Poetry and Performance

—— Prolegomenon to a Reading of Robin Kirkpatrick's

A Collection 稻草——

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> The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
> Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
> And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
> Leave not a rack behind.[1]

1. Hardness and Dead Poetry

One of the first things that is likely to strike anyone coming across Robin Kirkpatrick's monograph on the first volume of the *Divine Comedy* is the contrast between the sobriety of its blue-grey dust jacket and the radical suggestion contained in its subtitle. *Dante's 'Inferno': Difficulty and Dead Poetry*, published just over thirty years ago, is one of the most original and insightful studies of this great medieval poem ever produced. No other work of criticism, before or since, has engaged so wisely and elegantly with the moral dimensions of Dante's thought. The book does this in part because its purview is not restricted to the first *cantica* of the *Commedia* but takes in Dante's oeuvre as a whole, exploring the points of contact between the epic poem and several of the so-called minor works such as the *Vita nova* and the *Convivio*. It is this strategy of tracing the development of Dante's thought and poetic practice throughout his career that lies behind that disconcerting title. For in part, what the book does is suggest that the *Inferno* can be seen as writing that Dante grew out of, a stage he had to pass through en route to something better, or, worse, as a kind of dead end.

That there could be some association between the *Inferno* and difficulty might at first seem perplexing. Perhaps, we might imagine, this is the difficulty the modern reader experiences in grappling with the stern morality of this Christian poet writing in the early fourteenth century or with the rebarbative otherness of the medieval intellectual culture that informs his writing. If we are to entertain the notion of a 'dead *poetry*', however, it is hard to see how this could

refer to anything other than the words Dante wrote, and equally difficult to conceive how this could not amount to some kind of repudiation of the *Inferno*'s literary worth. It turns out that the indictment is pronounced by Dante himself. The phrase 'dead poetry' occurs in the opening sequence of the *Purgatorio*.

> Per correr miglior acque alza le vele
> omai la navicella del mio ingegno,
> che lascia dietro a sé mar sì crudele;
>   e canterò di quel secondo regno
> dove l'umano spirito si purga
> e di salire al ciel diventa degno.
>   Ma qui la morta poesì resurga,
> o sante Muse, poi che vostro sono;
> e qui Calïopè alquanto surga,
>   seguitando il mio canto con quel suono
> di cui le Piche misere sentiro
> lo colpo tal, che disperar perdono.[2]

> To sail better waters now the little boat
> of my intellect hoists its sails
> as it leaves behind so cruel a sea,
>   and I will sing of that second realm,
> where the human soul is purged
> and becomes worthy to ascend to heaven.
>   But here let the dead poetry live again,
> O holy muses, since I am yours;
> and let Caliope too rise up,
>   accompanying my song with that sound
> that made the wretched Magpies rue
> their fault and despair of forgiveness.[3]

(*Purgatorio* I, 1–12)

Does Dante refer to his poem as 'la morta poesì' simply because, as some commentators claim, the poet's subject is the state of the human soul after death? Or, if it is the first *cantica* only which we are to think of as 'dead', is this because the first part of the *Commedia* treats of those souls who, in their eternal exile from God, are in some way more dead than those in the higher realms? Or is there some sense in which, as Robin believes, the poetry itself is to be seen as 'dead'?

It is unlikely that Dante was the first poet to be troubled by the notion of having composed a 'morta poesì'. Poetry has an ancient connection with the dead. Anne Carson recounts how, in the fifth century, the poet Simonides of Keos was the 'most prolific composer of epitaphs in the ancient world and set the conventions of the genre'.[4] The essential requirement was that his verses would fit within the narrow confines of the stone on which they would be carved.

And so poetry became defined by an aesthetics of concision, of the 'lapidary'. As he enters his own imagined realm of the dead, Dante envisages God as an author who sets his verses down in stone. The protagonist of the *Commedia* famously quails beneath the admonition he sees over Hell's Gate.

