THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO

DANTE'S *COMMEDIA*

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Transmission History

Nothing written in Dante's own hand has survived. Our knowledge of his masterpiece comes from the more than eight hundred extant manuscript copies of the *Commedia*: the richest manuscript tradition for any medieval vernacular work. (There are six hundred or so complete copies of the poem; another two hundred contain just one *cantica* or are otherwise incomplete.) For purposes of comparison, around eighty manuscripts survive of the *Canterbury Tales* (*c.*1387–1400), around two hundred of the *Roman de la rose* (*c.*1230 and 1275), both works hugely popular in their time. The *Commedia* was the medieval equivalent of a runaway best-seller. The very high number of surviving copies is comparable to a modern print-run of many millions; the wastage rate – the percentage of copies which do not survive – has been calculated at between 80 and 90 per cent. The textual scholar working on the transmission history of the poem shares the same goal – to restore a text as close as possible to the author's original – as scholars working on other medieval vernacular texts, and has the same need for a sound method for evaluating the available evidence. But the sheer scale of the task facing an editor of the *Commedia* makes it a unique case.

Eight hundred copies of the poem, no two of them identical. How do we work back from the surviving evidence to Dante's lost original, or something as close to that original as our scholarly expertise and acumen allow? In this chapter, I attempt to set out the problem, to outline the history of engagement with it over the course of seven centuries, and to describe the current state of play in this area of Dante scholarship.

The transmission of a text is a process that occurs over time: we can usefully start with some dates. Dante died in 1321. The oldest securely dated manuscript of the *Commedia*, the Landiano manuscript (La) now in the Biblioteca Comunale of Piacenza, dates from 1336.[1] There is a tantalizing fifteen-year interval in which there was an explosion of interest in the poem but no copies of it survive. A proliferation of commentaries and glosses in

these years throws much light on matters of fact and interpretation, but in the absence of copies of the poem itself, our knowledge of its transmission history in these crucial missing early years is of necessity indirect or speculative.

No fewer than five commentaries on the poem were written in this fifteen-year interval. The poet's youngest son Jacopo composed a sketchy one within six months of his father's death, in early 1322. Two Bolognese intellectuals, Graziolo Bambaglioli and Iacomo della Lana, quickly followed. Graziolo's Latin commentary on *Inferno* dates from 1324; Lana's extensive vernacular commentary on the whole poem was composed between 1324 and 1328. Early in the next decade the Carmelite friar Guido da Pisa wrote a Latin commentary on *Inferno* whose first draft is pre-1333; and the anonymous Florentine author of the *Ottimo commento* on the whole poem was working around 1334. (The conventional title of this commentary reflects the seal of approval later accorded it by the Accademia della Crusca for the excellence of its content and the quality of its vernacular language). There are smaller collections of glosses on *Inferno*, the so-called *Chiose palatine*, composed between 1325 and 1333; and those conventionally attributed to an *Anonimo lombardo*, whose initiator was working before 1326. Collectively these commentaries and glosses give glimpses into the earliest phase of the *Commedia*'s transmission history, showing that there were already errors and variant readings in circulation, and that alert copyists and commentators were well aware of this and were anxious (like any modern editor) to present the best possible text.

Jacopo's *Chiose* give us our first documented case of a corrupt reading. At *Inferno* XXVII, 54, the line 'tra tirannia si vive e stato franco' is glossed by Jacopo as though it read *si vive in stato franco*. But Dante is telling Guido da Montefeltro that Cesena is in a politically intermediate state 'between tyranny and liberty', not a city 'in a state of liberty' – a clear error. The process of textual degeneration in the *Commedia* almost certainly predates Dante's death for those portions of the poem already released to the public (*Inferno* 1314, *Purgatorio* 1315–16; some scholars believe smaller groups of *canti* were released earlier in batches as composition progressed).

