1

The Commedia *from Manuscript to Print*

The *Commedia* was written at a time when literary works were copied out by hand and transmitted in books made of paper or parchment. Not a trace of Dante's own handwriting has survived, or at least none has yet been identified. In his *Vita di Dante* (1436), Leonardo Bruni wrote of seeing the poet's autograph letters, describing his handwriting in admiring terms as 'thin, long and very correct'.[1] The earliest complete manuscripts of the *Commedia* date from about a decade after the poet's death in 1321, and most from somewhat later again.

Two features merit particular note. First, the *Commedia* was copied widely across the Italian peninsula, and in large numbers.[2] A much smaller number of these manuscripts were richly decorated by some of the leading book artists of the day.[3] Second, the *Commedia* quickly attracted the attention of learned readers, who sought to offer guidance on how to interpret the poem. Large-scale commentaries are commonplace in the Middle Ages for a sacred text such as the Bible, but not for a literary work and, even more strikingly, one in the vernacular; this is an important and highly significant development.[4] It is clear from such an impulse that the poem was popular and widely read from a very early

[1] 'era la lettera sua magra e lunga e molto corretta', citing from *Vita di Dante*, §38, ed. Monica Berté in Dante Alighieri, *Opere di dubbia attribuzione e altri documenti danteschi: Le Vite di Dante dal XIV al XVI secolo. Iconografia dantesca*, ed. Monica Berté, Maurizio Fiorilla, Sonia Chiodo, and Isabella Valente (Rome: Salerno, 2017), p. 239, and compare pp. XLVIII–XLIX.

[2] The standard repertory is Marcella Roddewig, *Dante Alighieri, Die göttliche Komödie: Vergleichende Bestandsaufnahme der Commedia-Handschriften* (Stuttgart: A. Hiersemann, 1984); more specific to the fourteenth century is Marisa Boschi Rotiroti, *Codicologia trecentesca della Commedia: Entro e oltre l'antica vulgata* (Rome: Viella, 2004).

[3] See Peter Brieger, Millard Meiss, and Charles S. Singleton, *Illuminated Manuscripts of the* Divine Comedy (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1969); see too the 'Illuminated Dante Project', at www.dante.unina.it, which allows for close study – in high-quality images – of many early illuminated manuscripts.

[4] See Paola Nasti and Claudia Rossignoli (eds.), *Interpreting Dante: Essays on the Traditions of Dante Commentary* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013).

stage, while the large number of manuscripts presents enormous problems for the editor in establishing a reliable critical edition.

It is not known for certain how Dante set about composing the poem, nor indeed what its first circulation looked like. Three pieces of evidence suggest that cantos may have circulated in batches. In a poetic exchange with the Bolognese professor of rhetoric Giovanni del Virgilio, Dante defends his use of the vernacular and promises to send ten pails ('decem vascula') of milk from his favourite sheep ('ovis gratissima'), who stands apart from the flock. This has commonly been understood to refer to ten cantos of *Paradiso* and suggests a batch of ten as enough to give Giovanni del Virgilio a good sense of the poem.[5] Giovanni Boccaccio, in the *Trattatello in laude di Dante* ('Little Treatise in Praise of Dante', also known simply as the *Vita di Dante* 'Life of Dante'), reports that Dante sent his patron Cangrande della Scala batches of cantos of *Paradiso* for his approval. After Dante's death, it seems that the final thirteen cantos were missing, and his son Jacopo had a dream in which the poet revealed their hiding place in a wall.[6] Boccaccio also recounts that Dante had begun work on the *Commedia* in Florence, but his sudden exile had forced him to leave the first seven cantos behind. These were eventually retrieved and recognized as important by Dino Frescobaldi (an admirer of Dante and himself a prominent poet in the city), who arranged to have them restored to the exiled poet.[7] Boccaccio uses the term *quadernuccio* 'booklet', to describe what had been found, which suggests how Dante composed the poem, in a series of batches copied in booklet form before finally being bound together.

