of books that might have remained hidden. Fisher performs a worthwhile service for readers who can use *La Cosmogonie* as a guide accompanying them in their reading of Cixous's texts.

Though Fisher chooses to follow a chronological progression in her approach, her readings remain entirely textual. By her own choice, she steers away from any kind of historicizing. As is, the result tends to be, at times, a bit flat. Fisher's voice drones on somewhat monotonously — though there are highlights — over the three hundred and eighty-two pages, on the relationship betweeen writing and living, life and death, body and soul. The subtlety of some of the points encrypted in Cixous's texts might well be worth elucidating, but Fisher's study would benefit from a somewhat more critical approach and from a more comparative reading, or an attempt to situate Cixous's endeavor within modern fiction and theory. The only authorial intrusion on Fisher's part consists in praise of Cixous. Not that the latter does not deserve it, but Fisher's patient and laborious work would accrue more momentum if she tried to develop a slant of her own, or if she inserted Cixous's writings in the context of larger problems for which the chapter subheadings — unfortunately not pushed beyond close readings of Cixous's work — could serve as points of departure. Thus Fisher could turn her very genuine readerly talents in a direction other than that of hagiographic style. VERENA ANDERMATT CONLEY, *Miami University*

The Body of Beatrice. By Robert Pogue Harrison. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988. 207 pp. Although Charles Singleton was at Harvard when his *Essay on the Vita nuova* first appeared and the revolutionary volume itself was initially published by the Harvard Press, neither the *pater* of American Dantisti nor his seminal work on Dante's *libello* were destined to remain associated with the Cambridge institutions. It was, rather, with the Johns Hopkins that both would be rejoined and, undoubtedly, perenially associated: Singleton would return to Hopkins after an exile of nine years at Harvard; the *Essay* would be reprinted by the Hopkins Press, which distributes it in paperback — along with the "companion" *Journey to Beatrice* — to this day, to generations of Dantisti in the making. In this context, then (and regardless of what may or may not have been intended), the publication of a new study of the *Vita nuova* by the Hopkins Press could be interpreted as either strongly traditional, continuing a Singletonian "line" or, conversely, as constituting a laying to rest of a past that cast a long shadow. Or both.

Harrison's book is, more than any other "essay" on the *Vita nuova* that has emerged from the Singletonian shadow, eminently suited to play this ambivalent filial role: tributes are paid but other ties are broken; Harrison is himself a student but obviously once or twice removed; and, most of all, the author is invariably conscious of the critical role he is playing. In the Preface and an introductory chapter (entitled "Critical Differences") Harrison is bent on clarifying the diverse and multiple ruptures on which his study is grounded, the principal one being what he calls the avoidance of the hermeneutic trap of Dantology. And the Singletonian construct, one in which the *Vita nuova* is not only prefatory to the *Commedia* but a kind of practice version, an earlier miniature, is second in importance in this Dantology only to Dante himself, a Dante who laid most of the traps "by embedding within his works the hermeneutic guidelines for interpreting them." So strong and pervasive is the Singletonian trap, in fact, that Harrison eschews a systematic setting forth of his own methods in favor of a detailed cri-

tique of Singleton's reading of the *Vita nuova*. And therein lie both strengths and weaknesses here: the *pater familias* is still dictating the terms of engagement and one is astonished at Harrison's naiveté in assuming his own methods will speak for themselves after he has dismantled the regnant model, a naiveté implicit in the assumption of objective textual reality that is at the heart of his "phenomenological" approach. In fact, one might well argue that the trap of Dantology has merely been shifted from one presumed truth, one presumably intact artifact, to a different one: we have shifted from the authorial construct to the textual one.

But the heart and soul of this study in the end lies elsewhere: an extraordinarily courageous Harrison has not only taken on a number of sacrosanct structures (Singletonian, Dantesque) but has crafted a number of truly compelling readings of some of the most difficult — and most avoided — aspects of the *Vita nuova* and, as a necessary ancillary, of a series of critical problems that bedevil the lyric at this historical juncture. The entire enterprise is executed in a style that reads and relates the *Vita nuova* in a far more all-embracing context than has been true before — the traditional philological/scholarly apparatus and rhetoric is kept to a minimum, and even played with, while the high lyricism of the primary texts, the *Vita nuova*, Cavalcanti's poetry, often resurfaces in Harrison's own prose, terse and passionate at once. Thus, from many other examples one might choose: the eight principal chapters are divided into two sections entitled "Beatrice Alive" and "Beatrice Dead," a division which playfully echoes a number of critical tropes in Italian lyric studies (including, of course, the infamous misreading of Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, which makes an appearance here, charmingly, at the beginning of the *in morte* section).

