Introduction

This book is concerned with Dante's reception in Florence during a period that extends from the first meeting of Boccaccio and Petrarch in 1350 to Cristoforo Landino's commentary upon the *Comedy* which was first printed in 1481. During this time, all of Florence's main social groups make use of Dante, and he is present in its manuscript, print, and oral cultures. He is linked with the work, both Latin and vernacular, of humanists, scientists, philosophers, theologians, artists, and poets, and his name has especially close bearing upon the ways in which both Florentine identity and the Tuscan vernacular are developed and promoted. We will encounter Dante in various protean guises, as patriotic emblem, politically committed citizen, moralist, philosopher, theologian, Neoplatonist, and prophet. The book explores how several generations of Florentines fashion these 'Dantes', and how they affect, and are affected by, the cultural, political, and literary dynamics of the city. Its six principal chapters follow a chronological trajectory in order to investigate the nexus of factors that influence how individuals and groupings defined and redefined Dante's significance and placed him within their own fields of vision. As a first step this introduction provides an overview of Dante's reception in the period as a whole in order to clarify the varied forms and contexts in which Dante was assimilated, and to outline the main themes and preoccupations that will be explored in the chapters that follow.[1]

The view that Dante marks a pivotal moment in the revival of classical poetry and learning is first stated in the late 1320s by a Pisan commentator on the *Comedy*,[2] and it was to be widely repeated with differing emphases by later Florentines until at least the end of the sixteenth century. It is perhaps not surprising therefore that, in the last seventy

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years, several scholars have supported such formulations, by arguing that Dante either foreshadows or directly embodies 'Renaissance' forms and ideals, especially in his apparently humanistic veneration, cultivation, and imitation of classical antiquity.[3] It is true that Dante shows a strong predilection for classical writers and philosophers in all his writings, and most especially in the *Comedy*. After all, Virgil is his guide for much of the poem, and a place of honour is reserved for other pagan poets and philosophers in Limbo, the first circle of Hell. And yet, Dante's relationship to the classical world is quite a narrow one. His knowledge of Greek literature is confined to comments in Latin authors and his acquaintance with the Latin tradition is itself limited when compared to later humanist writers. For example, Dante never mentions the important Roman poets, Catullus, Lucretius, Martial; and he only has second-hand knowledge of other Roman poets and playwrights such as Persius, Propertius, Plautus, and Terence. He seems to have known little of the Roman historian, Livy; and he knew none of the authors and texts so enthusiastically rediscovered within his own life-time by Paduan contemporaries with strongly classicizing interests such as Lovato dei Lovati (d. 1309) and Albertino Mussato (d. 1329). These contemporaries also possess a sharper sense of historical consciousness and a closer concern with matters that were to become the hallmark of later students of the *studia humanitatis* such as the recovery of lost texts and the collation of manuscripts with a view to assessing the most authentic textual readings. By contrast, Dante's general conception of history might best be described as theological, since it is centred upon the Incarnation and the inscrutable unfolding of divine providence. Unlike some contemporaries and many later humanists, Dante is not motivated by philological preoccupations with textual accuracy and recovery, and his own omnivorous relationship to books is more often guided by compendia, excerpts, and commentaries than it is by texts that are read as integral works.

These considerations help to illustrate why earlier studies that have emphasized Dante's humanistic values underplay the profound differences between his outlook and the sensibilities of Florentine humanists from the late 1370s until the end of the sixteenth century. More importantly still, such studies often neglect the innovative nature of Dante's approach to antiquity. In the *Comedy* Dante may have Virgil born under