[5] See *Egloge*, ed. Gabriella Albanese in Dante Alighieri, *Opere*, gen. Ed. Marco Santagata, 2 vols. [of 3 projected] (Milan: A. Mondadori, 2011–), II, pp. 1635–1783 (p. 1644, and note on pp. 1722–1723). On the remarkable *Egloge* generally, see David G. Lummus, '*Egloge*', in *Dante's 'Other Works': Assessments and Interpretations*, ed. Zygmunt G. Barański and Theodore J. Cachey, Jr. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2022), pp. 306–332. For the suggestion that this might be the *final* ten cantos of *Paradiso*, see Lino Pertile, 'Le *Egloghe* di Dante e l'antro di Polifemo', in *Dante the Lyric and Ethical Poet = Dante lirico e etico*, ed. Zygmunt G. Barański and Martin McLaughlin (London: Modern Humanities Research Association and Maney Publishing, 2010), pp. 153–167.

[6] See Giovanni Boccaccio, *Trattatello in laude di Dante*, ed. Pier Giorgio Ricci, 1° red. §§186–189 and 2° red. §§121–127, citing from *Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, ed. Vittore Branca (Milan: A. Mondadori, 1964–1998), III [1974], pp. 423–538 (at pp. 485–486, 527–528).

[7] *Trattatello*, 1° red. §§179–182 (pp. 482–484); 2° red. §§117–120 (pp. 525–527). Commenting on *Inf.* 7 in the *Esposizioni* ('Expositions', the public lectures on the *Commedia* delivered in Florence in 1373–1374), Boccaccio mentions that Dino made a copy of these seven cantos and circulated them amongst a tight circle of friends in Florence; see *Esposizioni sopra la Comedia di Dante*, ed. Giorgio Padoan, VIII esp. Litt. 10, citing from *Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, VI [1965], p. 448.

What is likely the earliest physical witness to the *Commedia* is a fragment of two parchment pages comprising *Inf.* 26. 67–28. 48, which have been reused to cover another manuscript. The scribe is Andrea Lancia, a notary who is responsible for several surviving copies of the *Commedia*, and the fragment has been dated to approximately the middle of the 1320s, though some scholars have suggested a dating between 1314 and 1320, which would mean it was copied during Dante's lifetime.[8] The page measures 245 × 177 mm, a medium-sized format, in two columns, written in a cursive script typical of that used by notaries in official civic documents. The early date and the format are particularly striking aspects of this fragment. Another is the number of lines per column: thirty-four ruled, with thirty-three accommodating the text, comprising eleven terzinas per column. These numbers resonate with the structure of the poem: thirty-three cantos per canticle, with an additional canto for *Inferno*; and are reflected even at the local level of the terzina, which comprises three lines of eleven syllables each (giving thirty-three per terzina). As Teresa De Robertis tantalizingly remarks: 'It is difficult to ignore the obvious connection between the micro structure of the page and the macro structure of the poem.'[9]

The 'look and feel' of this page would become familiar to readers in Florence by the middle of the fourteenth century, where the use of the cursive chancery script in two columns practically became the 'official' format of the *Commedia*. There is a striking uniformity in the script used, the page design, and the rubrication, suggesting a high degree of coordination amongst numerous scribes: the term '*scriptorium* "diffuso"' ('distributed' *scriptorium*) has been used to describe the phenomenon.[10] Probably the best-known example is Triv, which dates to 1337, copied by Francesco di ser Nardo da Barberino.[11] One distinguished palaeographer has even hypothesized that in Triv we can discern a 'virtual' autograph,

[8] Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, MS Conventi Soppressi H VIII 1012; for an interpretive edition, see Inglese '21, pp. CLXXI–CLXXXI (and on the text pp. CXX–CXXI). On the manuscript, see Teresa De Robertis, 'Rivalutazione di un frammento dantesco', *Studi Danteschi* 66 (2001), 263–278. On Lancia, see Luca Azzetta, 'Andrea Lancia', in *Autografi dei letterati italiani: Le origini e il Trecento. Tomo i*, ed. Giuseppina Brunetti, Maurizio Fiorilla, and Marco Petoletti (Rome: Salerno, 2013), pp. 195–214.