Dante's older son Pietro, in his thoughtful commentary begun twenty years after his father's death, alerts us to an error widely in circulation when he paraphrases the line 'ma chi parlava ad ire parea mosso' (but the person who spoke seemed moved to going; *Inf.* XXIV, 69): 'the person who spoke seemed moved, don't say "to anger", as many texts say wrongly, but say "to go", that is, in motion'. Many texts have the corrupt reading *ad ira* (to anger); the correct reading, he says, is *ad ire* (to go). The two readings are equally plausible in context. This, in a nutshell, is the problem: two possible
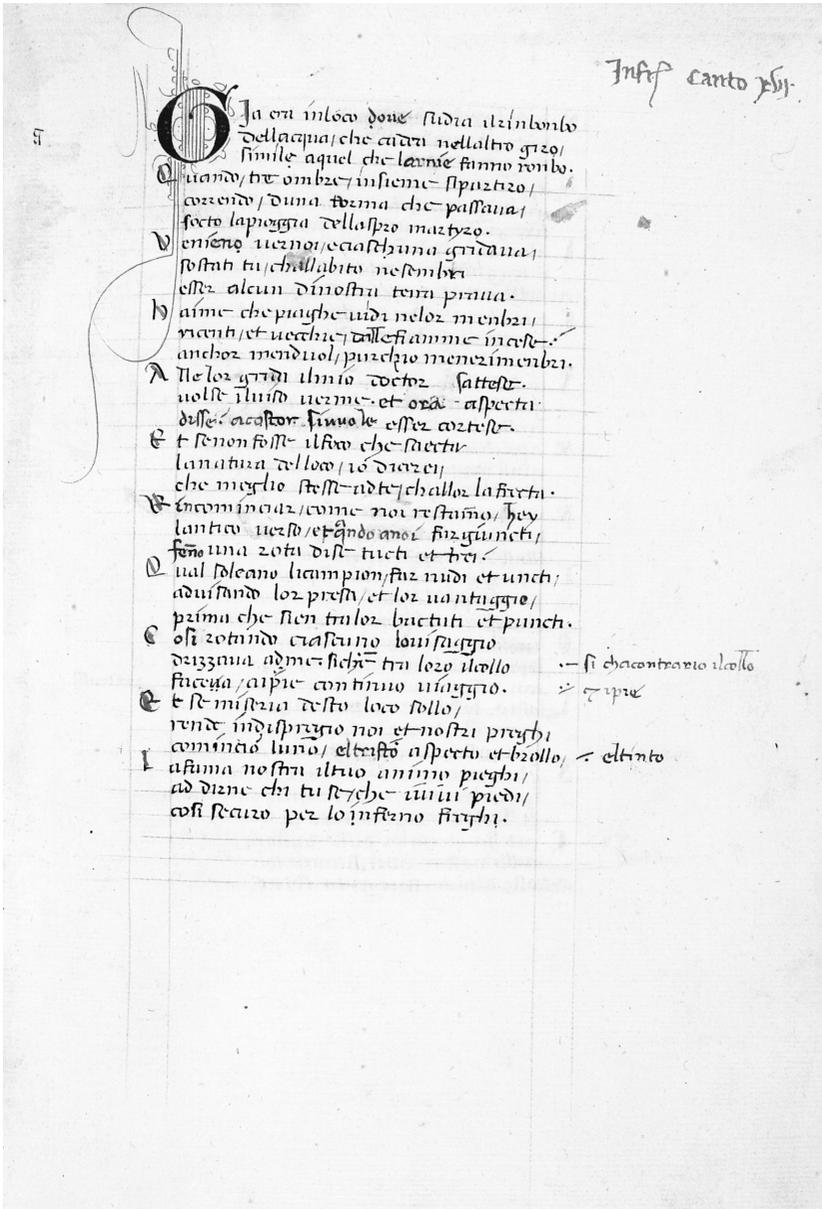
Figure 4. A page of Filippo Villani's manuscript copy of the *Commedia* known as LauSC (MS, Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Pl. 26, sin. 1), showing a heavily worked-over text. For a full account of the interventions of the correcting hands here, see the *Commedia* DVD-Rom and follow the links > Editorial Material > IV. Ms Transcription Notes > LauSC. By permission of the Ministero per i Beni culturali e ambientali.

readings, both of which make perfect sense. What do we think Dante wrote? Most modern scholars think *ad ire* to be the better reading, even though, remarkably, it is not known from any early surviving manuscript – a striking instance of the value of the commentary tradition for the textual scholar.

Questions of this kind arise over the whole 14,233 lines of the poem. But why is textual corruption in manuscript traditions omnipresent? For our purposes anything which alters the words Dante wrote counts as corruption (a more neutral term would be scribal innovation). Where do these alternative or competing readings come from? There is no evidence of authorial variants for the *Commedia*, though such variants have sometimes been hypothesized.

Texts become corrupt because there are two things scribes unfailingly do: they alter textual substance, and they alter linguistic form. They alter textual substance in two ways: by innovating inadvertently as they copy, unwittingly introducing variants and errors; or by intervening deliberately to improve the text, correcting what are, or seem to them to be, obvious mistakes. An obvious mistake might be to call the German theologian Albert the Great, 'Alberto ... di Bologna' instead of 'Alberto ... di Cologna' (*Par*. X, 98–9); or to add the unlikely name Merlino to the list of ancient writers celebrated early in *Inferno* (IV, 141) in place of the obscure Lino whose unfamiliar name was an early casualty of the copying process, and, remarkably, survives intact in only one manuscript.[2] But most innovations or errors are far more insidious: often they make perfect sense in context and are very plausible. Many of them will be distributed throughout the tradition in a way which does not lend itself to easy analysis.

