

## CHAPTER 14

### Dante and Death in Late-Medieval France

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‘Although Dante was known by name in fifteenth-century France, his influence was scant.’<sup>1</sup> *The Dante Encyclopedia*’s entry for ‘Dante in France’ offers an unpromising opening for thinking about and with Dante in late-medieval French literature. I do not argue here for hitherto grossly underestimated influence, but do wish to consider carefully how we retrospectively frame reception of and responses to the *Commedia* in particular. I should argue, for instance, for ‘scattered’ rather than ‘scant’ — meagre findings depend upon the sources in which one has searched, and, for the fifteenth century, there is much currently under-studied literature that was nonetheless popular at the time; the formerly maligned court writers dubbed *grands rhétoriciens* have found their way back into favour, but only emergently into circulation through modern critical editions.<sup>2</sup> Gauging scope of impact is challenging when there are localised pockets of evidence across France and Burgundy from across several decades — it is tempting, for profile-raising purposes, to extrapolate an unduly globalising narrative. In this chapter, by focusing on death as a key theme of fifteenth-century literature,<sup>3</sup> I unpick how both direct reference to and echoes of Dante contributed to writers’ abiding concerns with the relationship between literature and morality, most especially the contemporary status and role of vernacular poets. After examining afresh the difficulties of defining Dantean influence in medieval France, I shall consider references to Dante by name as part of a literary genealogizing discourse, before discussing how the dead were represented in poetry and prose in ways that may productively be viewed in dialogue with the *Commedia*,

interrogating the limits of representation through a reflection on the relationship between fiction and embodiment.

### **Dante in Medieval France**

Whilst the evidence is scattered and variable, we can nonetheless discern a multifaceted and multilingual relationship between Dante and Francophone medieval literature, not least given this relationship's beginnings in the Florentine's appreciation of Occitan verse of the troubadours. Linguistic reasons have been offered, however, as a significant constraint on dissemination of the *Commedia*, given its composition in vernacular Italian rather than Latin,<sup>4</sup> especially when compared to the substantial and widespread transmission of Boccaccio, above all *De casibus virorum illustrium* in Latin and in French translation;<sup>5</sup> though of course Dante himself features as a character within *De casibus*, so is nonetheless vicariously present.<sup>6</sup> The picture is complex.

Let us scrutinize first the manuscript record. Whilst, for Boccaccio, Laurent de Premierfait and others have obligingly provided a rich fifteenth-century history of translation into French, the first known French translation of Dante's works, thought to date from the late fifteenth century, is now lost,<sup>7</sup> and the first published French translation of the entire *Commedia* only appeared in 1596.<sup>8</sup> It is believed that Italian texts appeared in France from the turn of the fifteenth century;<sup>9</sup> these manuscripts were a combination of the whole work, single books and commentaries on the poem.<sup>10</sup> Printed editions, counterfeits of Aldine editions, began to be produced in Lyons in 1502.<sup>11</sup>

Encounters between individual authors and copies can sometimes be inferred or conjectured.<sup>12</sup> Study of fifteenth-century library inventories has revealed that René, Duke of Anjou, possessed 'ung livre en parchemin nommé *Dente de Fleurence*, escript en lettre

italienne' [a parchment book called Dante of Florence, written in Italian script],<sup>13</sup> identifiable as Paris, BnF, MS it. 74, decorated with the arms of René's seneschal, Jean Cossa; when he came by this, however, is uncertain. The *Commedia* was translated into Latin at the Council of Constance in 1416–17, and the various ecclesiastical council meetings of the first half of the fifteenth century are more generally known to have been fora for rich intellectual and literary exchange.<sup>14</sup> Martin Le Franc, working in the service of Amadeus VIII of Savoy, was present at the Council of Basel in the later 1430s as the anti-pope's secretary; it is plausible that he accessed the *Commedia* and other Italian texts there, if, indeed, one was not already available to him in the Savoyard ducal library.<sup>15</sup>

One important conjecture regarding an author-text encounter that has exercised scholars is that first made by Villani and Boccaccio: that the Florentine himself travelled to Paris, which Laurent de Premierfait elaborates into Dante's first reading of *Le Roman de la rose*. De Premierfait interpolates a biographical sketch of Dante into his second, highly popular, 1409 translation of *De casibus*. Dante appears already as a character in conversation with Boccaccio-persona, wishing not to have his own tale of misfortune included, but to direct the persona's attention to one who brought shame on Florence, Walter, Duke of Athens (IX.xxiii). Was De Premierfait's interpolation explicatory, to introduce a figure unfamiliar to his French court audience?<sup>16</sup> It is striking that, whilst laudatory of the 'noble poete florentin',<sup>17</sup> and offering a moralising vision of Dante's poetic vocation that implicitly promotes him through alignment with (better-known) Boccaccio ('dampnoit et reproit les vices et les hommes vicieux', fol. 395<sup>r</sup> [he condemned and sanctioned sins and sinful men]), the main focus is praise of Paris, which De Premierfait claims Dante sought out as a centre of learning, piety, and justice, and of Jean de Meun ('homme d'engin celeste', *ibid.* [man of divine intelligence]), continuator of the recently completed *Rose*, which purportedly furnished Dante with his model for the *Commedia*. Since:

ou livre de la rose est descript le paradis des bons et l'enfer des mauvais en langaige françois, vault, en langaige florentin, soubz aultre maniere de vers rimoiez, contrefaire au vif le beau livre de la rose. (fol. 395<sup>r</sup>)