[9] De Robertis, 'Rivalutazione di un frammento dantesco', p. 274: 'Difficile ignorare la sfacciata connessione tra la struttura minima della pagina e quella maggiore del poema'.

[10] Irene Ceccherini and Teresa De Robertis, '*Scriptoria* e cancellerie nella Firenze del XIV secolo', in *Scriptorium: Wesen, Funktion, Eigenheiten. Comité international de paléographie latine, 18. Kolloquium, St. Gallen 11.–14. September 2013*, ed. Andreas Nievergelt, Rudolf Gamper, Marina Bernasconi, Birgit Ebersperger, and Ernst Tremp (Munich: Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften in Kommission being Verlag C. H. Beck, 2015), pp. 141–169 (esp. 141–147).

[11] See Prue Shaw, 'Editorial Matter', pp. 188–195 (available at www.dantecommedia.it).

that is, the kind of format Dante intended for his poem.[12] Manuscripts from outside Florence, by contrast, tend to look rather different. For example, Urb, copied in 1352 by a scribe somewhere between Romagna and Bologna, has a page measuring 305 × 217 mm with the text in a single column, in a formal script (known as 'littera textualis').[13]

From a relatively early date, the *Commedia* was illuminated, sometimes very richly, and by the leading book illuminators of the day.[14] Often, the illuminations were reserved for the opening page of each canticle, which is the case in Triv, for example.[15] But there are examples of much more extensive iconographic programmes, the earliest of which is London, British Library, MS Egerton 943.[16] This remarkable manuscript, measuring 394 × 265 mm, dates to *c*.1340 and was produced somewhere between Bologna or Padua, with the text of the poem in a single column surrounded by a commentary in Latin.[17] As Anna Pegoretti has noted, the cycle of images attend carefully to the 'story' of the poem, that is, to the journey of Dante the pilgrim, rather than the narratives presented by the characters Dante encounters. The effect is to lend the journey a certain tangibility, almost a cinematographic quality.[18] The powerful visual quality of the poem did not just appeal to illustrators and book artists: the first feature-length film made in Italy, in 1911, was based on *Inferno*. The *Commedia* continues to inspire modern artists; Monika Beisner (b. 1942), for example, is the first woman to illustrate the poem with a complete cycle of images, inspired by medieval manuscripts and the long, rich visual tradition attendant upon the poem.[19]

[12] Giancarlo Savino, *L'autografo virtuale della 'Commedia'* (Florence: Società Dantesca Italiana, 2000), repr. in his *Dante e dintorni*, ed. Marisa Boschi Rotiroti (Florence: Le Lettere, 2003), pp. 257–265.
[13] See Shaw, 'Editorial Matter', pp. 196–198.
[14] See K. P. Clarke, '*Inferno* 1: Openings and Beginnings', in *Reading Dante with Images: A Visual Lectura Dantis*, ed. Matthew Collins (London: Harvey Miller, 2021), pp. 33–53.
[15] See Lucia Battaglia Ricci, 'Testo e immagini in alcuni manoscritti illustrati della *Commedia*: le pagine d'apertura', in *Studi offerti a Luigi Blasucci dai colleghi e dagli allievi pisani*, ed. Lucio Lugnani, Marco Santagata, and Alfredo Stussi (Lucca: Maria Pacini Fazzi Editore, 1996), pp. 23–49.
[16] A facsimile has been published: Marco Santagata (ed.), *Il manoscritto Egerton 943. Dante Alighieri,* Commedia*: saggi e commenti* (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana fondata da Giovanni Treccani, 2015), while the manuscript may be consulted online at www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Egerton_MS_943.
[17] See Anna Pegoretti, *Indagine su un codice dantesco: la 'Commedia' Egerton 943 della British Library* (Ghezzano (PI): Felici editore, 2014), pp. 259–262; see too Lucia Battaglia Ricci, *Dante per immagini: dalle miniature trecentesche ai giorni nostri* (Turin: Einaudi, 2018), pp. 37–50.
[18] Pegoretti, *Indagine su un codice dantesco*, pp. 124, 131.
[19] See *Die Göttliche Comödie, übersetzt von Karl Vossler, mit farbigen Illustrationen von Monika Beisner* (Leipzig: Faber & Faber, 2001), and compare *Comedy: Translated by Robert & Jean Hollander, illustrated by Monika Beisner* (Verona: Valdonega, 2007), and in Vol. 3, pp. 229–235 the essay by

