The emergence of print in late fifteenth-century Italy gave a crucial new importance to the editors of texts, who could strongly influence the interpretation and status of literary works by determining the form and context in which they would be read. Brian Richardson examines the Renaissance production, circulation and reception of texts by writers including Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio and Ariosto, as well as popular works of entertainment. In so doing he sheds light on the impact of the new printing and editing methods on Renaissance culture.

PRINT CULTURE IN RENAISSANCE ITALY

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PRINT CULTURE IN RENAISSANCE ITALY

THE EDITOR AND
THE VERNACULAR TEXT, 1470–1600

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PREFACE

The edition of Dante's *Commedia* printed in Venice in 1477 has on its last page a sonnet which identifies in turn the four people responsible for the volume. First of all there is the author, 'Dante Alleghieri Fiorentin poeta'. Then comes the commentator, named as Benvenuto da Imola. These two are followed by a certain Cristoforo Berardi of Pesaro, described as the 'unworthy corrector' of the work 'in so far as he understood its subject' ('indegno correctore | per quanto intese di quella i subietti'). Last of all comes the German printer, Windelin of Speyer.

Of the four roles represented in this epilogue, those of author, commentator and printer need no explanation. Less familiar, though, is the third figure, the 'correctore'. What were his probable functions in the relationship between Dante's poem and the assumed fifth character, the reader of Windelin's volume? Berardi's position in the list suggests that his tasks were carried out before those of the printer. He would, first of all, have prepared for Windelin copy-texts of the *Commedia* and of its commentary using one or more sources, most probably introducing his own punctuation and correcting aspects of the language as he saw fit. However, Berardi's duties extended beyond that of the textual critic, for he had overall responsibility for the contents of the volume. He included summaries of each canto and a life of the author: items intended, like the commentary, to help readers to find their way around the poem and to understand it. He no doubt also composed the colophon-sonnet, since only he could reasonably have described himself as 'unworthy'.

There was probably more than a grain of truth in this self-assessment, for the sonnet is a clumsy one. Yet a 'correctore' or editor could justifiably present himself as having played a key role in the production of a book such as this Dante because of his supervision of the text and because of his provision or creation of supplementary material to assist the reader. These were also among the main features which would affect the reception of the book and thus determine its commercial fortunes. Whether, therefore, one is considering vernacular print culture in the Italian Renaissance from the perspective of the printer or from that of the consumer, the contribution of the editor deserves close examination. He is the central figure of the present book, and his aims and methods form its principal subject.

The study of editors also touches on broader cultural issues on which print

had a significant influence, even if not an exclusive one. One of the themes running through this book is that of the contribution of editors to the evolution of vernacular scholarship (that is, the establishment of reliable literary texts and their understanding) as a worthy partner to classical scholarship. The two aspects of the editorial function which we have already identified – the correction of the text and the provision of help for the reader – had their roots in long-established practices in the editing of classical texts. These date back at least to the third and second centuries BC, when the scholars of the Museum in Alexandria produced a standardized text of Homer, established a more helpful system of spelling, punctuation and accentuation, and wrote works to explain and comment on literary texts. From their example sprang a tradition of emendation and exegesis which passed to ancient Rome and thence to the medieval world. It was still flourishing in the fourteenth century in very different contexts. In northern Greece, for example, the Byzantine scholar Triclinius was emending classical Greek poetic texts and compiling new sets of interpretative notes or scholia. In papal Avignon, Petrarch was piecing together, correcting and annotating the most complete and accurate edition then known of the Roman historian Livy. And these skills were already being applied outside classical literature. To this same tradition belonged the task undertaken by Giovanni Boccaccio in Florence later in this century: that of editing all the vernacular poetry of his compatriot Dante and commenting on the early canti of the *Commedia*. After Boccaccio's time and for much of the fifteenth century, more attention was paid by humanists to classical texts, and vernacular literature was not treated with the same seriousness. In the last third of the fifteenth century, however, the gap between the two disciplines began to narrow: the status of the vernacular rose once more, interest in its history grew, and its older texts began to be treated with the same care that might be applied to a classical text. One of the outstanding instances, though it had nothing to do with print, was the compilation, probably in 1476 and by the foremost classical scholar of his age, Angelo Poliziano, of the collection of medieval Tuscan verse called the 'Raccolta aragonese'. Poliziano is not known to have edited any texts, classical or vernacular, for printing, but his influence can be detected in the best vernacular editions of the late Quattrocento and early Cinquecento, for instance those of Pietro Bembo. Later in the Cinquecento, the influence of the most rigorous traditions of classical editing is evident in the work of the Florentine Vincenzio Borghini, a friend of the great classical scholar Piero Vettori. It is no coincidence that the most scholarly vernacular editions were printed by two presses which specialized in classical Greek and Latin works: that of Aldo Manuzio in Venice and that of the Giunta family in Florence. We shall, though, also see a striking continuity between vernacular editing and the less reputable methods of those editing classical texts for the printing press, illustrated for instance by E. J. Kenney in *The Classical Text* or in Martin