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the wrong Emperor, erroneously view Statius as hailing from Tolosa, and introduce some other glaring historical anachronisms.[4] These misapprehensions are often detected by later commentators on his poem,[5] and they are a sign that, as in many other areas of learning, he is a man of his time. Yet where he differs from his contemporaries is when, as the vernacular *auctor* of the *Comedy*, he consciously outdoes classical texts, sets about correcting and rewriting Virgil's poetry, and makes Virgil himself into the agent of Statius' conversion to Christianity.[6] One of the great paradoxes that lies at the heart of the *Comedy* is the fact that he is at his most radical and original when adapting traditional and often quite dated material. His richly transformative approach to classical literature is part of a still more audacious innovation – his exhaustively experimental use of the vernacular in a poem which offers a totalizing vision of the universe and incorporates a vast wealth of philosophical, theological, and scientific ideas. Dante was undoubtedly aware of the ferment in the Veneto where Mussato and others were developing new ways of approaching classical texts and cultivating a more refined style in Latin prose and verse.[7] His correspondence, between 1319 and 1320, in the form of Latin Eclogues with a Bolognese professor of poetry, Giovanni del Virgilio, is testament to this (as it is to Dante's own intimate knowledge of Virgil and indeed his ability to recover a lost classical genre). But when del Virgilio asks for a poem in Latin, which will be restricted to a narrow intellectual elite, Dante reaffirms his desire to use the vernacular in order to open up his message to a wider audience, and not merely the *pallentes*, those blanched from constant study of the Latin classics.[8]

A similar blend of backward-looking qualities and radical innovation emerges when comparisons are made between other features of Dante's *forma mentis* and the concerns of his contemporaries. While Florentine merchants are conquering European markets and the city is expanding, Dante denounces the activities that are making Florence the economic and cultural hegemon of Tuscany and longs instead for a return to a narrowly circumscribed civic space and a civic life characterized by feudal values.[9] While imperial ideology in Italy is in decline, as Florence and other Italian city-states increasingly assert their autonomy, and as national monarchies begin to emerge in France, Spain, and England, Dante presents a bold vision of the separation of spiritual and temporal

powers in which a universal emperor rules the temporal sphere and re-
ceives his authority from the Pope.[10] As the first fissures start to appear
in scholasticism, Dante remains a schoolman in doctrine and method
and a follower of Aristotle.[11] As Duns Scotus and William of Ockham
are unsettling the bonds between reason and faith, the *Comedy* produces
its own supreme synthesis of Aristotelian science and Christian revela-
tion. At a time when Latin is the language of learning and statecraft
and increasingly the object of study and imitation by humanists in cer-
tain areas of the Veneto, Dante turns to the humble and unassuming
vernacular, the language that 'even women use'.[12]

Some of Dante's later Florentine readers, especially the two gener-
ations of humanists that followed Petrarch and Boccaccio, were aware
of the lacunae in his knowledge of antiquity and were often startled by
his promotion of the vernacular, as well as by his political views and his
decidedly unusual approach to certain classical texts. To this humanist
avant-garde Dante did indeed appear outmoded, medieval even (be-
cause medieval was a term that they were coining and starting to use),
when measured against its own standards of judgement in the second
half of the fourteenth century and throughout the fifteenth. But not
all Florentines adopted this critical approach, and most early humanists
active in Florence did not regard his 'medieval' qualities as sufficient
reason for discarding him. Indeed, it became difficult to ignore Dante,
given that, by 1350, he had already acquired an imposing status as the
city's supreme vernacular poet and leading civic patriot. By this date,
a small-scale industry was producing manuscript copies of the *Comedy*
in Florence, the city's authorities were being petitioned for public lec-
tures to be held on the poem, and a cult of the author, complete with its
own penumbra of legendary material, was establishing itself throughout
Tuscany and in many other cultural centres on the Italian peninsula.

The preceding paragraphs help to explain why this book is not an
attempt to define Dante's qualities using terms such as 'medieval' and
'Renaissance' which are at best rough and at worst arbitrary and tenden-
tious periodizations (although Dante's reception does offer us a privi-
leged point-of-view from which to consider how such labels originate
and develop). In an intellectual climate that justified innovation in terms
of renewal and restoration it was perhaps inevitable that Dante would
get caught up with myths of rebirth. One major preoccupation of this

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book is rather to examine how and why Dante was distanced from, and associated with, these categories in later Florentine contexts that used and transmitted his name and works. In other words, the book deals with the ways in which later readers and writers responded to Dante and his legacy by tailoring him to their own contexts across at least six generations. The key point about such responses, or at least the most influential ones, is that it was his interlocutors who actively selected and interpreted the features that they then used to construct various visions of Dante and his poem. To understand more closely the factors involved in such reconstructions and to trace out more fully Dante's varied Florentine reception, one must first explore in greater detail the issues raised by the mediation and reception of his name and his texts.