The *Commedia* enjoyed a flourishing early print tradition, beginning with the edition of Johann Neumeister in Foligno in 1472, followed almost immediately by volumes printed in Mantua and Venice. Subsequent editions appeared in Venice in 1477, in Naples in 1477 and 1478, and in Milan in 1478, while Cristoforo Landino's extensive commentary was published with the text in Florence in 1481. Without doubt, the 1502 edition of Aldus Manutius in Venice is one of the most influential, not just because it was prepared with great textual acumen by no less a figure than Pietro Bembo, but also because its small format in octavo (152 × 95 mm) suggests a kind of pocket book quite unlike anything that had been seen before for the poem. This is a *Commedia* being read almost like a medieval Book of Hours, carried around for frequent, private consultation. Another major moment in the print history of the *Commedia* is the 1595 edition prepared by members of the Accademia della Crusca, which itself had only been founded in 1583 and whose work was to become closely associated with the study of the Italian language.[20]

The *Commedia* continued to be printed frequently in Italy, but it is worth noting that a readership abroad was also establishing itself, and to such an extent that by the early nineteenth century, Italian-language editions were being printed in, for example, the city of London. In 1808, two separate three-volume editions of the *Commedia* appeared, by G. B. Boschini and Romualdo Zotti respectively. Zotti had taught in a girls' school, which perhaps gave him an insight into his British reading public, noting in the preface: 'Ho supposto che il Lettore non sia uno dei più gran Letterati, e che insieme non sia uno di quegli uomini privi di ogni coltura che non hanno mai quasi udito a parlare di Dante' ('I have assumed that the Reader is not among the great *literati*, but at the same time is not one of those wholly uncultured persons who have never, as it

Marina Warner, 'Monika Beisner: Illuminating Stories'. See too Monika Beisner, 'Seven Years from *Inferno* to *Paradiso*', *Deutsches Dante-Jahrbuch*, 96 (2021), 17–23 and Monika Beisner, *Forest of Things: Conversations with Robert Bush* (London: Silva Rerum, 2021), pp. 106–131. For modern illustrations, see the exhibition catalogue Giorgio Bacci (ed.), *Hyper-Modern Dante: Illustrations of Dante throughout the World 1983–2021* (Florence: Fondazione Memofonte–S.P.E.S., 2021).

[20] The Aldine and the Crusca editions are both now available in facsimile reproduction: *Le terze rime di Dante: lo 'nferno e 'l pvrgatorio e 'l paradiso di Dante Alaghieri*, introd. Edoardo R. Barbieri (Florence: Olschki, 2021); and *La Divina Commedia di Dante Alighieri nobile fiorentino, ridotta a miglior lezione dagli Accademici della Crusca* (Florence: Accademia della Crusca, 2000). On the Renaissance reception of Dante, see Simon A. Gilson, *Reading Dante in Renaissance Italy: Florence, Venice, and the Divine Poet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018). See too Anna Pegoretti, 'Early Reception until 1481', and Fabio Camilletti, 'Later Reception from 1481 to the Present', in *The Cambridge Companion to Dante's 'Commedia'*, ed. Barański and Gilson, pp. 245–258, 259–270.

