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Archaeology of the *Tre Corone*: Dante, Petrarca, and Boccaccio in Benvenuto da Imola's Commentary on the *Divine Comedy*

LUCA FIORENTINI

One of the oldest documents—maybe the oldest—in which the names of Petrarch and Boccaccio are explicitly associated with Dante's is a commentary on the *Divine Comedy* written by a Neapolitan interpreter who lived in the fourteenth century: Guglielmo Maramauro.

Most likely born in 1318, Maramauro was a member of the Neapolitan aristocracy. In the first part of his life, he worked as a functionary for the Angevin Monarchy; thanks to this position, he was able to travel throughout Italy and also visit foreign countries including Germany, Hungary, Crete, and England. In the last years of his life, he worked at the University (*Studium*) of Naples, where he taught courses on Thomas Aquinas's oeuvre. Maramauro was still teaching at the University of Naples when he died. We do not know the exact date of his death, but it was probably between 1379 and 1383.¹

Roughly ten years earlier, in 1369, Maramauro began his most important work, the *Expositione sopra l'«Inferno» di Dante Alligieri*, which he completed between 1373 and 1374. In the prologue to his commentary on Dante's *Inferno*, Maramauro first provides concise information concerning the structure of the poem and discusses the origin of his own hermeneutical activity, quoting from the previous commentaries on Dante's *Comedy* that helped him write his own. Then he mentions some

figures who, he says, helped him to complete the “difficult task”—“la dura impresa”—that is, the commentary on Dante’s poem:

E tanto con l’aiuto de questi exposituri, quanto con l’aiuto de misser Gioan Boccaccio e de misser Francesco Petrarca [. . .] io me mossi a volere prendere questa dura impresa.²

Here Maramauro asserts that Boccaccio and Petrarch helped him to interpret Dante: “I began this difficult task with the help of Giovanni Boccaccio and Francesco Petrarca.” The question is how we should understand this assertion.

It is highly unlikely that Petrarch volunteered himself to provide expertise on Dante’s poem. Obviously he would have been able to do it, but it is well known that Petrarch expressed an aversion to Dante, declaring that he had never studied Dante’s poem—“nunquam librum illius habuerim” (“I have never possessed his book”), to quote the famous epistle *Fam.* 21.15, addressed to Boccaccio in 1359.³ Nevertheless, Petrarch and Maramauro surely knew each other. Petrarch sent two letters to Maramauro, the epistles *Sen.* 11.5 and 15.4, in which he seems to display love and affection for his correspondent (especially in *Sen.* 15.4).

Concerning Boccaccio, we know that Maramauro had quite a close relationship with him. Above all, it is highly probable that Maramauro attended the *Lectura Dantis* given by Boccaccio between 1373 and 1374 in Florence, in the church of Santo Stefano in Badia; this is demonstrated by the fact that in Maramauro’s commentary we can find many points of contact with Boccaccio’s exposition on the *Divine Comedy*. Since Maramauro could not have had access to the written draft of Boccaccio’s commentary, which was published many years after Maramauro’s death, these textual contacts in all likelihood derived from the notes he took during Boccaccio’s course.⁴

A thorough investigation of the citations from Petrarch and Boccaccio in Maramauro’s commentary on Dante has never been attempted. It is thus possible that, when Maramauro writes that Petrarch and Boccaccio helped him in interpreting Dante, he actually means that he used Petrarch and Boccaccio’s *works* as instruments for the interpretation of Dante’s *Comedy*. At this stage of the research, however, we must take as our starting point this fact: just a few decades after Dante’s death, Maramauro mentioned Petrarch and Boccaccio as the most important authors

to consult in order to read and understand Dante correctly. For the very first time—at least in an explicit way—Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio are mentioned in the same sentence. Maramauro's commentary therefore offers one of the first testimonies of a process that would culminate a few decades later in the creation of the canon of the *Tre Corone*.

Studying the genesis and use of a literary canon means studying the genesis and use of a symbolic form, one that can be adapted according to different needs in different eras. The complex history of the canonization of the *Tre Corone* in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries is well known; less well known are the very first steps of this process and their immediate implications.

To illuminate these first steps, let us focus on three main questions: 1. What are the elements of continuity among the works of Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio that prompted those earliest readers to link the three authors? 2. In what way did collective awareness at the end of the fourteenth century concerning the authority attributed to Petrarch and Boccaccio influence the intellectuals of that period? 3. Above all, how did Petrarch and Boccaccio's authority influence the intellectuals directly interested in the first member of the triad, Dante—i.e., the first interpreters of Dante's *Comedy*? I propose here a case study, one which will obviously not solve the problem but, rather, highlight its ambiguities; I hope, however, that it also highlights the interest and the vitality, so to speak, of this research project.

As stated above, Guglielmo Maramauro likely participated in the course on the *Divine Comedy* Boccaccio held in Florence in 1373 and 1374. Another important scholar of that period was also present, listening to Boccaccio in the church of Santo Stefano: Benvenuto Rambaldi da Imola. We have little information about Benvenuto's life. He was born in Imola around 1330, and in 1364 he wrote his first book, the *Romuleon*, a compendium of Roman history. The year after, he went to Avignon as an ambassador on behalf of the municipality of Imola, asking for Pope Urban V's support against the Alidosi government. The diplomatic mission, however, was unsuccessful: the Alidosi became imperial vicars and Benvenuto, like Dante, was forever exiled from his town. Benvenuto then moved to Bologna, where he held courses on Dante's *Comedy* and on Valerius Maximus's *Memorable Deeds and Sayings*. In 1375, he was forced to abandon Bologna suddenly as well; we do not know why.⁵ He then moved to Ferrara, where he remained, under

the protection of Nicholas II d'Este, until the end of his life. In Ferrara, Benvenuto taught a second course on Dante's poem as well and worked on drafting the written version of his commentary on the *Divine Comedy*. In the same period, he also gave public lectures on Virgil's *Bucolics* and *Georgics*, on Lucan, and on Petrarch's *Bucolicum Carmen*. In his final years, Benvenuto composed another compendium of Roman history: the *Libellus Augustalis*. He is believed to have died in 1388.⁶

As we can see, Benvenuto was a scholar interested in both classical culture and vernacular poetry and who, during his life, experienced different political and social contexts, communal as well as courtly, along a trajectory with some similarities to that of Dante. Both Boccaccio and Petrarch are frequently mentioned in Benvenuto's commentary on the *Divine Comedy*—after all, Benvenuto knew both of them personally. He had a friendship with Boccaccio: this is demonstrated by the numerous anecdotes in Benvenuto's commentary that reaffirm the image of a relationship based on genuine affection.