Lowry's studies of Nicholas Jenson and Aldo Manuzio. Among the practices which aroused scorn even then were the failure to treat authoritative sources with the respect they deserved, the overuse of conjecture as a means of emendation, unscrupulous rewriting of passages which seemed obscure, vagueness about sources, even dishonest claims about access to non-existent manuscripts, and (though this was normally the fault of printers) an imprudently hasty rate of work.

There was, however, one major respect in which the tasks of vernacular and classical editors differed. When printing began, the vernacular (one cannot yet call it Italian) still had to go through a process of standardization. Italy was politically disunited, so there was no capital city to impose a linguistic norm. The Tuscan of the three great fourteenth-century authors, Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio, provided a natural model for those writers who wished to rise above the confines of their regional tongue, but up to the end of the fifteenth century nobody thought of imitating it more than partially. And the rise of humanism in the fifteenth century meant that Latin became another powerful influence, particularly on the spelling, syntax and vocabulary of the vernacular. Thus in the second half of the fifteenth century most writers were using a language which involved some sort of compromise between their own spoken usage and Trecento Tuscan, while also containing many Latinizing elements. This was the case even with Tuscans themselves, since their everyday language had changed in several respects since the Trecento. But then, in the early Cinquecento, the view began to gain acceptance that vernacular literature could not become a worthy alternative and successor to humanistic Latin literature unless writers strove to learn and re-create the language of what was acknowledged to be the highest point of its tradition.

The move towards the selection and adoption of a Trecento Tuscan standard was naturally reinforced by the new pressures and opportunities of print culture. This is by its nature a meeting point of economic and cultural forces, and the work of editors was shaped not only by the world of letters to which they belonged by background and inclination but also by the commercial motives of printers. Among the features which distinguished print culture from manuscript culture were, firstly, a large initial investment in labour, in materials (the press itself, metal type, and especially paper), and in transport, with a consequent need to recoup this capital outlay as quickly as possible; secondly, the production of hundreds or thousands of theoretically identical copies simultaneously, aimed at a relatively wide audience rather than at one which would inevitably be restricted; and, thirdly, a cheaper unit cost, which made it easier for those who were relatively poor (and therefore probably less well educated) to afford books. If a printer was to be more successful than his competitors, then, careful thought had to be given to the needs and expectations of a varied and widespread public. One of the most important ingredients

in the success of an edition would be its language. A linguistic colouring from
outside Tuscany, or more precisely from outside Trecento Tuscany, might be
acceptable to readers if a work were circulating in its region of origin, but it
was very likely to restrict the market for a work elsewhere. Thus editors, with
their pivotal role in this two-way relationship between the printing industry
and the reading public, increasingly assumed the power to adapt the original
text so that it was better suited to success in the new medium, to the mutual
benefit of printers and of the purchasers of their products. Editors also had to
think of the needs of inexperienced readers, those who needed more help in
understanding texts and in learning to imitate those Tuscan works which were
seen as models of correct usage. The annotations and glossaries which they
compiled for such readers played their part in the spread of Tuscan among
those who might not have used it before.