were, heard tell of Dante').[21] That each volume is dedicated to an English lady (the Countess of Lonsdale, the Countess of Dartmouth, and Mrs Pilkington) suggests an avid female readership of the poem. Italians in exile were also crucial to the printing of Dante in London. For example, Giuseppe Mazzini, a key figure in modern Italian political history, had Rolandi print a four-volume edition of the *Commedia* in 1842–1843 with a commentary by the major poet and critic Ugo Foscolo, himself an exile in the city from 1816.[22]

Modern critical editions of the poem are (primarily) based on a small number of early authoritative witnesses. With over 800 manuscripts, the task of studying the textual tradition of the *Commedia* is formidable, perhaps only akin to the philological complexity of establishing the text of the New Testament, or in Middle English studies the text of the great alliterative poem *Piers Plowman*. After a series of important editions by Karl Witte (1862), Edward Moore (1894), Giuseppe Vandelli (1921), and Mario Casella (1923), the problem of establishing the text of the *Commedia* made an enormous leap forward with the monumental edition of Giorgio Petrocchi (1966–1967). In many respects, this remains the authoritative critical edition. In 1995, Antonio Lanza published an edition of the *Commedia* based on a single manuscript (Triv), with very many formal changes in respect of the text of Petrocchi. In 2001, Federico Sanguineti proposed a new edition, boldly claiming that one half of the stemma was expressed by a single manuscript (Urb). This claim has not met with wide acceptance, but the edition certainly provoked a new phase in the study of the text of the *Commedia*.[23] A team of scholars led by Paolo Trovato has embarked upon a new edition based on a much larger selection of manuscripts, with the first volumes appearing in 2022. In many formal respects, it resembles the text of Sanguineti, mainly because it accords a good deal of authority to the northern tradition of manuscripts (such as Urb). In 2010, Prue Shaw published a digital edition of the poem as a CD-ROM, making available

[21] Cited in Nick Havely, *Dante's British Public: Readers and Texts, from the Fourteenth Century to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 138 (with Havely's translation).

[22] See Havely, *Dante's British Public*, pp. 128–153.

[23] For a general account, see Prue Shaw, 'Transmission History', in *The Cambridge Companion to Dante's 'Commedia'*, ed. Barański and Gilson, pp. 229–244, and especially 'Editorial Matter' (at www.dantecommedia.it), pp. 50–129. See too Andrea Canova, 'Il testo della *Commedia* dopo l'edizione Petrocchi', in *Nuove prospettive sulla tradizione della Commedia: seconda serie (2008–2013)*, ed. Tonello and Trovato, pp. 29–45; Marco Veglia, 'Sul testo della *Commedia* (da Casella a Sanguineti)', *Studi e problemi di critica testuale*, 66 (2003), 65–119; and Riccardo Viel, 'Sulla tradizione manoscritta della *Commedia*: metodo e prassi in centocinquant'anni di ricerca', *Critica del testo*, 14 (2011), 459–518.

transcriptions and high-quality images of the most authoritative early manuscripts; this important work became available in a revised second edition, freely available online, marking the anniversary year of 2021. Shaw's extensive editorial introduction sets out in detail the problems of Sanguineti's text, reconfirming the solidity of Petrocchi's edition and its methodological coherence. It is the clearest and most extensive account of the textual tradition of the poem in English and will remain a point of departure for any engaged reader. Finally, another landmark publication marking the anniversary year is the edition of Giorgio Inglese, who after a long task of careful and attentive commentary (published between 2009 and 2016) re-edited the *Commedia* and 'updated' Petrocchi in light of the vast textual scholarship of the previous half-century. The result is an edition that not so much supersedes Petrocchi as sits alongside it.