Benvenuto's relationship with Petrarch was less warm. The two men met each other more than once and also carried on a correspondence, but it is quite clear that Benvenuto never had feelings of affection for Petrarch comparable to those he had for Boccaccio. Petrarch did not seem to consider Benvenuto a particularly important interlocutor, either. The letter Benvenuto sent to Petrarch is lost, but we have Petrarch's response: the epistle *Sen.* 15.11, a text that, while interesting due to its topic (the value of truth in poetry), is also quite cold, even somewhat dismissive, in its tone.⁷

If in Maramauro's commentary Petrarch and Boccaccio's names are simply juxtaposed with Dante's, in Benvenuto's commentary—somewhat close, chronologically, to Maramauro's—it is possible to perceive the full awareness of the role these three authors have taken on in the landscape of “new poetry.” Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio are often discussed together as the three great “modern” poets. Let us look at a first example, a passage from Benvenuto's gloss on *Purgatorio* 11.94–96:

Giotto is mentioned and commended by two other poets from Florence as well, Petrarch and Boccaccio. The latter writes that Giotto was such an excellent painter, for his genius and his technique, that there was nothing in all that Nature creates which he did not depict faithfully enough for human eyes to be deceived, taking for reality that which was but depicted.⁸

Benvenuto says that not only has Dante exalted Giotto, but Petrarch and Boccaccio as well. Anyone who has read Boccaccio's *Decameron* should recognize something familiar in this passage: Benvenuto is accurately translating the *incipit* of novella five of the Sixth Day of the *Decameron* ("Giotto ebbe uno ingegno di tanta eccellenza . . .").⁹

Benvenuto remarks on the occasional contact points between the literary works of Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio, but he also conveys a clear idea about the fields in which each of these three authors excels. Concerning poetic creation, Dante is without question the greatest in his eyes: the author of a "universal" work of poetry in which every aspect of knowledge is developed in perfect poetic forms (*convenientissimae representationes*) and that, more importantly, finds its place within a solid moral perspective:

No other poet knew how to praise and admonish better than Dante, I mean in a most excellent and effective way. (. . .) He praised virtue and virtuous people, he admonished vice and vicious people. He was a perfect poet and he used poetic images in an extremely appropriate way, as is clear to anyone who reads his poem: in every place, his poem contains admirable figurations.¹⁰

Petrarch is also frequently defined by Benvenuto as a "poet"—*modernus poeta* or *novissimus poeta*—even though Benvenuto was familiar with only a small part of Petrarch's poetic production: he read the *Bucolicum Carmen* and wrote a commentary on it, as I have discussed elsewhere.¹¹ He also knew of the existence of *Africa* but does not seem to have read it, and he did not seem to know either the *Canzoniere*¹² or the *Triumphs*.¹³ From his perspective, Petrarch is no more than the author of some Latin treatises: Petrarch is a "rhetor" more than he is a poet.

Benvenuto's gloss on *Paradiso* 1.34–36 is very explicit in this sense. Here is Dante:

Poca favilla gran fiamma seconda:
forse di retro a me con miglior voci
si pregherà perché Cirra risponda.¹⁴

Dante closes the invocation to Apollo by introducing a note of modesty: "maybe after me," he writes, "there will be someone who will pray to Apollo with a better voice, with better lines." Let us read Benvenuto's gloss on this passage:

[. . .] it is as if Dante says: ‘perhaps there will soon be a poet more eloquent than I, who will be able to move Apollo better than I’; and Dante says *forse* (maybe), expressing a doubt. You can observe that Dante partially says the truth: indeed, in the same period in which Dante was in full bloom, the new poet Petrarch was just blossoming. Petrarch was actually more prolific and eloquent than Dante. But certainly if Petrarch was a greater rhetor than Dante, Dante was a better poet than Petrarch. And this is easily demonstrated by this holy poem.¹⁵

While Petrarch is overall a more prolific and eloquent writer (“copiosior in dicendo”), his poetic work still cannot compete with Dante’s. Benvenuto quickly closes the discussion: “ut facile patet ex isto sacro poemate” (“this is easily demonstrated by this holy poem”), there is nothing left to add. It is important to underscore that Benvenuto makes no reference to the issue of the *language* of the poetry: the fact that Dante’s text was written in vernacular, an important topic of discussion in his time, seems to be of little importance to Benvenuto. I will come back to this point because it is pivotal.

Just as Benvenuto prefers Dante to Petrarch, he prefers Boccaccio to Petrarch as well. More than textual analysis is at work in this case: Benvenuto considered Boccaccio his teacher, and repeats the expression “venerabilis praeceptor meus” (“my venerable teacher”) several times in his commentary:

1. *ad Inf.* 2.10–12: [Petrarch] scribit ad venerabilem praeceptorem meum Boccacium de Certaldo [. . .].
2. *ad Par.* 15.97–99: [. . .] dum audirem venerabilem praeceptorem meum Boccacium de Certaldo legentem istum nobilem poetam in dicta ecclesia [. . .].
3. *ad Par.* 16.49–51: Hic siquidem Iohannes Boccacius, verius bucca aurea, venerabilis praeceptor meus, diligentissimus cultor et familiarissimus nostri auctoris, ibi [in Certaldo] pulcra opera edidit [. . .].
4. *ad Par.* 22.73–75: Et volo hic ad clariorem intelligentiam huius literae referre illud quod narrabat mihi, iocose, venerabilis praeceptor meus Boccacius de Certaldo [. . .].

For Benvenuto, Boccaccio was, however, not only a teacher but also a great author: the author of the *Decameron*, in his words a *pulcerrimus* book (“a very beautiful book”), which Benvenuto employed frequently in his commentary on Dante’s *Comedy*.¹⁶ Benvenuto’s interest in and admiration for the *Decameron* also explains another revealing expression he used to describe Boccaccio: “curiosus inquisitor omnium delectabilium

historiarum” (“an attentive investigator of all charming stories”). It is interesting to note that Benvenuto uses the same expression to define Dante: “Dantes curiosissimus investigator rerum memorandarum et modernorum,” “curiosissimus indagator poeta Dantes.” (“Dante, a very inquiring investigator of memorable and modern things”, “Dante, a poet and a very inquiring investigator”). Both Dante and Boccaccio, then, are great “narrators”: they are both capable of telling memorable stories of their own times, and of transmitting those stories in useful and delightful forms.