[in the *Book of the Rose* the paradise of the good and the hell of the bad are described in the French language, [he] wished to reproduce closely the fine *Book of the Rose* in the Florentine language in another manner of rhymed verse].

De Premierfait unproblematically aligns the *Rose*'s and *Commedia*'s ethical projects as sharing the same didactic scheme, but it is a perception of irreconcilable differences between the two that characterises Dante's principal channel of early-fifteenth-century reception, Christine de Pizan.<sup>18</sup>

It is important to recognise that Christine was not the first French writer to mention or cite Dante; in 1369 and then 1389, Jean Froissart and Philippe de Mézières demonstrated an acquaintance with his work that may have arisen from their extensive travelling.<sup>19</sup> The idea of travel, of physical *translatio*, has likewise been associated with Christine's knowledge and promotion of the Florentine, her having moved from Venice to Paris in early childhood to join her father, court physician to Charles V. Her intervention in Dante reception is construed as significant because it is substantial, multiple (explicit reference occurring in four of her works), for prestigious audiences (nobles of the royal court (through the severally dedicated copies of her allegorical narrative *Le Chemin de longue estude* (1402)) and prominent clerics (through her engagement with Jean de Montreuil and others in an epistolary debate over the *Rose* between 1400 and 1402), and polemical.

*Le Chemin* recasts Dante's journey with Virgil by giving Christine-persona the Sybil as guide, thereby itself revisiting Virgil's *Aeneid*, where she accompanied Aeneas to the Underworld. Christine seems to have read the *Commedia* primarily as a moral and

theological, not political work,<sup>20</sup> and to have enlisted Dante to promote her vision of *poetrie*, a figurative mode of discourse embracing both verse and prose, as fostering the pursuit of learning (‘science’) and spiritual discernment, not erotic love.<sup>21</sup> The *Commedia* and its Virgilian roots thus serves as cogent counterpoint to an Ovidian line of literary descent via the *Rose*, commending Dante as ethical authority and denigrating Jean de Meun as propagator of immorality, which she expounds in a letter to Pierre Col, canon of Paris — refuting Col’s contention that de Meun urges his readers to follow ‘paradis et [...] vertus’ and to flee ‘vices [et] enfer’,<sup>22</sup> she argues that he seeks instead to reward sinners:

Et pour ce mesle il paradis avec les ordures dont il parle: pour donner plus foy a son livre. Mais se mieulx vuelz oïr describe paradis et enfer, et par plus subtilz termes plus haultement parlé de theologie, plus prouffitablement, plus poetiquement et de plus grant efficace, lis le livre que on appelle le Dant, ou le te fais exposer pour ce que il est en langue florentine souverainement dicté: la oyra autre propos mieulx fondé plus subtilement [...] et cent fois mieulx composé; ne il n’y a comparaison, ne t’en courouces ja.<sup>23</sup>

[He mixes paradise in with the filthy acts of which he speaks for the following reason: in order to lend more credence to his book. But if you wish to hear a better description of paradise and hell using more subtle terminology, expressed more majestically from a theological perspective, more profitably, more poetically, and with greater efficaciousness, read the book attributed to Dante or have it explained to you since it is brilliantly written in the Florentine language. There you will hear another discourse, more wisely conceived and with a better foundation [...] — and a hundred times better written. Do not be angered by this, but there is no comparison.]<sup>24</sup>

Contrary to De Premierfait’s ethical alignment of *Commedia* and *Rose*, Christine deems them utterly incompatible. But the fifteenth-century writers’ framing of the two works — as