It is true that the metrical scheme of the *Commedia* acts as a constraint on textual volatility: it might almost have been devised by Dante to function as a brake on the wilder excesses of scribal ignorance, carelessness, and over-confidence. The mandatory syllable count within the line, the non-negotiability of the intricate *terza rima* rhyme scheme, inhibit scribal innovation to some extent. It is startling to find Cristoforo Landino, in his prestigious 1481 print edition, misquoting the first line of the poem: 'Nel mezzo del camino di nostra vita', clearly metrically faulty with its twelve syllables (the error is present in several early manuscripts);[3] it is unusual to find an uncorrected error which falls at the end of the line and fails to observe rhyme, as when the scribe of manuscript Rb writes *porse* instead of *puose* in the sequence – *dolorose-puose-cose* – at *Inferno* III, 19. But in spite of the inbuilt metrical constraints, the degree of textual variation in surviving copies of the *Commedia* can seem little short of astonishing.

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The second thing copyists unfailingly do involves linguistic form: they adapt the text they are copying to their own language habits and preferences. In medieval Italy there was no standard form of Italian and regional varieties were very distinctive. The northern manuscript Urb opens: 'Nel meggio del cammin di nostra vita'; *meggio* is simply a northern form of *mezzo*. A Tuscan copyist copying from a northern manuscript will write *mezzo* even if his exemplar has *meggio*. But this linguistic flexibility and lack of fixity can be a source of confusion and error: copyists may fail to recognize or correctly interpret some forms. At *Inferno* V, 64, 65, and 67 ('Elena vedi … vedi 'l grande Achille … Vedi Paris, Tristano … '), present tense *vedi* ('you see') in some northern manuscripts is written *vidi*, a form which a Tuscan reader will interpret as a past tense ('I saw'), altering the dynamics of the narrative. Even within central Italy, manuscripts copied in western Tuscany (Pisa, Lucca) will have a quite marked linguistic colouring which is very different from Florentine.

From the outset, geographical and regional factors are a crucial dimension of the transmission history of the *Commedia*, and pose fundamental questions for the textual scholar. The precise relationship between the relatively small number of surviving northern manuscripts of the poem and the much larger number of Tuscan manuscripts is one such key question. The earliest copies of the poem were northern: Dante had lived in Verona and Ravenna for many years before he died. The Tuscan tradition has as its point of origin a copy of the poem assembled by Jacopo which he is thought to have taken to Florence circa 1325. (We can be sure he did not have access to a notional master-copy belonging to his father.) Dante's birthplace quickly became the epicentre for the production of copies. One professional scribe reputedly provided dowries for his daughters by copying the poem one hundred times.

A separate and particularly delicate question touching on geography is what form of language Dante actually wrote. How permeable was his native Florentine to other regional forms of speech and pronunciation during his twenty years of exile in northern Italy? A related and important consideration is that Tuscan copyists may re-Tuscanize the language, but their language will not necessarily be that of Dante and his time. Linguists assume that Dante's Florentine is that of the last decade of the Duecento, some forty-odd years before the earliest surviving Tuscan manuscript, the magnificent Trivulziano 1080 (Triv), dated 1337.

Erosion and oil stain are two compelling images for the process and effects of textual degradation through successive generations of manuscript copying, evoking as they do both the loss for the reader and the problems for an editor that such degradation entails. Erosion – a wearing away, a flattening of distinctive features – translates in linguistic terms

into *banalizzazione*, the loss or blurring of everything which is freshest and most original and distinctive in the poet's language. An oil stain spreads outwards from an initial spill: just so an initial error may have a knock-on effect, seeping into and causing further errors in the surrounding text. The final result may be that a passage becomes not just flat but unintelligible, as when *Inferno* XVI, 34–6 – 'Questi, l'orme di cui pestar mi vedi, / tutto che nudo e dipelato vada, / fu di grado maggior che tu non credi' (This man, in whose footsteps you see me tread, for all that he goes naked and hairless, was of higher rank than you believe) – becomes, in the famous Holkham Hall manuscript now in the Bodleian library in Oxford, 'Queste lorme di cui tu pestar mi vedi / tucto che nudo et dipelato vada / fur di grado maggior che tu non credi'. Here the initial error of making *questi* agree with *orme* (*queste l'orme*: 'these the footsteps', rather than *questi, l'orme di cui*: 'this man, whose footsteps') is compounded when the singular verb *fu* is changed to a plural *fur* to agree with this new subject. The lines now make no sense at all.

Textual corruption, and an awareness of textual corruption, go hand in hand from the very beginning of the *Commedia*'s transmission history. The words of a scribe working in 1330, six years before our earliest surviving copy of the poem, are revealing. He describes the care with which he has sought out good readings from several manuscripts: 'on account of the lack of skill and experience of those who write in the vernacular, the book is much disfigured by corrupt and false readings. But I, drawing on various other copies, rejecting readings that are false and bringing together those that are true or seemed suited to the meaning, faithfully executed this copy as soberly as I could'. These words, written just nine years after Dante's death, strikingly bear witness both to an awareness of widespread corruption in the text, and to one copyist's attempts to counteract it. This is the earliest copyist of whom we have knowledge, albeit indirect – and he is actively and enthusiastically seeking out alternative readings and evaluating them: in modern terms, editing. (In technical terms he is contaminating, on which more below.)