The few passages that we have seen offer quite a clear picture. The unconditional admiration for Dante and the affection and high esteem for Boccaccio relegate Petrarch to a secondary position in Benvenuto’s eyes: Dante and Boccaccio are great narrators, while Petrarch excels only in the composition of treatises (“Dantes fuit maior poeta ipso Petrarcha”). In fact, according to Benvenuto, Dante and Boccaccio possess higher artistic and intellectual stature than Petrarch. However, if we more deeply examine the concrete influence Petrarch and Boccaccio exerted on Benvenuto’s interpretation of the *Divine Comedy*, we realize that things are not exactly as they first appear.

I will discuss and analyze two examples—a small but adequate number, I hope—to demonstrate how Benvenuto’s interpretation of the *Divine Comedy* is concretely influenced by his ongoing inner dialogue with Petrarch and Boccaccio. These examples will provide a general idea about the ways in which Benvenuto’s relationship with Boccaccio and Petrarch—and with their literary works—has a decisive role in the analysis of some of the fundamental aspects of Dante’s poem, such as the reason the *Divine Comedy* was written and the form Dante used to convey its contents for the benefit of his readers.

Let us start with Boccaccio. As we have seen, for Benvenuto, Boccaccio serves as a teacher and a guide. And he is a guide especially in the interpretation of Dante’s work, thanks to his course on the *Divine Comedy* (“[. . .] dum audirem venerabilem praeceptorem meum Boccacium de Certaldo legentem istum nobilem poetam in dicta ecclesia [. . .]”, “while I was listening to my venerable teacher reading this noble poet in the church I mentioned above [. . .]”). Like Maramauro, Benvenuto was not familiar with the written version of Boccaccio’s commentary on Dante, which was only published after Benvenuto’s death. But Benvenuto knew and quoted another important work that Boccaccio dedicated

to Dante, the biographical *Trattatello in laude di Dante*. Benvenuto knew both the first and the second drafts of the *Trattatello*, but he relied especially on the first, which dates back to 1351–1353. A table with a list of quotations from the *Trattatello* in Benvenuto’s commentary has been published by Luca Carlo Rossi;¹⁷ I reproduce his list below, though I have lengthened it by including two more occurrences (points 1 and 10):

Section of Benvenuto’s commentary	Content	Quality of the quotation (explicit or implicit)	Draft of the <i>Trattatello</i>
1 Introduction; <i>accessus, intentio auctoris</i>	Why Dante wrote the <i>Comedy</i>	Implicit	First draft, § 176
2 Preface; <i>excursus</i> about poetry and poets	The dream of Bella degli Abati, Dante’s mother	Implicit	First draft, §§ 16–18 and 207–228
3 <i>Inf.</i> 2.7–9	Moral and physical portrait of Dante	Implicit	First draft, §§ 111–113
4 <i>Inf.</i> 2.10–12	Very first draft in Latin of the <i>Divine Comedy</i>	Implicit	First draft, §§ 190–192
5 <i>Inf.</i> 10.43–48	Dante’s Ghibellinism	Explicit	First draft, § 170
6 <i>Inf.</i> 15.70–72	Origins of Dante’s family	Explicit	Second draft, § 9
7 <i>Purg.</i> 17.13–18	Dante finds an interesting book in Siena and reads it over the course of many hours	Implicit	First draft, §§ 121–122
8 <i>Purg.</i> 30.34–39	Dante meets Beatrice for the first time	Implicit	First draft, §§ 30–38
9 <i>Purg.</i> 30.127–132	Dante is desperate after Beatrice’s death	Explicit	First draft, §§ 40–46
10 <i>Par.</i> 24.46–51	In Paris, Dante takes part in many <i>disputationes</i>	Implicit	First draft, § 123
11 <i>Par.</i> 30.133–138	Dante’s death (burial and epitaph)	Implicit	First draft, §§ 86–91

It is not surprising, looking at this table, that the *Trattatello* is used nine times out of eleven to supply information about Dante’s life (for example, case 10, where Benvenuto adopts—and then redeploys for his own purposes—the information that Dante spent a period of time studying in Paris). In cases 1 and 2, the reference to the *Trattatello* serves a different function, a strictly hermeneutic one: Benvenuto uses it to help explain the fundamental meaning of Dante’s poem, and especially

to clarify how—that is, in what form—the fundamental meaning of Dante’s poem is transmitted to readers.

We can consider the second case closely: the dream of Bella degli Abati, Dante’s mother. This is an important passage of the *Trattatello* because it contains a general reflection on the formal structure of the *Divine Comedy* and insists on the allegorical dimension of Dante’s language, a conceptual point to which Boccaccio returns often. Both in the *Trattatello* and in the *Esposizioni sopra la «Commedia»* (written twenty years after the *Trattatello*), Boccaccio claims that Dante wrote the *Comedy* in order to be understood by a select audience. The poem, therefore, deliberately hides its deeper meanings under the mantle of a beautiful tale: only those who have sufficient intelligence and knowledge are able to lift this mantle and reach the truth beneath.¹⁸

Dante’s mother’s dream explains this concept through a series of images. Boccaccio says that during her pregnancy, Bella degli Abati dreamed of giving birth to her son, Dante, at the foot of a laurel tree. In the dream, the baby eats the laurel’s berries and quickly grows up to become a shepherd; the shepherd then disappears and a peacock appears in his place. In Boccaccio’s interpretation, the peacock in the dream represents the *Divine Comedy*.¹⁹ According to Boccaccio, Dante’s poem supports this comparison for four main reasons:

[221] It seems that the peacock has, among other attributes, four notable ones: the first is his angelic plumage with its one hundred eyes; the second are his ugly feet and silent step; the third is his voice, which is most terrible to hear; the fourth and the last is his sweet-smelling and incorruptible flesh.²⁰

Let us consider how Boccaccio interprets three of these four elements: that is, the angelic plumage (1), the ugly feet (2), and the incorruptible flesh (3):

1. Angelic plumage: “[224–225] The feathers with which this body is covered I take to mean the beauty of the unique narrative which appears on the literal surface of the *Comedy*: for example, how Dante descended to Hell and saw the structure of the place and the various conditions of the inhabitants [. . .]. Truly, then, the flesh of our peacock is covered with an angelic plumage.”
2. Ugly feet: “[226] In the same manner the ugly feet of the peacock [. . .] conform perfectly to our author’s *Comedy*. For since the whole body seems to be supported by the feet, so too, at first sight, it appears that every written

work is supported by the spoken word [*'il modo del parlare'*, which we can perhaps translate better as 'natural language']. The vernacular that props up every part of the *Comedy* is ugly in comparison with the elegant and masterful literary style that every other serious poet employs."

