

U.S., Irish, and Scottish book cultures. His book implicitly urges scholars to think about how the book trades as legal and economic ventures were as much a part of the Anglophone colonial system as the more familiar commodities of sugar and cotton, even when the U.S. was no longer colonial. And because novels transmitted ideas in addition to goods, they offered ways of reading that system which were not always in accord with instrumental and local politics and considerations. Rezek repeats at multiple points that the Romantic ideal of transcendent literature was as much a philosophy as a pragmatic strategy for a provincial marketplace that needed to appeal to London. His book highlights that future work should examine how colonialisms are bounded by economic and aesthetic patterns, not simply revolutions and political documents. While at one point he states that responses to colonialism and the “uneven distribution of cultural capitalism” are distinct, his book suggests that they are in fact inextricably linked (64). The American Revolution did not produce a clean separation between colonial and national periods. In being persuasive about the long persistence of American provinciality, Rezek’s book argues against solely nationalist approaches to book history and textual cultures. As a result, his introductory reminder that his project “does not directly address the print culture of the early black Atlantic” (a subject he has begun addressing elsewhere) underscores the need to explore how the economics and legalities of the book trade not only facilitated the exchange of an aesthetics of provinciality, but also an aesthetics of racism and imperialism throughout the century and beyond (20).

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TODOROVIC, JELENA, *Dante and the Dynamics of Textual Exchange: Authorship, Manuscript Culture, and the Making of the Vita Nova*. New York: Fordham, 2016. ISBN 978-0-8232-7023-1. Pp. 248. Hardback \$55.00.

Jelena Todorovic’s *Dante and the Dynamics of Textual Exchange: Authorship, Manuscript Culture and the Making of the Vita Nova* paints a detailed tableau of the young Dante’s received culture of reading and writing, and is a welcome contribution on the subject of Dante’s largely undocumented literary formation.

In chapter one Todorovic argues that Boethius’ *Consolation of Philosophy* is a significant yet underrecognized philosophical source for the *Vita Nova*.

While the *Consolation* was used as an intermediate grammar text in Florentine schools, she argues that Dante mines it for philosophical substance. His poetic shift to the self-sufficient *stilo de la loda*—aiming to praise Beatrice without recompense—seems rooted in the *Consolation*'s conclusion that secure happiness must be independent of fortune, and can be found in the philosophical pursuit of truth. But Todorovic risks overstatement in claiming that “through Boethius Dante became aware of the insignificance of transitory things” (65); here she might consider the poet's other sources on stoicism or religious praise poetry. This does not, however, mar her reading of the *Vita Nova* as a “consolation of poetry” (60), in which Dante's roles as author, glossator, compiler, and scribe create a “‘manual’ for writing poetry in that it returns over and over again to the inventive process” (57); the grieving poet's “search for [. . .] consolation is parallel to the creation of the account of literary history” (65).

Chapter two examines Dante as scribe and commentator, proposing that the *Vita Nova*'s prose illuminates Dante's pedagogical formation and represents an important first intervention in self-authorization. Todorovic demonstrates that the list of poets appearing in Dante's discussion of literary history (VN par. 16 [XXV]) and later in the *Commedia*'s Limbo are those poetic *auctores* whose texts were used to teach grammar and interpretation in Florentine schools. She argues that Dante distances himself from his contemporaries and aligns himself with this canon worthy of exegetical interpretation. To that end, Dante weaves an *accessus ad auctores*, traditionally used to introduce canonical texts and Scripture in the medieval classroom, into the presentation of his own poems. Todorovic argues that “we should understand the prose and the whole of the *Vita Nova* as a defense of [Dante's] intentions and a clarification of the circumstances that surrounded the composition of the poems” (82); it theorizes “how [poetry] is conceived, how it is produced, how it is part of a wider and longer intellectual context in history” (95).

Dante's scribal and exegetical personas are again addressed in Chapter three, this time taking up his likely influences in Old Occitan poetry. While there exists no certain evidence that Dante had direct contact with Occitan verse, Todorovic's argument for Dante's exposure to influential manuscripts in Florence leaves little room for doubt. First, she accounts for the mingling of the Occitan, Sicilian, and Tuscan traditions during Dante's poetic formation in Florence. She notes that the prose *vidas* (lives) and *razos* (accounts) accompanying Occitan verse in Italy functioned as *accessus ad auctores* and mediated between the cultures of the Occitan diaspora in Italy and of the Italian courts where the poetry was performed. The

vidas and *razos* eventually circulated in manuscripts independently of the poetry, as proto-novellas that narrated literary history, as they recounted the life events that prompted poets to write. Two key Florentine manuscripts in Todorovic's study incorporate a *cobla* from the lyric into each *vida* and *razo*, anticipating Dante's prosimtrum, while also giving him a precedent for the exegesis of vernacular lyric. In Dante's case, it is the author himself who, in language reminiscent of the *vidas* and *razos*, desires to "explain in prose" (*aprire per prosa*) his poems in *ragioni* (accounts, *razos*). Todorovic's most striking and original argument is that the paratextual elements of the Florentine Occitan manuscripts—the emphasis of exegetical prose through rubrication and spatial arrangement, and the de-emphasis of poetry through truncation—indicate that the compilers were highly attuned to the role of the juxtaposition of prose and verse on the page in telling a story. Here Dante has a source for the temporal split between the two modes of writing which, as a literary device, allows "insight into the poetic process: what triggers it and how it develops" (127).

Todorovic's final chapter examines a group of poetic anthologies that reflect the formal, aesthetic, and political tastes of specific poetic communities in Dante's Florence. Dante's innovations as a compiler are both "poetic, reflected in the change of the subject matter [his shift to praising Beatrice]; and material, pertaining to mixing literary genres and introduction of prose" (137). Yet this far into her study, her interrogation of the "wide range of Italian literary and scribal forms and genres" (137) informing Dante's choice of prosimtrum no longer seems to be a fresh question, and the chapter might have been better positioned as the book's introduction. Indeed, here we find the best articulation of Dante's five roles (protagonist, compiler, author, scribe, and commentator) and some nuanced readings demonstrating how Dante combines these roles to thematize the materiality of textual transmission. The technical terms of the study pertaining to genre, form, and the entire process of bookmaking also receive their clearest treatment in these final pages, which make it a good place to begin, especially for a reader unfamiliar with the *Vita Nova*.

As Todorovic acknowledges, in lieu of textual proof of which works and codices Dante encountered, scholars must adopt a hermeneutic approach to teasing out the many threads woven through a text as complex as the *Vita Nova*. She is most successful and convincing in the second and third chapters' analyses of the manuscript cultures of Dante's Florence. Here, she offers a compelling narrative for certain aspects of the *Vita Nova*—the apparent pedantry and repetition of the commentator's interventions, the oddly-placed literary history at the heart of the work, the temporal and

spatial dynamics emerging through the prosimetrum and the multitasking authorial persona—that continue to puzzle modern readers, specialists and novices alike.

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