The manuscript to which this note was appended was copied in 1330–1 and does not survive. We can reconstruct it from the careful collation made of it in 1548 by the Florentine humanist Luca Martini, who meticulously recorded, in the margins of his copy of the Aldine printed text of 1515, the many readings where the manuscript he was examining diverged from his printed collation copy (Martini's collation is referred to with the sigil Mart). He copied the scribe's account of his search for good readings onto a blank page at the end of the Aldine volume.[4]

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La, the earliest securely dated surviving manuscript, offers an excellent image of the state of the text fifteen years after Dante's death. The whole text of the poem in the Landiano manuscript has been revised, with readings erased and replaced by other readings: some but not all of the erased readings are recoverable; some but not all of the amended readings are improvements.

How do we make sense of the textual evidence provided by Mart and La, not to mention the many hundreds of later copies of the poem? What conceptual model does an editor work with when seeking to understand the myriad alternative readings attested in the surviving tradition, and to choose between them?

The presence of scribal error lies at the heart of philological methodology. The act of copying embodies a vertical transmission model: each new copy is made from an existing copy of the text, forming an unbroken chain which ultimately leads back to the original. Precisely because copyists make errors, we can create a genealogical tree (or stemma) of manuscript relationships based on shared errors. But, crucially, those errors must be significant ones. Trivial errors, the myriad small errors copyists are liable to make independently of one another – 'convergent error' in English or 'polygenetic error' in Italian – will have no evidential force. Scholars using stemmatic methodology to illuminate the textual transmission of the *Commedia* will need to decide which errors are significant and therefore form a solid basis for reliable deductions. There is no consensus about what constitutes a significant error.

La is a graphic example of how a vertical transmission model is compromised by horizontal transmission (contamination) – that is, by the introduction of readings laterally, from a source other than the primary source of a given copy. Contamination subverts the relatively simple model of vertical transmission that enables us to plot manuscript relations with some confidence. When contamination is rampant, as it is in the *Commedia* – from the very earliest times, as the evidence of Mart and La so clearly shows – the difficulties may seem insurmountable. Paradoxically, from the very beginning, the keenest, most proactive admirers of Dante's genius, in spite of (or rather because of) their eagerness to have the best possible version of his poem, make the task of establishing an authoritative text incomparably more difficult.

Not all the earliest copies of the poem are contaminated. Of the small number securely dated before 1340, three magnificent exemplars show no obvious traces of contamination, though all three have occasional minimal corrections to the text: Ash, the Pisan manuscript known as the 'antichissimo', the 'oldest', which may indeed date from 1334; Triv, securely dated 1337, copied by one of the most famous of Tuscan scribes, Francesco di Ser Nardo; and Rb, copied in Bologna by a maestro Galvano towards the end of

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the decade. (All three can be viewed in their entirety – the full text, images, and transcriptions – on the *Commedia* DVD-Rom, where close analysis reveals that Rb is in fact contaminated, but only in the opening and closing cantos of the poem.) These very precious early manuscripts neatly illustrate the main geographical areas of scribal activity, and the characteristic linguistic forms associated respectively with western Tuscany, Florence, and northern Italy.

By the time we reach the turn of the century, sixty years later, we are dealing with some three hundred surviving manuscripts. Within this rich panorama of scribal activity, two figures stand out for their passionate commitment to Dante and the *Commedia*: Giovanni Boccaccio, working in the third quarter of the century; and Filippo Villani, working in its final decade. Their tireless activities over many years – copying the poem and seeking out variants, working on a commentary and a biography – are a vital part of its transmission history, not just because of their high intrinsic interest, but because they play a determining role in the unfolding story of modern scholarly attempts to establish a reliable text of the poem. Villani's editorial endeavours underlie the work of the nineteenth-century German scholar Karl Witte, the founding father of Dante manuscript studies for the modern age; Boccaccio's provide the theoretical underpinning of the most authoritative twentieth-century edition of the poem, that of Giorgio Petrocchi.