> Per me si va ne la città dolente,
> per me si va ne l'etterno dolore,
> per me si va tra la perduta gente.
> Giustizia mosse il mio alto fattore;
> fecemi la divina podestate,
> la somma sapïenza e 'l primo amore.
> Dinanzi a me non fuor cose create
> se non etterne, e io etterno duro.
> Lasciate ogne speranza, voi ch'intrate'.
> Queste parole di colore oscuro
> vid' ïo scritte al sommo d'una porta;
> per ch'io: «Maestro, il senso lor m'è duro»

> Through me they enter the city of sorrow,
> through me to eternal suffering,
> through me to join the lost souls.
> Justice moved my exalted maker;
> I was made by power divine,
> highest wisdom and the first love.
> Before me was nothing created
> but what was eternal, and I for eternity shall endure.
> Leave behind you all hope, you who enter here.
> These words in dark lettering
> I saw inscribed over the gate;
> And so I said: "Master, the meaning of these words seems hard to me".

(*Inferno* III, 1–12)

Uncharacteristically, Dante repeats the rhyming 'duro' (lines 9 and 12), though with semantic and grammatical shifts from the notion of 'enduring' to one of 'hardness', from verb to adjective. The juxtaposition hints at the obvious etymological link, present in English as much as in Italian, for 'endure' has its roots in the Latin *indurare*, 'to harden'. It is hardness that guarantees permanence. The meaning of what he reads is 'hard' in more than one way. It is not simply that he finds it difficult to grasp how 'love' could have conceived of this place of harrowing pain and anguish, or even that he is daunted by the implacable harshness of divine judgment. God's words are literally 'hard', carved in stone, much as Hell itself, with its rocky terrain, is hard and unyielding, as are the sinners confined within its valleys.[5] The meaning conveyed by the sentences incised over the Gate of Hell is utterly final and non-negotiable. The divine edict is not 'hard' in the sense that it is difficult to interpret, but insofar as the

understanding that it generates will admit of no subsequent growth or alteration.

As he wrote himself through the final cantos of the *Inferno*, Robin argues, Dante experienced a poetic crisis. In the vengeful tones in which the poet depicted his encounters with the sinners fixed in place by the ice that characterizes the lowest circle of Hell, we find a language which functions to 'erode and incriminate' the moral system that Dante has constructed. Once again he struggles with the same 'intellectual stoniness' that he had faced in the 'hard sense' of Hell's Gate. The poet whose earliest lyrics had found their voice in the language of praise was now writing a poetry of judgement. 'To speak of dead poetry', Robin concludes, 'is to speak, in one sense, of how far Dante has travelled from the praise-style'. The problem with judgement lies in the necessity that the poet 'attempt to affirm his final assessment of others'. It is this stony finality that contrasts with the 'openness' of the *Vita nova*.[6] As we shall see, to write against the lapidary, a poet must remain open to the responses of others.

The title of the volume of poems Robin published in 2013 is bilingual, the inital 'A Collection' followed by the Chinese characters 稻草, meaning 'straw'.[7] Or this at least is how I assume we should connect the words that appear on the book's cover. For it is not clear that the ideogram is in fact a component of the title, and there are plenty of indications to the contrary. It is absent, for example, from the book's spine and from the British Library Cataloguing Information. Equally, the Chinese characters could fulfill their function, whatever that might be, without having to be incorporated into the title. For most Anglophone readers, the enigmatic presence of the 稻草 will be both unsettlingly alien while, paradoxically, in the essential balance of its design, seeming to offer a kind of aesthetic stability. It is both disorienting—if actually deoccidentalizing— and reassuring. But once its semantic charge is known, other possibilities present themselves. For a start, it is difficult, I think, not to find in the allusion to 'straw' a metaphor for impermanence, the implication of a resistance to the monumental and the lapidary. And so perhaps, in this quiet fusion of East and West, our reading is foregrounded by an oxymoron. Against the impulse to archive, to build collections, stands an image of the ephemeral, a perception that if words can be anthologized they can also be scattered and lost. We might recall how Dante, nearing the climax of his vision in the *Paradiso*, invokes the prophecy of the Sybil.

> Così la neve al sol si disigilla;
> così al vento ne le foglie levi
> si perdea la sentenza di Sibilla.

> As the snow melts away in the sun;
> so on light leaves in the wind
> the words of the Sybil are lost.