depicting heaven and hell — is notably similar: a common didactic template applied to both, or the possibility of De Premierfait implicitly responding to Christine, co-opting Col's point to enhance the lustre of Paris's intellectual splendour? Christine's remarks are, quite typically, predicated on an indissoluble link between literary form and ethical implication; casting de Meun as a confidence trickster, she opposes his having created 'a deceptive linguistic instrument that undercuts the moral value of poetic language'.<sup>25</sup> When she speaks of Dante writing plus 'poetiquement', she is ascribing a greater integrity, in all senses, to the *Commedia*'s allegorical fiction. 'Subtilz', a term that she deploys with polyptotonic emphasis, is often used by late-medieval writers to connote finesse of style and literary intricacy, subtlety, and sophistication. For Christine, that can carry either positive or negative moral value; she uses it elsewhere deprecatingly of De Meun (as connoting deceitful wiles), but employs it here in approbation to evoke a certain kind of refinement in Dante's poetry: its allegorical reach into theology,<sup>26</sup> evoking a particular role for the vernacular poet in conveying Christian truth.<sup>27</sup> The moralising lens through which Christine views all literary endeavour inflects late-medieval reception of both Dante and Jean de Meun by positioning them as poles on an axis that measures 'grant science' [great erudition];<sup>28</sup> she thereby discards the romance narrative of the latter's 'rommant' to treat it more, in De Premierfait's denomination, as the '*livre de la rose* [my emphasis]': 'on quitte le domaine de l'amour pour celui de la morale et de la connaissance'.<sup>29</sup>

Studies of Dante in medieval France tend to stop at this chronological point, with Christine serving as both launch-pad and, for lack of another well-known name, end-point for defining his reception prior to the Renaissance. Pick-up thereafter occurs either at Charles VIII's Italian campaign in 1494,<sup>30</sup> or with poets of the early sixteenth century, starting with Clément Marot.<sup>31</sup> A whole century is thus usually elided, from 1430 to 1530, but, as we shall see below, a scattering of fifteenth-century interventions suggest a sustained conception of

Dante as Christian moral authority, of the *Commedia* as a journey to be imitated, and of representation of the afterlife as a spur to virtuous living.

### **Living and dying with Dante**

Le florentin poete Dante

A escript merueilleusement

La paine et la vie meschante

Des esprits dampnez justement.

Mais mortel homme plainement

Oncques n'entendy n'entendra

La grandeur de cellui tourment

Qui ja aux dampnez ne fauldra.

Halas, que mal nous entendons

La fin de la vie mortelle!

Que mal les yeulx au ciel tendons

Pensans a la joye immortelle!

Nostre condicion est telle

Que pour eternel bien conquerre

Et eschiver paine eternelle

Nous ne sçavons le chemin querre.<sup>32</sup>

[The Florentine poet Dante has depicted brilliantly the suffering and the wretched existence of souls justly damned. But mortal man plainly never heeded, nor will heed, the enormity of this torment which the damned will endure forever. Alas, that we fail to understand the end of mortal life! That we fail to direct our gaze to heaven in contemplation of immortal joy! Our condition is such that we do not know how to seek out the path towards attaining eternal good and avoiding eternal suffering.]

The Normandy-born poet Martin Le Franc, in a work dedicated to Philip the Good of Burgundy, cites Dante as a laudatory point of reference for evoking pains of infernal torment in his dream-vision debate poem *Le Champion des dames* (c. 1442). Four of the poem's five books pit a pro-feminine protagonist Free Will against delegates of his arch-misogynist adversary Ill Speaking. The first book, the source of this quotation, furnishes a narrative preamble in which the first-person persona is guided around the demesnes of Venus and Love, their pertinence to the forthcoming debate being that the Castle of Love houses the ladies whom Free Will will defend. Everything associated with Venus is set up as a perverted antithesis to Love: corrupted, worldly sensuality pitched against Love understood in a spiritual, Trinitarian sense: sinful vice vs. Christian virtue. Dante is referenced when the persona is being shown the cemetery of Venus, a conduit to 'la caverne Lucifer' (l. 1403). The mention comes as the retrospective narrator steps back from what his experiential counterpart witnessed in the cemetery to reflect more broadly on humanity's ignorance and misdirection. Dante is thus invoked as moral guide, but one whose audience are ill-equipped to follow the path that he lays out for them — Le Franc emphasizes through polyptoton the deficiencies of human understanding which is unable to locate the correct 'chemin': this lexeme undoubtedly evokes the 'cammin di nostre vita' [our life's way] in *Inferno* I.1;<sup>33</sup>

might it also nod to Christine's *Chemin*, suggesting, through plural layers of Dante reception, a further, French path to find?

The locus of a cemetery and issues of language arise in the French court writer Octovien de Saint-Gelais's reference to Dante, which also brings us back to the *Rose*. In the cemetery fiction of his *Sejour d'honneur* (1489–94), another didactic allegory about finding one's way, his persona encounters a 'divine precinct' in which a memorial site is dedicated to contemporary authors: Jean de Meun, Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio, Alain Chartier, and Jacques Milet.<sup>34</sup> An interest in literary genealogizing, adumbrated already by Christine,<sup>35</sup> was often dramatized narratively in the fifteenth century, thereby assembling a kind of medieval canon — Le Franc's *Champion* commemorates Machaut, Froissart, Christine, and Chartier, and, perhaps most famously, the literary cemetery of René d'Anjou's *Livre du coeur d'amour épris* (1459) honours Jean de Meun, Ovid, Petrarch, Boccaccio, Chartier, and Machaut.<sup>36</sup> Saint-Gelais could thus be seen to be replacing Machaut with Milet (explicable chronologically, since Milet was still alive in 1459) and Ovid with Dante. One reason for these substitutions could be the different orientation of the two cemeteries: René's allegory concerns erotic desire, the graveyard of the Hospital of Love valorising victims of love; Saint-Gelais's several memorial grounds structure the education of his persona away from sensuality and towards learning and the Hermitage of Understanding, aided by Divine Grace. The *Sejour*'s precinct is a 'lieux solacieux, / Scïentifique et moult delicieux' (III.xii.6–7 [a place of solace, learning, and delight]), a garden of knowledge and scholarship, not an amorous garden of sensual pleasure. The ordering of its commemorated authors is chronological:

Aprés luy [Jean de Meun] vy ung noble Florentin

Qu'on appelloit en commune voix Dente,

Qui maintz œuvres en tresaorné latin

A compillé par raison evidente.

Il declaira de la vie presente

Soubz fainct langaige et poëtiques vers

Les accidens et tourbillons divers

Et *si* descript de l’infernal repaire

Le cas piteux et la grande misere. (*Séjour*, III.xii.118–126)

[After him I saw a noble Florentine who was commonly called Dante, who compiled many works in very elegant Latin by clear reason. He revealed the contrary misfortunes and vicissitudes of contemporary life beneath disguised language and fictional verse, and thereby described the pitiable situation and the great wretchedness of the infernal domain.]

Le Franc presented Dante as ‘le florentin poete Dante’; does Saint-Gelais’s more expansive, indefinite naming, referring to the past rather than the present (‘ung [...] qu’on appelloit [...]’), indicate lack of current knowledge of Dante for which he is therefore compensating? His depiction of the Florentine’s work is pitched quite generally, but certain features are noteworthy: firstly, the matter of language — only Latin is mentioned, perhaps suggesting Saint-Gelais’s acquaintance was uniquely with Latin translations, including of the *Commedia* given that he, like Le Franc, privileges mention of *Inferno*, and solely *Inferno*: did both writers necessarily know all three books? We recall Christine’s advice to Pierre Col to have the *Commedia* explained to him through translation from Italian — but did she mean into French or Latin? The second point of note is Saint-Gelais’s spotlighting of Dante’s allegorical method – the *poetrie* praised by Christine – and the didactic orientation of *Inferno*: like Le Franc, he portrays it functioning as an *ars moriendi*, using representation of

posthumous suffering to prompt urgent moral and spiritual reformation in life, like doom paintings or the *Traicté des peines d'enfer et de purgatoire* (published 1492). It is interesting that Boccaccio follows immediately after Dante, in that Saint-Gelais's framing of the Florentine's enterprise is couched in terms redolent of the Certaldan's most numerous disseminated didactic text in late-medieval France, *De casibus*: the particular lexeme 'cas' gestures in this direction, as more broadly does proclaimed depiction of the misfortunes and vicissitudes of life, like the fates and turbulent fortunes enumerated by Boccaccio. Is it possible that Saint-Gelais knew Dante only from his appearance in *De casibus*? He brackets him as a moral authority alongside Boccaccio and Petrarch, who 'ont fait livres tresmoraulx et exquis' (III.xii.132 [have written morally excellent and remarkable books]).

Brief consideration of commemorative praise of Dante in the fifteenth century, representing him as a deceased author, points up the richly networked way in which his name is enlisted and his depiction of hell cited, and thus the importance of reading such references relationally and severally as carefully contextualised moments of reception. The Dante of Christine, for example, is in some of her works conditioned by being placed in dialogue with Jean de Meun, a pairing which is then crucial for *De Premierfait*, but is more simply a case of chronological contiguity for Saint-Gelais. The idea of a vision of hell is seized upon by didactic writers wishing to advise on paths to virtue, with the 'infernal repaire' of 'espris dampnez' valued more for its general moral implication (as the consequence of vicious living) than for its representational particularities, though both Christine and Le Franc commend the manner as well as the matter of Dante's depiction, 'subtil' and 'merveilleusement escript', perhaps in part to encourage broader readership of a writer whom their commemoration seeks not to honour as an already-established figure in the medieval canon but to inaugurate as a writer worthy of propagation.

### **Representing the dead with Dante**

My final section, considering late-medieval French representations of the dead in light of *Inferno*, does not depend on our securely identifying direct Dantean influence. Given what we have seen of the richly networked scene of transmission and reception, it concerns itself more analogically with shared preoccupations, valorising concerns present in both the *Commedia* and texts by René d'Anjou and George Chastelain. The key principle at stake is the importance of morality underpinning the definition of posthumous identity: ontological status has an ethical implication, which we can expediently approach through two issues mobilised in how the dead get represented — on the one hand, reputation and judgment; on the other, the 'complex materiality of virtual bodies',<sup>37</sup> when the deceased are shown embodied and animated, walking and talking, as in Chastelain's *Temple de Bocace*.