Boccaccio copied the *Commedia* three times, using as his exemplar ms. Vat 3199 (Vat), the manuscript he had ordered from a Florentine scriptorium for his friend Petrarch, probably in 1351. Vat is a manuscript of key importance in the transmission history of the poem, being not just the source of Boccaccio's copies (To, Ri, Chig), but the basis, as we shall see, of the two most influential early printed editions. But far from copying this illustrious exemplar faithfully, Boccaccio consulted other copies, and incorporated into his own copies plausible variants from these other manuscripts. Nor was this a once-and-for-all procedure: he continued actively to seek out and introduce new readings in the later copies. As a result, his second and third copies differ both from his first copy and from one another. Boccaccio's contaminatory activity is on such a scale that when Petrocchi was asked by the Società Dantesca Italiana to prepare a critical edition of the poem for the 1965 centenary of the poet's birth, he decided to base his edition only on manuscripts securely datable, in his view, before 1355 – before (as he believed) Boccaccio's editorial endeavours had irremediably contaminated the tradition beyond any possibility of rational analysis.

Villani's copy of the poem in his own hand (LauSC), written at the turn of the century (*c.*1401), heavily corrected and worked over, with many

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abrasions and rewritings, was long regarded, in spite of its relatively late date, as one of the most valuable and reliable of all the surviving manuscripts. It is one of the four manuscripts on which Witte based his ground-breaking 1862 edition. More recently, a renewed claim for its importance was made in 2001 by Federico Sanguineti, who claimed (but offered no proof) that the *scriptio prior* of LauSC is an authentic uncontaminated copy of a very old manuscript, rather than the heavily contaminated composite text that fine-grained analysis of the variants shows it in reality to be.

Boccaccio and Villani's editorial procedures were pragmatic rather than theoretical: they replaced one reading with another they thought better in the copy they were working on. Their *strumenti di lavoro* were the pen in their hand and their own judgement. Only in the nineteenth century was a methodology established for evaluating manuscript variants more objectively, eliminating (or at least minimizing) the subjective element. We can briefly survey key moments in the transmission history of the poem in the intervening centuries, before considering attempts in the last one hundred and fifty years to apply the stemmatic methodology that puts the establishing of a critical text on a more objective footing.

Not much interest was shown in the text of the poem in the Quattrocento. Little changed with the invention of printing. The earliest printed editions of the poem (Foligno, Mantua, Venice [all 1472], Venice [1477], Naples [1477, 1478], Milan [1478]) are mostly based each on a single manuscript whose text is uncritically reproduced. The Landino commentary to his 1481 edition was to be hugely influential, but its text, as we have seen, was poor.

The Cinquecento, by contrast, was a period of intense interest in the text of the poem. The century is bookended by two important editions, both widely influential, seen as authoritative in their time, and often reprinted.

The Aldine edition, first printed in 1502, was prepared by the eminent man of letters Pietro Bembo; the 1595 edition was prepared by the Accademia della Crusca.[5] The Aldine edition was still essentially the reproduction of a single authoritative manuscript, Boccaccio's exemplar Vat, which Bembo's father owned, though Bembo did consult other manuscripts. It was reprinted in 1515 and became the standard printed edition for the century, republished many times, several times in tandem with Cristoforo Landino's authoritative commentary, even when text and commentary do not match.

In the middle years of the century there was a resurgence of interest in Florence in establishing the text of the *Commedia*. Martini, who two years later collated Mart, tells us that in 1546 a group of five Florentine scholars met at San Gavino in Mugello to compare the readings of seven early manuscripts. This was a landmark moment: a collective enterprise to assemble and

collate textual data. Sadly, many of the very early manuscripts they examined do not survive; nor, alas, does a complete record of their activity.

The edition published in 1595 by the Accademia della Crusca was produced in tandem with the Academy's famous dictionary, whose first edition was published a few years later. The academicians made extensive efforts to establish a good text of the *Commedia*, consulting some hundred-odd manuscripts, whose readings appear as occasional marginal variants in the printed text; but that text nonetheless still remains anchored to Bembo and Vat. The Crusca edition became the vulgate text for the following centuries.

Only in the nineteenth century is the dominance of Vat challenged, with the heroic efforts of two distinguished Dante scholars, Karl Witte and Edward Moore. Both studied hundreds of manuscripts of the poem; both were familiar with the now well-established stemmatic methodology. Their pioneering work vastly broadened the manuscript base underlying their respective editions. Witte's 1862 edition is based on four manuscripts, but his choice of those four drew on his wide knowledge of many more. Moore's extensive researches, presented in his epoch-making volume *Contributions to the Textual Criticism of the Divina Commedia* (1889), included a collation of the whole of the *Inferno* in the seventeen manuscripts found in Oxford and Cambridge. Moore's conclusion on the methodological front was that the tradition was so contaminated that he believed it would never be possible to produce a genealogical tree of manuscript relations. He made a practical suggestion: a way forward might be to work with 'test passages'. His edition of the text, published in Oxford in 1894, superseded that of Witte and remained authoritative for several decades.[6]