A second theme underlying this book is therefore that of the contribution of
editors to the process of the establishment and spread of a Tuscan-based
vernacular. It must be said that their efforts were, here too, often erratic:
editors came from a wide cross-section of literary society and, like Berardi, did
not always have a great deal of expertise in Tuscan usage. When grammars of
the new language began to be printed, editors did not apply their precepts
immediately or meticulously. But even their improvisation and inconsistency
have an importance for us, since they allow us to measure the rate at which
everyday linguistic practice was changing and the extent to which it deviated
from the lofty precepts of grammarians such as Fortunio and Bembo.

Another of the broader features of Renaissance Italy which the study of
editors can help to illustrate is the cultural rivalry, the divergences and
mutual influences, between the various cities of the peninsula. This book
focuses on two cities whose distinctive approaches to the written word, to fine
art and to politics gave rise to much discussion in the Cinquecento: Florence
and Venice. Such a narrowing of scope has meant the virtual exclusion of
centres such as Rome, Milan, Bologna and Naples, which were nevertheless
important and deserve further study, but which were not so influential in
setting editorial standards. It is true that Florentines tended towards stubborn
cultural isolation and that their printed books were often of interest only to a
local readership. But Florence's proud independence, based on her long-
established leadership in vernacular culture and her prominence in humanis-
tic studies, helped her to maintain a tradition of vernacular scholarship which
no other city could rival, and she did prove able in the course of the
Cinquecento to learn from the innovations of Venetian culture. Venice's
importance as a centre of editing also stemmed partly from the quality of her
scholarly tradition. The Venetian state was at the vanguard of the new
literature, based on the study and imitation of the Tuscan Trecento, which
came to dominate Italy in the first decades of the sixteenth century, and one of
the products of this study of earlier literature was a new, more painstaking

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attitude towards editing it. Allied to this, though, was a printing industry which was far larger and more prolific than that of Florence or of any other Italian city and which provided a medium through which the linguistic and editorial principles evolved in Venice could spread to other parts of Italy. The opportunities provided by the city's presses attracted men of letters from all over the peninsula, and this reinforced the tendency for Venetian editing to avoid the narrow patriotism which could restrict the success of Florentine books. Yet the emphasis on producing books in quantity and for a wide readership meant that Venetian editing could sometimes imitate the initiatives of other centres rather passively and even risked sacrificing the high editorial standards of which she showed herself capable early in the sixteenth century. A further story which this book sets out to tell, then, is how editors in Florence and Venice influenced or emulated each other at certain points, yet still retained an approach to their task which was characteristic of the cultural centre in which they worked.

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Generous encouragement and tolerance has come from my family: from my father, who sadly did not live to see the completion of a project which he followed with close interest, and my mother; and from Catherine, Sophie, Alice and Laura.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AIS	Karl Jaberg and Jacob Jud, *Sprach- und Sachatlas Italiens und der Südschweiz*, 8 vols. (Zofingen, Ringier, 1928–40)
ASI	*Archivio storico italiano*
BLF	Biblioteca Laurenziana, Florence
BMC	*Catalogue of Books Printed in the Fifteenth Century Now in the British Museum*, 9 vols. (London, 1909–49)
BMF	Biblioteca Marucelliana, Florence
BMV	Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Venice
BNF	Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Florence
BRF	Biblioteca Riccardiana, Florence
DBI	*Dizionario biografico degli Italiani* (Rome, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1960–)
ED	*Enciclopedia dantesca*, 5 vols. (Rome, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1970–6)
GSLI	*Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*
GW	*Gesamtkatalog der Wiegendrucke* (Leipzig, Hiersemann, 1925–)
IGI	*Indice generale degli incunaboli*, 6 vols. (Rome, Libreria dello Stato, 1943–81)
IMU	*Italia medioevale e umanistica*
IS	*Italian Studies*
LB	*La Bibliofilia*
SB	*Studi sul Boccaccio*
SFI	*Studi di filologia italiana*

NOTE ON TRANSCRIPTION

I have edited quotations from medieval and Renaissance Italian sources in a fairly conservative manner, while attempting to make them easily comprehensible. Abbreviations have been expanded and the consonant *v* has been distinguished from the vowel and semivowel *u*. Words have normally been separated and accentuation, capitalization and punctuation have been modified, except in a very few cases where it seemed preferable to leave the text in its original state in order to show exactly what changes an editor made or to illustrate an unusual system of accentuation.