A relationship between identity, reputation, and judgment is developed by Dante in the liminality of *Inferno* III at the Gate of Hell, on which is written 'giustizia mosse il mio alto fattore' (III.4 [Justice urged on my high artificer]), when he encounters the morally neutral, those souls 'che visser senza 'nfamia e senza lodo' (III.36 [who lived without disgrace and without praise]). Having never truly lived (III.64), they can never truly die (III.46), and so Virgil advises that they will not be spoken of: 'Fama di loro il mondo esser non lassa' (III.49 [The world will let no fame of theirs endure]). Moral worthiness determines judgment, which itself assesses moral worth, and moral status — for ill or for good — accords identity. This nexus of concerns is juggled in the Francesca and Paolo episode in *Inferno* V, which is picked up in René's *Livre* in a manner that resonates intriguingly with Dante's drama of justice and compassion. In the Hospital of Love, *Livre*'s protagonists, Heart and Desire, attend a mass in memory of a lover and his lady 'apportez mors leans par ung cas piteux nouvellement advenu' (CXX [brought here dead by a grievous accident recently occurred]). Desire asks Courtesy, a superintendent, for the truth of this case, which she proceeds to recount in very allusive terms, speaking anonymously of 'cest amoureux' (l. 1645

[this lover]), persecution by ‘mesdisans’ (l. 1652 [slanderers]), and how personified Jealousy took the couple’s lives:

Car d’une espée par le corps

A ung coup les a tous deux mors. (*Livre*, ll. 1657–8)

[Piercing a sword through their bodies, she killed them both in a single blow.]

René’s adulterous lovers are thus cast as sympathetic victims rather than as sinners meriting punishment; one could see this to be adopting Dante-persona’s sympathetic response to *Inferno* Francesca’s account of love’s compulsion.<sup>38</sup> Alternatively, however, one could conjecture a response here, not to the *Commedia*, but to Boccaccio’s version, which mentions explicitly the sword (Dante does not) and presents the pair as tragic lovers, betrayed by a deceitful Gianciotto more readily assimilable to the courtly ‘mesdisans’ trope than the betrayed husband of the *Commedia*.<sup>39</sup> René’s presentation also carries Boccaccian resonance in the introductory framing of Paolo and Francesca as ‘ung cas piteux’ (incidentally, the same collocation used by Saint-Gelais in his cemetery transition between Dante and Boccaccio). Teodolinda Barolini has proposed that, more important than Dante placing Francesca in hell, is how he ‘records her name and saves her from consignment to historical oblivion’;<sup>40</sup> the significance of storytelling to shore up identity is also promoted by René. After Courtesy’s allusive account, she lifts a sheet covering the bodies to reveal their corpses pierced by the sword that killed them. This act of uncovering, I propose, opens up the body as a space to be filled with narrative, with the sword as a prop for storytelling, a tool for activating a tale – a kind of cue to which *Livre*’s protagonists respond by kissing it, mobilising its potential to serve as a relic, a preserving trace of the unnamed lovers. It is moreover a cue to the extratextual audience — not to determine a single identification so much as to juggle possible associations (does it matter whether this is or is not Paolo and Francesca, and, if it is, whose

version it relays?) and thereby appreciate the very processes of identity construction, as when Dante invites us to read his readerly Francesca's reading of herself.<sup>41</sup> A metatextual reflex is prompted. Courtesy speaks of 'mesdisans' as those 'qui plus que veoir / Dient et on dit mainteffoiz' (*Livre*, ll. 1652–3 [slanderers who very often say and have said more than the truth]), and who thus come reflexively to represent bad tale tellers, whereas Courtesy's account and the mass now being celebrated in *Livre* can be seen as recuperative recording opportunities: in the posthumous events commemorating their death, their life — in the sense of a positive identity narrative — can be restored.

*Livre*'s treatment of Paolo and Francesca raises the issue of posthumous corporeality — a relatively straightforward matter for corpses depicted recumbent and inert, but more complicated when the fictional framework deployed requires physical movement and oral communication with the living, as with Dante's 'ombre triste smozzicate' (*Inf.* XXIX.6 [lost and mutilated shadows]), and also with Boccaccio's processional dead in *De casibus*. Boccaccio is not concerned with defining his deceased characters ontologically; whenever a collective noun is used, they are classified, not as 'dead', but often as 'unfortunates' ('infelices') or 'mourners' ('fluentes') — their status defined by the import and tone of the story that they (and/or the persona) tell, the attitude that they have adopted posthumously towards their own life. Both Dante and late-medieval French respondents to *De casibus* are, by contrast, keen to explore the limits of representation through complex reflections on posthumous ontology. In *Inferno*, a clear distinction between living and dead is established when Charon upbraids the pilgrim:

Et tu che se' costí, anima viva,

Pàrtiti da cotesti che son morti. (*Inf.* III.88–9)

[And you approaching there, you living soul, keep well away from these — they are the dead.]