(*Paradiso* XXXIII, 64–66)

Like the pronouncements of the oracle, inscribed on leaves dispersed by the wind, the vision the pilgrim now readies himself for will fade from memory like a dream. And surely Dante here recognizes that the words he writes may similarly be borne into oblivion. However much the poet aspires to gather all he knows into a single volume, as God binds together the countless pages of his creation 'in un volume' (*Par.* XXXIII, 86), he also acknowledges obliquely that his 'sentenze' can make no more claim on the eternal than the prophecy of the Sybil. The point about the ice in the depths of Hell is that there is nothing natural about its stony permanence. Without the refrigerating blast of cold air generated by Satan's wings, it too would thaw, like snow in the sun. The 'disigilla' of Dante's simile literally means 'unseal' in the sense of an undoing of the imprint which a seal makes in wax, and such seals were, of course, the means by which the validity of written documents was affirmed. They were the stamps of authority, the mechanism whereby statement was authenticated and language become, metaphorically, carved in stone.

2. Performance

One very obvious way in which the poems in *A Collection* 稻草 offer a resistance to writing in stone has to do with how often they concern themselves with performance. This is most explicit in the first group of poems, which are gathered together under the heading of 'Performance Poems'. Several of these are composed in response to performances, either musical or choreographic, or else were themselves the inspiration for performances, including the making of drawings. The many references to the liturgy, to hymns and religious festivals, to the feast days of the saints, are also evocations of performance. Not only is this a question of the performance of sacred music and the often elaborate rituals of the Catholic mass but also of a conception of the liturgy as a form of communal human action.

No less important here are the connections that can be drawn between performance and time. The Christian festivals whose dates become the titles of poems are particularized events in time. They are both dates in the Church calendar but also moments that punctuate the lives of particular individuals. They are in a sense narrative episodes and impart to the poetry something of the momentum of narrative. The significance of performance lies in part in its temporality. Performance is both a progression of varying forms unfolding through time and a sequence of events, of gestures, that are unrepeatable. If no performance, whether musical or choreographic, can be exactly the same as any other, every performance must always be new.

In *Difficulty and Dead Poetry*, Robin juxtaposes the representation of the gluttons and the avaricious in the *Inferno* with Dante's conception in the *Convivio* of the philosophical appetite. Whereas the desire of the sinners is always directed towards the same thing, the philosopher, having solved one question, then embarks upon another, necessarily different, inquiry: 'The characteristic of the philosophical mind is that it sets itself a goal which it knows to be attainable and, having attained that goal, proceeds to conceive a new ambition'. In contrast,

for the gluttons and avaricious, who desire 'one thing and one thing only, nothing can ever be new'.[8] For Dante, the figure of the philosopher is like a 'good traveller' ('lo buono camminatore') who, having reached his goal, stops to rest (*Convivio* IV, xii). And this, as Robin remarks, cannot help but put us in mind of the pilgrim of the *Commedia*, the traveller on his journey to God. But it also encourages a particular understanding of the form of Dante's poem, an ethical understanding of narrative as a process of constant renewal, as an intellectual movement from one episode to another. And herein lies the value of the perception that Beatrice, who is the source of Dante's poetry, is also, as Robin observes in a more recent essay, a 'source of motion'.[9]

The *Commedia* is often compared to Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae* as if its function was to be a repository of all the knowledge of its age. Yet, Dante's poem does not aim at the kind of accumulation that characterizes the encyclopedic project but rather articulates its truths through the diachronic form of its narrative, advancing from the writing in stone of Hell's Gate to the dances of the *Paradiso*. In the light of all this, it seems significant that *A Collection* 稲草 concludes with a section devoted to works in progress, poems which thus make visible the performance of writing as it unfolds through time, each work advancing towards a settled form, which, as we shall see in what follows, is still infinitely open to the modifications that others might make to its meanings as they formulate a response to the poet's words.