3. Incorruptible flesh: "[222] I say that the profound meaning of our *Comedy* is symbolically similar to the flesh of the peacock, because whether you give a moral or theological meaning [= allegorical] to any part of the book that you like most, its truth remains simple and immutable."²¹

Points 1 and 3 show the traditional dialectic between literal and allegorical senses of a text. The angelic feathers—the external part, the surface of the body of the peacock—represent the literal sense ("the beauty of the unique narrative"); the flesh of the peacock, hidden by the angelic feathers, represents the allegorical meaning. In other words, the truth of the *Divine Comedy* is entirely hidden by an external story that is original and beautiful but essentially false ("for example, how Dante descended to Hell and saw the structure of the place [. . .]").

Why was Boccaccio so interested in underlining the allegorical dimension of the *Divine Comedy*, the hidden meanings of Dante's poem? It is very likely that Boccaccio's interpretation was a sort of response to Petrarch's devaluation of Dante. Or, rather, it was an attempt to adapt Dante's *Comedy* to the criteria that had been elaborated by Petrarch in order to define, and to defend, "high poetry." This effort faced at least one major obstacle: Petrarch's criteria were based on a linguistic prerequisite—the absolute superiority of Latin over the vernacular—that could do nothing but exclude Dante's *Comedy* from the "pantheon" of the greatest literary works.

In his *Trattatello*, Boccaccio repeats what Petrarch had written about poetic language in the fourth letter of the tenth book of the *Familiars*.²² High poetry, Petrarch had claimed, must be written "in a style far remote from common and public speech," a style that "possesses a certain artfulness, exquisiteness and novelty" ("non vulgari forma sed artificiosa quadam et exquisita et nova fieri oportuit"). And Boccaccio repeats: "[131] [. . .] all this could not be done in a vulgar or ordinary form of speech, but in a way that was artistic, processed, and novel." As a keen reader of Petrarch, Boccaccio was prompted to admit—even though he was probably not entirely convinced—that the language of the *Comedy* is, as vernacular, an "ugly" language. (As we have seen,

Dante's vernacular corresponds, in Bella degli Abati's dream, to the "ugly" feet of the peacock.)

So how could a text written in an "ugly" and popular language be "ennobled"? Boccaccio's solution consists in claiming that this text is only *apparently* "popular": while easily accessible because of its language, its concepts are far less accessible, and are high, noble, and comprehensible only to those with adequate knowledge and intelligence. In other words, Boccaccio's insistence on the allegorical dimension of Dante's *Comedy* compensates for the "awkwardness" related to the fact that the *Comedy* was written in vernacular, "a plebeian or common style of speech" ("plebeio o pubblico stilo").

What does Benvenuto think of this idea? Let us read his adaptation of Bella degli Abati's dream—based on the dream's description in Boccaccio's *Trattatello*—and in particular his reflection on the symbolic value of the details of this vision:

1. Angelic plumage: "(T)he peacock has a very beautiful plumage, which dresses and adorns his flesh (. . .): we can say the same for the literal sense of this poem, which adorns the concepts with different rhetorical decorations."²³
2. Ugly feet: "(T)he peacock has ugly feet (. . .): we can say the same for the style of this poem, which sustains the subject matter and which can be considered ugly compared to Latin but in its own genre is the most beautiful of all and, moreover, is better suited to modern intellects."²⁴
3. Incorruptible flesh: "(W)e can say the same for the fundamental sense of this book, which is fragrant and delightful in all its parts, in the surface as well as in the sentence, because it contains a simple and incorruptible truth."²⁵

Almost everything changes in Benvenuto's rewriting. Let us start with the "ugly feet" of the peacock. According to Benvenuto, the language of Dante's *Comedy* is not objectively "ugly," as Boccaccio admitted under Petrarch's influence, even though it may *seem* ("videtur") ugly if compared to Latin ("stylus [. . .] literalis"). However, Benvenuto claims it is not at all ugly, both because it excels in its genre and because it uses the language that is best suited to the present ways of thinking ("magis conformis ingeniis modernorum"). The "angelic feathers" do not correspond, in Benvenuto's version, to the story—to the fiction of the literal sense, as opposed to the truth of the allegory—but rather

simply represent the rhetorical decoration that adorns the versification (“variis floribus et diversis coloribus”); Benvenuto completely omits the “unique narrative” mentioned by Boccaccio (“how Dante descended to Hell and saw the structure of the place [. . .]”).

The most significant change, however, concerns the image of the “incorruptible flesh” of the peacock. As we know, Boccaccio identified this with the allegorical sense of the *Divine Comedy*—the hidden meaning, “moral or theological.” According to Boccaccio the truth lies only in this sense, in this “hidden meat,” not in the surface of the text. Meanwhile, in Benvenuto’s version, the truth of the *Divine Comedy* is to be found at both levels, both in the literal sense (“superficialiter”) and in the “conceptual” one (“sententialiter”). The distinction between letter and allegory is thus lost. According to Benvenuto, Dante’s *Comedy* basically obscures nothing: its truth is immediately transmitted to the reader, residing as it does in the literal sense—the surface—of the text. This means, in other words, that in Benvenuto da Imola’s opinion, Dante’s *Comedy* is not an allegorical poem: it is a text that contains some allegories but does not make allegorical language its typical mode of expression.²⁶

Benvenuto’s commentary describes Dante’s representational style as clear and highly intelligible. This evaluation was antithetical to that of Boccaccio—and much less “elitist.” In a brief gloss on *Inferno* 9.54, Benvenuto writes, “I would be very surprised if those who have pleasure in reading this poem do not become better people in their lives”.²⁷ Anyone who reads the *Divine Comedy*, in other words, derives an immediate ethical profit.