But there is nonetheless continuity between the two states, as when Capaneus states: ‘Qual io fui vivo, tal son morto’ (*Inf.* XIV.51 [That which I was in life, I am in death]), and this continuity is moral: an unrepentant sinner’s ethical identity is eternally fixed (like Le Franc’s ‘paine eternelle’ of the damned), so that sinful acts in life are expressed in the afterlife. Such expression somatically materializes sin, as in the physical dismemberment of the sowers of discord encountered in the ninth *bolgia*, most famously Bertran de Born:

erch’ io parti’ così giunte persone,  
partito porto il mio cerebro, lasso!,  
dal suo principio ch’è in questo troncone. (*Inf.* XXVIII.139–141)

[Because I severed those so joined, I carry — alas — my brain dissevered from its source, which is within my trunk.]

His severed talking head representing his having ruptured the bond between father and son.

Chastelain’s *Temple de Bocace* (1463–65), the most widely disseminated prose work by the Burgundian court historiographer, offers a dream-vision narrative of unfortunates from recent history (from Othon III de Grandson to still-living Margaret of Anjou, the work’s dedicatee). The narrator witnesses them entering a temple dedicated to Boccaccio, whom, we learn, is himself entombed there and resuscitated in order to advise Margaret that she cannot have her life recorded as wretched because she is not yet dead and her fate thus not yet fixed; as a punning rejoinder, Boccaccio offers her the ‘plus vif exemple’ [more cogent [lit. living] example] of her late uncle, Charles VII.<sup>42</sup> Some continuity between life and death is evidenced as the unfortunates appear bearing signs of their demise: Richard II is a dead man walking, entering multiply pierced with weapons; Jacques Chabot arrives in a state of

dismemberment and speaks whilst decapitated: ‘atout une doloire, sans teste, le troncq du corpz esquarteré, qui durement se complainnoit de la honte que procuré on avoit a son parentage’ (p. 75 [with a doloire, headless, the trunk of the body quartered, who was complaining bitterly of the shame that had been brought upon his kin]). The corporeality of the deceased is spotlighted by its flagrant impossibility — Richard II appears ‘par ostention lamentable’ (p. 27 [in a lamentable display]). Its paradoxicality draws attention to their ontology and also to their temporality: when someone speaks impaled by swords and daggers, recounting their life and its downward fall towards death, it is difficult to classify them according to any simple ontological or temporal binary: living or dead, past or present. Posthumous representation releases the body from any assumption of unitary integrity and inaugurates instead a mode of performance: the nouns by which Chastelain designates his characters qualify their substantiality — Richard II is ‘l’image d’ung roy’ (p. 27 [the image of a king]); Boccaccio directs Margaret to ‘des personnages que tu vois droit cy’ (p. 129 [characters whom you see here]). Like Dante’s shades, whose ‘simili corpi’ [bodiless bodies] cast no shadow on the ground (*Purg.* III.32, 28), these are virtual embodiments, but nonetheless arresting for the impact on their viewing audience, not least insofar as they stand as projections of the viewer’s imagination and the representational limits of their human understanding. Chastelain’s persona offers an interesting retrospective reframing of the processional dead that prompts a metatextual reflection:

vis je entrer en vif personnage une roine, atout couronne en teste, menant en main ung roy, son mary [Henry VI], en vie aussy par difference de toutes les aultres presentacions contees dont les ymages ne faisoient que fiction. (*Temple*, p. 79)

[I saw enter in living person a queen, with a crown on her head, leading by the hand a king, her husband [Henry VI of England], also alive, in contrast to the other representations recounted whose appearances were only fiction.]

The ‘living’ status of Margaret and her husband, both still alive extratextually, is contrasted with the figures who have appeared before, not in terms of the latter being ‘dead’, but in relation to their status as ‘fictions’ or illusions. We are reminded of the illusory human reality of the shades whose physical form is revealed to the pilgrim as insubstantial when he tries to embrace Casella: ‘Ohi ombre vane, fuor che ne l’aspetto’ (*Purg.* II.79 [O shades — in all except appearance — empty]). On another level, of course, as literary constructs within a dream-vision narrative, Margaret, Henry, the dead and, for that matter, the persona, all share the same status as ‘fictions’, like the *Commedia*’s pilgrim and Virgil.