2

Dante's Italian

As previously noted (p. 3), no autograph of the *Commedia* has yet been identified, which has ramifications not just for establishing the text of the poem, but also for developing a clear understanding of the language of Dante. As such, descriptions of Dante's vernacular remain approximate and must be based on surviving evidence from Florence in the second half of the thirteenth century. The period of writing the poem took place while Dante was in exile in the north of Italy, which also has important implications for the language of the *Commedia*.

Italian as a literary language develops later than the vernaculars of what are now France, Germany, and Britain.[1] Many of these first literary vernacular texts, the so-called *Ritmi* (comprising groups of eight-syllable verses of variable number followed by two or three verses of decasyllables or hendecasyllables), emerge out of a monastic culture, and the first named author in the Italian vernacular is the most famous saint of the European Middle Ages, Francis of Assisi, whose *Laudes creaturarum* dates to *c*.1224.[2] The first lyric work in the vernacular appears at the court of the Holy Roman emperor, Frederick II, and perhaps because of the 'lateness' of Italian, these compositions are sophisticated and highly developed. The so-called Sicilian School seems to have largely dispersed upon the death of the emperor in 1250, but the poetry moved northwards and was avidly read as a literary model. The most important manuscripts of nearly all of this early poetry were produced in Tuscany in the final years of the thirteenth century (or perhaps very first years of the century following), and the poetry has been linguistically adapted for

[1] See K. P. Clarke, 'Italian', in *Literary Beginnings in the European Middle Ages*, ed. Mark Chinca and Christopher Young (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), pp. 203–227.

[2] See Carlo Dionisotti and Cecil Grayson (eds.), *Early Italian Texts*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1965); Arrigo Castellani, *I più antichi testi italiani: edizione e commento* (Bologna: Pàtron, 1976); Vittorio Formentin, *Poesia italiana delle origini* (Rome: Carocci, 2007); and Ludovica Maconi and Mirko Volpi, *Antichi documenti dei volgari italiani* (Rome: Carocci, 2022). In *Paradiso*, Dante has Thomas Aquinas praise Francis of Assisi in the Heaven of the Sun; see ▷*Pd.* 11. 43–72.

Tuscan readers.[3] That is, the Sicilian vernacular ceased to be used, even if traces of it can be felt in the northern, Tuscan literary work of Dante's youth.[4]

By the middle of the thirteenth century, the vernacular had been in use by generations of Florentines for day-to-day communication, as well as for the city's burgeoning economic activity in trade and finance. Indeed, the earliest text in vernacular Florentine is a fragment of a banking account book, dating to 1211, and many of the surviving documents in the Florentine vernacular from the middle of the century are practical rather than literary.[5] The vernacular, however, was also in vigorous use as a literary language, which had developed a wide linguistic register which could accommodate such different poets as the popular Rustico Filippi and the archaizing Dante da Maiano.[6] Florence also had a rich tradition of vernacular translations of the work of Latin authors such as Orosius and Cicero. Brunetto Latini is amongst the preeminent intellectual figures producing *volgarizzamenti* such as the *Rettorica* (*c.*1260), based on Cicero's *De inventione*.[7] Outside Florence, the work of Guittone d'Arezzo and Jacopone da Todi, each in very different ways, exerted an enormous influence for Dante on his developing sense of the language of literature.

Dante's early literary activity in Florence focused on lyric verse, mainly sonnets and canzoni. From surviving correspondence poems exchanged amongst contemporaries (both friends and rivals), it is clear that Dante was in an intense literary dialogue. Though there was no formal 'school', Dante himself will come to use the phrase *Dolce Stil novo* in ▷*Pg.* 24. 57, the 'Sweet New Style', to identify a shared literary endeavour amongst poets such as Guido Cavalcanti and Cino da Pistoia, who tended towards

[3] These manuscripts are: Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS 3793 (V); Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, MS Redi 9 (L); and Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, MS Banco Rari 217 (P). See Lino Leonardi (ed.), *I canzonieri della lirica italiana delle origini*, 4 vols. (Florence: SISMEL Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2001); and the editions in *CLPIO*.