In essence, Benvenuto da Imola betrays his complete extraneity to one of the fundamental principles of Petrarch’s reflection on poetry and on poetic forms, a principle widely accepted and emphasized by humanists as well, from Albertino Mussato to Giovanni del Virgilio and Coluccio Salutati: that high poetry must address a select audience.²⁸ A passage from Petrarch’s *Invective contra medicum*, written in 1352, illustrates this:

Poets [. . .] strive to adorn the truths [. . .] with beautiful veils. In this way, the truth eludes the ignorant masses, of which you are “the very dregs.” But for perceptive and diligent readers, it is just as delightful to discover as it is difficult to find.²⁹

To undermine Petrarch's disapproval, Boccaccio tried to transform Dante into an author who was perfectly in compliance with these principles. The result was a portrait of Dante as a sort of hermetic poet, as well as the confirmation of Petrarch's interpretative framework. Benvenuto rejects this hermeneutical line of thinking and the idea of poetry behind it. To do this, he corrects his teacher: while he quotes Boccaccio's text, the *Trattatello*, he completely changes—even overturns—its meanings.

The rejection of Petrarch's reflection on poetic forms does not, however, definitively end the dialogue between Benvenuto and Petrarch. According to Benvenuto, Dante's *Comedy* is essentially a great catalogue of exempla, of morally meaningful stories, all of whose meanings are explicit and immediately available. All the souls that Dante meets during his journey embody either a vice or a virtue without ambiguity, thus offering a clear moral teaching.

Yet the exemplary stories collected by Dante in his *Comedy* are sometimes quite problematic. Let us consider the case of Canto 27 of the *Inferno*, dominated by an important contemporary character, Guido da Montefeltro. In a gloss from the commentary on the canto, Benvenuto writes (*ad Inf.* 27.16–23):

[. . .] every day I find men saying: 'Why did Dante mention this modern man or this modern episode? He would have done better to write about the illustrious men of ancient times.'³⁰

Benvenuto's commentary contains many references to the opinions of commentators that do not correspond to the texts to which we have access,³¹ and this is one of those cases: in none of the extant commentaries on Dante's *Comedy* can we find a similar critique, and thus we do not know who the "homines" mentioned by Benvenuto are. The criticism directed at Dante—of not looking sufficiently at the great examples of the past but, instead, preferring the stories of obscure modern characters—seems to come from an intellectual environment ideologically close to early humanism. But in the texts of the two humanist authors Benvenuto knows best, namely Giovanni del Virgilio and Coluccio Salutati, nothing like this appears. In fact, when Giovanni del Virgilio invites Dante to write a Latin poem, he specifically suggests that Dante concentrate on events of the recent past (*Edl.* 1.25–34): the (tragic) Italian

campaign of Emperor Henry VII (concluded in 1313); the victory in Montecatini of Ugucione della Faggiuola against the Guelph coalition led by Florence (1315); the attack by Cangrande della Scala in Padua (1319); and the military campaign by Roberto d'Angiò against Genoa (1318).³²

What we may suppose is that the criticism that Benvenuto records as a gloss can be traced back to Petrarch, even if indirectly. There are various texts by Petrarch that support this perspective. I will mention just one of them: Letter 4 from Book VI of the *Familiars*, a letter that Petrarch sent to Cardinal Giovanni Colonna in 1342 entitled “What examples are worth is shown by examples” (“Quid exempla valeant exemplis ostenditur”). Colonna had expressed a very specific criticism against Petrarch: he accused him of too frequently using the examples of the ancients in his writings. Petrarch fired back, saying that the examples of the ancients are a great instrument to fight the irremediable mediocrity of the present.³³

The distinction between “illustrious ancients” and “mediocre contemporaries” conveys a clear-cut idea of what the specific tasks, objects, and aims of literature are. Literature must make current the great virtues which, resisting the passage of time, have already proved their exemplarity. Re-enacting these virtues, bringing them to life in the present, is the specific task of literature:

For indeed if statues of outstanding men can kindle noble minds with desire for imitation [. . .], how much more should virtue itself directly bring this about, since it would be reflected not in shiny marble but in direct examples? To be sure, the outlines of bodies are contained more distinctly in statues while descriptions of deeds and costumes, as well as the condition of minds, are undoubtedly expressed more fully and perfectly by words than by anvils. Therefore I feel that it would not be improper to state that statues reflect images of persons while examples reflect images of virtues.³⁴

Here Petrarch not only claims that literature is the best artistic medium for transmitting the virtues of the ancients, he also implies that any aim besides this one would be inferior. The present—contemporaneity—is to be understood as a non-viable space or subject for literature. Dominated by passions and contingencies, chaotic and incomprehensible, the present should in fact be forgotten by artists altogether:

[. . .] while I write I become eagerly engaged with our greatest writers in whatever way I can and willingly forget those among whom my unlucky star destined me to live; and to flee from these I concentrate all my strength following the ancients instead.³⁵

Let us try to imagine the effect of a similar elaboration when applied to the *Divine Comedy*. In Dante's poem, contemporary events and contemporary people were promoted to the role of "examples" for the very first time. As Benvenuto da Imola writes, Dante brought to light facts that previously were completely unknown: "traxit eos in lucem, ubi primum nihil erat dictum de eis" (*ad Inf.* 20.1–3). This approach to virtue is of course precisely the opposite of Petrarch's.

We can thus imagine that the "homines" to whom Benvenuto refers in his gloss on *Inferno* 27.16–23 had followed Petrarch's lesson about ancient examples to the point of no longer understanding Dante's project. And these men then proceed to criticize it, as if, in their eyes, Dante wanted to make exemplary a world and a time that were irremediably chaotic—and therefore, by definition, could not be exemplary at all.