## Conclusion

Sylvie Lefèvre asserts that ‘la *Commedia* n’a d’abord été connue que grâce à des changements de perspective’,<sup>43</sup> meaning travels by a Mézières or Froissart, translations of Boccaccio, and Christine’s critical approach to the established authority of Jean de Meun. To these movements, one could add French fifteenth-century literature’s particular fascination with addressing life — moral conduct, identity formation, writerly vocation — from the perspective of death: posthumous genealogizing through cemetery fictions, and dramatizing communication between the living and the dead. In Dante’s words, ‘forti cose a pensar mettere in versi’ (*Purg.* XXIX.42 [to put in verses things hard to conceive]) or in prose, yields fruitful interrogation of the capacities of poetic fiction, which, translated into a late-medieval French context, involved debate as to the rightful powers of *poetrie* as a figurative mode of discourse and its legitimate subtleties. Dante became cited in a network of references about the didactic role of literature, positioned in particular in relation to Jean de Meun and Boccaccio. In common with both those writers, mention of his name inevitably represented varying degrees of knowledge of his works (books of the *Commedia* or otherwise), variously

transmitted (in part, in the original language, through translation, via another author, etc.). Whilst undeniably scattered and not copious, fifteenth-century French engagements with Dante nonetheless attest a measure of influence insofar as his name clearly played an important rhetorical role for them, with their role in turn being in part to propagate it further. As Francesca ‘became a cultural touchstone and reference point through the intervention of the fifth canto of the *Inferno*, [...] giving [her] a dignity and a prominence — a celebrity — that in real life she did not possess’,<sup>44</sup> so Dante’s ‘reputation took hold’<sup>45</sup> though Christine de Pizan’s and others’ acts of promotion through commemoration.

## Notes to Chapter 14

<sup>1</sup> John A. Scott, ‘Dante in France’, in *The Dante Encyclopedia*, ed. by Richard Lansing (London/New York: Routledge, 2010), 259–62 (p. 259).

<sup>2</sup> See, in particular, the work of Adrian Armstrong, Florence Bouchet, Cynthia J. Brown, François Cornilliat, David Cowling, Nathalie Dauvois, Frédéric Duval, and Jane H. M. Taylor.

<sup>3</sup> See Helen Swift, *Representing the Dead: Epitaph Fictions in Late-Medieval France* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2016).

<sup>4</sup> *Dante: The Critical Heritage, 1314–1870*, ed. by Michael Caesar (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 16.

<sup>5</sup> Documented by Carlo Bozzolo’s seminal *Manuscripts des traductions françaises d’œuvres de Boccace: XV<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Padua: Antenore, 1973), and articles on medieval reception in *Il Boccaccio nella cultura francese*, ed. by Carlo Pellegrini (Florence: Olschki, 1971), as well as art historical work by Vittore Branca (*Boccaccio visualizzato: narrare per parole e per immagini fra Medioevo e Rinascimento*, 3 vols (Turin: Einaudi, 1999)), Brigitte Buettner (*Boccaccio’s ‘Des cleres et nobles femmes’: Systems of Signification in an Illuminated Manuscript* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996)) and Anne D. Hedeman (*Translating the Past: Laurent de Premierfait and Boccaccio’s ‘De casibus’* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2008)).

<sup>6</sup> And Boccaccio also wrote the *Trattatello in laude de Dante and Esposizioni sopra la ‘Comedia’ di Dante: Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, ed. by Vittore Branca, 10 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1964–98), III, VI.

<sup>7</sup> See Gianni Mombello’s substantial article, ‘I manoscritti delle opere di Dante, Petrarca e Boccaccio nelle principali librerie francesi del secolo XV’, in *Il Boccaccio*, pp. 81–209 (p. 143).

<sup>8</sup> Scott, p. 259. The first printing in France of the Italian text occurred in 1547 (Werner Friederich, *Dante’s Fame Abroad, 1350–1850* (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1950), p. 72).

<sup>9</sup> Nick Havely, *Dante* (Malden, MA/Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), p. 228.