３．**Persons and Conversations**

The first poem of *A Collection* 稲草, entitled 'After Prospero', begins with the word 'ENTER', evoking the figure of an actor emerging upon a stage. Prospero, the central protagonist of Shakespeare's play *The Tempest*, serves as a touchstone insofar as he is an orchestrator of spectacles, an impresario whose most memorable speech has turned out to be a rueful meditation on the ephemerality of performance.[10] The grand illusion of all that has transpired on the stage will vanish into 'thin air'. And if Prospero's enumeration of the elements that compose the 'fabric' of his vision is so architectural, comprising 'towers', 'palaces' and 'temples', it is of course because we are thus compelled to see in his phrase 'the great globe itself' an allusion to Shakespeare's own theatre *qua* material edifice (*The Tempest*, Act IV, Scene 1, lines 150–153). A 'brave new world' may lie ahead of the play's children, and dynasties have been restored, but the truth that lies before Prospero has to do only with the fading of the past. Gonzalo declares that the marriage of Ferdinand and Miranda should be 'set [...] down / With gold on lasting pillars' (Act V, Scene 1, lines 207–208). Yet, so starkly does his embrace of the monumental seem at odds with Prospero's vision of architectural dissolution that one wonders if this is not once more the now familiar comic device of the loyal councillor's tin ear coming into play. More importantly, though, the critical commonplace here is to regard Prospero as an avatar of Shakespeare himself and to view his

sentiments as those of the aging playwright.[11] As Robin remarks, the Shakespeare of *The Tempest* is a poet 'who can make self-abandonment a part of his own authorial practice'.[12]

But notions of 'self-abandonment' must also invoke the moral theme of one's dependence on others. For one more thing that Prospero should bring to mind is the necessity for an actor of an audience, and ultimately the notion of response. At the play's end, Prospero faces the audience alone, appealing for their 'indulgence':

> [...] release me from my bands
> With the help of your good hands:
> Gentle breath of yours my sails
> Must fill, or else my project fails,
> Which was to please. [...]
> And my ending is despair,
> Unless I be relieved by prayer,
> Which pierces so, that it assaults
> Mercy itself, and frees all faults.
>   As you from crimes would pardoned be,
>   Let your indulgence set me free.

(*The Tempest*, Act V, Scene 1, lines 327–338)

The audience themselves are thus brought into conversation with the play's central themes of forgiveness and freedom, as they are presented with an opportunity to forgive the actor for the deficiencies of his performance.[13] In its metaphorical language, Prospero's epilogue becomes increasingly theological. He entreats his audience finally not simply for applause but for 'prayers', for an intercession of such force that it will successfully plead his case before God himself. Not only does the 'indulgence' of the play's final line hint at the ecclesiastical practice of granting remission of sins, but the couplet as a whole suggests lines from the Lord's Prayer. Just as we would do well to forgive the trespasses of others if we expect God's forgiveness for our own, so the actor appeals to his audience to forgive in him the same propensity to fail that they must surely recognize in themselves. If prayers too, as ritualized expressions of keenly felt emotion, are performative, then what Prospero desires is indeed some manner of reciprocation, one performance in exchange for another, which tallies well, I would suggest, with what actually takes place psychologically between actors and an audience at a curtain call.

Shakespeare's surprising conflation of theatre and church, in what many critics see as his farewell to the stage, probably goes too often unremarked.[14] It also puts me in mind of a recent discussion of Robin's on Dante's credentials as a theologian. His 'Polemics of Praise' essay argues that Dante's accomplishment lies not in questions of doctrine but rather in 'his ability to make us reflect upon and appreciate the linguistic and narrative action of a Christian performance'. Once again, what distinguishes the *Commedia* from other kinds of theological

writing is its narrative form, the attention directed not to argument but to instances of human action. This is true, Robin insists, even at those junctures where the poem seems to be at its most doctrinal, such as in the extended episode in Cantos XXIV–XXVI of the *Paradiso* where the protagonist is examined, rather as a candidate for a university degree might be, on questions relating to the three theological virtues of faith, hope and charity. Here, too, it is the performative element that is most significant.

> The whole thing is a performance. This is to say that, just as the Creed is performative, as a promise of a way of life made in a communal context, Dante here likewise speaks to be heard by others, including the otherness of God, and to be at one with the response that Otherness alone—whether divine or human—can offer.[15]

Inseparable from the importance attached here to the idea of response is the notion of the value of persons.

To read Prospero's epilogue as the valediction not only of Shakespeare the actor and impresario but also of the writer, is to imagine that what is at stake is the poet's deference to his readers. Through Prospero, his alter-ego, the author begs our indulgence and forgiveness for all that has failed to 'please' in his many tales and the manner of their telling. At its conclusion, the 'baseless fabric' of the drama gives way to the lone figure of the actor, the machinery of the play falling away to reveal a person—and a rather vulnerable and exposed one at that—awaiting the judgement of other persons. Not, of course, that the responses of readers to poems need always be offered in the shape of an adjudication.