Two completely different understandings of literature, as well as of reality, are here opposed. Dante writes to remind human beings of the order that Providence gave to the world; this order is, by definition, inescapable, eternal, and therefore ever-present. Petrarch instead shows a radical detachment from the world, and in particular from the present world. Compared to the complex weave of passions and "contemporary" contingencies of the present, antiquity contains the only immutable certainties.³⁶

What is Benvenuto's perspective on this dialectic? Let us read his response to the criticism reported in the commentary on Canto 27 of the *Inferno*:

[. . .] every day I find men saying: "What was Dante's aim when he mentions this modern man or this modern episode? He would have done better to write about the illustrious men of ancient times." But they often do not know what they are saying, because authors frequently raise and exalt common events and people in their works. I am sure that King Latinus, as well as Turnus or Mezentius, exalted by Virgil—and I do not mention other secondary characters of his poem—Latinus, Turnus, and Mezentius were not more important in their historical context than Count Guido da Montefeltro, Malatesta, Maghinardo, and the various other men from Romagna who will be described in this canto.³⁷

In this astute rejoinder, Benvenuto explains, though briefly, what literature is. As he sees it, if considered within their own historical dimension, the ancients are just like modern men: they exhibit varying qualities, and act well or not, depending on the particular case. In all instances, then, it is literature that makes them great: poets and writers understand how to recognize the universal in men's lives and in their actions, and they extract these universal elements from the rush of history, transforming them into perpetually relevant examples. Turnus, Mezentius, and Latinus are what they are today thanks to Virgil. Thanks to Dante, the same fate awaits Guido da Montefeltro and the other modern characters to whom the poet has, for the very first time, given exemplary value.³⁸ While Petrarch thought of exemplarity as an historically objective value that, confined to the ancient past, literature must narrate and keep alive, Benvenuto considers it to be something *produced* by literature. For him the precise function of literature is to draw exemplarity from the world, regardless of epoch.

According to Benvenuto, Dante did not bring the classics back to life through the (more obvious) route of direct imitation; his poetic operation was not, so to speak, limited to archaeological recovery. Instead, Dante assimilated the lesson of the ancients so well that he was able to apply it to his own time: he was able to demonstrate the universal implications of his own period, and to extract universal lessons from it. For this reason, it does not make sense for Benvenuto to question why Dante, in his poem, included people like Guido da Montefeltro while keeping silent about an important Virgilian character like Turnus: both Guido and Turnus belong to an historical and accidental dimension, which means that there is no qualitative difference between their lives. The point, for Benvenuto, is that nobody before Dante had been able to identify a universal meaning in the story of Guido da Montefeltro, just as nobody before Virgil had been able to find that same universal dimension, that same universal meaning, in the stories of Turnus, Mezentius, and Latinus.

The superiority of Dante and Boccaccio seems therefore to be based on the relationship that they established with their own ages, on their ability to understand the universal implications of their own epochs. In a gloss on *Inferno* 29.138–139, Benvenuto writes that Dante understood human nature perfectly, in all its eventual realizations, and was able

to represent it “tam utiliter, quam delectabiliter”: “Dante was able to understand, in an admirable and very subtle way, the nature of men of all conditions, all professions, all fates, and to represent their ways of life, their actions and their moral qualities in a useful and delectable way.”³⁹ This is precisely what writers and poets are asked to do, and this is what Dante and Boccaccio—both great “investigators of wonderful and modern stories,” as mentioned earlier—had been able to do better than anyone else, according to Benvenuto.⁴⁰

It is thanks to Benvenuto that we can observe the two main features characterizing the earliest phase of the canonization of the *Tre Corone*. First, far from being static and homogenous, the formation of this literary canon was internally conflicted and animated by conceptual tensions concerning the nature of poetic language and the relationship between the poet and his public—just as it would be if Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio were regarded as different facets of the same poetic system of values. These tensions eventually led an interpreter such as Benvenuto to play one of these authorities against another, to take a step aside from his own guide, and even to elaborate a new vision of what poetry itself should be. Second, we can conclude that—in its very beginnings at least—this canon stemmed from the need to counterbalance Petrarch’s authority in matters of poetry, as his framework excluded some of the best and most successful products of vernacular literature. If we think of the genesis of this literary canon, instead of imagining Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio advancing together, we should picture Dante and Boccaccio following Petrarch onto the stage, hurrying around on either side to grasp hold of his historical advantage, and limit his impact.

NOTES

1. For the life and culture of Guglielmo Maramauro, see “Guglielmo Maramauro,” in *Censimento dei commenti danteschi*, ed. Enrico Malato and Andrea Mazzucchi, vol. 1, *I commenti di tradizione manoscritta (fino al 1428)*, vol. 1 tome 1 (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 2011), 262–267, and Saverio Bellomo, *Dizionario dei commentatori danteschi. L’esegesi della «Commedia» da Iacopo Alighieri a Nidobeato* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 2004), 325–329.

2. Guglielmo Maramauro, *Expositione sopra l’«Inferno» di Dante Allighieri*, ed. Saverio Bellomo (Padua: Antenore Editrice, 1998).

3. Francesco Petrarca, *Le familiari*, ed. Vittorio Rossi, 4 vols. (Florence: Sansoni Editore, 1933–1942). The bibliography about Petrarch’s influence on Boccaccio’s interpretation of the *Divine Comedy* is vast. See to begin Giuliano Tanturli, “Il disprezzo per Dante dal Petrarca

al Bruni," *Rinascimento* s. II/25 (1985): 199–219; *Petrarch & Dante: Anti-Dantism, Metaphysics, Tradition*, ed. Zygmunt Barański and Theodore J. Cachey (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009); Jason Houston, *Building a Monument to Dante: Boccaccio as Dantista* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2016). See also the 'classic' studies on Boccaccio's exegesis by Paget Toynbee: "Index of authors quoted by Boccaccio in his *Commento sopra la Commedia*. A contribution to the study of the sources of the Commentary," *Miscellanea storica della Valdelsa* 21 (1913): 142–174, and "Boccaccio's commentary on the *Divina Commedia*," *The Modern Language Review* 2 (1970): 97–120.

4. See Luca Carlo Rossi, *Studi su Benvenuto da Imola* (Florence: SISMEL Edizioni del Galuzzo, 2016), 224; and Luca Fiorentini, *Per Benvenuto da Imola. Le linee ideologiche del commento dantesco* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2016), 443–445.

5. See Rossi, *Studi su Benvenuto da Imola*, 125–126.

6. Concise—but very accurate—information about Benvenuto da Imola's life is also provided by Paolo Pasquino, "Benvenuto Rambaldi da Imola," in *Censimento dei commenti danteschi*, tome 1, 86–88.

7. Benvenuto's epistolary correspondence with Petrarch was recently analyzed by Rossi, *Studi su Benvenuto da Imola*, 167–169. Concerning the tone of Petrarch's *Sen.* 15.11, see, for example, the hasty response to Benvenuto's worried question about the correct interpretation of Boethius's *Cons.* I pr. 1.7–11 (*Sen.* 15.11, 2): "De reliquo non muto sententiam: quicquid contra poetas iuste dicitur, scenicos notat. Nam quod dicitis, Boetium scenicum non fuisse, et ego fateor, et fatendum esse viri cogit autoritas. Quid ergo? Non scribentem sed stilum philosophica notat increpatio" (the quotation is taken from the γ version of the epistle, edited by Rossi, *Studi su Benvenuto da Imola*, 200–202).