- <sup>10</sup> For example, Paris, BnF, MS it. 534, housed in the library of Fontainebleau at the start of the sixteenth century, consisted of *Inferno* and an Italian translation of a Latin commentary (Lucien Auvray, *Les Manuscrits de Dante des bibliothèques de France: essai d'un catalogue raisonné* (Paris: Thorin, 1892), p. 46).
- <sup>11</sup> Scott, p. 259.
- <sup>12</sup> For the case of Alain Chartier, see Joan McRae, 'Alain Chartier's *Livre de l'Esperance*: A Remodeling of Dante's *Commedia*?', *Digital Philology*, 7.2 (2018), 230–49.
- <sup>13</sup> Mombello, p. 137.
- <sup>14</sup> On Serravalle's Latin translation and commentary, as well as the importance, from the fourteenth century, of the papal curia at Avignon for wider transmission of Dante's work, see Havelly, *Dante's British Public: Readers and Texts, from the Fourteenth Century to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 15–17, 24–32.
- <sup>15</sup> Mombello, p. 158.
- <sup>16</sup> McRae, p. 234.
- <sup>17</sup> Paris, BnF, MS fr. 226, fol. 394<sup>v</sup>. Subsequent references to this manuscript are incorporated in the text.
- <sup>18</sup> William Burgwinkle, 'Dante and Medieval French Literature', in *Dante in France*, ed. by Russell Goulbourne, Claire E. Honess and Matthew Treherne, *La Parola del Testo*, 17.1–2 (2013), 21–29.
- <sup>19</sup> McRae, pp. 233–4.
- <sup>20</sup> Burgwinkle, p. 28.
- <sup>21</sup> Jacqueline Cerquiglini-Toulet, 'Introduction: L'Amour de Sophie. Poésie et savoir du *Roman de la Rose* à Christine de Pizan', in *Poetry, Knowledge and Community in Late Medieval France*, ed. by Rebecca Dixon and Finn E. Sinclair (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2008), pp. 1–14; Suzanne Conklin Akbari, 'The Movement from Verse to Prose in the Allegories of Christine de Pizan', in *Poetry*, pp. 136–48 (pp. 141–3).
- <sup>22</sup> *Le Débat sur 'le Roman de la rose'*, ed. by Eric Hicks (Paris: Champion, 1977), p. 141.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 141–2.
- <sup>24</sup> *The Debate of the Romance of the Rose*, ed. and trans. by David Hult (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), p. 184.
- <sup>25</sup> Sylvia Huot, 'Seduction and Sublimation: Christine de Pizan, Jean de Meun and Dante', *Romance Notes*, 25.3 (1985), 361–73 (p. 364).
- <sup>26</sup> See *Dante's Commedia: Theology as Poetry*, ed. by Matthew Treherne and Vittore Montemaggi (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010).
- <sup>27</sup> Cerquiglini-Toulet, p. 13.
- <sup>28</sup> *Le Chemin de longue étude: édition critique du ms. Harley 3341*, ed. by Andrea Tarnowski (Paris: Librairie générale française, 2000), l. 996
- <sup>29</sup> Cerquiglini-Toulet, p. 13.
- <sup>30</sup> See Scott, p. 259; Caesar, p. 29.
- <sup>31</sup> Goulbourne, Honess and Treherne, 'Introduction', in *Dante in France*, 15–19 (p. 16).
- <sup>32</sup> Martin Le Franc, *Le Champion des dames*, ed. by Robert Deschaux (Paris: Champion, 1999), ll. 1909–24.
- <sup>33</sup> References here and following are to *La Divina Commedia*, ed. by Giorgio Petrocchi (Milan: Mondadori, 1966–67) and, for the English translation, to *The Divine Comedy*, trans. by Allen Mandelbaum, Everyman's Library, 183 (London: David Campbell, 1995), both according to *Digital Dante* <<https://digitaldante.columbia.edu>> [accessed 03 August 2019]
- <sup>34</sup> *Le Séjour d'honneur*, ed. by Frédéric Duval (Geneva: Droz, 2002), III.xii. Subsequent references to the *Séjour* are incorporated in the text.
- <sup>35</sup> See Kevin Brownlee, 'Literary Genealogy and the Problem of the Father: Christine de Pizan and Dante', *JMRS*, 23.3 (1993), 365–87, and Huot.
- <sup>36</sup> *Le Livre du cœur d'amour épris*, ed. by Florence Bouchet (Paris: Librairie générale française, 2003), CXIII. Subsequent references to *Livre* are incorporated in the text.
- <sup>37</sup> Timothy J. Welsh and John T. Sebastian, 'Shades of Dante: Virtual Bodies in *Dante's Inferno*', in *Digital Gaming Re-Imagines the Middle Ages*, ed. by Daniel T. Kline (London/New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 162–74 (p. 163).
- <sup>38</sup> For critical debate regarding Dante-author's position, arguing for willing ambiguity and suspension of judgment, see Elena Lombardi, *Wings of the Doves: Love and Desire in Dante and Medieval Culture* (Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012), pp. 9–11.
- <sup>39</sup> *Esposizioni*, ed. by Giorgio Padoan, *Tutte le opere*, VI (1965), p. 315.
- <sup>40</sup> 'Dante and Francesca da Rimini: Realpolitik, Romance, Gender,' in *Dante and the Origins of Italian Literary Culture* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), pp. 304–32 (p. 330).
- <sup>41</sup> On Francesca's reading, see Lombardi, pp. 217–23.
- <sup>42</sup> *Le Temple de Boccace*, ed. by Susanna Bliggenstorfer, *Romanica Helvetica*, 104 (Bern: Francke, 1988), p. 131. Subsequent references to the *Temple* are incorporated in the text.

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<sup>43</sup> 'Dante Aligheri', in *Le Dictionnaire des lettres françaises: le moyen âge* (Paris: Fayard, 1992), 369–70 (p. 369).

<sup>44</sup> Barolini, p. 330.

<sup>45</sup> Burgwinkle, p. 21.