Dante cared deeply about questions related to his fame and reputation. The writing of the *Convivio* was prompted by a desire to recover the good name that he had lost with exile; and in the opening lines of *Paradiso* xxv he indulged himself in the thought of being crowned as poet laureate in his beloved Florence.[13] Dante was fully conversant with the axiom that reception depends upon the nature of the recipient,[14] and, although he did not develop these ideas with explicit reference to literature, he was well aware of the ways in which an author may lose control over how his text is read, especially in matters of translation.[15] This may in part help to explain his tendency to interpret his own texts, commenting on some of his earlier lyric poetry in the *Vita nuova* and his *canzoni* in the *Convivio*, and also composing (at least in part) a Latin letter, the Cangrande Epistle, which offers a set of interpretative prolegomena to the *Paradiso*. In the *Comedy* he shows an awareness that his poem will have more than one audience. Indeed, his concern with the nature and effects of reading is such that he explicitly places within his poem scenes of reading which provide a critique of deficient approaches to literature, highlight the dangers and limitations of specific literary genres, and even promote certain ways of reading classical texts.[16] He repeatedly addresses his readers, calling upon them to engage in the intensely active series of processes that reading involves. An important strand in recent Dante scholarship has, moreover, suggested that the *Comedy* contains within itself its own auto-exegesis in a way that is designed to assist his readers and to close off the poem to misinterpretation.[17] It may well be that his very choice of *terza rima* reflects an awareness of how written texts

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can easily be distorted and subject to interpolation, and how this might be mitigated by the binding architecture of his rhyme scheme with its interlocking chain of rhyme words.

The study of Dante's reputation and influence developed in the age of positivist literary criticism and it considers why he and his work became famous, how that fame was perpetuated over time, and what factors increased or diminished it. Since the late 1960s, however, such an emphasis upon the author and his text has been reassessed by critics and theorists who prefer to view reading as an act which is socially situated and constructed. The branch of this field of study known as reception theory is particularly pertinent here, and it is most closely associated with the work of the German scholar, Hans Robert Jauss. By making readerly activity the ultimate source of meaning for a text and for literary history itself, Jauss stresses how the evaluating subjects of a work bring their own social and historical situation to the text in a way which conditions interpretations of it. To privilege the reader is not, therefore, to disregard contextual factors: readers' perceptions are closely influenced by their own cultural background, and these perceptions issue into broader acts of interpretation. For Jauss, literary interpretation is unavoidably dependent upon the historical horizon of the interpreter: changing horizons of expectation, defined as the conventions and systems of reference shared by a work's public(s), determine the ways in which readers approach and interact with particular works. It is thus the activity of the reader and changes in the manner of decoding texts that most clearly set off reception theory from studies of an author's reputation and his influence.[18]

The renewed exploration of the active role of the reader, of the reader's perspective, and of the conditions under which interaction with texts occurs has something to offer the kind of study proposed here. It opens up the possibility for different, and even conflicting, conceptions of Dante and interpretations of his work to co-exist without dismissing them as absurd or ancillary misreadings. It encourages further study of the reader's social, intellectual, and ideological background, and a closer appreciation of how such factors may in turn condition reading practices. It places history and literature into a more productive relationship, not within a hierarchy of value where literary works simply reflect history, but as discourses that are both constructed and that creatively

interact and overlap with one another. However, while this book draws some insights from concerns developed in reception theory, there remain several problems with Jauss' approach that have direct bearing on later 'readers' of Dante. Jauss tends to overemphasize the conformity of reading practices within designated periods (whose boundaries are in any case often arbitrary), whereas we will see that readers responded to Dante in a variety of ways and that interpretative screens may jostle and compete with one another in a single historical moment and even coexist within an individual reader. Jauss' approach posits, moreover, direct contact between reader and text, whereas we will witness a more complex situation, whereby later Florentines approach Dante in partial and selective ways and the very forms in which he is mediated are often crucial to their effect upon the reader.[19] Finally, within reception theory there is a danger of underestimating the legacy of tradition – a considerable one in the case of Dante, and even as early as 1350 – and of failing to take full account of how earlier critical vocabulary and paradigms are transmitted and re-used across generations.[20]

For these reasons, this book focuses upon how the history of Dante's reception is closely related to the construction of interpretative frameworks and filters by which his work, life, and reputation were approached. But it also considers how both earlier traditions and contemporary contextual issues shape these interpretative schemes. By covering an extended period of time and paying attention to both vernacular and Latin cultures, it should be possible to pinpoint elements of continuity, development, and disjunction in the reception of Dante over some 130 years during which he was shaped and re-shaped by his later Florentine readers.

