

two processes can be, but they come together in a marriage of convenience and practical performance. Some seventy-five years ago Lynn Boyd Benton invented a machine for engraving steel punches mechanically from large patterns. Immediately, the tiniest details came under control in workable size, since type patterns are usually about twelve inches high. Now an exact ratio of line thickness can be measured and controlled, and minute variations in serifs and brackets are easily drawn.

The key word is "drawn." Now, instead of accepting the structural domination of a broad pen, we use a pointed pen to draw the outline of a letter, giving it whatever skeleton and flesh and physiognomy we choose—or have learned by experience is permissible. In the words of Frederic W. Goudy, the most prolific and imaginative type designer of our time, we "think of a letter and draw a line around it."

A type designer, or anyone who draws letters, considers all these structural and surface elements and combines them in a purposeful letter — light and graceful, sturdy and dependable, or bold and emphatic. He is concerned not only with a basic form of skeleton and flesh, but even more with the delicate variations in minor details which notably affect the character of individual letters and the appearance of a printed page. But he must also bear in mind, with utmost respect, the relationship of one letter to its twenty-five associates. Drawing a single letter is a fascinating exercise in taste and ingenuity, but construction of an entire alphabet is a dedicated essay in judgment and discrimination. His manner of thinking was neatly expressed by Max Beerbohm when he said of Rostand's literary style: "His lines are loaded and encrusted with elaborate phrases and curious conceits, which are most fascinating to anyone who, like myself, cares for such things."

But a reader need not care for such things. It is enough for his reading comfort that, as long as the letters and words on a page are easily recognizable—and that is true of most books today—it makes no difference where or how the letters originated, how they have been refined or distorted, or who spent an entire afternoon — as has been done—deciding whether one point of a letter should be moved one quarter-thousandth of an inch.

Books

Michele Barbi's Life of Dante. Translated and Edited by Paul G. Ruggiers. University of California Press (Berkeley and Los Angeles), 1954. Pp. x + 132.

In preparing a translation of Michele Barbi's life of Dante, Professor Ruggiers has brought within the reach of the student and the general reader without proficiency in the Italian language the most recent authoritative introduction to the study of Italy's greatest poet. By the time of Barbi's death, in 1941, at least two generations of Dante scholars had come to look upon him as their master. His life-long and strikingly successful work as a textual critic in classifying and editing the manuscripts of the *Vita Nuova*, the *Canzoniere*, and the *Commedia*, and his interpretative and critical powers in elucidating minute points of literary history led almost inevitably to his authorship of the article on Dante which appeared in 1931 in the *Enciclopedia Italiana*. This definitive treatment, in which Barbi distilled to a quintessence the fruit of his erudition and the substance of scores of essays and studies, was reproduced somewhat later, with slight revisions, as a book, *Dante: Vita, Opere e Fortuna* (Florence, 1933). From it the English translation has been made.

Barbi's Life of Dante is arranged in four parts: "The Life of Dante Alighieri," "The Minor Works," "The Divine Comedy," and "The Reputation and Study of Dante." To these Dr. Ruggiers has added a preface, explanatory notes wherever they are needed to clarify the text, and a bibliography, mainly of English works that lead the general reader toward a deeper understanding of the poet and his art. The historical matters which Barbi recounts are the established facts of Dante's life: his Florentine origins, early studies and youthful experiments in art, and domestic life; his entanglement in the faction and the political turmoil that all but destroyed Florence, and long years of exile, filled with the vicissitudes of hope and despair; and, most importantly, the historical relations in which his masterworks were conceived and produced. The *Life* is a model of historiography. Recognizing better than many that there are problems of Dantean scholarship that offer at best only hypothetical solutions, Barbi prudently eschews myth, legend, and conjecture—pedantic or romantic.

The reader's interest in Dante centers, of course, in the *Commedia*. And Barbi's treatment of the conception and genesis of the poem in the light of its author's exile is especially important. In accordance with the traditional view, the *Commedia* is Dante's fulfillment of a resolution and a promise, made at the end of the *Vita Nuova*, to write no more of Beatrice until he could treat of her more worthily. To Barbi, the *Vita Nuova* appears to have been no more than a composition determined by the conventions of current amatory poetry, historically important in estab-

lishing the characteristics of the 'new style' in both the conception of love and the conception of art. The scope and range of the *Commedia* are patently higher and wider. Whatever Dante's first plan of the epic might have been, his purposes, Barbi infers, were radically altered by his enforced wandering through Italy as a scorned and an indigent outcast. On every side, in both the spiritual and the secular members of the political body, he could view the triumph of greed, envy, and violence. The perversion of the Papacy and the Empire, the two divinely ordained guides of humanity, were, he thought, responsible for the disaster. Judging that his only authority to speak and to be heard lay in his genius as a poet, he conceived of the *Commedia* as a vision in which the immensity of evil could be vividly and impressively portrayed, in which the meaning would arise from the history of mankind in its own eventful development, and in which the divine intention to intervene in the restoration of eternal law and the re-establishment of the world upon its true course might be announced. His *Commedia*, he hoped, would instruct the Empire in its proper care of earthly goods, and the Papacy in the care of spiritual goods. That justice in the right distribution and ministering of these goods is the only way of human salvation was, as Barbi would have it, the deep conviction present in all the works of Dante. And Barbi's conclusion must weigh heavily in any interpretation of the poem.

In *Michele Barbi's Life of Dante* Dr. Ruggiers has produced an able translation: the language moves fluently, and the diction is clear, precise, and appropriately dignified. In this handsome volume, with the medieval feeling of its binding, the frontispiece with de Michelino's portrait of Dante, the select type, and the fine paper, the University of California Press has issued a book worthy of both the writer and the subject.—Philip J. Nolan

Dr. Paul Ruggiers, Associate Professor of English, who joined the staff of the Department in 1946, spent several weeks of the summer, 1951, in the Library of the Institute of Medieval Studies, University of Toronto, where he made the first draft of a translation of the CONSOLATIONS OF PHILOSOPHY of Boethius. During the academic year 1953-54 he was on leave of absence, having received a Faculty Fellowship from the Ford Foundation for the Advancement of Education; completed his translation of THE LIFE OF DANTE, which is receiving very favorable comments from Italian scholars in this country and abroad.

Dr. Philip Nolan, who has written this review, joined the faculty in 1953 as Assistant Professor of Classical Languages and Literatures and of English.