When the Società Dantesca Italiana was founded in 1888 its stated goal was to establish authoritative texts for all of Dante's works. In 1891, at the invitation of three senior *dantisti* linked with the Società, a youthful Michele Barbi produced a list of lines in the *Commedia* which he believed would prove crucial for establishing manuscript relationships: the so-called 400 *loci* (in actual fact, 396 lines of text). The *loci* were not chosen arbitrarily, but, as Barbi himself emphasized, were the result of much practical experience working with the rich manuscript resources of the Florentine libraries and pondering on the significance of certain variant readings. When the list was published, an open invitation was issued to other interested scholars to check these lines in any manuscripts of the poem to which they had access, and to send in a record of the readings at these various points. Special forms were printed to facilitate the task. The hope was to accumulate a mass of material drawn from a large number of manuscripts scattered over a vast geographical area – far beyond the possibilities of any individual scholar to examine and

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record. This would constitute an invaluable data bank of textual material and serve as a basis for a detailed analysis of manuscript relations, and, in the fullness of time, an authoritative edition of Dante's poem to be prepared under the aegis of the Società.

The response to Barbi's invitation was disappointing. A handful of scholars examined a handful of manuscripts and reported their findings. Thirty years later, in the early 1920s, when Giuseppe Vandelli and Mario Casella independently produced new scholarly editions of the poem, they had largely to rely on their own labours. Vandelli's edition, which was published to mark the 1921 centenary of Dante's death and was to be influential for more than forty years, was the fruit of many years of investigation into individual manuscript variants, but Vandelli did not produce a theory of manuscript relationships; like Witte and Moore before him, he thought it was not possible to do so. Rather, he attempted for each individual reading to explain how the variants were related to, and derived from, an original reading which might account for them. In effect he applied stemmatic methods to individual readings on a case-by-case basis.[7]

Casella's edition was less influential than Vandelli's, but methodologically his contribution was fundamental, in that he articulated a first tentative theory of manuscript relationships. His grouping of manuscripts into two families (α and β) paved the way for all future studies of the transmission history of the poem.[8] Petrocchi's edition is based on a two-branched stemma, though his α and β families are very differently constituted from Casella's; and scholars since Petrocchi have continued to hypothesize a two-branched tree, although there is no consensus about its exact configuration.

In Petrocchi's view, as we have seen, the scale of contamination in and after the Boccaccio copies is new and non-negotiable. Petrocchi based his edition on twenty-four complete manuscripts and three fragmentary copies, renouncing any attempt systematically to utilize later manuscripts (though he was confident they contained no good readings not present in the earlier tradition). This editorial strategy was not simply a pragmatic response to the vast size of the surviving tradition; on the contrary – he insisted – it was imposed by the transmission history of the text itself. Petrocchi's edition marked a historic step forward in Dante studies, both for its theoretical take on the complexities of the textual tradition and the text which resulted from his approach: not simply *La Commedia* (the poem as Dante wrote it), but *La Commedia secondo l'antica vulgata* (the poem as it circulated in the three and a half decades after the poet's death). Crucially, that is, Petrocchi did not claim to be reconstructing Dante's original; and his title reflected his scrupulous insistence that no edition could be called genuinely critical or definitive which had not examined all the manuscript evidence.

In the fifty years since Petrocchi's edition was published, scholarly work on the transmission history of the *Commedia* has proceeded on many fronts. Recent scholarship suggests that of the three hundred or so surviving Trecento manuscripts of the poem, many more than the twenty-seven used by Petrocchi were copied before 1355 (the true figure appears to be over eighty). The contribution of codicologists and paleographers to the debate has been crucial. In this new and more complex panorama, the significance of Boccaccio's role seems less clear than Petrocchi believed to be the case.

On the theoretical front, scholars have debated, and continue to debate, the shape of the stemma, and the relative weight to be given to particular families or to individual manuscripts within it. The question of whether it is possible to reconstruct Dante's original remains open: two recent editions claim to supersede Petrocchi by presenting a text which is very close to that original.

The 1995 edition of the *Commedia* by Antonio Lanza argued that since it was impossible to examine and analyse all the manuscript evidence, the only rational course of action left to an editor was to choose the best manuscript available and to prepare an edition in conformity with the practice recommended in an influential contribution to the theoretical debate by the eminent French philologist Joseph Bédier. On Bédier's view, the most useful thing an editor could do was to give an accurate and scholarly edition of the 'best' surviving witness, so that the reader would see a version of the text which in that limited sense at least was authentic. The 'best manuscript' chosen by Lanza as the basis for his edition was Triv, whose Florentine character and exceptionally careful scribe in his view justify this choice. With this new text, Lanza claims, we have 'a Dante who has not been "italianized" (or, worse, "bembo-ized"), but a municipal and much more medieval Dante: in a word, the true "Florentine" Dante'. The text is said to be 'close, very close, to Dante's original text'.[9]

This same claim was made – but on entirely different grounds, and of a very different text – in the edition of the poem edited by Federico Sanguineti in 2001.[10] Sanguineti questioned Petrocchi's methodology in a far more radical way than Lanza, claiming that by applying stemmatic methodology rigorously, it could be shown that Petrocchi had simply got it wrong. The number and choice of manuscripts on which a critical edition should be based, the exact relationships among those manuscripts, and the weighting of different readings in the light of those relationships, were all called into question. Sanguineti's edition explicitly sought to displace the Petrocchi edition as the standard critical text, with a detailed and intricate argument about the nature of the poem's transmission history and the character of the

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text that could be reconstructed from a proper understanding of it. This text, far from being merely 'secondo l'antica vulgata', was – like Lanza's, but for very different reasons – declared to be a critical edition very close to Dante's original.

