

## Call for Abstracts

### Forum: “Women Scholars in Dante Studies” edited by Gaia Tomazzoli for *Dante Studies* Vol. 144 (2026)

The bibliography in the field of Dante studies is imposing, encompassing contributions made over centuries by scholars and readers from diverse backgrounds and regions worldwide. Efforts are frequently undertaken to systematize this extensive body of work through analytic and historical overviews, providing valuable perspectives on the development and diversity of Dante studies over time. Nevertheless, these state-of-the-art surveys consistently marginalize or entirely overlook the contributions of women scholars to this field of scholarship. Despite the wide scope of Dantean bibliography, the voices and perspectives of women remain disproportionately underrepresented, revealing a significant gap in the historiography and analysis of research carried out by women in the field. This Forum, to be published in *Dante Studies* Vol. 144 (2026), seeks to address this imbalance, highlighting the often-overlooked contributions of women to Dante scholarship past and present.

For centuries, reading was considered a dangerous activity for women, who were perceived as incapable of maintaining boundaries between text and reality and prone to emotional, irrational, and overly empathetic reading. Women who dared to challenge this taboo by expressing opinions on the texts they read or by asserting their own authorship were mocked, silenced, and erased from the history of criticism. Nonetheless, Dante’s oeuvre has been read by a female audience since the earliest years of its circulation. Early readers span from the women addressed by thirteenth- and fourteenth-century lyric poetry (Lombardi 2018) to Christine de Pizan, while the following centuries are also dense with women who were familiar with his works.

Over the past 150 years, numerous women have engaged with Dante in their scholarship, yet their studies have received limited recognition. Vincenzina Inguagiato, for instance, published in the *Giornale dantesco* during the early twentieth century, while Cordula Poletti delivered a *Lectura Dantis* at the Biblioteca Classense in Ravenna in 1920. Abroad, the distinguished English astronomer Mary Acworth Evershed produced a work on Dante and astronomy in 1914, while American Helen Flanders Dunbar authored *Symbolism in Medieval Thought and Its Consummation in the “Divine Comedy”* for Yale University Press in 1929. Even essays written by popular cultural mediators such as Victoria Ocampo or accomplished scholars such as Irma Brandeis were often excluded from bibliographies of Dante’s work because of their sex (Tomazzoli 2022). Only translators such as Dorothy Sayers and Jacqueline Risset achieved somewhat better recognition, likely due to the long-standing perception of translation as an ancillary task, subordinate to literary criticism proper.

In recent decades, however, an increasing number of female scholars have secured a place within the canon of Dante studies and attained an established position in the global academic debate,

thus contributing to a substantive renewal of the methods, perspectives, and topics addressed in Dante studies. Teodolinda Barolini, Yvonne Batard, Lucia Battaglia Ricci, Franca Brambilla Ageno, Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi, Maria Corti, Joan Ferrante, Marina Marietti, Claude Perrus, Barbara Reynolds, Marcella Roddewig, and Prue Shaw are essential contributors to this work alongside many others, especially among younger generations. A new appreciation of their contributions from a historical and geographical perspective can provide contemporary insights on neglected scholarship, as well as a better understanding of the bigger picture of the development of Dante studies.

In recent years, the question of queer readers of Dante's works has been investigated alongside Dante's own approach to same-sex desire (Cestaro 2021). If, more broadly, Dante's representation of women and gender roles has been somewhat explored over the past few decades, no systematic inquiry has ever been attempted to sketch the history of his female reception, despite the significant numbers of women – cis, queer, and transgender – from all over the world who have written thought-provoking contributions on Dante (Federica Coluzzi's extensive study on the diverse female readership of Victorian England, including prominent figures such as Christina and Maria Francesca Rossetti is an important exception; see Coluzzi 2021). This Forum aims to promote a new appreciation of women's contributions to the development of Dante studies through a renewed contextualization of their critical activity within specific historical and cultural contexts, while also addressing broader questions regarding the framework of feminist criticism.

The intersection of feminist criticism and reader-response theory has prompted scholars to question not only the objectivity, but also the presumed neutrality of the reading process. Reading as a woman involves bringing to the act of reading a set of paradigms concerning the world, literature, and the scholar self-reflexively – paradigms that are not biologically determined, but socially constructed. These paradigms differ historically from those of institutionalized male criticism and are deeply shaped by the social and cultural contexts in which the scholar operates. This Forum thus adopts a geographical approach, gathering inquiries from diverse cultural contexts to trace the contribution of women to major developments in Dante studies over the past 150 years, focusing on Italy, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and the Hispanic world.

Contributions may center on individual scholars or offer broader portraits, constructing parallel canons or counter-canons of Dante studies to explore the gender-specific contexts in which these works were produced and received. This intellectual archaeology seeks to uncover alternative perspectives that challenge traditional interpretations and acknowledge the overlooked contributions of women scholars, in line with Virginia Woolf's famous assertion that women "think back through *their* mothers." Such an investigation will serve to redress historical biases and inequalities, thereby providing a more comprehensive and inclusive understanding of intellectual history in Dante studies.

Some contributions, by contrast, will adopt a more theoretical perspective, addressing how we might reconfigure feminist academic discourse and reading practices to navigate the intricate tension between essentialism and pluralism, while developing more inclusive approaches to literary scholarship. By engaging with these questions, the Forum seeks to enhance our understanding of gender dynamics in Dante studies and beyond, offering new insights into the critical perspectives available to those who identify as women. In doing so, it aims to enrich and diversify academic discourse, inspiring pedagogical approaches that incorporate a wider range of voices and overcome the constraints imposed by gendered expectations and limitations. Ultimately, this approach seeks to deepen our engagement with scholarly fields even beyond Dante studies by embracing a broader spectrum of perspectives and insights.

Authors who are interested in contributing to this Forum, which will be published in the 2026 issue of *Dante Studies* (vol. 144), are encouraged to send an abstract between 200 and 300 words in English and short biography (under 150 words) to Gaia Tomazzoli, the Forum Editor ([gaia.tomazzoli@uniroma1.it](mailto:gaia.tomazzoli@uniroma1.it)), and Cosette Bruhns Alonso, Managing Editor of *Dante Studies* ([dantestudies@gmail.com](mailto:dantestudies@gmail.com)), by **December 1, 2024**. Authors will be notified of the Forum Editor's decision by February 1, 2025.

### **About the Forum:**

The Forum is a special feature of *Dante Studies* consisting of a collection of essays in dialogue with one another on a contemporary question or topic relevant to the life, work, and reception of Dante. Forums are edited by a guest editor who invites contributing essays related to the Forum topic in collaboration with the editorial board of *Dante Studies*. Authors of abstracts accepted in the Forum will be invited to submit essays, due in November 2025, between 6,000–8,000 words (including notes), which can be submitted in English, Italian, Spanish, and French. In addition to the publication, the Forum Editor will convene a virtual roundtable discussion on the Forum topic with the contributing authors as participants. Questions about the Forum should be sent to [dantestudies@gmail.com](mailto:dantestudies@gmail.com).

### CFP References:

Cestaro, Gary. "Queering Dante." In *The Oxford Handbook of Dante*, edited by Manuele Gragnolati, Elena Lombardi, and Francesca Southerden, 686–700. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021.

Coluzzi, Federica. *Dante beyond Influence: Rethinking Reception in Victorian Literary Culture*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021.

Lombardi, Elena. *Imagining the Woman Reader in the Age of Dante*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.

Tomazzoli, Gaia. "'Donne ch'avete intelletto': dantiste del XX secolo." *Tenzone* 21 (2022): 87–128.

Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*. London: Hogarth Press, 1929.