[4] See Ignazio Baldelli, 'Dai siciliani a Dante', in *Storia della lingua italiana*, ed. Luca Serianni and Pietro Trifone, 3 vols. (Turin: G. Einaudi, 1993–1994), i, pp. 581–609.

[5] See *TF*, pp. 3–15; Arrigo Castellani, 'Frammenti d'un libro di conti di banchieri fiorentini del 1211: nuova edizione e commento linguistico' [1958], in his *Saggi di linguistica e filologia italiana e romanza (1946–1976)*, 3 vols. (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 1980), ii, pp. 73–140; and see too *NTF*, and Arrigo Castellani, *La prosa italiana delle origini*, 2 vols. (Bologna: Pàtron, 1982).

[6] For Rustico, see *PD* ii, pp. 353–364; see too Giuseppe Marrani, 'Rustico Filippi, *Sonetti*: edizione critica commentata', *Studi di filologia italiana*, 57 (1999), 33–199; Rustico Filippi, *Sonetti satirici e giocosi*, ed. Silvia Buzzetti Gallarati (Rome: Carocci, 2005) and *Sonetti amorosi e Tenzone*, ed. Silvia Buzzetti Gallarati (Rome: Carocci, 2009). On Dante da Maiano, see *PD* 1, pp. 477–482 and Dante da Maiano, *Rime*, ed. Rosanna Bettarini (Florence: F. Le Monnier, 1969).

[7] See Brunetto Latini, *La Rettorica*, ed. Francesco Maggini, preface by Cesare Segre (Florence: F. Le Monnier, 1968).

a refined style of love poetry in which the beloved is a near-divine figure and the experience of love is one of sublime transcendence.[8] And 'newness' is also built in to the title of Dante's most important early work, dating to *c.*1294, the *Vita nuova*, 'New Life', which combines poems with passages of explicatory, autobiographical prose.

In the first years of exile, Dante began a theoretical reflection on the literary status of the vernacular. Dating to *c.*1303–1305, the *De vulgari eloquentia* ('On Vernacular Eloquence', abbreviated *Dve*) is often described as the first modern work of Romance linguistics.[9] Dante seeks out what he calls an 'illustrious vernacular', a language that soars above the regional, aiming for a form of expression that is pan-peninsular, or 'national' (though it will not be until the nineteenth century that one may politically describe Italy as a 'nation'). One of the most striking features of the *De vulgari eloquentia* is not just its novel theoretical approach, but also its highly practical focus on words, on which words belong to the illustrious vernacular and which do not. These words are for Dante vividly material, provoking all his senses: some are smooth and combed, others are hairy; some are sweet, others bitter (see *Dve* II VII). Dante's evaluation of the quality of the different languages in use in Italy is scrupulous but forceful, and ultimately not even the language of Florence is deemed appropriate.

Precisely why the *Dve* was left unfinished is unknown, but it may well be because Dante had turned his attention to a new work that was clearly going to occupy all of his energies. One does not need to read much of the *Commedia* to realize that Dante breaks virtually every stylistic 'rule' set out in the *Dve*, and so the poem represents an ideological break with the Latin treatise. Where the *Dve* is concerned with avoiding the local, such as the Florentine adverb *introcque* 'meanwhile' (*Dve* I XIII 2), the *Commedia* instead will find a space to accommodate it, in *Inf.* 20. 130, *Si mi parlava, andavamo introcque* 'Thus he spoke to me, and we went meanwhile'.[10] Indeed, Dante makes Hell a space that might well be described as 'local' and in *Inf.* 7. 1 and *Inf.* 31. 67 even furnishes his readers with its local, demonic language as spoken by Pluto and Nimrod. Dante has thus created a language in the *Commedia* in which readers

[8] See Patrick Boyde, *Dante's Style in His Lyric Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971).
[9] See Dante Alighieri, *De vulgari eloquentia*, ed. and trans. Steven Botterill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
[10] See {84} and {187}.