. In the specific case of Dante, the (re-)assertion of medieval *auctoritas* paradoxically opens the way to a proto-modern notion of literary authorship, one which emerged gradually, inconsistently, between the thirteenth and the eighteenth centuries. Charting a broad set of thematic concerns and formal practices over the course of Dante's career as a writer will make possible a detailed account of the appropriation of the title of *auctor* for himself and the status of *auctoritates* for his works. It will reveal how Dante used a wide range of linguistic and conceptual resources available to him for such ends, and how he did so both implicitly and explicitly – at times with an apparent lack of any overt awareness, at others with declared intention. It will suggest, finally, just how dramatically Dante transformed the fundamental categories of the medieval culture of authority.

II. THE *AUTORE* OF THE *COMMEDIA*

> "Tu se' lo mio maestro e 'l mio autore,
> tu se' solo colui da cui io tolsi
> lo bello stilo che m'ha fatto onore"
> (*Inf.* 1.85–87)

(You are my master and my author, you alone are he from whom I have taken the [lovely] style that has won me honor.)

In an important sense, the balance of this book constitutes a gloss on this, the best known and most prominent by far of Dante's uses of the language of *auctoritas* in his *oeuvre*, the phrase with which Dante-*personaggio* welcomes "Virgil," his spiritual guide and poetic master, onto the grand stage of the *Commedia*. For reasons that will soon appear, the most productive approach to this question is through a historically informed, rhetorically detailed reading of the prose and prosimetrum works of Dante, rather than via a frontal assault on the *Commedia* itself.[15] Nonetheless, it is hardly possible to undertake such a study without initially touching on the "sacrato poema" (consecrated poem; *Par.* 23.62). In the first place, this is because the *Commedia* provides an image of authority achieved around which the attempts of this sub-group of the *opere minori* to define and appropriate *auctoritas* organize themselves retrospectively and in the light of which

[15] Though not its principal aim, this book contributes to the project of reading the so-called minor works on their own terms and for their own sakes. A judicious discussion of this methodological problem is in Botterill 1996a: ix–xiii; cf. E. Gilson 1939: 83–5. See also Ascoli 1991b: 186–93, 1995; as well Chapter 6, section v. Inspiring precedents for this approach are Mengaldo's studies of *DVE* (1978a, 1979) and the work on the *rime petrose* cycle of Durling and Martinez (1990).