8. "De isto namque Giotto faciunt mentionem et laudem alii duo poetae florentini, scilicet Petrarcha et Boccacius, qui scribit, quod tanta fuit excellentia ingenii et artis huius nobilis pictoris, quod nullam rem rerum natura produxit, quam iste non repraesentaret tam propriam, ut oculus intuentium saepe falleretur accipiens rem pictam pro vera [. . .]." The final draft of Benvenuto's commentary is cited here and throughout from Benevenuti de Rambaldis de Imola *Comentum super Dantis Aldigherij «Comoediam»*, ed. Jacobus Philippus Lacaia, 5 tomes (Florence: Typis G. Barbera, 1887).

9. Concerning Benvenuto's use of Boccaccio's *Decameron*, see Maria Luisa Uberti, "Benvenuto da Imola dantista, allievo del Boccaccio," *Studi sul Boccaccio* 12 (1980): 309–319; Rossi, *Studi su Benvenuto da Imola*, 215–223; Fiorentini, "Appunti sulle inserzioni dal *Decameron* nel commento dantesco di Benvenuto Rambaldi da Imola," *Levia Gravia* 15–16 (2013–2014): 399–415; Fiorentini, *Per Benvenuto da Imola*, 475–501.

10. "Nullus autem poetarum scivit excellentius aut efficacius laudare et vituperare quam perfectissimus poeta Dantes; laudavit siquidem virtutes et virtuosos, vituperavit vicia et viciosos. [. . .] Hic autem poeta perfectissimus convenientissime repraesentationibus usus est, ut patere potest discurranti totum poema ejus ubique mirabiliter figuratum." This passage is quoted from Benvenuto's general introduction to the poem. All translations of Benvenuto's commentary are my own.

11. See Rossi, *Studi su Benvenuto da Imola*, 149–161; and Fiorentini, *Per Benvenuto da Imola*, 189–200.

12. In Benvenuto's gloss on *Inf.* 2.52–54 we can find a vague reference to Petrarch's love for Laura: "Petarca amavit Laurectam per tempus XXI annorum historice et poetice." For a short commentary on this passage, see Rossi, "Presenze di Petarca in commenti danteschi fra Tre e Quattrocento," *Aevum* 70, no. 33 (1996): 450.

13. A full list of all the explicit quotations from Petrarch's works in Benvenuto's commentary on Dante is provided by Rossi, *Studi su Benvenuto da Imola*, 181–183.

14. All quotations from Dante's *Comedy* are taken from Dante Alighieri, *Commedia*, ed. Giorgio Inglese (Rome: Carocci, 2016).

15. “[. . .] quasi dicat: ‘forte veniet alius poeta eloquentior me, qui magis movebit Apollinem’; et dicit *forse*, dubitative. Et hic nota quod poeta pro parte videtur dicere verum: nam tempore quo florebat Dantes novissimus poeta Petrarca pullulabat, qui vere fuit copiosior in dicendo quam ipse. Sed certe quanto Petrarca fuit maior orator Dante, tanto Dantes fuit maior poeta ipso Petrarca, ut facile patet ex isto sacro poemate.”

16. See note 9.

17. See Rossi, *Studi su Benvenuto da Imola*, 212–213. The items in the list have been translated by me.

18. See Fiorentini, “Il ‘Secolare Commento’ alla Commedia,” in *Dante tra il Settecentocinquantesimo della nascita (2015) e il Settecentenario della morte (2021)*, ed. Enrico Malato and Andrea Mazzucchi (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 2016), 622–630. For a more general perspective, see Daniele Mattalia, “Dante Alighieri,” in *I classici italiani nella storia della critica*, ed. Walter Binni, vol. I, *Da Dante al Marino* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1974).

19. Concerning Boccaccio’s use of the image of the peacock in order to represent Dante’s *Comedy*, see the essential studies by Giuseppe Ledda, “‘Uno bellissimo paone’: immagini animali tra Dante e Boccaccio,” in *Boccaccio e i suoi lettori*, ed. Gian Mario Anselmi, Giovanni Baffetti, Carlo Delcorno and Sebastiana Nobili (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2013), 405–410, and “Biografia, poesia e allegoria nel *Trattatello in laude di Dante* di Giovanni Boccaccio,” *Lecture Classensi* 42 (2014): 72–77.

20. All quotations from the *Trattatello* are taken from the translation by Vincenzo Zin Bollettino: Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Life of Dante*, trans. Vincenzo Zin Bollettino (New York and London: Garland, 1990). See the original version of this passage, taken from Pier Giorgio Ricci’s critical edition: “[221] Il paone tra l’altre sue proprietà, per quello che appaia, n’ha quattro notabili. La prima si è che egli si ha penna angelica, e in quella ha cento occhi; la seconda si è che egli ha sozzi piedi e tacita andatura; la terza si è che egli ha voce molto orribile ad udire; la quarta e l’ultima si è che la sua carne è odorifera e incorruttibile,” Giovanni Boccaccio, *Amorosa Visione, Ninfe fiesolano, Trattatello in laude di Dante*, ed. Vittore Branca, Armando Balduino e Pier Giorgio Ricci (Milan: Mondadori, 1974).

21. “[224–255] Per le quali penne, onde questo corpo si cuopre, intendo la bellezza della peregrina istoria, che nella superficie della lettera della Comedia suona: sì come l’essere disceso in inferno e veduto l’abito del luogo e le varie condizioni degli abitanti [. . .]. Dunque bene è d’angelica penna coperta la carne del nostro paone;” “[226] Sono similmente a questo paone li piè sozzi e l’andatura queta: le quali cose ottimamente alla *Comedia* del nostro autore si confanno, perciò che, sì come sopra i piedi pare che tutto il corpo si sostenga, così prima facie pare che sopra il modo del parlare ogni opera in iscrittura composta si sostenga; e il parlare volgare, nel quale e sopra il quale ogni giuntura de la *Comedia* si sostiene, a rispetto dell’alto e maestrevole stilo letterale che usa ciascun altro poeta, è sozzo;” “[222] Dico che il senso della nostra *Comedia* è simigliante alla carne del paone, perciò che esso, o morale o teologo che tu il dèi a quale parte più del libro ti piace, è semplice e immutabile verità.”

