A wealth of publications on D. have appeared in 2004, but John A. Scott, *Understanding Dante*, Notre Dame U.P., 466 pp., is certainly one of the most significant. The very title smacks of oxymoron: understanding Dante is an objective scholars have been striving to achieve for almost seven centuries. Nevertheless, Scott makes real headway in producing, within the compass of a single volume, what is perhaps the best handbook to the poet’s life and works now available and at the same time an introduction to the major academic debates on D. currently in progress. S. analyses all D.’s works, examining them from a variety of angles. His chapter on the *Rime* highlights the poet’s contribution to metre and style, with many references to, and comparisons with, Guinizelli, Cavalcanti, and the Sicilian and Pr. schools. Writing on the *VN* he discusses the relationship with med. vernacular lit. on Courtly Love. As for the *Cvio.*, he puts Bertrand Russell to shame (for him D. was uninfluential and hopelessly out of date) in highlighting D.’s study of, involvement in, and contribution to, the subject of med. philosophy. S.’s work will become an invaluable resource for students, *aficionados*, and academics alike.

As always, the publication of the International Dante Seminar significantly contributes to the advance of D. scholarship. *Le Culture di Dante. Studi in onore di Robert Hollander*, ed. M. Picone et al., F, Cesati, 376 pp., collects the proceedings of the Seminar held in 2003 at the University of Notre-Dame (25–27 September) and is divided into four main sections under rather traditional headings: ‘Dante e la poesia provenzale’; ‘Dante e Aristotele’; ‘Dante e la politica’; ‘Dante and Ireland’. Each section concludes with a transcript of the discussion that followed the seminar session. Although not under scrutiny here, the discussions are of interest, gathering as they do the observations of experts and scholars present at the seminars. Several of the articles are noted below in the appropriate sections. Three exploring the relationship between D. and the troubadours are general in scope. P. G. Beltrami, ‘Arnaut Daniel e la “bella scola” dei trovatori di Dante’ (29–59), offers some
points for reflection when challenging the *communis opinio* that D. did not know any of the troubadours active before Peire d’Alvernhe. B suggests that ‘se Dante ha potuto conoscere i trovatori che cita […] cioè li ha potuti vedere scritti, è evidente […] che ha avuto fra le mani una e probabilmente più d’una raccolta; ma in questo caso la sua conoscenza dei trovatori deve andare molto al di là delle sue citazioni’ (45). He may have known Marcabru and probably knew Jaufre Rudel. B. then focuses on the rationale behind D.’s exaltation of Arnaut and concludes that ‘la drastica riduzione del canone trobadorico ad una sola persona punta di nuovo all’auto-affermazione di Dante come poeta volgare’ (49). S. Aspertinti, ‘Dante, i trovatori, la poesia’ (61–92) aims at achieving a taxonomy of the troubadours in the *DC* in the light of Tavoni’s research on the evolution of the concepts of poetry, poet, and *auctor* from the *DVE* to the *Comedy*. According to A., all the troubadours encountered in the *DC* up to the wall of fire in *Purg*. ‘evidenziano il limite — morale e spirituale innanzitutto — di una cultura che è anche letteraria’ (89). However, some of his most interesting points concern D.’s understanding of the ‘legame musaico’. He also suggests that it is possible to consider Folquet as a model of conversion for D. himself, even though one should never forget that, at the end of his long process of revision of the vernacular canon, D. remains ‘unico poeta del proprio tempo cristiano’ (90). P. Cerchi, ‘Dante e i trovatori’ (93–103), starting from the challenging question: ‘perché la poesia d’amore ebbe tanto successo?’ (95), argues that the roots of this success are to be found in the bond established by poets and intellectuals between passion and ethics through the troubadours’ belief in the ennobling nature of love, which D. takes one step further: his poetry of the ‘loda’ is based on the concept of *honestum* found in Cicero’s *De Finibus* and *De Officiis* and hence Beatrice’s *onestade* is a spiritual beauty which must be admired ‘sanza utilitate e sanza frutto’ (98).

D.’s concept of love is also investigated in Alberto Gessani, *Dante, Guido Cavalcanti e l’amoroso regno*, Macerata, Quodlibet, 291 pp., a dense and balanced discussion of one the most intricate Dante problems, his relationship with his best friend and their elusive dialogue on the nature of love, where the author interprets the (difficult) signs sensibly, paying close attention (as always) to the lexical and semantic detail of the text. For C., as G. observes, love led to *lamentatio*, for Dante it meant *visio*, ecstasy. But the book is also a journey through the vernacular culture of the late 13th c., a learned and lucid survey of D.’s relationships with his other fellow poets, and an assessment of the meaning of the *dolce stil nuovo*. 