Sanguineti's idea was to take Barbi's 400 *loci* and examine them in all surviving manuscripts, and to see what results such an analysis might yield. His conclusion was that just seven manuscripts were necessary and sufficient for a critical edition of the *Commedia*. An edition based on these seven manuscripts, far from being in some sense provisional (as Petrocchi's 'secondo l'antica vulgata' formulation explicitly acknowledged), would instead be very close to the authorial original. The isolated β manuscript Urb – the sole representative of the β family, in his view – although it dates from 1352, is extremely close to Dante's original, and its readings, unless they are manifestly erroneous, are always to be preferred over those of the remaining manuscripts. Even its northern linguistic patina requires only moderate intervention.

Sanguineti's stemma has the visual appeal of an elegant and minimalist diagram. Nothing in it hints at the two evocative images Petrocchi used to describe the effects of contamination in the textual tradition of the *Commedia*: the tangled web and the seeping oil-stain. To judge at least by the visual representation he provided, Sanguineti believes the manuscript relationships to be clear-cut and unambiguous.

Sanguineti's edition had a mixed reception: the response of some philologists was very critical. Scholars questioned the reasoning which lay behind the drastic winnowing of the extant manuscripts to a mere seven, pointing out the inadvisability of basing a stemma for a text of this length on a very small number of readings. They expressed reservations both about the configuration of the stemma (the positions of Rb and LauSC), and the use made of it in constituting the text. The choice of many of the Urb readings incorporated into the text left many unconvinced – some of those readings seemed clearly inferior or wrong. The automatic privileging of Urb, sole representative of one branch, ignores a basic tenet of stemmatic methodology: with a two-branched tree, each branch is worth 50 per cent, and textual choices must be argued case by case. Nor does Sanguineti acknowledge that some Urb readings will have been introduced in the β sub-archetype of which it is the only representative. (A case in point: the last line of Urb reads 'L'amor che move il cielo e l'altre stelle'; *cielo* instead of *sole* (sun) could have been introduced in β, in Urb, or in some intermediary copy: isolated Urb readings which seem plausible cannot be accepted uncritically as original.)

But Sanguineti's edition, notwithstanding its problematic aspects, galvanized Dante scholars: some of the most interesting work being done today on

the textual transmission of the poem was directly sparked by engaging with his challenging claims. Paolo Trovato believes that Sanguineti is right in privileging the northern manuscripts of the poem, though his configuration of the stemma is very different from Sanguineti's; and, along with a team of young scholars based in Ferrara, Trovato continues to work with the Barbi *loci*, supplemented by another 100-odd errors which he believes are securely monogenetic, that is, from a single source.[11] Giorgio Inglese is much closer to Petrocchi in his view of the tradition: his stemma fine-tunes Petrocchi's, emphasizing that the congruence of Triv and Urb is the key to reconstructing Dante's original. Both these distinguished scholars have produced a steady stream of important articles in recent years. Trovato's projected edition of the *Commedia* is yet to appear. Inglese has published single volumes for *Inferno* (2007), *Purgatorio* (2011), and *Paradiso* (2016) which contain a wealth of interesting observations on individual readings and on theoretical questions.[12]

There is widespread agreement that Urb, though relatively late (1352) and relatively isolated, is the least corrupt surviving manuscript in terms of textual substance. Scholars whose editorial approaches and procedures are very different agree on this. Yet their views on where Urb fits into the broader picture, and the use they make of Urb in establishing a text, are at odds. We are brought back to *iudicium*, to the role of personal judgement in evaluating the evidence about the transmission history of the poem. Even within the structured context provided by stemmatic methodology, *iudicium* still looms large.

An attempt to remove *iudicium* from the equation entirely was made in the electronic *Commedia* project, a UK-based and funded project headed by the author of this chapter, working with a small team of research assistants, in collaboration with a scholar widely experienced in working with computers and manuscripts. The aim of the project was twofold: specifically, to utilize information technology to test Sanguineti's hypothesis about manuscript relationships; more generally, to explore the use of computers in analysing and understanding complex manuscript traditions. The Sanguineti seven manuscripts were transcribed and collated in their entirety, presenting notable technical challenges in the registering of altered and amended readings. (In the case of LauSC, there were sometimes as many as four layers of readings.) The files were then fed through cladistic programmes designed by evolutionary biologists to produce genealogical trees on the basis of shared genetic innovations. No judgements were made at any point about the value of readings, about errors, significant or otherwise. The neutral notion of scribal innovation replaced the value-laden one of error or corruption.