This takes us back to the poem 'After Prospero'. Against the background of Venetian carnival, the figure instructed by the opening stage direction to 'enter' does so 'wearing no apparent mask' in order to announce that 'there is no world but persons'. To speak in the shadow of Prospero of the world as composed of 'persons' is interesting not least because the word we now use, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, to denote 'a human being regarded as an individual', in its original guise as the Latin *persona*, once signified the mask of an actor or a 'character in a play'. And personhood, too, is perhaps a kind of performance in the sense that the self exists in the world through the actions it performs in the eyes of others.

In the Preface to *A Collection* 稻草, Robin comments that the decision to circulate the poems privately was driven by a belief that poems are best read by persons rather than publishers. For a poem to be complete, he suggests, it is necessary for it to meet with a response of some kind, and, as we have seen, Robin as a poet has been more open than most to the many possible forms which such responses might take. What is being mooted here, as the 'Or' placed at the beginning of the poem 'Hymn II' implies, is a radical alternative whereby poetry is regarded as a form of expression best interpreted not by literary critics but by the actions of dancers or musicians.

> Or: words belong to those whose meaning is
> an action carried on by all through time.
> So better all should sing them than explain.

It is through surrendering the poem's meanings to the responses of others that the poet evades the lapidary, perhaps as Mozart is here imagined in 'Out East: Partita with Envoi' as liberated by his encounter with Papagena from the temptation to enclose the luminous energies of the sun 'in circling stone'.

> [...] He might (as masons do) have claimed
> imperial entitlement to shut
> the sun's geometries in circling stone,
> but clicked with Papagena, so did not.

❖

Anyone who, like me, has been taught by Robin, can testify to the supreme value he places upon conversation.[16] This deeply held conviction is visible, I think, even in that enigmatic 稻草. The Chinese characters both attract and deflect attention, leaving us uncertain as to whether or not they stand outside the formal element of the title. Above all, they betoken an understanding of language as graphic sign, as the performance of a calligraphic gesture. The 稻草 summons an image of the dried stalks of rice-plants, having fallen perhaps haphazardly on the ground. Yet, the strokes of the brush or pen have been made by a practiced hand and eye. The characters hover between the linguistic and the pictorial, suggesting the kind of conversation between forms and media of expression that is so much to the fore in the first part of the book. What emerges is a conversation both between two cultures, the European and the Chinese, and between the two antithetical processes of collection and dispersal, of assemblage and dissolution.

Ultimately, the significance of calligraphy lies in the way it functions as the trace of an embodied presence. The brush strokes are the result of a particular set of human actions. They point beyond the poems to the abiding concern, apparent throughout much of Robin's critical writing, with Dante's interest in the particularity of embodied individuals and in the moral value of the human person.[17] Truths are not 'set down', as Gonzalo proposes they should be, but realized, as the title of Vittorio Montemaggi's recent book declares, 'in human encounter', in conversation.

Notes

[1] *The Tempest*, IV, i, 153–156. Shakespeare's plays are cited throughout from William Shakespeare, *Complete Works*, ed. by Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2007).

[2] The *Comedy* is quoted here from *La 'Commedia' secondo l'antica vulgata*, ed. by Giorgio Petrocchi, 4 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1966–67).

[3] The translations of the *Commedia* given here are my own but draw on the following published editions: Dante Alighieri, *The 'Divine Comedy'*, trans. with an introduction, notes and commentary by Mark Musa, 2nd edn, 3 vols (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984); and Dante Alighieri, *The 'Divine Comedy'*, trans. and ed. by Robin Kirkpatrick, 3 vols (London: Penguin, 2006–2007).

[4] Cited by Ange Mlinko, 'In Coleridge's Bed', *London Review of Books*, 39, no. 8 (2017), 39–40 (p. 40), from Anne Carson's 'persuasive account of the nexus between poets and death' in *Economy of the Unlost: Reading Simonides of Keos with Paul Celan,* Martin Classical Lectures (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).

