

provided by science, which in turn results in a double-faced attitude of both bewilderment and enthusiasm. Gigliucci's *Realismo barocco* thus relates to the wave of scholarly analysis that has been underlining the sense of uncertainty experienced by mankind during the Baroque period, which coexisted with a push toward new investigations prompted by the discoveries of new science.

In order to examine such a contradictory mix of feelings and impulses, Gigliucci undertakes an extensive investigation of Baroque art and literature. This investigation centers on Italian culture but includes other European cultures as well. The volume is divided into two parts, both of which are devoted to an interdisciplinary analysis of the relationship between Baroque literature and culture and the examination and representation of reality. The first part, "Ambiti generali" (General contexts), analyzes artistic and literary Baroque realism in its European context. This section explores the Baroque notion of the world as a theater, and also takes into account different genres such as the picaresque novel, the short story, and the field of historiography and of political writing. This first general section is followed by a more specific second part, titled "Quadri italiani" (Italian frames), which is an in-depth investigation of Italian Baroque realism through Baroque Italian poetry and a reflection on the concept of classicism.

Realismo barocco is a remarkably exhaustive and erudite study, and an essential instrument for anyone intending to approach the cultural complexity of the Baroque. Its dense cultural references make it best suited for a specialized readership that already possesses some familiarity with the cultural context explored in the book, such as scholars of literature and of the visual arts or advanced graduate students. The two main parts that form the book are usefully divided up into smaller sections introduced by sub-chapters. The first part opens with a brief introduction that lays out the book's field of analysis; however, a more substantial introductory section would have rendered the book easier to navigate.

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Reading as the Angels Read: Speculation and Politics in Dante's Banquet.

Maria Luisa Ardizzone.

Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016. xii + 454 pp. \$95.

Early in the *Convivio*, Dante announces his intent to share a banquet of fourteen *canzoni*, each of which is described as a course accompanied by a barley bread of vernacular prose commentary—a commentary that Dante admits may pose a variety of difficulties for its readers. In *Reading as the Angels Read*—the 2016 recipient of the American Association for Italian Studies' Medieval Book Prize—Maria Luisa Ardizzone offers a formidable accompaniment of her own to Dante's abandoned treatise. Like its object

of study, Ardizzone's contribution is subtle and illuminating but also therefore sometimes difficult to chew and digest.

Ardizzone's primary aim is to establish that the *Convivio's* central philosophical focus "is a discussion of human intellectual power in its inner natural link with political life within a community" (22). Ardizzone's thesis is that "Dante's idea about intellectual happiness implies a community that contemplates together and that intellectual happiness [is] coincident with a political happiness shared because the thinking subject [is] one" (314). In connection with this claim, Ardizzone points out that, because the object of this shared contemplation is the same separate substance, this contemplative activity also unites individual human beings to the active angelic intelligence that is the intention of their collective contemplation. Thus, on Ardizzone's reading, the *Convivio* emphasizes a "principle of unity, in which the cosmological order is the expression of a superior intellectual love and desire, one which human and superhuman beings may share" (274).

In order to defend this thesis, Ardizzone trains the force of her considerable erudition and interpretive acumen on several major points of contention in Dante scholarship, chief among which is the question of the potential heterodoxy of Dante's philosophical views concerning human ontology. On this point, Ardizzone stresses that, in the *Convivio*, Dante's rhetorical choices—particularly his "subtle and difficult" rhetorical ornaments (291)—consistently involve a "covert language" (228) that implies an awareness of controversy and the probable heterodoxy of his own views even while concealing the precise scope of his heterodoxy. Of particular concern to Ardizzone throughout her study is to distinguish aspects of Dante's view that resemble basic tenets of Averroism from the materialism favored by more radically heterodox thinkers such as Guido Cavalcanti. In short, Ardizzone allows that the second and third books of the *Convivio* express a fundamental commitment to the unity of the possible intellect. However, she insists, even in his most heterodox moments, Dante nevertheless resists the potential materialist implications of that view, especially in his overt insistence on the significance of faith, hope, and charity as virtues orienting the human being toward its natural felicity. Thus, in contrast to Cavalcanti, for instance, who emphasized the sensuous nature of the human being and the fundamental mortality of the individual, Ardizzone claims that the second and third books of Dante's *Convivio* emphasize, instead, the potential for human beings to achieve an earthly intellectual happiness in the shared activity of the contemplation of separate substances.

For many readers, Ardizzone's extended discussions of the philosophical context may be difficult to chew, no matter how necessary that context may be for understanding the significance of the *Convivio*. In particular, Ardizzone relies on her readers to have some basic familiarity with medieval philosophical disputes concerning the relationships between separated substances and both the possible intellect and the agent intellect. Unfortunately, there are also unnecessary difficulties to be overcome in *Reading as the Angels*

Read. In the first place, many readers are likely to be impatient with avoidable redundancies in the argument. Ardizzone's commentary on the second and third books of the *Convivio* is exhaustive, but much of the evidence that she marshals in defense of her thesis is redundant in the *Convivio* itself. Moreover, the philosophical resources that Ardizzone uses to elucidate the *Convivio*'s underlying doctrinal content is frequently re-deployed in treating each new case. Finally, some additional editorial scrutiny would have been of benefit even to patient and enthusiastic readers. At the very least, it is regrettable that Ardizzone neglects to provide a citation for the English translation of the *Convivio* that she quotes extensively (though not exclusively). Dante scholars will probably recognize that the translation is that of Christopher Ryan (*The Banquet*, 1989), but the only English translation that appears to receive a citation is that of Richard Lansing (*Dante's "Il Convivio,"* 1990).

Still, as in the case of the *Convivio* itself, the difficulties encountered in *Reading as the Angels Read* are far more often a necessary consequence of the book's significance than of its shortcomings. In sum, Ardizzone sets before her readers a banquet that constitutes an important contribution to the field of Dante studies.

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The Task of the Cleric: Cartography, Translation, and Economics in Thirteenth-Century Iberia. Simone Pinet.

Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016. xl + 192 pp. \$65.

The Task of the Cleric's first chapter, "The Cleric's Compass," defines the professional purview of the medieval cleric as author. The author, Simone Pinet, focuses on the thirteenth century, a crucial period in Spanish history defined at its beginning by the Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa in 1212; at its midpoint by the Spanish Christian Reconquest's completion of the major phase of its project of colonizing Islamic Spain; and in its final decades by the gradual consolidation of Castile as the principal emergent nation-state of the Iberian Peninsula. Coincident with these historical developments was the appearance of the important literary movement known as the *mester de clerecía* (cleric's craft), which produced some of the early classics of vernacular Spanish literature. The author rightly devotes most of her attention to the earliest and most important of these works, the *Book of Alexander*, a long verse romance chiefly based on French and Latin versions of the same basic tale; all of these derive, ultimately, and with numerous variations and additions, from the late classical Alexander romance. Supported by artful citations from an impressive array of judiciously selected medieval sources, the author persuasively demonstrates the importance of cartography in the Spanish *Alexander* author's deducible milieu, in which map making was a central pedagogical element frequently incorporated