Let us now examine the diverse ways in which information about Dante and his works was transmitted and outline the principal contexts in which such mediations took place. Of all the works of Dante that were available in our period the most important was the *Comedy*. Several of the individuals studied in later chapters are involved in the production of texts of the *Comedy*; and, in the period covered here, this was undertaken predominantly, but not exclusively, through the laborious copying of manuscripts.[21] As early as 1350, the heavy demand for the *Comedy* had led to processes of manuscript production on a mass scale in Florence, with one workshop owned by Francesco di ser Nardo da Barberino famously

turning out a hundred copies of the poem, the so-called 'gruppo del Cento'.[22] It is a revealing index of Dante's growing popularity that more codices of the poem survive from the fifteenth century than from any other period, and of these extant copies more than fifty per cent are Florentine. The *Comedy* is also twice translated into Latin during the early fifteenth century, and there are several other partial translations, a number of them made in Florence.[23] The data from surveys of extant manuscripts reveal the great demand for the poem, and the material form of the Dante manuscripts described by Giorgio Petrocchi and Marcella Roddewig also helps to provide indications of its readership. Manuscript copies are found in all sizes, formats, and scripts,[24] but in Florence 'il Dante' (as the *Comedy* was known) is especially linked to a mercantile readership. Christian Bec's studies of library inventories and manuscript ownership of the *Comedy* confirm the popularity of the poem with this kind of reading public, especially in the first half of the fifteenth century.[25] However, the helpful inferences that can be made from statistical data and the material form of manuscripts still do not tell us anything qualitative about *how* their owners might actually have read Dante. For insight into the varied but elusive world of these readers of the *Comedy*, we must turn to the marginal annotations made by merchant readers and comments found in other written texts owned by them. For some merchants the poem seems to have been no more than a status symbol, a material possession; but there is also evidence from *libri zibaldoni*, the merchant book *par excellence*, that the *Comedy* was the privileged means by which Florentine men and women learned to write and then to read.[26]

The manuscript tradition of the *Comedy* brings with it several other layers of Dantean and non-Dantean material, all of which affected how his text was received. First of all, depending on their date, manuscripts of the *Comedy* frequently contain one or more of the many fourteenth-century or Trecento commentaries on the poem.[27] Several of these works are non-Florentine, but they circulated widely in the city and provided the conceptual and interpretative edifice upon which later Florentine constructions of Dante would be built. This tendency to extract earlier material (regardless of its provenance) and to fit it to a Florentine template is a feature of Dante's reception that we will meet in several later chapters. Later chapters will also deal with the influence of both

non-Florentine commentaries and the main extant Florentine commentaries: Boccaccio's unfinished *Esposizioni* (1374); Filippo Villani's incomplete *Expositio* (*c*. 1400–04); and Landino's *Comento* (1481). The commentary, its modes of reading, re-reading, and re-presenting Dante, and the contextual issues it raises, will thus be a recurrent concern throughout this book. Here it is sufficient to stress that, for all its conservatism, Dante commentary, both in manuscript and in print, is valuable in its own right as a form of literary criticism and as an expression of a particular moment of interchange between past and present. The commentary can be usefully read as a revealing index of how Dante was adapted to later contexts, provided that sufficient discrimination is made between material which is traditional and glosses which elicit responses that arise from contemporary or personal concerns. Aside from commentaries, the manuscript tradition of the poem often includes biographies of Dante, especially Boccaccio's own life of the poet, various poems and other writings in his defence, and pseudonymous material sometimes erroneously attributed to Dante. One also frequently finds diagrams, illustrations, and illuminations in manuscripts of the *Comedy*, as well as layers of reactions from earlier readers in the form of marginalia.[28]

Apart from the manuscript tradition, with its accompanying commentaries and other paratextual material, our time frame sees the first printed editions of Dante's poem. The *editio princeps* is produced in Foligno in 1472, and it is followed by five more printed texts in Venice, Naples, and Milan between 1477 and 1478.[29] These printings are not, then, Florentine products, but in the late 1470s they play a part in provoking Landino to draw upon more than two decades of teaching and study of Dante in order to produce what was to become the most famous and influential Renaissance printed edition and commentary (see Part III).