[5] For a meditation on what it might mean in existential terms, and in fact in terms reminiscent of the French existentialists, to see the damned souls of the *Inferno* as 'hardened', see John Took's splendid essay, 'Recursion and Reiteration: Patterns of Existence in Dante', in *Patterns in Dante: Nine Literary Essays*, ed. by Cormac Ó Cuilleanáin and Jennifer Petrie (Dublin: Four Courts, 2005), pp. 71–83. Took himself does not use the notion of 'hardness', but his sense of the 'fixity' of the damned could be seen as analogous. He views the human soul in Hell as trapped in 'reiterative' patterns such that it 'moves endlessly to and fro within the same fixed boundaries', a condition in which no 'genuine liquidation' of guilt is possible (pp. 75–77). Farinata is emblematic in the way his fixity and refusal of self-transcendence allows him 'no renewal, no progression, no emergence of the spirit onto a fresh plane of existence' (p. 79). On the hardness of bodies in the *Inferno* as a correlative of psychological states, see my own, '"Uno lume apparente di fuori second sta dentro": The Expressive Body in Dante's *Commedia*', *The Italianist*, 34, no. 1 (2014), 1–22 (pp. 6–7).

[6] Robin Kirkpatrick, *Dante's 'Inferno': Difficulty and Dead Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 411–412; and 436.

[7] Thanks are due here to my Chinese colleague Xiaomei Yan (閣 小妹)for help with this.

[8] Kirkpatrick, *Difficulty and Dead Poetry*, pp. 104–105.

[9] Robin Kirkpatrick, 'Polemics of Praise: Theology as Text, Narrative, and Rhetoric in Dante's Commedia', in *Dante's 'Commedia': Theology as Poetry*, ed. by Vittorio Montemaggi and Matthew Treherne (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), pp. 14–35 (p. 24). See also Kathryn Dickason, 'Discipline and Redemption: The Dance of Penitence', *Dante e l'arte*, 4 (2017), pp. 67–100 (p. 85): 'Though Beatrice herself did not partake in dancing, her presence animates the performative nature of the Earthly Paradise. Beatrice [...] operates kinesthetically, setting the whole scene, and arguably the whole *Commedia*, into motion'.

[10] Tony Tanner, *Prefaces to Shakespeare*, with a foreword by Stephen Heath (Cambridge, MA and London: Belknap / Harvard University Press, 2010), p. 821, supposes it is 'the most famous speech in Shakespeare', though this is probably not to be taken at face value.

[11] On the long-standing and enduring 'inclination to identify Prospero and his creator', see again Tanner, *Prefaces to Shakespeare*, pp. 823–825.

[12] Robin Kirkpatrick, *English and Italian Literature from Dante to Shakespeare: A Study of Sources, Analogue and Divergence* (Harlow: Longman, 1995), p. 264. Compare the understanding in Vittorio Montemaggi, *Reading Dante's 'Commedia' as Theology: Divinity Realized in Human Encounter* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 158, that the poem 'September 8th 2013' (*A Collection* 稻草, p. 222–223) 'conveys compellingly the challenge that Dante's poem presents us with to abandon any preconceived, self-centred notion of existential searching in favor of one that might be based in genuine dispossession of self [...]'.

[13] On the theme of freedom in the play, see my '"Thou shalt have the air at freedom": The Theme of Liberty in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*', *Shinshu University Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 9 (2014), pp. 13–28.

[14] See, however, Jonathan Bate, 'The Tempest: Introduction', in William Shakespeare, *Complete Works*, ed. by Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2007), pp. 1–5 (p. 4): 'Prospero's Christian language reaches its most sustained pitch in the epilogue, but his final request is for the indulgence not of God but of the audience. At the last moment, humanist learning is replaced not by Christian but by theatrical faith.'

[15] Kirkpatrick, 'Polemics of Praise', p. 25.

[16] This emerges repeatedly in a recent book by another former student: Vittorio Montemaggi, *Reading Dante's 'Commedia' as Theology: Divinity Realized in Human Encounter* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016). Affectionate tribute is paid here to the generosity with which Robin has always been willing to

engage his pupils in conversation (p. 155). But Montemaggi adopts the conversational paradigm throughout as a way of viewing his interactions with other thinkers and writers.

[17] See especially, Robin Kirkpatrick, 'Dante's Beatrice and the Politics of Singularity', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 32, no. 1 (1990), 101–119, and idem, 'Dante and the Body', in *Framing Medieval Bodies*, ed. by Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), pp. 236–253; and also now Heather Webb, *Dante's Persons: An Ethics of the Transhuman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

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