22. For the use of Petrarch’s works in the *Trattatello*, see Monica Bertè and Maurizio Fiorilla, “Il *Trattatello in laude di Dante*,” in *Boccaccio editore e interprete di Dante*, ed. Luca Azzetta and Andrea Mazzucchi (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 2014), 42–49.

23. “[. . .] pavo habet pennam pulcherrimam, qua ejus caro vestitur et ornatur [. . .]: ita litera ipsa, variis floribus et diversis coloribus adornata, vestit sententiam.”

24. “[. . .] pavo habet turpes pedes (. . .): ita ipse stylus, quo tamquam pedibus ipsa materia consistit et firmatur, turpis videtur respectu literalis, quamvis in genere suo sit pulcherrimus omnium, et magis conformis ingeniis modernorum.”

25. “[. . .] ita sensus istius libri, quomodocumque capiatur, sive superficialiter, sive sententialiter, est odorifer, idest delectabilis, continens veritatem simplicem et incorruptam, et quanto magis discutitur, tanto magis reddit odorem incorruptibilis veritatis.”

26. For a slightly different perspective on Benvenuto's version of Bella degli Abati's dream, see Zygmunt G. Barański, "Boccaccio, Benvenuto e il sogno della madre di Dante incinta," in «Chiosar con altro testo». *Leggere Dante nel Trecento*, ed. Zygmunt G. Barański (Fiesole: Cadmo, 2001), 99–116; and Domenico Pantone, "Il pastore e i 'piè sozzi' del pavone. Benvenuto vs Boccaccio," *Bollettino dantesco* 2 (2013): 17–26. Both Barański and Pantone recognize that «in Benvenuto la carne indica tanto la dimensione letterale quanto quella allegorica» (Barański, "Boccaccio, Benvenuto e il sogno della madre di Dante incinta," 111), but they do not seem to understand the concrete ideological implications of such a variation.

27. "multum miror, lector, quod quicumque habet cognitionem et delectationem huius libri non melioret multum vitam suam . . ."

28. On the relationship between Petrarch's knowledge and the use of Albertino Mussato's oeuvre, see Giuseppe Billanovich, *Petrarca letterato. Lo scrittoio del Petrarca* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1947), 122.

29. Francesco Petrarca, *Invectives*, ed. and trans. David Marsh (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003). See the original passage, taken from Francesco Bausi's edition: "poete [. . .] studium est veritatem rerum pulcris velaminibus adornare, ut vulgus insulsum [. . .] lateat, ingeniosis autem studiosisque lectoribus et quesitu difficilior et dulcior sit inventu," in Francesco Petrarca *Invective contra medicum, Invectiva contra quandam magni status hominem sed nullius scientie aut virtutis*, ed. Francesco Bausi (Florence: Olschki, 2005).

30. "[. . .] tota die invenio homines dicentes: 'Ad quid Dantes fecit mentionem de tali viro vel facto moderno? Ipse debuisset potius dixisse de illis magnificis antiquis.'"

31. See Uberti, "Benvenuto da Imola dantista," 300–302, and Alberto De Simoni, "'Alii dicunt . . .': Il rapporto con la tradizione nel *Comentum* di Benvenuto da Imola (*Inferno*)," *Rivista di studi danteschi* 7 (2007): 243–301.

32. See the recent commentary on these passages by Marco Petoletti: Dante Alighieri, *Le opere*, vol. V, ed. Marco Baglio, Luca Azzetta, Marco Petoletti, and Michele Rinaldi (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 2016), 528–533.

33. See Carlo Delcorno, *Exemplum e letteratura tra Medioevo e Rinascimento* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1989), 229–263.

34. Francis Petrarch, *Letters on Familiar Matters* (I–VIII), trans. Aldo S. Bernardo (New York: Italica Press, 2005). Here is the original Latin version (quoted from Francesco Petrarca, *Le familiari*, ed. Vittorio Rossi): "si statue illustrium possunt nobiles animos ad imitandi studium accendere, [. . .] quanto magis ipsa virtus hoc efficit, claro dum proponitur non marmore sed exemplo? corporum nempe liniamenta status forsans expressius continentur, rerum vero gestarum morumque notitia atque habitus animorum haud dubie plenius atque perfectius verbis quam incudibus exprimentur; nec improprie michi videor dicturus statuas corporum imagines, exempla virtutum."

35. "[. . .] et michi scribo, et inter scribendum cupide cum maioribus nostris versor uno quo possum modo; atque hos, cum quibus iniquo sidere datum erat ut viverem, libentissime obliviscor; inque hoc animi vires cuntas exerceo, ut hos fugiam, illos sequar."

36. See the thorough and recent discussion on this point by Sonia Gentili, "Petrarca e la filosofia," in *La filosofia in Italia al tempo di Dante*, ed. Carla Casagrande and Gianfranco Fioravanti (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2016), 265–280. See also Luca Marcozzi, "Petrarca esule nel tempo," in *Images and Words in Exile. Avignon and Italy during the First Half of the 14th Century*, ed. by Elisa Brillì, Laura Fenelli and Gerhard Wolf (Florence: Sismel Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2015), 223–237.

37. "[. . .] tota die invenio homines dicentes: 'Ad quid Dantes fecit mentionem de tali viro vel facto moderno? Ipse debuisset potius dixisse de illis magnificis antiquis!'. Vel nesciunt quid dicant in multis, quia autores saepe personam vel rem vilissimam in suis stylis magnificat et extollunt. Certe non dubito quod rex Latinus, Turnus vel Megentius, de quibus Virgilius facit tot praeconia, ut de caeteris minoribus taceam, non valuerunt tantum in rebus mundi, quantum iste comes Guido, Malatesta, Maghinardus, et alii multi in Romandiola, de quibus statim dicitur in isto capitulo."

38. On the exemplary function of Dante's modern characters, see the classic and essential essay by Erich Auerbach, *Dante als Dichter der irdischen Welt* (Verag Walter de Gruyter & Co.: Berlin, 1929).

39. “[Dantes] scivit tam mirabiliter et subtiliter cognoscere naturas hominum cuiuscumque conditionis, professionis et fortunae, et eorum mores, actus et proprietates tam utiliter, quam delectabiliter repraesentare.” For a deeper commentary on this gloss and its implications, see Fiorentini, *Per Benvenuto da Imola*, 548–554.

40. See also the discussion on this point *ibid.*, 364–371.

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