The first section opens with a reading of the first dream of the *Vita nuova*, a dream so starkly enigmatic it has been dealt with only cursorily in the past or, more simply, not at all: the flaming, eaten heart, the weeping Beatrice, the red everywhere. Harrison lays the groundwork for his book here, prefigures his central notions: in a complex and difficult reading that does justice to the difficulty of the dream vision itself we are led to see the author of the *Vita nuova* grappling with the body of Beatrice — and the burden it will bear for his poetry. What emerges here — and throughout the book — is a Dante violently in love who will struggle to construct a lyric that will revel in access to that body, that presence, in all its details. (As Harrison points out, such a lyricism will be starkly different from the revelling in inaccessibility to otherness that informs the poetics of Cavalcanti and Petrarch.) The *Vita nuova* illuminated here, then, is one built of both flesh and reflections and to be approached with a hermeneutics that sees those as feeding into each other — rejecting, of course, both the philological and the allegorical. Beatrice lover and Beatrice muse are no longer to be separated out in such terms, and poetry, at least the poetry in and of the *Vita nuova*, is not so far removed from flesh.

No less courageous (although in part for different reasons) is the fourth and last chapter of that *in vita* section, "The Ghost of Guido Cavalcanti": while a handful of critics (notably Durling) have in recent years grappled with the vexing issue of Dante's seeming mistreatment of Guido in the *Commedia* Harrison tackles the issue bluntly and provocatively — and understands clearly that the textual issues are hardly separable from the critical ones (and leaves one even more puzzled at earlier statements about the epistemological independence of the textual artifact). This chapter, in fact, is only on the surface of it a dazzling reading of Cavalcanti's most dazzling poem ("Chi è questa che ven, ch'ogn'om la mira" "Who

is she who comes, that everyone looks at her"), the "sister sonnet" to Dante's crucial "Tanto gentile," to which Harrison has already devoted a chapter. Of at least equal significance here is the author's extended meditation on the problematic and complex Oedipal structures that haunt — to appropriate his terms — almost every level of Dantology from the story line of the *Commedia* itself to contemporary quarrels among Dantisti. And Guido's ability to escape those structures, to continue to haunt, in other words, is per force to be read in the context of a search for ways out of the strictures and structures of a Dante criticism that has identified itself (perhaps quite unconsciously) far too closely with Dante himself — a Dante supremely anxious about authority and highly synthesizing as a result. It cannot have escaped Harrison that he is in great measure playing Guido himself — and the question to be asked is whether he succeeds in the subversion at hand.

The only way in which the project is a failure, ironically, is if one takes too seriously the notion that real or absolute escapes are possible, that there can be an authentic phenomenological approach as Harrison defines it ("the attempt to go directly 'to the thing itself'") or a critical stance that can really escape Oedipal structures or the sort of synthesis at which Dante is the supreme master, or for that matter an objectively independent textual artifact at all. It is in the context of a remarkably repetitive critical tradition and a simplifying reading of the *Vita nuova* itself that Harrison's readings are, in fact, such a great success at the sort of "originality" it seems to me he seeks. (This review can hardly pretend to do justice to the many different ones incorporated in this short but quite rich book, including, besides those mentioned above, provocative meditations on Petrarch, on Pound, and on the perpetually vexing question of the textual/philological relationship between *Vita nuova* and *Commedia*.) It is heartening and refreshing to read about Dante and the *Vita nuova* as a poet and a literary text, respectively, rather than as elements of the largely closed and often arcane world of Dantology, and there is not much (if anything) in this work that would make it anything but provocative and satisfying for those souls that lie beyond Dante criticism — and that are thus usually excluded from most "serious" work on Dante. Conversely, the usually staid and often reverential tradition will read much here, if they get past that introductory chapter, that will no doubt offend — one can only speculate whether the dismantling of the Singletonian apparatus or the unreverential appraisals of Dante (especially vis-à-vis Cavalcanti) will provoke greater ire.

Most importantly, and most subversively (most Guido-like, too, in my reading of Guido), Harrison succeeds in what he explicitly sets out to do: to restore the distinctive enigma of this highly lyrical text. For him — and many may be convinced — in the presence of the *Vita nuova* one should eschew exegesis that clarifies — i.e. stands back and simplifies — and value the reading that embraces the enigma of its lyricism. In doing so, of course, he is no less bound by and to the critical traditions (and other contingencies) he is debunking and surpassing than others who more simply follow them — subversion, if course, is both dependent on the authority to be subverted and itself a highly personal, lyrical even, enterprise. *The Body of Beatrice* is a great success on its own terms: a good, insubordinate read that tweaks noses and throws out flashy and impressive new readings by the fistful. To discuss further whether these are further from or closer to authorial or textual "truths" than Singleton's is merely to return the ball to his court — and I think, in the end, Hopkins' second book on the *Vita nuova* will and should continue in the Singletonian tradition of compelling reading that changes our minds, again. MARÍA ROSA MENOCAL, *Yale University*