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Though limited in its scope to just seven manuscripts, the project produced three interesting results that could not easily have been achieved with such precision by any other means: it clarified the contested position of Rb; it showed the heavily contaminated character of the *scriptio prior* in LauSC; and it gave identical phylograms or diagrams of manuscript relationships for *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*, and a near-identical one for *Paradiso*. (The separate release of the three *cantiche* to the public in theory makes it possible or even likely that they might have different transmission histories.) It goes without saying that it would be extremely interesting to add other key manuscripts to this computer analysis, though the time and costs involved in such an enterprise are daunting; but it also needs to be emphasized that, although computers can help the textual scholar, the expertise of the philologist will always be necessary for correctly understanding and interpreting the results a computer analysis gives.

Notes

1. The manuscript sigils used in this article are those widely adopted by textual scholars working on the *Commedia*. See Dante Alighieri, *La Commedia secondo l'antica vulgata*, ed. G. Petrocchi, 4 vols. (Milan: Mondadori, 1966–67; 2nd edn., Florence: Le Lettere, 1994), I, 57–8. Ms. Ash in the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana in Florence may be two years older than La, but experts disagree about its dating.
2. *Alberto [. . .] di Bolongna* in ms. Po; *Merlino* in ms. Canon. Ital. 97 in the Bodleian Library in Oxford; *e lino* only in ms. Urb.
3. S. Bertelli, *La tradizione della 'Commedia' dai manoscritti al testo. I. I codici trecenteschi (entro l'antica vulgata) conservati a Firenze* (Florence: Olschki, 2011), pp. 340 [Plut. 90 sup. 125], 343 [Plut. 90 inf. 42], 345 [Acq. e doni 86], 354 [Strozzi 150], 358 [Strozzi 152], 385 [Ricc. 1012].
4. The original is viewable on the *Commedia* DVD-Rom: Dante Alighieri, *Commedia*. A Digital Edition, ed. P. Shaw (Birmingham: Scholarly Digital Editions and Florence: SISMEL-Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2010), and website (sd-editions.com) at Mart Image/Text page 247v, where one can also see a virtual recreation of the lost 1330 manuscript by following the links: Home page > Image/Text > Mart > Form to show > Martini's Collation.
5. *Le terze rime di Dante. Lo 'nferno e 'l Purgatorio e 'l Paradiso di Dante Alaghieri* (Venice: Aldo Manuzio, 1502); *La Divina Commedia di Dante Alighieri Nobile Fiorentino: ridotta a miglior lezione dagli Accademici della Crusca* (Florence: Domenico Manzani, 1595; anastatic reprint Turin: Loescher and Florence: Accademia della Crusca, 2012).
6. C. Witte, *La Divina Commedia di Dante Allighieri, ricorretta sopra quattro dei più autorevoli testi a penna* (Berlin: R. Decker, 1862); E. Moore, *Contributions to the Textual Criticism of the Divina Commedia* (Cambridge University Press, 1889); *Tutte le opere di Dante Alighieri*, ed. E. Moore (Oxford: Stamperia dell'Università, 1894).

7. *Le Opere di Dante. Testo critico della Società Dantesca Italiana*, ed. M. Barbi, E. G. Parodi, E. Pellegrini, E. Pistelli, P. Rajna, E. Rostagno, G. Vandelli (Florence: Bemporad, 1921).

8. M. Casella, 'Studi sul testo della *Divina Commedia*', *Studi Danteschi*, 8 (1924), 5–85; *La Divina Commedia*, ed. M. Casella (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1923).

9. Dante Alighieri, *La Commedìa. Nuovo testo critico secondo i più antichi mano-scritti fiorentini*, ed. A. Lanza (Anzio: De Rubeis, 1995), p. xiii.

10. Dante Alighieri, *Comedìa*, ed. F. Sanguineti (Florence: Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2001); Dante Alighieri, *Comedìa. Appendice bibliografica 1988–2000*, ed. F. Sanguineti (Florence: Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2005).

11. P. Trovato (ed.), *Nuove prospettive sulla tradizione della 'Commedia'* (Florence: Cesati, 2007); E. Tonello and P. Trovato (eds.), *Nuove prospettive sulla tradizione della Commedia, Seconda serie (Studi 2008–2013)* (Padua: Libreriauniversitaria. it, 2013).

12. Dante Alighieri, *Commedia*, ed. G. Inglese, 3 vols. (Rome: Carocci, 2007–16).

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