As far as Dante's other poems are concerned, the *sestine* of the 'Rime petrose' and the moral *canzoni* seem to have been more popular than his other lyric production.[30] Florentine interest in the *Convivio* is notable in the second half of the fourteenth century – the work is not known to Dante's first commentators – and becomes very marked in the second half of the fifteenth century, especially at a time of heightened rediscovery of vernacular texts from the 1460s onwards. The *Convivio* is, in

fact, the first of the 'minor works' to be printed after the *Comedy* and re-vealingly the first edition is produced in Florence.[31] The vernacular text that seems to have been transmitted most unevenly is the *Vita nuova*. It is mentioned by Dante's earlier commentators as well as by Boccaccio, who draws on it repeatedly in his fictional and exegetical work, but it seems to disappear from circulation in the early fifteenth century and it only became widely known again in the final third of that century.[32] The most interesting 'minor work' of all is the *Monarchia*. In spite of ecclesiastical censures in the 1320s and 1330s and significant later reser-vations about its Latin, the work begins to be copied again in Florence in the second half of the fifteenth century (see chapter 4, section 2). As for Dante's other Latin works, the *Egloghe* exchanged with Giovanni del Virgilio and several of his Latin letters, the *Epistole*, are not neglected throughout our period, but there are some significant omissions from his Latin oeuvre. The *De vulgari eloquentia*, Dante's unfinished Latin treatise on the illustrious vernacular, though well known to Boccaccio, dropped out of circulation and was only rediscovered in Florence at the beginning of the sixteenth century.[33] The cosmographical treatise, the *Questio*, re-entered circulation only in the early sixteenth century; and, except for its use by Filippo Villani, the *Epistle to Cangrande* did not circulate independently.[34]

Outside the textual tradition of Dante's own works, both in manuscript and printed forms, a vast array of information was relayed about him in a wide range of written sources, in prose and poetry, both vernacular and Latin. The traditions of commentary and lives of the poet have already been mentioned, since these were often connected with the textual tradition of Dante's works. But a variety of other prose writings also offers 'information' about his appearance and moral character, his role in the political life of the city, the nature and qualities of his poetry, and associated anecdotes, legends, and stories. None of this material can be taken at face value, since each strand of it is partial (in both senses of the word) and interpretative. These writings could be subdi-vided into Florentine historiography,[35] defences of poetry and works of poetics,[36] Latin epistolography,[37] mercantile production,[38] writings on artistic practice and theory,[39] and novelistic traditions.[40] But to employ such genre divisions is to mask the rich complexity of each tradition and to disregard the significant interconnections between many of them.

excerpt definition: 1. a short part taken from a speech, book, film, etc.: 2. to take a small part from a speechâ€¦. Learn more.Â This excerpt provides insights into the various factors involved in the interactive process, highlighting the callee's crucial role in the accomplishment of collaborative identification. From the Cambridge English Corpus. It would seem from this excerpt that bells performed not only a practical, but also a devotional function. From the Cambridge English Corpus. Translations of excerpt. excerpt â€" [n] citation; something taken from a whole extract, fragment, notation, note, part, passage, pericope, piece, portion, quotation, quote, saying, section, selection; concepts 270,274,835 Ant. insert, whole excerpt [v] take a part from a wholeâ€¦ â€¦ New thesaurus. Excerpt â€" Ex cerpt ([e^]k s[e]rpt; 277), n. An extract; a passage selected or copied from a book or record. [1913 Webster] || â€¦ The Collaborative International Dictionary of English. Excerpt. From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. Jump to navigation Jump to search. Wikipedia does not currently have an article on Excerpt, but our sister project Wiktionary does: Read the Wiktionary entry on excerpt. You can alsoÂ Start the Excerpt article, using the Article Wizard if you wish, or add a request for it; but please remember Wikipedia is not a dictionary. wiktionary:Special:Search/excerpt. From a cross-project redirect: This is a redirect that is used as a connection to other Wikimedia projects.